

Micronotes from Bulgaria

By Wailana Kalama

I.

I kneel onto the cliff ledge in Veliko Tarnovo where Baldwin of Flanders was once hurled out into the Yantra river far below. Next to my foot, someone had knotted a piece of red yarn onto a yellow bush for good luck. Two meters or so from the edge, I pondered the chances of being shoved off by the ghost of Kaloyan Romanslayer.

II.

Shropska Salad is a salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, raw onion, peppers, parsley and that magical element called sirene, the white and soft brine cheese. Drizzled with olive oil and lightly salted, it's quite the appetizer. They say it's from Shopluk and was invented by communists. Shopluk is home to the Shopi, it's a place where Bulgarians and Serbs and Macedonians meet and eat. Bulgarian cheese is like pungent feta. After the initial sour wave, grainy and biting, like wine it develops a moist crumble in your mouth. White crumbles buried in tomato and basil, stuffed with eggs in roasted peppers, melted onto parsley-peppered polenta. On their tongues it's transformed into Sirene, from sirishte, curled milk from an unweaned calf.

III.

The snaky streets of Sofia are littered with Irish in green and orange, spilling out from the bars. Soccer fanatics await the match at Vasil Levski Stadium. Men and women are gleefully pronouncing Irish victory prebellum. My feet run away and turn the corner and I'm at a flea market, and one old man is selling Dickens and Chaucer. My feet move again and I'm in a gallery, and the sculptures are made of chalk-white paper. Mobiles of paper birds, a paper book imprinted with Braille.