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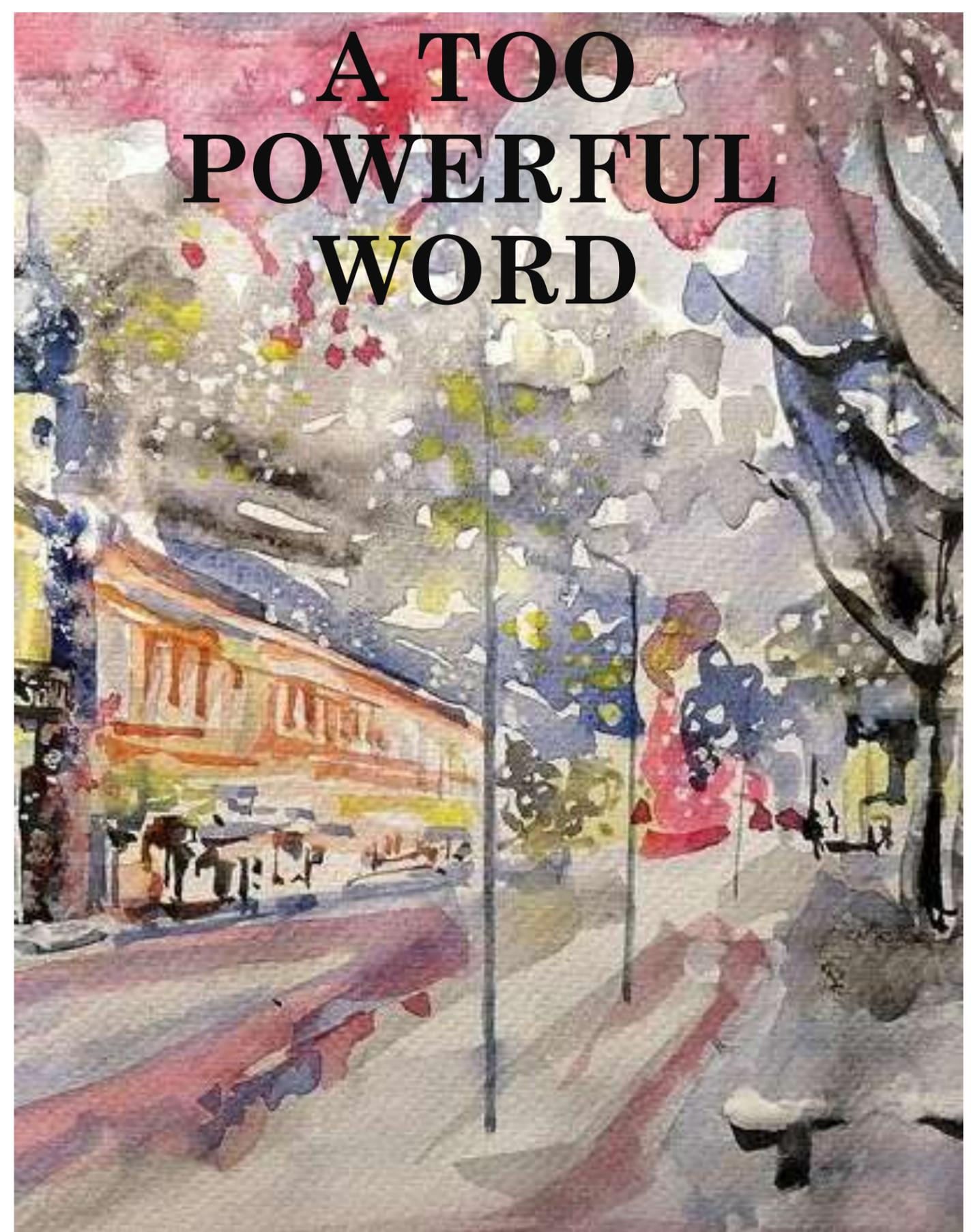
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Special thanks to
Beba Kouzouli



Snowstorm Over the Village by Sava Stojkov

1

NIGHTMARE

ZVONKO TANESKI



After the Storm by Andys Constandinides

You will leave quickly
like a madman who runs away
from a hospital
because somewhere it must be
paradise
or some other place
where madhouses
are not needed

Suddenly you will feel
inside you a concentration camp
from which the only escape
is a fantasy

Translated by Danijela Trajković

2

HER VOICE RISING ABOVE ALL
THE OTHERS

DIANNA MACKINNON HENNING

My grandmother's voice held Scottish ballads; a voice brought down from Nova Scotia when my grandfather married her. I imagined her voice wrapped in newspaper, tied off in twine. Her voice dominated family tale telling, caroling, and I imagined myself drinking in that voice so that one day it would become part of mine.

Aunts and uncles and older cousins and grandparents told stories how times were getting better, the Canadian Railways they worked for were again employing men, and with the layoffs further behind them, living conditions in Vermont were looking up. My aunt was able to buy a Christmas turkey for the first time in two years, and Grandmother Ella sighed with relief she could again put homemade presents underneath the tree.

My grandparents' modest home in the Northeast Kingdom seemed to hold

numerous rooms, and there was always room enough for those who traveled from far away to Island Pond, the small town of my grandparents, for the holidays. Our family stayed over while other relatives lived close enough to safely return home after the festivities. We were always the first to arrive and the last to leave, or perhaps that's the way memory works in order to cherish what it will later embellish.

Following our family's arrival was my aunt and uncle and seven cousins. My aunt carried in boxes of mincemeat, pecan, apple and pumpkin pies. These were stored in the small pantry. My grandmother would wrap newspaper around the pies to keep the winter hungry mice from eating them.

Sometimes I'd sneak into the pantry, mischief painted wide on my face, and wiggle

Quay of Pančevo by Aleksandar Alimpić



a finger underneath the pie-wrap, diving into the soft filling for a taste, small flakes of crust caving in. I'd pinch the crust's back into a patched form so there would be few tell-tale signs, but there prevailed a secret expectation that children did such things. So long as the favored pies remained *somewhat complete*, no harm was done.

Winter in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom was an endless tarp of white. No worry as to whether there'd be a picturesque Christmas in that part of New England. Dagger-like icicles hung from the eaves, icicles that could tear a kid's tongue raw if not approached carefully. Icicles became an endless food supply for my cousins and myself and we'd stock several in our igloo, dipping them in salt or sugar snuck from the house. Sometimes we'd roll them in turkey fat drippings we found left to cool in the shed. With a stack of broken branches, we'd make forbidden fires, our shadows pantomiming on packed snow, our breath anxious that the adults might catch and scold us for making a fire behind their backs.

Uncles carried in ukuleles they'd later play when we gathered, singers and non-singers alike, around the piano for Christmas carols, a few cousins twanged on their jew's-harps as though they serenaded heaven itself. Grandmother Ella always led the caroling, her hand on her chest, head thrown back like a great throated robin, and although her voice was objectionable to some, I was fascinated by the gusto that thrust her words into the visible world of sound. If she didn't know a song, she'd invent.

Mother played the piano as though she was a great swan floating above the keys, and she'd give my grandmother a scowl each time her mother belted out a wrong note. My cousins and I sought first row around the piano. Elbows became weapons we shoved into each other as we edged closer. Perhaps we wanted a bird's eye view of my mother's hands as they flew down the ivory notes, the majesty of movement making sounds.

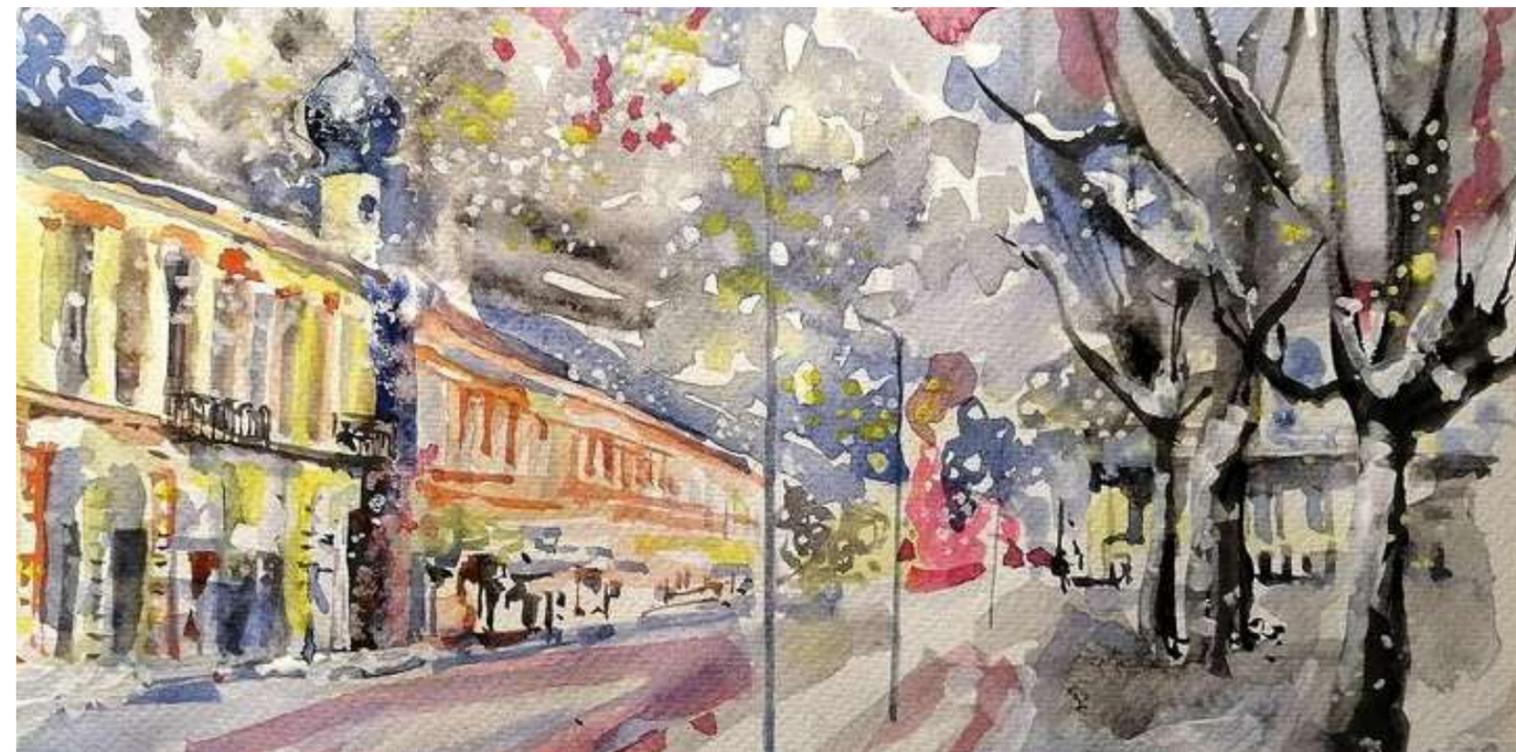
* * *

Grandmother Ella held the undisputed reputation of master of the main meal. She sautéed the turkey liver and giblets with chopped onion and garlic on the kerosene fueled stove. The jug holding the kerosene belched with bubbles as it grew low. When turkey innards were tender to a knife's touch Grandmother chopped and added them to the dressing smothered in home-made butter. With pinched fingers, she'd measure out sage and thyme. The dressing consisted of very old bread brought in from the shed, frozen hard—bread so belligerent that

everyone kidded her about needing an axe to hack it into bite sizes.

She boiled the neck of the turkey until that too grew tender and would easily peel in long strips from the knobby connected bones. She poured broth from the neck over the dressing until it held just the right consistency. Then she scooped the dressing into the bird's large cavity, packing it firm with the backside of her wooden spoon. Whatever dressing was left over was tucked under the long flap of skin that cloaked the neck.

With the turkey in the oven, she would ask me, "Want to split the neck?" Everyone thought we were out of our minds to eat the neck, but I liked pulling off the long strips of dark meat. "Each part strengthens a part," she'd say, a bit of mischief taking up the larger part of her eyes.



Winter in Pančevo by Aleksandar Alimpić



Winter by **Dragan Tasić**

“Girl, with your asthma you need a good neck to funnel air through.” I never questioned her. It would have been unthinkable. She was the woman who brought down the moon, who propped me night after night in the rocker by the kitchen window, the rocker normally reserved for grandfather, so that I could better breathe. She’d tell me stories until my wheezing abated. “Healing stories,” she called them.

* * *

I think bone is a voice and that she gave me a voice by sharing the turkey’s neck which she split in half. No one else wanted the neck. It seemed everyone desired only the plump, juicy parts or the white meat, and I felt gifted being allowed the very first taste of the holiday dinner, our tongues diving between the bone links. She’d look intently on to make sure I cleaned off every strand.

She would tell me, as well as the other grandchildren gathered by, stories of West Branch, Nova Scotia, how she had lived in an eight-room house. Her father, a blacksmith, also owned riding stables. The only entertainments aside from horseback riding were barn dances or skating parties, both of which were closely chaperoned. She told us about sleigh rides over the crisp white snow and how the brilliant sheen of the moon cast its hue as far as the eye could see. Returning to their woodstove warmed home, she and her friends ate cookies and drank warm milk, but never a touch of alcohol because spirits were forbidden by her strict Presbyterian family where they regularly held bible readings. Her favorite place on earth, always remained Nova Scotia.

* * *

Christmas at Grandmother’s meant the men retired to the front parlor where they traded hunting, fishing and railroading stories. Grandfather would slap his knee with a loud *By Jove* over some fish story that stretched each year with the telling. “That trout,” he’d say in his New England vintage twang, “was four inches bigger than any other fish caught in that damn brook.”



Snow Sheep by **Dragan Tasić**



Novak Đoković by Sava Stojkov

While the men gabbed, the women bustled about in the kitchen and they never thought about roles, gender or the division of labor. It was as if they alone knew they participated in some type of alchemy held only in kitchens, in the mix and batter of ingredients.

Aunt Marjory was in charge of the gravy, stirring it until it thickened and turned a warm brown. I ground pepper for her and tipped the water tumbler whenever she asked me to thin out the gravy. My sister and cousins set the dining room table with the blue willow plates stored in the china cabinet for holidays, plates grandmother brought down in a trunk on the train from Nova Scotia. By the time everyone was seated in the dining room where the piano took prominence, there was not an inch to spare. That meant all food, sweet potatoes, salt and pepper must be on the table, and everyone better have used the bathroom before sitting down to eat. If not, one whole side of seated relatives would have to move for whatever one errant person forgot.

Later, my aunt served pie with milk. After desert, uncles, father and grandfather would retire to the parlor to resume stories they'd earlier left, but we knew the spaces between their words would grow until sleep shepherded them into silence. Soon they would doze. To us children, they were the great walrus people, and their concert of snores grew so deep we were certain they came from the root cellar where grandmother kept her squash, turnips and preserves.

* * *

Kitchen alchemy and singing around the piano are what I remember best. My Cousin Claudia's ringlets rose and fell with her voice, her eyes earnest as prayer. She was lead singer in the church choir and I envied the rich quality of her voice that reached notes I could never achieve. Cousins would tug on my long hair to get a rise from me as we sang "Silent Night," or "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." Uncle Claude would belt out an occasional yodel, his voice, a round of canons.

The smells of the holidays were the smells of turkey and simmering apple juice that stewed in a cast iron pot, cinnamon sticks floating like rafts on its surface. Christmas was also the smell of liniments grandmother rubbed into her skin to soothe her arthritis. The louder she sang the stronger the liniment scent, sweat dripping from her face, her red hair cocked into damp curls along her neck.

I'd look at my grandmother as she sang, and there was no doubt that Christmas was grandmother, the two of us sucking juice from the turkey's neck, her voice rising above all the others.



Saint John of Damascus by Aleksandar Alimpić

3 | WHAT IS LIGHT

STELLA VINITCHI RADULESCU

in a dream I was
 taken to a sinful
 place
 don't look back said
 the Master but
 I did &

touching
 the ceiling to escape
 darkness what is
 light if not
 one more word for
 resurrection

grew as a plant

first wave

I take it
 in my heart
 nothing blue not yet—
 could you figure out the color
 of this hour
 light hardens your statue
 rises in the air
 put your cross away once
 I walked from nowhere
 to nowhere
 breathing was simple as
 simple as death

statuary

the shape of my tongue
 turns
 to the shape of a stone winter white
 & calm
 days called nights nobody
 moves around with full legs
 the landscape evolves we talk
 loud & crisp
 my styrofoam head hangs from silence
 the wasp caught
 by its stinger

4 SIDEREAL NECTAR

Scott Thomas Outlar

and ghosts
 those years
 and dreams may bring a locust swarm
 to prelude larger problems still

Yellow neon fluorescence escaping
 behind the cover of pines
 full moon bows a graceful retreat
 replaced by live wires and humming generators

X Marks the Fountain

There are only so many species of drugs
 designed by the gods
 and the rest is filth in a vial
 but who am I to stop
 the hands of fools who poison their own hearts

There are decades of nostalgic scenes
 that flash within my shifting mind
 with innocence that tries to save the youth

cross-tide and chemical trails
 hung from the wings of gods

but we're no longer living in

5 MY CYPRESS

Agron Shele

Every time that snow starts falling
 I don't know why I come to you
 might be a promise;
 the silent exchange of our stories

Mine are simpler
 there's no noise, no glory that you can listen to.
 yours, I don't know,
 but I see the prints on your skin
 and believe too many hands have touched you
 they have prayed and asked for more love
 met with a bowing of the head and a Namaste
 that you hold deep in your soul.

Here I am again today
 you know, when the snowflakes start I will be here
 I see the prints of the running wind as well
 not those of the wind's reindeer, because they are fare away
 but just the pain that we feel, you and me
 when wildly winds rock the top of the tree
 shaking off the snow to your shoulders

to shelter more birds
 As for me...I am shaken by silent memory
 of people that I unconditionally love

My cypress,
 there is no end to the odes and songs
 that come to me
 along with this cold air
 which can't ever strip your green joy
 as it murmurs in your branches,
 as for me, I do not need more than a greeting
 when I come
 always unspeakably understanding each other
 you, still in your world of old love reposing
 I, again forgotten on my bench

I need to lit a cigarette and see through the smoke,
 the reappearance of what is gone
 whereas I am stealing your body
 and take it with me, to my very last station

Translated by Merita Papparisto

6 JUST KICK AWAY YOUR SORROWS

Vijayaraghavan Nair



First Coffee by Francisca Esteve

Morning fell, the specter of the distant mountains glittered like a dream. I walked looking at that wonderful sight winding down the ever changing tranquilized and crammed neighbourhoods.

Morning walk always gives pleasurable moments. The self-confessions, the thoughts and the quirky imaginations all prevail wonderful moments.

I always take the road along the main road, cross the playground and enter the muddy road which leads to the Ganesh temple.

A handful of boys played soccer. I stood watching for a while recollecting my childhood. Unexpectedly the ball came to me with a slow pace. I just watched for a while and then gave a kick. It went to a faraway place making one of the boys running after that. The boys murmured something to each other and then stared at me. fixing me with an inquisitive look. I gave a smile and went on.

I proceeded through the grassy path way. A woman stood near the pathway clutching the hand of a little girl with a flowered scarf and a running nose. Her red dark slakes poking out from under her short flowered skirt. The little girl turned and smiled at me. She had dimples, and rosy cheeks. Her mother fondled her head, asking her to look down. She did as she was asked, then turned her head just enough to stare at me sideways, I left behind the garden and entered into the muddy road, I met some of the familiar faces. While greeting them I thought that, how for a thousand times or more, these scene had repeated itself with same amount of enthusiasm and companionship.

In a short distance I saw a procession. My curiosity made me walk fast to reach there. When I touched the procession, I noticed so many of my friends walking their heads down. It's a funeral procession and I am still curious to know about it. Suddenly one of my friends caught my hands and asked "Where were you? Why didn't you pick up your cell?" "I am on morning walk; today I am a bit slow". "Shasi expired today early morning, this is his funeral procession". He said giving me a shock. Why unexpected things are happening with such a speed!

We met yesterday for about an hour and discussed various things about life and our future perspectives. He was really cheerful and more energetic than me. Then why this mockery of heart attacks in early morning to detach him from his world of dreams and his world of reality. There is no answer for that. We seldom name it as "fate" and take a long breath.

I followed the funeral procession keeping my head down. Thoughts besieged me with its scorching realities. His fate is over and the fate of his family is now marked with questions like how they will survive, who will support them etc.

I saw Shasi's wife walking along with her children. Her face was swollen and she has focused her eyes skywards. I don't think any miracle is on sight now as usual but I too focused my attention skywards to give her support. children followed. Someone took his son to the nearby well and made him bath to be ready to do the last rites. I took the initiative of going up to him with a cool mind to accompany him to the pyre. He was still in shock and did everything as asked and fell on my hands. I took him to a lonely place nearby and wiped his tears. While fondling his face I thought it is too hard to forget that warmth which Shasi used to give his children.

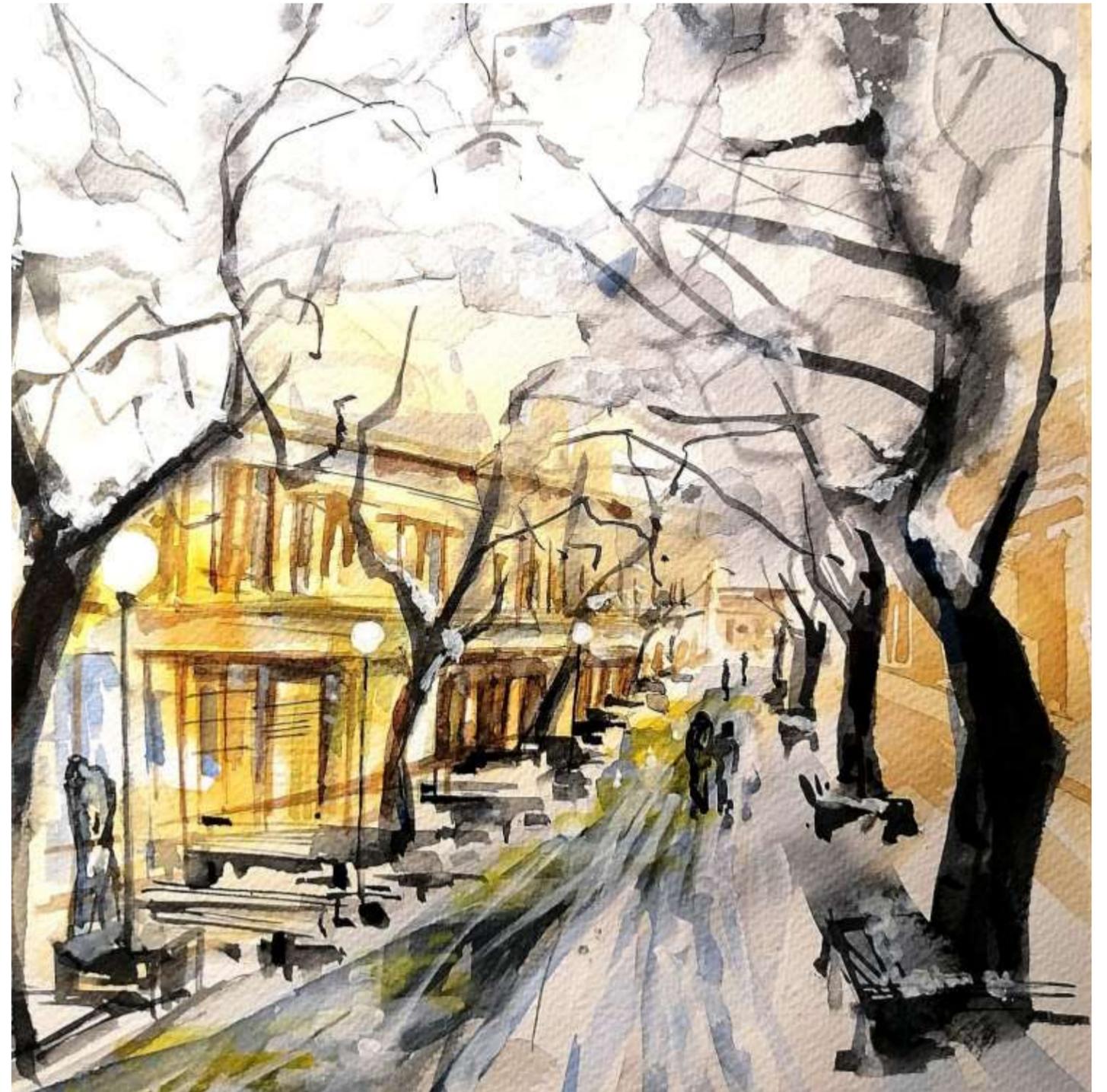
I had a sigh of relief while thinking that they will manage to live without that when time passes according to the rules of the nature. The fire started embracing Shasi's body and I could see the feelings of fire in the form of thick white smoke.

We reached the cremation ground. While putting the body on the ground she burst out crying and her Suddenly I thought about my family. I am still not home and didn't inform them about Shasi's demise. I told one of my friends that I will be back with my family within a short while.

I passed the muddy road with a paralyzed mind. When I passed the playground automatically my eyes searched for that little girl, but she was missing. The boys are still playing football. Unexpectedly once again the ball came to me with a past pace. I quickly gave a kick. It went just near to the goal post and the boys clapped for that. I showed them a thumbs up sign and proceeded home.

When I recollect the happenings, I thought there is only one alternative. Just kick away your sorrows to face the realities courageously.

I didn't know whether I was thinking on these lines while proceeding home on that fateful day.



Winter Street by Aleksandar Alimpić

7 | INVISIBLE BONES

MIKE ZONE

They've made us the type of animals
 where screams of banal
 entertainment and the uselessness of
 bullshit jobs have burnt out
 our corneas
 by the grave of existence
 you shall eat the world's due
 of emptiness
 of the final rot
 with the scent of musty lust and faintly
 perfumed laced love
 unlettered
 you'll dig deep trenches in beauty's field
 toiling through 40 winter snows
 looking back through a looking glass
 there'll be bones piled on high
 invisible
 sunken eyes gazing into empty sockets

When love mattered

Sunspot on her chin
 lost in desire
 Cupid torturing a lover
 "theft from thyself?"
 "who are thou?"
 "thou art that?"
 an advocate of civil war
 internal
 "you will find no quiet"
 transplant me
 somewhere safe within nocturnal
 wayward delirium
 the essence of memory
 with but a touch
 stray
 soulful portraits
 of us

8 | WINTER LINES

ARIF RAJA

What came and whispered
 During these cold times
 Into ears?

Look, how your cheeks
 Have turned!

*
 Once again
 The ice block
 Has caught fire
 As if someone
 Struck the matches...

Where can you
 Find another moon
 In this cold winter?

*
 What is this winter
 Shedding?

Leaves?
 Stars?
 Or sighs?

*
 The breast cut off and thrown away
 At the border-
 Is half-eaten bun
 The moon divided
 Into two halves
 Is the lone sandal
 On the highway

Whose futile prayers
 Are these?

*
 The beggar at the signal
 Is praying helplessly
 Non-stop

Why did you send
 Me to pick
 Tattered dreams
 Of this town?

*
 The doctor who came out
 Of the ICU said:
 'Sorry'

His face filled with
 Winter's stars now
 Is, like an emptied ATM,
 A looted sky

*
 What can I offer
 To the fakir
 Who came for alms?

What shall I put
 Into his pouch
 -this winter cold?
 Or this loneliness?

*
 No coffee, no cigar
 No bad habits for you

Still
 This winter
 Smoke is going up
 From your eye-pond?

*
 The tree shedding leaves
 The doves spreading feathers
 The fish in the aquarium

Are not as lonely
 As we thought!

*
 The seasons in rags
 Are queuing up
 On the side of the highway

After entering my heart
 Why is this winter's arrow
 So slow?

*
 What name should I give

To this winter evening?

Is it
 These burning lamps
 Or your eyes blown out?
 *
 This winter
 Is a dog
 Puppy-bearing non-stop

All seasons
 Are clinging
 To milk less udders

*
 Why is it moaning still?

The tree spreading its feathers
 Even after getting free
 From winter's hold!

*
 The palpitation
 Hasn't stopped yet

After your touch
 Is it heaven
 Or hell?
 Not decided

*
 I gave a kiss
 Winters snow melted
 I gave a kiss
 Winter shed leaves

I gave a kiss
 The winter stone
 Began to throb

Translated by- H.S. Shivaprakash



Gray Day by Aleksandar Alimpić

9

MELANCHOLY

Miroslav Aleksić

It's just a waste to push it hard,
it won't pull the heavy wobbly car uphill.
It's not a mythological horse
with the pair of magical wings,
it's only your tired mare
eating the fasting grass
beside the dusty village road.
Neither a vestalis nor a courtesane,
nowhere you have reached,
you tired soul,
when in the evening

taking off your thick makeup layers
looking at the face of the girl
and, leeches of sorrow instead of the
eyebrows.

As you search in your bag,
without watching,
you search in yourself
the traces of withered loves
and, you fall asleep alone,
still beautiful, hot and alive
like a half-burnt candle.

Hot Noon In Pompeii

He entered her strongly,
as riding a horse.
Gooseflesh, tingling and sweat,
the greenish flame of love,
like a burning raw wood.
Afterwards, they were lying
embraced.
She was telling him
about a beautiful woman
she was with in the baths last night
and, he was telling her

about the magic of a city theatre.
And, they covered themselves with
magma
not to be cold until the day
the archaeologists dig them.
Night came at noon
and, in the evening
it rained
over the ashes.

Translated by Danijela Trajković



Motif from Zlatibor by **Dragan Tasić**

I want to go back

in that street where the night
brings the echo of secrets,

in the house where my mother
waits the dawn for days
and keeps quines for me...

While sedges rustle under the feet
she waits us to share shadows with
the old lantern again,

and, to move away from the
galloping illuminating horseman
who conquers the sky running
through the time.

My fingers become numb to touch

her table,

my pupils as well to get again the
live coals of the fireplace at the
beginning of Winter.

To warm my frozen palms over the
crackling fire

smelling of bread and joy.

I want to return to that evening
when my mother sets the dinner
table for all of us.

Translated by Danijela Trajković



Holy place by **Aleksandar Alimpić**

11 READING IN THE VILLAGE

Nenad Trajković

in a warm

soil-floored room

I used to read

fairy tales aloud

from my school books

while my granny

made bread

in secret she would cry

and let her tears drop

into the dough

because for her every story

was a unique true life

after reading

the bread was always sweet

Translated by Danijela Trajković

12 *(hypo)stasis*

Violeta Anciu

an utterly unknowing sun

the women you loved
have never known
you have watered yourself to their
breast
and they've never known it.
only your shadow could
find shelter
at a woman's breast
without her aching and not knowing
why
you grew tired you say to me
allowing the mist to hang
over our cracked open
heads and glasses

look how peacefully an utterly
unknowing
sun comes up.

allegory

when was the last time you had faith
in yourself?
when was it you believed in God or

beauty or anything else besides you? *static*

when you look at yourself in the
mirror
are you entirely present?

tell me

have you ever considered waking up?

restlessness and tempest

when a restlessness meets a tempest
the two shall acknowledge
accept reject each other up to the
point of
carving the void they come from.
over a ritual dancing a beastly
craving and calling run out

close to the hopelessness threshold
either birth or annihilation occurs

a voiceless is carving
the tree under which is asleep
silence rejoicing

wisdom blossoms in May.

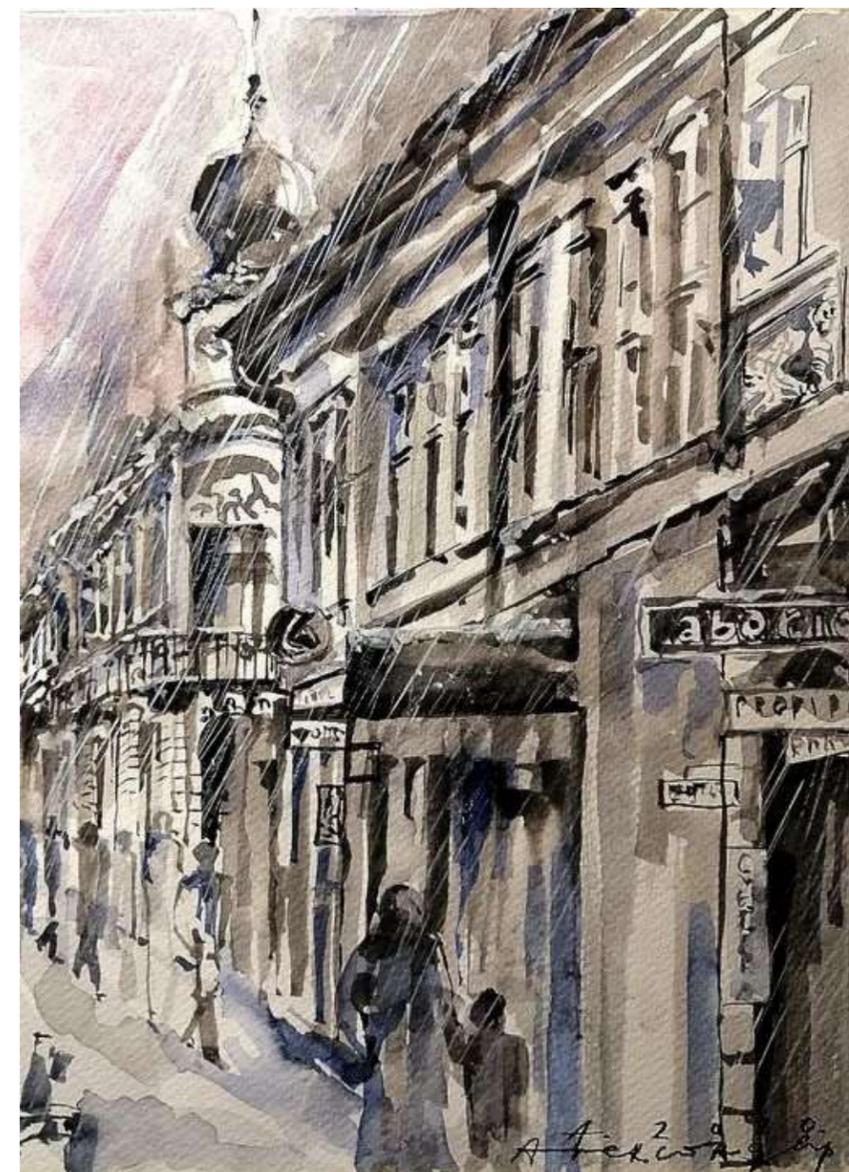
(of) revelation

what a silence falls upon
my lambs' thirst
and how much truth takes shape
from your blood, god.

(hypo)stasis

the most intimate act of becoming
is submission as a form of self
surrender.

Translated by Nicoleta CRĂETE



Rainy Day by Aleksandar Alimpić

13 RAPTURE

CARL SCHARWATH

I am waiting for you.
On this evening, cold as adoring snow
Daring to question the stars
As they fall like raindrops of memory.

anguishing incarnation-

Flooding my soul with
Fragments of us, together in a
Life we both knew had a
Termination wired into our destiny.

rejoice-

Alone, left to witness the end.
As the world gyrates
Towards a glorious rebirth
Knowing I missed the rapture.

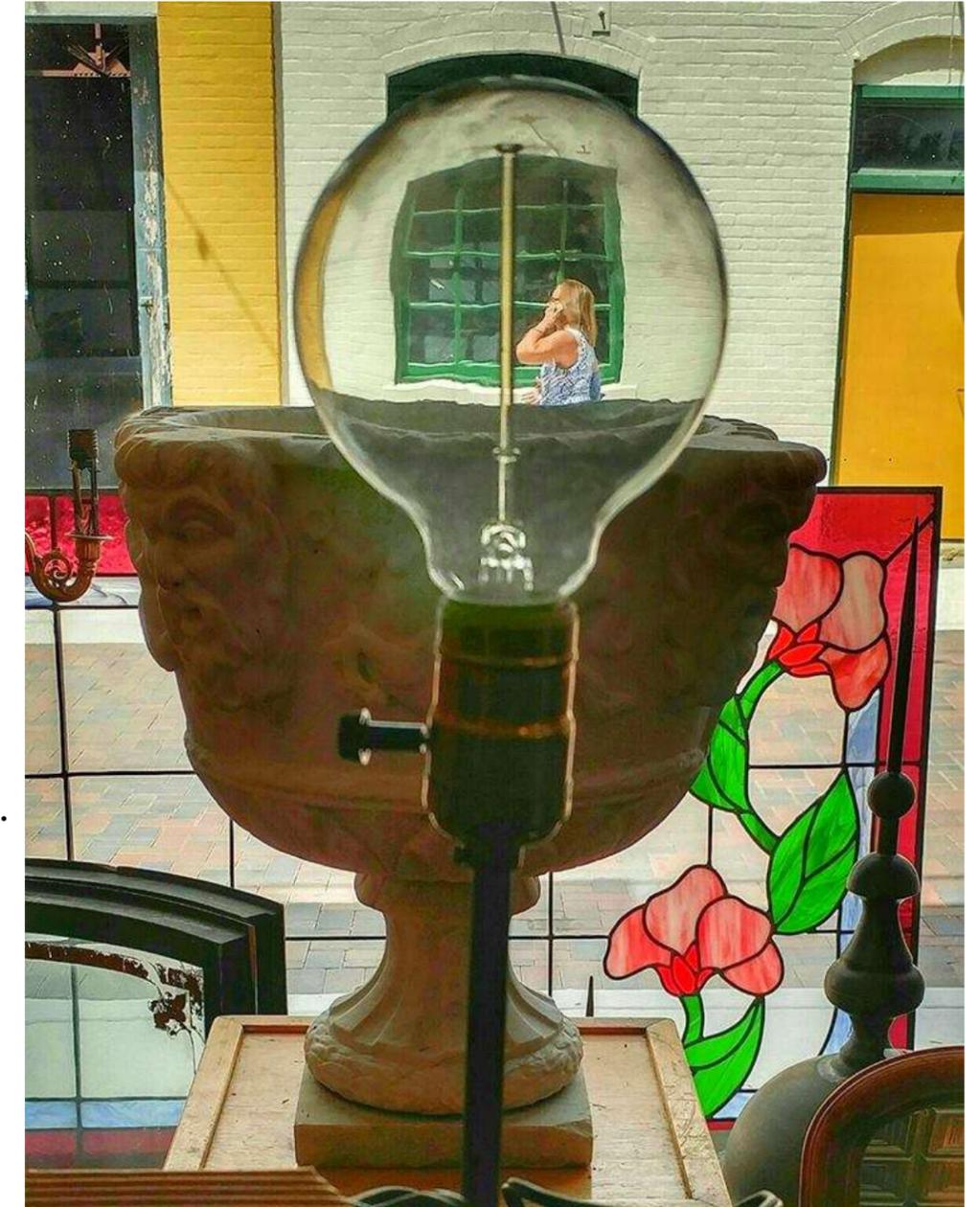
martyrs

MY DAUGHTER'S WINDOW

For a moment
Frozen at the window
A peaceful vision glorifies

The placid tree thrusts into
Our luminous sky,
Letting go in death.

Dull gold leaf's
Dancing slowly
To their graves of memories.



Captured by Carl Scharwath

14 A MIDNIGHT CLEAR

Marlon Fick

Do you see what I see? A child! A child!
from Noel Regley and Gloria Shayne

Eugenev Kaminsky sat in the park every afternoon and drank tea from a thermos, and waited. The park was situated around the corner from The School for the Blind, and each weekday afternoon, some of the students—those who had either been born blind or had learned how to manage—passed him unaware on their way home. Kaminsky often wondered what it would like to be without one or more of his senses. Once he blindfolded himself and stumbled around his brown stone walk up apartment. On another occasion he plugged up his ears and put Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture on his record player, an experiment he found most frustrating. After a time, Kaminsky gave up these games, writing them off as a futile waste of time. After all, he could see, hear, touch, smell.... He was in complete control of his faculties.

Kaminsky lived alone. He had lived alone since he had come to America from Russia to find work as a civil engineer. He left his mother, father, and three siblings in Moscow and arrived in The United States sometime in the 1980s. He was then in his twenties. Like many of his fellow Russians, he loved the United States and its freedoms, and he loved its president, Ronald Reagan. "America great because America goood!" he quoted. "I can achieve dat ting whatever I set my mind to... in America." Now, some thirty or forty years later, he lived with his cat, and, with the exception of a few friends with whom he played chess on Sundays, weather permitting, Kaminsky was quite alone. He tried dating some of the women he knew at work, but this usually went badly. He was socially awkward and not very handsome. His once brown hair sprouted wildly and grew in oblique angles. What's more, he smoked incessantly, sometimes absentmindedly lighting a cigarette before terminating another. Also, his ears and his nose were large and red and his lips were fat, often chapped from inattention to the cold, dry winds that swept through the city. The women he chanced to meet were similarly comely. Some of them had slightly misshapen faces and were pale and shaped like pears. Others were speckled, ill-dressed, and had discolored teeth. One was just plain un-hygienic. He leaned in close to try to tell her, diplomatically:

"You... dirty. You need take bath."

The woman, who, as it happens, had just come to meet him from the gym, was indeed perspiring from an intense work out. Ordinarily, she would have shrugged off inordinate or unrestrained comments, but on this day she had already suffered a series of small misfortunes—a parking ticket and a boot on her BMW, cross words from her neighbor who complained that her cat was causing him to sneeze (somehow through the adjoining wall of their respective apartments), and an overdue notice from the public library. She was looking forward to a simple cup of coffee and pleasant conversation. Kaminsky's critique fell at the end of an already bad day. She slammed down her cup of coffee, spilling it, and pre-emptively left before Kaminsky could offer any further advice on self-improvement. After that, and for ten years, Kaminsky used his computer to look for girls who were pretty and who would like to date a man of means, an educated man, a man who spoke English, French, and his native Russian. He even posted a picture of himself. Unfortunately, the last picture he had, other than the usual driver's license photo, was taken when he was twenty-five years old. When the occasional liaison did arise, he was sharply rebuked for having perpetrated a terrible deception. "You are NOT twenty-five!" one said. Another didn't bother to say anything. When she found his table, identified by a white carnation (the pre-arranged sign for recognition), she just turned around and walked out of the restaurant.

Despite his positive nature, always hopeful, Kaminsky had nearly given up hope of ever finding a companion. Toward the dawn of the new millennium, Kaminsky joined a single's club. It was here at one of their social gatherings that an older gentleman took him aside and spoke to him frankly. His name was Mr. Muftaz—he was a Syrian. Muftaz had noticed Kaminsky's overbearing nature and clumsy overtures toward the female members. Their meeting turned fortuitous. Muftaz was quite successful in the art of social interaction, or, more accurately, seduction. Women wanted to meet him, talk to him. Many of them even wanted to go home with him. And why not? There was an indescribable aire about him, a movie star quality, a charisma not easily summed up. He was gracious, soft spoken, confident, wealthy, handsome and rugged. Passing years had only made him more so. He was turning gray, yes, but his elegance, matched by his intelligent conversation, continued to draw the best women to his side.

Kaminsky, too, had noticed that women were attracted to him. So when Muftaz took him aside, Kaminsky let his oversized ears take in the master's advice:

“First, you must never critique a woman unless it is to pay her a compliment, and the compliment should be fitting and believable. For example, ‘That color brings out your eyes.’ Second, speak softly and speak only ten words to her one thousand. When you do speak, make sure it is a question, a harmless one, one that will invite her to talk about herself. Yes, I realize that the listening may strike you as an interminable and unwarranted punishment, but unless you humble yourself in the female presence, you will never catch one. You must take them unawares, you understand.”

At first Kaminsky did not understand. However, he did trust Muftaz and followed him blindly, noting even his smallest gestures. Nights, alone in his apartment, he repeated words he'd heard from Muftaz and even practiced his physical gestures, the way he lowered his head to listen intently to some inane female prattle, the way his face grew serious with concern because a woman's cat had passed away a year earlier and she still missed it. Muftaz possessed the social graces one might learn in a seminary in one of those graduate seminars on pastoral care. His “bedside manner” had become so refined, that Muftaz could quickly move from the side of a bed to its middle. So then, it occurred to Kaminsky to ask, why was he still single? Why had he not yet found a companion?

“I have not the slightest interest in them after I have bedded them. I do not want one of them. I want all of them.”

“Oh, I see,” replied Kaminsky. But in reality, he didn't. He wanted more than a meaningless fling. He was lonely and he knew it. He knew that the mere physical pleasures of a woman would leave him feeling empty and more alone than ever. It was with this realization, that Kaminsky began to withdraw from Muftaz. He even quit attending the single's club, but not until he had learned Muftaz's techniques. For one night or forever, it would be necessary to first capture the woman's heart. For the next few years he read women's magazines and analyzed them as carefully as prepared blueprints for the re-sectioning of a city block of the city's sewer. He was determined to be as knowledgeable (or seem so) as Muftaz, so he read every section of the New York Times and the New York Times Review of books. He read novels on the advice of female bookstore clerks: “I recommend Nicholas Sparks.” So he read Sparks, stopping to take copious amounts of Pepto-Bismol.” He read romance novels, para-romance novels, horror romance, fantasy romance novels and any other book that women considered to be fine art. In every case, he carefully studied the qualities of the male character and compared them to himself, subjecting himself to near Freudian level self-analysis: *De man is veery confident. Check. He have money. Ok. I have money. So, check. He have foreign accent. I have foreign accent. Check. He is gentleman and he also bad man or have some dark secret. Ok, I try. He hold head up high and act sometime like he do not care. Ok, I try that to. He handsome...*

There isn't much one can do about one's basic appearance, but Kaminsky decided to pay an outrageous sum of money for a good hair cut, one that would make his nose and ears appear proportionate. He purchased products for his skin to clean out his pores. He could, however, only go so far. When a cosmetologist told him that his smoking was damaging his skin, he dismissed her, saying that he liked smoking and wouldn't give it up. *So I find woman who smoke too or woman who don't care.*

A year from the time Kaminsky encountered Muftaz, Kaminsky began experiencing success. He dated one woman for three whole weeks. Naturally, he could not change his basic nature, so inevitably he slipped up and quite by accident insulted the poor woman with an obvious truth, and she was on her way. He dated another for two days. They had met in a bar where the music was so loud that it was impossible to voice soft Muftaz-like tones, but it hadn't mattered to the woman because she was drunk and wanton. Kaminsky, for all she cared, could have been her apartment doorman, a man she passed thousands of times, but whose face she would never be able to picture in her mind.

As for Kaminsky, time passed and gravity began to work its downward flight. He developed a waddle where his Adam's Apple had been. His hair turned grey. His nose seemed two sizes larger now than it had when he'd first come to America. His daily beers lingered, hung around, and formed a paunch that sagged over the top of his belt. He was now nearly sixty and still alone. To make matters worse, his company was downsizing and encouraging (actually, insisting) on his early retirement. Now, he spent his mornings reading the paper beside his cat. In the afternoon, he went to sit in the park around the corner from the school.

On the first occasion his eyes happened to fall upon a young woman, an amazing young woman, no doubt one of the students from the school, or perhaps one of the teachers. She was beautiful. Long and beautifully brushed hair, high cheekbones, a smart dress. From her white cane, which she tapped from side to side, and her designer sun-glasses, Kaminsky deduced that she was blind. He decided to follow her.

Having read that the blind have an excellent, even uncanny, sense of hearing, Kaminsky made sure to follow from a distance of at least a hundred feet. She walked ten city blocks uptown, turned and walked another two blocks to a tall apartment building and disappeared inside. Kaminsky noted the time he first saw her. It was a few minutes after four in the afternoon. The next day he decided to return to the same park. Sure enough, the young woman in sun-glasses tapped her way past him where he sat on the park bench in front of his scattered collection of cigarette butts which lay on the sidewalk like snipped flower buds. Again, Kaminsky followed her.

From the moment he first saw her, she was all he could think about. He must devise a way to meet her. A way that wouldn't frighten her. An encounter that would seem perfectly natural. Until he could conceive of a plan, his encounter with the young woman presented him auspiciously and unexpectedly. About a week after he had spotted her and stalked her to her apartment, the young woman dropped something from her school bag. It was on a windy day, and the item, a piece of paper skittered on ahead of the blind woman. Kaminsky, seeing this, rushed ahead, passing her, and stomped his big shoe down on the paper to keep it from getting away. Then he picked it up and examined it, but he was unable to make any sense out of it. It was in "finger language." He heard her cane taps approaching. Turning around quickly, she was right in front of him. Somehow she knew that he was standing in her path without the sweep of her cane.

"Miss, you drop piece of paper."

"Oh, my! Oh, thank you, Sir." She held out her hand. It was a moment before Kaminsky realized he had to physically guide the paper into her hand. Having never been blind, Kaminsky often unaware of the obvious. The woman continued to hold out her hand until Kaminsky placed it directly on her open palm. With her cane tucked under her arm, she ran her fingers across the surface.

"Ah!" she said, "It is a poem by Pushkin, one that we have been studying."

"Really? These goose bumps are in Russian?" he asked with genuine innocence. "I am Russian!"

"Yes, Sir. I know. I am blind, but I have ears."

"Oh, you mean accent. I sound like Russian."

"I mean accent. No, the bumps—which we call braille by the way—are in English translation. Anyway, thank you again. It's rather cold today, so I suppose I'll be on my way now."

"Wait," said Kaminsky. "I meet girl who know Pushkin. I wary much like to walk with you and talk more. That is okay?"

"That is okay. It beats following me every day, doesn't it."

"What mean you? I don't follow you."

"Mr... What is your name?"

"I am Eugenev."

"Eugenev. Well, sometimes the wind, like today, comes from the south and your tobacco precedes you."

"Oh! I see. I mean... Yes, I walk home about the same time. Sometimes I have seen you. I not follow you."

"It's okay. Even if you did, you wouldn't be the first man to follow me. People are naturally curious about what they don't understand."



My mother Milica by Sava Stojkov

As was as if she had eyes, and yet she did not mind him. She even welcomed his conversation. She folded up her cane and put it in her satchel, and then she felt around in the empty space until she found his elbow. Then the two of them walked together and talked.

“You know. You are wary pretty girl.”

“Thank you. I have been told this, but it doesn’t matter to me very much.”

“Wary wary pretty. And you were born without eyes.”

“I have eyes. They just don’t see.” She stopped and turned in the direction of his voice and took off her sun glasses, revealing a pair of eyes like milky white and opaque moons. The swiveled around, trapped inside of orbits. They were, to Kaminsky, hideous. Something about them even seemed evil and malignant. Possibly contagious. How could such a beautiful woman have such eyes. He stared for a moment at them and then turned away. She put her sun glasses back on and they

resumed their walk, but with an uncomfortable silence. After another block, Kaminsky broke the silence.

“I sometimes rude by accident. I forget ask you your name.”

“Lara. Like Pasternak’s Lara. Do you know Pasternak?”

“Only movie.”

“You should read the book. Anyway, I assume you can read it in Russian. It would be such a waste not to read such books when you can read them in the original.”

“I thought women like read books by Jackie Collins or Danielle Steele.”

“Oh no. That’s trash. Who told you that?”

“Women.”

“Okay, maybe there are some women who waste their time with books like that, but there are also women who read good books. When we get to my apartment, why don’t you come up for a hot cup of tea, and I will show you some of the books in my apartment. You need a more balanced perspective.”

Kaminsky could not believe his good fortune. She was inviting him to her home and they had only just met. Was she foolish? After all, he was a stranger. Was she a whore? She did not seem to be either, but what did he really know about her? He conceded that a cup of tea would be nice. And she added...

“Only for an hour though. I have to study. All right with you?”

“All right with me. Yes. All right.”

When Lara and Eugenev reached her apartment, she paused to talk at some length with the doorman. She politely introduced Eugenev as a “friend,” and told him they would be talking about books for a while. The doorman, “Mr. Zieglitz,” was friendly. He said that it had been an uneventful day, but he thought it might rain. If Eugenev needed to borrow an umbrella upon his departure, he would be welcome.

Lara’s apartment had no pictures on the wall. There was one light stand—presumably for use by visitors. He turned it on. There were many books, perhaps over a thousand, but Kaminsky could not tell one from another as their spines bore titles in finger language. Lara went into her kitchen to make the tea, and Eugenev sat on the sofa. It was a small apartment so they continued their conversation from the adjoining rooms.

“What do you do, Eugenev?”

“I civil engineer.”

Then the next question, as unexpected as their sudden meeting, was upon him.

“How old are you.”

In a split second, Kaminsky made up his mind to lie.

“Thirty.”

“Funny. I’d taken you to be older.”

“Thirty. That’s all.”

“Are you married?”

“No. I not married. I... I not married. Single. And you? A boyfriend?”

“Single. Not very many men want to date the blind.

“You must have many boyfriend. You wary beautiful.”

“Not as many as you might suppose. There’s the blind thing. Also, Some of them aren’t interested in dating a bookish person either. I think the word they’d use is ‘nerd’.”

“I see nothing wrong. Beautiful woman can be intelligent. Why not? This is America.”

“A beautiful woman can be intelligent in any country.”

“Yes. I believe you wary right.”

Lara brought out tea on a tray and sat it on the coffee table. She did not need her cane in her house and Kaminsky noticed. As he had never met anyone who was blind, he asked a great many stupid questions.

“You not need cane now?”

“Not as long as you don’t move the furniture.”

After she put down the tea she walked to the bookshelf and began to read off some of the authors.

“On this shelf I keep Pushkin, Pasternak, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy... On this one, I have Dickens, Austin, Elliot...”

Kaminsky suddenly wished he had not wasted so many years reading the wrong books. He had of course read some of the Russians in high school, but now he doubted he’d read an important book in several decades. No one asked him to read them, and his degree was in engineering. He suddenly felt his confidence wane.

“You will think your new friend, Eugenev, wary stupid. I not read so many books like you.”

“Eugenev, don’t say that. It isn’t books that makes a person, it’s what’s inside them.”

“Eugenev—good man. That what Lara mean. That if I good person, you still be my friend.”

“That is exactly what I mean. But I won’t stop talking about their importance. They are very important.”

“I read all books you tell me.”

“It would be very nice to talk to a Russian man about Russian literature.”

There conversation continued on for an hour. Without even checking her watch—a special watch with a removable glass—Lara knew it was time for her studies. Eugenev thanked her for a most wonderful afternoon and asked if he could meet her again the next day.

“Perfectly wonderful idea.”

Kaminsky walked home that night with his feet barely touching the ground. He felt he had won some long awaited prize. He was on the verge of “dating,” and not just this, but she was “normal,” or no, beyond “normal.” Lara was extraordinary. He was filled with admiration for her. She managed to master the world from her secret place of darkness. She could go anywhere and do anything. She could read anything. She had fine taste in music and poetry. Her other senses were so acute that her blindness didn’t seem to matter. As for that, he could assist her in new environments. He could take her places—places like Moscow and Kiev, Prague and Amsterdam. He could take her to museums and describe the paintings. Through her, he would become a better person, a person of culture. He could take care of her. How hard could it be? He took care of his cat Sigmund until it died at the age of twelve. Then he got another cat and took care of it until it died. Then he got another one. Kaminsky hardly noticed the passing blocks or the sun going down and the daylight fading into night.

That night he tossed and turned. When he did sleep, perchance, his dreams were wild distortions of the day with Lara, mad chaotic distortions born from his excitement, exaggerations of her beauty and the intoxicating effect it had on him. But Kaminsky was unused to excitement. He had led a sedentary and simply life, bent, mostly, over plans for the city commission on a drafting board. He dreamed in straight lines and well fitting intersections. But tonight his dreams were both ecstatic and troubled. In one of the inchoate episodes, the beautiful Lara removed her glasses and he saw again the hideous twin moons orbiting in their imprisoned orbits, circling around in the sockets, circling, circling, circling, stupidly and grotesque.

Their sightlines bore through space aimlessly and crossed at uneven intervals. And as the two moons swiveled in her head, she laughed at him. It was a sinister laugh, mocking him, and belittling him for impotence. Kaminsky woke up sweating and went to the kitchen for a glass of water, stepping on the cat and causing it to scream, in turn upsetting him further, as if he were someone still stuck inside his dream. But he composed himself. He poured some milk in a saucer—it was his way of apologizing for stepping on him. “I’m sorry,” he said to the cat. “It was dark. I didn’t see you.... There now, drink some milk.”

Then Kaminsky went back to bed and tried to think of something pleasant. For a few minutes, he told himself the dream was from something he ate. He looked forward to seeing her again the next day. He wondered what new wonder their meeting might bring. He regained hold of his old self, hopeful about tomorrow. By 3 o’clock in the afternoon, Kaminsky reached the park and sat on his park bench to wait for Lara. Like a fine watch, she rounded the corner at precisely 3:10.

“Lara! Hello. It is I, Eugenev.”

“Hello, Eugenev. Come to walk me home?”

“If you like... or, perhaps... Perhaps I take you to dinner.”

Lara thought a moment.

“It is Friday. I don’t usually study on Friday night. I suppose we could make an afternoon and evening of the time. Yes.”

“Splendid. You like Russian food? I know Russian restaurant.”

“Yes, Eugenev,” she said, folding her cane. “Lead on.”

The two of them walked over to the East Side. Lara ordered a Mimosa salad and Kaminsky had Borscht. Lara talked about some stories she was reading by Isaac Babel. Kaminsky had never read them, but he was aware of their background, the Russian Revolution.

“Babel was a soldier in the Red Army,” she explained.

“Really? My grandfather was a soldier in the Red Army,” he

spoke before he even knew what he was saying. If she counted the likely years, this would certainly make Eugenev older than thirty. But Lara didn’t notice, or she pretended not to notice. Possibly she didn’t really care if Eugenev Kaminsky were old. If she didn’t care, Kaminsky thought, then all would be splendid.

“Yes, just smelling the food here, the onions... It reminds me of a page of Babel. Babel’s favorite subject was food. At least he never fails to describe it in detail. I guess you could say he was more gustatory and olfactory and less visual—like me,” she said, chuckling a little.



Gentleness by **Francisca Esteve**

“No. Not like you,” said Kaminsky. “I not know wary well the books of Babel, but I see picture. He was wary ugly, but you are beautiful.”

All through their early dinner, Lara had kept her glasses on. This pleased Kaminsky. He did not want to be reminded of his nightmare. Seeing her without her glasses, too, might spoil his dinner. After dinner, he suggested they drink vodka. Lara protested a little. “I’m a bit of a light weight. probably shouldn’t.” But Kaminsky insisted, so she acquiesced. Lara was not a light weight. She had five drinks while Kaminsky was just starting his second. Yet she did not seem to feel the effects, save for a slight change in her humor. She was jovial and affectionate. She leaned into him when she spoke. She laid her head on his shoulder and felt his muscle with both her hands.

“Ah, Eugenev. You are a big man. And strong. May I...” she hesitated.

“You may what?”

“Can I touch your face, Eugenev? Touching is how I see and I would like to see you.”

Kaminsky tried to cover a feeling of panic. She might touch and “see” that gravity had begun to denigrate his body. He had a waddle. What if she were to feel where his Adam’s Apple is and find a waddle there? What if she could discern the wrinkles that had formed on his face, or the bags that sagged under his eyes? What if she could discern from the lines on his face his entire history? Her fingers might even be psychic! On the other hand, how could he refuse her?

“You... You touch. If you like. You touch. It fine.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Eugenev, little nervous. Yes.”

“I will be very gentle.”

She ran her fingers around both sides of his head and lingered around his ears.

“I love your ears,” she said. “And you hair. You have a pronounced forehead, a good strong nose. You are very beautiful, Eugenev. I’m surprised the girls are not chasing you.”

Kaminsky could barely believe it. She actually found him attractive? No, this could not be. She could not have mistaken his face for the face of a young man. And, too, it occurred to him, finally, that it would not be long before someone would remark that Kaminsky was in fact much older than her pretended.

“Really, you think I handsome man?”

“Yes. But, well, to be perfectly honest with you, Eugenev—and maybe it’s the vodka talking—I don’t really have anyone to compare you with. I haven’t had many boyfriends,” by which Lara actually meant that she had never had “any.”

Kaminsky could not believe his good fortune. He asked her if one day she would like to visit Moscow. Of course she would. He even asked her if they could walk home together every day. Of course. That would be so fine. There was agreeable to everything. She did not even mind his momentary lapse of curtness with their waiter. Perhaps because he scolded him in Russian, but anyway tones are universal. She simply asked what he had done wrong.

Eugenev and Lara went out on Saturday and Sunday, the following days. The walked

home to Lara’s apartment on Monday and again on Tuesday. On Wednesday, Kaminsky, seeing no reason to delay the inevitable, asked Lara for her hand in marriage. He knew that a few days was impulsive, but he also knew that he wasn’t getting any younger. As for Lara, Kaminsky’s proposal might be her only chance. It was as if the two were circling in the same orbit with the same purpose—to intersect and form a union. At once the two began to plan their future. Lara, of course, wanted children—a thought that had not yet occurred to Kaminsky. Would the wedding be Orthodox or Protestant? Lara was raised a protestant, but she told him he could decide. Religion didn’t matter to either of them. Both of them were visibly excited to pedestrians who passed them on the street or in the park. Those who passed, if they bothered to take notice, simply assumed that the two were father and daughter.

And who would come to this wedding? Weddings require witnesses. Kaminsky explained that his only friends were some fellows he played chess with in the park on Sunday. In a stroke of genius, Kaminsky suggested they invite her friends from the school. Being blind, they would not notice Kaminsky’s age. They would make perfect witnesses. Lara agreed. But what about her parents? Certainly they would see him. He confessed...

“Lara, my darling. I nervous. I no want meet your parents.”

“Eugenev, don’t be silly. They will adore you because I do.”

Kaminsky began to dread the wedding. That day would be his end. Her parents would see him and ask the embarrassing question. Or, perhaps they wouldn’t. Perhaps they would simply assume that Lara knew his age and that it didn’t matter. Anyway, he was not so old. He was still strong. He could still give her whatever she wanted. He tried not to think about it.

The week before the ceremony, Kaminsky rented a truck and helped Lara pack her books and bookshelves, along with the rest of her things. In each box she poked a series of holes which she could later count and identify the contents of all the boxes. They hauled everything over to Kaminsky’s apartment. To make room for all her books, she had Kaminsky remove all the pictures from the wall and put them in the closet. Kaminsky hated having to take down his poster of Farah Facet, his poster of Olivia Newton John, his poster of Cindy Crawford. He told Lara they were only art prints, not important, but he could only name a couple of artists, so he told her they were by Monet, Rembrandt, and Picasso. That was the sum total of artists he could name. When Lara asked him specifically which paintings, he said “Oh, the usual” and quickly changed the topic. Every day the week before the wedding, Lara painstakingly placed things where she could find them, and she had the furniture rearranged in a more sensible manner, explaining to him that, were they to leave it were it was, she would have to count every step all the time and turn at 45 degree angles five times just to get from the bedroom to the kitchen. Perhaps she had exaggerated a little. Kaminsky remembered stepping on his cat and began to worry a little.

“No,” she said, “cat’s will get out of the way unless they’re asleep and they seldom sleep on the floor. Kaminsky nodded that she was probably right but Lara did not see the nodding, of course.

Eugenev and Lara were married on a Saturday. It was a small ceremony at the Russian Orthodox church. The priest spoke in Russian, but then translated as he went for the benefit of the bride and her party. Lara’s party consisted of her mother and father and three of her friends from the school. The whole time, Kaminsky was sweating: Lara’s father and mother were, in fact, much younger than he. Yet, no one said a word—at least out loud—about Kaminsky being old. When the ceremony was over, Kaminsky whisked away his bride to his apartment, which was now “their” apartment, or even “her” apartment since Kaminsky’s things had mostly been put away or thrown away. The apartment needed to be arranged for her convenience. Every turn was memorized. The edge of every piece of furniture must be known in the dark.

He asked if he could carry her across the threshold. Of course he could. He should. She insisted. He opened a bottle of champagne and poured two glasses, putting one of them in her hand and clinking his glass against hers. “Cheers!” Then, as he always smoked whenever he drank, he looked on the table for his cigarettes. No cigarettes. He searched the pockets of his tuxedo, but there were none. He excused himself and went to the kitchen to look...

“What are you looking for, darling, Eugenev?”

“I look cigarettes. I not find.”

“Oh, that’s because I have thrown them all away. You don’t need them now. You have me. Come back, Eugenev. Kiss me?”

Kaminsky thought for a moment. He couldn’t ever remember being without cigarettes, not for nearly forty years, not since he was a young teenager. The thought terrified him. He came out of the kitchen with a bewildered look that feel on oblivious eyes. She had taken her glasses off. She had taken off her coat and her shoes.

“You can have me now, Eugenev. I am your wife for as long as we both shall live.”

“You not want finish champagne first?”

“Bring it to bed with us.”

Kaminsky had prepared himself for a longer preamble from the living room to the bedroom. She was, after all, young. He was certain that she would be nervous. He did not stop to consider that he would be more nervous than she. She wasn’t nervous at all. She found her way to the bedroom and told him to unbutton her white satin dress, so he did. First he dimmed the lights and tried to avoid looking at her eyes. Then she pulled off her satin slip and laid back on the bed.

“Can you help me with the rest?”

Kaminsky was becoming increasingly aroused. He forgot about the cigarettes. He could not take his eyes of her body. It was the most beautiful body... more beautiful than he had ever contrived in dreams. She was as perfect as a mathematical equation, all of equal proportions, all the curves of nature and beauty and youth. He salivated and swallowed, and even though nervous, he tried to act naturally. He caressed her stomach with his hand, the hand that now bore age spots. Her skin was

unblemished and smooth. He ran his fingers through her hair, fingers that had begun to bend in odd directions, with the onset of arthritis. His breathing grew heavy even before he had slid off her hose, unclasp her bra, and pulled down her tiny underwear. He felt her lips, her ears, her full mouth. He even ran the tip of his finger across her young, beautiful teeth. He still tried not to meet her two dead eyes. Looking at her eyes now might ruin everything. They were repulsive, yet the rest of her was angelic, untouched, and it belonged to him. Her body was his body. Conversely, he considered, his body was hers, such as it was, as old as it was. Momentarily the thought crossed his mind *how long would it be before she discovered his secret...* No. No. *I must put such out of my mind. She loves me that is all that matters. She loves me and she wants me. She wants to have baby with me. Baby...*

Lara pulled Eugenev on top of her and opened her legs for him. How many years had it been since he had known such joy? Many years. He had sex with the woman he met at a bar, but it had not brought any joy. He had grown so lonely that he had sought out women on street corners, but that too was not joyful. Love changed everything. Utterly. He moaned with bliss as the rhythm of her hips matched his rhythms. She also let out little cries that affirmed she too was in love with him. These noises increased

After awhile, the two of them fell back on the pillows, breathing heavily and sighing.

“Oh, Eugenev. You are so wonderful. I love you, Eugenev. So good. Was it good for you?”

“Wary good!”

“Can we do that again?”

“Now you want?”

“As soon as you can, I mean.”

“Yes. A moment though. Only a moment.”

Kaminsky excused himself and went to the bathroom. Lara had completely rearranged the medicine cabinet, but he found his bottle of Viagra. He reasoned that he might need it given her youth. He had heard that younger people were more sexual, and now she was already asking to go again. He took two tablets and went back to bed, but not before he found a cigarette butt in the kitchen trash and smoked the last few millimeters. Then he rinsed his mouth with mouthwash. She would notice, he knew.

Kaminsky returned to his bride. She had, for some odd reason, turned on all the lights in the bedroom.

“Why all the lights on,” he asked.

“I want you to see me. All of me. I want you to describe to me what you see.”



Snowing Eiffel Tower by Andys Constandinides

“I see beautiful woman. I see my Lara.”

“Compare me to other women.”

“I not can think of other woman. You only woman.”

“Then compare me to the women you see in a man’s magazine. Am I that beautiful?”

She was looking in his direction, the two dead moons making erratic and unstable orbits.

“You have a beautiful face, beautiful body, lovely long brown hair, a beautiful smile....”

“Ok. We can do it again now?”

“I think so.”

Lara and Eugenev both fell asleep after blissful exhaustion. The Viagra had worked. As far as she knew, he had the stamina of a young man, a man her age. Kaminsky was satisfied that he could keep her in the dark about his age indefinitely. And if anyone did ever make a comment, he could simply deny it or say they were making a bad joke. “Yes, I am her ‘old man’ as the expression goes... Kaminsky drifted off to sleep soon after Lara, around midnight. Before he turned off the lights in the bedroom, he looked once more at her face. Her eyes were closed, so they hid the hideous image of death, their two white moons. They remained behind the curtains of her eyelids. Seeing her face this way, he felt more at peace. He loved her dearly. This much was clear to him. He loved her especially when she closed her eyes or wore her sun glasses.

That night his dreams seemed to run in circles. He watched himself returning again and again to the church where they were married. She waited for him at the altar in a ray of sun that poured through a stain glass window, casting deep blues, yellows and reds all over her silk white wedding dress. Then, suddenly, the sun went out and the church turned dark. Only the wedding candle flickered and Kaminsky was aware of the absence of everyone in attendance. Where had they gone? Then he found himself outside. When he entered the church again, the same images appeared and vanished. The dream upset him. It might have woken him up save for a sharp interruption. In his dream, he could hear screams. He thought they must have been coming from the adjacent apartment. The screams were muffled. What he did not know, what he could not know, was that the screams were his own. He woke from his dream and his eyes were on fire, but he was still unaware that the screams were his of his own voice, screaming from darkness. He was panting heavily and his heart was racing. Through all this it was difficult to make sense of Lara’s voice. She waited patiently for his hysteria to die down or subside long enough to speak to him, to make him understand what was happening.

“Are you wondering what has happened? Are you ready to hear me? I have taken an eyedropper and have used sulfuric acid. In a moment, the pain will subside and I’ll flush your eyes and apply an ointment.”

Lara’s voice was different. It was low and steady. Every word was deliberate, possibly rehearsed.

“Lara,” Eugenev cried, “What you have done?”

“What have you done!” Lara corrected him, harshly. “Learn English!”

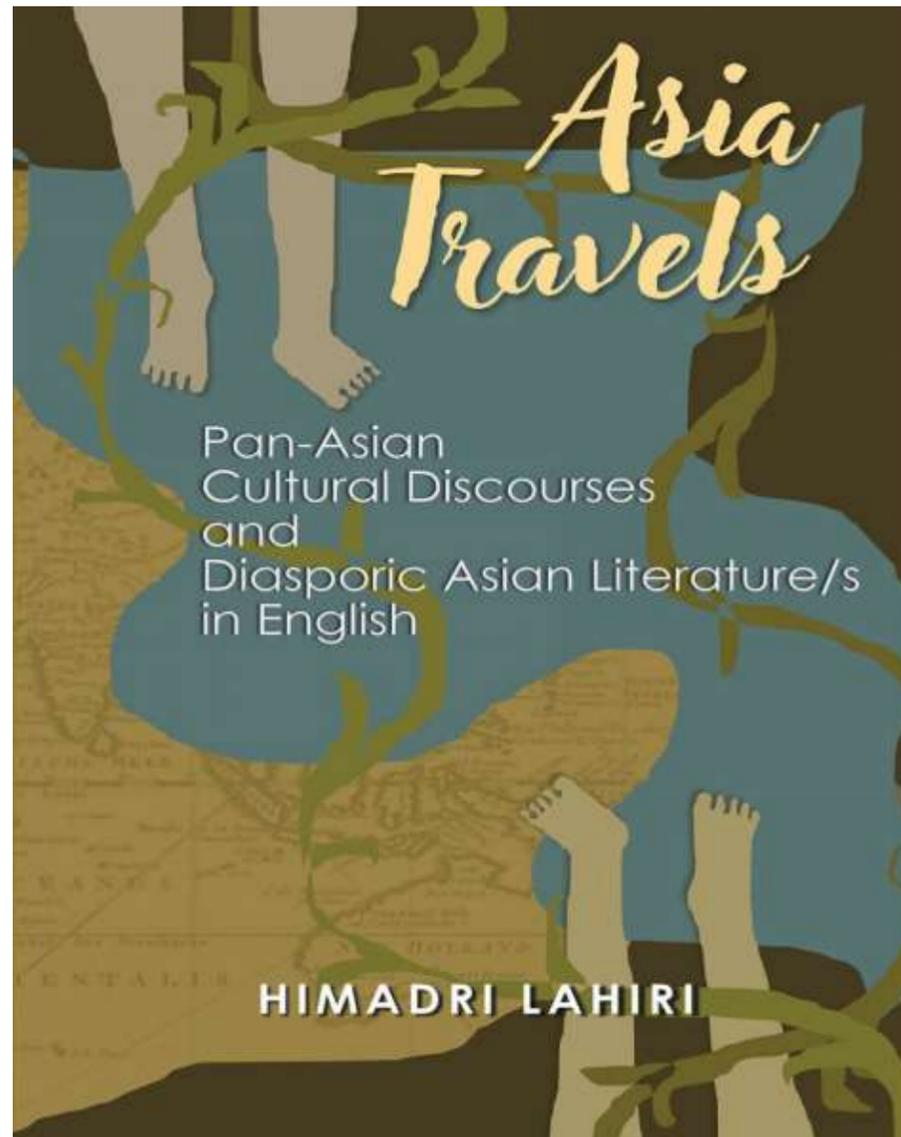
“Why? Why you do this? I not can see! I not can see!”

“Are you sure? Are you sure you do not see? Do you see what I see? I see an old, filthy pervert. My husband. A disgusting pervert! And me? A child! I’m just a child! So, my dear daddy, you will see now what I see.”

15 BOOK REVIEW

MILI DAS

Himadri Lahiri, *Asia Travels: Pan-Asian Cultural Discourses and Diasporic Asian Literature/s in English*. Bolpur: Birutjatio Sahitya Sammiloni, 2021. i-xxiv+1-272 pp. ISBN: 978-81953067-8-7.



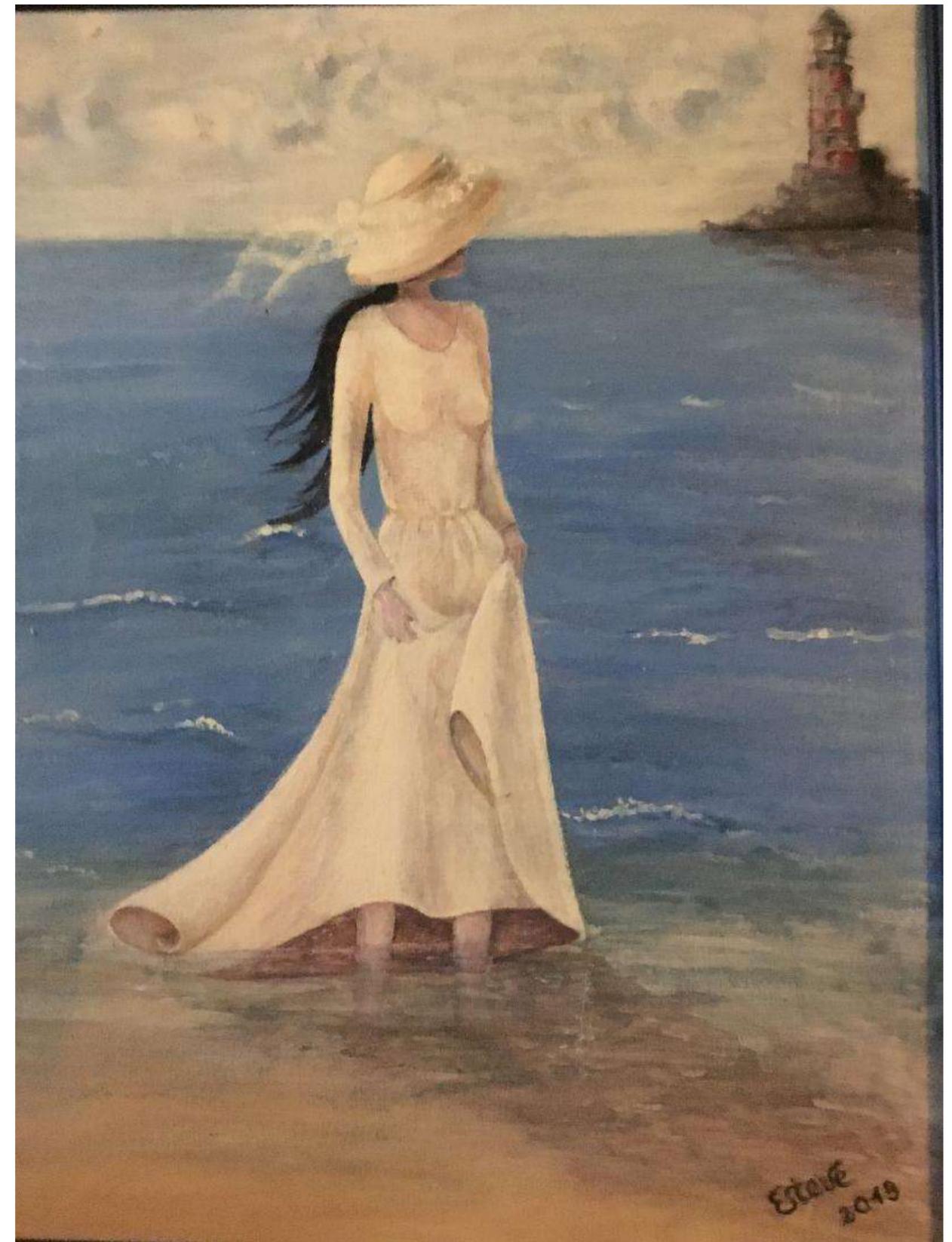
The book under review offers us an overview of cultural ‘travels’ within and outside the continent of Asia. It offers fresh perspectives on Pan-Asian cultural discourses. It talks about how ideas and people travel from the national space to the transnational one and how they interact under the pressure of alien cultures. Pan-Asian ideas of several thinkers like Okakura Tenzin, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sun Yat-sen, have been discussed here. It further focuses on the literary works of Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Monica Sone, Hisaye Yamamoto, Bapsi Sidhwa, Ranbir Sidhu, Khaled Hosseini, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manjushree Thapa and several Asian diasporic anthologies.

The foreword to this book, written by Nilufer E. Bharucha, provides an appropriate historical background of diasporic travels from Asia. The volume is divided into three sections. The first section entitled, “From Home to the World: Pan-Asianism and Diaspora” contains four chapters. Each of the chapters deal with the discursive aspects of the journey from ‘home’ to the outside world. The first chapter of the book, “Pan-Asianism and Its Prospects: Through the Cultural Lens” focuses on the cultural dialogues that play an important role in achieving an effective amalgamation of Asian cultures. It argues that cultural transactions between nations can play a cohesive role and cites the example of the Pakistani theatre group Ajoka that was instrumental in binding the common people of the countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh together. It also analyses the stories of Mahadevi Verma’s “Chini Pheriwala” and Rabindranath Tagore’s “Kabuliwala” to suggest that these are the antidotes to the concept of ‘foreignness.’ Chapter two of this section entitled “Tagore’s Pan-Asianist Discourse: Reception and Resistance” dwells on Tagore’s concept of Pan-Asianism which has a strong presence in his travel narrative *Java Jatrir Patra (Letters from Java: Rabindranath Tagore’s Tour of South East Asia)*. This chapter also talks about Tagore’s experience in China where his discourse on Pan-Asianism encountered opposition from Chinese intellectuals of the time. The next chapter “Asian American Literature: Problems and Possibilities” discusses the rise of Pan-Asianism in the American context. From a theoretical perspective, it shows the growth of Asian American Literature which emerged out of the ‘politics’ of discrimination, confrontation with racism of white hegemonic groups and consolidation of kinship between Asian communities in the United States. The fourth chapter, “Crossing Borders: In Search of Aesthetics” critically discusses how distinct aesthetic and philosophical patterns are born out of the ontological experience of displacement and movement.

The second section of the book, “Shadows in the Nation: Diasporic Perspectives” consists of four chapters, all of which suggest that internal conflicts and external aggression can pose threats to the possibilities of Asianist unity and understanding. The first chapter “‘Pearl Harbour Echoes’: Japanese American Internment Experience in Monica Sone and Hisaye Yamamoto” dwells on the imprisonment of Japanese Americans in the United States in the wake of Japanese bombing on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941. Through the analysis of Monica Sone’s autobiography *Nisei Daughter* (1953) and Hisaye Yamamoto’s short story “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara” (1951), the chapter demonstrates how the internment affected the Japanese American community and divided the Asians in the United States. The second chapter in this section entitled, “Insane Characters, Innocent Child Narrators: Partition in Ranbir Sidhu’s “Border Songs” and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*” concentrates on the violence resulting from internecine conflicts that took place during the period of Partition of India in 1947. The following chapter “The Nation in Peril: Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*” throws light on the years of darkness in Afghanistan. Hosseini depicts how aggressive imperialist intrusion and internal ethnic divide can tear a country apart. The next chapter “Diaspora from the Himalayan Region: Nation and Modernity in Select Literary Works” focuses on Nepal and Tibet, a less explored area. It focusses on Manjushree Thapa’s novel *Seasons of Flight* (2010) and some works of Tibetan writers in exile. This chapter is useful in understanding the emerging corpus of literary works from this region.

The last section “Settling Down: Response of the Authors in Diaspora” includes three chapters which focus on the process of acculturation in the diasporic space. The first chapter entitled, “On Their Immigrant Mothers’ Trail: Chinese American Daughters’ search for Identity in Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston” analyses the new texture of mother-daughter relationship in the diasporic context. The following chapter, “Nation, Nationalism and Cultural Citizenship in Bharati Mukherjee” deals with Mukherjee’s novel, *Jasmine* (1989) which argues that cultural citizenship is more effective than political citizenship in the process of cultural integration to the nation. The final chapter of this section “Family Space in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Short Stories” primarily dwells on two short stories – “A Temporary Matter” and “Interpreter of Maladies.” The characters like Shoba and Sukumar in “A Temporary Matter” and Mr. and Mrs. Das in “Interpreter of Maladies” belong to different stages of acculturation. The stories bring out the complex gendered relationship in the Asian families of the diasporic space. The concluding chapter of this book argues that South Asian diasporic anthologies created a common cultural platform for forging unity among different Asian-origin groups and encountering racist forces in the diasporic space.

The Appendices of this book contain five book reviews. Each of them addresses the discourse of Pan-Asianism and diaspora in one way or other. Interestingly, the book uses appropriate paratextual images which reinforce the basic thrust of the book. This book which addresses the cultural gaps between Asian and Western cultures is a remarkable contribution in the field of Diaspora Studies and Cultural Studies.



Girl and Lighthouse by **Francisca Esteve**

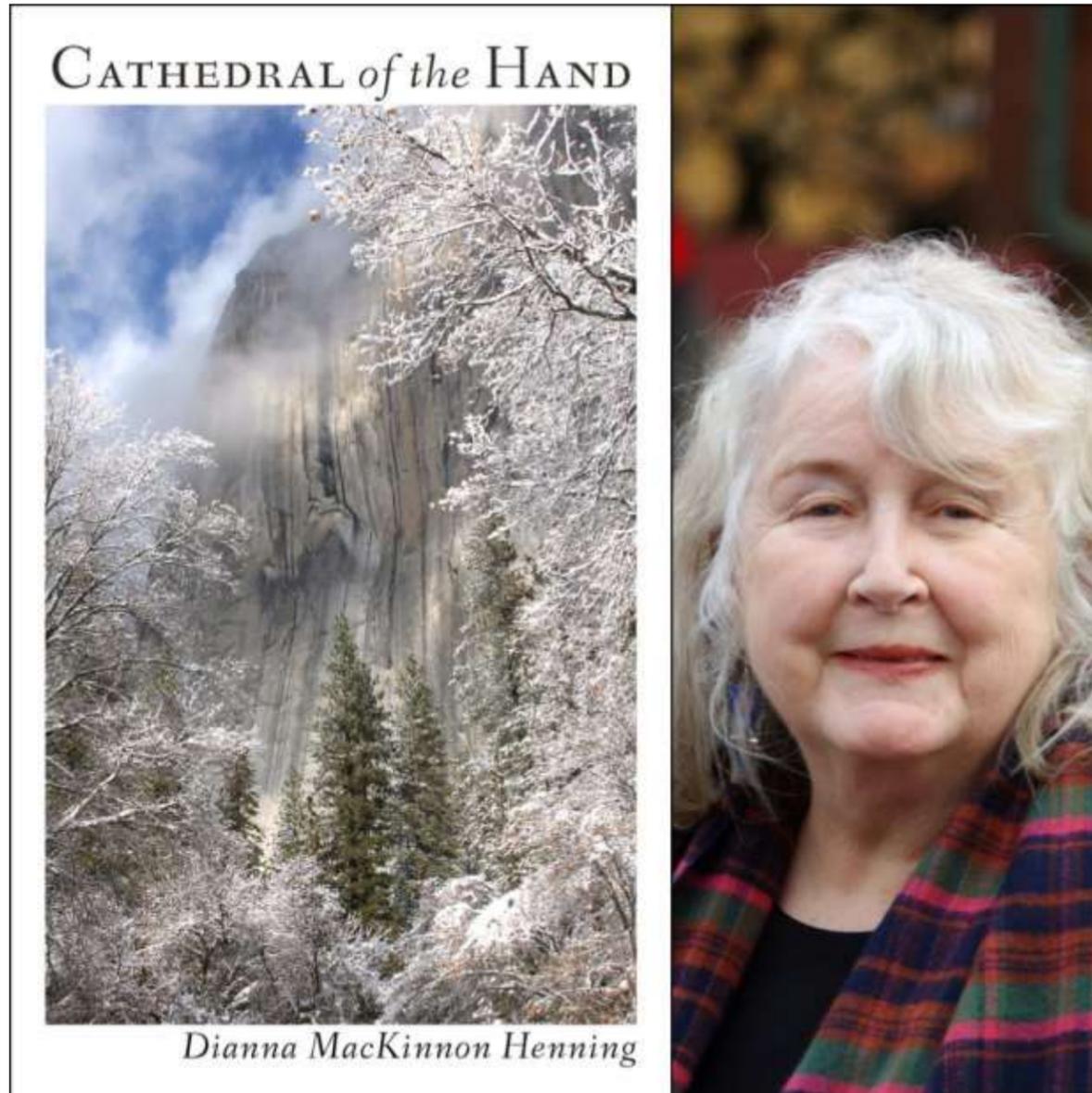
ZVONKO TANESKI



Zvonko Taneski (1980) is a Macedonian poet, literary critic, university professor in Slovakia and translator. Studies of general and comparative literature was graduated from the Faculty of Philology of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje in Skopje. In 2007 he defended his PhD thesis from “Theory and history of Slovak literature” at the Department of Slovak Literature and Literary Science on Comenius University in Bratislava. He worked as an independent researcher at the Institute of World Literature in Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava (2007–2008). In 2011 the commission for assessing scientific qualification of Slovak Academy of Science acknowledged his scientific qualification level IIa (senior researcher) in 2011, and in the same year he received a habilitation at the Faculty of Foreign Languages FON University in Skopje, where he worked from 2011 to 2014.

He worked at the Research Institute on Cultural Heritage of Constantine and Methodius in Faculty of Arts at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra from 2007 to 2011 year and at the same workplace acts as assistant professor (2014–2015). From September 2015 he works as an associate professor on Department of Slavic Philology in Faculty of Arts at Comenius University. Research activities: Comparative Slavonic studies and Balkan Linguistic and Literary studies.

Dianna MacKinnon Henning



Dianna MacKinnon Henning taught through California Poets in the Schools, received several CAC grants and taught poetry workshops through the William James Association's Prison Arts Program, including Folsom Prison. Recent Publications: *Artemis Journal*; *The Adirondack Review*; *The Plague Papers*, edited by Robbi Nester; *Pacific Poetry*; *New American Writing*; *The Kerf*; *The Moth*, Ireland; *Mojave River Review*; *the New Verse News*; *Sequestrum*; *VerseVirtual*; *Your Daily Poem* and *Naugatuck River Review*. Four-time Pushcart nominee. MFA in Writing '89 from Vermont College, Montpelier, VT. Her third book "Cathedral of the Hand," published by Finishing Line Press. Henning's fourth book, "Camaraderie of the Marvelous," just published Sept. 2, 2021 through Kelsay Books. Dianna has just been nominated for a Pushcart Prize by the *Adirondack Review*.

Stella Vinitchi Radulescu



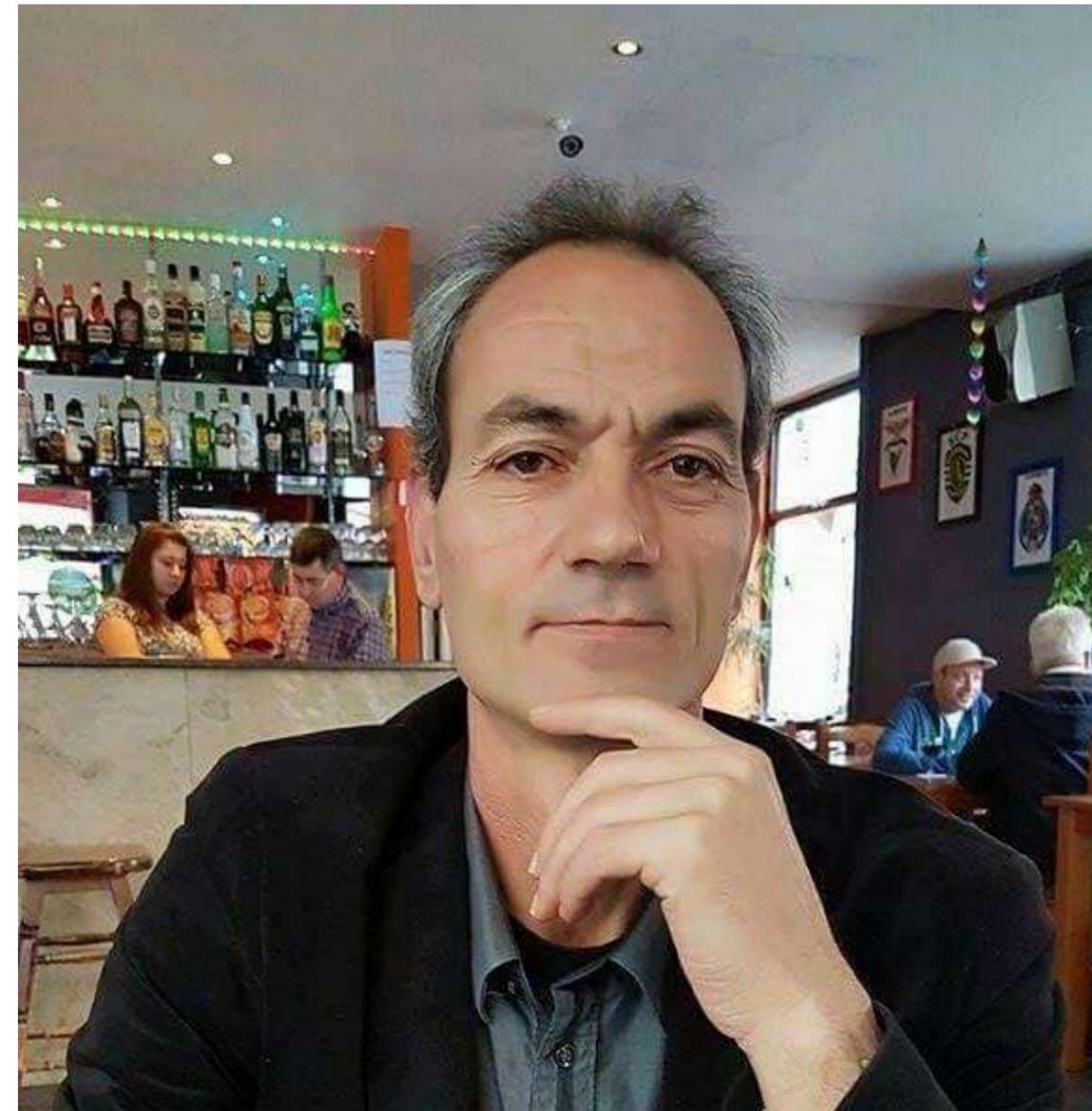
Stella Vinitchi Radulescu, Ph.D. in French, was born in Romania and left the country permanently at the height of the communist regime. Writing poetry in three languages, English, French and Romanian, she has published many poetry collections in the United States, France and Romania. Some of her French books have received several awards, including the Prix Amélie Murat and the Grand Prix de Poésie Francophone. Her last collection of poetry *I scrape the window of nothingness - new & selected poems* was published in 2015 by Orison Books Press and a book of translations of her French work *A Cry in the Snow & Other Poems* in 2018 in an international edition by Seagull Books. A new collection of poetry *Traveling with the Ghosts* is forthcoming at the end of the year. At the present she lives in Chicago.

Scott Thomas Outlar



Scott Thomas Outlar lives and writes in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He guest-edited the Hope Anthology of Poetry from CultureCult Press as well as the 2019, 2020, and 2021 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. He has been a weekly contributor at Dissident Voice for the past seven years. More than 2,000 of his poems have been published in literary venues around the world. Selections of his poetry have been translated into Afrikaans, Albanian, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Dutch, French, Hindi, Italian, Kurdish, Malayalam, Persian, Serbian, and Spanish. His podcast, Songs of Selah, airs weekly on 17Numa Radio and features interviews with poets, artists, musicians, and health advocates. His seventh book, *Evermore*, was written along with coauthor Mihaela Melnic and released in 2021. More about Outlar's work can be found at [17Numa.com](https://www.17numa.com)

Agron Shele



Agron Shele was born in October 7th, 1972, in the Village of Leskaj, city of Permet, Albania. Is the author of the following literary works: “The Steps of Clara” (Novel), “Beyond a grey curtain” (Novel), “Wrong Image” (Novel), “Innocent Passage” (Poetry), Whiste stones (poetry) RIME SPARSE -Il suono di due voci poetiche del Mediterraneo (Poesie di Agron Shele e Claudia Piccinno), La mia Musa (“Libri di-versi in diversi libri” – Italy, 2020); murmure d’ un autre monde (poetry), “Ese-I and Ese-II)”. Shele is also the coordinator of International Anthologies: “Open Lane- 1,” “Pegasiada Open Lane- 2, ATUNIS magazine (Nr 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)” and Atunis Galaxy Antholgy 2018, 2019, 2020. He is the winner of some international literary prizes. Is a member of the Albanian Association of Writers, member of the World Writers Association, in Ohio, United States, Poetas del Mundo, WPS, Unione world Poetry and the President of the International Poetical Galaxy “Atunis”. He is published in many newspapers, national and international magazines, as well as published in many global anthologies: Almanac 2008, 2017; World Poetry Yearbook 2009, 2013, 2015, The Second Genesis -2013, Kibatek 2015-Italy, Metafora (Poland), Keleno- Greece, etc. Currently Resides in Belgium and continues to dedicate his time and efforts in publishing literary works with universal values.

Vijayaraghavan Nair



M Vijayaraghavan is a retired senior executive of a multinational pharma company. He lives in Kerala, India with his family. Being a multi lingual and prolific poet he has written 100s of poems in his native language Malayalam and in English. His first anthology of poems in Malayalam titled as “Vaakku” (Word) is getting ready to be published soon. Most of his works have been appeared in periodicals and social media

Mike Zone



Mike Zone is the Editor in Chief of “Dumpster Fire Press”, the author of *Shedding Dark Places (almost)*, *One Hell of a Muse*, *A Farewell to Big Ideas* and *Void Beneath the Skin*, as well as coauthor of *The Grind*. frequent contributor to “Alien Buddha Press” and “Mad Swirl”. His work has been featured in: “Horror Sleaze Trash”, “Better Than Starbucks”, “Piker Press”, “Punk Noir Magazine”, “Synchronized Chaos”, “Outlaw Poetry” and “Cult Culture magazine”.

Arif Raja



One of the promising and prominent poet of Kannada **Arif Raja** born at Rayachuru districts Arakera on 6th December 1983. His name is foremost in the list of new generation kannada poets. He was then a primary school teacher and now working as an assistant professor in a degree college. His poetry collections,” Saitanana pravadi” (prophet of satan),” jangama phakeerana jolige” (Satchel of the mendicant Faqir), “benkige todidid batte” (A raiment for fire) and “Nakshatra Moha” (Drawn to the stars) are published on the year 2006, 2009, 2013 and 2017 respectively. “Ede Halina Pali” (Queue\Shift of Breastfeeding) is his recent collection of poetry published on the year 2021. Style of Arif Raja’s poetry is Unique with intense phrases and powerful metaphors. Meanwhile his poetry shows strong social concerns and also has universal questions regarding the Life. Arif Raja received 2010’s Da.Ra. Bendre award, 2010’s Aralu award of Karnataka sahitya Parishath, 2012’s yuva puraskara of Kendra sahitya Academy, and 2014’s Dinakara Desai award. Including this he also own many poetry competitions and book Awards. Many of his poems are translated to other Indian Languages.

Miroslav Aleksić



“**Miroslav Aleksić** (1960) is a Serbian poet. He graduated from the Department of General Literature and Literary Theory at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. Among other things, he worked as the secretary of the Festival of Yugoslav Youth Poetry and the manager of the National Library "Danilo Kiš" in Vrbas. He is currently working as an assistant manager of the Matica Srpska Library. He is the editor of the forum Contemporary Man and the Contemporary World at Matica Srpska. He is a member of the Association of Writers of Serbia, the Association of Writers of Vojvodina and the Association of Writers of Novi Sad. He was also a participant in the Founding Assembly of the Association of Writers of the Republic of Srpska. He has published six books of poetry. He has published poetry, prose and literary criticism in newspapers and magazines. His poems are represented in about twenty anthologies and poetry collections. He won the awards: The Seal of the town of Sremski KarlovciW” and “Lenka's Ring”. He is a participant in the most important literary festivals in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Montenegro, and as a poet he has been a guest in Russia, Hungary, Croatia and Romania.

Sunčica Radulović Torbica



Sunčica Radulović Torbica (1965) is a Serbian poet. She obtained her faculty degree at the University of Novi Sad, where she lives and works in a school. Her poetry and prose have been published in numerous literary magazines as well as on websites covering culture and arts. Her poems have been translated into Russian, Greek, Bulgarian, Ruthenian and English. As a poetess, she participated in many important literary manifestations. Therefore, some of her poems can be found in the festivals' collections. She was shortlisted for Golden string award in 2018. at the International poetry manifestation Smederevo`s Poetry Autumn. She received Bešenovo Charter for spiritual poetry in 2019. She received Special award for 2019 at the international festival Melnik evenings of poetry. She also received the award Golden spring in 2019. The manuscript of the book “*Odbrana proleća*” was published in 2019. by Prometej and it was noticed and commended at the open competition for *Gordana Todorović* award. And *Milica Stojadinović Srpkinja* award in 2019. She is also the author of the collection of poems “Nikolajevski nokturno“ published by Prometej in 2018. and trilingual collection of love poetry “Kao ljubav u Toskani” in cooperation with poetesses Lalka Pavlova (Bulgaria) and Alikí Telesku Mihalidis (Greece) which was published by Kairos in 2020. She is the member of Association of Writers of Novi Sad and Matica Srpska.

Nenad Trajković



Nenad Trajković (1982) is a Serbian poet, essayist, literary critic and translator. He graduated from Faculty of Law, University of Kragujevac, Serbia. He has published four collections of poetry ‘Traces’ (2008), ‘I Take You to the Museum’ (2011), ‘Wind From The Tongue’ (2016, for which he got ‘The Rade Tomić Prize’) and ‘The Thinner Line of Endless’ (2019). His work have been published widely in literary magazines (‘Poem’, edited by Fiona Sampson, etc.), anthologies (‘Von A bis Z - Acht Jahrhunderte serbis’, translated and edited by Johann Lavundi, ‘World Poetry Almanac’, edited by Dr Hadaa Sendoo, etc.) and newspapers in Serbia and abroad. Translated into English, German, French, Polish, Macedonian, Slovakian, Russian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Greek, Hungarian and Romanian. He has translated and edited three collections of poetry from Macedonian into Serbian. In 2013 he received the award given by the Bulgarian publisher ‘Melnik’. In 2015 he received the award ‘Rade Tomić’ for the best poetry manuscript in Serbia and has been nominated for the most prestigious Serbian literary awards such as ‘Branko Miljković’ and ‘Lenkin prsten’. In 2018 he wins at the ‘Facebook Poetry Festival’ (Serbia) sharing the first place with Indian poet, Arvind Joshi. He is a founder and editor of an international literary manifestation ‘Pisanija’, one of the poetry editors of ‘A Too Powerful Word’ and a member of Serbian Literary Society. He lives and works as a lawyer in Vranje, Southern Serbia.

Violeta Anciu



Violeta ANCIU (September 4, 1991) is a Romanian poet. She graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences, Master on Equal Opportunities Policies in Romanian and European Context (University of Bucharest and Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona). She published for the first time in 2009, in „Revista Noastră” (Our Magazine), a publication of students and teachers of Colegiul Național „Unirea” (‘Union College’), founded in 1912. Since 2015 she has published in national literature magazines such as „Luceafărul”, „Actualitatea literară”, „BOEM@”, „Cenaclul de la Păltiniș”, „Feed Back”, „Pro Litera”, „Antares”, „Sintagme Literare”, „Armonii Culturale”, „Singur”, „Poesis“, etc. as well as other national and international literary online workshops or journals. She’s a member of Cultural Association „Direcția 9” (Direction 9). For two years she was a Vicepresident of Asociația Clubul Scriitoarelor (Women Writers Club Association), where she started to support and promote Romanian and foreign women writers, throughout various events and campaigns. Parts of her work have been translated into English, Czech. **Books:** „**Amprente Urbane – Evoluția**” (‘Urban Prints – The Evolution’), Ed. BookBreak Publishing, 2015; „**alte mașini si-un fotograf amator**” (‘some cars and an amateur photographer’), Grinta Publishing House 2017; „**migrația inocenței**” (‘shifting innocence’), Tribuna Publishing House, 2020. **Anthologies:** „Parodii” (Grinta Publishing House, 2015); „Scrisul de azi” (Singur Publishing House, 2015); „Dor Românesc” (2016); „Almanahul Sintagme Literare” (Eurostampa Publishing House, 2016).

Carl Scharwath



Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 170+ journals selecting his poetry, prose, interviews, essays, plays or art. Two poetry books *Journey to Become Forgotten* (Kind of a Hurricane Press) and *Abandoned* (Scars Tv) have been published. His new book “*The Playground of Destiny*” (Impspired Press) features prose, poems, and photography. His first photography book was published by Praxis in Africa. His photography was also exhibited in the Mount Dora and Leesburg Center for The Arts galleries. Carl is the art editor for Minute Magazine (USA,) a competitive runner, and a 2nd degree black- belt in Taekwondo. Carl was recently nominated for Best of the Net 2021 award and was a finalist for the Mary Cassatt award for photography.

Marlon Fick



Marlon Fick (1960) is a novelist, poet, translator, short story writer and one of the prose section editors of “A Too Powerful Word”. Education: BA, University of Kansas; MA, New York University; Ph.D. (1992), University of Kansas Awards: Fellow for the National Endowment for the Arts in Poetry; the ConaCulta (Mexico); Ramon Llul Award for Literature (Catalonia); Best American Literary Translator (Latitudes Foundation) for *The River is Wide: 20 Mexican Poets* (UNM Press, 2005). Publications: A few books of poetry, short fiction, novel, and translations. Among them are his latest novel, *The Nowhere Man* (Jaded Ibis Press, 2015), and an edition/translation of Catalan poets, *XEIXA: 14 Catalan Poets* (forthcoming Tupelo Press, 2018).

He works as an Associate Professor and Chair of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas, Permian Basin.

Mili Das



Mili Das who completed her Graduation and Masters in English from the Department of English, University of Gour Banga, West Bengal, India is an independent scholar. Her areas of interest include Diaspora Studies, Postcolonial Studies and South Asian Studies.

Aleksandar Alimpić

Aleksandar Alimpić (1966) is a Serbian painter. He has graduated from the Academy of the Serbian Orthodox Church for Painting. He lives and works in Pančevo.



Dragan Tasić

Dragan Tasić was born in 1950 in Zrenjanin. He is a Serbian painter. He lives and works in Užice



Francisca Esteve



Francisca Esteve was born in Valencia and grew up in Barcelona. She trained at *Escuela Massana*, Art and Design Center in Barcelona, and became an interior designer and a painter, eventually emigrating to Mexico in 1984. She and her husband, the writer Marlon L. Fick, lived in China for a while, and then came to the United States in 2014. In 2018 they were co-translators of the poetry anthology *XEIXA: Fourteen Catalan poets*.

Andys Constandinides



Andys Constandinides (1974) is a self-taught artist from Cyprus. He made an exhibition in Switzerland, in 2017, in Montreux, with other artists. He has six paintings of his in Paris, more than 10 in US, New York and Santa Barbara, and many others in other collectors and private collections in Europe, and lots in Cyprus also in private collections. His page that anyone can find his latest works that are ready for sale <https://www.etsy.com/shop/AndyscArts>

His new instagram account- www.instagram.com/constandinidesandys

Sava Stojkov



Sava Stojkov (1925 - 2014) was a Serbian naive art painter, known for his environment depictions, as well as for his pre-photorealistic tendencies.

HAPPY

2022 !

