

Alexander ULANOV

*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.

-----

2. Translated by Michelle Murphy and Thomas Epstain.

Published in The Crossing Centuries.

\*\*\*\*\*

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, burntlime 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.

Previously published in *The Transcendental Friend* and in *The Crossing Centuries*.  
*Translated by Michelle Murphy and Thomas Epstain.*

\*\*\*\*\*

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

Previously published in *Essays in Poetics*

***Translated by Gerald J. Janecek***

\*\*\*\*