

California Dreams

you so frantically wanted to see the fish market, I remember
the dampness in the corners of your eyes, your lips pulled down into an angry
grimace, turning the channels in the tv heavens, in glass towers with thick
strokes the sun spills itself, the golden gate bridge's antennas broadcast a static-like
violin concert over the city, the beach displays its muscles and firm
shapes, and you, having fallen on your knees, beg to be taken to the fish market, you wanted
to touch the tender crab carcasses with your own fingers, inhale the pungent stench of fish flesh,
shake the milky hands of fishermen, you wanted to feel like home again, but that was a long time
ago your seaside became overgrown with forests of oily reeds, your parents' home
was swallowed up by the mouths of sand dunes, the beached fishing ships became
the home of several seabirds flapping around in the sky, the stewed flesh of the rest eaten
by clouds of radioactive dust, the air smells like metal and propane gas you
glided through the market square, your feet never touching the ground

the southern wind runs through
your hair, your curls rise
and fall lightly, I am unable
to reach you, my fingers burn
the background is blurred like a watercolor
doodled in drunkenness,
I see your mark everywhere
the impression left by your body
your warmth in a slept-in bedsheet
the words you said –
they are still frozen in space
I broke all the mirrors, which
recorded your image
I burned the objects, which you
had touched
I didn't know what to do with myself
each cell, each atom like litmus
imbued with your being

On Friday evenings we open up like blossoms

like a gasping sprinter Friday night rides in
we await in our little nest behind natty curtains
we lie down on the carpet, ruffle ourselves up like pigeons
while watching the evening news, we wait a long time,
until the baby's crying next door quiets down and calm takes over
the room, we slowly warm up, we feel, that steam is flowing into our veins
we start to make love, we up the tempo, it wasn't exactly easy
on the carpet – our legs slid around, the floor made us sore and what's more
a second later it became so hot, that the sweat irritated my eyes
but I did not give up, you were close to climaxing, there was no
doubt, that a happy ended was in store for our little family porn film,
I saw out of the corner of my eye, that for our whole life we will lie down and look at the ceiling,
roll vanilla cigarettes and talk about the neighbors down to the smallest detail –
the young couple, both our age, calm and quiet people
everyone knows, that they got two small kids, a gray audi universal and they
are waiting very impatiently, until Friday night comes

I remember, how you taught me to recognize colors
an early summer morning, after a sleepless night
I lie down beside you, a dust storm out the window
it smells like wet moss, you turn restlessly in your sleep
your nostrils expand and contract, pastel tones stream from you
I hold my breath, so I don't accidentally say too much
I observe our reflections in the glassed door sections
your blue eyes, pale orangish skin, a strip of a brown shirt
and everything, that I am able to offer the world to behold
you're not there at all – pressed up to my side
is a flickering rainbow, a warm, agile spectral circle

A Toast near Kalpaks Bridge

like cats in the rain we run under the bridge and popping it open we drink for
all the trawlers written off in ruins and submarine shells dishonored by rust
to the croaking seagulls and military helicopters in the city sky,
we drink for the Tosmare shipyard repair shop, where my grandfather
screwed up his liver with technical spirit, for the little tower, from which children like droplets
shimmering in the sun in summer dive into the oily waters, we drink for the Zhiguli shell, which
for years nobly wallowed in the depths, for the shards of bottles and cigarette butts
on the channel's shores, for the eternally restless sea wind, damp and bitter like horseradish,
we drink to the Russians on both sides of the bridge, we drink to the Latvians
on both sides of the ocean and finally we drink to the hope that there will always be a bridge
under which you can take refuge from trial and tribulation in hard times. cheers!

A Family Tradition

my grandfather, sitting on the can,
read *War and Peace*,
read *The Brothers Karamazov*
read Jēkabs Janševskis's best works
and countless memoirs
about the fates of people played out in wars.

my father, sitting on the can,
was apparently in awe
about my grandfather's accomplishments,
which is why during that time
he read *The Fisherman's Son*,
he read *The Four Tank Drivers and a Dog*,
he read all the stories about Sherlock Holmes,
even those, that Doyle didn't write himself,
after that he continued to read all that again
without any sort of set system
or any other serious objectives.

out of respect for their achievements
each time, that I sit on the can,
I have doubts about my choice of reading material –
will I fulfill the hopes heaped upon me.
or will these strange books in their eyes
justify the years of my life spent
in smelly solitude.

1993

these memories are the scattered cigarette ashes,
which dad's finger sweeps through the open window.
they are smoke, which flows through his lips,
the vertebra of his back relaxing in delight,
an uncorked bottle of *Merkura* on the windowsill,
the smell of paint and turpentine from the room,
the sounds, which appear from light rock-in-roll on the radio.
we both know, that mom is coming.
a moment later the key will click and
this scene will disappear from the screen of consciousness.

these memories are a carousel of cheap appetizers
the intoxication of which vanishes in a second.
banknotes burn in tall bonfires,
caterpillar tracks grind up people's bodies,
an enormous monster is gripping
a tram wagon in its hands and trying to shake
the colorful lego figure passengers out of it.
then these images also fade out gradually,
the television is covered in rosy streaks,
and the VHS cassette bunches into a ball.

this poem is a little weird,
so forgive me for this liberty,
because that was an important year for me.
I learned to swim like a dog,
swear pretty well in Russian,
free myself from unmotivated aggression,
I also probably fell in love for the first time.
it's possible something else noteworthy happened,
but how could I ever remember all of it now?

That was my first year of school.

The Boys from Liepāja

For the C Class's bad apples

We, the boys from Liepāja,
Are like Klondike gold diggers on this morn'

Olafs Gūtmanis

once we started off in school together, some went further, some stayed behind a bit
- we heard the shot of the starting pistol separately. We got closer,
we were shoulder to shoulder, but time mercilessly drove us further, and a child's
awkward friendship is replaced by a maturity rooted by calculation.

we haven't met for a long time, we don't call each other, we don't write each other, just
sometimes we click "like" on each other's family photos uploaded positively
on facebook – because children, as the old saying goes, is good marketing, our
lives run in parallel lines, which hardly are destined to cross.

we, the Liepāja boys, won't get the main roles, we won't save
the day and we won't destroy the oligarchs' plans, we won't be legends, no
one will write songs and novels about us, we won't be Klondike gold diggers.
we will simply remain right here and live a quiet life.

A Dream About Kroma

after a motif of Monta Kroma and Patty Smith

freshly ground coffee wafts in the little kitchen,
breakfast quietly sizzles in a pan, I don't even notice,
when she even came in,
Monta's smoking on the balcony, her pink morning gown flutters
in the wind
in the distance the mouth of the Ventspils, a tanker sublimely rocks in the waves,
the cranes are already worriedly busying themselves. They are waiting.
"Hi, how did you sleep?" her eyes warm like little gas flames.
"are you staying for coffee?" I have to be on the ship in ten
minutes, you know that..." I rumple the jockey in my hands, my head hanging.
guilty, guilty, what else did you expect... the mill of life grinds too strongly,
you, my dear, you know very well yourself, that my door closes from the inside.
"alright, then call me," she remains business-like as always, when it
comes to say goodbye, her warm lips, the smell of *Kosmoss* and lilacs,
which seethes in your brain, also when you go outside, in the July heat,
I hum to myself, Jambalaya, my merry little girl, that tall and handsome
sailor loves you, and, when I feel her burning stare, I push my hands
into my pockets, so I don't turn back, better like that, my dear, better
like that, perhaps once it will be meant for us to meet in May
and live happily together in your little poetry notebook.

A notice from 1987

the smell of sweat and the taste of melting asphalt in my mouth – if that was the beginning of my life.

or maybe it was – a nearing storm in the field, an idyllic landscape using Purvītis's method, my parents

hurriedly fold the blanket, dad feverishly closed the doors of zaparozhets, while my mom is cooing a song in my ear about bear cubs.

or perhaps I am mistaken.

the roar of fighter jets above the city's ceilings, the way to the bomb shelter, mom is groped the whole time, dad is called away, torn, bloody rags on people's flesh, naked trees, electrified skies, at that time it was all over and nothing started.

or perhaps I am mistaken, consciousness gives birth to the fruits of fantasy, perhaps I told my mom this dream once, before the operation while falling asleep in the ward.

perhaps everything started totally differently. crimson pennants waved, and the masses of the working class glided past the central hospital's windows, in the air drifts the smells of a newborn, straw and milk. I crawl through holes in time, sneak up to the door quietly and pressing my ear to it listen, as my sprout appears in the world, I hear, how the fruit's eyes open up and the mouth's organs issue their first cry. it's all so simple, so inconspicuous and unimportant. The clocks continue to tick, the people chat, and even the janitor doesn't stop cleaning the floor covered with toxic green linoleum for a second.

or perhaps I am mistaken.

Aivars Madris
Poetry
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