

Aušra KAZILIŪNAITĒ**Poems****stuffed**

one day, by the dumpster, i saw an abandoned stuffed bird
i saw it and forgot, but it didn't forget me, it even began to stalk me –
wherever and whenever i would go, whomever i would meet, i saw the ragged bird

at first, i pretended not to see it
let it show itself, what do i care – it neither chirps nor pecks at me

but eventually, it grew rude – appearing not only in public places –
among students, listeners, pedestrians –
but showing up among friends, perching even on my loved ones' heads

so i tried to make nice, asking – what are you doing here and what do you want?
but the stuffed thing just squatted there – silent
and my father, on whose head it eventually perched, only looked at me inquiringly
dad – i whispered – there's a bird on your head!
but he just waived his hand, you know – big deal

from that time on, i began to see the stuffed creature in my dreams –
no escape – i hardly slept, i barely ate, i barely was –
and i would keep seeing it – always frozen in the same pose, mute, frayed,
though it began to seem to me that it was smiling – the stuffed bird was mocking me
so i finally snatched it up and threw it with all my strength at the wall, only, it turned out,
that wasn't the wall, but a mirror.

that was the first time i saw a bird fly
in a mirror

holy

pedestrian smiles, a cold spring, books, films
shoes in the wrong spot, sex, monday's sirens
a pigeon flies into church –
none of it appears to mean anything

and that's the only reason
it appears

holiday make-up

i saw angels with automatic rifles in their hands
staring sadly at the floor in airports and stations

waiting

i saw eight-year-olds sent by their parents
running up to human rights activists
shouting – give us back the rainbow –

giggling

i saw men who thought they were real men
and women who thought they were real women
saying in greeting, instead of a name –
i am so and so's woman –

i saw emptied villages, forests felled
dammed rivers and steeples of small towns

in the mirror

alien planet

the computer says – we've arrived
it's generally not very talkative, but has been jabbering
for hours now about the pruning of fruit trees
it says – we have reached our journey's goal

my toes are numb
i climb out of the spaceship
and look around, gathering samples for scientists –
i walk about a room identical to my own
nothing lives for light years all around
there are no curtains
it's quietly snowing outside
garlands glitter in windows across the street
children push and shove on the sidewalk

nothing but cosmic loneliness and stone

the blooming bush

i don't remember much of childhood –
often getting sick, i had nightmares, i feared the dark
i had no friends, sometimes, i was afraid of vanishing,
of just disintegrating like a cloud –
there's almost nothing more
and when i try to remember
it seems that i always had a fever
that when i broke my leg, i had to learn to walk again

another thing – my mother got especially angry once
and broke off a branch of this yellow blooming bush in spring
and i didn't care at all
but pretended to cry

after that, i went to school, finished school, had boyfriends
and girlfriends, matriculated in a BA program, graduated
matriculated in a MA program, graduated, matriculated in a PhD program
and always tried to be very excited about all of this
because i was trying to the last to hide from myself the fact
that it didn't really matter to me

and now, slowly, i begin to understand
that this dripping from the tap
the dead cats lolling on my lap
the fog slinking over the land
all of the words of the people i once met
and all of the yellow blooming bushes of spring

recognized me

before i was born

wildflowers
at city cafés
steeped in soda bottles

that's us

omelet

i was planning to cook an omelet
i broke one egg
then another
and in the third i found a grimy boy

sitting there, parentless, alone
in a shopping mall
with a small box at his side

i looked around to see if anyone saw
then continued to prepare
breakfast

plants

i arranged myself
on the shelves
of grocery stores

poured myself into the gas tanks of buses
where it's dark and tight
but at least there's a direction – maybe a meaning

i wrote my name at bus stops
but nobody gets on there

i checked myself out
of all the municipal libraries
and forgot to return myself

i feel the weather changing
i feel the debt growing

and that spring is coming
spring is coming
spring is coming

with me

all flowers wilt

i hear a knock, i open the door:
my neighbor from the other side of the wall

i used to hear her, in the evenings, washing up
i've seen her out of the corner of my eye a few times –
the first time was in childhood
when our dog Lord didn't come home
and again
when grandmother didn't come

i always tried to do what was intimate quietly – so she wouldn't hear
in truth, the most ordinary things became intimate because of her

holding my breath, my heart quivering, at one in the morning
i would slowly and quietly stir honey into my chamomile tea
so that she wouldn't hear, so that she wouldn't understand

and here she is standing in front of me with a giant, red bouquet of blossoms

their heads bob with satisfaction in my trembling hands

stunned, like some fool, i ask

what should i do with them?

she smiles so beautifully, beautifully

just love them

rain in Vilnius

gravediggers
dig out the city little by little
lower us into it nailing it up
then scatter rain on top

at first –
by the handful
later –
with shovels

later yet –
they cover us with silence

the moon is a pill

the moon is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

anger is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

Mindaugas Bridge is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

summer is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

drought in Africa
that wipes away
the lives of 500 thousand children
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

a beloved woman is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

a cop striking the protestors' dog
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

to give up one's seat on the bus
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

to sing from joy
having buried one's self
is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

silence is a pill
with a groove
down the middle

drunken time lies

in the groove
and babbles

never ask
who cut this groove
who dug this day for us
who nailed a twitching bird
to its teeth
BREAK IT

swallow one half
and the other –
opening the bird's lid with both hands
insert the pill and close

then you will finally
see –

drops of blood
streaking
over the day's teeth

you have to live somehow

every night i hear the herons leaving
every morning i see the falling leaves
every day a winter comes somewhere
without end
every evening i am buried by a man
wearing denim overalls

he doesn't earn enough for this
but you have to live somehow
pay your mortgage
child support too

he grins

i haven't read a poem

i haven't read a poem in a long time:
surrounded by the impassable bogs
of philosophy, the impenetrable
forests of novels in translation –

i dreamed a creature there

not a serious beast
sort of yellow
brooding

maybe a jay

only a hundred-page jay
but already a beast

i haven't read a poem in a long time
because it doesn't fit
into three hundred pages
the jay doesn't fit
either

it takes more time
it takes all time

i haven't read a poem in a long time
because it doesn't fit
because it takes

i haven't read this poem

if i lose my hands while walking
don't pick them up and don't
run up to me to give them back
they were simply too heavy
they were too heavy
and that's that

you can take them home
to decorate a Christmas tree
homeless cats won't touch them
they were too heavy
just too heavy

if i lose my head while walking
don't say
you're so unlike yourself today
so not like yourself –
there were creatures inside, creatures
who were hunting me

if i lose my words while walking
don't pick them up from the soggy ground
let them lie there in the dirt
they'll sprout when spring arrives

the meadow will rustle where teenagers gingerly touch

if i lose the rain while walking
go outside
it's me, it's me
caressing you, without hands

spring

sitting next to you i can smell
the wounds under your clothes

magnolia blossoms
pushing through your skin

no, thank you!

you're walking the narrow streets of the medina-quarter
you turn the corner
and there's no one there, no vendors, no pedestrians
just charcoal shadows and soured pigeon shit

eventually, at one corner after another, you find volunteers to show you the way
they follow you, insinuating that if you run from them you'll lose your way

a small boy runs after, mocking you: no, thank you! no, thank you!

and then – a square, a tree, a person
wrapped in cloth, he could be one of Jesus's friends

“so go, go, and don't stop, and don't listen to what they say
you're like those donkeys who go without stopping, go until they die”

and i go on, i go listening to how the old man under the tree rages
i turn in circles, always meeting those who want to show me the way
thinking, maybe i really need to stop, let them lead me astray, rob me

maybe when you're led astray you're less lost than when you lose yourself

storm

on your body – tattooed rain
falling leaves splashing
cars in the old town
and i –

my wet tattooed
clothes, torn shoes
and soaked hair

but there is no
umbrella
here

and no
you
on your body

signal lights

lying in the heads of dream people
in the entrails of forgetting and remembering
thoroughly digested and digesting
you suddenly turn over to the other side
so that you could wake up
in the already dreamt dreams of dream people
and when the town executioner cuts off the head of dawn
you arm yourself with the sharpened blades of unease

you skip along like a summer breeze
like freedom that knows no will
like a desert jackal scenting the carrion of victory
separating you from the executioner's neck

another split-second
AND

it's cold,
a red light
blinks in the distance –
an alarm sounds
in the neighboring house's lot

lifting your eyes
you see the entire sky
is full of similar lights and unease –
stars that don't blink, but burn

that
is the alarm
sounding above
from a long time ago

a longer time than we have been
a longer time than the word has been
proclaiming that someone
is stealing –
that someone stole the sky

and so what if god is a seagull

all our history of trying to see, craves not to see

for so long we looked for confirmation
that this time it's for good, that now everything is really real
that to the very grave, etc., etc.

time and time again, we wanted clear and tangible evidence
something concrete and visible
but so what if it's there, and so what if god exists

and so what if god is a seagull, turning his head to all sides in disdain
swallowing fishes live, and shitting on a Belarusian writer

and so what if god is orange juice
whose expiration date is missing and which
some uncle Stan bought for breakfast some six years ago

and so what if god is that athletic young man
with brown eyes, showing the exact measure of his penis
on a gay website

and so what, if god is –
only we don't notice him

wardrobe

i saw another person's dream
trying you on for size

it washed and ironed you
hung you in the closet
then threw you away
– you were just too big –

occasionally i meet
the homeless man
who wears you now

finally, there is light in his eyes

coltsfoot will grow along the fence

someday, all my friends will die
my relatives and loved ones too
my enemies will die and all my neighbors
the passers-by whom i once met on the street
will vanish from the surface of the earth

my classmates and colleagues
teachers professors co-workers
will die

all the people will breathe their last
with whom i wore
for reasons unknown
the same uniform of time
though i never fought
in any of its battles

birds who once flew
above my head held high
will die and the dogs i used to hear howl
on spine-chilling nights outside the city
will grow silent for all eternity

coltsfoot will still grow along the fence
tired grapes will rest on arbors
but no one will call me by name
and i myself will not be

but then
carefully
head slightly cocked
i'll watch the strange dogs
grapes and coltsfoot

and then
for the first time
i'll really see the flight of birds

and the couple hurrying by
will scroll
their eyes
along the bench
on which i sit

and they will know
that i see
the flight of birds
differently

and that
i am
those things i don't know
the dogs the grapes
and the coltsfoot

fortune

in a flash, i am all those people on whom fortune smiled
but they are afraid to smile back
so they look down at their feet and blush

they just look down and blush

even though no one has smiled for some time

in a flash, i am all those people who feel superior to others
and all those people who feel inferior to others
and i am
a snail
a live snail in a North African bazaar

i find myself
in a coiled basket with other snails

slowly unfurling my antennae

tourists pass
taking pictures

second storey

from my windows i can see
the trolley bus wires
take people away

electricity sparks and
dies

pupils narrow
and expand

blood flows to my temples

and a buck restlessly raises
his head

to listen for the unheard murmur
of the night he just drank

idyll

i'm sitting on the bed
and hear the birds outside the window
i smell potatoes frying
and see myself among them
in the uncertainty of fortuitous lumps

this one has my grinning lips
rolling greasy on the ground

so i say to myself:
now everything is really all right
now everything will finally be real

the bed, birds, window and potatoes
all assent:
now everything will finally be real

Translated from the Lithuanian by Rimas Užgiris