

Bird Sabbath

I entered the language of rabbits as if it were a rainforest. I was swift, slick with tears in the early dawn and delighted: the dew in my ears was bloody. The cows succumbed to the law of leaves, dry and rustling, and underneath them blades of grass lay on the ground, concealing lovers. Every kernel and every castle and every bullet dark with death got it, and were equally delighted.

The day of Bird Sabbath had just begun. And although it was clearly spring, nothing flew in the sky. Reason says, the nothing had narrowed: the wind whirled seeds, pollen lost its mind, a banded demoiselle copulated with a blue damselfly as if there was nothing more urgent than juicy airborne fuckwheeling and up high, high above it all, a lewd helicopter burned.

Although the ruling birds deemed with certainty that peace was in effect—a plain and willful *non-spring*—the sky team played dirty. Parachutes descended like incorrect subtitles from the bodies of verbs. Sinful thoughts got wasted over bedquilts and jackets. The secret princes of inkwells stood up. The dark shire hung its flags. And on top of that, the hats: those treacherous hats—awful to even think of them. Those quiet gardens with no trace of a tiger—how could freedom ever murmur there? Freedom, which, of course, is just the Eskimo word for forest. And I entered the language of rabbits with a clear intention: to put my teeth in the service of the pillow conspiracy, turn a fingernail into a knife. I'm naked, and that dew murmurs through my ears.

Second Coming

I didn't care. The blood did whatever it wanted. Across the heath rabid dogs spread words, visible and invisible like subterranean rivers. They'd tear the word *home* into pieces. They'd leave the word *fruit* to dry in the sun. They'd banish the word *stamp*, then immediately build a monument to it and to the words *man*, *skin* and *growl*. I didn't care. I forgot how things lined up. I forgot how to lie. The dogs were truly rabid: they carried cities in their maws, rot on their teeth, calendar squares in their hearts. And I, cut open like a lip, carried a jug bigger than my conscience to the water. There was nothing to do but wait. The golden rule applied to the heathland: whatever the dogs brought was immediately put into the constitution—a sack of lust and bones, the wrong wolf. Just as well I didn't care, because while I spent nights squatting by the spring, waiting for the annunciation and excess, someone's special sin, I also forgot to wait, and I surrendered to predatory love. The jug remained whole. The throats deep, bitter. The blood did whatever it wanted: the blood returned.

Brash Raids

The heath where this piece takes place—which in some footnote poisoned with Aristotle could be considered *the setting*—that heath is hardly a safe place.

Aside from the usual evil, those brave enough to go on late night walks are in danger of meeting, for instance, the specter of Srečko Bloody Kosovel. That gentle boy-poet in his signature glasses walks the karst in windy nights armed with a billhook. He cuts back elderberry and juniper, licks bloodroot and witch hazel, glides his tongue along a grinding stone until sleep snuffs out everything, including death. He then grabs the lonely moonlight by the neck, and keeps squelching it until he's finished packing it in salt, alone in a tight barrel.

That passerby—be it a hedgehog or a human—could also run into Fluffy Fear, Hydrous Home, Politician-turned-Poet, or some other festive spirit. For some reason the heath has long ago become a place of resurrection, so it's no surprise that Brash Raid Day is celebrated every sober Thursday, not counting whenever one of the spirits gets lucky. At times the spirits wake early and in the shadow of a desk practice the art of love.

Still Sea

Since the dawn of history, Still Sea has been celebrated three times: it is the rarest of holidays. People say: not a soul has been born to hear such silence twice, and if they have—they would've died at once. Anyway, the majority of those who have traversed the heath have never witnessed Still Sea. Knowing someone lucky who has, or even someone related to them, is considered a peculiar privilege. Deemed equally privileged are the hunchbacked, parents who conceived sleepwalkers, dogs, and all those who have never fallen asleep—though at best they might bring out a smile in their neighbors. Witnessing Still Sea warrants the medal of honor and at any moment that medal can be traded—on the black market—for a flock of fears, or an instant pyre. Poets have the most use of it, and incidental prophets have the least, as they can only be understood during Still Sea. Poets pin bows to collarbones while prophets, lined in quiet columns, whisper burning psalms deep into the night. People say: a poet who hasn't surrendered language to a baton is yet to be born. People think: an icebreaker who only bypasses ice is yet to be born.

Tableaux Vivants

I dream of a mail carriage driven by a shitfaced Char. Two horses, a wooden shaft, reins between an angel and an animal. I coach in the passenger seat, a shade more sober, but just as old. Char himself is as old as he was when he died: you could hardly make out the old Captain Alexandre in him; a firm landmark, a father figure to the shooting flocks of parachutes, the jock-starlings of nights. The carriage hauls a used-up bread oven. Turn of the century Paris suburbs fly by. The slums had been cleared so a châtelet or a robust, classical townhall could be built for magpies. In front of such a building a series of living paintings embody one after another: the fall of Bastille, the last supper, a still life dominated by a fruit basket. The apples represent curly heads of boys whose torsos, we suppose, hide in invisible double bottoms. There are no pears in the basket. Next to the shacks a flame rises from its dream, and a more animated, indomitably lively landscape seizes the paintings; at once the whole suburb turns into a sooty nightmare. *It'll be alright, everything will be OK!* Drunk Char yells at the children. Then mutters to himself: *but not for us; of course, not for us.*

And So On

So I won't see Ithaca again, I thought while frowning at a crossroad, sweaty, stuck in indecision. Nailed to the rude mast of spring, I weighed between song and suffering, like Odysseus. The Monday was firm, the asphalt shimmered in the afternoon. This surely had to do with wandering, even the gaze followed the white bird. Ivy berries were ripe: its gait short, hands clasped behind the back, as if walking. A curse melted on the tongue slowly: a blind pastille. And Penelope, of course, was an apparition beyond the bodies, more a forest than a woman. I stood among cars, uncertain, in a no man's land of pavements, waiting for the pavement to age, settling into a parking spot. There was nothing behind me. In front of me, though, a thick fabric unfolded: the panic of place. Dense and so on.

Strays

I hated no one like Orphans. At the same time, I was naturally afraid of them. No one understood why their appearance was made a holiday. They'd raid silently, lighting up the night sky like four blazing blast furnaces. Their arrival would be announced by a sudden flicker of unexpectedly hot evening air, followed by a quieting waltz and the silent scent of rain. Coal and wood would kindle by themselves, waiting for Orphans to hone a Wordsworth verse—a pentameter nailed to every trunk, printed on eyelids and milk boxes; a rhyme that every cinder, every burnt stick stripped and sanctified. Their unique vocation was the sharpening of verses, and honestly, for this they achieved great notoriety. On the eve of Orphans Day, the subway ran all night. I was still confused and afraid of them, even though these were just cruel hedgehog rituals. Thanks to them I hated Dickens, people's palms, the miner from the banknote. Why are Orphans sometimes known as Strays? Can language become a noose? In the nineties some idiot in a textbook turned *Narcissus* into *Daffodils*, too lily-livered to touch the poem's navel: that yellow trumpet that to this day spreads Wordsworth's greetings across the heathland. *Death to Orphans!* the trumpets screamed. They were a bare slope. I was a tender, toothless trap. The woods kept quiet.

Some Bridges

Happy are the bridges that link the shores of gulfs like legs, eclipse large riverbeds! They remind the colorblind of rainbows, and the blind of nothing in particular. Those concrete, snow-covered paths of cannonballs, contours of screams harnessed into the mythology of the sky. Proud, morning-bright. How they spite the birds, how they snicker at the slippery village logs. People choose to take their own lives on them—their spectacular views—rather than while returning from the market, all grubby, carrying sausages under their pits. Oh, their lavish, ludicrously tight curves...

But at the joints of these bridges arching above gulfs, riverbeds, estuaries nested in school atlases, the places where their heavy metal plates meet and the steel whispers a tale of the wind, are small red buttons and a sign that says, "Don't press!"

And along their fences and ribs countless swarms of even smaller, green microscopic creatures mosey along, jump onto tiny buttons with childlike delight, roll over and yell, "Here you go!" "Here you go!"

A Footnote for the Bridges

Because four words disappeared without a trace, at least two of them critical. Because they disappeared at dawn, like teeth in a bar fight, for good, and because a sail-taut lake spread underneath me like a wedding sheet, lake as deep as liver; because a tongue naturally dries out, and meaning slowly vanishes within us—there're no words no no no —and since they are gone and will return, I now stand at this gate with a spectacular view, and I wait for the setting word: the word earth, the word body, the word house.

Some bridges must be torn down.

Water

Instead of a wish I offered her a bone: water was larger. In front of her feet I laid out a land made of woods, a blanket of fields stitched with rivers that carry mud, a land with its people, ore and cattle, a land with snakes and collarbones, jawbones, and all the other bones—water was larger. I suggested: the migration of people, the sky, that feeling when you find a parcel with money and return it knowing it belongs to someone like you. I offered pride, revenge, silicon, Eurasia, the equator, the wind. I planted a firecracker of love. Balzac? The hunters in the snow? Wagner's ego? An ode? Water was larger, decidedly clearer: even when music snuck up on her like a cat; a notion larger than itself, the hungriest apparition. Death could do nothing, nor could sleep. Water was stronger. At night, when the gates of light close, it won't be fire that devours us, but a flood of flame.

Oracles

On Oracles Day I entered a temple crowded with tiny bones, and I asked the white hare if it was going to rain. I wanted water whiter than itself to descend disguised as humming plumage, to snuff the pale fire in me. I whispered: will it pour? Plain as day, says the white hare. It'll pour.



The Thunder of Chance

Didn't I witness with my own eyes the arrival of the long, darkening shadow of memory? I did. Didn't I hear the damp air raise from seeds, twisting into a beehive of rain, puling—a dark barge—behind crop and seed? I did. Didn't I see and hear dumplings slide down your throat, one by one, like lava; words ripped from the quarry of tongue and promptly crushed, like hostages too tightly bound by an amateur captor, built into the temple foundations of some sect vowed to silence? It's obvious that I've seen and heard it all. It's also obvious that the sect cultivates a dark cult of love, and that just like in theatre, the only punishment can be death. For something changes within us at night: eyes stumble, and heels, suddenly free, wander the dreamy gardens of quilts. One thing weds another. And the thunder of chance hits her, the risk-averse woman who just fell asleep.

Snowdrops, aka Hanging Grampas

The first snowdrop says: spring is the woods that haven't sprouted, a rug unrolled with rot.

The second snowdrop says: oh no, that's got nothing to do with spring.

The first snowdrop adds: and the daffodils' trumpets admire themselves, those rusty gramophones from the turn of the century.

The second snowdrop says: no no. You've obviously never visited the good times; they hanged you too early, before beehives burst with boiling blood, before hedgehogs unstitched the guts of fascists with their own souls, and across the heath free clarinets started springing.

The third snowdrop says: spring, that is a transgression. There's no remorse after spring.

The fourth snowdrop, the fourth grampa with his drooping head, spots a crow on his shoulder, large as a fallow, and heavy, a crow that tamely crawls down the lapel, then in an instant notices a burning spot. *Peck*, says the fourth grampa, but no one laughs. Like gossip, a dense silence spreads across the treetops.

Delirious Cherry Day

Delirious Cherry Day is celebrated across the heath every first Monday in May, on the week that starts with the word cornflower (or some other related word recently stolen from the dialect of deer, their recently stolen language). Following dream logic there were attempts to call the day—shorten it to—D-Day. Needless to say, such attempts miserably failed. First, the board of Dwarf Porcupine Day protested. A cackle of arrogant nuns, farmers of dwarf porcupine, and (do we need say) the owners of the quill toothpick factory, issued an indignant demarche. Those who saw the nuns' extremities knew they'd sooner bang penguins than give up: their feet were destroyed with porcupines' rage, and the skin on their palms was scarred by the lucrative smuggling of needles. Then Doldrums Day filed a complaint, followed by relatively justified notices from: Dandelion Day, Day of Days, Disapproving Pear Day in DDR and in the Prussian provinces, although it's possible the latter was in error. That aside, hardly anything else happened. Waters kept drying up, countries inhaled and exhaled, faucets dripped with blood. A wounded line staggered like a deer across a tight charter of sleep, tying language to the morning. The way it moved through dangerous suburbs, and its solid start, made it clear that the source wasn't a cornflower, but a forget-me-not. The deer dialect was disputed by the clergy of hairy linguists. And there was a ghost, and a flood, and the smell. Finally, Delirious Cherry Day arrived: everything SHOOK, SHOOK, SHOOK; it was wildly exciting, and flowers spilled across us, like hooves. As if, good Lord, there is such a thing as a simple, rational cherry!

War on Wind

We declare the war on wind: we are alone, like a distant Libyan tribe, alone, and equally lost. Our flags are starched, like shirts of board members. They rest stiff, gazing at the ground, as quiet as our eyes. We declare the war on wind: we anyway face the desert. We have cut our hair, weighed the book pages beyond recognition. Like luggers, our pockets are filled with dumb Christian powder. We have turned our wombs into urns for voice and scent; we have locked up everything, everything that flies, and we repurposed it into reservoirs of love. Every war, obviously, hinges on song and supply. Last summer, in the one and only southern night, stoked by grim novels, we have butchered the windmills. We don't have much left: wigs, occasional badminton, functioning umbrellas. Still, we declare the war on wind. We declare war and call it a holiday.

Hairs

Yes, I'm the chief of operations. This unit here: let me remind you—in human sector alone!—there are nearly eight billion similar, unique production centers, which keep delivering.

The reception varies, of course. And from one enterprise to another, the product differs as well, or to put it professionally, the article. The thickness, length, cross-section; every factory offers several varieties. I can disclose this much: colors are often artificial, and inflation does its thing.

Everything that is produced is expended. The market devours, like an addict, or a banker. Admittedly, individuals don't behave rationally: the machines are destroyed thoughtlessly, like in Ned Ludd's time. The product suffers even more often: every day is an endless godless Boston tea party. Imagine, entire trades are determined to exterminate the product, showrooms filled with terrible tools—that madness is in vogue. Sometimes destruction is a forced process: then a showroom is called a prison. There are also other forms, such as “barracks” and, in extreme cases, “camps.”

The dynamics of the production process? Some sectors obviously shrink with time, so much that they entirely cease production, while others flourish. At times a new silent machine appears in the hallway in the morning, cramped near the hollow of the window. There are strikes and scabs, but I'd rather not talk about that in public.

You mean for me personally? You know, it's hard to pick one—I've spent my entire life at this job... Definitely the fact that we work great in our sleep. Definitely possible, also the fact that when our enterprise becomes technologically outdated, when we're enclosed in a sturdy rehabilitation box, that we continue handling deliveries in an orderly fashion for days later.

Slag Splashing

Sometimes an entire dog oven burns down. That shouldn't happen, but it does, like in fairy tales—those strange stories where there is but one world, and freedom is a dull deity. Should the northern winds rush down, the whole situation could get sick. The sparks which the aeolian committee fans with straws from cocktails called Peppery Prosperov or Ruinus Raspudić whirlpool in hot air spelling classic sutras, whose titles aren't translated. Need it be said this is a cookbook? On the first page, under the photo of the front man of the Blue Orchestra Band, a laconic instruction states:



take a clump of clay and hold it against your chest, as if it were a woman. Then into that Golem clump press:

*1 barren lake
a throat that cannot be found
the damned moon the swinging moon devil's yo-yo
closeness by choice*

and shake the lot till it settles into a strong swan, the night, for which tomorrow exists. When the swan burns out, slag gathers in pans. From that slag wild irises are baked: the most delicious holiday cake. Caution! In case it burns, that cake becomes a trap, and then—woe is to the cheerleaders, woe to the master of ceremony! No one ever whispered *zimmerfrei, judenfrei* to the trap. Freedom, terrible freedom. Terrible, unbearable freedom.

Mini-Death

I planted a mini-death, round, blush like a strawberry. On the sunny lot under the window, where a parking spot used to gape, now sprout mounds shaped as honeycomb, dense, plowed by verbs. Above them, small mothers fall in prostration.

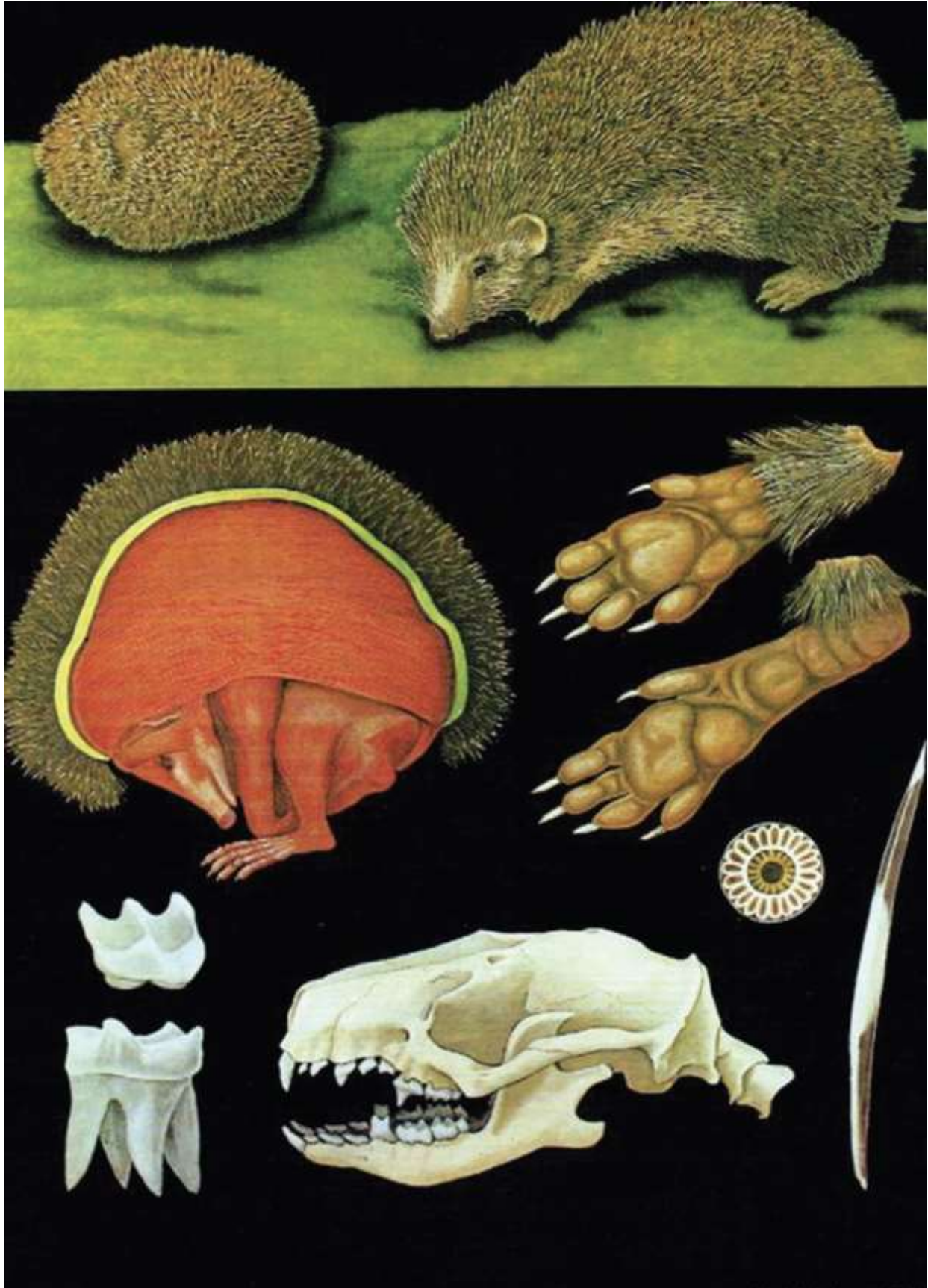
Breasts

I dream of a street whose blacktop splits in front of me, parts like a zipper on the back of a woman undressing after a long day at work, a woman who is surely a mother, and who is now greeted with the gift of long hours of housework. As she takes off her dress, slick with summer sweat, the tired woman's breast falls out and, like a plow, efficiently furrows the field of her bedroom.

From then on breasts parade through my dreams in perpetuity: men's, women's, animals', cat breasts and mother breasts, breasts of lovers, trendsetters' and trans', girls' breasts, mothers in law's breasts, ministers' and nuns', breasts of masons and heroes, Tito's breasts, Savka's and Debbie Harry's breasts, Tito's dog's breasts, the steep breasts of the Republic, the breasts of the northern wind and the dream, the sharpness of the breasts approaching and then retreating in the image of a wave, just as close and intangible, vortex-like, and even more so—their indescribable softness; we sit, the unbuttoned woman and I, in the kitchen of the flat near the river, late into the night we celebrate, with coffee we celebrate breasts.

Epiphany

My dearest gentlemen: hedgehog.
Hedgehog is my pillow.



About Desire

Even the oldest of hedgehogs remember her from the very beginning: the blade-like whistles, rattly wheels. Instead of the rails they see a simple thread, usually a yellow one. In the afternoons the thread would turn blue, and by night the blue would ripen into a juicy bruise, until the entire scene would disappear into darkness, that, like a pinecone, would rise from damp diesel.

Sometimes you could thread those needlelike trains through the eye. And those cruel stitches would patch up a landscape flooded with woods, and segregate it. Grown hedgehogs believed the railroad cars carried away souls, and whenever the horizon would flash announcing the blind rumble, they growled and snarled. They saw rail tops as horns, and railway sleepers as rungs on a torture rack. The younger ones, who kept in step with the times, knew that every car lasted a second and contained exactly twenty-four windows, and that the result was a film. Meanwhile, she, strange and familiar and slightly wild slipped away, like desire. And just like that, platform by platform, considering that stations haven't been invented yet, the hedgehog dreams of the world settled into the living air.

Yet letters still arrive and rains rustle, boys rot underneath newsstands, and in spring, ping-pong balls fire away. First ping, then pong, and then skyward: like explaining death to children.

Bigheads

Bigheads carry their huge heads proudly, as if only they were special. Some of the heads are covered in mold, some slip through fingers, and some routinely, unconsciously change faces, as if the stunning, hundred-headed hydra of Pessoa lived inside them. It's hard to tell what else lives in those heads, or sleeps, takes long showers or never runs late, considers every neighborhood association meeting sacred. But it's clear that in the cavities, in those deep mining shafts, dines a sleepless woodpecker, a woodpecker blue from hope, a woodpecker whose eyes give birth to the eyes of beasts, which habitually look up at the stars.

Bigheads don't usually hide their joy when the night arrives—*jus primae noctis* is still practiced at the heath. They click their tongues and spit cherry pits. Their excited pumpkin heads tremble, like lone apples at the end of the catfishing rod. On dirt roads and promenades, at bookies and cafés, at grandmas', at the market and at the church, Bigheads wear t-shirts with *Fuck God and Football*, and no one, in heaven or on earth, neither God nor FIFA, no one

can do

nothing.

Snowdrops Breathe

On pregnant mulberry branches, those heaven bound roots that during winter days translate the spirit of dirt, the discourse of rain and bones, directly into the language of wind; on those dreamy antennas bagpipes dawned blue and heavy. In the treetops, instead of uvulae, snowdrops bloom. And those awkwardly bloated snowdrops now sway, they sway and drop petals, as bees beset their narrow eyes, their eternal pestles. And the mulberry now thunders like a sleepless music box, the bagpipes tighten, the rotten northern wind presses one's chest, and four French gut-horns puff in four voices, spin a story about joy.

Slashes

They called me a northern Hannibal, an eel, an arrow. Their contempt turned them into dogs, although they kept their poetic license: the growling words lined up at my expense, measured, damp with spit. How many fucks in assonances! Fields and fields of vegetables lined with my head, my penis, my nose. Not to mention the synecdoche.

I smelled of clean uniform, soap and sin, and I just wanted my craft, for which I wasn't paid a penny. Over my head a golden, lazy zero of the moon. Under the counter, saved whiteness. An innocent, starched space that is the page road opened in front of ink: all that is saved. I went to sleep happy. Expert foul sonnets and amateurish mockery bounced off me, like women used to.

For I used to trim stanzas and plant slashes in them, turn colonnades into coffins. I was a quiet verse-cutter, a gardener in love with the white space. In mornings I'd start my secret craft and spent hours copying poems. I abridged Sappho and Shakespeare, Ashbery and Atwood, dithyrambs, limericks and odes, Song of Songs; even the one and only, proverbially waste-reluctant Whitman.

Always and only horizontally, ever consistently, modestly. They called me a communion wafer, a dog, a candle stick. And it's true, I burned with the heat of duty reminiscent of ironing, Penelope's labor and love. I couldn't figure out why would anyone, for god's sake, object to something like: *Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul* or *Remember Barbara / don't forget / that good and happy rain / on your happy face / on that happy town* and so on, while slashes, tall slashes between words glare like demonic dominos, and everything suddenly topples.

Night Glimmers

Heathland, in your nights the lights of tankers and the lights of tractors flash like swordfish, in your morning eye rocks and heather flash, and an ice-like rage armors your nails dark from dirt and slippery from betrayal; oh, wakeful heathland, washed in the sweat and blood of hedgehogs, the blood of wind and other animals without which, I think, I'd never be able to imagine you, not even in a dream of free snow; oh heathland of frost and Spanish broom, of karst and empty flame, the flame that is raw, scalding hot: are you a fatherland, or a bed and breakfast? A swallowed bullet, scars, the sentient swaddles of stars.

The Drilling of Bells

Something else about the heath: we never worshipped gods, because we had a heart. Suddenly, in the muddy swamp totem poles sprouted, like cattails, which in turn resembled hot dogs on reed sticks. When lit, they burned, but once on fire, they, as all burning things tend to, refused to transcribe magpies' dreams onto the night sky.

Everyone could smell the restlessness that the past carried. Mice lifted mosques, worms ate the interiors of their own brick churches. As for the first, we were initially delighted by the absence of picture. We liked the brushstrokes, which, like the snakes, take on the logic of water: in the canyon of bed, under the walls run-down by the wind. As for the latter, we liked the bells, the flashy Spanish Bluebell brothers, bells whose scent drove the dead to ditch themselves, quit their own essence. Soon we grew tired of the dead. So we called our magpie secretaries, the straight-backed daughters that descended in flocks, beaks rushing towards brass, as if towards bare eyes. And the cold smell disappeared from pits, as sweet as the final Wednesday, and everything got quiet.

Thursday

Every Thursday is a holiday. That legendary, terrible, swollen with watchful bites Thursday, wet from approaching tears Thursday. Such an obvious day, still unborn, swaying at the edge of every rusty Wednesday. It's observed in a variety of ways. Some simply wrap themselves up in a Thursday, like in a shaggy coat. Others eat till they drop. And some run, stumbling as if absolution stretches out in front of them, baffling and final, a parliament of eyes whose tears are more like nails than sweat, more like sweat than tears. Those who don't observe Thursday are traditionally recruited into the dead.

Night Owls

There are four kinds, but only the most informed people can tell them apart. Those—deacons of differences—will admit so only after they are subjected to torture. A properly tortured deacon (which, after infinite multiplications in a Platonic cave of mirrors implies their crossing onto a higher ideational sphere and a rebirth as a lazy demon) is expected to say the following: the most dangerous Night Owls are snowy. They're usually found in a syncope, the silence between two calls of a scops owl. At touch they are feathery and soft. As soon as they show up, they should be burned like scars; if not, the house they enter will be struck by a staunch, seven-year avalanche. Every demon-deacon will immediately be able to distinguish between Night Owls who witness and those who despair. They will say nothing about either. In an unlikely case that suddenly on the horizon appear extraordinarily rare, to mortals invisible Night Owls of hope, the deacons will turn into starlings and take off, forgetting their own misfortune. At the same time, expert rain will descend onto the chimney of the heath: an apprentice and middleman, a spy and representative from the sooty power of sleep.

Starlings and Chickadees

Like a plow chased by a steam tractor, the blade of the northern wind tills the meadow.

Starlings and bowers take off in swarms that look more like clouds of soot than flocks.

Both are a type of text: a typeset of an abstract syllable appears in the air or dirt, and it crumbles, as if instead of lead it was made of sugar, and the operator's fingers were nothing but rain.

Their writing swings off the northern wind like a vigil lamp, a bead placed in front of a pig.

Having landed on the neck of a swine, a chickadee whispers: pearl, acorn, pearl acorn, pearl, acorn...

The pig, however, is put down by a silver bullet.

A canonical apparition of a text—a verse that does and doesn't exist.

Ceiling Fans

First there were hand fans. The air and lacy curtains spread out in front of them like earth threatened by a plow; they beat the bright space like Gallic drums, chased by the dark love of servants. Then cooling fans, their gentle knives, arrived with the notion of a wind planted in deaf palms of mothers. With that clapping—hours and hours of small cells shedding through the pharynx of a water clock hidden in a clavicle, in pistons of Otto engines of death clamoring in some distant March—we carved the idols we praise. We spent centuries clapping, hiding from the detective agency of saints, the angel troop of hired assassins who strangle with wire, running away from the teeth of sawblades. Finally, the air conditioning arrived like a cloud of raging combine harvesters, and the end of history kicked off silently, a finger crossing the equator of the switch.

All Birthdays

How like polite witnesses they ley into their feathery holes! All the birthdays. Birthdays, which in our country, are the only holiday for the living, dedicated to those of us who have not yet gone extinct. Of course, it's a somewhat paradoxical holiday, like any damn race. It's never been made clear what should be celebrated with its ending, what's with glorifying the goal, the end that destroys it? And what is the point of singing odes to hurdles, which get taller with each circle, over which time and hoofs stumble? Then again, birthdays. Under no circumstances jubilees, anniversaries, lonely Thursdays from school textbooks; precisely birthdays. Momentarily forgotten in the oven, sweet yet brittle, overbaked cookies of hope.

Vipers

Traveling to the reception—alone, the only way a hedgehog can wander at night—I met vipers. Not at all unexpected: after all, their night was scheduled. The odd thing, though, was that the vipers ran late to the banquet and they looked like they had no fun along the way. On the contrary, they moved tepidly, rigid, polished by the wind that scattered the rays of the spent sun, their blacktop-sliding bodies scribbled messages reminiscent of distress calls. SOS, SOS and again SOS, their tired tongues hissed and clicked; their shirts took on the pattern of snakeskin boots. Who knows how much, if any, elixir they carry in the flasks of their horns, I wondered while I approached them from behind to politely greet them. And—snap!—I sentenced one of those juicy cats that curled up in an S like a chief, fooled by an ordinary night. The night seduced the viper before it had a chance to treat itself. The nightfall was fickle, a passing favor of the sun: an art of loving a little, enjoying a lot.



A New Day

A new day is a holiday that is rarely talked about, unless residents are simply unaware of it. However, it belongs to the most important holidays, and it's wished with an archaic, possibly controversial yet still universal, soft like a breath greeting: good morning.

Hedgehog Day

I am a hedgehog. I have several billion cousins on the coast, and that's why I send cards with the hot Morse code of the sun. How I manage the flail, let that stay a secret.

I am a hedgehog. When a drunk apple falls on me, that apple stays on me. Fuck you, Newton!

Smooch

Smooch is a holiday that dangerously approaches kitsch. Early morning, before lilacs turn white, it's time for the greasy *KüssdieHand*. On the eve of the ceremony finger joints are filed with sandpaper, and lips are exposed to the patient dogs of chaos. Then comes shaving, polishing of fears, makeup, and then finally: Opera.

Godunov always plays, played by Jacques Houdek. The latter, however, has to enter the stage dressed as a *gopnik*, die in the first act, poisoned by hot love.

Hedgehogs understand: life simultaneously is and isn't a dream. From such a nightmare—a tangle that is resolved only when rumors fill hearts, and icicles like slippers sail the soft moss of hallways—only False Dimitri could be the winner.

He walks along the map of the world like a cock-eyed Christ bowing down in front of every passerby, so much so that he quickly hunches over. Children follow in his footsteps yelling: *There goes a willow tree!* And *Here comes a question mark!* To which Dimitri responds with a mystical counter. Dollars, a room, a bat, he mutters to himself. Dollars, a room, a bat, he repeats until he disperses.

Feast of the Corpus Christi

If I stumble across your body, if I trip over, in this hour we share tonight, the thin-ribbed comb, the calyx crowded with a narrow shoulder; if I stumble and while sliding to the ground pull with me the thin veil that hides you, your secret tongue, will a landscape reminiscent of a beach in low tide bust out in front of me, stripped bare, like a village fight? I don't know. Breath turns inside me, your war burns underneath fingertips, hot, my lips separate your chains.

The Return of Snowdrops

The earth didn't yield beneath them to let them into its invincible ranks; hanging off their strength and our night, for months they broke themselves open above earth. Magpies carried their snowy eyes toward the sun. Slightly darker sky columned their feet, whiskered with early moss. Still, deliberation started with the first hint of wind. A voice carried, the caterpillar's web of dispatches spread out between one branch and another; worms from chests and apples took bites out of passwords, and a woodpecker Morse-coded an uprising song. Then spiders got to work, cloaking the treetop into a concrete cocoon, and the tree took on the barely perceptible scent of the dandelion. At that point, everything was already ripe for betrayal, and in the morning: a pause. Blood said, no.

Strawberries

Statue number 19, which regulates the extent and extensibility of love (on the meadow already tied with the proverbial thread length of the hedgehog's yoyo), states that strawberries are a holiday in themselves. What follows are descriptions of the interpersonal relations among strawberries, as well as relations between strawberries and the world.

Strawberries approach each other as if they had snouts: what interests them most about another strawberry is the smell of their soul. They pull the scent—like quarks—from their own death. Each particle that leaves them is free, but it can't market its freedom, which eventually, without fail, leads to the collapse of love capitalism.

Strawberries treat the world simply: as if the world doesn't exist. However, history in the shape of conspiracies, history that is a cage that binds, decides to prop up the ladder of the word: the rungs stretch into a lousy infinity like billysticks.

The world and its adagio! The strawberries, barely enthroned, in an incredible reversal, are slaughtered by displaced Cossacks.

Zipf's Law

Zipf's law is not a book. Not quite like a collection of articles, it more readily reminds of the one and only quiet dead man, a sleeping arthropod, a descendant of the indescribable tribe of centipedes. Not like a prayer book, but the wind's D minor blown through the hungry flute of a slow worm; not like a missal, but a mouse which will eat thick pages. Instead of the ribbon that the reader skips over breaking his personal record from one moment to the next, across the edge hangs the spine, narrow and joyous, tail and rose. There's no such cover of the law book: instead of leather there's coconut, instead of the title there are chickadees. The axiom of Zipf's law: only twenty percent of the days can be considered holy. No wonder the crows of the heath advocate for its burning, and that the role of fire is played by someone's eyes. Shots of liquor, the sweaty bird flesh. And within each of us a drunk flame rises with no retraction or stomping, forgetting this is an error.

Sparrows

A rascal, nothing but a rascal, I say, can compose this miserly codex, this guide through the brief hour of heath, the guidebook through the desert of its calendar. We know, time itself is a trap. Every day is a leaf-covered hole on the forest trail, every hour a stick at the hole's bottom, sharp, coated with the poisonous glue of love. Even such a moment should be trusted, of course, more than a man—his finest pointer, the mold that ruins him. Yet still a rascal, rascal, and nothing but a rascal can be the person who, rewriting these pages skipped the sparrows: the god's stairs. Snowflakes, for whom the body rises, are revived by bread.

Holy Vocative

Oh out! Oh tea! Oh bigger! Oh nomad! Oh lynx! Oh bow! Oh bitches! Oh plants! Oh easy! Oh sea
wave! O sacred, restless sleepless Spring;

Oh ho

Oh hoho

Ohohoho.

Foreword for Maria

I called her my Maria out of hope at first, then out of habit, and finally out of spite: there was nothing mine about her. Her waking was, like any novel, an overly long goodbye letter; her gait a sharp staccato, a composition that at dawn slides down to the station. I can't say the color of her eyes. She used to show up in the neighborhood at night, after the last tram, all shimmering and drenched with meaning. At night when all eyes look alike, like eyes of skinheads, or bats. When manholes sigh and chestnuts waver in autumn wind, and the conductor smokes in his cocoon more quietly than a footnote: tiny fists into the teeth of the blind world, our blood and water.

Maria, or How Things Could've Been

I called her Maria of possibilities, the princess of choices, of which there were usually four. The first trembled, dwarflike, ashy like her hair before rain; hair sticking from the canopy, defiant, tougher than any hot roller, hair which will take in the final drop. The second choice contained a choice: the situation concerned a party to which the pub porter was invited, but no one except him could tell whether he would go. The third resembled a bowl of alphabet soup: however much Maria tried, no words were born from those centipedes, words didn't add up to sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and finally paragraphs into the anticipated novel. The fourth choice was an army airport: in every season cloaked in a veil of mystery. And Maria, smooth like morning rain, glided among tables filling coffee cups; steaming black coffee that chokes, accepting every choice.

Some Cups

He finished his cup of coffee and put it away, face down, on the intended platter. The platter, made of steel and polished into a supreme shine, acted as a mirror: it held the eyes of a girl, the waitress that had just arrived from a village. Within moments they were replaced by an amorphous, bright light that poured from some mute height, not revealing the secret of its origin. He, however, knew this was a ceiling light with a few thousand candles, opulence that hung over him like a promise of future, and he thought this was a good day. The ashtray was empty, the sugar bowl was of questionable taste; a distant war dominated the back of newspapers, which, squashed by the tragedy of someone's breakfast, pressed to the wall a solved sudoku. Murmur ticked off like a tame midnight. And the upside down cup before him gathered into a bell made of strong Czech factory porcelain, and he—since there was still time left and because this was a good day—wished to ring for more coffee, but no; something flashed within him and the waitress, a village girl, got confused and somewhat abstractly cried out: “oh, god!”

Day Honoring Former Holidays

It is most like Victory Day, seen in the mirror. On the heath this undoubtedly poses a problem: mirror images are understood to be harbingers of misfortune, a guarantee that the mirrored person has been issued a fatwa of embodiment. Palindromes, books by known authors and perfect anagrams fared equally poorly.

Things were different with language. It was insisted to smell the tulips and lale, to fill sacks and bags, to push rollerblades and inline skates. But there was trouble with ombudsmen: just like attorneys at law they could be hanged without due process, or forced to write. It was the same with former holidays. Persecuted from the moment they left the shackles of the calendar, went out to the city and lay down on roads, they returned driven by the firm arpeggio of rain. They lined one after another like goblets in a pawn shop: Excellent Taste Day, Boars, Dreamy Shadows, St. Hamster which improves memory, then: Liberation Day, Featherbrain, Tripe.

Then the flag of forgetfulness lifted and the future rose sooty, dark like the night deep within the pocket.

Books That Turn Their Own Pages

They lay on park benches, abandoned like train stations in small towns, forgotten by nannies, or very young mothers. By some accident, the heath lords over gender roles, and father-owls rarely read. Yet those books, like the stations which the train might reach with its nightly scent, make their living core—what is a bench, left alone, stripped of shame and purpose, other than a practical altar, an urban book shrine that turns its own pages? Sometimes rain falls on those pages like ripe apricots. Dogs pull on leashes after smelling the spines, they growl while licking the backs and flaps covered with meaningless author bios. Some breeds immediately smell a fake: those are the agents of plagiarism, Cerberuses of libraries and literary juries. That's how, for example, on the bench in front of cousin Ilia's house, a bench left to rats in heat, flies, dreams, and other chaos of the world, the pages of August Šenoa, Hegel, Coelho, turn themselves. My cousin, you could say, has nothing to do with these book-traps. Just yesterday he became a father of a child—a boy with ashy hair and clear, Thursday-blue eyes—to which the books responded with an inconvenient compassion, like compassion that father almost showed to Isaac.

Turmoil & Sleep

Young hedgehogs huff glue by the office buildings of their fathers, phantom import-export firms. Usually they import winter, and export lace-trimmed, delicatessen-intended spring. The plant for processing of the raw materials is called sleep, but hedgehogs know this is actually a secret, passionate ride, a taiga soft with moss, a prairie that narrows in front of them into a road reminiscent of a blade, which binds like a knife.

The targets are often the young but well-known silhouettes of their mothers: as if those hedgehog-teenagers, following Cioran, would prefer not to have been born. However, it should be said that such tendencies appear only under the influence of toxic fumes, when their cornea shrinks into strained glass, and consciousness breaks down into a cabinet of curiosity.

After the typical onset of paranoia, the young hedgehogs start talking among themselves in German, a language they don't actually know. *Die Hasen haben heute Hunger; diese schrecklichen, schmutzigen Hasen*, they say looking around; their claws slipping into the mute pits of pockets, pockets that uncannily resemble rabbit holes, at whose bottoms something silently rustles.

Waves

I believe in the evidence of the wind.
I believe in the evidence of the wind.
I believe in the evidence of the wind.

Meta-Hedgehog

At first he talks about himself in third person, like a criminal or a lord. He says: *this is no Maleš's or Čopić's hedgehog*; this is an entirely different hedgehog. His toes are cold. His hearts resembles a burnt field and he, as if he doesn't recognize it, lays a fire in reverse on it, a heavy, starched snow.

Then all the lies thicken into a loud clump. And wet soot hurries along the hedgehog's throat, climbs up, and the smoke blue and famished with fire, offers the first person perspective. And the branches under its snout whisper soft and hot, and he growls: *I am a hedgehog, god's junction box, the prettiest pin cushion*; he says: *I am my own hedgehog and I celebrate, I am my own hedgehog and I celebrate.*

Different Times

Oh the times, calm Maria, that we usually call free! Such times do and don't around here: those better informed prefer bad times, they cultivate innate restlessness. Typically, most forms of breaking freedom, or active avoidance of it, is encouraged. Even though no one recognizes the authorities of the heath, it is commonly accepted that rainy days go by slowly. Bright days, days for leisure and reading, lunch time and time dedicated to hunting blue birds, is like river rapids. Pulled into a rapid, a person quickly loses control, but—to have control over times. . .

Still, not that long ago there was an underground movement which tried to hamper the forecast with a manual. Their holy book, a collection of instructions on absolute perception contained a series of jokes at the account of “things in themselves.” The armed wing of the movement, though, insisted for things to get serious—the text needed to be edited down, and then treated as a manifesto. In light of its strong arguments, the final version of the text is known as the Ossuary Book. That pamphlet contains only two confusing sentences: *Sit on the shore of a local river and wait. It will rain, and the quiet will arrive and settle on you like a cuttlebone on sand, like sunrays on bone.*

The Holiday of Tragedy

Hamlet, how many father ghosts must a man meet before he sobers up, and finally loses faith in humankind? One could just as well put trust into a small beast, or a bank. Instinct teaches us, the most dangerous ones are most like man, that obese, ticking meat cake.

Bones are the organ, Hamlet. Blow gently and you will hear a confession, force the mistral for a story of crime, but leave them be to the southern winds of autumn—the winds of November that knock teeth and wreak havoc—blow extra strongly and the name of a neighbor, cousin, brother will rise. Hamlet, here homes are built on bones. Aeschylus or exile: that is the question.

Nothing

I woke from a dream, screamed, and saw in front of me an out-of-wedlock ruin, a magpie that drank from my eyes, my body parted from its mass, and pure gravity flew in my veins like black soil, a pantry that ties tongue to winter; darkness slipped down the knife blade, raw, alone, and for a moment it triumphantly shined, and then there was practically nothing left of the heath.