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22.11

For some reason we do not consider our territory to be a fertile land. Transcarpathia, Moldova, and, perhaps, the Kosiv region—those are the fertile lands. While all we have are potatoes, beans, some squash, and onions. But our region—the *prykarpattia* foothills—is an apple paradise. Nowhere else are such winter apples found, except, perhaps, somewhere in northern France, but they're hard to find in the winter anyway because the whole harvest is used to make calvados. And we have the most prized Rennet apples, and winter apples can last—if treated with love and care—until summer, without losing their taste or smell, even though they leave a trace of their fragrance in spaces where they have been stored.

In wintertime, mountain orchardists make their way to the stations in snowy hoards, bringing apples to the Ivano-Frankivsk market by train. If one of their sacks should tear along the way, those yellow-red apple billiard balls might utilize that which they had absorbed from the sun to warm the whole dreary *Chervona Ruta* train-car, or maybe they'll sing the hopeless frigidity of the snows with their cooled skin.

Sometimes that is what takes place. And then the apples need to be gathered. But once, it so happened, that not one single winter apple, which had been spilled along the railroad tracks, had been touched by anyone. They just lay there like that and then melted through snow's thickness and eventually seeped into the ground, maybe without even having deteriorated; no one can say for sure because, when the snow thawed, no traces remained. And no one picked up those apples because they spilled from a sack belonging to Mr. Boiko. Mr. Boiko was carrying a sack of red winter apples to the train station. It was still dark and freezing cold. His winter hat was tied tightly, his head bent from the weight sitting on his neck. That is why he didn't hear the train approaching from the rear, and the apples spilled out along the train tracks.

The reason people didn't gather them was not because, in wintertime, there were no flowers to lay at this spot, but because the apples served to remind them how difficult it was to escape one's fate. Because Mr. Boiko had been hit by trains in the past, having gotten his wagon stuck while crossing the tracks. Never had this happened to anyone else. He had always survived, unscathed, while his wagons had been smashed into splinters. For him, trains probably had been like lightning bolts.

I don't know why, but I find this story to be very optimistic. But it also reminds me that you never really know who it will be that eats up the harvest you have gathered.

24.11

When you live in the mountains, firewood becomes an important part of your life, like bread, milk, a bed, a shirt, a warm jacket. Firewood becomes an extension of you—it's as if it's a part of your body. You see condensed warmth in that timber, without which your body ceases to be yours. Upon it, in fact, your existence is dependent. And a pile of logs can be regarded as a peculiar anatomical structure that is part of your organism. That's why you can't even think of treating it as something that is foreign or supernatural; you just want to make sure there's lots of it.

Up against the walls, arranged stacks such as these transform houses into true fortresses. In such a lair, one can survive any attack. And they will come. The frost will press up against the walls so hard that the wooden framework inside will crack and, at least a couple of times, the snow will blow up against the door so that you'll have to climb out through the window, crawl over the snow heaps up to the door and shovel the snow. The wind will transform the windows into vibrating membranes and the chimney and the attic into territories settled by various unfamiliar creatures.

And then your choice is simple—don't burn it, and become one with the wind, the frost and the snow, or burn it, and transform the wood into warmth for your body.

That's after you've lived in the mountains for a while. Winter's progression, its calendar, its marked off days—all of these are traced by the gradually shrinking of that pile of wood.

But when you only come to the mountains occasionally, firewood is not treated as daily bread but as some kind of delicacy, as gourmet food, like a cordial. My firewood, in fact, is most similar to aged cognac. Because, in addition to last year's spruce logs, I also have a stash of beech logs, which has been stored for over twenty years. They are pure white, almost transparent and sonorous. And they provide a warmth that is simultaneously intense and delicate, and, most importantly—long lasting. They've learned not to hurry. It seems to get warmer when you're just holding such a log in your hand.

In Austria, they use such aged beech to make crucial components for violins. From one of my logs they could make about twenty. I am aware of how many violins I have burned over all these years, I am aware how much money I could have made, had I just taken one suitcase full of logs to Vienna. But I also know that I'll continue to burn them little by little, offering them to my friends and children, as one offers conversation or wine. And I'll spill the ashes onto the plot where garlic spends the winter, awaiting its time. Let it warm up as well.

30.11

After grandpa's funeral, I noticed that various people would approach me and, among other things, cautiously begin asking me about some kind of grass that is used for smoking. It reminded me of plots in films about secret drug addicts. I, of course, was convinced that grandpa had nothing to do with grass that is smoked and I tried to convince all those who had approached me of this. Old village men would walk away doubting my honesty.

I remember the way grandpa smoked. He had a plain, but high quality, pipe and a nice little bag for tobacco. He loved to take a break from work, lean up on his hoe, shovel, scythe or rake and smoke a bit in the shadow of the plum tree or on the knoll overgrown with sweet briar—depending on the weather. And it was by that plum tree that he had his worst asthma attack, the result of having spent many days spent on the Lysol-covered concrete floor of a solitary confinement cell.

After the attack, grandpa stopped smoking. For several months after, he would keep dried plums in his pocket, so that he could eat them to help suppress his cravings to smoke, and a bunch of kids would follow him, asking for a plum. Grandpa left behind some almost poisonous machorka tobacco dating back to the end of the 1950s, half a pack of Herzegovina-Flor cigarettes and a couple packs of small filtered Soviet cigarettes unimaginatively named “Minty”. But I knew nothing about any grass. By the way, those old men would keep coming up to me, sometimes once a year, sometimes more frequently, asking that, even if I were to continue to refuse giving them that grass, that I at least show it to them. I came to understand that all this represented some kind of secret my grandpa had had.

Several years later—in the attic, of course, among homemade Christmas ornaments, I found a little metal box of Lviv ground coffee. Upon opening it, I was astounded by the extraordinary fragrance that was released. It was the smell of an orchard in summer, honey poured over magic herbs, the most delicious fruits and the essence of the most delicate petals. And I recalled that scent, although I had believed that a distant recollection of it was really just another childhood fairy-tale. Grandpa would put a pinch of this herb in his tobacco and this would make the smoke very pleasant. This little box contained that grass those wise old men were searching for. As it turned out, it was a treasure more valuable than grandpa’s whole inheritance. This secret mix he had discovered was a real masterpiece. It makes poor tobacco good, and good tobacco—amazing. If grandpa wanted to, and if he had lived in a different part of the world, he could have become the magnate, the champion and the hero of all smokers. Instead, he passed that chance along to me. Maybe someday I’ll be up for it. But today, I

just pull a pinch of herb from the little box, mix it with Dutch tobacco and throw myself a little party. And I meditate over grandpa. And, to this day, I don't know what grass is contained therein.

04.12

The arrival of the concept of second-hand—the market for used clothes—can be considered to be one of the most important events in recent years. It greatly affected our daily lives. Let's recall Soviet times, when clothing was rather expensive and most fellow citizens wore sad, identical suits, coats, jackets and hats. Because of this, our people were recognizable throughout the world, in the way that Indians or Africans are, when they wear their national costumes. Second-hand provided two or three major possibilities—to have lots of affordable clothes, to have everyone dressed differently, and, most importantly—to find something that fit you well.

But there is a great danger hidden within it. Because we know that clothing, like nothing else, accumulates the energy of its owner. Thus, every one of us, by donning something worn by the anonymous, takes on the remains of something that is good or bad, calm or nervous, happy or tragic. It is not possible to ever deduce which it is; it is not possible to determine it in any manner. The grand circulation of the clothing spirits is like the massive spreading of various viruses, which enter genetic codes, seeping into them, snatching for themselves something from the previous master, and then inhabiting the next person with all of this.

I thought of these things when I got dressed this morning—there was not one single thing that I myself had purchased. Everything had been given to me, everything was someone else's, everything with traces of someone else's life. A jacket given as a gift, which had been purchased at a Prague store stocked with goods hailing from various 'colonies.' A sweater, which earlier, had belonged to a famous, avant-garde actress from a German youth theater. A shirt worn by a Kurd, who had fought for the sovereignty of his people and who, simultaneously,

was a student at Lviv University. An absurd pair of pants, wide at the waist and of a stupid color, presented to me as a sign of recognition by the Maltese Order. A belt given to me by grandpa on the day I turned seven, and on which I have noted every new place where I have been. Complimentary socks obtained by an actual German count when he flew on Lufthansa Airlines. Army boots which had taken part in the storming of the palace of the President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Also—an earring given to me as a present, a silver ring, a watch, a knife. A Franciscan cross brought from Assisi. I did not choose any of these things myself. They came to me from various parts and they brought with them fragments of the lives and fates of others. But my advantage over the second-hand is that I know what to expect from each of these things.

07.12

Today I was scolded—so and so or so and so, who had raised you, would never have conducted themselves in such a way. In other words, what happened to all the guidance you received, your upbringing? At first, I was shocked—I truly did not want it to be this way. I would like to be the person I was brought up to be. But after a few hours, it hit me—my god!—well I’ve been raised by so many different, extraordinary people. I loved all of them, I was enamored with all of them, and I’ve absorbed something from, and remembered something about, each one of them. But these people themselves were so dissimilar they often had difficulty agreeing on anything. I didn’t recognize this as a child because I didn’t comprehend it. I now realize that certain individuals who raised me, each of whom had the same amount of influence on me, were all equally exceptional. That’s why coming to a conclusion based on one, as criminologists say, episode, is incorrect, illogical and impossible.

And, in addition to living relatives, two irrefutable factors, that have had a direct influence on me, have to be taken into account—the dictate of blood, that eccentric twisting of heredities, and, of course, myths—stories about those whom I never met in my life but without whom I cannot imagine my worldview.

Take this story about my great grandmother, for example. When it became too dangerous for my great grandfather to remain here in Galicia, Sheptytsky was able to get him to America. After a period of time, my great grandmother joined him there. She settled in a small town, and, being the wife of a priest, had to participate in the social life there. But my great grandmother had one important need—she was a heavy smoker. And in America at that time, a woman who smoked was looked upon with disdain. Smoking in public was simply forbidden. My great grandmother couldn't last more than half an hour without a cigarette. She truly loved her husband but she just could not suffer such torture. She stayed in America for a bit longer and then took her child, who had been born there, and returned to her homeland. Forever. She kept smoking and later died of lung cancer. This was foreseeable but, ultimately, not obligatory. What was obligatory was not succumbing to the decrees and dictates of social mandates. And what can be said about this? How can her conduct be logically justified, and moreover, how can all this be applied to an interpretation of my behavior? And to the fact that, in one particular episode, I did not act like so and so, or so and so, who had raised me.

09.12

I believe that most offences should be forgiven. I believe that society should not be divided into the guilty and the not-guilty. However... Today, I came across a manifestation of something that had frightened me ten years ago. Here's what happened. It was the Ukrainian revolution. We, students from L'viv, were organizing a very risky demonstration in Kyiv. Marching toward us was a riot police brigade. This was scary, but most of us were used to it. That day, doubt had emerged within the police. So they didn't start beating us right away. Several leaders of the student corps, including me, were packed into a car and taken to the commanders of the Kyiv special forces. There were people there, whose last names were the very symbols of brutality, but it's not worth listing them now because they are the ones who are in power in today's Ukraine. And it was then, at that interrogation ten years ago, that I suddenly understood: a

time—the one for which, in fact, we are fighting now—will come when I will be forced to attest, to these very people, my allegiance to a sovereign Ukrainian state. I understood that neither my absolute belief in Ukraine, nor my indisputable patriotic upbringing, nor that which I do now, so that Ukraine may continue to exist, nor all that my family has done—nothing will protect me from that situation when I will be forced to tell all those generals and their cronies that I am for Ukraine and for its statehood. It's absurd but absurd things such as these are precisely those that usually come to fruition. And today, I finally experienced this as reality. I am all for forgiving, I am against revising biographies, but I desire that which, it seems, is completely normal—that the forgiven understand that they have been forgiven, that the guilty know that they are guilty and, thus, don't continue their offences. I don't want to have to prove to people responsible for all sorts of malevolence back then, that I am for this country and for this state. I don't want former enemies to judge what I have done for my people. And I don't want to have to answer to boys from the special service who were members of the Komsomol to its dying days and who are now responsible for the safety of my country. Even though I have lost the biggest game of my life and things have not turned out the way we had wanted them to, my former brothers-in-arms and I should not have to fear the harassment of those who change colors when it's convenient.

15.01

Living in my home (in addition to various people) is an extraordinary plant—an araucaria. If you look through the window from the street, you can see it. The araucaria is still shorter than me, although it's over a hundred years old. They grow very slowly, these araucaria, in their Andes. For araucaria are Andes evergreens. And they live some three thousand years. They were rather fashionable in European dwellings at the beginning of the century. The Secession style adored ornaments such as these. And truth be told, it really is beautiful. It has paw-like branches, four on each level. It usually does not contain more than three levels. The rest gradual shift, die off and are moved out of the way. And

fresh millimeters begin to grow on the top. This araucaria was given to my grandma as a gift in return for some sort of successful medical treatment back in the 20s. At that time, it was no taller than 40 cm, although it was older than my grandma, who, actually, was not yet a grandma. Based on its life span, the araucaria was an infant. At first, the plant did not notice anything. Later, it became increasingly nosy of everything that went on in the house and all our experiences came to be preserved in its tree rings. Because it's been proven that plants—especially such perfect ones—although, perhaps, not fully capable of thought, at the very least, understand, sense and remember everything.

Sometimes it's scary to be in its presence. Because it's not so easy to have witnessed past events and then live on for a few more thousand years, having outlived us all, everyone close to it now. For it, we, probably, are like some kind of half-real, half-imagined childhood memory. Perhaps, it barely notices us—if one takes the difference in our life spans into consideration. Surely, it's not able to comprehend individual episodes that take place with us as they happen—in the same way that a camera with an unbelievably long shutter speed does not fixate something that has moved somewhere.

In that way, trees that live slowly don't notice, cannot notice, the existence of seasonal butterflies.

And I bathe it every now and then. And every time I take out the trash, I see that my trash bin is unique because it contains araucaria branches.

Not long ago I purchased another little evergreen from the Andes. Perhaps it's as old as I am. I'm convinced that this araucaria, at least, will survive to see better years.

24.01

The greatest joy a person, or any other living thing, can possess is communication. No matter what some may think, it is through communication that all things having to do with happiness come together. Without

communication everything loses its sense and no pleasures can bring it back. That is why anything having to do with poor communication always results in drama. And complete misunderstanding—tragedy. There are various types of misunderstanding—on purpose or not on purpose, sudden or drawn out, fleeting or endless, radical or compromising. They're all tragic. And, first and foremost, they are based on an opposition of desires and intentions—this is the first level of misunderstanding. And the second level is more complicated—when interests are common but there are different world views and manners of coexistence. And even higher is the level on which everything concurs, except for an understanding of words—meanings, shades, emphases, the history of a word and its various synonyms.

These tragedies are the most unpleasant ones and there is almost no way out of such a situation. What's saddest is when everybody thinks that they've done everything they could to understand someone else, and to make themselves as easily understood as possible. What remains, then, is nothing but sorrow, reproach and distrust. I once knew a turtle. And I knew its owners. Both the owners and the turtle were very pleasant and loved one another; they did all they could to make sure that everyone was satisfied and happy. I remember the look that turtle had when it communicated with its owners. But one day the turtle carelessly crawled to the edge of the balcony and fell helplessly down onto the pavement. Luckily, it was found right away and taken back home. As it turned out, it was still alive—the shell had been only chipped a little bit. They treated it and it seemed like everything was back to normal. But something was not quite right—happiness had disappeared; at first the turtle became indifferent and soon, as a result—so did the people.

Gone were communication, contact, and understanding. Remaining were sorrow, reproach and distrust. And that is how they lived. On one occasion, I gazed into the turtle's eyes for a long time and came to understand everything. It had become different—having fallen, the turtle had damaged its brain. Permanently. Simply put, it had gone crazy. And we could not know what was going on in its head—perhaps total darkness, perhaps the brightest of search-lights, maybe it had forgotten everything or, maybe, it had excruciating

headaches every night, maybe it tickled between its brain and its skull or maybe all sounds and smells irritated it. We could not know. We could not come to an understanding. We could not advise. We could not save it because we could not fully communicate. It, by the way, will live for another 240 years. With all of the above, but without us.

25.01

“A fable, that’s all,” is what they say in the mountains, when they are inferring that something is not worthy of attention or is trivial. “Tell us the latest fable,” they say on the street, as night approaches, when a couple of friends sit by the fountain, enjoying a few beers at the end of a day of partying. It is then that true yet fantastic life stories are told, having been passed along by an acquaintance. And literary scholars refer to a fable as a short, allegorical work, in which usually animals, or other natural phenomena, embody various human characteristics, traits and conditions.

For too long, people have abused that last definition of a fable. As a result, an enormous amount of mistakes and superstitions have occurred, which twist the truths of natural science. Animals have become erroneous symbols, strapped with the burden of human faults and digressions that are alien to them. Yet, this can be looked at from another point of view. Instead of utilizing animals-protagonists when telling human stories, we can simply study actual situations that animals find themselves in and then correctly recognize that which took place, is taking place, or will be taking place, with us. So here’s a short and true, non-fable story about how foxes acquire dwellings.

For foxes, to live comfortably in luxurious burrows is of paramount importance. But they are incapable of, don’t want to, and don’t know how to, dig them. Wonderful burrows are made by badgers—deep, dry, sophisticated, multi-roomed. Toilets and bedrooms are in separate rooms; corridors branch out; there are several entrances and exits. Badgers are born to be builders. While foxes

need to find badgers' burrows and take them over. It is impossible to do this by force. A badger's jaw is among the most powerful, and a strike with its paw can kill two foxes, along with their babies. But there is another way, another approach. Badgers are extremely tidy animals. They hate—they cannot stand—the smell of a toilet. Foxes take advantage of this. Upon discovering a badger's dwelling, they relieve themselves right at the entrance. The first time around, the badger gathers the feces and buries it somewhere. And then the foxes do it again. And the badgers do it again. This goes on for several consecutive days. The tired and disillusioned badgers gather their whole family, including their pregnant women, infants, teenagers and the helpless aged, and abandon their homestead. They cannot take it any more. They prefer to go a different place and build a new, ideal home—sophisticated, dry and deep. And the trashed, vacated burrow is then calmly settled by the foxes.

Translated by Mark Andryczyk

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