

Selections from *Tyhry*

Emma Andijewska

The Melon Patch

There's a melon patch outside my window. It's a few stories high, with cantaloupes and watermelons, but meat grinders grow in it, too. It seems that these meat grinders are condensers of silence, although I can't say what their exact function is. The people who walk across the concrete courtyard below do not notice the melon patch. Even I myself, when I go downstairs and look up from below, don't always take note of it. That's why I'm still deliberating whether it's just carried in by the south wind in the evenings, or if during the day the melon patch simply takes on the colors of the air, making it difficult to perceive. Because the fact that it changes, chameleon-like, caught my eye a long time ago.

The melon patch is outside my window all year long. True, when I open the door it gets carried into the room by the draft and then hangs above the lamp or near the bookshelves, but, nonetheless, I'm used to the idea that it's just outside my window. It's convenient that way. Because I like order, and when I sample the watermelons with a knife, lots of juice spills out on the floor, and then it's difficult to breathe. And I quite like breathing. I can lie and breathe for hours on end, intently inhaling whole landscapes into my lungs, because I perceive the world through my lungs.

I keep the melon patch right outside my window, so I don't even have to walk out on the balcony or lean out of the window to get to it. After all, the melon patch knows my hands, and all I have to do is extend my knife and it flows onto my fingers. With one movement of the blade I slit open the watermelon and take out the insides. I walk around my room barefoot, consuming watermelon after watermelon, and the neighbors who live next door run from apartment to apartment, informing one another that I'm pacing once again. They don't know that I'm getting heavier from the watermelons and that my steps are losing confidence. And that's when I hear soft music from the meat grinders.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Bashtan"

Tigers

The first suspicion that it was tigers came to me sometime around noon, when the room was full of sun. Looking at the spots and stripes that were stirring about, I couldn't shake off the feeling that beneath the spots of sun were at least a dozen tigers, and that all of them were racing across chairs and trestle-beds, ignoring the rules of respectable behavior. I cannot, of course, assert that it was exactly then that I first noticed them. No. I just felt that something around me wasn't right, though I couldn't explain straight away just why. The fact of the matter is that I'm not very observant, and it wasn't until they began to roam in my apartment every day, almost knocking me off my feet, especially when I was carrying something in my arms and couldn't look at my feet, that I began to look more closely at what I had once considered to be spots of sunlight. Now, of course, it is clear to me that if I had been observant, then surely I would have noticed earlier how often during the heaviest rains there would be a flickering of sunny spots and stripes in my apartment and I would have begun to wonder if just maybe there weren't, by chance, tigers hiding behind those spots of sun, tigers that for some reason had grown fond of my apartment, although I could not imagine where they could have entered it, if they weren't living in the furniture or behind the cornice along the walls. Quite probably I wouldn't have noticed them to the end of my days if I hadn't once been angered by my neighbors, who began to ask what it was that races about in my apartment from time to time, albeit I never had visitors and I always wore soft house shoes indoors so as not to disturb the neighbors. I myself did not like to be disturbed, which is why I tried to be considerate to others, but this kind of iniquity offended me deeply. I didn't even allow myself to sneeze loudly in my apartment, so as not to disturb somebody on the other side of the wall, and they had the nerve to declare that something was racing about in my apartment. Naturally, I told them that the way homes—and most larger structures, for that matter—are built today, there is a displacement of acoustic properties due to a lack of appropriate building materials, and that is why those who live below me hear not me, as it seems to them, but my neighbors, who have a large family. But I myself wasn't satisfied. I began to look closer at what I had hitherto presumed to be spots of sun. And no matter how much I did not want to admit this—I cannot bear complications of any sort—after some deliberations I came to the conclusion that these were, indeed, tigers. Then I decided that, since they were tigers, it would be necessary to feed them, despite the fact that they had found their way into my apartment illegally. How could I neglect any living creature, even if tigers were a disturbance in the apartment? For they would certainly be hungry, and it can't be ruled out that the reason I hadn't noticed them for so long was because without food they had become excessively thin, although this argument was less persuasive in light of the

stories about their racing about the apartment. But I decided to feed them. At the beginning, to be honest, I was rather apprehensive that if I accustomed the animals to food it would be difficult to break the habit, and tigers grow to be quite big and strong, and that it was my responsibility to care for them, as they had already grown fond of my apartment, so I dug out of my memory a recollection from my childhood of when I was taken to the circus, and then it occurred to me that tigers can also be tamed. In all honesty, I didn't know how one goes about this, but I was quite sure that it wouldn't take a genius. What happened after this I cannot express in words. I can betray only this: I now ride a tiger.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Tyhry"

Passion

You'd think that nobody would be disturbed by my rooster, which I walk on a leash, just like others take their dogs for a walk. But no, somebody took the trouble to observe my rooster in a vacant lot blowing the sun out of its beak, and now I have to tremble at the thought of his being harmed, because I have already heard that the butcher from whom I buy meat complained that the sun has begun to rise too early. As if that wasn't enough, I have received several threatening letters from the observatory, alleging that I've been forcing my rooster to blow out new stars that have no place whatsoever in the heavenly design, as if there really were any universal laws established on earth, but what's more, these letters insistently claim that, by emitting new stars, I am disrupting their observation of the sky, and that is why, if any calamity appears from space, which, in the present circumstances could easily occur, then the only one guilty will be me, and so it would be best, then, for me to turn my rooster over to the authorities, so that official bodies can decide its fate. This kind of naïveté simply moves me. They think that since I have my own rooster that blows out the sun, this automatically means that I have a special rooster. They don't know that all I have to do is take any rooster, or even a hen, or the most mangy duckling, or, indeed, any animal, although I prefer birds, because a star blown out of a beak has a far more shapely appearance than one blown out by other animals, and keep it in my house for a couple of days and it will begin to blow out the sun. Those who complain don't understand that my roosters blow out the sun only because it would not be proper for me, at my age and in my position, to engage in such activities myself. Besides, I am prone to obsession, and that is why if I were to begin blowing out the sun myself it would be doubtful if I could be stopped, and that would have consequences far too unpleasant for all, whereas when I transfer my passion onto an object, which, in this case, happens to be a rooster, it is far easier for me to regulate this passion. But everything I say is met with total misunderstanding. All of my arguments, which occupy so much of my time, are yielding no results, and I am beginning to worry more and more that when they come to take away my rooster, and if I don't learn to blow out soap bubbles instead of the sun, then when they appear on my doorstep to put things in order once and for all, I will greet the police with the sun on my lips.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. "Prystrast"

At The Post Office

“This letter must go out today.” “But we are closed for the day.” “If that letter arrives even one minute later than it should, the whole structure of the universe will collapse, everything will be destroyed and this world will no longer exist.” “This world will not exist, but there will be another, and the people will settle in another space outside its boundaries.” “If this letter does not go out today—” “We are closed for the day. It won’t go out. The post office is a government institution and here everything is governed by rules, according to which the post office is closed for the day.” “Then everything will be destroyed!” “Unfortunately, I cannot be of any help.”

The ceiling began to crumble and the walls to cave in, but the postal clerk did not move from his little window. He didn’t notice it. It was noticed only by an old woman who had come to collect her rent. She sat on the floor and started to cry. The clerk looked at her and said that she should get up because it was forbidden to sit on the floor in the middle of the post office. But the old woman could not hear him anymore. She was covered up by the rocks and rubble of the whole structure of the universe.

Emma Andiiivs'ka. “Na poshti”

In The Restaurant

“If you don’t return, I will die,” said the girl, laughing and eating strawberry ice cream from a goblet. “One doesn’t die from that,” replied the imaginary friend at her table. “Life is so simple, and you will soon forget that he ever existed.” “You must return, because I will die,” said the girl. “I can’t go on without you.” “Everybody can do without another, and people with rosy cheeks like yours don’t die so quickly.” “But I will die, because I can’t go on without you.”

Cars drove past beside the tables, and confident young men walked by, their thighs rocking the air as if on a swing.

“I’m dying,” said the girl and paid for her ice cream. “Young people don’t die from this—time heals all wounds.” “For me, time does not exist.” “Everybody your age says that.” “If you don’t return, I will die,” said the girl, and got up from the table. Two men eating cold turkey sandwiches looked at her and then saw her off with their eyes. She was pretty and young, and it was indeed a pity that as she was crossing the street, vehicles were already driving through her. Passenger cars, commercial vehicles, and trucks with trailers went through her, as did people and the policemen controlling street traffic.

Emma Andievs'ka. “V restorani”

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