BRODSKY, Joseph

**Elegy**

It's not that the Muse feels like clamming up,

it's more like high time for the lad's last nap.

And the scarf-waving lass who wished him the best

drives a steamroller across his chest.

And the words won't rise either like that rod

or like logs to rejoin their old grove's sweet rot,

and, like eggs in the frying pan, the face

spills its eyes all over the pillowcase.

Are you warm tonight under those six veils

in that basin of yours whose strung bottom wails;

where like fish that gasp at the foreign blue

my raw lip was catching what then was you?

I would have hare's ears sewn to my bald head,

in thick woods for your sake I'd gulp drops of lead,

and from black gnarled snags in the oil-smooth pond

I'd bob up to your face as some Tirpitz won't.

But it's not on the cards or the waiter's tray,

and it pains to say where one's hair turns gray.

There are more blue veins than the blood to swell

their dried web, let alone some remote brain cell.

We are parting for good, my friend, that's that.

Draw an empty circle on your yellow pad.

This will be me: no insides in thrall.

Stare at it a while, then erase the scrawl.
 **Dutch Mistress**

A hotel in whose ledgers departures are more prominent than arrivals.

With wet Koh-i-noors the October rain

strokes what's left of the naked brain.

In this country laid flat for the sake of rivers,

beer smells of Germany and the seaguls are

in the air like a page's soiled corners.

Morning enters the premises with a coroner's

punctuality, puts its ear

to the ribs of a cold radiator, detects sub-zero:

the afterlife has to start somewhere.

Correspondingly, the angelic curls

grow more blond, the skin gains its distant, lordly

white, while the bedding already coils

desperately in the basement laundry.

**Don’t leave your room**

Don’t leave your room. This is better left undone.

You’ve got cheap smokes, so why should you need the sun?

Nothing makes sense outside, happiness least of all.

You may go to the loo but avoid the hall.

Don’t leave your room. Don’t think of calling a taxi.

Space consists of the hall and ends at the door; its axis

bends when the meter’s on. If your tootsie comes in – before

she starts blabbing, undressing – throw her out of the door.

Don’t leave your room. Pretend a cold in the head.

What could be more exciting than wallpaper, chair and bed?

Why leave a room to which you will come back later,

unchanged at best, more probably mutilated?

Don’t leave your room. There might be a jazzy number

on the radio. Nude but for shoes and coat, dance a samba.

Cabbage smell in the hall fills every nook and cranny.

You wrote so many words; one more would be one too many.

Don’t ever leave your room. Let nobody but the room

know what you look like. Incognito ergo sum,

as substance informed its form when it felt despair.

Don’t leave the room! You know, it’s not France out there.

Don’t be an imbecile! Be what the others couldn’t be.

Don’t leave the room! Let furniture keep you company,

vanish, merge with the wall, barricade your iris

from the chronos, the eros, the cosmos, the virus.
 **Again, I hear your voice wistful**

Again, I hear your voice wistful

on vacant lots - through the hoarse barking of bulldogs,

ff mother looking in the crowd margins,

and I see again the Christmas needles

and lights, sizzling in the snowdrifts.

Nothing or rather your address does not specify,

than the cry, wandering in the darkness

transparent, crystal drop of poison.

Now I celebrate the New Year

a vacant lot, in silent dance,

and extinguished the candles the old me,

and runs on the mouth the wine Tristan,

the first time I do not answer the call.

Recently, I also see in the dark.

 **H.P.**

Once again we are living by the bay,

and the passing clouds over us,

and modern rumbles Vesuvius,

and the dust settles on the lanes,

and glass lanes rattle.

Someday we cover everything ashes.

So I would like to at this hour of the poor

to come to the outskirts of the tram,

enter into thy house,

and if hundreds of years

detachment will dig up our city,

I would like to, to find me

remaining forever in your open arms,

zasыpannoho new ash.

 **Belfast Tune**

Here's a girl from a dangerous town

She crops her dark hair short

so that less of her has to frown

when someone gets hurt.

She folds her memories like a parachute.

Dropped, she collects the peat

and cooks her veggies at home: they shoot

here where they eat.

Ah, there's more sky in these parts than, say,

ground. Hence her voice's pitch,

and her stare stains your retina like a gray

bulb when you switch

hemispheres, and her knee-length quilt

skirt's cut to catch the squall,

I dream of her either loved or killed

because the town's too small.
 **1 January 1965**

The Wise Men will unlearn your name.

Above your head no star will flame.

One weary sound will be the same—

the hoarse roar of the gale.

The shadows fall from your tired eyes

as your lone bedside candle dies,

for here the calendar breeds nights

till stores of candles fail.

What prompts this melancholy key?

A long familiar melody.

It sounds again. So let it be.

Let it sound from this night.

Let it sound in my hour of death—

as gratefulness of eyes and lips

for that which sometimes makes us lift

our gaze to the far sky.

You glare in silence at the wall.

Your stocking gapes: no gifts at all.

It's clear that you are now too old

to trust in good Saint Nick;

that it's too late for miracles.

—But suddenly, lifting your eyes

to heaven's light, you realize:

your life is a sheer gift.

*Translation: George L. KLINE*

**A Song**I wish you were here, dear,

I wish you were here.
I wish you sat on the sofa
and I sat near.
the handkerchief could be yours,
the tear could be mine, chin-bound.
Though it could be, of course,
the other way around.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish we were in my car,
and you'd shift the gear.
we'd find ourselves elsewhere,
on an unknown shore.
Or else we'd repair
To where we've been before.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish I knew no astronomy
when stars appear,
when the moon skims the water
that sighs and shifts in its slumber.
I wish it were still a quarter
to dial your number.

I wish you were here, dear,
in this hemisphere,
as I sit on the porch
sipping a beer.
It's evening, the sun is setting;
boys shout and gulls are crying.
What's the point of forgetting
If it's followed by dying?

**I Sit By The Window**I said fate plays a game without a score,
and who needs fish if you've got caviar?
The triumph of the Gothic style would come to pass
and turn you on--no need for coke, or grass.
I sit by the window. Outside, an aspen.
When I loved, I loved deeply. It wasn't often.

I said the forest's only part of a tree.
Who needs the whole girl if you've got her knee?
Sick of the dust raised by the modern era,
the Russian eye would rest on an Estonian spire.
I sit by the window. The dishes are done.
I was happy here. But I won't be again.

I wrote: The bulb looks at the flower in fear,
and love, as an act, lacks a verb; the zer-
o Euclid thought the vanishing point became
wasn't math--it was the nothingness of Time.
I sit by the window. And while I sit
my youth comes back. Sometimes I'd smile. Or spit.

I said that the leaf may destroy the bud;
what's fertile falls in fallow soil--a dud;
that on the flat field, the unshadowed plain
nature spills the seeds of trees in vain.
I sit by the window. Hands lock my knees.
My heavy shadow's my squat company.

My song was out of tune, my voice was cracked,
but at least no chorus can ever sing it back.
That talk like this reaps no reward bewilders
no one--no one's legs rest on my sholders.
I sit by the window in the dark. Like an express,
the waves behind the wavelike curtain crash.

A loyal subject of these second-rate years,
I proudly admit that my finest ideas
are second-rate, and may the future take them
as trophies of my struggle against suffocation.
I sit in the dark. And it would be hard to figure out
which is worse; the dark inside, or the darkness out.

or the part of the local Baroque.

**Leiklos**

have been born a hundred years ago

 and drying over featherbeds

 I stare out the window and see the garden,

 crosses biceps Katharina;

 ashamed of their mother, hiccup

 by induced lorgnette,

 pushing a cart with junk

 the yellow alleys of the ghetto;

 sigh, having covered with a head,

 of Polish young ladies, eg;

wait until the First World

 and mouth in Galicia - for Faith,

 the king, fatherland, - but no,

 so sidelocks converted into tanks

 and move to the New World,

 blyuya into the Atlantic like a duck.

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I was only that which
you touched with your palm
over which, in the deaf, raven-black
night, you bent your head…
I was practically blind.
You, appearing, then hiding,
taught me to see."

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Your voice, your body, your name
mean nothing to me now. No one destroyed them.
It's just that, in order to forget one life, a person needs to live
at least one other life. And I have served that portion.