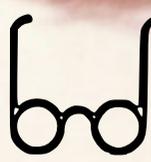


Poems

THE GENDERLESS EGG

ROBERT MOSCALIUC



 THE
DOUBTFUL
RECLUSE

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Designed and written by Robert Moscaliuc for The Doubtful Recluse.

WWW.THEDOUBTFULRECLUSE.COM

Originally published in Italy and the European Union.

*To Matteo F., who let his monsters come out to play.
And to Davide S., who threw my solitude into the fire.*

Robert Jofcalivo

ONE HUNDRED

These men, *my men*
Do their best
When they disappear.

Gay men are the greatest magicians
On the face of the Earth.

They're shapeshifters.
Pretenders.
And I'm one of them.

This is my makeup.
My plastic nerves.
There's so much pretending to do.

NINETY-NINE

When you opened your arms
The grasshoppers hushed
The dogs lowered their ears.

It was
akin to seeing a saint
struggling to climb a tree
to see better in the distance.

NINETY-EIGHT

He's shorter than me
Which is not really my thing.
I'm giving it a try.

We're discussing psychiatry over beers
In a cheap bar by the train station.

Then I'm dizzy halfway through my beer
Let him have it.

I kiss him
Forcibly, rather
Because the train is about to leave
and I'm supposed to be on it.

NINETY-SEVEN

My story is not bigger than yours
Yours moves with the weight of
centuries.

My poets are young
Their instruments
still awkward.

NINETY-SIX

*You're not ugly
You just don't want to be beautiful.*

The words come down from the ceiling
like humid plaster.

I'm the duchess who cannot
bring boys into the world of men.

*Baby, I sing,
when you don't like someone
you tell them they need to heal.*

It's what you do.

As if, once healed
they would come back to you.

NINETY-FIVE

You did a great job.
You said and squeezed my thigh.
Later you'll say by not saying it
That my thighs are the only part of my body
You like.

My body, the tragedy.

That night
I imagine myself becoming my thighs
The way a child dreams of becoming
their favorite actor
the one with the dreamy eyes
and the mysterious smile.

NINETY-FOUR

I put the flower you gave me
 behind my ear
And thanked you solemnly.
 Perhaps theatrically.
You know, the way *we* do it.

That's when I heard the man
Sitting on a park bench with his family
 On a Wednesday afternoon
 Saying
These people, they're [*that word*].

I looked at you and you became [*that word*]
My hands, they became [*that word*]
 The world,
It became [*that word*].

NINETY-THREE

When I told my mother I'm gay
She finished the sentence for me.

*She knew and I knew she knew.
But I had to say it to make sure.*

I felt blessed because I didn't have to talk to her
Not about the women I wasn't going to marry
But about the men I was still afraid of.

My father.

My brother.

My grandfather.

My uncle.

These men who have grown bigger than me.

NINETY-TWO

I don't tell the boy who's also a nurse
I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

It's four in the afternoon
When my guts start sending signals
While he's above me
Grunting.

Pretending to be a man.

NINETY-ONE

To these, *my men*
I've built an altar
Out of my failed attempts
to be like them.

To wear my body a certain way.
To be seen doing certain things.

NINETY

The boy in my bed makes a joke
About my CK underwear.
We don't talk about our lives
Except to keep the dirty talk
At sanitary levels.

*He bites my tongue
When I should bite my own.*

There comes a time when one should talk
about disease as well.
The way you can't put your finger on it.
Or them.
Much like unicorns or scolding fingers
they exist
in some invisible realm
both limit and extension
to our own.

EIGHTY-NINE

We were somewhere in Berlin
Drinking beer and listening to protesters screaming
Across the river from where we were sitting.

You told me, *you'll find somebody*
You'll see.

And I knew it wasn't you.
Somebody is always somebody else.

EIGHTY-EIGHT

The man with a limp from Rosenthaler Platz
Was out of breath when we met in front of the pharmacy.

I had sushi he had some variety of chicken.
By the time he asked me to come to his house
[Which happened to be close by]
He had regained his breath.
I told him NO, NEXT TIME.

But there wasn't a next time.

EIGHTY-SEVEN

When I got off the train
You were there
But we both pretended we hadn't seen each other.

*To make yourself invisible
is another way
of saying you've moved on.*

I didn't want to start *that* conversation again
About how positive I was about life
About how lost you felt
About how these two views of life
Are inherently incompatible with each other.

EIGHTY-SIX

Peter's from Boston.

[We're in Berlin.]

We're having lunch in the cafeteria
German food tastes so bad
But Peter makes it better.
I can see his chest hair in the opening
Of his shirt. He says,

*I knew you were not Italian
Your English is too good.*

And I might have heard him say *baby*
But that might be a figment of my imagination.

EIGHTY-FIVE

Later we're in a restaurant
I'm hating the salad
But I won't let the man see that.

I want to crawl underneath the table:
I got the salad
Because it was the only thing I could afford.

EIGHTY-FOUR

The man across the table
Is talking to me while waving a glass of red wine
The way you would wave a goblet with sacred blood
Or a knife in some bad movie.

I want to kiss him so badly
I know he's putting these words between us
The way other men build highways
To run away.

EIGHTY-THREE

At times, when I listen to you on the phone
Your words grow into my ears akin to demon trees
The way you can't remember
How tears feel and you think of crushed grass
In mid September.

They curl akin to dancers when they fall
With fatigue and smell their own sweat
And for a moment have the sense of being
Outside their own bodies.

They scrape the surface of my forehead
Lightly, like the wind of a train
That's not supposed to take you anywhere.

EIGHTY-TWO

[for R.]

If you were to hold the world in your mouth
All of us would dream of sleeping better
Our backs and necks leaning against
Your mouth, resting, finally, inside your words.

If you were to hold the world in your mouth
I would cover it with my own
With otherworldly kisses
Plant words around it
The way you would plant roses
Around the house.

If you were to hold the world in your mouth
I would breathe the air between us until
We're breathless, until there's none left
To mark the space between us.

EIGHTY-ONE

Here in this house
The cold above the skin at sundown
Is a coat of arms
With memories sewn in between the legs
Of ancient beasts and nightmares.
Here in this house where I grew brain
And tongue and toes
The light smells of ants
Where no lover stepped or slept
Or clicked his tongue in disagreement
From this house I fled I flee
My legs curled behind my back.

EIGHTY

I was crossing the street when I saw the man
Dead in his tracks and jeans
As if waiting for the light to change.

When his arm fell off from his body
And rolled on the burning sidewalk
Blue liquid and sparks poured
From the stump of his shoulder.

This is the thanks I get, he shouted.
I said I was sorry,
Our words like the tracks of a wheelbarrow
On freshly laid pavement.

SEVENTY-NINE

Men with goatees with
Hideous shirts and equally hideous ties
Reading from *The Great Gatsby*
On trains late at night
Teach you one thing and one thing only:
Love is the one thing you can do without.

You just need a job
To work and be seen returning
From the honest work
That somehow ennobles
The hideous tie.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

I hold my fears in my mouth
The way you hold your mouthwash.
My tongue sorts them out
Akin to grandma's chubby arms
Sorting through peas in the morning.

The people you love
Start by loving you back
But end up hating you
With the fierceness of overachievers.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

There are so many train stations
By which I did not sit or weep
But felt instead strangely energized
By watching others return
To welcoming arms.

*You leave so many times, so often,
Until you're gone for good.*

SEVENTY-SIX

It seemed unlikely
That such love could be held together
By groups of muscles so taut
As if there, on the beach,
Where the picture was taken
The rocks beneath you
And the whole world as well
Were all loose compared
To your composure.

SEVENTY-FIVE

Baby, our song is the grunt of falling trees
Cut down in unison;
The sweaty woodcutters' chant.

When you hold your bare foot on my face
Does it feel rubbery with affection?
Because every time you do that
It feels as if my mother's world
made of husbands is suddenly supreme;
Where each and every dream
Is but another ironed shirt
Pressed down to follow
The stubbornness of her mother's mother.

SEVENTY-FOUR

In restless darkness at the cinema
I wonder what verb should one use
For holding hands while on the screen
The green-eyed monster
Booms from the speakers
“What you have is not forever.”

We return, after the movie
To the room we've rent
And I go down your body
Through the tattoos
And the hair
To get to you.

SEVENTY-THREE

The nasal grunt running towards me
Eyeing me like a hungry dog
Over the desks and stacks of books
As you lift your sweater over your head
To let your chest breathe in the stuffed room
Makes me want to hide in shame.

*The bodies of these men
I cannot live without.*

SEVENTY-TWO

You had so many faces
And I saw each one of them
While waiting for my afternoon train.

That's how I knew about you,
About how your tongue
Could sprout into my mouth
The way the ocean floor splits
Behind the anchors
Of sturdy cruise ships.

SEVENTY-ONE

Come to my house where
We're constantly waking up
Revelation after revelation
Cigarettes from a bottomless pack.
Where I'll stand mortified
And all smiles
Glad to have such a man in my life.

Our love is a form of real estate.
We must kiss on our property.
In our cars.
In parking lots.

SEVENTY

Come back to our room
Where I'll fatten you up
Like those actors who need
To bulk up for their next part.
I'll feed you with this fantasy of me wearing
A Norwegian sweater
While working on my thesis.
Of you preparing hot cocoa.
I'll sell it to you, baby,
Not like a merchant
But more like a bartender
Who never gets drunk
On his own liquor.
Somebody has to keep vigil
To keep your dreams awake.

SIXTY-NINE

My king, sing to me again
Look again like a Russian doll
Your fuzz ruffled
Behind those glasses of pure cruelty
And I'll speak to you again
Of the animals you see in your dreams
Don't you know I'm that dog
You're not afraid of?

We played this game
Where you were a king
And you said your dick was a god
I was supposed to trust.

SIXTY-EIGHT

Intelligent men turn into functional housewives
It happens while they rewrite Shakespeare late at night
Their houses childless.

It happens
While they see triangles uniting to form a circle
Their sharp tips like the noses of taciturn men.

My men are not real, of course
But lifeless sympathies one sees
Shared on train seats on cold January mornings
When the grime on the upholstery
Looks utterly authorless.

SIXTY-SEVEN

I'm sorry, said contemptuously,
This our love, which looks like
The warped plastic handle of
A stainless steel cheese grater
Can't replace the light bulbs
Above the bathroom sink.
It doesn't know algebra
While standing above
A crying kid.

SIXTY-SIX

Those waters with ominous names
In which we swam laughing
Brought on our shores
Bodies written in different languages
And we gave them poisoned shoes
As if the shoes were our most prized possessions.

SIXTY-FIVE

The night you took me out
And you wanted to go to the disco
I knew you were looking for people
To witness your conquest
Let them see the strip of land
You stuck your flag into
I felt girlish and real.

*For once
I felt I could see the world from above.*

We looked at each other as if
We exchanged a rifle
And I had not gone through
The motions properly.

SIXTY-FOUR

Our sex bears the mental image
Of a white van at a time of heightened
Vigilance.

There must be violence.
Each encounter a show of force.

SIXTY-THREE

After the man wished me luck
I washed the apple
And cut deep into its cheeks.
I thought how easy it could be
To use the same knife to hurt myself,
The blade like a dog's tongue thick with saliva
Circling a bone,
To finally see how pain
Is not so much like broken glass.

They all wish me luck
As if I'm about to get out of a green zone

unarmed

SIXTY-TWO

How can you be so sure?
When light travels with such rapid tenderness
Over the hoods of cars traveling at night

Like the bowling pins of jugglers
Seen in a curved mirror.

I imagine us listening to the playlists
I diligently prepare for each trip.

This is where we'll sing together.
This is where I'll touch your knee
Lightly.

These songs they form a geography
of discovery.

SIXTY-ONE

We're not actors in this movie.
We happen to be around staring
At a made up man getting into a taxi.

Though we hear the director screaming *Cut!*
Let's wrap it up, people!
We go on living
And hope others see us
The way we saw the man getting into a taxi.

SIXTY

Somewhere along the wombs of women
I later learned to call my mothers,
I must've changed my mind.

*The genderless egg
has the wisdom of an alien race.*

Set my mind on the lipstick-red bound path
To nowadays, a path as irregular
As the thoughts in which I wonder
Whether women, too, fall for men
The way *I* do.

FIFTY-NINE

The night you failed to arrive at her doorstep
I had to listen to parallel rooms taking turns
At calling each other vile.
And all I wanted to tell you was that
People won't miss you
Or look for you in the crowd
Unless you give them reason to.

FIFTY-EIGHT

Christmas is always the ghost of
Christmas past; it is light
In all its moods and phases
Seen all at once.

FIFTY-SEVEN

To stop a river from running
You must drink its waters
Until there's none left.

You must add stones
From its unwelcoming bed
To your empty pockets
Until they feel heavy with love.
Then drink.
Drink to us.

*Celebrating must feel this way.
A way of letting go.*

FIFTY-SIX

When you opened your eyes
Your world was as big as a bully
His blond hair cut short you saw the scalp
So fragile above a forehead of fury.

I was in it, too
And you wanted to spit me out
Like a chunk of rotten apple you bit into
Knowingly.

FIFTY-FIVE

Lovers in the world unite to give you:
The ideal shape
So amorphous you'll never fit in
No matter how many sit-ups you do.

But you try anyway and you sweat your life out of you
And sometimes
Someone might accept you with
An inaudible grunt
And live the rest of their lives thinking
About how they could have done better.

FIFTY-FOUR

This laughter, my laughter;
It's sitting in our room
Like a row of piano keys
Just under my breastplate.
It might be a distraction
From your daily chores
Such as waking up in Paris
Next to a man with stretch marks.
It might resemble the rat-a-tat-tat
Of me thrashing our room.

FIFTY-THREE

I'm not sure but I might be
Lying in a hole in the grass
A giant serpent moving above me.
Really, I don't know what to do
So I just help the serpent move above me
Making sure it feels I'm part of the grass
Hoping it won't realize I'm a man
Who doesn't know what to do.

FIFTY-TWO

It's the new Darwinism:
Your life turns into a supermarket.
People come
Take what they need.
Cash and carry.
You are the fittest
Only if you have what other people need.

FIFTY-ONE

The stars on our dark ceiling so sharp that
When you push your palms up against them
As if to push a violent man off you
Or the lid of a coffin six feet under
They make you bleed.

It's the only time when we're alone
we can finally be ourselves
When we can lick our armpits
And measure ourselves against each other.
Where safety is a form of neutralized shame.