

Rebenok

White light. On. Off. On. Off. *Bzz. iii. Bzz. iii.* Onoffonoffonoffonoffonoff.

Bzibzibzibzibzibzibzi. Off; no light. On; white light. This is not heaven.

Bzibzi again. Like a fly. I saw a fly once go *bzzibzzi.* tip tip on the whitelightnolight.

Swat; fly died. Fly died. Flydied. And only whitelightnolight *bzibzi* now.

Would swat and I die? I die. Idie. Do I live? Fly lived. Fly moved. I do not move. Fly touched light. I do not touch light. But I blink. I think, I think. Something in me thumps.

Umpathumpa umpathumpa. Did fly thump? or only *bzzibzzi*? I cannot *bzzibzzi.* I do not know how. But I eat and fly ate. White light does not eat. White light does not live.

I live. Somehow I know. I live.

Matb

She would hum to herself in the night - *mishb, moy mpadenets, mishb* - rocking back and forth in her chair with empty arms - *son, moy mpadenets, son.* Out the window a street light shone on the empty streets. Silence hung in the stillness. Almost. Quietly the chair creaked. Back and forth. Back and forth. And it was still night.

Vy beeopasny toya tilochka syeyf b matb blyublennosmb, she hummed.

It was a lullaby.

-- *Moy mpadenets, moy mpadenets*: my baby, my baby. She whispered.

She was not asleep. She was not awake.

All around her lived the dream. The nightmare.

<<Your baby is dead>> It echoed in her mind.

The cold rushed through her again. The cold of a corpse; the cold of death. The emptiness ached. Empty arms and empty streets. Absence of life. Something in her did not believe, but the freezing tears still streamed over her burning cheeks.

The nightmare lived.

She was not awake. She was not asleep.

Yet.

She awoke.

Rebenok

Ikati. Ikati comes. Ikati feeds me. Ikati *Zdra-stvu-eetee* softer than light *bzibzi*. Not harsh. Soft. Soft *Zdra-stvu-eetee*. It feels like her finger on my cheek. Touch. Voice. Soft. I would smile. Ikati smiles. I would smile like Ikati but I cannot. I try. The corners of my mouth twitch. They want to smile too.

But no smile. I cannot smile. I cannot even *bzibzi*. I only blinkthinkumpathumpafeel.

Matb

Light glittered off the silverware. Forks and knives. Her chair was hard. There was food on her plate but she was not hungry – not hungry for food.

Her husband sat beside her, his black hair disarrayed, his deep black eyes despondent. It pained her to look into those now sad dark eyes. It tore her heart. But she loved him too much to look away.

He smiled at her, not the bright, awkward, consuming smile so common to his pale Russian face, but the dim, sad, slight smile that had replaced it eight months and three weeks ago. She counted the days. Yes, he smiled at her and nudged her hand with the back of his. He turned his eyes away.

And she noticed the voices at the table: Mother, Father, Sister, Grandpa, Cousin – all her husband's family. All living together in Father's apartment as she did. And they talked of work and school, and cabbages and kings.

Rebenok

iiii. Click. No light. Silence.

Something tick tock somewhere. Far away. Very near. I do not know.

Dark. Something rises in me. Makes me shake. I would cry. But I do not know how. I make no sound. My eyes are dry. But I feel it. I do not know what it is I feel. But I feel it.

Then. It goes. The feeling goes. The darkness goes.

White light.

But it is not really real. Somehow I know.

I see again, and it is clearer, but it is dark.

Then dark slips away again.

I see Ikati. Ikati's smile. My lips twitch.

I see again, and it is clearer, but it is dark.

The bad something in me rises. I shake. But the Bad goes. And the Good comes. A soft light and soft eyes. An Ikati but not Ikati. Better. Softer. Touch better. Sound better. I belong to this Ikati.

The dark. But not Bad. Dark like eyes. Not Ikati eyes. Not my Ikati eyes. My eyes: Eyes that I belong to. Black eyes. Good eyes.

Something fills me. A something like soft touch and voice and eyes and Good.

I hear a muffled voice. I hear a lullaby. Safe. Safesoftnessgood. Good night.

Matb

She looked at the ceiling in the darkness and the quiet. Too awake to sleep. Too asleep to wake. The lullaby looped in her mind.

White light – it hung around her like breath on cold mornings.

Muffled sounds – clinking metal, footsteps echoing off stark white walls.

She opened her eyes. Darkness and quiet. Darkness, quiet. darkness...

Nurses, doctor, husband. Moving here, there, back, forth. A vision. A memory. A mirage.

Faded; indistinct. But true. Pain. She heard a cry. She saw her husband smile. Joy.

She reached for her baby. <<No>> No baby: doctor had grabbed. He left with her baby, *her baby*, and a worried face.

Darkness.

--moy mpadenets, moy mpadenets. She cried out to the sky, to the doctor, to the empty streets, to God if there was one. *My baby*.

She grasped at air. Empty hands. Empty arms. Empty arms.

-- moy mpadenets! It was a scream.

<<Dead>> came the doctors cold voice. The hospital was around her again. It spun.

A scream rose within her. She found herself dumb.

<<Dead>> the voice shouted. For imperfection shall not live. It rang like bells.

Resonated. Shook. Trembled like fear in a darkness that overcame, overwhelmed, consumed her.

Light.

And the darkness was overcome.

A whisper came. It passed through the hospital, the empty streets, the night. It lifted her on its wings, and enveloped her in love. And the whisper said >>Hope<<.

-- *Your baby lives. Your baby lives. Your baby lives.*

She awoke.

It was still dark – but the sun was rising.

Rebenok

White light. No light. Why? Why whitelightnolight. Where did it come from? Where did I come from? What am I? Skin? But I am not skin. Thinkstoughts? I am not thoughts. I am something, something. Something unseeable too.

I know. I know little, but I know that. Where ‘’ somethings come from? Something

something comes from Something

It is true. It must be. The Something tells me so.

--I made you. It says.

I do not ask where the Something came from. The Something always was. The Something is forever.

--Zdra-stvu-eetee, Something. I would say. But I cannot.

--Zdra-stvu-eetee, Something. Zdra-stvu-eetee, bog.

Matb

She dropped to her knees before her window, her hands resting palms upward on her lap.
She looked into the sky.

-- I do not know Your name. Or Who You are...I do not know, really. But I think, I believe You are there. I believe You can hear me. Can't You? Please. Please, hear me. I just want my baby. I'd die to see my baby. Please. I believe you are here. You've always been here haven't You? Waiting for me to see You. You kept me from harm, and I was never hungry and always loved, because of You. I see that now. It was always You. Oh I'm sorry, so sorry, and I know I don't deserve it, but please. Please, let me see my baby again. I'll do whatever You say.

Rebenok

-- Zdra-stvu-eetee. Ikati says.

I open my mouth. But I cannot Zdra-stvu-eetee.

-- Mpadenets. Ikati says, touching me.

Goodness. What is Mpadenets? Touch? Skin? Me? Maybe I. I Mpadenets.

-- s'esh'te. She says. She feeds me. Not sweet food. But food.

Ikati good. Ikati came from Something. Ikati belongs to Something. Like I belong to my Ikati. Maybe I belong to Something.

Matb

She walked along the Russian streets. She was cold. A high clock tocked. The people walked along the streets, but she did not heed. One, or one thousand, they were all the same: All cold. All pushing through air and time. Each step farther from where they started. Each step closer to where they were going. Farther from birth. Closer to death. In this there are no exceptions.

Birds perched on a rooftop – seven dark, one as white as clouds and snow. Below, her footsteps sounded on the pavement. Left and right. Her building was a mile away now.

Coo. She looked up. The Bird.

-- Zdra-stvu-eetee. She said

The Bird cooed for reply. She smiled and walked on.

Coo. It penetrated, commanded, resonated.

She turned, and looked at it. There was Something in the sound.

It flew. Down the street, around the corner, through one alley and another, around another corner, up a black, metal flight of stairs. Instinctively she followed it. Through a heavy door, down a dirty white hall, through another door.

The Bird was gone.

Before her stretched a thousand cribs in a warehouse room. Within them, infants of every age: Eight month olds. Eight year olds. Eighteen year olds. Eighty year olds. Hardly

breathing. Cold. Ignorant to humanity. Alone. Taken at birth. <<Dead>> the doctors say.

But only dead to the world.

A thousand cribs in a warehouse room. A thousand beating hearts. A thousand souls.

Breathing. Thinking. Perfectly imperfect. Alive.

And down one of a hundred rows, a woman stood. They looked at one another.

Rebenok

A sound.

Sound very small, but I hear it. tap tap, tap tap. This sound means Ikati, but Ikati is here already.

Ikati is not smiling, now.

--Zdra-stvu-eetee. A voice says. The voice of my Ikati. My Matb. Somehow I know. It is my Matb.

Matb smiles at me. Goodness. She picks me up. She holds me. Umpathumpa inside her.

Umpathumpa inside me. They are one.

-- Moy mpadenets. She says, holding me tight. Over her shoulder I see Ikati. Ikati smiles.

Safety. Goodness.

-- I love you. She says.

Love

My lips twitch. I almost smile.

Sounds.

Heavy. Harsh. Thump. Not Umpathumpa. Like Bzibzi. Like bzzzzz. Worse. Bad.

I see only Ikati. Sad is her face.

Bad voices. Harsh sounds.

-- Net. Says my Matb. Net. Moy mpadenets.

UmpathumpaFasterHarder

-- Net. Harsh voice.

No Umpathumpa.

-- moy mpadenets. She says. She sighs . She falls to hardgreypavement, holding me tightly. A hand stops my head from hitting the floor. Unseen hand of the Something.

-- Matb! I say. I say!

-- Matb. I say again. My eyes water. Three tears stream out. Now four.

She does not live.

The Something comes. It is bright. Beautiful. Only I can see it. It takes the unseeable part of my Matb away. She smiles bright. She waves.

-- Pakah, moy mpatenets. Pakah, moy Rebenok.

Pakah seems sad. I cannot say Pakah. I do not know how. But I can say Matb.

-- Matb. I say. It means everything I cannot say to her.

>>Matb<<