

Alexander Ulanov
POEMS

In memory of Valeria Simina

A crow is eating snow and cleaning her beak against a branch. Honesty of high temperatures. Winter presses against the river's elasticity. There's not enough space for everybody; everyone has their own hell. Yellow fanfares, notes of wheat grains. Only for the stone hurled down is everything transparent. A gleam of lonely snow is a splinter though the other five are the same. A is a letter, aa a question, aaaaaa a cry. A barberry tree strokes the air with its branches, pulling the air slowly to its trunk. Captives of fatigue with their hands on the backs of their heads. It becomes the past when one understands that it no longer is. What no one can change no longer exists. A thousand flickering eyes of water. The old one, by night, won't stumble against the sea.

Winter slowly surfaces from the comet's first snow. Night pulls the horizon into a soup bowl of thickets. The snow grows bolder, fevers crumple and fall. No water-logged telegrams come from September's harbor, telling of the golden siege in the leaves' voices. Now the windows are losing their hinges - every night - and a fly is crying in a petrified garden.

Farther on there are walls of elastic dust, cold salt, on which the elbows of light are leaning. Still farther, a lost moth and cherry mice. However why are they measuring the dull east, when a face is getting cold under a net, when an acrobat is standing in the doorway of a scream on the very brink of a ravine and the crater is filled not with wine but steel filings.

But next to evening there are the shoulders of trees, a whisper of cold raspberries. Seduce me or transform me. Night is the promise of moon snails; a frog swallowing stars left floating on the river. Sails flapping over chalky water. Beyond the pyramid of frozen copper, weeks of sun are coming, the sun is biting through leaves, a salt temple stands over a cheek of landscape.

But, somebody's canvas is thawing, the cold is cocking its trigger, street lamps are scattering, and a mirror is breaking on knives.

Time moves steadily, in the body of a snake. Not like stairs or a wheel-rather like scarcely visible waves under its rough skin, the same undulating trace. Achilles won't catch up with the tortoise - the snake will, effortlessly enduring, and slipping away at every point. Time contains all, a snake knows all. She writhes through narrow paths, striking precisely. The sound of her scales is the rustle of fine sand.

Time rests, rolling up into a snail. In her hushed padding it dreams. The quietest dreams are under water, and for that reason sea shells are the most beautiful. Clots of time are scattered on the sea bottom, on vine leaves, on pages, hiding in O and moving out of V, hornlike.

When a snake and a snail meet, they remain quiet. A conversation between the one awake and the one asleep is impossible. The snake knows the snail - like everything else. The snail often dreams about the snake - with all the snake's knowledge. Therefore they smile and skim along, each going its own way.

Translated by Michelle Murphy and Thomas Epstain.
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Your bones are made of glass, and fish scratch their foreheads on them. Old air yellows on the inside. After a night where no one touches, the morning's rough. Rejected apples and tattered heels pursue you and your sky is ten minutes to seven.

All you can do is go to the river. What joy it would be for you to sleep in a stranger's home, having the day for yourself. However, your rounds are circular, burnttime is scattered over your dreams, and papers blow over your titmice.

If you know everything - say my name.

A perfect snow is in your hands.

1.

Wind becomes bleached after fire, when it rouses itself from the hills. It has two sides - stone and water. Rain tests the knife-air with its tongue. Eyes are turned inward, a bush drums. The east is tightly drawn, there's no west for it, no place to put a jug on a broken town square. Night can happen, like an ever-widening column of Crete. Near the ankles of a birch lies a snake, lighter than first spring leaves.

2.

From a one-eyed feather, a voice from the north - about rain's old age, the loyalty of birds. White-eyed fish tales, stolen skin and the burn of forgiveness. They should ask a door about its street, a field about its town. Time lives behind doors of rooms, but a year isn't time, only a dash on memory. A flicker of light shows only a face, leaving everything else to the warm dark. Where is there a point without length or breadth? In the prick of a needle. When a man dies, the thread that's drawn him slips.

3.

Sometimes I want to be in compact and less transparent surroundings, to walk, moving it apart with my arms. But the air's too empty.

Night's brought on by the tips of their fingers, and they study it for a long time, like practicing the flute. Eyelashes are longer than the night, a light brown tree of a red-lipped snake. Fireflies appear at the touch. Afterwards, you glance at a puddle on the street - there are reflections of a Gothic church or a tree which are absent here. And you aren't reflected either.

**Translated from the Russian by Michelle Murphy and Thomas Epstain.
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Hello, slow god of raining poplars,
with truth of tired eyes undividedly quiet,
don't take this love of branches to heart,
or their resonant weight will bend down.

Pure-hearted dust, distance of all who depart,
stone of houses roads, a multi-figured shield.
The pity of hard palms things handshakes,
but the lowered ray in itself will meet the rays.

Now even this face is lines of darkness.
Only by them can one discover, disentangle contours.
Light, guessed, mixed, mixing, where are you,
hello, open your arms, lean down, release me.

And what would our pain do without us,
where's it to go once it's left the shell of life,
who will sketch the city on a city wall,
shut off the gas, say I'm sorry, turn over in sleep.

A little later than the word was the flood.
You always leave what is behind you.
So the wind mulls over the campfire sparks,
waits till morning, leaving its forehead on its day off.

To A.Kuftin

33 rpm.
 Every one of them has his hitchhike.
 By it they even get to Liverpool.
 When will you learn to expect stupidities ?
 You haven't yet been bitten by a roadside plantain.
 And your dreams are the dreams of antennas
 in the kingdom of watches, thermometers and old calendars.

Surprised soap,
 do you know
 what payment Pontius gets from Pilate?
 You'll fall asleep, but where will you put it...

In the labyrinth of an long-playing record
 there are no animals, no huntresses.
 And the spider webs fly past
 the fingers of the swamp maidens.

A sea of cross bindings
 in a glass windows of the library.
 And birch trees without shadows
 or rivers through eyelids.

And in this blood the clay
 is what indeed they promised.
 And the dolphins don't hold
 onto land or sorrow.

Winter circles before the eyes words laughter
 in six-mile sandals a Greek passes into church-slavonic September
 time can fall apart onto windows and furs
 can run away from moths on Kittens' paws
 an urban moon and do they name us now as then
 city zero city wind dedicated to the wide white world
 surrounded on the street by the Aegean Sea memory water
 the palm of one's hand trembles map routes to Mediterranean summer

A mosquito on a metal windowsill
 an echo rushes by
 not finding anyone
 you think you are come
 it's like snow without cold
 the seconds peel away
 in cellophane air
 a hair
 resounds

A balmy summer rubs its brown velvet on my hands.
 The pale evening rotates on a mosquito axis.
 Thus slowly a saucer falls into clumsy sharp sounds -
 and you regret it, but won't ask for pardon.

And at the windows, flown in from who knows where,
 beats your voice of reflected crosses, sands and grains going through.
 A mistake, a trinket, a straw - a bridge from whimsy to wonder,
 and in a martlet's beak a drop of spilled country brought.

Let it all remain - in fragments, in dust, in grammar and in eye sockets.
 And things coalesce into rivers, called by their names.
 Spring tree, mirror, bell, clay, border...
 And where you place a candle on a rock, there will be your temple.

And anyone the wind, blowing up to the boat
 on a dry shore, laughing, recalled
 and a garden devolving into momentary peace,
 and the elevation of lindens, and bitter eglantine.

And quiet, unfolding, again disappearing
 on yellow, sentenced, partial in a dot,
 standing in the grass acute, not knowing,
 shimmering and feeling - the house is pierced.

A waiting insomnia has big eyes -
 deeper than white cathedrals abandoned by parables.
 The unremembered dream cannot be linked

by a bell bridge - sky-blue and brown.

Only toward morning the sand returns to hand,
rustling with a milky released name.
It is an arched vault, rosy, high
to everything shaggy, shell-like, warm and clay.

The glory of stone and word, like waves only by lips.
Here is water, here fire, whoever changes is invincible.
If autumn comes, then it's better to sigh by shores.
Odysseus is not sought, but they wait and become him.

Who here is leaving, and who of us two is leaving?
In submerged cities the dolphin question has not ceased,
and the snake finds it ever more transparent, spacious in columns, wells,
and layers of cave jewels are not quicker than sea ones.

And he who was walking on the left
will step to the right,
And he who was walking on the right
will step to the left.
And each of my steps has its own dust.
It settles on me
and becomes part of me.
And steps toward other dust.

Night continues day.
Day continues night.

We'll play chess
with empty matchboxes.

Electric light.
Ashes in patchwork.

We'll scatter sand around by hand.

If the roof falls, it falls inward -
where it is raining.

Much to do:
 tear a journal
 walk the fish to the Sidur Museum and back
 prohibit elevators operators from eating sprats in tomato

So all are awaiting
 the Big Sound
 letters not stuck on
 corridor corridor corridor

Together let's breathe
 into a telephone
 into a third-class sleeping car
 into a room
 into a pillow

Maybe they'll be found
 Maybe there'll be more of them

Translated by Gerald J. Janeczek
 published in *Essays in Poetics*

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The wind turns around telephone poles,
 rays of fish near the seconds of the lightest eyes.
 How does this look from Mt. Etna? Is this love
 or the pity of things that don't leave us?

The meeting of breath with air on a shore of skin,
 a habit to dishabituate, a boiling corner brick.
 If one can see - not like a cave here.
 The met one is the meeter, the trenchant one is true.

The cold of departing sleep teaches water,
 the city will tell stone of the wing and of growth.
 The one who shoed the road is walking down the furrow.
 Is it I, Aitolia, stonemason, water-carrier.

* * *

V. P.

Look through the poplar into the cask of night
 from fish-scale sleep to callous walls.
 An honest piece of the substance of things,
 a tinge of ants and swallows.

Where words attach themselves to branches,
 the eye freezes on the letters of a break
 as a fresh shadow on the angles of an answer,
 as ancient darkness on the saddle of thunder.

Calling no one in vain,
 birds are flying through each other.
 You exist by as much as you see,
 slowly rising from the bottom of your eyes.

* * *

Here is this world opening grains.
 A flute for sleep, an ant hill.
 You will swear on the book of the lake
 that neither fire, nor water will be boring.

A raggy voice at the head of the bed,
 a day of chess over Cretan water jugs,
 by pipes, by waves, by roofs, by blood,
 quietly leads to opened lips.

Here it is, sudden, constant, local,
 that it doesn't empty, only dies,
 that you will gather it if you quickly lean
 over the weightless, accidental twist.

Translated by Gerald J. Janeczek,

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1.

If every day flows into the same night, everybody being alone under falling leaves, arrives to the North all covered in a wet snow of names. Yellow-beaked stars, roses and crows, a frozen leaf crumbling in a pocket. A letter to self brings you back to air along the way lit by the windows in the house of a seagull. An agreement with Egypt's poor pride, that's how the obelisk of the moon is built out of unpassed dust in white-headed corners, and out of thin coal of branches.

2.

Rowing your ores on the soot does not change the dryness of a dust pyramid. Unicorn's measure is Latin. The body of the East is the indifferent silk. Wax netting in the night of a book, sincere fall, a stone-museum. Digging for a ford, letting the April Caryatids go. Knees of the night beach, that's where the sand refuses to ossify.

3.

Where is it? It is in the air of the head, in the head of the air. A sky like that is not good for the clouds. It's always short of stars, the ones that are sources of herbs. Nymph of the night, last sadness, they are carrying cloves and pepper. The stare of a lizard hurts your eyes. The lady of rain, pockets full of birch bark. Light upper copper, the leaves, falling from the mouth.

4.

Rags of gasoline dreams and slack lime of newspapers are begging the owner of dead rats for some stupid bread. A square impression, the second room is unfavorable; the third one is half empty. A classified day is a nerdy bookcase. Nail another half hour in to your wall. Dead sounds of a rubber night orient themselves in the city by a department store map.

5.

Bookshelves placed into empty streets. People reside in apartments, trams and trolleybuses live in the city. Haloes light up over them. Do you know the secret names of a teapot? Why catch a crab? So that he will pinch your finger; you let him go, you keep sleeping. Tightly stretched lead, hail is on the shore. The river moves, reflections stay, even when buildings are no more.

6.

Emblems herbarium, a tamed skull, grapes of ghosts, – that's how the bashfulness of a blade wanes into the sand. How can you keep a column of nails, is it with all celestial circles? But, whoever provides the rain also grants us a paper cover of the night. One who allows for a cobweb catches a pail in the body of water. Every turtle wants to be petted. Pushing off from a loss where ice bumps into stars.

7.

Cigarettes invasion and dreams of loose teeth. North is discontentedly moving towards a blue lamp. I would like to die of cold. Everybody who enters divides this room into two. That's how the ceiling affects the night.

Filament of road burnt out. It's time to change views back, have a nice nap in the intersection. Moss, sea wave, secretive water. An ore sinks to the bottom. A second is a thin knife; it is also a table-cloth. Here seeing means admiring. There comes a signal rain.

8.

Who are you, by the house of leaves? I am tar to you. I am the time for your river, the darkness of eyes, the eye of the darkness.

The night is grinding the hills off. Butterflies will lead you towards the corners of constellations between a bitten apple and glass, where a snail is looking for a path; if not with the hands, – then with the eyelashes, if not with the air, then – with a willow's long leaf.

The wind is a thousand years old. In the scales of clouds fish are going to sleep.

9.

A handful of ants, a water lily moth, a twelve dotted ladybug, what does precipitate into the sediment of a voice?

A tree placed where water flows, a windy day over strawberries. His appearance brings words of consolation between a willow bush and carnations. Water is chasing contours of stones, and an apple falls to the center of the Earth. Here, on the shore of dry needle smell, four weeks were dug in two years ago. There's never enough time to take them back. Does forgetting something mean solving a riddle? This is a walk over a wet field. Little dinosaurs drag their tails on the leaves at the end of September.

Translated by Maria Petrenko

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