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Prose and poetry

HELLO, MY DEAR SILENCE-KEEPERS!

Hi, my dear silence-keepers! Just imagine: your fledgling opened its mouth. And asked Mitterand. And asked Yeltsin. What are they going to do with Central Asia, asked. He had just chirped so. Silence – it's the most worthy thing in the world. Journalists!!! This writing machine, damn it, likes exclamation points. Thus, journalists didn't yet understand. And sitting at home – is a worthy thing as well. You sit at home, make trifles, and it's good. The most important thing: have a roof. And have tea under that roof. Hot tea! Give me a machine, more exclamation points, come on!!! You know well – I am telling the truth! So hard now in Russia without its own tea...you know that perfectly. You say always: Paris-Paris, write to us about Paris. You sinners, I know what you are expecting – exclamation point.

And it is so hard for me. I am walking the long corridors of the metro, the cement and ads, the smoke towards me, low ceilings, tired eyes, the refined spirit of Chanel.

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Here are two vagabond friends of the Parisian metro – spirit of unfiltered cigarettes and spirit of Chanel, the essence. Here are two friends, they live here, on cement stairs, they are older than my father. They have white grey beards. It's a mystery for me – what are they talking about, these “*aksakals*” (Kyrg: white beard, wise men). The crowds and crowds pass by every second, every moment. In one hour our *aksakals* see more people than the Secretary General of the UN himself. I cannot find his name in newspaper – what's the value of this newspaper if it doesn't even mention the name of the UN Secretary General?!

They have a thermos as well. I am so glad about that, I hope they have hot tea in there, so our world is not so desperate, ha? And the crowd is so much weaker than they are, squealing, restless, exhausted.

A stray melody. Play, accordion, play, and do not pretend you're so happy! You exhale sadness, and your melody is troubled, it races the long corridors, crashes against the billboard smiles, flows down the gray hair and spills – against the greyness of the cement crowd... It's beyond me, I can't get this pathos!

Two hawks are startled. Everything was “*comme il faut*” for the meeting, such celebrated birds. Something from life, something from a show. A condescending smile, some dignity, an innuendo. The spirit of Chanel was floating there in the Elysee Palace, under the chandeliers. It had left its best friend, “the spirit of the cigarette butt,” left him alone to weave and sway along the corridors, and ran away... He is like this: believes in his own chic charm, speaks exclusively in French and likes to repeat “*c'est extraordinaire!*” and stop by the Elysee's Chambers. And this time it would be a sin not to go in. He is loved here as well. Here he is a regular guest, he rules the ball, he is so arrogant, even celebrated birds are nothing to him (and so much the cigarette butt). He flies from one curtain to another, he startles them, wakes them up, all feathered.

...

Ah, here I found his name in the “Le Monde” – a paper of world class. His name is Boutros-Boutros Ghali. Monsieur Boutros-Ghali, I am so happy for United Nations, she has luck with beautiful names. The Guardian of peace! She deserves such names. Excuse me for this drivel, but today in this city the sun is shining, sun is so rare a guest here, so I'm lead to noble everything, exclamation mark.

...So, this swindler Chanel managed to trouble the stenographers. They typed, embarrassed, "Kurdistan." Chanel got crazy: "...zistan-distan-Kurdistan", didn't manage to catch the right spelling – Kyrgyzstan.. But what's the difference? Akaev or Nazarbaev : just the same... Oh, I praise him, a provident President of "five Frances", here in the Presidency of this France his name is known very well, lucky man, he never retreats without spirit, how is his atomic bomb, by the way? Kyrgyzstan, Kurdistan, "Gorbistan", Akaev, Nazarbaev, *aksakals** or *saksauls***, how the hell he could know all these diphthongs, our Chanel - poor thing! Let us excuse him, he's very busy right now, very tired, though "extraordinaire" sounds easily and extraordinarily from him. Look at journalists, it's a different thing, even they are always tired and cannot manage to stay home, they are an ever-darting people, interested: "How are things in Djalal-Abad?", or "How do you translate Ala-Archa?", and vice-versa. Thanks to the bomb and lack of visibility, they know that name.

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The all-mighty omnipresent *Atman-Chanel* confused as well as – I didn't answer all that, but am really happy for my old Asia, she deserved that sonority and curiosity.

Here in Paris, whether I am walking triumphant under the Arch, or admiring the Eiffel Tower, the very same one written about, and where "De Gaulle chewed the chestnuts", or whether I immerse myself in the fumes of the local metropolitrain, I always, always remember you, my kind old lady (Asia), believe me.

And here is the proof – my pockets. And they are always stuffed with rubbish, but along with the junk, there are always the shells of pistachios. Yes-yes, the great Charles de Gaulle "chewed the chestnuts," he was right, and me, I take pleasure in chewing the Pistashki, "Le Pistache" – the French say, almost like the Kyrgyz – "Pistechke" or "Mistechke". *Pistache-Pistache* – the great fruit of great Ibn Sina, *Pistache-pistache* is growing on the slopes of *Maverrannabr*. Maybe I am right as well, in my own way...

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Those celebrated birds flew away, the celebrated spirits as well, not even a hint of stench. Three pompous days went so fast, left Paris to talk and gossip for three more and went nowhere, forgotten, as we forget, with time, the wedding at the neighbours' street. Even our "extraordinary" Chanel started to suspect this world of its inconstancy. To wrap up his story I'll tell you, he left by returning to his mundane friends – pistachios, and cigarette butts...

Montparnasse. Welcome! They are still here, so faithful to this metro. *Montparnasse-Bienvenue*. Sounds just like that. Two "aksakals" (white-beards), still talking, He alone knows what they talk about. Two "*clochard*" as the Frenchman would say, two from many-many. Yes, they have beautiful beards, so lousy, so noble. They are the celebrated birds of the Paris metro. Among the smoke, sighs, whispers, trampling, dirty posters, mean stares, low ceilings, they are faithful to their topic, you can not discover it in three days, you need a whole life.

So here's how it is, your Paris! This is his subject, his plot...

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And recently as well Mamma Roma merged with this life, quite authentically. Clucking can be heard over all the city: he whirls over the Arch, the Concord Square, spins around the summit of the Eiffel tower, walks through the streets of the Latin quarter, all over all the corners of Chatelet, stops by the ancient quarter Marais, to the *Center Pompidou* (or Beaubourg-center, explain to a Kyrgyz that it's not a "Khan Babur"), then he is tired and vanishes and drinks coffee in several cafes at once, because Paris is so cosy with its numerous cafes, and you could never miss them. Exclamation point!

Everything is the same with me. Those sad or pompous subjects merely move me, I am still fond of dry apricots and love to buy postcards. And plus, as you see, I talk a lot of rubbish, don't you pay attention to that, and what helped me - my Soviet heritage – staccato of the typing machine "Ortex" and the rhythm of "Pink Floyd". By the way I couldn't really translate "The Atom heart mother" or was it "Mother's heart is Atom," unless I understood – that it's silly even to try, it's just not

important. Better to stick with silence. Because silence is a most worthy thing. Let us keep silent.
Exclamation point!

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Recital of a Parisian city-dweller

Chirac, Chirac, think largely:
Your Paris is so splendid a prison.
The shine of soles, that I don't believe.
Paris is municipal might where Chirac, smiling broadly, drinks tap water.
Paris is the pitiful licking of a boutique's display windows.
Bowling to celebrities.
Paris is the blurred kiss in the sombre story of Doisneau.
Paris is so conservative, it contradicts itself.
Paris is so open, so welcoming.
Paris sound so roman, Paris sounds so *gallois*
Thronging in cafés, stench of dog,
Cappuccino for a tourist, espresso is enough for me.
Here is a wine for lunch, here is a wine for supper, and some left over for tomorrow.
Neon shining of the Bateaux-Mouches, the hysteria of a tourist at Trocadero.
Forbidden to park by the Louvre: merciless penalty.
This deceiving charm of ladies in cornflower blue.

Endless traffic jams and endless plot from nothing.
Paris, you know the value of antiquity and ignore our own times.
Your primitive cycle imprisons: "metro," "boulot", "dodo"...
Imaginary joy of thronging mornings.

Paris is eternal search for something... Other.
And only a tiresome presence of the self,
Such a deceiving discovery,
Such a bitter location of self.
Failed escape.
Failed escape.

Paris is ringing-ringing. The bells. What do you ring for? Silence!
Catholic nostalgia for the mosque.

Paris so servile. Paris is so dismissive.

The concierge with a Portuguese accent,
The garbage man in green pants,
Madame's suit with its confident buttons,
And Monsieur managed to get a Turkish rug on sale.
«*Solde! Solde! Solde!*» - shouts Galleries Lafayette,
And the Sri-Lankan shouts
That four avocados cost only four francs,
And four advocates that cost nothing
Fabricate their schemes at Palais de Justice.

And Chirac's name is Jacques,
Smiling widely, he drinks city tap-water.

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Parc Monceau

In the Parc Monceau the birds are singing
Without end
In the Parc Monceau there are gardeners.
They mow the grass in the Parc Monceau.
In winters and in springs, they mow.
Children play in the Parc Monceau.
They speak French. They laugh in the Parc Monceau
And the birds are happy there too.
There are some gardeners.
Everyone has a beautiful lawn
Everyone has a beautiful wife
They are so courteous, the gentlemen
Parc Monceau is so nice in the mornings
The Sun is always there
The Sun loves the Parc Monceau
The Gardeners and the Sun –
the Parc Monceau's true friends ...
In daytime come the children and the Sun
And at night, birds and a man with tired eyes
He lives there. He sleeps on the bench
It is a green bench
Everything is green in Parc Monceau
The eyes of this man are green ...
This is a man with tired green eyes ...
At night he sleeps in the Parc Monceau,
in daytime he reads *Libération*
Number one hundred forty seven
Oh, happy guy!
Daytime is his time to read
To read the same issue of *Libération*
Number one hundred forty seven of this year
Or maybe last year
At nighttime the newspaper serves as a pillow
He is a rich man –
he has the Parc Monceau and the Time to read
It's his happiness. And his burden
In the Parc Monceau you can hear laughing children
If not laughter, then noise – of lawnmowers

And the birds are singing – you always hear something
 Hey, you, citizen of the Parc Monceau,
 the birds and a man with green eyes! Make my world happy!
 Oh, happy creatures!
 Please open the mystery of one forty seven!

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To my dear Andree

My old lady lives by the Jardin de Luxembourg,
 At the base of the Senate,
 Goes to church once a week. At noon on Sundays,
 When the bells call insistently
 at Saint-Sulpice. She is not much for religion.
 But says “we should not forget the church.”
 Once a week, again on Sundays, her son comes. To lunch.
 This is a habit, this family ritual.
 What a poor family ritual...
 Every day my old lady goes to the market.
 On the other side of the Saint–Germain–des–Pres,
 along the rue de Seine and rue de Buci
 (that famous rue de Buci,
 of the Russian bookshop “Le Globe”).
 “Ah, that market has a remarkable selection
 and people are kind to me,” says my old lady.
 And she adds: I noticed in general, people are kind to the elderly.”
 “Thank God, then, if it is so,” – I think afterwards...
 There is a wonderful abundance of food on the Rue de Seine.
 But my old lady takes two slices of ham, a half-baguette
 and three potatoes, and comes back to the foot of the Senate.
 My old lady is a true parisienne.
 When it rains, she puts on her waterproof hat;
 and on sunny days always
 her unchanging “Elisabeth Arden” cream,
 advertised maybe fifty years ago.
 My old lady is my good friend.
 She watches her TV every day, afternoons and evenings.
 She has a super TV, either “Grundig” or “Phillips”, I don’t remember...
 She wraps up her feet, put on her glasses,
 Picks up a t.v. guide and studies it closely.
 Then bravely using her remote on her ‘Grundig’,
 she watches the whole thing and falls asleep quietly.
 Often she invites me to watch TV with her:
 news and thrillers.
 But I rarely find time. Only sometimes...
 And for her it is a pastime.
 But inevitably at noon and at four p.m sharp
 she gets up from her centenary armchair,

moves in the direction of her orange kitchen
and prepares her lunch or afternoon tea.
She drinks a bowl full of Chinese smoked tea.
I know she doesn't like it, but someone told her years ago
that we should have at least one and a half liter
of liquid every day; so she obeys.
"My God, I really don't want it, but I must..."
And she drinks, shaking her head unhappily.
And comes back to her post by the TV set.
My darling prefers police movies.
But she often falls asleep halfway through the film.
"So," sighs my friend, "I am going to my TV; I am obliged to.
Otherwise I don't know how to spend my day,
what to do really, I don't know."
So she looks at *Crosswords*, thrillers or news.
That's how she knows all of the events.
And she keeps me updated.
She announced the "coming death" of Jackie Kennedy-Onassis,
The wild 'Formula One' races in Italy, the catastrophe of a famous racer
that put Brazil and all the world into deep sadness,
Ayrton Senna. This is her news.
Sometimes I keep her updated when she asks me
whether modern youth still go to dance clubs;
or how Hitler died;
or whether there are still plenty of bakeries in other parts of Paris...

My old lady remembers very well,
what happened in her childhood.
When in 1914 she went to a German family
to learn German,
war broke out and that German family ('how kind they were!')
put her on the train that very same day, to avoid arrest...
"Today you have a chance – airplanes!
The same day – three thousand km away.
In my time, nothing like that..."
Once or twice a day she gets a telephone call.
From the post-office, or a bank, or occasionally, her children.
Every day the mailman brings letters.
But it is a anonymous, official exchange.
They are formal letters from the bank,
post-office, electricity, GDF or cable TV,
and once she got a postcard from Greece from her daughter.

I look out of the window to the inner yard.
Shutters, flower pots, laced lattices.
Everything reminds of past grandeur and stability.
It is an ancient yard. A patio. An ancient building.
From the time of the last *Louis*.
Someone's neat hand shakes out
a tablecloth with numerous crumbs.
It reminds me of the deceptive words
my darling often repeats.
"At least I have a window that looks to the yard,

where I can throw the crumbs.
I can't believe they forbid to throw them street-side!
It's forbidden now! What can I do?"
Ah, crumbs-crumbs and that old bread,
dry bread, what to do with you?
It is even forbidden to feed the pigeons in the street.
One can do it in the Park, but not in the street!
But my old lady does it anyway, hiding ...
Ah, my forgotten darling lady - my darling old friend,
her name is Andrée Pinsolle.
My friend is ninety-two years old.
And she always has her glasses in the right place,
and she is a real Parisienne.

...I walk up by our street towards the Senate,
towards the Luxembourg garden.
The morning sun caresses the roofs,
the kiosk man puts out fresh newspapers;
the manager of the glamorous boutique "Jean-Luis Scherrer"
which is just at the corner,
diligently washes the pavement
with thoroughly soapy water.
The water foams, spreading all over pavement.
Paris has awakened. But that is another story...
