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Poems by Laurynas Katkus *Translated by Kerry Shawn Keys*

LAURYNAS KATKUS is a Lithuanian poet, essayist, and translator from the German. His most recent book is *Bootleg Copy*, poems, published in summer 2011 by Virtual Artists Collective, Chicago.

Žvērynas in Winter

Darkness strikes suddenly
like lightning strikes the chosen ones,
and whispers: don't fight; give up; calm down...
Shadows sneak into the house across the street,
melting into the bluish blaze of the TV screens.

A blind cyclone tosses between
the roof and the dream.
The sun's fingers reach out stronger and stronger,
draw open the curtains, and the newborn,
fleecy snow astonishes my eyes.

This sparkle, tearing the body apart,
speechless, and me... for a moment.

Aunt Jané

Aunt Jané came out of the photo of a volleyball team.
She would never err when counting.
Aunt Jané learned German by heart.

She would often type something on the typewriter.
Aunt Jané escaped the soldiers by running over the roofs.
Her lonely husband ran through the woods in a burning shirt.
They found him by the Bible she had given him.

Aunt Jané came back, lived on. Nothing else to do.
Aunt Jané liked riddles, and inscriptions on tombstones,
according to her cousin.

When perfumed oils were running down my forehead,
a shiny ruble fell from her hand into my pocket.
Later, relatives stole Aunt Jané's memory.
In revenge, she began to rave, and disappeared.

Now there she lies, returned to her motherland.
We don't know what to do, and are crying.

ХЛЕБ, 1972

It smells of gas and yeast.
Diagonally across the pavement,
Vans: diagonal letters,
red teats on the underbelly.

Smoldering people
unload
one more generation of the newborn,
curse solemnly.

Black, blind bricks
don't give away
when the blockade will be over—
abruptly, like an odor.

It's half past five. In the gardens
in the outskirts, it's drizzling,
and along the avenue, caraway seeds
scattering.

Half past five. Half-gods,
we're deep in the bread,
not yet risen, as yet untouched

October Holidays

The piano is silent, drop-leaf covering the keys.
Somebody closed the textbooks with their questions.
Mother, finding me in my hide-out under the porch,
Doesn't scold, and when asked, makes a cup of cocoa.

Rectangular windows twinkle with colorful lamps.
To stare at them, and stare, and forget
The defeat of the Dakotas of the Great Plains,
And the neighbor dead-drunk in his drinking-glass prison.

One windowlight melts slowly into the air,
Like a sweet bonbon disappearing in the mouth.
Almost like sitting and waiting for the war to begin
On the screen in the movie house.

Attached so much to what is cramped, what smells,
What weighs one down, and conceals,
Only when compelled, did you learn how
To defend, to side step, to fall on the ground.

In your hideout behind the hedged-in barricade
You watch the neighbor's chandelier burst into darkness,
And mutter over and over with lips nearly numb:
For sure, for sure, I won't be a guardsman.

**Then from the porch the voice of mother: time to come home!
Tomorrow to awaken to the rumble of tanks and brass bands.
So it goes, such are the holidays, in our ageing,
October-born State.**

City of Mercury

The road happened to be boggy.
Cars drove by, splashing mud and light.
Below us loomed the blue city of mercury.
Tin and water rusted in its twilight.
We sat down to rest, shook dust
from our sandals, ate bacon and bread.

Me perched on a roadside post.
Tomas on his suitcase.
Marija—reclining sideways (it is not yet begun, Lord—
she's curled like a snail).
From the squares and taverns
the rumble of demons.

Refreshed we rose, spread the banner,
and singing our first hymns, started to descend
into the valley.