

Fleeting Encounters

by Elina Petrova

i L'Oiseau bleu

Running late. A sudden jolt of wonder —
indigo bunting under my window:

small bodied and molting, like the four
red finches in my feeder — only blue.

He pecks at shells they spit.
I like him best.

ii Chickadee

“What do you want me to make?” — says little Jasmine:
black cherry eyes & a hundred braids.

She makes a nest. She makes ice cream. She
makes gumbo. All is sawdust & blades of grass
stuffed in a gap between oak surface roots.

There is a chickadee above her — black cap & bib,
a pure two-note *fee-bee* outside of the bebop
in the hastening highway.

iii Bard

If a wren in hand is better
than a crane out of it,
then the wren was my crane.

I walked for him to this suburbia,
like a druid,
made nests of old shoe boxes
until I merged in his trill.

Now you won't see us
unless we sing.

iv Possibilities

Heidegger suggested roaming graveyards.
Pascal — sitting quietly in a room alone. Derrida —
deconstructing the language of *mauvaise foi*.
James Baldwin, ah — just recall his full eyes,
scarfed figure passing a Parisian bridge.

A Mississippi kite perched on my pine—
grey against grey sky before thunder.
Greeting first gusts. Awfully beautiful.

Temperature drop. Songbirds leave my patio.
Only he and I, in a sleeveless shirt,
stare at each other: curious and calm —
sitting quietly, just as Blaise said.

v Ptashka –

little bird in Ukrainian—a 20-year-old paramedic who sang folk ballads
to the soldiers in Mariupol's dark, besieged "Azovstal". Swapped for
several Russians, she is finally back from a hospital after beatings by
guards. Her smile is still blithe, the silt of pain buried deep in the lakes
of blue eyes, when she says how she missed kava — Turkish coffee
sipped alfresco in Old Kyiv — and squints at the October sun caressing
her dear cobblestones and passersby.

vi *Ibis*

An ibis guides me at dawn in Donetsk —
the hobbled woman, she slowly paces upstairs
to my abandoned Apt. 55, bows
to former neighbors — mostly dead
or drunk from the morning to cirrhosis,
but keeping doors ajar, so Ibis and I
could seep to the limbo of coal miners.

Mines are flooded. So are homes in Kherson.
Explosions beyond the Kalmius recall the future.
Ibis looks at the old maple from my window,
and what enframes her is intact and brown,
as a forgotten surveillance file.

vii *Heron*

A yellow-crowned night heron
perches on the power line
and watches me — now from the roof —
as I talk on the cellphone with my dead
friend's daughter.

She left her ex, drinking
on the wrong side of the war,
moved her new man from Nashville
to the Sunshine State, but doesn't swim —
only tans, drives to the gym.

Her mom once reviewed my book
in Russian. Now it's my turn to
introduce her chick to America.

The sun sinks, but what do I know,
except that herons' stomachs
dissolve shells of crustaceans.
Your daughter *is* an American —
don't worry, Natasha.

viii *Protection*

Like a hummingbird
under the hawk nest,
I settled here, hiding
from murder jays.

ix *Poet*

She might've flown two
thousand miles again.
The tiniest bird: the largest
brain, the fastest heart.

Her job is to flutter
at petals and glass flasks,
to open flat tips of her tongue
and draw nectar until

it doubles her weight
with sweetness
from the bright
harsh world flashing by.