

MALAKOFF, I WANT TO GROW OLD
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translated from the Bulgarian by Denitsa Petrova

1.

Do I have to be honest? I am not good at that.

A sound signal. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

There is no question in that I am growing old. The hairs on my arms grow old, too. Both on the left and on the right arm. When the wind blows the hairs, they do not resist, but rather submissively lie under its pressure. Ten or maybe fifteen years ago it wasn't like that - I was experiencing pleasure to see how these hairs resist the wind's pressure. And they really did.

Once, someone told me that he finds great fascination in old age. I do not remember who told me that but I do believe him.

A heavily built Macedonian is sitting before me. He is also aged and his broad shoulders fill up his coffee colored jacket. He is holding a "New Macedonia" newspaper in one hand, and the back of a seat with the other, in order to keep his balance. The subway accelerates very fast.

The honorable, bald-headed Russians at the seat on the right are also aged. They are probably more than eighty years old. The whiteguards look like that in my mind. If there are any of them left alive. These Russians can be their heirs, but they lack the sadness in their faces. They are probably enchanted with their old age.

They are all very old, but I am aging as well. They walk towards the end of their objective existence. They may never see Moscow or Saint Petersburg again, except on some postcards which they keep in antiquated aristocratic suitcases. Probably, neither will that Macedonian ever see Scopie again.

2.

"Champs-Elysees Clemenceau" station. An old woman eagerly thrusts her way to be the first to push the handle that opens the doors. I am absent-mindedly reading the ads on the right station's platform. My advertising old age is coming closer with every subway station that goes

by. I had to get on the longest subway line. When I got on the subway, it was as if I was a little boy back then, so little that I did not have any real notion of the surrounding space

As if I were really little when I got on at Malakoff station with the two Russians and I was rapturously applauding the fact that I am embarking on something very new and unfamiliar. I was looking at them and I was thinking that it would be rather mischievously and funny if I pulled their mustaches.

My youth passed by very quickly with the nicotine hurried heart rhythm. My maturity also hurried in a wild flight and remained forever on “Champs-Elysees Clemenceau” station.

Sound signal. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

The doors slammed shut with a passionate outburst of energy, just before fatigue came after the scattering of the crowd. At the end of each platform there are rubber gaskets with small bulges. I've also seen them in North America. They are meant to make it impossible for someone to fall on the rails on Friday evening, when he is running to catch the last train for home.

3.

My youth was pop. My love was pop. My old age will be advertising. Everybody will try to sell me something that is supposed to make my life easier. They would also try to make my life shorter if they could.

They are trying to explain to me the ecstasy of my old age. I will have a special anatomical bed, light fibro-glass walking cane or whatever they can invent.

Sound signal. Peep. Click-tick-flap. *Miromensnil, Saint-Augustine, Saint-Lazare...*

The subway does not only accelerate very fast but it also makes rapid progress. The Macedonian is not here anymore. He was already too aged. I did not ask him if he was fascinated. He got off at *Saint-Augustine* station and his end had been waiting for him there. The old honorable Russian whiteguards are neither here any longer. They got off at *Saint-Lazare*. We passed by *Liege* station. *Place de Clichy* is coming. Isn't it possible to take the train in the opposite direction? Everything will start in a reverse motion. The train accelerates so fast that I cannot read the whole texts on the ads. “New houses in the suburbs! 5000 initial payment...”, “New Renault...”, “Speak more for a lower price...”.

The advertisements that promote cosmetics make my skin feel old again. Sometimes I forget that this is so and my skin is again able to breathe in oxygen till insanity. It is called senile drug habit. Men and women with brilliant skin, hair and teeth, are looking at me from the cosmetic's ads.

After the sound that signals the wearied shutting of the doors, they merge into a uniform grotesque image of rather big menacing smiles with pearly white teeth. Too pop. Too insanity.

I sadly look at the senile marks on my wrists. The hairs on my fingers have lost their steadiness under the wind's pressure and bristle desperately friendly.

My old age deprives me from the ability of being pop. If I am pop, it will be unnatural. I desire for genuine pleasure out of my existence. When the whiteguards were born, no-one ever thought if he or she were more pop than the other, just because no-one had been as pop as one can be today. If at all, anyone was pop back then.

In the evening I sit before the TV and act out the ads that are on, but I cannot be pop even in my own face. Thus, I have remained a pitiful advertisement consumer. I brush my teeth in the morning, repeating ads that would otherwise make me pop. I put on my blue suit in order to go for my everyday walk. I fall in love with pop women, and I think of them while I am cooking eggs for lunch. Sometimes I listen to Celine Dion and jump for joy, in a way that is surely unbecoming for an old man. After a while, I realize that the pop time is up, and so is love time.

Garibaldi station. Peep. Click-tick-flap. *Saint-Ouen*. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

A black woman reaches out her hand begging: "Spare some change for the poor. I need to eat something." I don't pay attention to her, neither does anyone else. Everyone is withdrawn in his own pop ecstasy. And only I remain feeling advertising sad.

I love the subway because people read books there.

4.

Fine. I am going to be honest. Whoever told me that he finds great fascination in old age – I do believe him. And yet – I do not want it. I do not want to experience it. I want vigorous waves. I am not honest even at this very moment. I desire for pop, magnificence, ecstasy. Old age is sad. I desire for unending ecstasy.

The last station was coming. Therefore I get off at the “Saint Denis” basilica. I take the train back. I saw a beautiful pop woman. It made me feel sad, as if I were all alone among crowds of people. At that moment I realized I didn’t want to be pop ever again.

I listened to the song of the stations and shutting doors. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

Montparnasse-Bienvenue, Gaîté, Pernety, Plaisance, Porte de Vanves... Peep. Click-tick-flap. Peep. Click-tick-flap. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

Malakoff station. I sat on a bench and started to cry, and then a blue street Paris telephone rang. I realized that tomorrow I will be bitterly eating fried eggs and I will never again fall in love with pop women. Peep. Click-tick-flap.

I remembered my childhood adventures by the seashore, the American summer, the Bulgarian winter. The summer again. Black sea is not black; it’s just less salty than the Mediterranean. I want to see my brother and my friends again. The images pierced through me deeply. When I was a little child I used to puncture the cars’ tires. I am going to plant a tree. I also keep an antiquated aristocratic suitcase with a gramophone and some Ravel records inside, left by my grandfather. This day is coming to an end. The afternoon autumn sun is making its ways, so that it can leave the small street, where I sat to cry. There are no parking lots. I am only familiar with the subway, today I have no friends. Tomorrow I will go to church. I just hope it does not rain tomorrow. And if only I have not forgotten to cover the bread basket. If there were any rubber gaskets with bulges that protect you from falling into memories and images from the past, I wouldn’t have bought any. True joy hurts. True sadness makes you feel happy. A genuine ecstasy.

I am honest. I want to grow old.

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