

ILARIE VORONCA

ACT OF PRESENCE

TRANSLATED BY JULIAN SEMILIAN

I'm here and yet I know I should be over there, that somewhere a soul frozen with fright stares at the clock's hands till the hours blacken, they blur into a shriek which erupts from the surrounding air, shooting into the gaping mouth, like a bottle of sulfuric acid. I tense, I listen, I gaze, my fingers plunge into the shivery gush of papers, I am here and I fathom that over there somebody is fidgeting in anticipation of my arrival, but I don't know when I can make my departure, suddenly! orders are shouted; I slap my hat to get the dust off, I execute so many gestures dictated by well-learned purposes, but it torments me, it burns me, this thought, that somewhere a soul is fidgeting in anticipation of my arrival, that it's there I need to be, to give comfort.

I could fling open a window to the subsided harpsichord in the park and I could stare at the season flit its wayward fingers over arpeggios of unfurling blossoms. The keys discernible in the flower beds, quaver under the very same finger, further off, and much later, awaiting the frowning resonance of fruit and decay. Pears, greengage plums, ellipsoid grapes. The light puts on an apron of ash, the footstep grazes the gravel like a cheek, our eyes grip hands. The poem lounged in the sun like litmus paper, and if, in passing, I happen to jostle against your name, it's like an ant hill scrambling with so many alarmed memories. I crouch over a word, over another word, it's a spring imprisoned within the mirror's mechanism, I am here and I'm tormented because I know I should be somewhere else, when the voice slices like a scythe through the grass, compelling it to curtsy, unleashing an echo-like tremolo latched next to the wheat spike's camphor sachet.

And during this watch winter pushes its tents to other discarded whereabouts, summer's wild beast cages clamor along the sweltering sidewalks, a pliers' jaws wrench through the leadened portals of rain, the ripened bread of October.

Each one of us, unsuspecting, harbors within the tidings of his or her own death, like a dove that ferries under her wing a letter posted for a recipient of the happenstance. Someone will slowly strip us of foliage, deliver us again to the air, the water, until at nadir he will trace the envelope which our plasma has fetched for us from our forefathers so that we may drive it forward through the hour's marshy curtains. In me or in you, another soul will plunge like a pearl diver, and, between the barrette and a smirk, this being will swivel to illuminate the pebble left behind by the echo, or a delirium. A bird large as a cable concealing electrical wires will ignite in tone with the phosphorescence of flight. And the corpse carted off on an invisible stretcher will incessantly evaporate among worms and celery, will turn into the steam which at times you'll discern floating over swamps and mirrors.

Each word is on this wall the push button of a bell which — poked — will call into existence the requisite being. So many words, so many beings. In vain will you wait on the phantoms to rise from their ancient easy chairs, to fetch you the scent of basil long persisting in the pillows along with the laughter, sharded like a walnut still green. Here you'll stagger into thousands of spider strands, where your voice will wobble and reel irremediably. And myself, in a rush to be finished, have still another key left to try in the lock confining the secret of words, and all the while knowing in my bones that I should be somewhere else, where someone fidgets in anticipation of my arrival, somewhere next to the bottles faintly containing an ink which will transmute into an eternity of shrieks.

Someone shuffles the days like playing cards. One day replacing another has the semblance of a card lifted from the deck with the kings and the minuscule, multi-tinted Ladies. It is fruitless to clamp your fingers to your temples: no one can verify that today is Monday, or Wednesday, that today it is I or December. Until the burgeons sprout, granting passage to the startled rabbit ears of the leaves, the fingers of hands will not learn that immaterial gleam which compels the mirrors to suddenly murmur. Until then, the corpses left behind by the moon's clamor through the chest of drawers will not rattle the curtains and the folded linens. The silence tended with so much vigilance under the stained glass of the hothouse will not complacently wilt. Through the herbarium's bay windows brimful of the sun's blazing weed, the shouts of the strolling push cart salesmen are scarcely the extra cotton for the lusterless diamond I spotted mounted on the ring of soundlessness.

At times the ox-carts unload a new twilight in the courtyard with the resonant pavement, a few inhabitants scuffle by my writing table without a greeting. At times. Someone else barks an order at me, casts a reproof. The words fidget in anticipation, like a string of shirts, to be unfurled by the flatiron of my revelation.

The train of redolence lopes through the walnut's marrow, through the gooseberry, with a swiftness of shrieks.

The walls reveal processions of canvases, some in semblance to the raven of the wooden whimper over the clods stuffed with earthworms, others like bouquets shooting out of the refracted drinking glass disclosed by the plaster.

Solitary, I trace the measure of my breath, lapsing back into my lungs, after which, it coils like a cobra, along the mirror's limpid arms.

More cards, more canvases, parade before the retina's steam. Nightingales peck at my pupil like a bead, and afterwards, all of Beyond's hues endorse it with trills irradiating from their tiny crops.

Undulating, the slumber hovers over me short of a graze, stork or cumulus of an early afternoon.

This spring it will be as though I am in a target shooting booth, where row by row, the tiny mechanism of the tender cherry is animated, of the jittery eggplant, of the unexpected hare. When the eye grows weary, the pellet will sweep wide of the target, and the tiny wheels will fail to spin. Will it then be the autumn within me, or the one in the garden?

The window unendingly farther, an aquarium where the shrieks of the multitude transmute to other conjured up aspects.

If I lean out, I can grasp the wind in my fingers, like a blackbird in a birdcage.

No earthquake could shatter the frail ash of the poem.

In iron becrimsoned in embers, in the fingers grasping this flame in unrestrained entrancement, in the metal shops speckled with the soot persisting like grounds at the bottom of existence's coffee cup, in the nail that punctures the heart easier than the hoof, the same face swivels from midday to midnight.

In this grotto, am I myself not a stalactite which, manifested from nothing, amassed within itself sodium and visions? Thus, from the calcium of the initial granule of bone, of flesh, a whimper first sparkled, then the resonating voice, and later, graying hair.

In alternate chambers, creatures analogous to me slice into large squares the feast-like stuff of days. From their fingers, as in witchcraft, hats and vestments are hatched like peacocks. In courtyards, stout scullions plunge daggers into goats and buffaloes, construct, on top of glimmering trays, castles of salads and roasts.

Cutlery and culinary secrets journey from generation to generation. Some learn the utterances of thread strands and with them they know how to inscribe the embroidery drum

or the vestments incessantly rejuvenated. Others, out of their tools, organize rakes with which to glean the plasma gravel sweeping over the expanse surmised heroic. There are those who know how to coax, in flutes or tenuous piano keys, the songbirds, with a corn flour they alone preserve inside their hearts. But all of these, through the rivers of flora and years, cannot wrench me yet from this place. The same notion that I should be elsewhere torments me.

The hands of the clock journey through snows or maritime foam, my slumber fragments like amphoras on the morning's cold grindstone, evening and night follow irrefutably the celestial procession of light, humans plough, sing, demolish or build towns, the bread's gates swing open or close, and yet no comet stabs my cranium's sweltering planet. I'm still waiting for my hands to liberate themselves from me and roam searching for a cheek to caress.

Any word then: fireworks fulminate. When our cognizance of words dissolves, we'll need a baton to conduct the orchestra of the budding vowels. They will undoubtedly be the same, but the clamor of this summons will awaken all things and all beings as though from a legendary slumber. In the citadel from the tale, it's not the princesses who slept a hundred years, but the words. And from time to time Prince Charming, the poet, journeys through cities, and brings in his cask, resurrection water for the slumbering words.

And when the liberated hands return, I will inquire of them: What did you bring me, you, Right Hand, returned from Midday? And you, Left, back from Midnight, what did you? Where is the flocking of the carpets of fulguration, where are the redolent vowels? The hands having first rested upon the shoulders like ceremonial epaulets, will then resume their place among the instruments of reading. I will be obliged to recount to you, reader, the chronicles concealed in their touch.

If night fragments on the granite windows like a throttled street-lamp, the mittens unharnessed from the hands like some wings still retain the itinerary through a breathed-out echo: Come with me through the alleyways leading to the occulted dwelling of Light and gape at the enraptured begging each other forgiveness, while an ocean like an autumn of carmine clamors through the fronds of their tears.

Like a secret code, rapture shows up on the leaf of every age.

But no apparition procrastinates its presence on the photographic plate. With a single step you leave behind immeasurable distances. Where was I an instant back? The ostrich shoves his head into the fans of sand, the ruins are clavichords veiled in penumbra. I know, you delivered Pegasus to my door, you girted his waist with a sash blooming with verses, and yet I will not comply to your beast stalking gymnastics.

I begin now to distinguish: behind these backdrops, more backdrops. Incessantly yet another backdrop. Your successors will incessantly dismantle the cardboard landscapes, and their successors the same. Do you know whose turn it will be to unveil the penultimate? Incessantly yet another landscape. Would you like to follow me, our fingers interlaced, down this alley only a doodle? Quickly, take off your reality like you take off your dress so you can leap into the morning's artesian fountain. We'll be nothing but essence, tint on doodles purged of dimples, lacking brim.

If aurora were an arbor, we'd creep to the top to gaze at the advent of day. All is traced with disappearing ink, and the entire doodle, dissolving leisurely, crumpled in the pocket of a rover.

What incantation will it take to return us back to our selves?

Our heart plunges deeper into the plasma, like a raft in the water. I could hurl this heart in your face like a sponge soaking with blood.

The highway is a hammock where the slumbering city sways. The lips explode like a pomegranate and fracture all the words.

Have we journeyed, do you think, through the marrow of summer? Or the marrow of winter? I have told you before: through birds the electric current of flight is disseminated to our bashful quarters. Through cherries or apricots, the coagulated fire, the petrified flames, permeate our chambers.

But for what reason the unfurling like a slingshot of the stretch between the scattering trees? Why the wig of thunders, the suddenly rumpled wig of the mountain among the slanting of pines? What transfigurations! I will trespass through the squeeze of the brick walls, or I will wait here, between the pages, among the books decomposing on the shelves,

for you to appear, or for another, to bring it to my attention that I am here, that elsewhere some soul, frozen with fright, gazes at the clock's minute hands.

All these, could they be, do you think, purely an act of presence?