

# Гумилёв и Ахматова via СТРАННИКОВ

*by strannikov*

## **The streetcar that lost its way**

Walking down an unfamiliar street,  
I heard a sudden caw of crows,  
some thunder afar, strums of a lute—  
a streetcar came flying along.

How I got on board I'll never know,  
a mystery in daylight stark,  
and as it fled on down the street,  
a trail of fire flaming in mid-air.

It sped along, a dark black-winged storm,  
dropping lost into fathomless time—  
“Conductor, stop this streetcar now!  
Conductor, stop this car at once!”

Far too late: already by now  
we'd flasht past the wall, dasht through a grove  
of palms, past Neva, Nile, and Seine,  
clattered 'cross three bridges in turn.

—and flashing through a rushing glass,  
a beggar's face peered briefly in,  
the same, of course, who died last year  
in Beirut, just a year ago.

Where could I be? My heart replied,

dawdling in anxiety:  
“Is this the place where you can buy  
a pass to the India of souls?”

Sure enough, a billboard inked in blood—  
“Groceries”—but here I know they sell  
no lettuces or cabbages  
but only inert, lifeless heads.

The executioner appeared,  
and in his red shirt, swollen-faced,  
loppt off my head, which fell with those  
on the floor of this blood-slimed box.

In an alley a wooden fence,  
a three-windowed house, a grey yard:  
“Conductor, stop this streetcar now!  
Conductor, stop this car at once!”

Mashenka, it was here you lived and sang,  
wove rugs for me, whom you would wed.  
Where now your body, your voice that sang?  
It cannot be that you are dead!

You wept and moaned inside your room  
while I, with powder on my hair,  
went to the Empress to present myself  
and to never see you again.

Only now do I see it all:  
our freedom is but light that breaks through glass,  
that shines from some other world—while here stand  
shadowed people at the entrance of their zoo.

Just then, a full familiar wind

begins to whirling by—and beyond the bridge,  
a rider's hand in iron glove  
steers a horse whose front hooves leap at me.

Orthodox stronghold, great and true,  
Saint Isaac's dome holds up the sky—  
there shall I pray for Mashenka's health,  
there shall I chant a requiem for me.

—but even now do shadows haunt my heart:  
it's difficult to breathe, it's hard to live—  
Mashenka, I could never guess  
that love and grief could last so large.

### **The sacred boundary**

A natural boundary stands  
on any stretch of shared and cherished land—  
no passion, no love, no lover may cross,  
even if lips in horrid silence press,  
even though a heart cracks out and opens.

Friendship, too, lacks all strength here,  
no matter what fires, what glories of years,  
what happiness across short days is born—  
when the soul is free and remains aloof  
from all enfeeblements of every sense.

Those who aim to cross this sacred bound  
are crazed, and those who reach it meet their grief,  
in miserable agony torn up:  
now it is my heart you understand  
that does not speed its beat beneath your hand.

## **We have no talent for saying goodbye**

We have no talent for saying goodbye,  
shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm we roam.  
Already night begins to dim the day:  
your face is blank, and I now have no words.

Let's pause to go into this church to see—  
a funeral or marriage, christening—  
not looking to each other's eyes we'll leave:  
how can it be our lives don't seem to work?

—or let us go into this graveyard here  
and squat atop this spot of wallowed snow:  
you'll take a stick and trace out with its tip  
the rooms in which together we shall live.

