

Tabacaria
Álvaro de Campos

I am nothing.
Never will be.
Couldn't be bothered to.
Aside from that, I contain in me all the dreams of the world.

Windows of my room,
The room of one of the millions in the world whom no one knows
(And if they knew them, what would they know?),
You open onto the mystery of a street crossed constantly by people,
Onto a street inaccessible to all thoughts,
Real, impossibly real, true, unrecognizedly true,
With the mystery of things that dwell beneath stones and people,
With the death that dampens the walls and gray hairs of men,
With the Destiny that steers the carriage of everything down the road of
nothing.

I'm conquered today, as if I knew the truth.
I'm lucid today, as if about to die,
And sharing no longer a brotherhood with things
But merely a farewell, transforming this house and this side of the street
Into a row of train cars, and a departure whistled
From within my head,
And a rattling of nerves and a scraping of bones in the offing.
I'm baffled today, like one who puzzled and understood and forgot.
I'm divided today between the loyalty I owe
To the Tobacco Store across the street, as something real without,
And to the sensation that everything is a dream, as something real within.

I failed at everything.
Since I had no purpose whatsoever, maybe everything was nothing.
The education they gave me,
I lowered myself from it through the window at the back of the house.
I went to the country with grandiose ideas,
But found there only plants and trees,
And when there were people they were the same as before.
I step away the window, sit down in a chair. What is there to think about?

How should I know what I'll be, me who doesn't know what I am?
Be what I think? But I think I'm so many things!
And there are so many who think they're the same thing that there can't be
that many!
Genius? At this moment
A hundred thousand dreaming brains fancy themselves geniuses like me,
And history won't remember, who knows?, even one,
There'll be nothing but the dung of all these conquests-to-be.
No, I don't believe in myself.
In every asylum there are sick lunatics with such certainties!
I, who have no certainties, am I more or less certain?
No, not even in myself...
In how many attics and non-attics of the world
Are geniuses-to-themselves not at this very moment dreaming?
How many aspirations, high and noble and lucid
—Yes, high and noble and lucid indeed—,
And who knows whether attainable,

Will never see the light of the actual sun nor reach human ears?
The world is for those born to conquer it
And not for those who dream they can conquer it, even if they're right.
I've dreamt more than Napoleon did.
I've clung in my hypothetical breast to more humanity than Christ.
I've conceived philosophies in secret that no Kant ever wrote.
But I am, and might always be, 'he of the attic,'
Even if I didn't live there;
Will always be the one *who wasn't born for that*;
Will always be only the one *who had potential*;
Will always be the one who waited for them to open the door, at the foot of a
wall that had no door,
And hummed the tune of Infinity in a chicken coop,
And heard the voice of God in a covered well.

Believe in myself? No, nor in anything.
May Nature pour over my fiery head
Its sun, its rain, the wind that rustles my hair,
And all the rest let it come if it may, or had to come, or let it not.
Heart-addled slaves to the stars,
We conquer the whole world before getting out of bed;
But we wake and it's far off,
We leave the house and it's the earth itself,
Plus the Solar System and the Milky Way and the Unknown.

(Eat your chocolates, little one;
Eat your chocolates!
It turns out the world is not made from metaphysics, only chocolates.
It turns out that all religions can't teach more than a candy store.
Eat, my grubby darling, eat!
If only I could eat chocolates with the same truth as you!
But I think and, as soon as I tear off the silver paper, which is tin foil,
I throw everything to the ground, like I have thrown away life).

But at least there remains of the bitterness of what I'll never be
The rapid scribble of these verses
Entryway flung open to the Impossible.

(You, who console, who doesn't exist and therefore consoles,
Or Greek goddess, conceived as a statue that were living,
Or Roman patrician, impossibly noble and malign,
Or princess of laborers, most kind and painted,
Or marquise of the 18th century, low-necked and remote,
Or celebrated *cocotte* of our parents' time,
Or who knows what from ours -I really can't think of what-,
All that, whatever it may be, that you are, if it can inspire then let it!
My heart is an empty bucket.
Like those who invoke spirits, I invoke
Myself and find nothing.
I go to the window and see the street with absolute clarity.
I see the stores, I see the sidewalks, I see the cars that pass,
I see the clothed living things that criss-cross,
I see the dogs that also exist,
And all this weighs on me like a sentence of exile,
And all this is foreign, like everything).

I've lived, I've studied, I've loved, I've even believed,
And today there is no pauper I don't envy only for not being me.
I look at each of them with their rags and their sores and their lie,
And I think: maybe you've never lived nor studied nor loved nor believed
(Because it's possible to give reality to all that without doing any of it);
Maybe you've only existed, like a lizard who's had its tail cut off
And which is tail writhingly closer than the lizard.

I made of myself what I didn't know,
And what I could make of myself I didn't.
The disguise I wore was wrong.
Thus they took me for who I wasn't and I didn't correct them, and I lost
myself.
When I wished to tear off the mask,
It was stuck to my face.
When I pulled it off and saw myself in the mirror,
I had already aged.
I was drunk, no longer knew how to wear the disguise that I hadn't removed.
I set the mask down outside and slept in the closet
Like a dog put up with by the owner
For being inoffensive
And I'll write this story to prove that I'm sublime.

Musical essence of my useless poems,
If only I could find you as something that I made,
And not be forever across the street from the Tobacco Shop across the street,
Trampling with my feet the consciousness of existing,
Like a rug a drunk stumbles on
Or a doormat that the gypsies robbed and wasn't worth a thing.

But the Owner of the Tobacco Shop has come to the door and shut the door.
I watch him with the discomfort of a craned neck
And with the discomfort of a misunderstanding soul.
He will die and I will die.
He'll leave behind a sign, I'll leave behind poems.
Eventually the sign will die, and the verses too.
And then later the street the sign was on will die,
And the language in which the poems were written.
Afterwards the spinning planet on which all this came to be will die.
On other satellites of other systems something like people
Will continue making something like poems and living beneath something like
signs,
Always one thing across from the other,
Always one thing as useless as the next,
Always the impossible as stupid as the real,
Always the underlying mystery as true as the repose of the surface mystery,
Always this or always something else, or neither one thing nor the other.

But a man has gone into the Tobacco Shop (to buy tobacco?),
And the plausible reality crashes suddenly down on me.
I half-stand energetic, convinced, human,
And I go and try and write these lines to the contrary.

I light a cigarette as I consider writing them
And taste in the cigarette the liberation of all thoughts.
I follow the smoke like my own path,
And enjoy, in a moment of sensitivity and aptitude,

The release from all speculations
And the awareness that metaphysics is a consequence of being cranky.

Then I throw myself back down into the chair
And go on smoking.
For as long as Destiny allows me, I will go on smoking.
(If I married the daughter of my cleaning lady
Maybe I would be happy).

Having considered this, I get up out of the chair. I go to the window.

The man has left the Tobacco Shop (putting change in his pants pocket?).
Ah, I know him: it's Esteves the Unmetaphysical.
(The Owner of the Tobacco Shop has come to the door).
As if by divine instinct Esteves turned and saw me.
He waved goodbye, I yelled out to him Goodbye Esteves!, and the universe
Recreated him for me without ideal nor expectation, and the Owner of the
Tobacco Shop smiled.