

The huge complexity, the way the scandals blossomed in the public eye,

The chiaroscuro of the unknown and the known, the bright careers Destroyed, the President believing his own lies.

From the kitchen, it seemed that Alex had constructed a maquette Of Washington with all its shady machinations, and this

Now floated just above the table, our eyes on it, Believable down to the last acanthus.

Each further word and phrase

Had the effect of altering it however slightly –

New colours and textures moved across its surface

As he went on explaining quietly.

Somehow Orpheus and Charon were a part of this –

The tendrils of his clauses stretching out in all directions

Kept twining themselves round the trills and dour cadenzas

Expressed into the apartment's air by Japanese electronics.

Somehow the colours of our walls were part of this as well,

The arrangement of the furniture,

The way the others sat there all the while,

The way that I, amidst the after-dinner clutter,

Was simply standing in the kitchen, thinking.

I placed the mocha on the hob and waited in the background.

### **'You meet them at mid-afternoon receptions...'**

You meet them at mid-afternoon receptions where they have come from their small offices in ministries. They smile and they profess an interest in the IMF and options,

anxious to present the facts they know, yet curious if they feel that you know more, as if the market and the trading-floor had been invented just two months ago.

Their ties: diagonals of blue and white designed a year after the tanks came in, a sense of speed imparted by flecks of brown; their shirts the colour of collective wheat;

their smiling tolerance of the dissidents who now hold power, like parents who indulge idealistic children and won't divulge hard truths just yet, their sympathy immense;

their bonhomie; their polished anecdotes – all this suggests you couldn't have them shot and afterwards feel good about it, not because you like the golden Jakeš quotes

(you do) but because they impersonate a human being oh so well; will even take out photographs of faded children (who seem improbable in build and trait).

What they won't mention: X years back the period when in the role of high apparachiks they suddenly found that three or so rough weeks and their Socialist Republic had disappeared,

much as when in a crowded tram you find your wallet gone, the banknotes and IDs spirited away by murderers and thieves and other dirty bastards of that kind.

### **'Linger, tag, let go...'**

Linger, tag, let go and drift off through the children's furniture, while I do lighting.

Crowds on a loop, they flow and gaze considering their future spent with each beautifully designed bright thing.

Poor Adam Zagajewski lies on a desk in Swedish translation

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*Jakeš: Miloš Jakeš was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from 1981 to 1989, and head of the People's Militia (1987-89).*

in every showroom –  
 a heavy Polish key  
 to Åke's fraught life situation.  
 You're Åsa and I'm Åke, we consume  
 and money circulates  
 with new perspectives, skylights on the world  
 (Relax, *Nepstveek*  
 says IKEA now rates  
 quite high in labour-standards – word  
 is that they care what happens in Mozambique).

We yaw and joke and bicker  
 through this huge warehouse at the edge of Prague.  
 I make you out  
 among the garden wicker,  
 the pots, the outdoor shelving, rag-tag  
 terracotta objects – just about,  
 and don't think that I love you,  
 Åsa, but that you're woven into me,  
 although I might  
 be anybody too.  
 We exit. There's not much that we see.  
 Our eyes are blinded by the real sunlight.

### 'They stand around...'

*Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur  
 das Offene. Nur unsere Augen sind  
 wie umgekehrt und ganz um sie gestellt  
 als Fallen, rings um ihren freien Ausgang.*

They stand around. They reach into the offing  
 and pull him slowly out into the theatre.  
 Dragged struggling from the open, crying and coughing,  
 he feels arms hold him tight, then tighter.

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*Epigraph:* From the eighth of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*: 'With all its eyes the natural world looks out/ into the Open. Only our eyes are turned / backward, and surround plant, animal, child/ like traps, as they emerge into their freedom' (trs. Stephen Mitchell).

Sunlight fills an endless corridor.  
 Suddenly all its doors are shut at once.  
 It starts from here, the video recorder  
 is focused and the footage runs and runs.  
 They hold you out into the world and praise  
 your small fresh body, your full-throated fuss.  
 Come in to this enclosure of our days  
 and stay a while and more. Come home to us,  
 me stockstill missing all the nurse just said,  
 your mother lying emptied on the bed.

### 'Go through and down the steps...'

Go through and down the steps  
 into this low-lit cave with floral vaults,  
 the waitresses manoeuvring  
 past people who are also moving  
 to *Rebirth of the Cool* – its huge bass volts  
 juddering through the depths,  
 and sailing over those  
 a lithe and black soprano melody.  
 Impossible to get the lyrics  
 but it's love and *la vie en rose*  
 that sweetens through the voice – love is the eddy  
 that floats & swerves & flicks

out rippling through the hips  
 of this girl bringing me a beer just now.  
 She barely lingers, midriff bared,  
 and seems amidst all this so Tao.  
 And oh how smoothly, quickly, she now slips,  
 her tight black trousers flared,  
 back into the flows  
 and systems of her global clientele,  
 the press of KOOKAI and GAP clothes,  
 their jet-lagged, blue-chip ironies,  
 and her flesh taken with their push and swell,  
 her mouth, her hands, her eyes...