

MELIKA SALIHBEG BOSNAWI

H O U S E O F U R C H I N S

S A R A J E V O

K I D S W A R - C H O R U S

part 3.

*Those, namely, who're unmistakably,
from the very start of their lives,
rhymed with being:
abandoned,
forsaken,
forlorn,
dropped,
deserted,
left,
neglected,
cast out,
cast off
(by both parents and society)
and shed
(to the margins of life,
where are they to eternally dwell).*

***Named after a city district situated on a hill,
in the very city-centre of Sarajevo,
"The Bjelave orphanage",
popular just as "Bjelave",
was during the war
one of the most copious fountainhead of the Rhymes.
But before saying anything else,
my duty's to recall:
The Second World War orphans,
because of who, the institution was established
in the building doubtlessly stolen from godly nuns
by godless communists,
had all,
since long,
grown mature.
Each following,
far from the precinct,
their own,
personal,
fortune.
Before pondering over the reasons why "Bjelave",
that house of urchins (sic!),
joined Sarajevo kids war-choir,
during the Third
(but not World)
War,
in 1992,
and gave the tune on its own
to the hill-men's musical composition,
one has first to understand what is it ,
in that bizarre building,
that has always been rhymed.
The Bjelave house is supposed to be a
home,
asylum,
abode,
homestead,
fireside,
domicile,
residence,
habitat,
dwelling...
for all Bosnian offspring***

*who normally have no such a thing.
That they don't, the reasons are to be found
in the place of origin of the best part of "Bjelave's" tenants.
(As if all petite did not all come forth
from their moms' stomachs?!).*

*which usually is:
a fabric or plastic carry-back,
left behind*

in,

or on,

or by,

or below:

*the cities' waste-depots,
garbage-containers,
bridges,
sewers,
channels,
ducts...*

park benches,

tree trunks...

*The most often and simplest and cruellest way
of abandoning these creatures by their
carnal*

creators

*is, besides of the aforementioned,
simply dropping them somewhere in the corners of
city and town:*

lanes,

by-ways,

alleys,

passages,

roads,

streets,

parks,

nearby forests,

bus and train stations,

even hospitals...

*Thereafter, these foundlings are correspondingly looked after
by society,*

and correspondingly cared for,

and correspondingly cherished...

*In accordance with the places of their appearance,
the community into which they are supposed to integrate,
dubs them,*

*in the very dawn of their lives,
with the rhyming names:*

*ruffians,
yahoos,
rabblers,
wanderers,
strays,
barbarians,
savages,
street Arabs (sic!),
delinquents,
strollers,
dawdles,
scoundrels,
derelicts,
loafers,
villainies,
bad debtors,
juvenile offenders...
criminals,
bastards...*

*Or with any other name that may occur to one's mind
as a synonym for the rejected.*

*Those, namely, who're unmistakably,
from the very dawn of their lives,
rhymed with:*

*abandoned,
forsaken,
forlorn,
dropped,
deserted,
left,
neglected,
cast out,
cast off*

*(by both parents and society)
and shed*

*(to the margins of life,
where are they to eternally dwell).*

*But the above designations are only their social names,
while their small are just like ours:*

Ranko, Adem, Tarik, Slobodan, Verica...

*And just like ours are their wishing,
liking,*

*longing for,
feeling:
lone,
alone,
forlorn,
cheerless,
comfortless,
dismal,
dolorous,
doleful,
barren,
downcast,
downhearted,
sombre,
sorrowful,
sad,
lost,
depressed,
dispossessed,
hopeless...*

*especially in the centre of,
by the civilised world besieged,
city.*

*And especially at the time,
when everything was blazing, bleeding, screaming,
and grenades were bursting upon us
all the years long.*

*Still, it didn't cross anyone's mind,
in the heart of that bleeding union,
to feel for,
and treat them,
as a real part of their own.*

*Such was the time, environment and general mood
when I came across them.*

*The late spring sunshine oncoming summer heat climbing
uphill towards the city's main hospital already filled up with the
injured the state of the war still not declared the Sarajevo
defence already in the hands of the amateurish Bashcharshia's
ruffians' division under Juka's command the rare firing a long
black garment a lot of sweat a short rest in front of a building
never entered before...*

*Why don't you drop in?
several bold voices,
teenagers',*

*echoed,
and tell us something about Him?
Nobody ever wanted to say a word to us of God.
They kept Him in hiding, instead,
and now we've all been thinking about Him
ever since this doom began.
That was also a part,
an essential one,
of the general disposition.
Once started being bombarded,
(which looked more or less like Doomsday)
everyone began wondering:
if I haven't done any crime to anybody,
why this curse?
What am I being punished for...
and so...,
and furthermore...,
and besides.
And most of the people,
at the end of such profound thinking,
found themselves perfectly innocent
in front of everybody,
including their Creator.
(before Whom, they just began to shiver).
That everybody cannot be blameless,
the best proof are you yourself,
initiated I my course on
right or wrong
to the "Bjelave" juvenile.
On the first day there came five,
on the second, twenty-five,
after a week, I became a part of their big,
and if superficially observed, faceless family.
If I say that I turned into a collective mom,
it wouldn't be quite true.
I didn't have any money or food,
I couldn't wash the dirty,
I couldn't dress the undressed...
but I became for them a kind of
recycle bin.
With different options:
to be emptied right away, upon one's wish,
or restore,
one or all*

*recycled files.
I was shown the house,
each room.
First those bombarded and consequently emptied,
afterwards those somehow made up,
then the rooms for collective meeting,
coffee and smoking,
for love,
for studying,
for back-biting...
Once, I even had my lunch with them in the dining room,
just that nothing be omitted.
Then I was,
half-angrily half-jealously,
told:
a hundred of them,
the youngest,
were evacuated to Rome.
Possibly
(began to speculate forthwith my
in the Classical gymnasium obtained,
erudition),
because of the well known historic event.
When where found,
in the same city of Rome,
in ancient time,
two suckling,
also orphans,
Romulus and Remus,
and shielded,
and nourished,
and cherished
by a she-wolf.
Till they grew clever and strong enough
to conquer the world.
I was been subsequently let into the secrets of their loves,
both answered and unanswered,
then...
hush!
(abortions),
afterwards I heard complaints
against their new social parents,
or the rest of the "Bjelave" staff,
or each other...*

*In that way, the recycle bin of mine had been filled up with
whatever they kept,
whether hidden or open,
in their hearts,
or what had been anguishing their minds,
or occurring to them,
or rushing to their tongues.
During our discussions about
correct and incorrect
my basket was being filled up
to the brim
with all the frustrations they'd collected so far.
First and foremost from the hands of some of their
social parents who fled the country with their own fruit
without saying farewell.
No point in being unhappy or angry!
there were comforting themselves, the "Bjelave" urchins,
trying to fall asleep under the noisy radiant night-grenades.
Hadn't they done their best to bring us up and shape us
with their own disgust first,
with odium,
aversion,
enmity,
don't you remember their cunning way of hitting us,
their abusive style of addressing us?!
I withdrew,
on that day,
to my solitude.
And defeat.
Through the city and society
within which I was perfectly regularly born
half a century ago,
I'm still stepping my first...
And then, there was a radio-ham news:
the initial "Bjelave" urchins' voiced joined the other Sarajevo
kids
in their war-chorus.
More precisely:
when the rest of the "Bjelave" ruffians' social genitors decided
to flee,
an altruistic alibi was found in the room of the Orphanage tots.
(Uncle-Dou was not consulted).
Those two necessary for the war
(namely Radovan + Ratko)*

got infuriated.
 The orders got issued.
 The bus got shot.
 Two small babies
 placed in the front-seats of the bus
 which was taking them to the uncertain
 but deadly crash-proof future
 fall asleep;
 forever.
 Chiao¹, Allahemanet², Dovidjenja³
 this noisy planet
 (where's now Le Petite prince's?).
 Following that historic flight,
 a new boss of the urchins house was inaugurated.
 Hating, as people say, till noon, himself,
 And, after noon, himself and the rest of the world.
 I called to discipline.
 Then, within our course on
 moral and immoral,
 their robing the "Bjelave" store-room,
 well filled by the new Principal with humanitarian food,
 was widely conferred on.
 Hunger, starving, irresistible chocolates...,
 in a word, that was almost impossible to keep promise.
 And,
 over and above,
 the new Principal,
 just like any other boss,
 would give them a portion of delight
 at the tip of a very small spoon.
 Slowly, I was learning about their individual destinies,
 each worth a book.
 I have also learnt about the ways and reasons
 in which
 and for which
 they had come to that house of, inherent, misfortune.
 A plethora of causes and ways!
 Most of them,
 as I already said,
 were foundlings,

¹ In Italian, good-buy.

² In Arabic, I entrust you to Allâh.

³ In Bosnian, good-buy.

*abandoned babies,
waifs,
gathered here from the different regions of the country.
But there have been,
although equally socially labelled,
those who came to the "Bjelave" haven from real homes.
whatever they might have looked like.
For instance,
there have been moms with the gangs of the greenness,
but each one from a different father.
The consequences:
lack of food,
poor housing,
miserable clothing,
missing school,
delinquency.
The aftermath:
the moms, compelled to hand over their dearest
to the coldest social care.
The "Bjelave" household also knows some daddies
who got the little, but lost their wives,
and "The Bjelave orphanage" - the only refuge
from the lacking ma, and clumsy pa.
There have been cases
(I specially loved one, here I am, acknowledging my 'crime'
in a low voice)
of children whose moms have been the life inmates
of lunatic asylums.
My...
No! her Son,
Caesar-like hair-style,
a turn for drawing,
a dread of teachers,
the years of maltreatment...,
I couldn't do much.
Then taken to the front-line to dig trenches,
then terrified anew by both
present and future,
then agonised by his mother's fate at her mental resort;
today, occupied,
today, bombarded,
today, raped...
his mind bewildered.
Dead! Alive! Dead!*

*one by one, petals plucked off.
 Whenever the last one said - dead,
 he shuddered,
 then repeated the procedure.
 A good-fortune may befall him with another sample,
 a day may come for her to return to the
 vacant
 dark
 one-room flat,
 but still home for them two.
 If the result was - alive,
 then new petals plucked out,
 new pleas with destiny;
 hasn't she always been his matter of shame,
 a complex of inferiority,
 tongue-tied whenever asked about the father?
 Following the war and the latest art of torture;
 to rape, and then hold
 in concentration camps,
 till the time of delivering babies,
 "The Bjelave" family's refreshed with
 new peeps,
 and cheeps,
 and tweets,
 and squeaks,
 from the infants ward.
 I went to see them,
 and kiss;
 empty-handed,
 light-hearted,
 grateful,
 angry.*

*Are these sweet miniature creatures those of whom
 a shameless fatwa⁴ was issued:
 Better to give them away?
 No mistake! They are! A cruel sentence!
 but:
 might the author of the religious decision have been right?
 What social humiliation, distaste..., what disregard would be
 rhymed with these juvenile,
 (by the same people, presently fighting for their own dignity,
 honour, and approval to exist),*

⁴ A legal decision issued by a religious low authority.

*at a future time,
when the war stops,
and everybody goes after his own business?
Likewise, there are children,
(went on my "Bjelave" orphans
teaching me the literature of life),
whose lineage is perfectly regular:
both parents,
fairly comfortable home,
rather normal childhood,
warm family life.
Then,
all of a sudden,
fate's irregular hex,
and kids stay alone.
Such was my dear Girl's family profile.
Ma other, a heart patient,
loving self-sacrificing father,
five siblings,
each littler than the next.
Time passed,
mom's hearth gave up,
daddy's common sense as well,
a rope tightened,
children cried out,
people assembled,
condolences offered,
empty sympathy,
orphans,
loneliness,
silence.
Sarajevo.
Orphanage.
The life story of a timid girl
whom I found in "Bjelave" and favoured
would have been nothing new
in the cradle of the world
if her life,
in the house of pariahs,
bums,
dropouts,
orphaned,
had not been seized
by the war curse.*

*And by the people's
endless
baseness,
and if not, after that, torn apart
like a spider web.
When I started living with "The Bjelave orphanage" inmates;
going to them,
thinking about them,
teaching them,
being worried about them,
being called on by them at my war-home,
being met by them in the war-streets,
and then glimpsed at,
then ran away from,
or stand still in front of
(when caught by me at the act of stealing from the back of a
humanitarian vehicle),
She was always been somewhere around me.
The most timid,
most delicate,
fragile...
She kept trying her best to formulate her feelings, thoughts,
fright; ever less able to do so.
Grenades kept falling, ever more frequent.
The war trumpets kept performing, ever more deafening.
Medical care; ever more required.
But I was late.
A hwaja was asked
(by two refugees from a Sarajevo mahala,
two intruders actually into the errant, but still innocent
"Bjelave"
urchins' commune)
with his charm to undo mine.
The thing was done.
Everything given by me:
clothes, books... love - set on fire.
The necessary supplications - said,
the hwaja's written amulet - put in the water,
the water - drunk,
the rest - poured over her head,
all my "Bjelave" dearest - horrified,
the hwaja's dismantling my magic - completed.
The evil spell of a Muslim author
who simply loved someone,*

*absolutely useless for her successful life,
was undone.*

*But the hwaja's gewgaw,
and the Sarajevo mahala malice,
and the political games behind the curtain,
and the "Bjelave" vagabonds' shock over the new,
allegedly mine,
human betrayal,
and the war-darkness of the city,
and the soul-darkness of the Sarajevo citizens,
all these things together undid my dear Girl's sanity, too.
And my being a part of the family from the House of*

*Urchins,
after who I'll never stop to wail.
The cobweb in which there used to live my dear clean girl was
definitely torn apart.*

*She went to the mental hospital,
to fight,
for long,
on her own,
whirling.*

*Whether to sink definitely
when the ebb drags her down to its bottom,
or to get rid of it with a powerful swim,
once, driven upward?*

*And to join,
once again,
the main stream, in which
she's never seen much goodness.
Two toddlers taken to Romulus and Remus' city have not been
as yet fetched back.*

*Must be because they have not grown big,
let alone strong enough,
to defeat,
with the laugh,
this
genetically sad,
planet.*

*The older sister was also sent abroad,
but to another direction from the twins'.
The eldest and only brother got killed at the front.*

*A war site, reserved for those
whom nobody of any social or political weight
ever asks about.*

*And booked for the untrained Bjelave youth,
to dig ditches for the real army,
or be killed during barrage-fire,
exchanged between those who seriously fought.
And all this in the darkness,
and freezing,
as if they had not enough of such gifts of life?!
And everything - to defend:
freedom,
or life,
or patria
of those who'd only armed them
with instant patriotic feelings,
and with rifles about which they were taught nothing
except how to dismantle,
and assemble again.*

*I remember him, when we met last time.
Tall, still childish, but a sense of maturing and pride
when carrying a weapon and a masked uniform.
He got off to visit his sister at the Clinic and used
the opportunity to come up and ask my excuse
(on his own and the family's behalf)
for the magic séance,
held in Bjelave,
the sanctuary of grief,
during his absence.*

*Right! I do not possess any adequate political or social weight
to fight their craftiness,*

*I do not have any role on their social stage,
but I've been asking for him,
moaning after him,
accusing them on his behalf.*

*My God, have You given them the right,
far are You from their fabrications!
to keep on rhyming "The Bjelave" orphans
with such attributes:*

*outcast,
worthless,
forgotten,
lone...?*

*I ask only You, my only Lord!
for how long, will they be telling to this
war-uncharmed
Bosnian*

*nation,
about justice,
religion,
democracy,
human rights...
while keeping at the margins of their social empires
and private pride
these "filthy ones"?!
Over whom, they only feel sickened,
and annoyed.
Here I am, far from you, my dear Bjelave urchins,
in Carona,
in Ticino,
in Helvetia,
in my temporary Pantrovà home
discerning your voices an tones from the united
Sarajevo
kids
war
chorus.
Not because your wails, tears, laments...
when being killed,
or frightened,
or injured,
or maltreated...
are not of the same value as the other Sarajevo tots' and
greenness',
nay!
I've been singled out your part
in that
criminal-conducted
calamity accomplishment
because you have remained my most painful
war-memory.
Because,
in truth,
your wounds,
even if survived,
even if externally cured,
would never stop
paining,
paining...
Not in time of peace.
Nor in me.*

Post Scriptum:

***I have understood.
This has been a craft of my Most Aware
To bring me here,
to Switzerland,
to make me turn into literary form
all the War Rhymes about Sarajevo kids war-chorus:
part 1, 2 & 3.
And all this to be done in the house
from whose every corner
there resound
similar timbres.
From the books,
written by my hosts,
the late Casa-Pantrovà owners,
the Kläbers:
Kurt (and also Held)
and Lisa (also Tetzner).
Two German refugees, who devoted their literature
to wronged children from all over the globe.
If alive,
I am sure,
they would have raise their voices against
what the Bosnian minors have been afflicted with,
only because...
And because their murderers do not believe,
unlike the two upright authors,
in a world of
"sympathy and union with all races and nations".
Walking down their garden,
to decorate their stony grave with flowers from their own yard,
on my own
and on the behalf of the Bosnian kids,
I wonder:
has the "Blue bird",
(Lisa's Belgrade publisher, to which she wrote the sentence)
joined its singing with the Sarajevo
and Bosnia kids' chirps,
or with the thunderclaps of
Radovan-Ratko & co's
deadly
instruments?!***

*Casa-Pantrovà, Carona, Ticino, Switzerland
19. April - 10. June 1998*

*(From SARAJEVO ROSE / WAR RHYMES)
Sarajevo, 00*