***The Karma Goat* By Marjun Syderbø Kjelnæs**

**Translated from Faroese by Matthew Landrum**

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**SELAH**

That moment when I see

one of my grandmothers

in my own face

and feel the other one

in my body

Selah

I think

of the burdens

they carried

all the milk pails

and washing tubs

and creels of peat

how they would

churn

and wring

and knit

and carry children into the world

they would tear

without anesthesia

and knead

and scrub

and dig

so much work

and so little time

for them

to think

and educate themselves

Selah

All their struggles

were what saved me

the hard effort

they pitched

tents

on their grey

foreheads

and waved goodbye

to the past

all their waiting

for times of peace

for fishing boats lost out of sight

for a change in the weather

for a fever to break

the silence

they wore

dignity

every prayer

every contraction

every warm loaf

of fresh baked bread

steaming

on the kitchen table

a glorious monument

Selah

**CHAGALL AND THE WORLD**

A green eye

is looking

at a blue goat

the eye is bigger

than the goat

and the goat is bigger

than the woman

in the yellow dress

who crouches

by the udder

the goat is smiling

that’s her

that’s

the karma goat

she lives in Chagall's hometown

Vitebsk

the green eye

is looking out into

the russian night

the museum catalog describes

it as

an essentially

optimistic

vision

that everything will be alright

I doubt it

and am afraid

of the blue

goat’s smile

**THE COW**

My grandmother would

sometimes

tell us about

the cow in the basement

the warm body

in the darkness

beneath the bedroom

where they would sleep

her little sister and her

when they were girls

They could only catch glimpses

of the cow

between the cracks in the floor

and when their feet would freeze

at night

they would get out of bed

and stand in the stream of the animal’s warmth

or lie down flat

to talk to it

“Papa has pneumonia

he's so tired from coughing

that he doesn't have the strength to go fishing anymore”

“Muuuh” her eyes were glittering

black and melancholic

The family was big

nine children I think

and their house no more than a cottage

her father never did go

fishing again

my grandmother was eight

and she felt sorry for him

because he had to sleep in the graveyard

and it was so windy there

it would have been better

if he could have lain

near the cracks in the bedroom floor

so that the cow

could warm him up again

Grandmother held tight

to her little sister's hand

and insisted

they all stay

together

in the cottage

in the village

but their father went

out into the wind to sleep

and her sister went

over the mountain

to live with relatives

she had red hair

a color on its way

away

away

and she didn't come back

not until years later

not until she’d become someone else

a distant smile

a timid body

unfamiliar eyes

But the cow

stayed in the basement

didn't it grandmother?

Yes I told it everything

and it kept me warm

What color was it grandmother?

Why didn't I ever ask her that?

Wasn't it dark red grandmother?

**AUTOPORTRAIT À LA PENDULE**

The clock struck

in its wooden box

every half and full hour

the day and night

slowly

separated

the sound filled the living room

where grandmother lay

shrinking in her bed

she nodded at me

from the corner

thanking me for coming

she didn’t need

to take up much space

in this world

so she just let the clock

unwind itself

as much as it wanted to

Chagall painted this self portrait

with pendulum

after the second world war

in the foreground a blood red

smiling

goat

in the middle distance a

blue haired

woman

in the background a

rounded

grandfather clock

on the canvas

another

canvas

a verdigris green crucified man

a woman in white

comforting him

way too much

Chagall

for 86x70cm

my grandparents green house

wasn't more than

a half

extension

of her brothers house

one wall shared

that too was after the second world war

after all the waiting

while grandfather was in America

he sailed sugar

from Miami to Manhattan

did he come back?

oh, yes, he sat there

smiling by the window

leaning on his walking stick

when the clock struck

12

you couldn't hear a word in the living room

and in the corner

grandmother shrunk

a little more

as the swinging

brass clock

counted down

the seat by the window

was empty

and a journey awaited

in the big picture of things they were

as tiny

as sugar grains

but to us

they were

monumental statues

**YALLAH!**

It's dry here now

and two boys are running

around the house

with water guns

one of them is wearing a red sweater

the other one is wearing green one

they laugh

and shout

and shoot at each other

and at my window

little rivulets

stream down the pane

The BBC World Service says

there is a flood in New South Wales

in Australia

I can see the nose

of a cow

that's stuck in

the mud

in a river

swollen with rain

a woman in a kayak

is lying in close

with one hand under the chin of the cow

to stop the big black and white head

from going under

while they're waiting

for the rescue party

the cows eyes

wild

from fear

the woman’s hand

calming

Once

I tended cows

they were Hebrew

fat

numbering more than seven

Yallah!

I would shout at them

to drive them inside

for milking

I was 19 years old

and didn't think about

yallah being Arab

we also shouted it

when a cow was giving birth

and the calf was stuck

and we’d have to use a hawser

and a tractor

to pull

the unwilling soul

out into the biblical sun

Now they’re soaking wet

outside

the red

and green boys

water drips

from their hair

and runs

down their faces

the guns are empty

and the cow in Australia

has gotten so tired

from staying above water

that she too has to be pulled

to dry land

with a tractor

**SYMPHONY**

And the rose garden in the Iceland Sea

have you heard of it?

a deep-sea jungle

of cold-water coral

branch after branch

it has been smashed to pieces

by the weight

of heavy trawl nets

and iron fishing hooks

the pieces drawn on deck

or washed ashore

thought to be something lifeless from the abyss

not organic wonders

the coelenterates

weren't recognized

as architectural geniuses

calcium virtuosos

indispensable

like the woodwind players

in a symphony

the ecosystem

was not thought of as an orchestra

but now you can hear

that notes are missing

whole movements

the sound of bone ground to marrow

as all the instruments

are crushed and turned to white powder

and the last branches of the rose garden

collapse

storms boil

through

the empty gaps

**THE MEAL PLAN**

Today I will eat

all the leftovers

I won't throw anything away

it's all going through me

chewed

swallowed

digested

and processed it will come out

in the other end

Today everything will make sense

all the fertilizer

all the tractors

all the lines of semi-trailers on the highway

all the heavy laden cargo ships from the ends of the earth

My mouth will open

like the pearly gates

where there will enter a procession

of exotic fruits

imported slices of meat

and chocolate wrapped in gold foil

Today I'm going to save

a whole industry

from condemnation

blessed are the stuffed

for they have eaten every last thing

blessed are the empty shelves in the refrigerator

for tomorrow it all begins again

**THE KARMA GOAT**

In my dream

a goat tells me

that at any given moment

the majority of people

will stop

give up

and retreat

it’s the shame

of not succeeding

that’s too humiliating

But then there are

the eager

the headstrong

the beasts of burden

who jump

who miss

again and again

but still push on

that's the reason why I have my horns

she lows

There’s an animal smell

in my room

when I wake up

there’s a Chagall print

untidily colorful

the background

conveniently dim

the message

eternally ambiguous

like the smile of a goat

The morning is stretching out

like an unfinished poem

I wake up

take a look outside

and see a starling preening on a branch

dropping truth

to the ground

manure thickens roots

and tempts even the stubborn

to grow toward the light of day

Before the maggots

drag the words

farther and farther

down into the darkness

I read the writing

on the wall:

With you it is

karma

to be your own

goat