

Aigerim Tazhi

Poems

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. . . and somewhere everyday life turned into a miracle
a dragonfly summer stock still
grows waterlilies in a drying pond
though i don't need to, i'm going there

beyond the arch of interlaced trees
a forgotten house unhealthy and chill
accidentally preserved the familiar color
i look at: was the blind swinging? no

and the sun throws lavish glares
marking out the brokenness of space
with charcoal and chalk on an empty table
the light leafs through the outlines

a jug with a broken spout, hearts
of flowers pinned on their stalks
the same teddy bear still lies
or that's not it on the dusty piano
from over here i can not see for sure

* * *

In the house a window
In the window a pot
In the pot a twig
A drowsy woman is knitting booties
Inside her a fish swims without air
But she is content

She smiles as if to her own womb
At shouts in the street
At broken lights
At dark news from the bright box
The woman waits for the inevitable boy
A girl will do as well

* * *

I strain to listen for an imagined world:
one that absorbs music from the outside,
and will not preserve the borders
of an internal country. The peaceful theme
multiplies joy, doubles
my ease.

But something obstructs the oblivion of a dream.
On a moonless night or on a bright day
I hear something strange. Coming from where?
So desiccated tendons resonate
on a strummed instrument. An invisible
beetle stubbornly gnaws in the woodwork.

* * *

Underneath, in a German-chocolate box
mother hides the name-tag, the teeth, the first hair
of her son, who lives somewhere on the outskirts of town,
who calls on her birthday in a weary voice.
When he comes to visit, a man now,
with his gnarled hands, with a bouquet of cheap flowers,
She pours the cup of tea only half full
so he won't stay long.

* * *

A purple window. A yellow one.
The express train in pungent lands
slices through a canvas with sunflowers
a sunny side and a sunset side.
In one colorful spot the eye seizes on
mills flying in the opposite direction.
Threads of wind mute onrushing sounds.
A lavender window. Strong horses gallop.
Round dances of stout people are honored
among gingerbread-houses, unnaturally beautiful children
and ladies rising like dough,
shaking their sides, float along the grass to a river.
I should ask the way, but then would hardly understand
the reply in some unknown language.

* * *

Probably a god is like a dying person
In his eyes what no one can see
over his head the remains of a shining aura
salt on his lips perspiration popped out on his brow
I look at him and something in me feels shame

Give me water he thinks not saying the words

To the right foremothers sit forefathers to the left
at the foot dwarves giants at the head
have come in and say nothing

(they remember how he came out of the womb)

before them he is a naked infant
to whom not everything is possible but everything is proper

Others weep loudly pray for forgiveness
But in his ears it is his own voice sounding
There is no there will be no future
There is no there will be no future
And the past is far too illusory

* * *

Walking like a camel
a traveler throws up dust, draws near.
Eyes of different colors,
hands carved from wood.
A dead viper in his breast,
a rope with fangs.
A horse felled in the road.
Fragile as a twig,
a skeleton. Waves of a sandy pelt.
Your name? Say the word out loud.
A furrowed face. The angle of the sun shifts.
Paper-thin skin translucent,
letters appear on the forehead.

* * *

Don't take one last breath — nothing to breathe here.
In vain they say that country air cures.
Campfire smoke burns your nostrils.
it alters all outlines. Look closely.
Cut asters wilt in heaps.
A gardener uproots a linden
that never blossomed, not once.

* * *

sleepless in Tibet just like those here
the dial of the moon spills across the horizon
comes down from the mountains onto a third a grizzled stranger
holds in his hands old books in them fresh news
and passes by without looking as if blind
he places his feet in puddles he drops pages
on a dry branch a thin-shanked bird screams

he enters the fog and the woods close behind him

* * *

god
has a pocketful of people
a beggar
a pocketful of happiness
one shared with me
I have a sea in return
a large warm sea
a fish
a boat
and tackle

* * *

When the body dies, eagles and fish dine well,
— Lobsang at the communal dinner could not keep quiet,
spreading out the remains of rice on the plate.
— Whose soul do you save, carp, picked to the skeleton?

Sow rice in the fields where people lay.
pass by that earth when the rice will grow.
And you join the motley queue at the bright carousel
cheerful and barefoot, to keep from being eaten.

* * *

It seemed that you will not be touched
You can grow forever
And the world will not go away
You were reaching for the sun
Without noticing your parents' gray hair,
Blurred features,
Shrunken shoulders.

As if they were still young,
They straightened their backs in front of you,
A spring in their step,
Hurried to go dancing
They thought you wouldn't believe
That, having changed direction,
They look down, not up
That they had grown old.

And you hid your transformation from them.
Letting go of your child-self
You tarried at the door

In order not to leave tracks.
How grown-up you are!
(You are our hope)
Soon I'll be forty.
(Don't tell us today)
Everything is still ahead of you.

* * *

A violet sucks up from a saucer yesterday's sea filtered through the earth.
The sun gropes around the room, a stubborn beam warms a glass of water.
Any minute now his thread will burst. The sounding of a distant string.
Turn in my direction, an actual person. Let me see you. Your face
is growing dark. Transparent light withdraws into a cold garden.
Tracks of an ant-trail. An unfamiliar shadow on the pillow.
 Outside the window, falling leaves.

* * *

In a chilly phantasmal forest
In a clearing I have imagined
We are meeting one last time.
Eyes and voice do not lie —
Surrounded by mirage, we are transparent.
Trees listened intently. The back
Of the mountain shadowed the day.
But light beats from the earth. It's time.

The ageless forest rustles with starlings.
Weary Monday goes on and on.
The celestial miller bakes and bakes
a bitter bread filled with breath.
Do they intersect another time,
Those who stayed, those who left?
Hissing coals in my breast.
The mask slips. Without a face
Reading the lines of a lullaby,
I rock my father in my arms.

* * *

from resurrection to sunday
we cross off dates on the calendar
waiting for salvation

it comes in the form of mountain air
in the gas chamber of a city

silvery ants

drag along up to the stone height
rub against steel sides

itching
tracks left on the neck from a narrow gate

under quilted clouds

* * *

And you were there and the floor seemed to float
A blanket walked on naked feet
A creature nestled inside it

Hello, you're up? Breakfast on the table
Egg-yolk eyes skewed against the fork
Have frozen forever. So it will be.

Look at the deceptive way things go on
The tea cooled down, then rose again

From extinction with a single step
Prophetic, a glass ball glowed
Light broke down into pure shades

An onion bulb sprouted in a jar
Nothing under its husk. But a forest above.

And there it vanished, you, I vanished

... It sniffed settled on a knee
Hot breath tucked into a neck

* * *

I overheard a conversation in the park,
came up to a withered old plum tree
And hid my face in its crown.
First, I spoke up strongly
Then, embarrassed, threatened:
"Give me your fruit or I'll cut you down."
So the sky exploded in plums,
As if a bead necklace had broken.
Three days of a frenzy of fruit
Until I'd had enough of feasting.
Fruit lay like garbage on the grass
Mashed into a puree.

* * *

A new fence
painted blue and white
screens but I can hear
sharp cries from the sea
a soft answer
drowned out by the waves
a boat
canceled all conversation

a little gate swung open

an old woman
is knotting a mat
a boy sitting on a swing
watches her
in a tub a fat baby splashes water
along the waterline the walls sprout grass

like rattles
(how cold the wind is here)
dried fish
shiver on a string

* * *

the sea has enormous lungs
the sea has a monstrous mouth
today it makes a dinner of one
tomorrow will chew up another

on the strand a blackened sailor
lays out treasures at his feet,
fish to fish. Someone else's puppy
is playing with a sea urchin

* * *

A shaggy cactus in the window
Catches on the drape. A stinging
Spine in the hand. Along the wall.
Don't step into a moonbeam,
Don't tread on a house-elf
Or any other living thing.

In the newborn darkness
Pushing away dreams and shadows,
Sit on a sofa, keep still,
As if time had been turned off,
As if the finale were not waiting for us
And the world is spectacular, but small.

* * *

At the edge of the village a woman in a stupa ground millet.
She whistled brazenly, calling the wind from the steppe
to keep the chaff flying so her eyes wouldn't sting.
They all protested — she brings on the wind again —
"She's summoned a hurricane," "plays with the storm."

The wind blew over the grain.
A storm-cloud was born deep inside the stupa,
rose over the house,
taken in by the people, animals.

Mighty golden eagles dispersed.
Foxes barked.
The fire in the samovar hooted like a locomotive.

A swarm of blind husks. Her pestle beat to fatigue
in the mortar's cage. The grain grew heavy.
"That will do, enough!" —
then she lifted herself over the stupa.
The wind dropped like a hunting dog
on the doorstep, exhausted.

* * *

In the depth of a mirror mottled with stains,
something is revealed — we would rather not see.
Fish turn back at the air's edge, one breath, another.
A crescent moon swims belly up in the heavens,
and water eddies away into the distance.
People in white are talking — Let the words go.
do not look them in the eye, nod absentmindedly,
as if not having noticed: a bed stands empty,
a person cradled, shrouded in carpeting.
It seems clear who, but hard to believe. A line of mourners.
Is the soil cold now? Who will be sleeping there?

* * *

In the passageway of a stone labyrinth
A woman stands with her back to us
On the doorstep of a dark well
She holds the heavy door open with her foot
She has turned to the streetlight's face
And cries out laughing Let's go
I see you there Ally ally in come free
Mama's lost the game Come out

Behind a parked car out of sight
A little girl sits on the curb
She watches a point on the blank wall
She breathes out steam then holds her breath —
Waits intensely watches from her scarf
Lights in the windows turn on and then off
They are laughing there and laughing here
Past a man with a dog we pass
Coming around full circle

* * *

It was yesterday. A neighbors' dog barked.
She was looking on the floor
for the evidence of wet tracks —
Dust multiplied and shone
with magical silver.
She fell on it
With a rag, a military flag,
as if she were saving the world.

She pulled open the closet door,
threw things on the floor.
Trousers, the wedding suit,
Underclothes, socks, shirts —
the kind he liked — checked.

She sat on a mountain of cloth
and lost herself in memories.
She sees how the wild river
meanders in the foothills.
They strain minnows through their hands
He, having lost his hat,
squints in the sunlight.

* * *

There is a path in the gray fields.
A slim boy.
Behind him a stooped older man
And a dog.
They are in a hurry.
Talking wastes
heat. Letters fall from their mouths.

Vision reduces them to points.
Snow eats their footprints. What does it matter to me?
I try to turn my back on them.
A human body can shrink
To infinity, to the purity of oblivion.

To a random pencil mark.

Brushing flakes of graphite off the paper,
Forget how the excitement began.
Note to self: wash the window.
But it's cold. Wait until spring, until the sun.
Read while the light lasts. While still alive.

White piled on white.

* * *

The aircraft of a dragonfly over the river.
The black silhouette of a fisherman
fallen asleep.
His shadow moves over onto the oars.
The palm of the sky. Clouds rolled into balls.
Silent companion, steer
into a calm sea. No one is there.
Fish are silver strokes on the water,
thin bones in the food.

* * *

tomorrow twenty above thunderstorm possible earthquake
Fish landed on the tiles early in the morning
swept them away with a broom washed them down the drain
plunged them into the aquarium with the wise catfish
while he gazes through the glass
and stirs up terror
the soul starts at the heels
and rises to the belly
people run from houses of cards
they bring the children sandwiches matches
the catfish quivers its whiskers in the bowl
and watches everyone like a bull

* * *

slowly revealing itself
the shore leads to the sun
into a black and quiet town
soot on god's own temple
in the air people moan —
their weeping is a pinch of salt
fish drown in the air,
fall under a cat's paw
the city burns but the sea
will fill it with life

one day
and deep down a conch
a crayfish and a forgotten anchor

* * *

Where is the tail of the fish
And where its head?
It rots from there
If everything is cut away.
But the fish
Rots
With a huge swollen belly
Where Jonah lives.
He weaves nets, he sews sails,
Hat pulled down over his eyes.

* * *

First at a call a large lion's
Head pivots,
The sun over the top of a hump
Looks inside you.

Slowly washing the river sand,
It's panning for a nugget, but in the sieve
Useless rock.
Stones rattle in the water.

And after an earlier fire the forest
Stockade has cooled down. Poisonous dust.
But a child who felt fear breathes
Although he appears lifeless.

Translated from Russian by J. Kates

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