

Serafino Murri

INVISIBLE TO MYSELF

For Dad, *in memoriam*

In the sweet liquid silence
Of an early winter morning
Cold and licked by the sun
I woke up between a smell
Of plants left to die and cast-off clothes
On the floor, in the corners,
Unable to recall memories passing through
Days of billions of instants suddenly lost
Like faces recognized in a dream when you are still God,
And I turned between the blankets and the coughing
Of the lower flat tenant – never understood,
A dickhead of an old man, retired military
With photography as a hobby and a cronic smoker's cough
Boxed-up in his muscle fibreless chest like a dog's bark –
Divorced at 70, without a partner anymore,
Creeping back up inside me like vomit right now with his badly dressed and skinny
body
While escaping by the stairs of his apartment building turret
From the chain reaction explosion of his laboratory burning,
Eugenio I think is His name, a life of an eternal son like many others,
Lightning drowned in daylight without past or future,
With veins out of wrists clinging to customary sensations
Of cheap beverages and decayed food
In ebbs and flows of black desire – existing, resisting, trying and fucking and
Making it, making it once again between the old scraped walls
With the cat's eyes fixed again and again on the beds
Where he's been conceived between the warm breaths and the hands
Of a mother and a father still children, layabouts and restless
With bony hearts crushed and borne
With no more joy with no more fear long before we were born
To realise one day by looking at them without noticing
Certain enclosed spaces where nothing is possible any longer, where screams drip
slowly
Until they merge into the temples with a sleep ridden with regrets
That resurface into the eyes in the evening, and the morning after they are only
Irritation without a reason and mattresses on the window sill

So as not to waste not even another tear anymore.

Cold disgust that drips on tiny floors
In a tedium of flowers and shutters, a pinched disaster in installments,
Year after year like a foreboding of shut doors and fallen hospital wards
Behind my father' soul still haunting these rooms, stiff
Between the armchair and the old Swedish crank handle calculator,
working out the bills at night, when the drone of destiny's preys is higher,
In the crooked jail of a soul without convulsions, with a damp nose and a pain
Of never worn clothes and things kept still in wardrobes, as if even Time
Got ripped by the threat of losing pension pride isolation
Between her ageing breasts as she slept, droopy-lipped and soundless
In the other room, wasted away, as she vegetated sorrows without knowing,
Even in dreams, and incarnated in another life's peel came back
The soft vagina of a young girl in the good old times of her father's bar
Coveted by crowds of merry countrymen, full of teeth, red as apples,
An echo of slammed doors forever in her musical ear
Incinerated by misunderstood words, the sweet maternal legacy
Of a tank of a woman as dark-skinned as a gipsy
Who prevented her from becoming a violinist
Just like her father, at least that is what she says
In her confused head, as it unloads in her sleep
Her dinner-time worries of black encrusted aluminium saucepans,
The bashful anguish of a shy and frantic cloud
With children speared at the top of her stomach, dragged out
In summertime to hopeless seaside boarding houses after the Holy Grail of Relax,
Balancing still on her quiet head she now goes back
Towards her husband's eyes, with strong lines on the forehead
And dandruff scratched away with curses, a woman to measure up to his fears
And to the sweet taste of artichokes still lingering in his mouth that night
Slowly returning to his senses, to the armchair, making his way
Towards the mystery of the future,, in which one day all pending dues will be settled,
And another night then between the resounding of maternal rosaries in memory
And the nightbus' engine at the end of the line in the square fighting against the frost
- had he at least learned to smoke, or to swim, or to hurt himself -
Instead of suffering on the sly

Brushing off the dust of evil from her eyes now or never, stopping
The creaking of the skin dehydrated by last summer, but maybe forever
In the first dark spots on her hands,
A pianist's hands, almost wasted for sex
For him who at 18 wanted to box, and as to music
The only one had been Aida's march played with a trumpet in Fascist schools
Some years before inflating condoms under Palazzo Venezia's balcony,

Both with no longer any youth now in front of the filthy sheet music of duties
He with his low-pitched voice broken in the ribs by his accident on the job
The tumbling off the ladder down the parapet which saved him from his first death
And her mental breakdowns, with her vocal cords like an old jenny machine
broken by shameful lived and lost under neighbourhood
Howls of despair and lullabies
And the distress inside the legs sprawling on the cushions
of the back of the new leather couch
“Which – he used to say -,
You could cover with tenners and yet not reach its cost”,

He who plodded slowly for years around the rooms
Thirsty for instants (the shorter they were, the less frequent they became)
To wrest away from her delirium
With that bear cub smile of his, embarrassed and
Like the day he caught me looking at my stiff prick in the mirror
- but I only realized how big his eyes were when he was dead,
When he'd already dodged gallons of foreign blood injected in his body
To tampon the abscess of his Intentional Death
As it said in the attending physician's official exhibit, on Easter Monday of '87,
When he jumped from life's stalls and into the street's empty stage
eyes shut from the inside and wearing a woollen vest
To shut off the unendurable whistling of the crickets
trapped by that pointless sun
With his destiny made of white patches on the cracked skull that was growing inside
Since the day of his miner father's love suicide,
“The Parent” he called him, the logic of an Oak clinging to the soil,
Proud and jaunty, a Communist since '21, he loved the roughness of life,
the gusts of fresh air, the sties, convalescing from typhus fever, the hemostatic soap,
Cool water on the face, humble food and plentiful, laughter like sudden belches,
Went to sleep beating rhythmically a feet on the black chest beside the bed,
Came back from The America of Labor & Opportunities in '48
With two Smith & Wessons 7 and 65 in his suitcase
Only to be torn apart by the death of his catholic cropper, Penelope
Under a sky eternally pregnant of stars seen from the mountains
of a village without streetlamps
The Abruzzi
In the Italy of the Front
That got cheerfully fucked by the International Charity
Under floods of holy water blessed by ministers who once were Nazis
Of God's castoffs on Earth:

Back from Rome by coach with his stomach in his hands the father-to-be wore

The void look of a Parent who finished himself off with a knife in his throat one morning,
A stream of dreams poisoned in its waterbed,
Without an MA any longer, gauging with a plumb line
How wonderful life is, and Hope
With the wages of the miraculous home-building company
And in his pocket nails for the rails
That were being doubled in the womb of the Far South,
That took him increasingly back
Towards the face of that copper-blond 20 he'd met in a bar
Eating hake as a remedy for gastritis,
Unaware that within her cells she was brooding
Three black haired children to initiate to life
On the streets of Monte Mario that ended in open fields
With the taste of salt and iron in the evening buses after overtime,
For the love of work and the work of love, children
Of a single blood vessel, of love and panic,
of hot packs of vinegar and water on the forehead to ease the fever
Of childhood diseases waiting for presents,
And Easters and Christmases
Like fluids of rutting cats
Blown high by the wind
In the craters of insomnia
Under skies of lies and unspoken words,
In the smell of mother's milk and ointments,
In thoughts glued to the pillow like morning slime
In the routine open wide like a monster's jaws
On the tired smiles of the homecoming

Pockets full of cotton-wool for a constantly unstable nest
Where infancy went by slowly
Among Sundays of shutters shadows and sports heroes
Improvised games and 45 rpm records
on the battery-run record player,
Three children in a row
Towards a tomorrow
the smell of the flat iron in front of the tv,
And drawings on glasses blurred by breath
Thinking about mirage friends locked up
By hysterical parents Satan-looking and ninny
And cough syrups and suppositories and sudden fevers
To sweat out in the morning
Among uncertain lights to be able to return
To school to recover the slight but certain warmth

Of a common age,
Runs and stones thrown in the roads on the way out
The early brushes with life
As fast as the car beyond the curb,
Black knees after the match
T-shirts with plastic numbers, football footwear
And hair sweating on
imaginary sex tales and the first kisses
Until the day ended
Unexpectedly, with the rallying cries of mothers
Right into the evening,
Into the trembling evening
That became Night,

That Night

With neighbours into the rooms of home
Dismayed about the delirium of the Bride
At war with her Voices and the World,
until the epilogue of that afternoon
Of a worn out tomorrow
Glanced from a little balcony
Laughing a laughter scared to death,
As the ambulance took away Italia
To the Psychiatric Hospital,
Against his will,
Still in love and nevertheless:
But her face had changed – he told me that night,
While holding me tight in the desolate bed
In tears he begged me not to cry
And never to marry a woman
With shifting eyes

- and yet you were wrong, Dad:
You didn't owe me anything,
I often choked on Life, but I could fish it up
With my hands in the cone of shadow of your eyes:
I was raw flesh then, fibres
Not yet retracted from life's circumstances
While you, a fish out of water and dazzled blood
Lighting rod and shoe with plastic sole
An earmuff hat, a crutch and a panting breath
Engulfed in the tide of your thoughts
You walked back and forth

Between the obtuse talks of devoted workers
And the cellophane hell of Italia's mind,
In the twilight zone of your meals of nails, sitting on my bed,
Eyes tight in an effort of attention
You stayed there to listen
to the memories in the valve-radio
Of good old years, lost who knows where,
Rummaging for a bit of love amid her screams
With her decorum unclenching only
For the drowsy police officers
in front of a cup steaming with embarrassment:
You waited for me to get back
Just to meet me fleetingly
In the brief shelter of my island holding
On the hasty dreams of my 20s,
Without saying a word you'd go away
Just to make sure that I really existed,
That I was not a figment of your fancy,
That I was real:
And even here you were wrong.

Think about it again, think
About your last lunch,
A greasy Eucharist of baked meats
Your eyes searching a prairie of potatoes
And words like robots
That didn't answer anymore
To my thoughtless pleasantries
To my haste of going out
Of making love
Of being elsewhere
Think about your thought
Left alone
A web ripped by pus
A stained robe,
With time spat away into the sinks
In front of speechless mirrors
The spit like a strong current
Flowing on icy streets,
Death a siphon valve
Beard hair, blood, saliva, nails, skin, hair
Life's bitumen
In the duct of dark water
Washed off

Along with the last chances of an escape
With obscene and never spoken desires,
And the hopes encrusted on the griddle
And the void of the house
Two small flats connected by a bog
Golden prison of memories
Built with a smile
A long time ago
Only for you and for her, and then

You went away
With a full stomach
Went away
From the stains of pee in my sheets
Away from the scratched record of the Alpine songs,
Away from the parent's stable you turned into a house
Thanks to money made on-the-sly, illegal toiling,
Away from the plastic Christmas tree
And from the Standa¹'s filled up plastic bags
Away from your teachers daughters
caught unprepared before Life,
Away from your dandruff
caught between your fingers
From your humiliated rage,
listless, cutthroat:
You turned one last time
To stare in the face
Of the God of the Madhouses and the Abysses
that even then understood nothing
of the splinters of your bones scattered around the gravel
And of all the things you lost in that fall
To the Final Womb,
While His angelic orderlies
Between cursing and chest efforts
carried the stretcher over the gates of the basement
For one million and two hundreds liras a month:
Confuted by death
as by life,
you who, with the heart of a bull, searched for months for a cancer
in hospital aisles
as one can look for water in the desert,

¹ "Standa" (an Italian version of the English word "Standard") was the name of the first discount department store chain of Italy, founded by Fascists Regime in 1933, bought and re-sold in 1988 by Berlusconi, and currently overcome by other supermarket chains.

even in that *after*, you still did breathe

and in the meantime my sweat dried on me
while she stared waveringly at my mouth
half disrobed, full of forever,
that little head of hers trembling as she swallowed
all the poison of my deafened excitement,
the child of stolen pornography,
while I mistook the coldness of the room
for an elusive disaffection, resenting
that blind willingness of hers of being loved,
our twenties passing by
like a train crashing on the ritual thirst for
petting on the stairs at home or inside the car turned on,
for her ribs squeezed against my slenderness,
for the dull thud of the street into the looks of the thereafter,
for her mouth of gasoline and oil like an advance of despair,
for the posters pinned with tacks to the room's wall
for the silent music wound up in dusty tapes on the shelf,
for our foetus of love, for our abortion of love
looking at me with a sort of sad dog eyes
while I pissed my vanity at the corners of other women's eyes
a collapse of senses would have mirrored me one day,
to get away, faraway

then, on the phone, rugged, offhand,
the broken voice of the Bride: "Dad fell over,
go check at the hospital, Grandma must've been upset by it."
Behind me, on the background tv, the reunited Parliament
Was decreeing the new Christiandemocrat-Fascist Government live,
Love made on the floor in an empty house
White and rigid my body made of empty earthenware,
In the atmospheric dust of the ray of sunlight through the blinds
She listened
to the railway that went from Cilento to her heart
scrunched in words like residual festoons,
the dazzled petals of her carnivorous plant
crackling like paper in the wind:
she was begging me for this not to be true.
And before the nurse said,
As he stared at his hand's palms,
"Listen, he's no longer here
I mean, he's on the fourth floor
Of the red building, but I'm afraid

He didn't make it"
The clever child had already understood
he'd been left out of air
Even though the drug of the afterwards already shone through
Like a snail's trail on the path of sorrow,
Even if it was the shuttlecock of survival
Sputtering while holding back the tears
In the half empty little room
Like your smashed mouth forever opened
In your last dog-eyed glance at the sky
Before a Mother-in-law crying with hands on her face
And the moths-eaten woolly blanket on your body already cold:
The sun shone outside and it was April,
Everything was so clear, then,
You won't ever cross the Italian borders,
Not even with me to Paris
For the bicentenary of the Revolution
Polite Jacobean
Chained to the Master's money,
Old shoe of fears and reasons
Now Everything became Forever
And you
Didn't react to light and noise,
The house key you had broken it into your backbone:
Death was done, and from the white of the eyes
The cheque "paid to myself" of your errors
Was sent back to the unknown sender by air mail

The automatic Fiat 127 you crashed a week before
against wall of the panoramic road
(the one from which we drew out fuel
After you got a full load in the Vatican City)
Last piece of bruised soul to survive you
It fell to me to have it destroyed by the coachbuilder:
To stare at the metallic urn of your last panic
Sizzling the Nothingness of a payable end
In the stark sprawl of undone mechanics,
To celebrate the Silence that united us
funeral rites of spare parts,
While I signed the receipt for the return of the plates
In front of the gas station clerk's idiot son
Who kept repeating as he shook his head with reddened eyes:
"Too bad, poor chap, besides he was also a fellow*country man*"

And even that night at home, without you,
The daily bread was broken
Absolute bread you used to eat
Dumping the omelette
Bread dried by the black sun of insomnia
Bread before and after all, bread of shame:

You'll have woken up in nothingness,
In the end
Your head freed from umbrellas and broken plates,
With the sad expression of those who see
And are ashamed to say
That Death is the neighbour's radio
that keeps on playing:
How many things brought up along with children
And the sorrow wrapped in dirty washing,
In the still mutations
Of those haywire days:
But we were a house, then,
We didn't know the road to the end
The steep sweetness of those eyes
Pleading and silent like snowmen:
We have also got lost, in time,
The spectacle of the years was over
The house sold
So as not to remember anything anymore
Not to forget ourselves any longer
Sold with the ghosts and the madness inside
And telephonic interferences and grief
Renovated bathrooms and aluminium windows
Paid with your posthumous severance pay
Sold with the soul in mercury drops
And cold feet kicked into the heart
Burnt by the astonished silence
Of mothers lonely islands

Mothers

Who cannot speak in tongues and laugh with what is left of them
While they say *Bonjour* at their children's return from faraway cities
Frayed and hollowed love shells saying "yes" without listening,
With their minds in their iron, absent eyes of beaten beauty
Like the scars of cowpox vaccination on their arms
keeping out of rooms that they can no longer control
Where needles on the floor and dust on the tables speak for the glass of their eyes

Middle-aged mothers refusing death by tattooing make up on their faces
Who are still waiting for the right moment,
Redemption for God's abuse withering them,
Hearts of nettle still stinging not so long ago
Through the black bin liner of their thoughts with a subtle fear
Of the last coitus before menopause or of the definitive electroshock:
Love of non-sticking pans
Love oozing from dresses
Love of wind and fingers in the eyes
Love of compassion for sparse hair
Love of still beautiful features
Love of dental plates and tranquillizers
Obscene love forgiving everything
Love without instructions
Waxed love loaded with Mascara
And the gaze of the others

“at least Pastorious died while drunk”
I used to say months later to Crazy Luca, reminiscing
“and bouncers didn't know what a sharp brain they were smashing”,
I don't know to whom I said such words while already
I kept repeating by heart the absurdity of your face
Which I just wouldn't see in front of me anymore
'cause in front of me there was only age
Ahead of time over delirium vanity doubt
Abandoning myself
To the fatal hesitation, to the incredulous destiny:
I wouldn't say
That in life's absinthe, sometimes,
You would have come back up like the burp of a partaken meal
In front of a screen or before a word
Like a confused tear, a cloud,
A sad taste of defeat, like a forgotten burn
leaving a mark:

that evening also just like a thousand others
amid the smell of dust and death just passed by
with cockroach poison under the door
raising insomnia thanks to Crazy Luca's bouts of asthma
reading poets, learning to cry, to drown
into movies on tape until it was morning
with the blocked toilet drainage hole
with coffee spoons, panic and memories
which the foolish Bride would throw away with the leftovers

distracted by her Voices
coming back
into the Past's kidneys, jaded by hopes of Fair
into the shapeless mortal tangle
separated from the world
by the wall's angular veins,
and shit and wails and orgasms and looks and curses and silence
that my mother didn't want to flush away
with the forehead's sweat and the hands of a plumber
faraway filthy universes of certainties
nothing from all this:
Luca and I pissed one by one
into the empty bottle of Coke
the steam of ammonia inflated the plastic in my hands,
until I plugged it up and threw that
bastard piss into the dark
on the face of daybreak
into the underbush of the dilapidated villa in front of my balcony
the ruin of vacations of the early century
where the impaired son of the owners in the morning
used to go round waling for years the same nasal nursery rhyme
pushing the blue pram in which he had grown up

who knows where you are now
as the day lingers on
and the wind can't reach you
behind a burial niche in the upper floor
lost in the ignorant sun dust
of time carrying on,
if you can still recognize
the scattered signs of the smells you inhabited:
and in which dream's corner and whoknowswhen
will I must know how to find you once again
between lights that spring to eyes wolf-like
or in certain suspended afternoons
like foetuses in the water of a thought,
in which parts of me

under my hands out of my bed
the thickness of my body here now
clay from the sex of my parents',
a shared dream dried up
in the one-way-road of the Years,
I descend anew and pained from the embers of the eyes

Into the mirror
What is there and yet I cannot see
Invisible to myself staring at me
While outside I perceive
Gusts of wind on the line of clothes
hanging, swollen and headless birds,
in the sweet illusion of not being able to stop
this useless avalanche of old impressions
arisen with the coughing of Eugenio the serviceman
whom one day as he looked at me looking at him covering
the windows of the house with black veils, told me
from the road:
“Perfect darkness doesn’t exist,
This is something photographers know very well”

Since then I often dwell
The house that doesn’t exist anymore
The house of my father’s eyes.

Roma, 1997-2001

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