
We waited calmly for the end of the world
It won't even make the front page
The media put up the price of ads
Zombies stayed in their graves

Tourists are staying inside their buses
There are reports of the east becoming violent
Pilate's hands are scrubbed raw
The triage points are otherwise silent

Mountains of Nostradamus gather dust on shelves
All the copies of Proust have been taken
The Virgin Mary's had an abortion
The crosses of churches stand naked

THE BLIND BITCH'S SMILE

Smelling someone coming, she stands up straight

The corners of her mouth contract
Revealing a row
Of perfect teeth

The kitchen boy hesitates
Freezes
And after wavering on the doorstep
Flings a bowl of food on the ground

When the echo of running feet
Dies into the distance
She relaxes again
Lies down on the straw
And licks her puppies' faces

AN OPERA CLOAKROOM ATTENDANT'S MEMORIES OF LA BOHÈME

K.V.

Waiting for Mimi to hit the high *mi*,
Nina and I picked out the prettiest fur coats
and went on our date with Viktor.

Viktor is the carpark security guard.
He pulled up in a white Rolls-Royce looking stuck-up,
wearing a shirt and everything.
We whined until we convinced him
to shoot off to the sea. The moon, the Rolls-Royce, champagne
(the last hidden away from Viktor)...
When he went driving he'd invite two girls at a time
so he wouldn't lose his usual double vision.

About halfway there a fox ran out onto the road,
and Viktor swerved to make sure he hit it.
We got out and looked at it: a pregnant female.
Nina started screaming at Viktor,
and he, laughing, draped the dead animal around her neck.
She stopped screaming after that.
Just kept throwing up. But when she stopped,
she smashed the bottle on the bumper and burst one of the tyres.
I felt the evening's romance start to wane.

Viktor got very angry and punched Nina in the stomach
as hard as he could. Twice.
Probably because of his double vision. Then he got back into the Rolls
and drove off, brakes showering the asphalt with sparks
like a sparkler on a Christmas tree.

I helped Nina up and, supporting each other,
we tottered into the nearest pub

where we drank a bottle of vodka, smooched the bartender
and yowled Mimi's aria into the mike for half an hour straight
over all the karaoke tracks.

After the nth act we left, warm and soft,
our audience moved to tears,
their confused heads bent
like flowers waiting for the prima donna
in her dressing room since the morning,
and hitched a lift with the first car that came along.

At the opera again,
we put the fur coats back in the wrong places.

TANGO

A.V.

Mr. Poet
The only window in your bedroom
Is blocked up with books

This space always lacks warmth,
Like men's broken hearts
Where life goes on by the light of crackling fuses
Eating through poorly insulated wires
At both ends

At night a draught
and half of Rīga's bohemians blow in here
Pouring themselves everything that burns into their guts
Re-counting the teeth
Of an antique piano
Tuned like the lines
Of a clumsily-written sonnet

The dust on the tomes
By dead classic writers irritates your nostrils
More than cocaine

While in the rooms next to you
Women cling onto gloomy-looking men
Real machos who keep their hands
In their pockets
Fingering coin-sized holes
Even when they're dancing

Soon the mechanism will wind down
And they'll slump into beds
With their shoes on
Staring blankly at ceilings
Black from cigarette smoke

Mr. Poet
When you come out into daylight
A shadow like a pair of trousers
Fallen down before everyone's eyes
Drags along behind you

Rīga by night
Is a city of taxis
Checkers and chess
Criss-crossed streets
Like the wordplay
Of a crossword mess

I've written more
Than I can ever read
Why keep churning it out
The happy moments
Of this last year
Are barely enough to count

I take out my wages
From the sleepy ATM
I won't go walking tonight
Transportation teaches you to travel
Not in space but through time
Home is just in sight

I'll get out
By the high brick wall
I'll kiss the ground
On which almost four billion
Women who don't love me

Walk around

The logic of life
Arrives head-first
But leaves with the feet
The eyes of traffic lights
Are red from weeping
I guess no ride for me

On the other side of the window
A child wails silently
while adults yell and roar
All I ever wanted
Was for my ceiling
To become someone's floor

I climb up stairs in endless
Temporary homes
I've blistered my feet but I climb them still
A straight line
Crosses itself more often
Than two curves will

My body casts a shadow
When I hang up my skeleton
And likewise my soul casts a body
So that neither one feels cramped
I sink into a chair
And the background pushes through me

From all around the world
They fly in for the launch
Of the fourth-generation Vocaloid's new single
Long-haired geeks
And female telesales reps with glasses
Who work in online retail

The architectural wonders
On the island built in Tokyo Bay
Seem out of date
For the cosplay carnival organised every year
By the giants of the anime industry

When the hologram of a green-haired pop diva
Appears on stage
The thunder of the squealing fans
Overloads the equipment
And something like Chinese intonation
Pierces ears like
A thousand pieces of chalk
Writing a single character
On thousands of school blackboards

In the virtual anthill
Social status is proportional
To the size of your memory card
Or to the free space on it
Even as the hits of the season play
Local *otaku* keep an eye on their phones
Tracking the auction of an e-autograph

At the end of the show
The owner of the synthesised voice says goodbye
Waves to the crowd
And dissolves into a cloud of little pink hearts
Leaving everyone chanting her name
And waving the little lights

Included in the ticket price

After the concert the crowds pour into the subway
And sink into their screens again
Erecting invisible walls around themselves
Unshakeable even for
The two small earthquakes
That rock the carriage
Before the most colourful passengers
Spill out into Akihabara

The multi-storey *Bishōjo* (beautiful young girl) posters
Are dazzling to the non-Asian eye
In this paradise of comics
In almost every little shop
There's a boy in sunglasses at the counter
Trying to buy a magazine
With his older brother's passport

You can translate Ishiguro freely
From English to American
And Murakami
From American to Japanese
But foreigners amongst the mass
Of surgical masks
Are betrayed by the accent of their body language

Dinner time approaches
After lectures female students in French maid outfits
Earn money on the side
By inviting customers into cafés
Where for a fee
They draw kittens in ketchup
On re-heated ready meals
Blow on your spoon
Or sing a bon appétit song

There's no photography here
But someone always manages
To point a lens at them
From inside a bag

The girl waiting tables
Is moving too fast
And the photo shows her
Trailing a thousand arms behind her

Like the compassionate goddess Kannon
After whom
The tourist's camera is named

Later the tourist uploads the photos
To social media
Comes up with witty comments for each one
But doesn't write them in

Words suddenly seem out of place
Like shadows in children's drawings

As a child Lin Lin used to dance with a man's coat
In front of the mirror
Look through foreign music magazines
And try on the cutest boys'
Last names

Her mother always joked
That Lin Lin was
A child born from a kiss

Lin Lin rarely remembers her mother
The only reminders of her now are the jars
Of capsules which change in colour and amount
More often than underwear

When her mother didn't get up from bed
A woman in high-heels
Took Lin Lin away to a Go-Go club for girls
Who had been born as boys

In her free time Lin Lin
Strokes the handbag she was given by an American tourist
Or curls up on the mattress in her hotel room
And looks out of the window
Counting planes

Rain from one of Lin Lin's tears

Pours down all night

A TIRED GURU

He climbs out of his white helicopter
And heads to the ashram
Which his followers surround

Bodyguards try to steer him
Through the sea of outstretched arms untouched
But the usual dishing out of blessings
Is interrupted by the blindness visited on him
By the flash-bulbs going off in his eyes

Tickets to his revelations
Are sold out years in advance
Yet he hasn't even told his family
That the doctors only give him
Months to live

Inside the ashram the noise of the crowd
Is replaced by the quiet drone of the air con
And the synthetic smell
Of recently furnished spaces
That still hangs around

When his sight starts to return
He sees a sofa and photos on the wall emerge from the dark
And he, Sai Baba and Osho
Hug for too long
For the cameras

He comes out to his audience wearing sunglasses
And raises his ring-encrusted hands
To the sky

And his feet don't reach the ground

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

On the morning of the holiday
Winter comes to tourists on tropical beaches
Out of the blue

A frozen wave arches over the city