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Abyss

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will remove the firing squad's last bullet
rattling in the empty skull like a peanut
and send it to the laboratory
so that at least
the geological stage of the crime
will be brought to light
And the bald scholars of the future will write
two or three dissertations connecting this peanut
to a dark prehistoric time
which is our present

Translated by the author with David St. John

Y A H S I E N / T A I W A N

Abyss

Children are always losing themselves in his hair.
Spring's first torrent lurks behind the overgrown pupil of his eyes.
Part of the year is shouting. A nude is beginning its night's celebration.
In the virulent moonlight, in the delta of blood;
All the souls are coiled and swaying,
They strike at a forehead wilted on a cross.

This is absurd; in Spain
The people wouldn't even throw him a piece of bad wedding cake!
Therefore we will mourn for everything, spend a whole morning waiting
in line to touch the hem of his field coat.
Then his name is written on the wind, on the flag.
So he throws us
His leftover livelihood.

Go and look, and act sad, and smell the decay of time.
We are too lazy to know what we are anymore.
Work, walk, pay respect to the crooks, smile and become immortal.
He is a man who clutches maxims.
This is the countenance of days: all the mouths of wounds moan, and germs

hide under the skirts;
Metropolis, scales, paper moon, the language of telephone poles,
(Today's poster grows on yesterday's).
The cold-blooded sun shivers every few minutes,
In this grey abyss
Squeezed between two nights.

Years, cat-faced years,
Years which stick tightly to the wrist, years which wave as signal flags.
In the rat-weeping night, the people already killed are killed again.
They are using the grave's grass to make bow-ties, they are breaking up the
Lord's Prayer in the gaps between their teeth.
None of the heads can really ascend the stars,
Or wash its crown of thorns in glittering blood;
In the year's fifth season, in the thirteenth month heaven is down under.

We raise a tombstone for last year's moth. We are living.
We use barbed wire to thoroughly cook the wheat. We are living.
Passing the billboards' sad metre, passing concrete's dirty shadows,
Passing the prison of ribs, passing the released souls.
Hallelujah! We are living. Walk, cough and argue,
I take advantage of a part of this sphere, without a feeling of guilt.
There is nothing as the now is dying,
Today's clouds plagiarize yesterday's.

In March, I hear the cherry trees hawk their goods.
Many tongues are shaking out spring's looseness. A robin's egg blue fly
gnaws on her face,
Her *chi-pao's* split waves between someone's thighs; and it wants someone
to read it,
And work into the flesh. Except death and this,
Nothing is certain. To be is wind, to be is the sound of the threshing ground,
To be is, to them—someone to tickle them—
And the pouring out of all summer's desire.

In the night, beds collapse everywhere. A sound from the feverish light
Is walking on the broken glass. A farm implement compelled blindly to plow.
Pink flesh's translation. A fearful language
Spelled in kisses; a first meeting between blood and blood, a flame, a tired-
ness!
A movement which shoves her away.
At night, in Naples beds collapse everywhere.

On the end of my shadow a woman is sitting. She is crying,
The baby is buried between snake grass and tiger lily.
The next day we go to see the clouds again, laughing and drinking plum
juice together,

We dance until what character we were left with is gone.
Hallelujah! We are still living. Two shoulders still carry one head,
Carry being and non-being,
Carry a face wearing trousers.

Who will be next? Maybe the church mice, maybe the sky.
We are already too far away for our farewells to be heard by our umbilical
cords which we so hated before.
A kiss is hanging on the lips, religion is branded on the face,
We are bumming around, carrying our coffin tops on our backs.
Therefore we are wind, birds, sky-grey and a river without a mouth,
We are standing ashes, we are death without burial.

No one can uproot us from the earth and toss us away. Close the eyes to see
the life.

Jesus, have you heard the wild woods growing in his head?
Someone is hammering under the beet field, someone is under the myrtle
tree.

When faces change their colours like chameleons, how can the torrent
Portray the reflections? When his eyeballs grow in
The blackest pages of history.

We are nothing;

We are not like the man who breaks his cane upon the face of time,
And we are not like the man who turbans the dawn around his head for its
dancing.

In this shoulderless city, his book will be pulped again after three days and
turned into paper.

He washes his face using the night's color, he duels with shadows,

He eats estates, dowries and death's little protests.
Then we go outside and come back in, wringing our hands,
We are nothing.

What can you do to make the flea's legs stronger?
Inject music into the throat, let the blind drink in all the light.
Sow seeds on the palm of the hand, milk moonlight from the breasts.
—These successive nights revolve around us, and we revolve around every
night,

Seductively beautiful and ours.

A flower, a bottle of wine, a bed of giggles and a date.

This is the abyss between the bedclothes, as gloomy as funeral scrolls.

This is the tender face of a girl, this is a window sill, this is a mirror, this is
a little compact,

This is giggles, this is blood, this a silk sash waiting to be untied.

That night, the Virgin Mary escaped from her frame on the wall,

She wanted to find Lethe and wash away those shameless things she had
heard.

Therefore this is an old story like a *revolving lantern*: sensations, sensations,
sensations!

In the morning, I carry a basketful of sins and hawk them along the street,

The sun pricks my eyes with wheat thorns.

Hallelujah! I am still living.

Work, walk, pay respect to the crooks, smile and become immortal.

Exist for existence, look at clouds to look at clouds,

I take advantage of a part of this sphere.

By the bank of the Congo, a sleigh stops;

No one knows how it slid so far,

A sleigh no one knows stops there.

Translated by the author with William Golightly

Salt

Our old woman had never met Dostoyevsky after all. In the spring she only
cried: Salt! Give me a peck of salt! The angels were singing in the elms.
That year the garden peas scarcely blossomed.

Seven hundred miles away the camel-caravans led by the Minister of Salt
were passing along the seaside. No blade of seaweed ever showed up in our
old woman's pupils. She only cried: Salt! Salt! Give me a peck of salt! The
laughing angels covered her up with a shower of snow.

In 1911 the partymen arrived in Wu-chang. Our old woman left her foot-
binding cloth up on the elms and went off into the breath of wild dogs and
under the wings of the bald-headed vulture. Many voices whined in the
winds: Salt! Salt! Give me a peck of salt! Almost all the garden peas blos-