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THE BATTERED INSIDE; WHOSE SIDE AM I ON?; FORCEFULLY

Niels Høy

Translated by PK Brask & Patrick Friesen

The Battered Inside

The battered inside of the cupboard under the kitchen sink makes me happy. Here are two honest nails hammered into the original boards that have been there since the apartment block was built. It's like revisiting forgotten members of our closest family.

At some point the boards were blue; there is some leftover red and a green pastel. The kitchen sink is new and the counter has been raised ten centimeters. Probably it's been renovated several times through the years.

The kitchen has remained current; there are new lamps, electric stove, fridge and coffee maker.

But here under the sink a time warp has been allowed its hidden existence. Here is the wash tub with the floor cloth, the plunger and a forgotten bit of caustic soda. Here the spider moves about undisturbed.

Maybe there's been kissing and dancing in this kitchen.

Probably there's been crying.

Happy people newly in love have prepared fragrant meals and later cooked porridge while making sandwiches for lunch boxes. Hungry children have stolen cookies. Laughter has resounded in the stairwell and ropes have been skipped in the yard while new cars were being parked outside. People moved in and out, old ones died and were carried downstairs, newborn babies were carried upstairs. Everything according to order—

my nameplate will also disappear from the door one day.
I get down on my knees in front of the kitchen sink
and respectfully greet the plunger, the spider
and the two honest nails

Whose Side Am I On?

I'm for people who have joie de vivre—
the ones standing outside smoking,
while the president hands out medals,
content to shiver during the applause.

The man who washes the floor and puts the chairs back.
I do not agree with the chairman,
a general secretary gives me the creeps,
have those people no self-respect?

The woman who bakes cookies for the homeless.
I'm in support of common decency.
The man who gets up in the middle of the night to deliver
newspapers on his bike, while morons piss in his bag
and call him Paki.

People who cry in their sleep at night for lack
of vitamins found only in love.
I'm for the woman collecting bottles,
and going through other people's trash
so she can give her granddaughter a trip to Rome.
The man who crosses the street to help a bewildered
boy who fell out of the nest too early.

I'm all for kindness.
I'm for him who hides his poems
in the tool drawer in the garage.
The failed ones are the most remarkable.
The one who sweeps the sidewalk including his neighbour's.
Old people who lie dying in hospitals.

I'm for him who is misunderstood
whenever he opens his mouth. The mute poets,

content with walking around mumbling to themselves,
while they take care of their work and provide for the family.
The woman the others make fun of.
The man who isn't able to maneuver his wheelchair
and the bus driver who gets up to lend a hand.
The ones who sing in traffic. The man who makes a fool of himself.
People who move their asses.

I'm not for gang-related stockbrokers.
People who think they are the queen of heaven. Arrogant sneers.
The man who blocks other people's bank accounts.
The atmosphere in court.

I'm all for politeness, for bursting into tears
in the morning at the supermarket, common hysteria,
caring for pets, and bewitching smiles in traffic.

The man who spends seven years building a cottage
and finishes by smashing it to pieces in a rage.
That's whose side I'm on.

Forcefully

Joys evaporate
and everything disappears
in a scurry.

But give me,
give me—
oh, yes, give me again
a gulp
of the wildest
happiness
straight into my heart
muscle!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Niels Hav

Niels Hav is a Danish poet and short story writer with awards from The Danish Arts Council who lives in Copenhagen. He is the author of seven collections of poetry and three books of short fiction. His books have been translated into many languages including English, Arabic, Turkish, Dutch, Farsi, Serbian, Kurdish and Portuguese. He has travelled widely and participated in numerous international poetry events. His second English poetry collection, *We Are Here*, was published by Book Thug in Toronto. The three poems featured here are from the poetry collection, *Moments of Happiness*, which will shortly be published by Anvil Press, Vancouver.

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