

The house was a mess. When she finally got around to tidying up, she'd drop things, break dishes, and then stare out the window so that once or twice Zając swept up the shards of crockery himself. If she cooked, she'd burn the food or forget to add salt. She'd start on something, but forget what it was a moment later and begin something new, only to drop that quickly too and stare out again. She'd stand for ages at the window stock-still, as though bewitched. In the afternoons, she often fell asleep, and in the evenings, she'd go out and wander the village or the fields – quite aimlessly. These evening escapades worried Zając most – for what's in the house stays in the family – but hanging about the fields to no purpose – what would people say? He was right, as it turned out, for they soon had plenty to say. That she was mad. That she followed the moon. That she clambered on the burial mound in the woods where the memory of distant times lay gathered and buried in the earth, that she scabbled in that earth with her bare hands, as though she were looking for something. That she would lie down on the field's ridge, hitch up her skirt, and wait. Zając felt completely helpless. [...] Several times, it occurred to him that he could forbid it, yet he was afraid she might not listen, and that would be worse than anything – hence he did nothing in the end, and even began to pretend that he had accepted his wife's odd behaviour; thanks to this, the impotence of his anger was less obvious. [...]

One evening, she was waiting for him in bed under the quilt completely naked. Her soft, copper hair was spilling across the pillow, her eyes shone with an unearthly glow, and heat radiated at a distance from her parted lips. She pulled him close with her warm white arms and so enthralled him that Zając lost his head completely. He forgot his anger and about meting out a punishment, he tossed all cares aside and for a moment felt young again. She took him into herself as forcefully as though she wanted to absorb him entire, along with his bald patch, his farm and his field. And he submitted like a sacrificial victim, alarmed, but raised for that one moment above the daily travails, to some kind of heaven – low, not far above the earth, tasting of sweat, smelling of a woman's hair, like the fur of an animal – but heaven all the same. He forgot himself. He forgot everything. He merged with her warmth, the taste and scent of her, her breath.

But when he'd come round, after it all, he felt awkward, as though he'd sinned. For he'd not made love to his wife, but to some strange, wild woman who heeded nothing in her blind pursuit of some quite unhuman passion. It occurred to him that he could go to confession, but how to put such a thing in words? That he'd committed adultery? No, that wasn't it. It was all a puzzle, and most puzzling of all was the painful pleasure which he'd felt not only then, in the night, but long afterwards. He could not oust those strange feelings from his heart for a long while and in the end, he began to avoid Marianna. He was simply afraid of her. [...]

Marianna, meanwhile, sank more and more deeply into her strange state. Her son now prepared the meals. The two grown men ate in silence; she didn't sit down to table with them, but only slept, and dreamt, almost as though every night she were setting off on some distant journey, from which it grew increasingly difficult to return. Was it night or day? After waking, she'd lie a long time in bed, recollecting who she was – stupid Marianna with three grown children and a husband, Zając. The incontrovertible truths of the day seemed to Marianna less real than what she experienced in sleep; she repeated them to herself each morning like a dull lesson, and once repeated, she'd stretch like a she-cat and climb out of bed in just her nightdress, oblivious to who might see her, dishevelled, surrounded by some sleepy sensual aura.

Excerpt translated by Anna Zaranko



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**JULIA
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Selected prose

Każdy śnił swój sen, 2019

Bliskie kraje, 2016

Nieważkość, 2016

Biata Ofelia, 2011

Poranek Marii i inne opowiadania, 2010

Most recent poetry collections

Psalmy, 2018

tuż-tuż, 2012

Tlen, 2009

Selected awards

Wisława Szymborska Award (2018)

Silesius Poetry Award (2018) – nomination

Nike Literary Award (2016) – nomination

Foreign language translations

Fiedorczuk's poetry books have been published in the USA, Mexico, Serbia, and Sweden