

Oy Oy Oy

There's a man lying down in a grave somewhere
With the same tattoos as me.

Coil

In the bathroom of the Krasnoyarsk airport, pop starlet Amanda, passing through on her tour, glanced accidentally at the cleaning schedule and froze: the cleaning woman's signature corresponded precisely to her own, Amanda's, signature. Every crook, every curl—it was all identical, as though Amanda herself had signed there. Amanda couldn't understand how such a thing was possible, and that very same day she hired a private investigator to find out every detail about this cleaning woman. The following morning, the investigator told Amanda that the cleaner's name was Lyudmila Pashkevich; she was forty-four years old, uneducated, lived in workers' housing in the Sovetsky neighborhood of Krasnoyarsk, and there was nothing special about her. Plus, on top of all that, she had a harelip. Amanda the starlet just about calmed down, but then the investigator produced copies of all of the cleaning woman's official documents, including a job application she had written out by hand, and to her horror Amanda saw that Lyudmilla Pashkevich's handwriting was precisely the same as her own. All of which made Amanda somewhat uneasy. Like a thorn in her heel, this cleaning woman tormented her. After all, she had been doing just fine, recording songs, visiting her cosmetologist and tanning salon, dating her boyfriend, and knowing no woe—and now there was Pashkevich.

Amanda tried to put the woman out of her mind—No, no, I have nothing in common with her, what's a signature, what's someone's handwriting. Just a coincidence. It happens—she told herself. Her concert went well, though she did not perform her newest song. No one in the world had heard it yet; Amanda had written it only recently and intended to return to Moscow and record it in the studio. It went like this: “I love you and you love me / we're together finally / you're my joy / oy oy oy.” Amanda was going to dedicate the song to her boyfriend.

Waiting for her return flight after the concert, Amanda decided to go into the airport bathroom. You don't scare me, Pashkevich, she thought, though at the idea of the bathroom her heart began to beat strangely. I know everything about you, you're a poor lonely woman with no education and a harelip. The bathroom was sunk into a glimmering twilight, and when Amanda entered, all the noise of the airport faded. In the bathroom, a woman with a harelip was washing the floor, stooped over as she dragged a rag across the tiles, and she was singing "oy oy oy!" to the tune of Amanda's song. "What's that you're singing?" Amanda mumbled. "Oy oy oy!" sang the woman, almost viciously, then looked up at Amanda with cloudy gray eyes: "It's a song, see"—and went on scrubbing the floor.

Amanda flew to Moscow. Life lost its colors for her: recording, performing, trips, clubs, boyfriend, cosmetologist, tanning salon, shopping, whatever else she had loved—all of it turned out to be a trick, a lie, because somewhere in eastern Siberia there lived a woman with a harelip and Amanda's handwriting, her signature, her song. Amanda's entire life was ruined, poisoned, revealed to be a hoax, someone's cruel joke. One day, Amanda threw herself out of a window, nobody knew why. At her funeral there was a woman with a harelip no one recognized. She stood there for a while, then went away.

* * *

Act of Nature

N was walking down the street one day when, at the intersection of Leninsky Boulevard and Zina Portnova Street, he saw something strange in the sky. At first he thought it was a plane preparing to land; Pulkovo Airport was nearby. But then he looked more carefully, and it wasn't a plane at all, but a car flying through the sky, pretty high up there, really small, but you could see that it was a car. N spat on the street and decided it was a plane anyway.

Next evening, N was walking down the street again, got to the intersection of Leninsky and Zina Portnova, and again saw something strange in the sky. He saw—you guessed it—a car. As was his custom, N spat and decided it was a plane anyway. He walked a little farther on Leninsky, toward the Semya supermarket. But then he heard a peculiar sound, turned around, and saw a car falling from the sky to the ground. And crashing. All the other cars on the street began honking; the drivers jumped out, pointing up at the sky. Shitshow, thought N, and kept going.

He stopped by the Semya supermarket, came out with a little sack, and slowly headed back. But now the intersection was full of cops, ambulances, rescue vehicles. Traffic had completely stopped, people were running down the sidewalks in a panic, watching the sky. Meanwhile in the sky, cars were appearing one after the other, emerging from the sky's dark void to the southwest, tracing an arc, and plummeting. Some of them crashed, turning into piles of metal, others for some reason landed very neatly, as though on airbags, and drove off. But they couldn't drive very far, because the cops and rescue services stopped them.

N went up to a cop on the sidewalk and asked him what was going on. "What we have here," the cop said, "are cars falling from the sky, creating a public disturbance." "But why," said N, "aren't they all crashing?" "Cause not yet established," said the cop. Meanwhile, two other cops bring over a young man who had been in a car that just made a smooth landing from sky to pavement. "This," they report, "is so-and-so, twenty-nine years old, his Volkswagen just landed, this is the license plate." "What were you doing in the sky, for what purpose did you land here?" asks the senior cop. "I was just coming back from Tallinn," said the young man, "I spent the weekend there, so I'm driving down the highway, it's dark all around, then I look and see that all the other cars have disappeared somewhere and I'm driving in the sky, so I drove like that for a little while, and then I started going lower and lower, and then I landed here. And this is a real dumpster fire, and you should let me get home to my mom." All the other survivors said about the same thing. That evening, more than fifty cars fell out of the sky, and eleven of them made it.

N went home, feeling a little off on account of all this, but that was okay: he boiled up some dumplings, drank a little vodka, 200 grams, calmed down, and went online to see what people were saying about it all. On various internet forums, people were arguing: some were writing things about UFOs, some about devils, others about a special new technology for making flying cars. Other people were saying it was a false flag operation planned by special forces. At which point, N registered for a forum and wrote: it was an act of nature.

* * *

έκπύρωσις

Strings and strands of hair catch fire, eyes and eyelashes catch fire, it happened this morning, this afternoon, tonight. The fabric of the sky has turned from crimson to crocus—not fabric but Flemish lace, linen yarn stitched up into the air by golden-haired Godelieve in the old city of Bruges. There’s a movie about two killers in that town, eternally medieval, with its stone towers and spires, wooden bridges, chiming clock, town hall, museums, and breweries. And all of this is burning.

It’s different here. Petersburg autumn, sunset kindled over the Admiralty Shipyard, or the early dawn of two celestial bodies at once—the moon and the sun. They’re both in the sky at this hour: the moon pours out its pale green, pre-dusk. Over the fields around Pulkovo Airport planes descend slowly, blinking their lights, and a young man and woman have driven into those fields, turned off-road, parked, taken a blow-up bed and bottle of wine out of the trunk. Meanwhile the sun is already rising, spilling forth the dawn, and the world stands bemused by these two luminaries, as though they aren’t supposed to be there together, as though they’re a divorced couple.

The dissolving dawn dissolves distance, scatters its rays like a spawning fish, and the world steams in them, weightless. The city in the distance steams, the planes in the sky are steaming, the buildings of the observatory in the tall grass, and maybe some butterflies that haven’t yet frozen. More than anything else, I love that smell—smoke

carried on the wind, coal smoke, in which you recognize a mixture of every other smell: the scraped knees of childhood, pain and desire, patchouli and oak moss, wormwood and citrus, sand and asphalt, automobile resin, benzine, cut grass and coffee, wine and vanilla. An aching, unrelenting, irretrievable smell, the smell of everything—the smell of the world ending in the fire.

. . . As in disaster films, they'll step out of their cars, they'll leave them behind in the traffic jams on major and minor avenues; maybe, following film logic, they'll begin to dance. They'll dance embraced by tongues of flame, they'll spin like dervishes and lash the air with whips of fire. I've been told about a woman from Kyiv who was never interested in doing anything, not since she was a child—not reading, not playing with toys, not thinking, not speaking, not spending time with other people—only spinning like a top around her own axis, like a Sufi. So she spun and spun, and then she learned to spin with torches, and she left Kyiv and went to Goa and now she spins there. Kyiv burns, and Goa also burns. Millions of fiery dervishes with burning torches spin around their own axes.

Children run out of the schoolhouse onto the terrace, this is cooler than summer vacation, little whirls of electricity dance by their sides. Each gesture leaves a fiery trace in the air. How slow to ignite are time, space, motion, and matter. Teenagers climb up to the roofs to watch the glow of the world. Old man Indyukov, sick with tuberculosis, lisping and mean, goes out on his balcony too, to spit at the world one last time. The gob comes out precise, crimson with a black center-wormhole—tobacco and blood—like a poppy flower.

The planes above Pulkovo are on fire, the moon burns, and so does the nearby Gulf of Finland, as though oil had been spilled into it, virgin soil burns, the president burns in the Kremlin. Food—that's fire, baby, water—that's fire, baby—a Black man with dreads on the Nevsky Prospect sings and drums. Earth is fire. Air is fire. On Liteyny Prospect costumed Indian princesses with bare bellies sing and dance, and Sufis in the desert of Palace Square recite poems about the

exultation of the atoms. Cell membranes turn to blistering plasma, cytoplasm turns to flame. LCD displays melt in the running heat.

On fire are conjunction, disjunction, implication, the sacrifice of meaning in poetry, the incitements of language, the body, and music. All mirrors break, all images are holy. The waterfalls of worlds are born and burn in the chaotic fluctuations of the foam of the universe. From now on there will be no more strong and weak, master and slave, beauty and beast, division of being in reason, word and thing, form and content, thought and sign, holy hierarchy, enlightened monarchy, liberal democracy, or whatever else. Only the waterfalls of the burning worlds, the cleansing flame, *ekpyrosis*.