Sanctification of the Moon

A tumult in the house. Outside they are sanctifying the moon, and in the room, running, yelling, arguments. Perhaps they are all right, now of all times. The second one stands with his prayer book open. He flips through the pages so frantically that the pages almost rip. This occurs before four or five books, the moon, but as though to enite, he places the right elate. The small ones grab their cloth and throw them over their shoulders. In the end they are ashamed about coming late and missing their chance.

I stand frightened at a distance.

I know that before the house is the object of my brother’s ridicule! Look at her! What is she doing here? What do I have to do now? My name is—it doesn’t matter.

At times like this, recognizing their upper hand, they liked to dig at me and provoke me with their jokes.

I was hardly more than a girl at the time, and this sort of thing pained my heart, because in every other way, I was considered respectable. I always played a major part in their games. I would run, jump, and climb like a boy, and no one in the house really distinguished between me and them in matters of misbehavior. When they were busy preparing the sukkah, I’d climb up and go to the attic together with my mother, brothers, or any woman who felt like joining. Of course, I collected all the sekhah [thatching] and spread it on top according to the instructions of the old servant, whose voice we would obey and whose views we would consider.

With my brothers I listened to the lesson of the elderly woman. I’d come with my mother to the house. "If only one were a boy! Ayy, a pity!" he would sigh.

And this sigh would pierce and descend into the depths of my heart. Because I was born a girl, my rebbe whom I adored was compelled to exclude me from the community, and it was another trial, and another for me.

I yearned for it so.

And so the hour of the sanctification of the moon became a subject of great excitement for the whole community. All the young girls were made to suffer. I could not be consoled, for it shocked me then as a very severe death. If I had been able to lead a life alone [do hovri k'ti bivdah], my pain would not have been so great. But I could not imagine life apart from my mother, who was the center of my existence. This was a great sorrow, but it was certain as well, not greater in my eyes, than many of those who danced before the moon.

My only wish was to remain. Even sharing in the sanctification of the moon, which seemed to me then to be a source of great joy, but my brothers also warned me against it. They warned me that I, if I participate in the sanctification of the Torah!

And my heart yearned for the Torah [p'asufi; kashok ka-kashok bato]

Little I yearned for it.

On one occasion, I just couldn’t resist. I stole outside and purposely stood in front of those sanctifying the moon and listened to the sound of their melodies. And my brothers fell silent, saying to me: A disaster, God forbid, will certainly befall you.

In the beginning, I paid no attention to what they were saying, but within a few days, I began to be frightened of ever living longer. Every little whisper brought fear to my heart. My heart was especially worse at night. It would seem to me that the whole house was full of sounds, and the creatures all the kinds of strange creatures were walking and talking and approaching my bed, lying over me and enveloping me. So I asked my mother, in a whisper: "My mother, who was so good, who was so good, why do you think that all these creatures move about and change form. They stretch out ever wider and taller? I awaken with a frightened cry.

I was then a girl, a girl, a girl. I was weak, I was tired, I was asleep. Sleep prevailed in the house. In our room too—quiet. My sister was already asleep, only I alone was awake. Strange visions and strange dreams terrified me, and I lay afraid to raise my head or open my eyes.

Suddenly, I hear the footsteps of a man coming ever closer to our house. It’s early in the morning. Who could that be? Perhaps I am having a nightmare? I so wanted to believe this, but my heartbeats, which grew so loud that I could almost hear them, and the sound of my own voice, convinced me that I was hearing actual footsteps.

I held my breath and barely moved . . . and the footsteps continued to come closer. Here they are at the entrance. Someone is groping at the door in the dark to find the handle of the lock. A chair was suddenly moved. My heart beatmore . . .

I was startled by the voice of the Gentle gatekeeper calling: "Wake up, go out and pray before the moon! It just now revealed itself!"

I remembered that the gatekeeper was instructed on these occasions to be on alert all night long to see and check for the moment of the coming out of the moon.

And when it came out, [the gatekeeper was] to inform at once all the people in the house, except the women.