

The Dolomite Heel Print

by Kaja Weeks

I.

When I tell you about my visit,
I will not tell of *Pärnu* Bay;
How her pale midnight sun
casts a gold wash
of lacy ginger fronds
on empty, swaying swings that rise
from silken sand so soft
it swallows your feet.

Or how shell-pink luminous clouds gather
into their low blousons endless sea and dunes;
how the breeze shimmies your bare thighs
and shivers up your back, caresses your neck,
blows gauzy hair over your eyes;
how you could walk forever on the white sand
straight into the sea – how when you turn around,
your footprints will be gone.

II.

For you, my *pagulas* sister,
I will unravel the mystery
of chalky boot prints
that stained the land;
of white, grey-veined minerals
bound to blood, tamped into soil
by footfalls that will
never be gone.

III.

Just a sail from *Pärnu* Bay is *Saaremaa*,
isle of orchids, long-necked cranes,
windmills and ancient limestone.
Once, from their bedrock, islanders were forced

to quarry dolomite for Teutonic Crusaders,
for an oppressor-Bishop's fortress.
Majestic and unique, *Kuressaare* Castle
survives and still faces the sea intact.

Here, murmurs seem to rise from moats,
whip round medieval dolomite pillars –
they suffuse the wind.
No, listen, they carry the howls of 1941 –
of Stalin's conquering soldiers,
who left island corpses under mounds,
in cellars, under stones, in the well,
ghosts in the fortress courtyard.

A cobbler, fishermen, children,
the lady who cares for old folks.
Women's breasts wrapped with barbed wire.
Those limed in layers to decompose.
Those mutilated genderless.
Those boiled alive in retribution.
The rest, too barbaric to say.

Ask instead, if you dare, after
Okinawans jumping
from murderous cliffs to killing waters.

IV.

Remember, my *pagulas* sister?

That foul rumble of war – our people's refugee-years,
fleeing charred land they'd never regain.
Mothers abandoned on farms, brothers shot for resisting,
uncles on cattle trains bound for Siberian gulags.
On the run – children curled under benches,
sneaking into haylofts or sleeping in graveyards.

Remember, my *pagulas* sister?

All that before our births, yet rioting through our veins.
We were spared, yet free to be expat *Kungla* bards,
honor-guard-lasses upholding the lost republic's flag.
But inside, blue from fear, as true-congregant-elders

peered through us, like glass girls –
our sacrifices too small.

Remember, my *pagulas* sister?

In 1970, *Õõ Pime* was smuggled from Estonia
and we sang it, hymn-like, for *Maarjamaa pind*, holy land;
sang of *lubjavildi kand*, unknowing what that was.
Don't ask how we sustained breath while we wept inwardly
for ancestral lands never imprinted by our feet,
or how its acrid air wafted into our waking dreams.

Ask instead, if you dare, how wind endures
blowing through Cambodian killing fields,
or how anyone endures after tragedy.

V.

If you ask of that *lubjavildi kand*,
I will describe dolomite in Saaremaa's bedrock: limestone.
Traces of primeval mud, iron and sea fossils
now a timeless emblem as Estonia's national stone.

VI.

Õõ Pime, Õõ Pime,
Dark night.
I didn't know.
I know too much:
children's skeletons under Estonian soil
while island orchids still grew,
waves washing over fissures of ancient karst,
grey sediment immured in bloody prints.

But in summer 1941, Russian troops surged onto that ground –
in their absurd soft boots, and the mystery of their print
was revealed to me at Saaremaa castle, by the man, raised as a boy
in the shadow of its howls, while we grew in America.

*When the conquering regiments arrived
they wore boots not of leather but of plain felt.
Cheap, no match for the elements.
What fortified those Russian soldier's boots?*

*Dolomite – soaked into the felt, then let dry.
But, eventually, the dolomite leached
onto the land, and those chalky heel prints –
lubjavildi kand – left in their wake.*

The man's face is pale now, my eyes dark holes.
No, I will not see, I want to say,
knowing we both watch ghosts rise from limed corpses
beneath the ground upon which we stand.

Ask no more of prints, of others' dolomite heels, or our own.
To a blue-veined, glass girl crushed with ancestral *klint*,
pulsing with murmurs and howls,
they are all unfathomable –

as mind-splitting as Chibok girls abducted to thorny forests,
or Rohingya, drowning in the Sea of Bengal.

VII.

But let me tell you
of *Pärnu* Bay in midsummer
when sun glows sand gold
and washes your forehead,
cheeks, mouth and eyelashes,
your warm bare shoulders and breasts.
Let me tell you of wind blowing cool spray
as you laugh and lean squinting into it.

Look for the lowest white cloud,
without ghosts.
Now, catch its sail!
We can surf endlessly, my friend,
south, toward *Kuramaa*
or slip past *Saaremaa*,
swirl deftly around the *Kattegatt*
and west to the open sea.

Surely, if we could look back,
our footprints would be gone.

Terms Used in The Dolomite Heel Print:

Pagulas – refugee; here, those Estonians who fled during WW II

Kungla – a promised land in Estonian mythology

Õõ Pime – Dark Night, a song

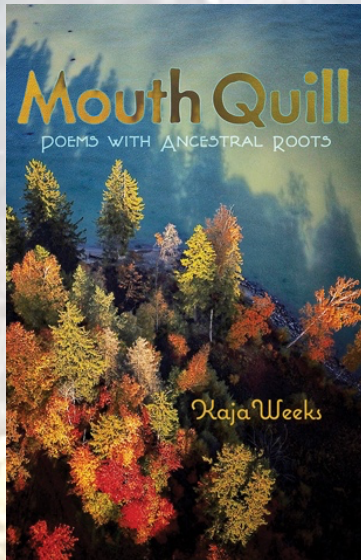
Maarjamaa Pind – Mary’s Land, a poetic, reverential term for Estonia

Lubjavildi kand – dolomite heel print

Klint – ancient cracks in the earth’s crust of Baltic coastal limestone cliffs

Kuramaa – coastal Latvian land with historic kinfolk ties to Saaremaa

Kategatt – Danish for “Cat’s Throat,” a strait connecting the Baltic and North seas



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