

Labour/Rosetta

## Labour/Rosetta

I remember a faraway future

we keep our promises,  
roses and lavender

I introduce you not by your name but with your titles:

my partner in crime  
my serial pickler  
my liefje<sup>1</sup>

I'm the first face you see  
when you wake up from the anaesthesia  
you say [...] and I burst out laughing, or crying  
even the nurse cracks a smile at the sight of honey dripping from our eyes

we celebrate your 32nd birthday eating mloukhia<sup>2</sup>  
talk to people in a language I don't understand  
at the spa, I lie. Say you had a double mastectomy from breast cancer. They let us in,  
we giggle like high school kids sharing a secret

we build a union together  
walk hand in hand into conferences and workshops, where people call us the power duo we already are

Your mum and my mom's last names appearing next to each other in  
a petition, a panel, a protest  
about community care, conflict studies, collective bargaining agreements  
our last names, hyphenated on a metal plate in  
the hague, the philippines, the village where

you hold your Isi<sup>3</sup>'s hand one last time.  
He says *I love you* with his eyes  
*I know*, you say with your hands  
We return to the Hungarian border every year to make syrup from his apple trees  
bring back pumpkin seed oil, steinpilz<sup>4</sup>, tales of bees

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<sup>1</sup> Dutch diminutive for 'love', literally translated into 'my (little) love'

<sup>2</sup> A homely Tunisian stew made with the leaves of the jute mallow plant

<sup>3</sup> Origin: Finnish word for 'dad', used in this context to refer to a Swedish grandfather

<sup>4</sup> The German name for porcini, a type of mushroom that grows in the wild near oak and pine trees

I remember this one summer we sleep underneath the stars  
promise to do this every year  
we won't, because I hate camping (and secretly, so do you)  
I manage to get you to watch Brokeback Mountain  
you say *This is too much dick for my taste* ten times  
I convince you to get back on a horse after all these years  
we race across mountains and valleys: Atlas, Fergana, Laufskálarétt

Our language is jars filled to the brim with harissa, pickles, scobies  
Our language is red and purple envelopes where warm words overflow like fresh focaccia coming out of  
the cocotte  
Our language is you letting me touch your hair, me licking your nose, you falling asleep to my snoring  
Our language is us: crying together at the kitchen table, you holding me, not running away

We open up that bookstore in Cairo, Marseilles, Vienna  
stocked with your favourite zines from Tunis and Paris  
at the counter, The Funambulist, a hot mug of milky oolong  
you, reading Sarah Ahmed. I repair the lights.  
On the wall:  
your blue paintings and my yellow flyers

I never leave you  
you tell me you love me without me saying it first

When we fight, you ask:  
*Can we talk?* Not:  
*...I'm ready for you to yell at me*  
and I don't cry from you  
anticipating violence with such nonchalance

I stop scraping words off of your lips  
you stop taking bones out of my chest  
I stop knitting poems with your tongues  
you stop building a nest with my hopes

You stop being afraid I learn to tell you:  
of losing me *I'm tired*  
to love again *Can you help me?*  
you stop being afraid. *Please don't leave me alone*

I won't call you a simple somebody who hurt me

I plan our sabbatical (nine months)

You bake me camembert with figs, don't let me do the dishes, hum me to sleep with Spring hymns,

I call her *my little poopy puppy*

You tell her: *ya yasmine, yasmeenti, ma petite Yasmine*<sup>5</sup>

You ban sugar and the TV from our house,

tell the child to eat the broccoli

I do the silly aeroplane dance.

she eats the broccoli

You hide the candy on the top shelf

I take her on little walks

and buy us mini haribos

You carry her on your shoulders

tell her to punch the bullies at school

I teach her to manipulate the adults in her favour instead

our bedtime rituals are

stories about Palestine and Sudan

her nestled between us until she's three years old

dreaming in Tounsi, Korean, jazz manouche

We talk and hold her through all of her dreams

even if one of those dreams is a career in accountancy

(or heaven forbid, in corporate tax law)

I never leave you,

you tell me you love me without me saying it first

we talk again, try again, try less hard

to repair the roses and lavender. The titles:

my partner in crime

my serial pickler

my liefje

I'm the first face you see

when you wake up

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<sup>5</sup> 'My little jasmine, my jasmine, my little jasmine' in Tunisian Arabic

For Rania

## For Rania

You're in Cairo now  
fundraising organising managing

We talk about  
cybersecurity, residency permits, flowers growing on our balcony

But all I want to do is tell you: *run!!*  
leave behind your people, your family, your everything  
start working in accountancy, engineering, a flower shop in a country where you'll be  
but another vreemdeling, étranger, Unbekkante<sup>6</sup>

Where your worth is no longer  
weighed in waxy sheets, 5 grams, times new roman, 12pt

*stamp stamp stamp signature signature smudge*  
birth certificate, bank statements, criminal records  
invitation letter, copy of your US visa (if applicable)  
yellow fever vaccine certificate, dated 3 months or less

*PLEASE FILL OUT ALL ATTACHED FORMS IN ALL CAPS FOR LEGIBILITY*  
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*Please remember to apostille all your documents*  
*Notarized translations accepted ONLY in: English (US), French (FR), Spanish (ES)*  
*fees must be paid in exact change according to daily exchange rate*  
90 EUR, 185 USD, 115 GBP

They won't  
dare say:

*I'm sorry Ms. [redacted] -*  
*There is currently no embassy for [redacted] in your country of residence*  
*Please travel to the nearest office in:*  
*Abu Dhabi / Riyadh / Tel Aviv*  
*We apologize for this inconvenience*

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<sup>6</sup> "stranger/unknown" in Dutch, French, and German

You'll only fly direct, Star Alliance, Economy Comfort Plus  
(The halal meal actually tastes good)  
You aren't detained by John F. Kennedy / Charles de Gaulle / Juan Santamaria  
Interrogated in a windowless room / handcuffs / a language you speak better than the men in uniform  
The colour of your skin isn't translated into  
Overstaying / financial RISK RISK RISK / terrorism

I'll file the stupid papers  
*IN ALL CAPS FOR LEGIBILITY*  
*IN ALL CAPS FOR LEGIBILITY*

I'll cramp myself into two red eyes, 32 hours  
to: Caracas, Khartoum, Mindanao, Zoka Forest, Victoria Peak, Wonsan beaches  
I'll ask you: *wait what kind of clothes do I need to bring Rania help me!!*

Show me your world!  
where we laugh and sprint across *your* Mediterranean beach  
sip sugary drinks on a rooftop  
put our feet up, let our toe rings show  
talk about our flirts (fresh), fears (frivolous), futures (far)

Until then I'll stop  
reading the papers, watching the news, scanning the Signal group chats  
because I'm afraid that one day  
I'll see your face, all of your four names  
in a place that isn't  
Geneva / Oslo / The New York Times

[In 2023 alone we lose 300 of you from 28 countries<sup>7</sup>]

I know you won't *run*  
leave behind your people, your family, your everything  
start working in accountancy, engineering, a flower shop

So until we meet again I'll be  
reading the papers, watching the news, scanning the Signal group chats

I'll look for your face, your four names, and wish / pray / beg  
I never find them

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<sup>7</sup> "At least 300 [human rights] defenders killed in 28 countries for their peaceful work in 2023". [Front Line Defenders](#). 22 May 2024.

Home

## Home

In another timeline  
We were sisters or strangers  
Who share a homeland undivided  
Petty pasts  
Little laughters

We sprint across cold beaches  
Snack on sunflower seeds on the Trans Siberian Express  
We grow up being girls whose mothers hold them to sleep  
Whose grandmothers know how to read their own tongue  
Girlfriends who throw us a sweet sixteen

At seventeen, we wear matching uniforms  
(You probably shorten your skirt and get caught; I'm in the debate club)  
In class, we're taught Strange Words, awkward translations  
like *annexation, dictatorship, martial law*  
they taste like sand in our mouth,  
they don't crawl on our skin  
they are: *someone else's problem*

You don't know how to swim across a river a hundred times your height  
Your South East Asia is a summer vacation destination  
We speak to each other in a language that's our own

Our lives are ornate and ordinary  
Small sorrows, petty pasts, little laughters  
Are all we know

We would be lesser women  
Less ambitious  
Less independent  
Less notable

If I asked, you'd say you wouldn't change a thing  
So would I  
But I still dream of us running together on a beach undivided  
A homeland united  
Where we are girls not women  
Free and happy  
By birth

(bonus) Dit is niet mijn eerste taal

## Dit is niet mijn eerste taal

Dit is niet mijn eerste taal  
(dat hoor je en het is helemaal oké)  
In deze vreemde taal ben ik vrij  
Vanwege de beperkingen  
Zonder de luxe om grote woorden te kiezen  
te versieren  
te liegen

In een vreemde taal wordt alles maar  
Een spannende schaakspel  
Een voorlezing  
Een beoordeling

In deze taal heb ik  
Geen gedichten die ik uit mijn hoofd mag herhalen  
Geen stem die iemand voor mij heeft gekozen  
Geen geschiedenis om te begraven

In deze taal ben ik steeds vrij  
Omdat ik niet vrij ben om jullie af te leiden  
(Voor dat heb ik wat tijd nodig)  
Tot dan zou ik maar met korte  
Woorden en zinnen te schaken

Dit is mijn zesde taal  
Die heb ik wél gekozen  
Maar ik weet nog niet wie ik ben  
In deze vreemde taal