



About the Editor



Shy Pangolin is a raccoon possessed by a middle-aged demon. She likes overcomplicated rum cocktails, computer jank, roller skating, and screaming into the void.

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Give me your hand and let's go to our sinful paradise!...
Defying all State Pension Plans of heaven,
May returned for us in wintertime,
and flowers blossomed in the greening meadow,
where in full bloom an apple tree inclined
its fragrant fan s above the two of us,
and where the earth smelled sweet like you,
and butterflies made love in flight...
We're one year older now, but what's the difference—
old wine has also aged another year,
the fruits of ripe knowledge are far more succulent.
Hello, my love! My grey-haired Eve!

About the Poet

Sophia Parnok was a poet, journalist, and translator who lived during the silver age of Russian literature.

Parnok's works center largely around themes of Russian and Jewish cultural identities, as well as lesbianism. She is often known as "Russia's Sappho".

After her death, Parnok's works were mostly forgotten until after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Even now, many of her works have yet to be been translated into english, and those that have been are mostly contained in autobiographical and academic sources, which has made them somewhat inaccessible to the masses.

Parnok's love poetry, in particular, is exemplary in its tenderness. For that reason, this collection will be mostly focused around her more romantic works, though there will be a few more generalized pieces thrown into the mix for variety.

So on other shores, by another singing sea,
millenia later, in such a youthful spring,
vaguely recalling her ancient Aeolian childhood,
a thoughtful maiden runs her fingers over the strings.

Hellas's breath flows to her as a wind from the sea;
the wind, unsensed by others, moves her heart:
the maiden feels she will complete your dreams, Sappho,
she'll sing the songs that have not fully sounded to us.

Oh my love! My madcap demon!
You're so bony that while eating,
a cannibal in search of meat
would very likely break his teeth.
But I'm above that sort of crudeness
(and besides, I'm somewhat toothless),
I won't tear you all to bits,
since I'll eat you with my lips!

A head of silver grey. And youthful features.
And Dante's profile. And a winged gaze,
and sorrow runs its fingers over my heart strings:
ah but the love I feel is out of place!
But be a little curious, just listen,
how aging women suddenly go mad...
Yes, I'd like to be a little stronger, drier,
like old wine—you know, I'm old myself!
If time could just evaporate this sweetness!
I've had enough. I do not want to want!...
Happy are those who in their youth can manage
to get their fill of sparkle, froth, and song...
I've come too late. The curtain has been lowered,
the hall empties. Not for intermission— it's the end.
Just in the gallery there one fool's still raving,
the more despairingly, the more intense.

A greedy spirit could not conquer
your self-betraying thoughts' caprice –
and, from thousands up for hire,
one night was given by you to me.

You had been tutored by dispassion
a brilliant artistry in love.
But suddenly, though used to quarry,
your arms, embracing me, convulsed.

Your eyes are frantic, stung by yearning,
your mouth is grim, clenched jealously,
you're paying fate back for my tardy
arrival by tormenting me.

1916

Not satiation, not desire
your languorousness brings to mind.
To all your speech and gaze are kind,
no one and everyone's my rival

But to delights that are mere wishes
how can dreams not betray me, when
you say not no, not yes, but then,
your eyes imprint my mouth with kisses?

O, arms affectionate and prudent,
how you protect your indolence...
But shadows under your eyes grow dense:
"Twill be, the hour of love's torment!"

January 1915

I, like a blind woman, find my way by touch
to your voice, your warmth, your smell...
In Pluto's garden I shall not get lost:
where you went in is East, West where you went out.
All right then, lead me, lead, lead
even through all the circles of hell
to that sandstorm blowing up ahead,
you're the only Virgil that I need!

You are young, long-limbed! With such
a marvelously molded, winged body!
How awkwardly and with such difficulty
you drag around your spirit, anguish-stunned!
Oh, I know that spirit's way of moving
through whirlwinds of the night and ice-floe gaps,
and that voice that rises indistinctly,
God alone knows from what living depths.
I recall the darkness of bright eyes like those.
As when you read, all voices would grow quiet,
whenever she, a madman raving verses,
with her frenzy would ignite our souls.
How strange that you remind me so of her!
The same rosiness, goldenness,
and pearliness of face, and silkiness,
the same pulsating warmth.
And the coldness of serpentine wiles
and slipperiness... But I've forgiven her,
and I love you, and through you, Marina,
the vision of the woman who shares your name.

And truly handsome, shapely young man, are you:
beneath the eyelashes' fringe two dark blue suns,
and curls, a darkly streaming whirlwind
grander than laurel, crown your soft features.

A real Adonis, young precursor of mine!
You began the cup which is now passed to me –
pressing the lips of my beloved,
with a doleful thought myself I comfort:

not you, oh young man, unbound the spell on her.
Marveling at the flame of her loving lips,
oh, first one, not yours enviously,
my name shall a lover murmur, praying.

October 3rd, 1915

All of me is twined in memories' rapture,
I say, as from happiness I weaken:
"Lesbos! Source of Lyric poetry
at the last of Orpheus's harbors!"

And was my soul with wonderous avarice,
to the muses we did not give leisure.
In that country I was not alone,
Oh, my splendid woman-friend and lover!
Underneath my hand, which was not at full strength,
you forgave the unfull sound of the lyre,
you, whose languid name inside of me,
like the moon, draws waves upon the shoreline.

1922

Thank you, my friend,
for your quiet breathing,
the tenderness of your sleepy arms
and whispers of your sleepy lips,
for your arched eyebrows
and hollow temples,
for not possessing the anguish
of my thick blood,
for the palm amulet-like
you lay upon my breast,
and the fire slows its course
through my tensed-up veins,
for my gazing at your face
with eyes that can see—
for, my angel, being you,
and being next to me!

Drowsily an aged pine
rustles in her sleep.
Leaning on her coarse-grained trunk,
here I stand and speak.
"Little pine-tree, just my age,
give me of your strength!
Not the usual nine months,
forty years I carried,
forty years I had been bearing,
forty years I had been begging,
begged my heart out, got by pleading,
brought to term
my soul."

Life is a woman. Merely by her own seductions
intoxicated, she will stand above her victim
The more unhappy is the soul that lies before her,
the fuller she all is with unrestrained desire.
How often her mysterious gaze has hovered over
my soul with powerful inquisitiveness,
but merely had my soul to quiver in responding—
and silently, with unconcern, she sought the distance.

Not spirit yet, but hardly flesh,
I have no need of bread so often,
it seems my finger, were it pricked –
would drip not blood, but drops of heaven.

But there are times: I'll pour a glass
brimful of wine – and it is wanting,
and salt my bread until it's white,
but to my lips it tasted unsalted.
And whispers in my torrid dreams
predict I'll suffer from my body,
the same as from a pregnant wife,
one oddity upon another.

Oh, dark, dark, dark path,
why are you so dark and lengthy?
Oh, veil that opened but a bit,
and then just wound itself up tighter!

To bear one's self right up to God,
and fall back into night, like stone,
and wait, until a lazy flame
will penetrate you to the bone!

1922

You sleep, my companion-lover, just like
a child on the breast of its mother!
How sweet: for you to fall asleep,
for me to lack strength to awaken,
since, tell me, is this not a dream,
this bed abounding in rapture,
the sonorous twilight, and you,
and you in my peaceful embrace?
Oh delicately winding tendrils
on your moist temple! Oh violets!
The same as the ones which would bloom
for us in our native meadows.
The two of us wove floral wreathes,
and where there were wreathes there was singing,
and songs came with bliss... Oh my last,
my sweet dream, are you finally asleep?...
Flow gently, Aeolian sky,
as you drift and drift up above me,
keep blazing, last sunset of mine,
keep foaming, my ancient wine!

No, today I do not want you,
Memory, so just hold your tongue,
you, vainglorious procuress,
don't procure me anyone.
Don't seduce me down dark alleys,
to the places left behind—
to the bold or to the timid
lips I've kissed so many times.
Sacrilegiously inspired,
I have ploughed my heart soil up,
rooting out the names of lovers
from my sacred calendars.

To Seluc-Rasnatowskaya

So strong, like death, seductively-superbly,
Each part of her whole being powerfully,
Lovingly enticed us all to her.
Unbounded passions of the southern girl
Came forth, it seemed, in all her singing,
Resplendent, hot, and powerful Delilah!
Acknowledging the celebration's start,
She slithered, like a snake, around her prey...
Not feeling love, she unrestrainedly
And passionately gave herself; –for god,
That god whom all her patrimony's sons,
Oppressed slaves, adored and owed obeisance,
With zeal she tried enticing Samson into
Seductive snares, not feeling any love.
Kalypso-like, what power she put into her acting!
And with your furious and forceful passion,
You have infected certainly not Samson
Alone, it seems to me, Delilah!

Perhaps because I wished to fall in love with being
with so much obstinate avidity
I felt more vividly how bottomless
dispassion for it had come over me.
But what of now? Can I be captivated
by life in an enraptured rush I do not understand?
My soul luxuriates in boundless freedom,
as if inhaling life for the first time.

To Lyudmila Erarskaya

Can a lynx ever really be tamed,
so why play the kitten with me?
How you soften your fateful face
with that smile so skillfully!
Thus an actress should play saucy girls:
training her gold, g*psy eye
from beneath sultry lashes downcurled
to look at you while looking aside.
Oh that ominous calm before storms:
it is just like the quiet was when
Don Jose said, "You're the devil himself,"
and Carmen replied, "I am."

To blush for poems that you wrote,
demand that I return your letters,
your gift is sacred, independent
of those blasphemous hands of yours!
What can I return? Here, catch
your notebook full of written pages,
but the fire, moisture, and wind in murmurs
of love can not be given back.
Aren't they why my night is black,
my eyes—vacant, my voice tender,
but do I know which ear of corn has
arisen from the seed you've sown?

In mournful luxury of trees that have been gilded,
in tiredness of branches bent without a quiver
is Autumn's quietude. Deserted and so pale
the distance that has dimmed; and in the night the play
of stars is cold; and a discerning silence
stands guard, or so it seems, to see if some weak sobbing
will not break out, a last enfeebled groan
from fading foliage. The air, though, is made thick
with fog . . . and it appears that the exhausted garden
wants to sigh, but doesn't dare; and strangely blazes
among the tree-tops, colorlessly gold,
a single ruby leaf, as if with blood engorged.

In words, in their cold interlacing,
your movements' melody and pacing
how can I say?
Your raptures' whims, your passion's slumber,
your power, and the way you tremble
can I convey?
The misty North has not made cooler
your mouth's vermilion, or your golden,
deep suntan's stream;
the sun's warmth, live and animating,
flows on in you without abating,
my very dream.
All of the East's intoxications
I drink in the deep undulations
of your night eyes.
Your spicy smell, can I convey it?
My drunken heart, how shall I say it?
Oh love of mine!

Remember: one little hair of my own head
Is dearer to me than all other heads.
So go away... You too,
And you too, and you.
Stop loving me, all of you stop loving me!
Don't watch over me in the mornings,
So that I might be free to go out
And stand in the breeze.

You wrote your sister, "What a pity!
I forgot my sleeveless cloak."
Your fine script helps me track the features
of a soul I did not know.
You were incapable of trusting:
your o's and a's are tightly spaced.
I try in my imagination
to sketch the outlines of your face.
You were quiet, uningenious,
like your lines, formed modestly.
And everything my heart cherishes
you would malign as vanity.
I cling, though, to the tempting dream
that all the same, you would have loved me:
the flourish ending your delicate,
small "l" is just so lovely.

Whose strange and savage will had cast a spell on us,
at that despondent, that night-time hour deep—
was I tormenting fate, was I by fate tormented,
who came and stood your life in front of me?
Our hearts are still replete with our night's madness,
but there's a lifeless wrinkle by your mouth;
the needless words we speak are more abrupt and cruder,
an emptiness has frozen in our eyes...
Oh ominous design! Paints that have been poisoned!
What has the artist of this canvas done
to paint two solitary, tragic masks like ours,
and merge two strangers' bodies into one?

At times our premonitions, at times our recollections
uncover to our souls a world beyond our knowledge:
we like the features of the faces we have dreamed of,
the voices and the hues that make our hearts responsive;
and often all our lives, we yearn for them in secret.
We can't resist a thing that resonates their music;
we seek them in all things, the fleeting and eternal,
in pictures, poems, and in our beloved women...
Is that not why, my darling, you have me in your power?
What voice has made your voice become its repetition?
From whose curved lips have yours retained their obstinacy?
Whose arms encircle me when I'm in your embraces?

We hadn't noticed what the dusk was up to,—
the muslin curtains suddenly looked grey,
the carpet deepened, the armchairs' outlines softened,
and you became—not you, and I became—not I.
A total stranger dropped her hand in sorrow
upon the place your hand had been till then,
and suddenly we knew our love was joyless,
and bloomed while hiding its own lack of strength.
Day's splashes had died down outside the windows
when oddly sharp, your voice began to speak
unnecessary words we both found strange;
when you got up, your shawl around your shoulders,
and rustling, your silks said their "so-long,"
when leaving, you gave me the merest nod