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The Rustle of Acacias

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The Rustle of Acacias · Joseph Brodsky

Summertime, the cities empty. Saturdays, holidays drive people out of town. The evenings weigh you down. Troops could be marched in at even pace. And only when you call a girlfriend on the phone, who’s not yet headed South and is still at home, do you prickle up your ears—laughter, an international drone—

and softly lay the phone down again: the city’s fallen, the regime has changed, more and more stop lights gleam.

You pick up a newspaper and start to read from where “What’s On” has spilt its microscopic type.

Ibsen is leaden. A. P. Chekhov is trite.

Better go for a stroll, to work up an appetite.

The sun always sets behind the TV tower. The West’s there too, where they rescue damsels in distress, fire their six-shooters and say “get lost!” when you ask for money. They sing, “who gives a damn!”

the silver flute held in grimy, trembling hands.

The bar is a window which looks out upon that land.

A row of bottles with a New York chic: it’s the only thing affords you kicks.

What gives the East away’s the bleak, oblique cuneiform of your thoughts, a blind alley each—

and the banknotes with neither Mahomet nor his mountain peak but a rustling in your ear of a hot “do you speak . . . .”

And when, after, you weave homewards, it’s the pincer device, a new Cannae where, voiding his great insides in the bathroom, at 4:00 a.m., with his eyes goggling out at you from the oval mirror above the wash-basin, and gripping the hilt of his sword, ”cha-cha-cha-” grunts the conqueror.

Translated by Daniel Weissbort with the author