

1983

## Correspondence

Gregory Djanikian

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Correspondence · *Gregory Djanikian*

closed please find tax forms and a dinosaur.  
—opening line of a letter from a friend

The tax forms will come in handy. Thank you.  
The dinosaur, on the other hand, presents me,  
As you must have foreseen, with special considerations.  
Not that I'm ungrateful: it is always a privilege  
To receive such tokens of friendship, such gifts  
From what I take to be your private collection.  
And what a fine example of Mesozoic fauna it is!  
How deftly it moves for its bulk  
Through the rubble of our dining room,  
The tin heap that is our kitchen.  
And how furiously social it has become,  
Holding the parlor hostage, contenting itself  
Both to reside in it and eat it.  
Frankly, since you are keen, it is said,  
On the great herbivores of the Jurassic,  
I am a bit surprised by its omnivorous nature:  
Last night, it devoured our Caucasian kilim,  
By morning, our mantlepiece had disappeared,  
And for the last hour, it has been eyeing  
Something as undramatic as our philodendron.  
I use "our" with some hesitation: poised  
In the doorway with her valises, my wife  
In a moment of absolute resolve and high art  
Declared herself with a tense and terse "I go."  
As if I had a choice. As if I could have said:  
"We are under a spell. Our lives are not our own."  
My daughter writes from Reykjavik: "It's cold.  
Will stay indefinitely. Good luck and love."  
The cat has been missing for three days.  
I do not complain, though I admit its presence  
Has redefined for me such words as "house" or "guest"  
Or "fear." And what does it ask in return?  
Only my belief in something more than a name  
Or a pile of bones stone-cold in a museum.  
Dinosaur: terrible lizard. And I am ready  
To say: "Yes, it is here, yes, it exists."

And having so avowed, I worry at the consequences,  
The other catastrophes the mailman might deliver—  
Meteors, droughts, ice, continental shifts—  
To make a lie out of reappearance.  
You see my dilemma, the risk in such matters  
Of faith, a risk my neighbors, bags packed,  
Trigger-fingers ready, are loath to entertain.  
What can I tell you? That we have only the names  
For things we have not seen? That the names  
Are dangerous enough? Of course you know.  
Fiction makes a truth out of some lives  
And this month, I am the odd man on the block.  
But please, send no more packages, and please,  
Nothing inflatable. Now, as a small proof against  
What some may call my liberal imagination,  
Please find enclosed shreds of our philodendron.  
I am sorry it isn't a dinosaur. It isn't even  
Mesozoic. But if you add water, it might grow  
Into something unexpected, a jungle perhaps,  
Where toucan and cockatiel may caw out your days  
And fireflies change forever your notion of darkness.