

## ROMAN KOREC / Ode to a Plastic Shopping Bag

This here's an ode  
to the common plastic shopping bag  
with its innumerable uses and unnamed abuses  
with its rustling sheathing and glossy lightweights  
with its ballerina twinkle in the eye and cinematic hemorrhoidphobe pirouettes in  
wind eddies.

This here's an ode  
to the ubiquitous plastic shopping bag  
that is one with our daily banalities  
a staple of our utilities  
sometimes the recipient of our absurdities:  
a mango pit, a condom wrapper, a banana peel, an emotions mapper  
an election speech, a presidential concession, a Democrat's heart, a Republican's soul.

This here's an ode  
to that celebrated plastic shopping bag  
that adorned the post-apocalyptic Adonis  
in the throes of his auto-passion  
as he embraced the neocolonial hegemonies of his seducers  
and inserted his manhood in between the silken sheets of a chocolate mousse  
and dreamed  
dreamed of being a Napoleon  
or perhaps a Yasar.

This one here's a venerable ode  
to that *deux ex machina* plastic shopping bag  
that accompanies millions of us a day, a second  
if only to be burned  
burned like a male coitus non interruptus happiness  
at the apogee of a climax

burned into the vast expanses of the trash dump of her many orifices:  
par vaginum ad astres, ad veritas  
amor perpetuum mobile

This one here's a timeless ode  
to the thankful plastic shopping bag  
that embraces our palms and caresses our skin  
longer than the lover no longer there  
longer than our animal love no longer fading out of forgotten memories  
longer than the gypsy breath of the wailing Catalan rising sun  
above Tokyo's many roofs;  
but the walking dead of the Nippon kereitsu won't let them enter:  
Laaaav youuuu laaaav youuuuu  
naaa mi daaa no Tooo-o kee-yoooo.  
Laaaav youuuu laaaav youuuuu  
naaa mi daaa no Tooo-o kee-yoooo.

But perhaps  
this one here is not a timeless ode  
to that certain plastic shopping bag after all  
as much as it isn't a celebration, nor a victimization  
perhaps it is simply an empty, pointless exercise  
like a vote sown to influence a bipartisan puppet autocracy  
perhaps, just  
perhaps  
it is simply a fetish "perhaps" whispered barely above our self-affirming lips  
that have long ago lost their self-affirming priviledge  
that have long ago ceased to be  
the medium  
of our voice  
springing forth

from our mind.

Because

ever since you began to chant that interminable ode

to the now venerable plastic shopping bag

you began to infiltrate

the Soviet steppes of your subconsciousness

for that little, fleeting moment of imperialist happiness

that is so easily purchased yet so difficult to own:

“His Excellency, the Venerable Plastic Shopping Bag,

is entering His fifth term in office

is elected and re-elected time and time again

by you and your ‘I...’

who is, as a matter of fact, no one but I

that is, my “you”

because, as I have said many times before

you are not “I”, as much as I am not “you”

which centuries of revolutions at the bloodied fist rule of man did not alter

as much as the abbey at Mont Saint Michel

(which “you” and “I” saw perhaps only in our past life therapies)

stood by motionless with its hues and Impressionist baie eminency

that figures prominently

in our collective

psyche.

Because

that is where I bought a soul

and brought it home

cooked it in a broth

pureed, heated and made it froth

and drank it in so copiously and so religiously

that I forgot the white plastic shopping bag

by the moveable, transfigured sea.

And the moveable, transfigured sea  
returned the innocence to that pure plastic shopping bag  
unmade it shameful and corporate  
unmade it the temple of Mammon and the clothing of a neo-Christianity  
made it reborn, and then some  
made it into you, made it into me  
made it into a carbonic ecstasy that would have lasted three summers and three  
winters  
were it not for a certain nobody  
emerging from the depths of his middle-managerial slumber  
to awaken and see you there  
in the timeless, autumn embrace of the plastic shopping bag  
that you worshiped so silently and stealthily  
in your bathroom  
while you defecated the best years of your life  
into his cold, ceramic heart:

Tell me  
tell me  
why did you enter the thirteenth room of that fairytale castle  
and let the plastic shopping bag free?

# A Short Story for Ludmilla

## 1

Friday afternoon.

Still clothed in that respected well-salaried professional living in the capital of a newly Europeanized Europe, in a newly awakened life of fruits of my labour and nights luscious with heavy food and ripe women whose eyes told their own thousand and one post-Soviet nights stories, but whose wombs betrayed a desire to marry me, enslave me and not let me leave, I left.

Because, ever since I left, I couldn't stop leaving.

## 2

Saturday morning.

I awoke a different man. Fragrant, rugged, in an old army caravan, in a field of wildflowers, at the edge of a garden colony near a railway spur abandoned by post-revolution fraud, I awoke a different man, with an untamed gypsy woman by my side.

I smelled her unwashed sex on my fingers sleeping next to me in that old caravan in that field of wildflowers at the edge of that garden colony about an hour from the capital of that newly unified Europe. I lay there and thought about my ordered closet of fine suits and pressed white shirts, my days of corporate culture philosophies and nights of soulful consumerism.

I thought about my Mondays and my Tuesdays, my Wednesdays and my Thursdays, and then I thought about my Friday and the train ride to that small provincial station in the middle of nowhere where I got off and sold my suit for the price of a chewing gum to an unwashed gypsy kid by the station. (He thanked me "Mister" and looked for a way to rip me off some more.)

I deeply inhaled her scent, felt her warmth and returned to the now. She was curled up against me like a cat and her bare neck glistened brown. My clothes and skin smelled of smoke and of the acrid ground on which we danced yesterday, late into the night.

I looked at my body and it was dirty and smudged with ash and coals. I smiled. It felt good to be close to the earth, close to my roots. I spent entire childhoods outdoors, by myself, in vast, empty forests, under lush deciduous canopies swaying

in makeshift summer storms, near forgotten, slow-moving rivers or in old, abandoned cars and fields, searching for something...

...such that half-gypsy that many many years ago kissed my eyelids with her shy smile and became my first love, my first unrequited yearning.

And, ever since I left, I've been searching for that something.

### 3

The caravan door opened onto a field dense with morning sunshine. A gentle breeze stroked the heads and stalks of tall grasses around and brought the scent of a coming fragrant day in. Her sister came in and curled up between the woman and I.

I heard the sound of laughter and children playing amidst the silence and tall grasses. I could not remember how I got there, nor could I remember the night before, for I had the distinct feeling that last night was not there or might not have even happened.

But, I smelled the scent of her unwashed sex on my fingers.

The gentle morning breeze played with the tall grasses and I watched their play through the opened door, from the cool darkness within. I did not want the woman lying next to me to be too much of a woman, because this story was mine, and it told me that she'd better be a young girl, like that Romanian half-gypsy at that Austrian *gasthaus* I called home for a few uncertain refugee months, and it told me that she'd be better turned away from me, so that I would not see her face, and it told me that she'd better not wake up, as not to disturb the already fragile moment of my happiness and tranquility.

Thus, I lay with my back to the wall of the caravan and stared at the woman sleeping next to me, right next to me—as close as I would ever be to a woman—and watched her dark hair touch the pillow and sometimes stroke the face of her sister and watched the rising sun hovering above the tall grasses swaying in the breeze, coming through the door, caressing her hair once more, illuminating her serene face.

The moment remained precisely like that for a long time, unchanging. I thought to myself that the sun should have moved further up the sky by now, because time also moved further ahead. I looked at the hands of my watch and they, too, had stopped. I wanted to ask a question, but I couldn't hear my voice. I opened my mouth and spoke, but I made no sound. This time, unlike *that time on the steppe*, there was no other voice instead of mine.

So, I stopped. It was no use. Everything seemed so perfect.

Everything seemed so perfect (lifeless) that I did not want to disturb it. Like the sixteen-hour otherworldly contact experience that lasted only a worldly second or the intensely beautiful *Solaris* arrays of hallucinations that seemed so utterly perfect, but so hopelessly static, I did not want to disturb it.

I sensed an uneasiness growing within me, but I chose to disregard it. It was so beautiful, the moment, that I began to feel uneasy. The laughter had long died down, the breeze was long not there, the air was thick. Time had stopped, the woman's scent was fading away.

A panic gradually began to grow within me, at first whirling slowly within my chest, then becoming more rapid and rapid and hectic and chaotic: faster faster stronger louder higher deeper deeper higher then BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! three times a loud bright flash exploded in front of my head, blinded and deafened me.

Then complete silence.

I woke up late next to the gypsy woman. Her scent was still on me. Her beautiful dark hair straddled the pillow, which was no more than a pile of unwashed clothes. Children's laughter streamed in from the outside.

I could move now, so I got up. I still could not see into the woman's face, no matter how hard I tried. No matter what my perspective, she was perpetually with her back to me. So mysterious, so invulnerable to deception.

I left the caravan. In the tall grass next to it was an old bicycle that could have easily been post-war. It still worked, so I got on and headed into the direction that the bicycle took me in. For a good while, I pedalled lightly along a flat Class Three road full of potholes and patches of asphalt. I savoured the morning and then turned onto a dirt road that headed past a field of wheat and into a dense forest that hid the Morava River. I continued until the road stopped and I was by the river.

On the bank of the river, deep within the forest, eager to dissolve with time, I watched the slow-moving river flow by. Then, suddenly, Kalashnikov showers of heavy border patrol fire rained down on me and I began to run like an animal hunted, through bushes, past trees, and I heard shouting and shots ringing in my head. Bushes, branches, tree trunks and dead wood of this fluvial forest scraped me and blood began to stream down my face, legs and forearms. I was so close to the river that I smelled it and bullets grazed the hair of my scalp. I heard some Russian, but I couldn't read Cyrillic so I didn't understand what it said.

My invented socialist past flashed before my eyes, my red scout bandana choked me and my gleaming pionier pin poked my breast and I bled, drop by drop, so I

jumped into the muddy brown river full of Austrobohemian silt, dove under and swam across to the West.

On the other side, the roar in my head relented. I never looked back, not even once. I sprinted in the direction of a forest, away from the border. Then, with the river far behind me, I slowed down. I walked stealthily, almost unseen, through the forest and when the forest ended, I stepped out on a parched, long-ago-plowed field and walked in the now-higher sun.

I walked until I could not walk any longer and curled up on the brown, parched soil and slept.

#### 4

When I woke up, the sun was quite high and I was completely dry. I could not remember how I got there, but the field looked familiar and I remembered that a village lay just a little further. I headed towards it and, just before entering it, I brushed the dirt off of myself. I reached into my pocket and took out a plastic pouch with my passport and my money and took out a few Euros.

I entered the only grocery store in the village and the grocer greeted me in broken English with a familiar smile:

“Not as wet as usual, today, are we...”

I smiled back at him. I bought some bread, sausages, green peppers and a bottle of beer and headed back in the direction of the river. At the edge of a wheat field that was just beginning to turn golden, I sat down, ate my lunch and drank my beer. I then lay down and drifted off to sleep again.

I slept for a good while and had psychedelic dreams of belly dancers and bedouins whirling to hypnotic sounds drifting through hypnotic darkness of early Arabian nights somewhere on outskirts of nomadic desert towns or villages full of hypnotic percussion, hypnotic trumpets, hypnotic cellulite undulating ornately in front of glowing fires, hypnotizing bedouin skirts rising and falling in a myriad of movements and speeds, the dancers blurring across night skies deep in primal twirling trances, until a rustling in the grass near me awoke me.

I pulled out my hunting knife. Its steel blade gleamed in the hot sun and stroked my face. A young doe sleeping in the tall grass beside me stirred. It saw me and ran away, so I decided to get up and head towards the river again. Once at its banks, I swam across, found my bicycle and headed back, first along the dirt road, then.....



I returned to the old caravan, but found no one there. I was hungry, but had nothing to eat. From farther away, I smelled a fire burning in the twilight, perhaps even music or singing. I was tired, so I went into the caravan and slept, dressed the way I was the entire day.

I drifted to sleep and slept heavily.

## 5

The next morning, I awoke earlier. The young gypsy woman was sleeping next to me, facing away. Her scent mingled with my own. Without looking at her face, I got up and left. I began walking in a certain direction through the tall grasses, then along the old, abandoned railway tracks.

I was dirty. I smelled. My clothes were dirty, but they felt good, like the earth clutching me and taking me back. I walked for a long while along the tracks, then along a dirt road that I did not yet know. Along the way, I ate wild cherries, blackberries and strawberries. Passing a field of corn, I hid inside, in between the rows, and savoured a raw cob.

Inside, close to the earth, I felt good. So, I slept. It's all I knew how to do.

When I got up again, I started to walk along the dirt road, past weekend cottages and hobby gardens, until the sound of trains passing got closer and closer. I followed it until I found the tracks and followed the tracks until I found a station. There I waited for a slow train to come.

The train came and I got on. Once inside, I relaxed and slept some more. The conductor woke me up at the terminus. I woke up and I didn't know where I was, but saw tracks, platforms and light boards and realized where I was.

I got off and caught a tram home.

Sunday night.