

CARROLL L. KLEIN

from *What Does It Mean to Light a Lamp? A Belgrade Diary*

mornings the bleak light of Belgrade  
presses on filthy glass presses against my  
body

beyond the door of this room  
where we live now  
there is an old woman  
who winds and unwinds bandages  
around her shattered legs  
she is silent and uncomplaining  
I avoid her fearing her kind eyes

my children continue to eat  
expect good bread and meat soup  
from the chaos and grease  
of the shared kitchen  
I kill cockroaches with my fist now  
and no longer fear the black rat  
behind the cupboard though I watch for it

what I fear is the others  
who inhabit this place  
who wander the halls in stained flannel pyjamas  
eat tins of cheap oily meat  
and light fires with books  
from my uncle's library

my husband hunches on the bed smoking  
pushes his hand again and again through his  
hair  
and weeps it is silent and terrible  
a contagion that I must not enter

my task is to keep moving find food  
take my reluctant children  
through neglected streets to school  
they quarrel and whine ask questions  
I cannot answer

in our old house in Osijek  
the walls were covered in art  
our books reminded us of who we were  
and the children had fine wooden toys made by  
their father  
we wrote ate stuffed pancakes  
and drank plum brandy with friends  
my husband sang the songs  
of Serbian gypsies  
song of longing and displacement

now there is only silence

*Carroll L. Klein is a writer and editor living in Waterloo. She is a friend of Sara Bafo.*