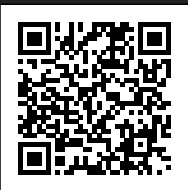


THE VANISHING TREE (POEM)

Posted on February 20, 2010 by Keghart



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By Tatul Sonentz, Watertown MA, 2010

✘ The old woman sits on a white wicker chair
alone in the backyard of her grandson's house
in a small New England town where the air
is crisp and fresh with the smell of the sea...

She sits staring at a lone chestnut tree
shedding its malodorous flowers on a lawn
recently mowed by her great-grandson
whose name was the same as her young
spouse whose face -- now a haze in her misty
mind -- no longer haunts her lonely bed...

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"May you grow old on one pillow,"
her mother had said on her wedding day --
"Mek bardzi vra tzeranaq..." heard a long,
long time ago, long before time stopped
for them on that early spring day far far away,
when the sun turned blood red... or was it
the ground he had stood on that turned
crimson, as he fell? She can no longer tell...
though she can clearly see the chestnut tree
his grandfather had planted in their garden
as a child -- ignoring his mother's forewarning
of the foul-smelling flowers of the chestnut tree.
"I love the smell of chestnuts roasting slowly

on the red hot manghal," the boy had answered,
digging deeper into the native soil...

All in white, the tree was in full bloom then –
like a bride -- and she can even now, after eons,
hear a snippet of an old song sung on her
wedding day – "Arevid mernem yar jan..."
may I die for your sun, my love... and with one
fatal blow of the yataghan, his radiant sun had
faded into a faint glow of life floating in her womb,
nourished by her blood, spared – it seemed --
for a fate that loomed ahead far worse
than death – a life of the living dead...
Later, before freedom would hail at another
springtime in May – as a lone servant
in her own house -- in the cold crisp winter
of that crimson year, she was told by her
savage landlords to cut down some limbs
off the bare chestnut tree to burn as firewood
to heat a house built on love, now petrified
with freezing grief at the sight of the severed
hands and limbs of its builders and their trees...

"That was the tree of the whole family,"
murmurs the old woman to no one in sight --
for under its canopy, they had collected
the spiny burrs from the ground, recovering
the chestnuts and preparing them for the roast –
and the aroma of the sizzling fruit attracted
all the children and grandchildren, as the family
gathered as one around that chestnut tree –
not too long after the stench of its flowers
had faded from memory....

Startled by the hand of his grandchild
on her frail shoulder the old woman starts
sobbing and begging, "Don't cut down
the chestnut tree, don't cut down the family..."
startled in his turn the grandson says "Nani jan,
we have no chestnut tree in our yard..."

that's the pear tree in the neighbor's backyard
you're looking at... nobody is cutting any..."

Oblivious to her grandson's plea
the old woman repeats between sobs...
"Don't cut down the family tree...."

