

Tata

By Christopher Adamson

On a windy late-November afternoon
a sparrow crashes into our window
falling, wing broken, to the balcony floor
Mama takes it to the roof and wrings
its neck, then looks defiantly up at the
sky and pegs the laundry to the line
while you, terminal and bone-weary, sleep through
live coverage of shootings on the six o'clock news.

When the January sun brightens
the frozen city below, Mama shows me
the list you made for the hospital:
cubes of sugar, Listerine and a comb
toothbrush, warm socks, an obscure
post-Hegelian book
crinkled snapshots of Mama and me
sitting on a deserted pebble beach
somewhere on the Baltic shore.

On nights she works late
slicing chicken parts for soup
whispering to ghosts, her yellow
gloves hiding the blue
ink sewn into her forearms
I go to St. Joseph's on my own.

You are asleep on the narrow bed
wizened, weakened and wounded
bruises in the crook of your arm
from the nurses, their needlework.

Feeling a chill in the room, I check
to see if the cast-iron radiator is warm
the nihilist in me wondering if it's
you the doctors see, or just one of
Arshile Gorky's emaciated faces.

Ontology can be nightmarishly opaque
but as you once patiently explained
we exist simultaneously in three worlds:
The world in which we are but facts
Our world, Tata, the one you and I created together
My world, one in which little is certain
except that you will live on in me.

Christopher Adamson is a sociologist and a fiction writer. His essay “Existential and clinical uncertainty in the medical encounter: An idiographic account of an illness trajectory defined by inflammatory bowel disease and avascular necrosis” appeared in *The Sociology of Health and Illness* (Volume 19, March 1997). His poem “Ode on a Styrofoam Cup” was in *Intima*’s Fall 2017 issue, and his blog, “The Diagnosis of Dying,” appeared in *Crossroads* on November 15, 2017. He is the author of a novella, *The Road to Jewel Beach* (Exile Editions, 2004).