

# Think no evil

by Natasha Boškić

## I shut the door tight,

sealed the chinks.  
I locked the memories inside,  
lost, forgotten, poisoned to death.  
Evil.  
Do no evil.  
Think no evil.  
Wish no evil.

## It started with a boring evening of a basketball practice

that turned into a dark sky with shiny orange balloons.  
All TV channels merged into a single one  
with a continuous banner  
at the bottom of the screen,  
saying: "Our country is in a state of war."

## Under the table, a whisper ventures

to be louder than the sirens and bombs.  
"What's your name?" I ask in English.  
"Borislav", he answers looking me in the eye.  
"And what's your name?"  
"Nevena", she says, rooting herself deeper into my lap.  
"How old are you?" I continue.  
"I am ten."  
And "how old are you?"  
"I am, I am..." she struggles.  
"Eight" - I finish the sentence.  
"Let's count now. You remember the numbers, right?"  
In unison, "one, two, three..."  
Quickly, we exhaust the knowledge of English.  
Should I try colours? - I think.  
Maybe that will keep them focused on me,  
on the words they are trying to master.  
I praise them for every syllable  
they manage to pronounce,  
but angst embarks like marching ants  
and interrupts my teaching.  
"Are they gone" - they ask.  
"How long do we need to stay here?"  
Suddenly, he is hungry;  
she needs to go to the washroom;  
they want their toys.

## I am starting a game.

This dining table is our make-believe tent.  
We are on a camping trip.  
My brain is split between  
the fairy tale I am creating,  
the sounds of blasts,  
and my calculation of the distance.  
Who is not safe today?  
What is the target? I wonder.  
I slowly sink into silence despite my wish  
to keep the day and the moment ordinary.  
There is nothing ordinary in feeling  
my heart hiding in my throat,  
in holding two little hands in mine,  
with sweaty palms. ●●●

**I refuse to go to the nearest bomb shelter**

as they strongly suggest.  
For the lack of a classroom space,  
with some cadre's permission,  
we strangely used one of them to teach there.

And I know, that despite the documentation  
about their capacity to protect,  
equipped with beds and basic furniture,  
boasted for their indestructible design,  
I know what they look like.

Even with less than 20 students,  
we had to keep the exits open all the time  
to get the fresh air,  
to breathe normally.  
I know those spaces,  
covered with grass as hobbit houses,  
but with solid, steel doors.

**I refuse to crawl into a hole with my children**

and suffocate, trapped.  
I would rather stay here,  
leaned against the inside, supporting wall  
of my ground-floor apartment.  
I would rather be here  
with four little yellow handprints  
on the kids bedroom door.  
Yellow, my son's favourite colour,  
the paint we chose to decorate our home,  
the colour of the sun.

**I am determined to keep them here, next to me,**

surrounded by the pillows I made for our sofa  
and an orchid on the window sill.  
Here, I can turn the radio  
and not let the chaos in.  
We can listen to Bajaga, my daughter's favourite singer,  
and dance until we drop, dead-tired.  
Here, the world is sparkling and young,  
here, we still have names.  
Say: "I am Borislav. I am Nevena".

## I refuse to crawl into a hole with my children

**There is no language  
to explain**

the logic of how that  
man in the plane  
can see us as dots  
and Xs on his map;

no mathematics to calculate the distance  
between his thoughts and mine;  
to multiply our heartbeats;  
no chemistry to describe the difference  
between the warmth of our embraces  
What is he doing here, far from his home?  
Who is waiting for him at the dinner table?  
Tears tiptoe down my dry lungs,  
for those who are equally bewildered,  
waiting for the loved ones.  
What did I do in my life to end up  
asking these questions?

How did that happen that I slipped  
from interpreting at business meetings  
with foreign delegations,  
and translating TV shows and cartoons,  
into this reality where everything collapses?  
How am I, instead of taking my kids to school  
and catching a bus to work,  
suddenly waking up to an empty day  
of scary expectations and indifference?

**We sleep in our sweatpants with shoes close-by**  
and a backpack with our passports, birth certificates,  
and a bottle of water.

Will that save us? Or just identify us?  
We sleep together in my bed, away from the windows.  
Words keep losing their meaning and innocence.  
I stare at the two faces into the night  
and through the dark  
as if that would help,  
as if I could take them with me into my memory,  
into my body, where they once were, protected.  
I don't want to lose them.  
I haven't loved enough.  
What if I don't have time to love enough?  
How will the universe  
compensate for the void of this colossal lack of love?

**I don't want much,**  
just a clear, friendly sky.

**For the sake of my children,**  
I start again,  
from this very moment.  
Do no evil.  
Think no evil.  
Wish no evil. ●●●●●