

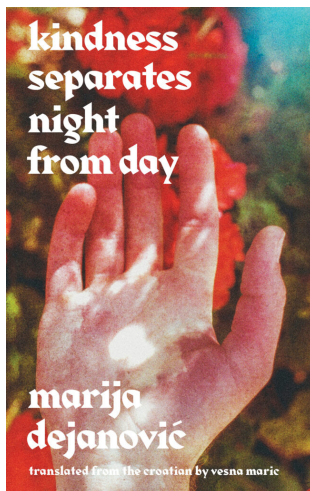


Passport

Marija Dejanović

About the Poem

“Passport” is a poem from my most recent book, *Kindness Separates Night from Day* (Sandorf Passage, 2023). The poem collages scenes of growing up as a child refugee from Bosnia in Croatia with scenes of being a migrant from Croatia to Greece who moved because she fell in love. The poem explores what moving house means and what it can be, contrasting the state of unwilling migration—refuge, migration from fear—with a state of willing migration, migration for love. The poem also explores essential needs—feeding and physical closeness, as well as more abstract needs, such as belonging to a people or place, balancing between the need to be self-sufficient and the need to love. The poem was translated from the original Croatian by Vesna Maric.



Sandorf Passage, 2023

About the Poet

Marija Dejanović was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and currently lives between Croatia and Greece. She studied Comparative literature and Pedagogy (University of Zagreb). Her poetry book *Ethics of Bread and Horses* (*Etika kruha i konja*, 2018) won the prestigious Goran Award and the Kvirin Award. It was published in Lithuanian in 2025 and was shortlisted for the award by the Lithuanian newspaper *15min* in the category of Best Translated Poetry Book. Her book *Heartwood* (*Središnji god*, 2019) won the *Zdravko Pucak Award*, and her third poetry collection, *Kindness Separates Night from Day* (*Dobrota razdvaja dan i noć*, 2021) was shortlisted for the Tin Ujević Award. Critically acclaimed across the region, the book was published in Serbia, Greece, the United States, and North Macedonia. Individual poems from the collection won awards and have appeared in internationally renowned journals. She was awarded and the Marin Držić Award (2020) by the Croatian Ministry of Culture for a dramatic text. Selections of her poems were published in Greece, Germany, and Turkey. Translated poems have been published in around 25 languages. She collaborates with the Greek publishing house Thraka and is creative director, alongside Thanos Gogos, of the international Thessalian Poetry Festival (Πανθεσσαλικό Φεστιβάλ Ποίησης). Email: marija.dejanovic92@gmail.com. Instagram: [@marijadejanovic](https://www.instagram.com/marijadejanovic)



Marija Dejanović (photo credit: Ivan Posavec)

Passport

Translated by Vesna Maric

The first couple of months
I didn't speak
When I finally spoke, I couldn't stop

I found out about the difference between a sponge and a lightbulb
learned grandma's words and created my own

I could talk about everything
except myself

That remained in place
for the first twenty years

*

My first words were wha-dee
uttered before a plate of bean stew
What's this?

There was no one around that morning
who might see themselves in those words
who might wish to tell lies about my first word being *daddy*

My first words cheered up mostly me
Father was sad because he'd missed them
Mother was angry because they were a mark
of his absence

He worked in a different town to put food on our table
That's why he never ate with us
That's why we ate in silence
That's why he ate our silence upon his return

Mother sees him at the door and says
I wish you weren't back
What she meant was
I wish you'd never left

I wish no one had to leave
For such departures belong to those
who never wanted to go

They are the departures of those with nowhere to return

*

A shortage of home, too many apartments
The first five years in Bjelovar, Zagreb, and Sisak several times

We arrived at Germany's doorstep, they didn't let us in
Despite my granddad saying I built those apartments

At university in Zagreb they asked me where I was from

I was in my birthplace
only at my birth
And over where I grew up I was always
the girl with a funny accent

All this was resolved when I went abroad
Where our accents all sounded equally

Now I leave only when I wish
And remain as long as I need to

If anyone wants to know the difference
between leaving and returning:

the difference is in me

*

He drinks a Greek drink, the same as the Croatian one
just triple
a nut mix always comes with the drink
a sign of hospitality

The first tree I ever saw here was an orange tree
the cities are so full of concrete they plant these fragrant trees

If you look up a little, you'll see greenery hanging off the balconies
The Greeks have these floating lawns and we have gardens

That is why I joked that he was a bird
who lands on the balcony and pecks at the almonds

I have to have a garden
because I sit there and drink homemade elderflower juice
I have a lounge and I sunbathe my legs

Here, sunbathe, you lizard, he says
and points at the sea

*

Most of my childhood
I played football with the neighborhood boys
entirely like the other players
then my breasts grew

I could no longer remove my t-shirt
and pour water on my bare torso
when the sun bakes the cars
on the cracked asphalt of the suburbs

the city's courtyard that sat so lonely
it accepted even us, even though it could hardly stand itself
offered us a job and a place to live

What did I witness in that childhood?
A fight here and there, a cat having her litter
under the stairs

A hill covered in snow
tons of mud on the hill after the snow
and snowdrops sprouting out of it

*

If I had wanted to travel from Sisak to Dubrovnik
I would have needed a passport

In my first twenty years
I only saw Dubrovnik
on Game of Thrones

*

I say, what's that
he says, *tsipouro*

The tourists think we drink ouzo
but ouzo is the rubbish that the tourists drink

*

I don't like tourists
Big shopping centers usually follow in their wake
community leaves with them and a slave state takes over

He says tourists come to the beach in front of my house
and then I can't go out on my kayak
That beach is for him what that bit of the road was for me
that I used to play football on
and the tourists are like cars

They pass by in loud numbers

They remind us that a space doesn't belong to us
even if it is where we spend
a significant part of our lives

They teach us that to own and to belong
are not one and the same thing

*

Historic men
and the few remembered women
are tourists in flip-flops on the Velebit of the world

They wrote either of friends, or the dead
That is why they decorated all truths
made them look more like lies

They remembered the things that could be retold
in the garden or on a balcony
photographed and stuffed in a pocket

taken along

*

In my youth I presented
an uglier version of what we are
myself and the world—but not my loved ones

I let them rest in silence

That silence was the best
I could give

Today I try to say it
exactly as I think it is