

Alina DADAIEVA

Six poems

A little boy, sliding on line of light  
to line of scroll,  
where black letters  
twisted, like black chains,  
twisted, like pulpy leaves.  
The boy stooping, leans slightly bald.  
The boy swallows drops, transparent.  
And in the temple two wilting lilies,  
white lilies  
and a bit of rice.

--

Disunited  
Dispersed.  
While whistling,  
Passionless  
Careless  
Groundless  
Left,  
Apart  
All points  
Precisely  
Stripped of all profit  
Ours – like litter  
Like leaflets,  
Like letters.  
Like you sleep,  
Gold cuckoo?  
Are there no dreams  
In the gray Kazakh steppe,  
Fergana wilds,  
No Russian words?

--

Two centuries in a rented apartment,  
quietly moving furniture  
from corner to corner  
and bare walls  
pasted over in fashion,  
the redhaired demon,  
he thirsts for different songs,  
Soviet string bags,  
bitter rowan berries.  
He has a sick liver.  
And at night  
he cries for mama—  
and his own and the other,  
and both plaintively.  
Two centuries ago  
his ancestor  
gave an immutable vow  
to wander  
crackling under the heat of the sun  
and all summer  
drink weak tea  
from a clay bowl.  
Tired and swarthy,  
with a rough beard,  
he asks to go home.  
But another's summer persists unending.

---

And the City slept.  
Only greasy beards of elders,  
prickling at its crown,  
as a throat by the down of rotting quince.  
And along the roads  
Shaggy Gorgons on twisted trunks  
Skimmed bare heels in water,  
Suddenly spilt from the sky.  
The bath on Staramoskovsky  
- or rather its remains –  
groaned  
with ghostly steam and pails.  
An instant – and all will subside.  
Only the scent of hennaed hair  
will linger on.

---

Shorts full of patches; a leaf tucked behind the ear  
Grandma Zuleika calls out to Zayinka  
In a half-Russian trills on: Olinka!  
And on the clothesline at Grandma's – A cloud  
dries next to a brassiere in satin,  
And it's unclear which is more - unsuited.  
The cat lazes around in the stable,  
and shattered a cup of mulberry jam.  
Horses flick at their drooping haunches,  
a cat with mulberries; horses – with apples.

---

And a child lives up in the clouds  
and babbles strange omens  
underneath the carpet  
braiding charades into knots.  
The boy solves something,  
but he is too small; too naïve,  
he dreams of winsome willows and red lilies.  
He sneezes from dust,  
dust mites  
and wool, trundling through fog,  
he tugs on an overbroad jacket  
and doesn't know,  
where the blue ball rolls,  
and rummages all around  
and cannot find it,  
and whines in resentment.

*Translated from the Russian by Alexandra Niemi*

\*\*\*