# nova·nevėdoma



*Lyrical I*

# Another Stitch On The Wall

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*Hello! This story today is a new edition of an old essay of mine that, I think, is better described as a piece of short fiction or, to be precise, neurotic auto-fiction[1]. I hope you enjoy it! *

> *Questions arose. Like, what in the fuck was going on here, basically.* - Thomas Pynchon, Inherent Vice Amsterdam: a hotel bed is propping me up from the underneath, and I watch villi and stitches on a huge jumpertextured wallpaper move. Like worms, or waves, or chains, or snakes, or like a jumper. A wind blows and villi and stitches shake and bend. Left and right, left and right. Or right and left? I don't wish to know. Too much movement, anyway. I must not distract myself. I must pay attention. What is attention, after all? Does it mean being focused? To concentrate? To pay attention, eh? Why do we pay attention? Do they accept cards? No way. Attention cannot be money. This is ridiculous. English is weird.

Anyway. Focus. Villi are moving. The grey-brown jumper turns a meadow, in fact, a grey-brown Chernobyl meadow, mesmerising,

enthralling, but somehow familiar. I have been to hotels of the same brand before. Maybe they put this jumper wallpaper in every hotel of theirs, in every room, on every wall, on a ceiling and on a floor. Perhaps there is a factory that 3D-prints hotels with jumper wallpapers on the wall behind the bed. Then they got distributed all around Europe and—who knows?—outside of it. I'm not sure. The jumper is moving. It's like a cat now, a cat crossbred with an optical illusion, an opticat. Can cats and optical illusions engage in carnal pleasures and then have small little optically-illusionary kitties? I don't know.

'Mushrooms are not working,' I say.

'Are you sure? Like for real?' She chuckles.

'I am. We should have gone for a stronger option.'

'Are you disappointed?'

'I am.'

The mushroom merchant had a catalogue: a colourful set of worn-out pages designed in Microsoft Word 2003 and WordArt. Every page showed characteristics scales, like weapons, spells, or items in video games, but it was not +5 stamina and +100 intellect—it was a bit different. Vision, energy— something else I can't remember—are affected, supposedly in an unusual and intricate way. My bet wasn't on positive ways, but the whole concept of positive and negative was under the question. When the world is about to warp into an infinite spiral,

who cares about such silly concepts? I couldn't remember the exact names or brands of the mushrooms, but they all had 'Magic' at the beginning of their names at the top and Latin names at the bottom of each page. Nice.

We went to Amsterdam for a few nights only. It was raining. No, incorrect word. It was pouring. It is better. Or bucketing down? The heavens had opened and were bucketing down on us. The skies were melting. It is much, much better. I'm happy that English is so flexible in describing different kinds of rain. We resembled a mushroom with a wide black cap and with two stalks, deluged from the top to bottom. We were heading back to the hotel after a long walk through the old city centre. Then we saw an amanita muscaria—that one from Mario brothers, the one you eat and gain superpowers, in the game, though, in real life you die (or not, if parents lied to me). It was a flat outdoor ad that invited us into the shop. Ads didn't affect us, but curiosity did, and we entered. It was late. Did this guy have permission to sell mushrooms that late? Nevermind. The existence of the catalogue convinced us. It wasn't like usual la carte, there was no mushroom soup, no mushroom risotto, and even no portobello mushroom burger. Is that true that living people eat dead mushrooms, but living mushrooms eat dead people? We skimmed through the pages and decided to go for the simplest option. Perhaps, it was a good idea. Was it? Or not? We had never tried such a thing before. What if we forget to use all of it and leave some in our pockets, and the border police arrests us? What if only Russian border control noticed it? I did not want to go to a Russian

prison. Agreed, the simplest version, the smallest portion. For two, please. Yes, card, please.

‘Don’t mix it with vodka.’

Why vodka? I thought. Maybe the merchant recognised our Russian accent. Is it stereotypical to draw a connection between Russians and vodka? Is it racist? But Russian is a nationality, not a race. Should we be offended anyway?

‘And buy some sweets, chocolate, or something.’ We had that already. ‘Eat it when you feel unwell or want the effect to ease.’ He actually cared about us—what a lovely guy! ‘Have a good night.’ The merchant smiled.

Friends said we shouldn’t get high outside (especially not with weed cupcakes). Otherwise, you can fall into a canal and die a miserable tourist death. We would rather not die a miserable tourist death, so we went back to our room. Smoking joints wasn’t allowed in a hotel room, so mushrooms seemed like a perfect option to brighten the evening. The skies were dipping their melting substance on us, remember?

‘Are you filming me?’

‘No. I am filming how mushrooms are not working.’ She laughs.

‘What?’

‘You’ve been staring at the jumper on the wall for the last 20 minutes.

I'm worried." She laughs. I laugh, too.

'Is that a good reason for filming me?'

'You reminded me a philosopher. Whatever you are seeing there, can a jumper be that interesting?'

'You said you are worried.'

'I am, but you seem alright.'

'The jumper, it's beautiful. I have never seen anything like that.'

She laughs. 'Why? It's normal. What do you see exactly?'

'It isn't normal. It's like... alive. Villi, stitches, they move, like a grass, like a fur on the wind. It's marvellous.'

She's in hysteria. 'Now I think that my mushrooms are not working.'

We both laugh.

It tastes like walnut but almost tasteless, not tasty, rather bitter, drier than a walnut, not oily at all, like a truffle maybe? Are we eating dried truffles? I should pay... I should've read la carte better. I put the last piece inside me. I don't eat anything, do not drink water nor vodka. Did you know that vodka has the same root as water, 'vodá' in Russian? You know why? It's also transparent. Boom! Who am I talking to? Are you the jumper? Are you behind the jumper? Why are you there? Are you hiding from someone? Are you hiding from me? Too many questions. I

don't have time to answer them, nor desire to do so. This new unreal reality is what's real right now. What if I am imagining you? What if you are imagining me? Is it me who behold the beauty of the jumper, or is it the jumper who behold the beauty of mine? What if I am just another stitch on the wall?

'Still doesn't work?' I ask.

'No, nothing.'

'You shouldn't have eaten anything else.'

'Maybe. I want to see the jumper, though.'

'I heard it's personal.'

'What is personal? The jumper?'

'The effect.'

'The effect of what?'

'The effect mushrooms have on your mind. People don't see the same things. It's like they unlock something, something innermostly yours. Perhaps, yours isn't a jumper, you know?'

We turn on a telly. It's Captain America. There's also Hulk there with the rest of the supernatural crew. They are Avengers. The second film. The one where they fight the AI robot that is too smart to bear humanity. Captain America speaks German. We laugh. We don't

understand German. He speaks again. We laugh harder. It seems surreal. Captain America is not supposed to speak German, but that's how humour works, I guess? We laugh. The AI speaks German, too. It feels weird yet hilarious, utterly. No more we can bear it, not the film, not the language, but our laugh stomach cramps. We switch the channel.

Breadman appears. His name is Bernd das Brot (that we will learn later). He looks like a brick or a loaf of sourdough bread, but has eyes that slept last time a few centuries ago and dangling gloves instead of arms, as if they had no bones. His face has wrinkles. How old is he? He sings, also in German. Is all TV in the Netherlands in German? Maybe it's not German? He has eyes, Breadman, Dreadman. Is he a superhero, too? 'He was bitten by a sourdough when he was a kid. Now he is a friendly neighbour, a warden of the city.' He sings, conveying his superheroic yeast-powered wisdom on how one should behave on a road. The answer—safely. We still can't understand German, thought, but we're getting there. We laugh. Hello, stomach cramps. It is ridiculous, hilarious, bizarre, funny, and maybe some other adjectives, or perhaps all of them at once, or perhaps none of those but some other adjectives which my mind is desperately looking for.

'What happened? Switch back to the bread man.' I say, laughing.

'No way, my abs hurt. I can't do it any more.'

'But he is Breadman, a manshaped bread, a breadshaped man. Please.'

She switches it back.

It's not a comedy. It's a kids show. Breadman explains the better ways of living. It's educational. Is it self-help? It's 2 am. Why the kids show is shown so late? What's a time zone in Germany? Maybe it's for German kids living in Australia. The show ends. God, please, no Peppa Pig. Breadman starts again. We laugh. Perhaps it's just filling in the program running during the night. Yes, it would make sense. We laugh for one more hour, or could be a day. Everything hurts. My neck hurts. It's hard to breathe. Can one die of laughing? Can Breadman show be torture for junkies? An execution by laughing, but without tickling? Am I a junkie now?

'You can't become a junkie after just one portion of mushrooms.'

'That's what junkies say.'

'It's just mushrooms.'

'Junkies' famous last words.'

Time passes and I look at the jumper. It's gone. Not the jumper—villi, and stitches aren't moving any more. Who watches that crap? Is the door to the secret chambers of my mind closed again? Was I freed from a cage whither my mind kept me locked? Was my mind also locked somewhere? A double cage? A cage inside a cage? A cage inside a cage inside a cage? A hypercage, a tesseract of cages, a Nicolas Cage? Whatever it was, I wish it always had a jumper on the wall.

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Notes

1. sounds like “erotic asphyxiation” innit

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*Read next part*

Of Love, Leisure, and Reality checks

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