

Anete KRUUSMÄGI

Poems and prose

We Never Went to the Cemetery

We never went to a cemetery,
but I still remember your hand in mine
and the feeling of driving through the pitch dark night
so that everything disappeared but music
that carried us further

It carried us to abandoned places
with blooming cottonwood and flowers everywhere,
to a graveyard of old machines.
Power lines and the sound of electricity
the only sound present when we made love.

We never went to a cemetery,
even though we ended up so often
in the middle of vast snowy fields,
watching cartoons in a car like children,
who had no other place to go.

We never went to a cemetery
even when we gave up talking,
let go of our hands
and forgot the colour of our eyes,
sunbathing naked in the grass.

We never went to a cemetery
and when you finally took me home
people flew Chinese lanterns to the sky
and we became just friends.

Sometimes you still call me long distance,
always to paradise
with white sand beaches and waterfalls
that are all too beautiful for me.
Yes, sometimes I miss you too.

Pantoum

The nights in your light-blue room are complicated,
there is no peace.

I'm turning and turning and turning
trying to find your eyes.

There is no peace
when I hold your hand
trying to find your eyes,
you pull it away.

When I hold your hand
it's soft and warm.
You pull it away
and I feel rejected.

It's soft and warm
while we are sitting in a kitchen
and I feel rejected,
because I don't know the language.

While we are sitting in a kitchen
all our past lies between us,
because I don't know the language,
I'm locked into silence.

And I realize: there is so much of you I don't know,
I'm turning and turning and turning,
but I can't get the picture.
The nights in your light-blue room are complicated.

*Down the Time Line:
Correspondence with Nick Drake.*

Dear Nick,

I know you will never read this, but I just need to tell you the story that has led me to you. It all started on a rather snowy February afternoon, far away from London, in a university city in Estonia, the small and buzzing, quite old-fashioned Tartu. There I spent my undergraduate years that could relate to your time in Cambridge perhaps. But different from you, I managed to break through the narrow walls of the student hall and escape with my best friend, to live in a house built in 1911. It was a time of searching and unnamed relationships.

On a grey February afternoon I asked my friend Kristjan to visit me, because I loved him. That was the only thing I was sure of at that time. The truth was, I barely knew him. Just like I barely know now what love is. He looked quite like you. He was tall and thin, he had long hair and full lips, wore a white shirt and on top of it a loose beige jacket that reminds me your loose grey suits. He looked kind of cool, just like Patrick describes you. He didn't say much, his presence was enough. Everybody looked at him when he entered to room. Girls liked him. And he played the guitar. For a long time he remained a mystery to me.

On this particular afternoon we walked up the winding staircase to my place and sat down in a kitchen. I made tea and he asked for milk, which is highly uncommon in Estonia. Nobody drinks white tea there. After a couple of slices of white bread with jam, and a couple of comments about the nice and rusty house--"It's good that it doesn't look too shipshape"-- he closed his hands around the cup; we were off to listen my records. We put on your record, which my friend had made for me just a couple of days ago. On the cover there were pink bird fetuses resting on a pink flower. Asko used to find, and actually still does, the most amazing gifts ever. I had never heard about you before. But quite soon me and my roommate, we found your voice so haunting that there wasn't a night when we went to sleep without you singing to us.

Snowflakes, as huge as cornflakes, are falling slowly. It must have been -10°C outside and completely dark. We listened to the end of your "Cello Song". Do you remember, the one that ends with the drums? We sat in complete silence. I can remember somebody's foot tapping along with the rhythm. What I can't remember is, was it his or my leg. I presume it was his, because at the time it felt somehow significant. This memory of a cold winter night never leaves me when I listen you.

Anete

Dear Anete,

My life is the same as always; we are doing the Bryter Layter and you would love it. It's bright, like you when you wear your pink clothes. I think it's like that because of the flutes; they really add light and hope to the songs.

Your letter made me think of my own relationships at the moment. I think I've told you about Linda, haven't I? The one who was later engaged to Joe and eventually married Richard? Well, she was an Island artist as well. You said that the guy, Kristjan reminds you of me. It's funny that you think so. Do you really think I'm cool, or posh? I mean I wouldn't mind this kind of impression, but I think I am way too shy to look any kind of cool. You know, I'm not a party person; I'm just a quiet observer.

But what I wanted to tell you about was Linda. I'm not really sure what to call the thing we have. Others seem to know much better. Sometimes they say "your girlfriend" and I get really confused, because I haven't a slightest idea who are they referring to, and then they explain and I go like "ah ha" and rush to explain that I really don't know who we are to each other. But well my situation is still different. I mean we cuddle sometimes, but most definitely I wouldn't call it love. It's something different, very special and comforting indeed.

I visit her quite often now. She has this really lovely apartment in Notting Hill. Have you heard about it? I suppose you have, because the film should be out by now. To come to think of it, it must have been out a long time already, like ten years or even more. Anyway, it's a neighborhood whose atmosphere you yourself must feel. It has so many faces, you know, when you just step outside the Notting Hill Gate tube station you have all these lovely record shops and stuff that seem to have been there forever and people sitting in cafes and you think this is it, this is Notting Hill, exactly as I have imagined it. But no, you haven't seen it at all. The truth is that even if you go a bit further down to Portobello Road and find yourself among those nice pastel-colored little houses, you're still not there. You still need to go on to get the picture. At this moment I need to warn you, though. There will be kind of slums and West Indians. Normally I wouldn't mind but you just need to be careful. It's just better not to get in the middle of these race conflicts. Just lately there was a Swedish woman who got beaten up because she had married a West Indian. In these situations you really think that we shouldn't complain about anything in our lives, at least there is nobody who thinks that the way we live is wrong, and starts to organize it. That was exactly what I was thinking last time I went to Linda's. It's easy actually, just me and her and everything I need to do is to show a bit of initiative. Everything is in my hands.

But I'll come back to that. Now I just want to show you that Notting Hill doesn't have just one face. It always shows you something different. At times I can even enjoy the market, all the busy streets, self-service Asian supermarkets, smells of all kinds of food, smoke, swearing, black families passing by, girls in overalls and long skirts, stockings with holes in them, children playing on the pavement, cakes, canned vegetables, mechanics around the corner, a car with its wheels up, the smell of gasoline, laughter, nurses, railway workers returning home, small handbags, light blue gowns, tired faces, shops where they sell whole foods, people people people everywhere and no rest. And of course the music. Since they won't let the black people in the pubs, they need to find their own ways to socialize. Lots of people are just sitting outside in the evening sun. But they don't really play music outside. So you can only hear some dim beats from the basement if you walk by: reggae, ska, bluebeat and above them you hear blues.

There was no place for silence, for sad thoughts; just the beat that carried you on.

I'm not crazy about the market though. It's far too crowded and I feel that when people are in a crowd they lose their personality, they melt in. They seem to go with the flow, they seem to wander around aimlessly, and that is something that drives me absolutely mad. You need to have an aim even if it's a vague one. You can't just turn off your thoughts and go, for me it's the end of existence. Or maybe it's just me and the fact that I've read too many books by existentialists. On the other day though I saw this baldheaded boy sitting next to me. I didn't know why but he reminded me of a dog. Maybe because of the warm sand-colored clothing he wore, or because of these round blue eyes. Anyways I recognized something. He was just sitting there smoking, stopped in the middle of all this movement. Completely out of the picture. And it wasn't that quick five minute cigarette you can't even finish. No, he finished his cigarette and stayed for quite a while, watching people, watching his hands, exchanging couple of words with an older man who drank lemonade. It was a funny recognition. He's like me. We could have easily exchanged our bodies and gone on, and nothing would change. I smiled while I tried to imagine myself working in one of these shops, taking breaks. No I probably couldn't do it. I put out my cigarette and went on.

Usually I never go that far though, I only do when I'm bit early, when I know that she is still in the city, recording or shopping for her groceries. Then I need to kill time somehow. Usually I just go straight to hers and that was exactly what I did last time. She lives in this nicer neighborhood, with pastel houses and fragrant cherry blooms not far from the station. It's surprisingly nice there; I think there were some laws or something that forced people to refurbish their houses. And if they didn't, because they only had money for paying rent and sending home 10 pence from every penny earned, they needed to leave their homes. So white people came and started to buy up the houses. It's not that far away from the Buckingham Palace and Chelsea after all.

When I walked there it was getting dark already and I was pretty sure about what will happen next. I was dressed up, which meant that I wore my best clothes and Cuban heel boots, they gave me some confidence. I imagined how I will go there and how we'll sit down and maybe listen to something and she will go to the kitchen to make some tea and when she comes back and music stops and she, without giving me a look, waits me to go and put on the new record. Then I wouldn't do it and instead I would just say "Listen, Linda, I really like in you place and I feel so good around you and I was just wondering how do you feel about me?" and she with her grey sweater would come sit next to me and put her arm around me and look out of window as she does when she tries to put her thoughts into words (she thinks it's much easier to just to sing, and I feel exactly like that, you know, as if conversations would be song lines). And eventually she would say that she feels the same way and wants to be with me forever. And you know we are so comfortable around each other that there seem to be really nothing, nothing to stop us. And so I stood there, behind her door, full of hope and some strange fragile happiness.

But when she came to a door it felt like somebody's cold hand had grabbed me. She felt distant in real life, in real life I wasn't so sure at all that she wants to be with me forever. She looked tired; she looked as if she had had another visitor. Of course she hadn't, but something in her betrayed that her mind was busy with something else. She opened the door and let me in, being as far from the present moment as one could possibly be, just her body there. And I went in quietly, feeling guilty, feeling as if I'd come to disturb her. But I knew I didn't disturb her. It was just the way she was, she probably just needed time to get out of her being alone with her thoughts only to be around me. And then she went to the kitchen. We had a cup of organic tea and I went to put on some record that she had left next to the gramophone. She hadn't had anything good happen today I remembered thinking, nothing that could fit the moment, or was the moment already

passed? She played some blues and sat next to me and I felt that the moment had definitely passed. I shook my head and she rose to change it and so it went on all night and all night I felt so comfortable around her. I felt as if I'm alone even when I am with her. This is the quality I like the most about the people- they don't disturb you, they leave you enough space to be and still, they are there. Just perfect. And then I fell asleep. Next morning I found myself on a floor, covered with blanket. I had woken up because it was too hot, the sun was in my face. I saw her back; she was standing next to the window, drinking tea, wearing the same top like yesterday. She should have had a cat I thought, it would fit her.

Then she walked me back to the tube station. All of a sudden there were too many people. Night had gone with its slight smells and dusk and melodies, warmth and soft words. Now everything was naked. Too real again. She gave me ten pounds for a cab. So you see, nothing happened, even if I would have wanted it to. Maybe it wasn't meant to be then. Maybe it is something else, something much more beautiful.

Nick

Dear Nick,

Lately I've been thinking about romantic heroes and all this myth that comes with you. I've been thinking about industrial romance. How time passes, but people are still the same. Strange isn't it? We used to think that time changes us, didn't we? That we grow with time, that we are not girls with needlework, endlessly tea drinking and novel reading girls chewing dried prunes in their pastel-colored rooms and can't wait to get out of them already.

Nowadays girls and boys have all possibilities to entertain themselves, nobody sulks in boring dream flows anymore.

And can there be romance anymore? Is anybody left out there still searching for the essence of life? Who sits on the stairs and has a self sorry cigarette? Who can listen to mellow music all night long because thoughts won't let her sleep? Yes, these people exist, no matter what the century is, and where they are located, the last hippies, tragic heroes, girls suffering everlasting sadness.

But they are rare rare finds who we probably pass sailing down the Northern line. And you, I believe, were one of them. You were solitary, lived quietly and tried to reach down to the bottom. You wore life down. You observed and absorbed it into you and turned it into music until there was nothing absolutely nothing left.

Come to think of it, the university town was full of characters like you, the ones whose presence transformed the environment for me forever. There are still benches in Tartu that make me shiver when I pass by them, like ghosts. And industrial romance is possible.

It was spring; the air was mild like cream. We came out of class, minds full of rubbish. The professor stood there at the low end of the lecture hall and told us that people are not meant to be alone. I looked back at the boy I fancied, and he was writing and he agreed. After class he sat on the windowsill of this huge building which had a zoology museum and bible classes in it. I couldn't really understand how these things went together. The only thing that came to my mind was the ship of Noah. He wore a burgundy-colored shirt that matched his dark long hair. My friend Asko, tall and skinny, told me that he reminds him a dramatic hero, sitting alone everywhere, on the windowsills, benches. "Girls like it," he said.

He smiled and we went to buy some gummy bears. We didn't have a place to go. Home? You mean the room where nobody's waiting? No way. The city was our solace.

It was dusk, but still not cold, mild I would say, we kept each other company sitting on the edge of a fountain near the library. The city was our playground.

Then it was time to say goodbye and from there the story began. I don't know how we found our way home, but I remember we couldn't go in. There were my flat mates, but we weren't finished yet, we weren't even started. So we sat down on the winding stairs and started to talk without knowing what about, we just needed to keep talking. I remember I sat on my handbag, trying not to sit on some spilled milk when you asked me if we are going to go to same way or different or maybe the ways are just crossing. At this point you kissed me and the city melted into a dream. We didn't sleep. We went for a walk. The spring was like a new species in a zoo. It was effusive like an impressionist painting. The park was empty it was early morning, wasted on most of us. On the corner of a street we saw a man having an epileptic fit. One second he was cleaning the street, another, he was lying on the pavement, spiting white foam. At this moment I knew, something told me that we are bonded through pain. Pain of your fingers while they were stretching guitar strings. Angst. Fate.

We left the man to cross the bridge. You kissed me and told me, if we are going to Tallinn, we are going to a cafe and the zoo. We never did. The bridge was demolished years after. The city had never been so heartless before.

He was the one who gave me your record. The almond-eyed boy who went for solitary walks in wintertime, because something wanted to come out of him.

Anete

Dear Anete,

I read through your letter with the biggest fear. You have turned everything into a myth. I knew you went for walks to find me, you dug out places to meet me, as if I would still be standing near o the brick wall. You know all about my depression and still you wonder what this smile was.

Anete, I don't want to destroy that romantic image of yours, but it's a fiction, a staging, let me tell you how it really was.

Your story of industrial romance, broken bridges and romantic souls strolling alone in Tartu's streets is something I'm jealous of, because I've never lived in this kind of story, neither have I ever been a romantic figure. Yes, true, I loved to give an impression as if I was, but it was mainly for songs and for the photographs, because I was made to love magic, but London lost this magic many many years ago. But listen it was more like "I was made to love no one, no one to love me" I bet you tell me now that this is the essence of a romantic soul, to be alone and left to one's fate, but I assure you there wasn't anything romantic in my day to day life. The truth is, all my days were a struggle. I woke up and felt like I have no energy to live another day. And London was a dull place for me-- a place that I had almost no good feeling about. It definitely had its magic for me when I was let's say 17, escaped from school to discover the music scene in Soho, like a red lipstick on London's grey face, or the time when I saw my first album in the record shop window. I was excited, but the feeling vanished bit by bit until I was completely broke, wearing broken shoes and feeling like a parasite on the city. I felt I was living and consuming the goods, without giving anything back, because my soul was empty and the emptiness is the worst feeling in the world.

Keith didn't take the photo sessions very seriously. He let me to decide what I wanted to be. And to play the solitary romantic type was the easiest solution.

But that idea, to link industrial to romantic, I don't even know whose this was, it just came naturally. I bet this was the pose that fit me the best, and Keith had a great eye for backgrounds. In-between the recording periods I lived my usual life, I ate breakfast and wandered around aimlessly and yes, I did take long walks in Hampstead and up and down my street and everything and I did them alone, but anyone can do that, right? Without being accused of being a romantic hero.