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DEMIE JONAITIS

[Poetry]

Encounter in Vilnius

Two strangers. One room.
Having lived, like you,
deeper than the sea that divides us,
I lay my multiple lives
besides yours
among the gifts on the coffee table
between us.

Your home closed to me
and mine to you
(Palanga and New York obliterated),
we meet in this collective enclosure,
"International" Gintaras Hotel;
Lithuanian roses from a stranger —
your mother —
wither tall and unbending
over the red cyrillic telephone
(some say it's the radio that's bugged.)

But who could understand us?
Our language
is space and time,
tough
like this dark Lithuanian bread
ready for the white eloquence
of the newspaper-wrapped farmer cheese
and mushrooms-in-cream
you've brought me.

Your gifts trouble me.
"What can I send you,
for all this, from America?"
"You've come — what more?"

Strangers across continents and a century
in a small hotel room,
encounter —

we are home together
knowing
home is not walls, nor crypt, nor sky.
We sit
on this cliff's edge
before an abyss

I welcome
like a known dream.

Time — Vilnius University

Life shines out
while time
crowds in
with rocks,
bones, ashes.

Minutes
dripping blood and fire
coagulate;
stalagmites of years
fire up
old shadows.

Pulse
outpulses veins;
a song
outsings the singer;
a dream
outdreams a dreamer.

Dusk in Vilnius darknes
into dawn.

Refugee Baltic Beachcomber on Fire Island

I still sift sand. Red noons, he sheltered me with shade
(the tree shook off its leaves);
corpsed nights, he kindled me new friends (it's they
who change to flumes of smoke and slee.)

He walked with us in Kaunas, Vilnius, Palanga
to his bloody amber cross;
I fled his dunes to save his bread from godless men
(refugee — I'm lost...)

His image in each flame, I burned to rise to him
(straws and cinders rose);
earth's wanderer, I shunned strange men who bid me
share unleavened, alien loaves.

Shifting shorelines search like eyes; rock, like bread,
rises in its mold:
oceans chant strange solace, churning rock to sand
(I sift — I sift the globe...)

Nickels and dimes I find on Fire Island — and rock
reduced to paradigm:
dustmote man-minds fragment atoms, shores and stars
(unified in him.)