

# Serafino Murri

## INVISIBLE TO MYSELF

For Dad, *in memoriam*

In the sweet liquid silence  
Of an early winter morning  
Cold and licked by the sun  
I woke up between a smell  
Of plants left to die and cast-off clothes  
On the floor, in the corners,  
Unable to recall memories passing through  
Days of billions of instants suddenly lost  
Like faces recognized in a dream when you are still God,  
And I turned between the blankets and the coughing  
Of the lower flat tenant – never understood,  
A dickhead of an old man, retired military  
With photography as a hobby and a cronic smoker's cough  
Boxed-up in his muscle fibreless chest like a dog's bark –  
Divorced at 70, without a partner anymore,  
Creeping back up inside me like vomit right now with his badly dressed and skinny  
body  
While escaping by the stairs of his apartment building turret  
From the chain reaction explosion of his laboratory burning,  
Eugenio I think is His name, a life of an eternal son like many others,  
Lightning drowned in daylight without past or future,  
With veins out of wrists clinging to customary sensations  
Of cheap beverages and decayed food  
In ebbs and flows of black desire – existing, resisting, trying and fucking and  
Making it, making it once again between the old scraped walls  
With the cat's eyes fixed again and again on the beds  
Where he's been conceived between the warm breaths and the hands  
Of a mother and a father still children, layabouts and restless  
With bony hearts crushed and borne  
With no more joy with no more fear long before we were born  
To realise one day by looking at them without noticing  
Certain enclosed spaces where nothing is possible any longer, where screams drip  
slowly  
Until they merge into the temples with a sleep ridden with regrets  
That resurface into the eyes in the evening, and the morning after they are only  
Irritation without a reason and mattresses on the window sill

So as not to waste not even another tear anymore.

Cold disgust that drips on tiny floors  
In a tedium of flowers and shutters, a pinched disaster in installments,  
Year after year like a foreboding of shut doors and fallen hospital wards  
Behind my father' soul still haunting these rooms, stiff  
Between the armchair and the old Swedish crank handle calculator,  
working out the bills at night, when the drone of destiny's preys is higher,  
In the crooked jail of a soul without convulsions, with a damp nose and a pain  
Of never worn clothes and things kept still in wardrobes, as if even Time  
Got ripped by the threat of losing pension pride isolation  
Between her ageing breasts as she slept, droopy-lipped and soundless  
In the other room, wasted away, as she vegetated sorrows without knowing,  
Even in dreams, and incarnated in another life's peel came back  
The soft vagina of a young girl in the good old times of her father's bar  
Coveted by crowds of merry countrymen, full of teeth, red as apples,  
An echo of slammed doors forever in her musical ear  
Incinerated by misunderstood words, the sweet maternal legacy  
Of a tank of a woman as dark-skinned as a gipsy  
Who prevented her from becoming a violinist  
Just like her father, at least that is what she says  
In her confused head, as it unloads in her sleep  
Her dinner-time worries of black encrusted aluminium saucepans,  
The bashful anguish of a shy and frantic cloud  
With children speared at the top of her stomach, dragged out  
In summertime to hopeless seaside boarding houses after the Holy Grail of Relax,  
Balancing still on her quiet head she now goes back  
Towards her husband's eyes, with strong lines on the forehead  
And dandruff scratched away with curses, a woman to measure up to his fears  
And to the sweet taste of artichokes still lingering in his mouth that night  
Slowly returning to his senses, to the armchair, making his way  
Towards the mystery of the future,, in which one day all pending dues will be settled,  
And another night then between the resounding of maternal rosaries in memory  
And the nightbus' engine at the end of the line in the square fighting against the frost  
- had he at least learned to smoke, or to swim, or to hurt himself -  
Instead of suffering on the sly

Brushing off the dust of evil from her eyes now or never, stopping  
The creaking of the skin dehydrated by last summer, but maybe forever  
In the first dark spots on her hands,  
A pianist's hands, almost wasted for sex  
For him who at 18 wanted to box, and as to music  
The only one had been Aida's march played with a trumpet in Fascist schools  
Some years before inflating condoms under Palazzo Venezia's balcony,

Both with no longer any youth now in front of the filthy sheet music of duties  
He with his low-pitched voice broken in the ribs by his accident on the job  
The tumbling off the ladder down the parapet which saved him from his first death  
And her mental breakdowns, with her vocal cords like an old jenny machine  
broken by shameful lived and lost under neighbourhood  
Howls of despair and lullabies  
And the distress inside the legs sprawling on the cushions  
of the back of the new leather couch  
“Which – he used to say -  
You could cover with tenners and yet not reach its cost”,

He who plodded slowly for years around the rooms  
Thirsty for instants (the shorter they were, the less frequent they became)  
To wrest away from her delirium  
With that bear cub smile of his, embarrassed and  
Like the day he caught me looking at my stiff prick in the mirror  
- but I only realized how big his eyes were when he was dead,  
When he'd already dodged gallons of foreign blood injected in his body  
To tampon the abscess of his Intentional Death  
As it said in the attending physician's official exhibit, on Easter Monday of '87,  
When he jumped from life's stalls and into the street's empty stage  
eyes shut from the inside and wearing a woollen vest  
To shut off the unendurable whistling of the crickets  
trapped by that pointless sun  
With his destiny made of white patches on the cracked skull that was growing inside  
Since the day of his miner father's love suicide,  
“The Parent” he called him, the logic of an Oak clinging to the soil,  
Proud and jaunty, a Communist since '21, he loved the roughness of life,  
the gusts of fresh air, the sties, convalescing from typhus fever, the hemostatic soap,  
Cool water on the face, humble food and plentiful, laughter like sudden belches,  
Went to sleep beating rhythmically a feet on the black chest beside the bed,  
Came back from The America of Labor & Opportunities in '48  
With two Smith & Wessons 7 and 65 in his suitcase  
Only to be torn apart by the death of his catholic cropper, Penelope  
Under a sky eternally pregnant of stars seen from the mountains  
of a village without streetlamps  
The Abruzzi  
In the Italy of the Front  
That got cheerfully fucked by the International Charity  
Under floods of holy water blessed by ministers who once were Nazis  
Of God's castoffs on Earth:

Back from Rome by coach with his stomach in his hands the father-to-be wore

The void look of a Parent who finished himself off with a knife in his throat one morning,  
A stream of dreams poisoned in its waterbed,  
Without an MA any longer, gauging with a plumb line  
How wonderful life is, and Hope  
With the wages of the miraculous home-building company  
And in his pocket nails for the rails  
That were being doubled in the womb of the Far South,  
That took him increasingly back  
Towards the face of that copper-blond 20 he'd met in a bar  
Eating hake as a remedy for gastritis,  
Unaware that within her cells she was brooding  
Three black haired children to initiate to life  
On the streets of Monte Mario that ended in open fields  
With the taste of salt and iron in the evening buses after overtime,  
For the love of work and the work of love, children  
Of a single blood vessel, of love and panic,  
of hot packs of vinegar and water on the forehead to ease the fever  
Of childhood diseases waiting for presents,  
And Easters and Christmases  
Like fluids of rutting cats  
Blown high by the wind  
In the craters of insomnia  
Under skies of lies and unspoken words,  
In the smell of mother's milk and ointments,  
In thoughts glued to the pillow like morning slime  
In the routine open wide like a monster's jaws  
On the tired smiles of the homecoming

Pockets full of cotton-wool for a constantly unstable nest  
Where infancy went by slowly  
Among Sundays of shutters shadows and sports heroes  
Improvised games and 45 rpm records  
on the battery-run record player,  
Three children in a row  
Towards a tomorrow  
the smell of the flat iron in front of the tv,  
And drawings on glasses blurred by breath  
Thinking about mirage friends locked up  
By hysterical parents Satan-looking and ninny  
And cough syrups and suppositories and sudden fevers  
To sweat out in the morning  
Among uncertain lights to be able to return  
To school to recover the slight but certain warmth

Of a common age,  
Runs and stones thrown in the roads on the way out  
The early brushes with life  
As fast as the car beyond the curb,  
Black knees after the match  
T-shirts with plastic numbers, football footwear  
And hair sweating on  
imaginary sex tales and the first kisses  
Until the day ended  
Unexpectedly, with the rallying cries of mothers  
Right into the evening,  
Into the trembling evening  
That became Night,

### That Night

With neighbours into the rooms of home  
Dismayed about the delirium of the Bride  
At war with her Voices and the World,  
until the epilogue of that afternoon  
Of a worn out tomorrow  
Glanced from a little balcony  
Laughing a laughter scared to death,  
As the ambulance took away Italia  
To the Psychiatric Hospital,  
Against his will,  
Still in love and nevertheless:  
But her face had changed – he told me that night,  
While holding me tight in the desolate bed  
In tears he begged me not to cry  
And never to marry a woman  
With shifting eyes

- and yet you were wrong, Dad:  
You didn't owe me anything,  
I often choked on Life, but I could fish it up  
With my hands in the cone of shadow of your eyes:  
I was raw flesh then, fibres  
Not yet retracted from life's circumstances  
While you, a fish out of water and dazzled blood  
Lighting rod and shoe with plastic sole  
An earmuff hat, a crutch and a panting breath  
Engulfed in the tide of your thoughts  
You walked back and forth

Between the obtuse talks of devoted workers  
And the cellophane hell of Italia's mind,  
In the twilight zone of your meals of nails, sitting on my bed,  
Eyes tight in an effort of attention  
You stayed there to listen  
to the memories in the valve-radio  
Of good old years, lost who knows where,  
Rummaging for a bit of love amid her screams  
With her decorum unclenching only  
For the drowsy police officers  
in front of a cup steaming with embarrassment:  
You waited for me to get back  
Just to meet me fleetingly  
In the brief shelter of my island holding  
On the hasty dreams of my 20s,  
Without saying a word you'd go away  
Just to make sure that I really existed,  
That I was not a figment of your fancy,  
That I was real:  
And even here you were wrong.

Think about it again, think  
About your last lunch,  
A greasy Eucharist of baked meats  
Your eyes searching a prairie of potatoes  
And words like robots  
That didn't answer anymore  
To my thoughtless pleasantries  
To my haste of going out  
Of making love  
Of being elsewhere  
Think about your thought  
Left alone  
A web ripped by pus  
A stained robe,  
With time spat away into the sinks  
In front of speechless mirrors  
The spit like a strong current  
Flowing on icy streets,  
Death a siphon valve  
Beard hair, blood, saliva, nails, skin, hair  
Life's bitumen  
In the duct of dark water  
Washed off

Along with the last chances of an escape  
With obscene and never spoken desires,  
And the hopes encrusted on the griddle  
And the void of the house  
Two small flats connected by a bog  
Golden prison of memories  
Built with a smile  
A long time ago  
Only for you and for her, and then

You went away  
With a full stomach  
Went away  
From the stains of pee in my sheets  
Away from the scratched record of the Alpine songs,  
Away from the parent's stable you turned into a house  
Thanks to money made on-the-sly, illegal toiling,  
Away from the plastic Christmas tree  
And from the Standa<sup>1</sup>'s filled up plastic bags  
Away from your teachers daughters  
caught unprepared before Life,  
Away from your dandruff  
caught between your fingers  
From your humiliated rage,  
listless, cutthroat:  
You turned one last time  
To stare in the face  
Of the God of the Madhouses and the Abysses  
that even then understood nothing  
of the splinters of your bones scattered around the gravel  
And of all the things you lost in that fall  
To the Final Womb,  
While His angelic orderlies  
Between cursing and chest efforts  
carried the stretcher over the gates of the basement  
For one million and two hundreds liras a month:  
Confuted by death  
as by life,  
you who, with the heart of a bull, searched for months for a cancer  
in hospital aisles  
as one can look for water in the desert,

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<sup>1</sup> "Standa" (an Italian version of the English word "Standard") was the name of the first discount department store chain of Italy, founded by Fascists Regime in 1933, bought and re-sold in 1988 by Berlusconi, and currently overcome by other supermarket chains.

even in that *after*, you still did breathe

and in the meantime my sweat dried on me  
while she stared waveringly at my mouth  
half disrobed, full of forever,  
that little head of hers trembling as she swallowed  
all the poison of my deafened excitement,  
the child of stolen pornography,  
while I mistook the coldness of the room  
for an elusive disaffection, resenting  
that blind willingness of hers of being loved,  
our twenties passing by  
like a train crashing on the ritual thirst for  
petting on the stairs at home or inside the car turned on,  
for her ribs squeezed against my slenderness,  
for the dull thud of the street into the looks of the thereafter,  
for her mouth of gasoline and oil like an advance of despair,  
for the posters pinned with tacks to the room's wall  
for the silent music wound up in dusty tapes on the shelf,  
for our foetus of love, for our abortion of love  
looking at me with a sort of sad dog eyes  
while I pissed my vanity at the corners of other women's eyes  
a collapse of senses would have mirrored me one day,  
to get away, faraway

then, on the phone, rugged, offhand,  
the broken voice of the Bride: "Dad fell over,  
go check at the hospital, Grandma must've been upset by it."  
Behind me, on the background tv, the reunited Parliament  
Was decreeing the new Christiandemocrat-Fascist Government live,  
Love made on the floor in an empty house  
White and rigid my body made of empty earthenware,  
In the atmospheric dust of the ray of sunlight through the blinds  
She listened  
to the railway that went from Cilento to her heart  
scrunched in words like residual festoons,  
the dazzled petals of her carnivorous plant  
crackling like paper in the wind:  
she was begging me for this not to be true.  
And before the nurse said,  
As he stared at his hand's palms,  
"Listen, he's no longer here  
I mean, he's on the fourth floor  
Of the red building, but I'm afraid



He didn't make it"  
The clever child had already understood  
he'd been left out of air  
Even though the drug of the afterwards already shone through  
Like a snail's trail on the path of sorrow,  
Even if it was the shuttlecock of survival  
Sputtering while holding back the tears  
In the half empty little room  
Like your smashed mouth forever opened  
In your last dog-eyed glance at the sky  
Before a Mother-in-law crying with hands on her face  
And the moths-eaten woolly blanket on your body already cold:  
The sun shone outside and it was April,  
Everything was so clear, then,  
You won't ever cross the Italian borders,  
Not even with me to Paris  
For the bicentenary of the Revolution  
Polite Jacobean  
Chained to the Master's money,  
Old shoe of fears and reasons  
Now Everything became Forever  
And you  
Didn't react to light and noise,  
The house key you had broken it into your backbone:  
Death was done, and from the white of the eyes  
The cheque "paid to myself" of your errors  
Was sent back to the unknown sender by air mail

The automatic Fiat 127 you crashed a week before  
against wall of the panoramic road  
(the one from which we drew out fuel  
After you got a full load in the Vatican City)  
Last piece of bruised soul to survive you  
It fell to me to have it destroyed by the coachbuilder:  
To stare at the metallic urn of your last panic  
Sizzling the Nothingness of a payable end  
In the stark sprawl of undone mechanics,  
To celebrate the Silence that united us  
funeral rites of spare parts,  
While I signed the receipt for the return of the plates  
In front of the gas station clerk's idiot son  
Who kept repeating as he shook his head with reddened eyes:  
"Too bad, poor chap, besides he was also a fellow*country man*"

And even that night at home, without you,  
The daily bread was broken  
Absolute bread you used to eat  
Dumping the omelette  
Bread dried by the black sun of insomnia  
Bread before and after all, bread of shame:

You'll have woken up in nothingness,  
In the end  
Your head freed from umbrellas and broken plates,  
With the sad expression of those who see  
And are ashamed to say  
That Death is the neighbour's radio  
that keeps on playing:  
How many things brought up along with children  
And the sorrow wrapped in dirty washing,  
In the still mutations  
Of those haywire days:  
But we were a house, then,  
We didn't know the road to the end  
The steep sweetness of those eyes  
Pleading and silent like snowmen:  
We have also got lost, in time,  
The spectacle of the years was over  
The house sold  
So as not to remember anything anymore  
Not to forget ourselves any longer  
Sold with the ghosts and the madness inside  
And telephonic interferences and grief  
Renovated bathrooms and aluminium windows  
Paid with your posthumous severance pay  
Sold with the soul in mercury drops  
And cold feet kicked into the heart  
Burnt by the astonished silence  
Of mothers lonely islands

Mothers

Who cannot speak in tongues and laugh with what is left of them  
While they say *Bonjour* at their children's return from faraway cities  
Frayed and hollowed love shells saying "yes" without listening,  
With their minds in their iron, absent eyes of beaten beauty  
Like the scars of cowpox vaccination on their arms  
keeping out of rooms that they can no longer control  
Where needles on the floor and dust on the tables speak for the glass of their eyes

Middle-aged mothers refusing death by tattooing make up on their faces  
Who are still waiting for the right moment,  
Redemption for God's abuse withering them,  
Hearts of nettle still stinging not so long ago  
Through the black bin liner of their thoughts with a subtle fear  
Of the last coitus before menopause or of the definitive electroshock:  
Love of non-sticking pans  
Love oozing from dresses  
Love of wind and fingers in the eyes  
Love of compassion for sparse hair  
Love of still beautiful features  
Love of dental plates and tranquillizers  
Obscene love forgiving everything  
Love without instructions  
Waxed love loaded with Mascara  
And the gaze of the others

“at least Pastorious died while drunk”  
I used to say months later to Crazy Luca, reminiscing  
“and bouncers didn't know what a sharp brain they were smashing”,  
I don't know to whom I said such words while already  
I kept repeating by heart the absurdity of your face  
Which I just wouldn't see in front of me anymore  
'cause in front of me there was only age  
Ahead of time over delirium vanity doubt  
Abandoning myself  
To the fatal hesitation, to the incredulous destiny:  
I wouldn't say  
That in life's absinthe, sometimes,  
You would have come back up like the burp of a partaken meal  
In front of a screen or before a word  
Like a confused tear, a cloud,  
A sad taste of defeat, like a forgotten burn  
leaving a mark:

that evening also just like a thousand others  
amid the smell of dust and death just passed by  
with cockroach poison under the door  
raising insomnia thanks to Crazy Luca's bouts of asthma  
reading poets, learning to cry, to drown  
into movies on tape until it was morning  
with the blocked toilet drainage hole  
with coffee spoons, panic and memories  
which the foolish Bride would throw away with the leftovers

distracted by her Voices  
coming back  
into the Past's kidneys, jaded by hopes of Fair  
into the shapeless mortal tangle  
separated from the world  
by the wall's angular veins,  
and shit and wails and orgasms and looks and curses and silence  
that my mother didn't want to flush away  
with the forehead's sweat and the hands of a plumber  
faraway filthy universes of certainties  
nothing from all this:  
Luca and I pissed one by one  
into the empty bottle of Coke  
the steam of ammonia inflated the plastic in my hands,  
until I plugged it up and threw that  
bastard piss into the dark  
on the face of daybreak  
into the underbush of the dilapidated villa in front of my balcony  
the ruin of vacations of the early century  
where the impaired son of the owners in the morning  
used to go round waling for years the same nasal nursery rhyme  
pushing the blue pram in which he had grown up

who knows where you are now  
as the day lingers on  
and the wind can't reach you  
behind a burial niche in the upper floor  
lost in the ignorant sun dust  
of time carrying on,  
if you can still recognize  
the scattered signs of the smells you inhabited:  
and in which dream's corner and whoknowswhen  
will I must know how to find you once again  
between lights that spring to eyes wolf-like  
or in certain suspended afternoons  
like foetuses in the water of a thought,  
in which parts of me

under my hands out of my bed  
the thickness of my body here now  
clay from the sex of my parents',  
a shared dream dried up  
in the one-way-road of the Years,  
I descend anew and pained from the embers of the eyes

Into the mirror  
What is there and yet I cannot see  
Invisible to myself staring at me  
While outside I perceive  
Gusts of wind on the line of clothes  
hanging, swollen and headless birds,  
in the sweet illusion of not being able to stop  
this useless avalanche of old impressions  
arisen with the coughing of Eugenio the serviceman  
whom one day as he looked at me looking at him covering  
the windows of the house with black veils, told me  
from the road:  
“Perfect darkness doesn’t exist,  
This is something photographers know very well”

Since then I often dwell  
The house that doesn’t exist anymore  
The house of my father’s eyes.

*Roma, 1997-2001*

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