

Lajos Kassák  
*The Horse Dies  
the Birds Fly Away*

*A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek*

Translated by Edwin Morgan

*Now I heard time neighing I mean it parrotishly spread its wings  
I say gapingwide red gate  
with my lover black diamonds bricked into her face and  
trailing 3 children  
in desperation  
we sat under factory chimneys  
we knew tomorrow the winding lines  
ho zhoop ho zhoop  
and she said my Kashi I know you're going off and for me it's  
shrivelling on the dais and modelling for mister nadler's  
cacocanvases  
what else  
what else  
the lord god lets pretty women slip out of his mind  
already the demichrist the woodcarver is here  
young reeking with truth not to be put down  
tomorrow we'll be over the hungarian border  
well yes h'm yes  
what else what else  
the city flew past  
squirmed to and fro and then reared up  
I saw my father's crumpled straw hat floating over the chemist's*

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**Edwin Morgan**

*(b. 1920), since 2004 the Scots Makar, or Poet Laureate of Scotland, has translated poetry  
from many language including more than two dozen poems by*

**Lajos Kassák**

*(1887–1967) the important writer, painter, critic, editor and theorist of the avant-garde.  
For his services to Hungarian literature Edwin Morgan has been decorated by the  
Hungarian government and awarded the Hungarian PEN Club's Gold Medal.*

frosted glass  
 to the holy trinity statue and back  
 ah well the old man dreamed I'd be a chaplain at 21 in the  
 parish of érsekújvár  
 but just ten years earlier I fed on smoke in the workshop of  
 mister sporni the locksmith  
 and now the old man very seldom came home to us  
 and soon my well-planned future was soaked in and pissed out  
 with his beer  
 he fell in love with an old cleaner  
 his hair dropped out he had no friends but gypsies  
 25 April 1909  
 I was ready to walk to Paris with the woodcarver  
 the hick town squatted in its puddle and squeezed its accordeon  
 on saint Christopher I must take my sings off you you will  
 never be your father's son  
 a drunk sobbed crocodile tears  
 as I propped up the wall of the Golden Lion inn  
 I felt everything was at an end  
 a red railway-track ran through me and bells rang in the towers  
 pigeons tumbled above the roofs  
 no they galloped with the suncart  
 the new franciscan bell just about sang  
 he who prepared for sleep should brighten up the lead bars  
 the hours are spectres on white sheepdogs  
 I felt everything was at an end  
 vintners and haberdashers shut up shop  
 good friend go back to your children go back now  
 the wheels have stopped turning back  
 man casts his milk-teeth and stares into the emptiness where life  
 devours its own tail  
 into the emptiness  
 oh jiramari  
 oh lebli  
 oh BOom BOomm  
 but the ship bobbed us along like a pregnant woman  
 and behind us there was at least someone manoeuvring the  
 scenes into place  
 this was the first slashed-across day in my life  
 torches and bottomless pits flickered inside me  
 papagallum  
 oh fumigo  
 papagallum

*coppery birds crowed in bands of twenty on the bank  
the hanged were swaying from the trees and crowing too  
now and again we got glances from the brooding corpses  
in the river-bed  
but we were 21  
the woodcarver's chin sprouted an ugly frizz of pink  
bristles  
otherwise we lived all right  
but for the diagonal of our bellies  
it was useless though we tightened the screws the oxen  
made off again and again into the stubble-fields  
and it was all we could do the scrape our eyes off girls'  
ankles  
at times like these I always gave vent to cries like  
cymbals  
Vienna saw us sleeping rough 3 days  
then finally we wrenched ourselves out of ourselves what  
is civilization after all  
you smear yourself with a glaze of enamel and start  
shuddering  
at the lice  
well what are family ties  
you eke out your umbilical cord with silk ribbon  
well what's the worship of god  
you take on fear to get shot of fear  
we nailed the highways to our soles and the sun was with  
us in space on his golden seven-league-feet  
believe me the elephant is not bigger than the flea  
red is not redder than white  
and if we really went, we went  
ahead only on kamaralogos if we set up the scales when  
were we ever better off  
and then our eyes were opened  
and soon we were deep like the black wells in mining  
country and so we continued  
13 angels walked ahead of us  
on foot too  
and sang for us about our youth  
we were already well-tried tramps with tame fleas in  
our armpits  
we enjoyed fruit from the roadside ditch  
sour milk  
and jewish community funds*

*and we had brothers round us oh from everywhere  
wonderful skins like brick a world's languages on their  
lips  
each had his special smell  
and some had been planed to the bone by kilometers and  
others came with milky mouths from their mother's breast  
the roads lay under us in white quilts  
the telegraph-wires jerked tight and wrote  
mantras on the sky  
at night we glimpsed the flowers blooming between women's legs  
but we were vegetarians and misogynists  
and dragged ourselves through Passau  
Aachen  
Antwerp  
the woodcarver grew splinter-thin and his beard pure ginger  
poems and hajura forests began to spring up in my head and  
swam twice across the light-rivers  
in front of us the rats on their big rafts festooned with birds'  
eggs and trouser-buttons  
letters from my lovers were waiting for me in post-boxes  
but I knew nights were worst for lice  
so I got to work on my poems then and they streamed  
from my head like some golden-fleeced flock of sheep  
these are certainly the most timorous put-upon creatures  
but let someone stick the slate behind his ear  
the startled shutters roll down  
this is our life  
at all the stations customs-officers stamp our hearts and we only  
swim further away to where  
dawn is  
in fact it would be more sensible if everybody dealt in  
sweet tree-roots or glucose  
ration the world you live in  
no trouble for us to leave it behind 50 kilometers a day  
in tunnels on hill-crests and in soundless german forests  
we notice the fresh dung smell of the fields  
the mountains swivel round at times and the trees shiver in the  
wind like zithers  
the trees what are they but pregnant girls  
but look closely—the boundary—stone and they are pregnant girls too  
in a low voice they confess to each other:  
if he leaves me I'll kill myself  
yesterday I was hemming nappies with gold thread all day*

*little angel she'll be christened I'll hang cherries of diamond  
in her ears  
or perhaps all they say is:  
every man's but a lame dog  
the mountains are arched right over us now  
and still the giant snake gulps down the sun with a smack  
I'll come to be a poet someday  
well then let's swing the rattles anyhow what's the cause  
of the fuss but miss anna's tantrums  
yesterday I sent home a couple of poems to independent hungary  
and again we dropped back to Stuttgart  
we sat at the beggars' table ate jam tarts  
and a styrian peasant's heart gleamed down from the rafters  
mass was celebrated by the SALVATION ARMY in the courtyard next door  
flutes and clarinets were shrill under the stars  
we saw the young mothers bowed over by the yellow glass owls  
o lamb of god who takest away the sins of the world  
the demichrist began to get going again in the woodcarver  
and was determined to speak at all costs  
shut your great trap the styrian peasant shouted  
as he shoved his heart under our very noses  
look at it 7 rusty daggers went through it  
7 lies my lover told me my dear brothers  
see this green border here on the right  
it's the last mark of my master's teeth my dear brothers  
I am 26 and my life has been as pure as the morning dew  
in winter I was all day sweeping the yard  
in summer I brought in the happy crop  
hey ai-yy man's fate is like the  
all eyes were opened and behind the walls we saw the world  
change its cloak  
budapest-paris-berlin-kamchatka-stpetersburg  
the woodcarver was drunk by this time and sadness seeped from  
his eyes like something from gutters  
the cries kept making for the corners to snuff their flames  
swear you'll put faith in nothing now except the magic  
power of neat long-john elastic  
I demanded out of the blue  
and I saw my voice approaching from the neighbouring courtyard  
I am a poet  
after all I know  
the lanterns burn well because twice turatamo  
and full of paraffin*

what biting misery was in me I wanted to give something to  
these wretched  
people  
but the stars had already left guard-duty  
the 13 angels are probably snoring now with their mouths open  
on the attic stairs  
my lord god  
the bugs are marching down from the walls in red battalions  
we should all rub salt on our nose  
see how brief life is  
but after all we'll be tomcats yet on the fire-walls of paris  
hushaby baby hushaby so  
the man falls asleep  
so the verticals become horizontals  
and vice versa  
and ink-children skip down from the sky  
come with me come through the garden  
over there on the river-bank Mary rocks her son to sleep  
we must all snap the bolts over our minds  
my memories go phosphorescent on the floor in puddles of yellow  
in the corners the rucksacks opened up and started barking at  
me like crazy things  
I cradled the whole garden in my lap like  
Mary with her son  
and further down look  
here are the good man-fridays with their 1 1/2 marks  
sighs glaze  
flowers flower  
ah well here you are too  
I and you  
I  
on you  
won't you lock your knees over me  
little woman my  
own silver salamander  
parrot  
frogging of my life  
fruit-tree  
plucked-out star  
ah no ah no  
we should all twist the glass stoppers  
the hours quit their starcoops  
and the elephants swing towards the east with their long

corky trunks  
the first sound I heard was a gramophone bawling from  
the suburbs  
the woodcarver had to stay in bed this morning  
I think I've had it he said I think I've had it  
the beggar-queen stood with an enormous washing-up basin  
over her head  
the bonehead cuckoo emerged from the clock with his humble  
becks and bows  
I think I've had it the woodcarver cried I think I've had it  
and everyone saw death  
passing twice through the room  
but why must you leave us my brother  
why  
you have not yet driven the herd home from the meadows  
you have not yet lit the lamps in your yellow hair  
and in your eyes too the serpents all lie asleep  
oh never mind the kitschy coffeepot that bit the housemaid's  
navel  
and now the two of them lie pregnant  
I think I've had it the woodcarver shrieked I think I've had it  
and the houses leaned towards the church in a long slow rhythm  
a single creamy foal poked its head through the window  
and whinnied  
who'll buy my coat I also said  
5 crowns going gone for 5 crowns  
and suddenly the mountain roads began to rush down  
so to go  
once more to go  
I have not seen the poor woodcarver since that time  
for all that we were the best of friends and his nocturnal  
beard glowed before me like the burning bush  
2 weeks I wandered alone  
I was sad as an old donkey and I  
washed my head in every puddle  
I would have washed away my memories which had sunk dreadful  
claws in my brain  
and it's true they brandished black banners down towards the  
river-banks  
but which bank which bank  
I felt I shared banks with a headlong river  
rich only in green frogs and stunted palms  
because by then I was a poet inoperably

*in regular correspondence with my lover  
and I knew if I sliced my chest out would pour pure  
gold from my heart  
these belgian peasants what makes them such scruffs  
these chauvinist brutes what do they know yet of the ways  
of the world  
I can stand in the midst of them to no end  
not one of them can see my forehead star  
I was like the 7 orphans  
but for all that the winding lines met in me here  
here I met szittyia who arrived from zurich and was bound  
for chile as a self-appointed guru  
I really did think he would come to something  
his ears had gone scabby in the strangest way  
we sprawled about the antwerp quays and he harangued the  
cotton-bales and  
sprat-barrels  
fellow-citizens he sang out fellow-citizens  
rabbits are the most prolific fowl and the mills are  
smuggling rat's-teeth in among the corn  
still you know they grind just the same and this is not  
pointless  
what are you afraid of you useless creatures  
my words were flaring already in the meadow flowers  
an end to those who need a point of rest  
in the morning we set off towards the sun we made for  
god's wayside inn  
lilies unfolded in my wretched mind  
it is true in the morning we set off towards the sun for god's  
wayside inn  
in the thatched barn we shall drink lacrima christi and  
plum brandy  
oh but there's always one crocodile that slides down into  
all good folks' fate  
and he who came from the zurich hostel and was bound for  
chile as a self-appointed guru  
got a dose of clap this night in the seamen's brothel in  
the rue de rivoli  
and the card-castles collapsed silently  
fences rose around us like those you see in the zoo  
21 times in succession I called up to the sky  
latabagomar  
o talatta*



*latabagomar and finfi*  
*the discs rotated without interruption*  
*craftsmen's black hands should be sawn off*  
*the cabinetmakers thrust out every knot from its place*  
*the locksmiths cannot fit their bolts*  
*no surprise if our cages disintegrate one day*  
*look how Isabel has lost one of her gloves too*  
*oh well why on earth should anyone worry about us poor*  
*miserable three-eyed things*  
*birds flap over the houses and fly off to other countries*  
*szittya forgot the key of the new religion left it in the*  
*changing-room*  
*and that first day he cried and cried for it like a child*  
*then he spread vaseline on his ears and we went away towards*  
*brussels*  
*like people who had been robbed*  
*we gave up everything in the knowledge that time alone*  
*would understand us*  
*oh it will never let us fall from its embrace*  
*in the evening we were already sitting at the long tables of*  
*the mansion du peuple*  
*and we smoked straight belgian tobacco*  
*saw vandervelde walking across the hall to the socialist*  
*secretariat*  
*other well-known leaders were dealing new playing-cards in*  
*front of the cashier*  
*the place was a gigantic reservoir brimming with a mush of*  
*men*  
*blue-eyed russians betrothed to the revolution*  
*oil-rancid dutchmen*  
*prussians*  
*wiry montagnards*  
*magyars with droopy moustaches*  
*pathetic garibaldi-clansmen*  
*everyone but everyone was here who was down and out and*  
*whose home*  
*had no bread*  
*some shoulders held up the sleepless skyscrapers of new york*  
*some eyes had hatred leaning redly out of them*  
*look how the world's strongest energies move out from the*  
*station*  
*hurricanes are roaring*  
*telephone wires are screeching from the heart of moscow*

*tovarishch smooth your dress at the piano*  
*we are threaded by waiters with black soups*  
*knots of proletarians are seen outside cinemas*  
*the man in the cooperative hands out his tickets in tens*  
*dogs scurry up the split-toothed walls and sing like old women*  
*somebody said down with the oligarchy*  
*and suddenly:*  
*rome*  
*paris*  
*tiflis*  
*stockholm*  
*samarkand*  
*and the mines of the ruhr*  
*can you hear the little town-hall bells of munich*  
*in florence the pigeons sleep on the apostles' shoulders*  
*everybody knew god's hour must now be near*  
*the skin of fanatics twitches faster than the seismograph*  
*and every one of us is scratching*  
*tovarishch smooth your dress at the piano*  
*up*  
*up*  
*oh if I could now latch onto my lover's diamond eyes*  
*the salamanders have set sail beside the central lamp*  
*szitty was already lying in the red pools asleep*  
*as beautiful now as a young bulldog*  
*even in an hour there are many ways of getting rich*  
*supposing we were sharp like say a camera*  
*but man is always the hermetic one and worlds he never feels*  
*wheel past over his skin*  
*at midnight we went to the petit passage and the russian*  
*meeting*  
*a blond tovarishch spoke he was just like a child*  
*his lips bloomed with flames and his hands flew like red*  
*pigeons*  
*are we not all descendants of dostoevsky's possessed*  
*we bit off for ourselves the seventh head of sentimentality*  
*and wanted to bring everything down in ruins*  
*oh Russia land under a curse*  
*who could see your helpless pain if your star-branded*  
*sons would not*  
*europa spits at the asian in us*  
*but for all that we are the ones to climb the peak*  
*certainly the astrakhan baker girl or the st.petersburg whore*

will one day give birth to the new man  
russia is pregnant with revolution's red spring  
but the steppes of russia are slow and loath to bloom  
but russia is like the land that has never been cultivated  
help then  
brothers  
luckless sons like us of europe  
help help!  
and we watched his head burst into flames beneath his old cap  
we all set in his palm  
three cheers for Russia! long live! zhivio! three cheers!  
then a hump fell off from my back  
frost-flowers blossomed on windows  
and szittyá who was to become police spy and agent-provocateur  
kissed his russian coat  
I'm as pure as a child  
he said—if I didn't have the clap I'd go to tsarskoye selo  
and kill the tsar  
this was one night we kept off the brandy  
we washed our feet and put love out of our minds  
a hungarian printer who later got 12 years for revolt took  
cards and told the  
housemaid's fortune  
and we sang softly sang far-sounding  
at last then at last  
the time has come and we are mature like grafted trees  
and we thought the gold flags of march were deployed above us  
the swans perched up on swings and gave a two-tone laugh  
on edward square I yearned to offer myself for the table of  
the poor  
but dawn found the belgian police coming after us at very  
first light  
there were no baedekered strangers gathered at the pissing  
statue  
those squalid streets actually thought themselves in paris  
the golden-scrolled town-hall mocked at us  
as we took our chained hands in the pouring blue  
down the steep stairs  
in front of the iron-hooped potato-roasters  
through tavern swill  
through the morning stench of fishmongers  
miserable tramps herded together by the law and about to see  
god die in them

*in the rue mouffetard we met the whores  
I was happy  
it pleased me greatly that at daybreak they could look so  
beautiful  
their chignons leaned into the leaning whitewashed wind  
a diamond veil hid the sun peering at them from the fire-walls  
ours was a saintly vigil all through the night  
and now their cigarettes made me wet my lips  
wish I could scratch my back groaned szitty  
who not so long ago was a messiah bound for chile  
somebody waved a white sheet from a balcony  
the blond russchild came into our minds the one who  
lived on flames  
like marinetti futurist god  
and loved russia with more than a son's love  
now they throw him over the belgian frontier and one  
blue morning he'll hang in front of the kremlin  
help then  
brothers  
luckless sons like us of europe  
help! help!  
what am I but a plain-minded poet there's an edge in  
my voice that's all  
what good is it to stick the tumaronian witch with a  
paper sword  
12 days we sat in the vagrants' detention-barracks which  
reeked of mice  
105 of us in a single hall  
day and night  
night and day  
at night we dreamed of highways and we squashed bugs  
in the morning we got warm water at midday cold porridge  
and all day long we had to pray aloud  
unintelligible belgian prayers with the bearded guard who  
was perched up on a high platform  
like some idol  
then we were driven to the french border in dark green wagons  
I found 9 sorts of birds' eggs in the nests  
my lord god  
here comes paris  
of which I have heard resounding wonders  
and which is still unknown to me  
I know the french coat-of-arms has a red cock in it*

I know french soil is blessed with girls and arts  
 at crack of dawn zola's peasants were swimming on silver  
     guitars  
 the seine deposited its blue bodies on the grassy bank  
 szittyta talked about dunajec the hungarian teacher  
 violin virtuoso now in the chat noir  
 9 lovers he has alien french girls war-horses from  
 the franco-german war  
 I glanced through my notes I have now seen 3004 christpictures  
 I found 9 sorts of birds' eggs in the nests  
 I shooed off 2 cows at liège  
 therefore  
 I was 300 kilometers from paris  
 and above our heads parrots went about on crutches  
 O PARIS!  
 PARIS!  
 andre ady saw you naked and guillaume apollinaire  
 simultaneist poet was born over your bloody rubble  
 we felt pretty sure we had the smell of pilgrims  
 and every day we walked 60-70 kilometers  
 and approached the shadow of the iron tower  
 buy our blisters we called out to the people  
 buy our blisters kept in excellent condition  
 if you pierce it with a fine pin you don't get the aftertaste  
     of burning  
 the french all in all are not unlike the belgians  
 bavaria has the decentest of the dummkopf brigade  
 it could be good malt beer got them that way  
 it could be also that in fact christian philosophy set on sealing-wax  
     in them  
 our necks were forever burdened with the swollen lachrymal sacs  
     we had swinging there  
 like a brace of heavy salty cowbells  
 for days we lacked lodgings  
 oh why did our mothers give birth to us if they were unable  
 to set a house on our back at the start?  
 a jailer otherwise a shoemaker  
 pushed us half a day into the straw  
 out of yellow pipes with lances pliers and russian pikes lice  
 paid us visits  
 but this was nothing  
 we slept on our faroff moonswing to flutemusic  
 somebody sang and sang above us

YOU ARE MY TWO INDEX FINGERS  
and we had morning coffee round the skirt of the shoemaker's  
wife  
who remarked I had very nice hair  
and on closer look I was like a lad called igor  
who drowned himself in the seine 20 years ago all for love of  
her  
that black coffee mulled about priestlike in our bellies and  
I promised  
I'd send her a picture postcard from Paris with  
two clasped hands and a pigeon billing and cooing on it  
PARIS O PARIS city of fine suicides  
and who knows why  
and I shall never forget her voice  
she cried through the whistle of the customs-officers  
and laughed through the electric horns of the city  
laugh then you fool  
can't you see you're snug in a gold-nest of life  
Paris is dandling us boy said szitty and completely forgot  
his clap  
once I even milked angels' blood from the stars here  
compared to that my mother's milk was sodawater  
pin up your wings  
tomorrow we're going to GRIZETTE  
tomorrow we'll be slipping oysters over on the boulevard  
italien and we'll take a look at the electric birds  
tomorrow we'll try the tuileries  
and the star-bar  
ah yes  
yes  
sad sad feeling the nails growing on my sick legs  
pain oh  
pain  
I'm reached by miracles bearded and plasterless  
 $2 \times 2 = 4$   
briars spread everywhere  
but modern horses have teeth of iron  
and he who starts off in the morning can never be sure  
to get home in the evening  
happiest of all is the reversible skin man  
for who can look beyond himself  
what we set up is set up  
but what we set up has no meaning

*the rivers will splinter in shreds if they have to hurry  
gentlemen can hardly walk on two legs like sparrows  
we know women leave their husbands  
the monkeys examined their backsides in mister goldmann's  
mirrors and have absolutely no complaints  
say I could play chess  
yet I'm really good at nothing  
sliced pig-shanks sit on shopwindow merry-go-round  
I saw paris I saw nothing  
my lover waited for me pregnant at angyalföld station  
my mother in her poverty was already a lemonhead  
I could have laughed in front of them but embarrassment  
took over  
for I had two pairs of trousers on and no underpants  
certainly the poet can either construct something that  
pleases him  
or he's at liberty to collect cigar-stubs  
or  
or  
birds have devoured the voice  
yet the trees went on singing  
this is already a sign of old age  
but it means nothing  
I am LAJOS KASSÁK  
and our heads twist up for the flight of the nickel  
samovar.*

*(1922)*