

Translated  
from Russian  
by Dana Golin

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Scrolls

## Kabuki kabuki (The Guiding Sound)

\*

June of the outskirts, dry reeds past the railroad tracks  
advance to the right,  
and it's the field's turn to unravel the bandages,  
to unspool one roll after another  
imprinted with the shape of the wound,  
with the ferrous swirl.

\*

Graffiti on a brisk brick wall — all in English.

A fresh inscription: “Forget it.”

\*

It adheres so tightly —  
can't tear yourself away.

## Kabuki (Act 1)

\*

An abandoned lover  
kisses one side of the mask,  
not knowing which one.

\*

“Summit,

Summit,

Summit” —

a squirrel scribbles on birch-tree bark.

\*

Hard to fathom running on empty.

\*

A coin-purse opens in a toothless smile  
to pay for a balloon,  
even just one.

\*

There's nothing more beautiful than this dress,  
take it off this instant!

\*

Can't see the protagonists over the row of heads,  
the scene of their first encounter, their kiss,  
the peripheral planes overwhelm.

\*

The mailman places newspapers under the door,  
as though dead mice.

\*

Not a letter all of March.

\*

In the museum? Find this painting: a horizon-less Chinese landscape,  
a blue meadowsweet, a doomed annual,  
springs up at the bend of the river.

\*

One may say to the moon, one may say afterwards,  
that this life had been long.

## Kabuki (Act 2)

\*

You are right —

there are words between words.

\*

When you wrote of a bird that molds a nest with its body,  
you ignored what comes next, when it flees the nest,  
forgot to consider what fills out the empty form  
or conveys a new one, its own, displacing the bird bit by bit,  
shaking it out, blowing its remnants apart,  
unhinging the looped, knotted twigs,  
disassembling the speckles of dust  
until there's nothing to rest one's eye on,  
nothing to contemplate.

\*

The Sycamore tree...

\*

Due to any number of reasons,  
the alphabets of asphalt,  
of silt and limestone and clouds,  
of cracks in the plaster and skin,  
have been forgotten,  
the alphabets of all types of writing but ours. Unfortunate.  
Incomprehensible entries abound.

\*

Road repairs ahead.  
Spring is waning.

\*

In order to present the map intact,  
folded along the crease, all planes aligned,  
one must recall the walk we took, the tune  
you hummed on the return, the laugh,  
one must recount the multitude of times  
the uppermost edge of the mountain's crest  
vanished from view.

\*

Should I knock or not?  
“... the reigning army of Assad.  
The separatist forces advance into the region”—  
declares a woman anchor through the closed door,  
obscured from view.

\*

Brewing tea, not to neglect  
the night,  
its steeped hue.

## Kabuki (Act 3)

\*

“The chance to take,  
The chance to take”—urge the train wheels.  
That chance is mine.

\*

What ample light!

Follow my hand with your eyes, higher—  
who is that soaring? I can't tell.

\*

Everyone in the household avails themselves of my reading glasses,  
borrowing them and, then, leaving them in places  
where they are trickiest to find —  
inside a folded newspaper, under the bedspread,  
on top of their heads.

\*

We'll do our best to see  
what will become of us, while we go on  
not seeing each other.

\*

"Officer's world" — a school girl is writing a story,  
so far, just the title page.

\*

I soap up my belly,  
a leg, then the other, an arm,  
make the water warmer, the other arm,  
the curve of the back. First, there was water.

\*

There was something she said about adding the onion last  
in that intricate recipe.  
It's thirty years since I can no longer ask her,  
might you, remember, sister?

\*

No one around.

The window sits idle.

A ballet of wind-tousled shrubs.

\*

The ficus grew tall and spread out.

It barely holds itself up, a stem snapped under its own weight

while we were talking. It must be that

it left a lot to be desired,

this long-forgotten gift to you.

(The Last Act)

\*

Kabuki Theater.

Drying on a clothesline in every yard,  
the same delicate things.

\*

Miserable.

The rain is arranged in rectangles,  
packed like bales of hay,  
tossed around this way and that,  
as if someone in a hurry needed to wrap up by morning.

\*

I despise telephone conversation.

Please, call.

Let me hear you speak.

\*

A gesture in the direction of the windows,  
as though it was released  
to fly, and it flies,  
straight into glass.

\*

Don't interfere with my waking,  
Let go of my hand in the dream.

\*

My father will take his sweet time  
getting the foraged mushrooms home from the woods.  
So many places my childhood bike cannot go.

\*

Having sorted through the broken umbrellas,  
the homeless man puts them all back in the garbage bin,  
they must be beyond repair.

\*

That's just how it was worded: "A gesture, not a look, becomes the primary form of expression, and a false one at that"—pertaining to people in the photo. Yes, perhaps. They sit there holding hands, in the days just before the war.

\*

Many had once lived in this room, even I.  
Be sure to dust.

## Scrolls

He inserts an arm,  
yet it is a leg that appears, bare, like a messiah  
out of the cave of the pant-leg,  
a critter pokes out of its hole,  
a sable paintbrush floats up to the surface  
of a glass jar;  
it is an East-bound train that flies out of the under-the-Hudson tunnel,  
a ray from a flashlight that thrusts out a bright spot

into the night, a window falls out of a window  
 and a yawn emanates from a maw... posits a stoned man half-asleep;  
 “Fuck!” — a coarse sound bursts out,  
 as if a wet match is being struck, until  
 the fragments of smoke light up...  
 The phlegmatic reposes in reverie.

Any minute now,  
 he will dress  
 brushing off the dream  
 of a kabuki performance —  
 the prolonged, undulating leaps of the Japanese dancers;  
 his lumbar pain will ease a bit or might be gone for good.  
 O, how profoundly ill he is, packed deep inside himself and split in two,  
 how long everything takes — the dressing and the cough,

the raspy cackle of a silent sea;  
 the dancers roll themselves  
 like pebbles, while he looks  
 yet barely sees  
 their belted kimonos  
 the rippling, intelligent octopi,  
 the stage down below,  
 dotted with phosphorescence,  
 the random flourish of the room,  
 congealed glass in the capillaries of sea weed,  
 schools of fish — ceiling shadows dashing.  
 Tamatori dances,  
 while the only spectator lies high on his back,  
 supine, his spine straight.

“Stoned” he registers his own state, half-dressed.

The smoke billows

out of his mouth,

its curling tentacles ensnarl Tamatori, the pearl-diver princess,

search behind the folding screens of her clavicles, her pelvis,

seek her out in her chest cavity, in the seashell, in the swollen knee-joint pouch,

search the brown rose, the pinecone, the pinched grip,

scour behind the thin membranes of her cheek.

(The smoke overtakes her,

shapeshifts,

escapes from all the smokestacks at once.)

A room fashioned out of rolling paper.

A cannabis field.

Black calligraphy ink — there was plenty,

precious little left now.

A hieroglyph,

splayed out as if in dance,

a still-damp inscription,

a red stamp in the corner — like a square heel inside the heel print.

\*

I open my legs,  
look, my love — sunrise.

\*

I understand about the sea now,  
after you'd told me  
you once nearly drowned.

The pedal gear under the dainty foot of a Japanese seamstress  
lifts the presser-foot, feeding the thread,  
needles shuttle back and forth,  
churning the fabric, turning it  
from its pallid to its festive side,  
the thread snaps itself,

the mouth fills with sea-foam saliva,  
the pattern decals swim across the cutting tables,  
it's getting dark and an octopus with a pearlescent belly  
rises in every window.

You're in there,  
translated simultaneously  
into all the marine tongues,  
speaking on the radio,  
reading a chapter from your book,  
its pages rustling against the microphone.

You're in there naked, because unseen,  
or dressed in all things at once,  
as though swaddled and wrapped

in shirts untucked, in everything  
that's still being spun, stitched and swaying,  
in billowing fabric smelling of labor and lathe,  
you're all buttoned up, clasped at the throat  
with stones.

Time after time, stitch by stitch  
of air, line upon line you pull through,  
shedding the sea.

The sea releases you as I watch.

\*

It rejects, tosses aside, moves the stones around,  
upset with the shore —  
especially with the shore —  
with its boulders  
their slick gloss,  
the putrid smell of the spat-out stones;  
it raises a handful of them to the light  
just to discover they're all the wrong ones!  
It's perturbed, it's incensed, it's beside itself,  
completely beside itself.

## What the Japanese man understood

It's damp in the world,  
 tiresome to linger around,  
 families are inscrutable,

but it's light and airy in the produce department,  
 clothes separated from the body are nothing more than peelings,  
 suppers progressing in stages of sizzle,  
 chickens and octopi splayed in various poses, lovers,  
 gutted parcels, parchments in tatters.  
 The storm pervades everything,  
 crackling, it ripens, a hail-grape at a time,  
 the purplish limb of lightning ossifies, becoming brittle.  
 Envy and night seem far off, but they reach here.  
 I, a forevermore man, on the edge of the park close to downpour,  
 wearing tissue and bone under a creased cellophane wrapper,  
 wish today to appear as a guest,  
 safely dry and lighthearted.

\*

What a joy to encounter  
 a ragged eucalyptus and a magnolia in an eruption of red buds.  
 Immutable, they stand on either side of the road,  
 waist — deep in tall grasses,  
 one more night under their belt,  
 everything seems illusory exposed to light.  
 Tell me, did that stain come out?  
 Tell me how you spend your days.

\*

The foliage was dense with promises,  
 now, the crowns have thinned out.  
 The twins in my dream  
 exchange slow, labored breaths,  
 mouth-to-mouth.

\*

The storm cloud turns onto its belly  
and the blizzard subsides;  
the relentless caller, calling in vain, sways to the rhythm of god-knows-what.  
Yes, it's night  
and it doesn't matter at all  
that we live apart close by  
each other, he thinks.  
The cold intensifies.

\*

The floor lamp — a parchment,  
 as long as the switch works,  
 a pencil, accustomed to leaning against someone's pocket — a coil,

its tree-pulp embroidered with cross-over stitching inside,  
 the stamp with the orange-brown Monarch — remember? — affixed  
 wingtip to wingtip to the sinuous scroll of the letter,  
 the bridgeheads, the train cars — all parcels, all scrolls,  
 the sun too — a parchment on surface, a channel for tears,  
 a cup — rolled up water,  
 binoculars — eyesight rolled up,  
 a butterfly — parchment uncoiled and smoothed out to the tip,  
 a woman — a scroll of desire  
 to unravel at length;  
 every wave — an attempt of the sea to curl up like a scroll,  
 a piccolo — a curlicue from the start,  
 a familiar face curling in at the lips.

A word meant for someone swaddles him like a shroud;  
the past is wrapped tight in the hardening soil.  
the rest is all wrapped in the sky.