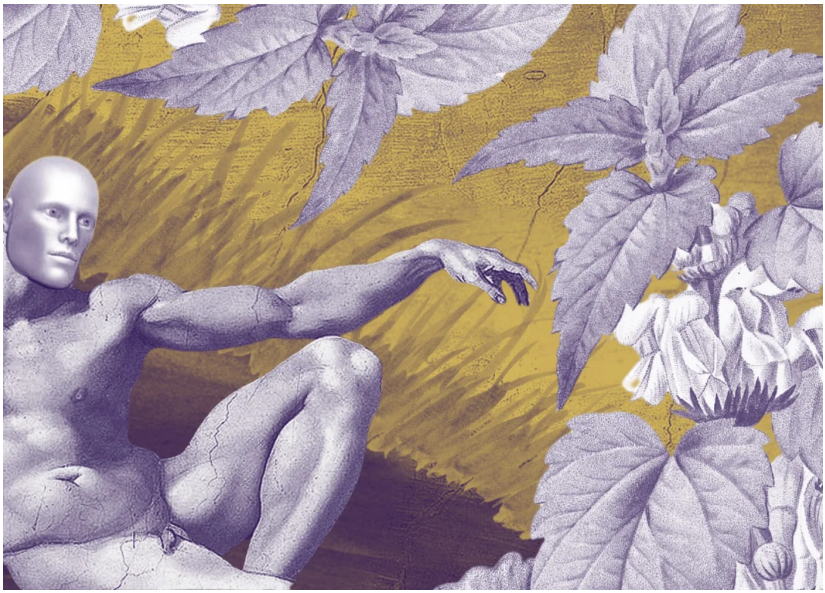
nova·nevėdoma



Lyrical I

Word salad, with nettle leaves and rakes

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Touching of Grass, also known as La Tocca dell'Erba** Everyone steps on the very same rakes, because they love to learn and make mistakes themselves. Learning from others' mistakes — boring. Others' mistakes you can only admire, and laugh at like first-rate jokes. You can sculpt a meme or craft a whole book about where the rakes lie and how to find or avoid them, attach maps with a legend and secret paths, supply with footnotes, supplementary materials, a sequel. Perception, however, is

deceptive — every book is but fiction, every character is not you.

— Touch grass. Made up some rakes, — says the author's mate. We're nowhere else but in a tippling house, yet we're drinking pure water, because the tippling house's turn has come to renew its alcohol licence.

— I'm outraged by the situation.

— No more than it's outraged by you.

— It's universal outrage! As if you, my dear fellow, aren't outraged. Everyone's outraged.

— Thing is, if it's so universal, then not-being-outraged is far more effective, swimming against the current, unperturbedly being outraged at the universal outragedness.

— You're not right.

— I know, and you...

Also know, "touch grass", but what if it's nettles?

— Well, cheers!

Glasses of H_2O in the air, faces serious, up-we-go! The water's carbonated, Georgian Borjomi.

Once lived a boy, let's call him Boy. In a field grew his parental home, and in that home he himself was growing, and next to the house not a

blessed thing grew, except grass, and the grass every last blade was called “nettles”. Ow and ouch! Oh and ah!

— Nettles?

— Eh you… townie!

Nettles — that’s the prickly, stinging kind, from which they also make soup, that very one Boy was force-fed by the surrounding adults every day: for breakfast, lunch and dinner, though who in their right mind would make soup from a biological weapon? Only madmen, idiots and adventure-seekers, but the latter for some reason hadn’t been seen for ages, they’d dwindled, dispersed, tumbled into adventures.

Nettles — that’s what, after midnight’s sleepwalking strolls through its thickets you return covered in pink welts from head to toe, regardless of the amount of clothing. You, foolington, didn’t distinguish it from some other grass, and the welts now itch — itch so much that you feel alive, truly alive, so that the “I” finds itself, “I” suddenly remembers that it “is”, for it always craved to “become” and “be” to step on rakes or avoid them, but now it un-craved, for it itches, itches it is, clawing skin to blood; well, when will it stop already, unlivable conditions!

— Leave off! Drop it! Drop the nettles! — shouts Boy.

— And you don’t run from us! — other boys with a small “b” shout after him.

— Whack you with a nettles whip! Wearing shorts? T-shirt? Here, take

that, on the arm, on the leg. Townie!

— Ow! Leave off! Ow! I'm not a townie! I live in a nettle field.

— Well then you're used to it, aren't you?

— Cheers! — spring H_2O runs inside, tickles the tongue with bubbles, like waternettles, only pleasant.

Nettles — that's what when you brush against, you yourself become nettles. That also happens, often enough against anyone's will. So it happened with Boy's uncle. You could say he became an adventure-seeker, but no — one day he simply rebelled against the ongoing injustice in reality, not yet realising that besides injustice nothing can go on in reality by definition, or reality consists of injustice, for if there were justice in it, it would simply stop itching and forget that it is, would die in oblivion, in silence and peace, at night on its torn sofa, in drunken delirium. A daft fool he was in general, this uncle, left home with a desire for knowledge, but without a desire to learn from others' mistakes, paradoxically-ironically, but completely predictably stepped on the rakes, fell into a field of nettles and... died, we could say, but no! He became nettles, ceased being both uncle and fool, though not growing any cleverer in the process, because for nettles to be nettles intellect isn't needed — it can simply sting, that bastardous grass, opening for whoever gets stung the magical world of welts. After this incident Boy began fearing nettles even more, for he didn't want to share the fate of his dear uncle. He wanted neither to itch nor to become grass, which everyone goes about touching in moments of mental

overload, the kind that sometimes makes you suffocate, like from excessively long paragraphs, or, equally — from excessively short ones.

— Touch grass!

— With pleasure, only if grass is the name of your fat mom!

— Touché. Ask for another bottle. Goes down well!

— Turns out alcohol's not necessary to philosophise and discuss other people's moms.

— For you — other people's, but for someone — their own!

— Good sir, we'd like another round. Two glasses of Borjomi, please. Actually, let's make it four straight away. Tingles the tongue pleasantly, so it does.

If you want to learn something, you need to go to that very field and touch-touch-touch, on rakes step-step-step, so they hit you in the forehead-head-head, until you're all red as an animal's reproductive organ in a fit of erotic frenzy, and on your forehead grows a bump, like those extinct horned horsies had. They certainly once existed, lived in their quasimythical forest with trees and bushes, with berries, vegetables and fruits hanging from leafy branches, but as soon as the forest ran out of food, hunger began starving the horsies. They grew thin, from male and female[1] prancing beauties turned into bony uglies, fit only for the horsemen of the apocalypse, namely Famine. The horsies gathered in a herd and went to that very field, where grew the house, in which grew

Boy, and nothing grew except them and nettles, went there just to eat at least something, even these bloody nettles, but after the first bite all immediately turned into them, “became” them, began to “be” them. Everyone’s destined to unite with nettles, merge into a single nettle meadow, sprawling from one horizon to the other, until it too becomes irritated, redden, selfcovers with welts, and night falls.

— Touch grass!

— I mean, yes, but no, like what if we’re in a desert. Imagine, sand, and besides it — nothing, not a blade of grass, not a little nettle.

— But you’ll find one, with your medical history, you just have to know how to find something like that, anything even, to touch.

— Touché!

— Touché grass! Something to drink for.

Nettles — that’s the kind of grass that doesn’t grow only in the desert and in space. Boy knew this, but couldn’t fly to space and loved breathing oxygen on Earth. So, given the lack of other options, he moved to live in the desert, having dug himself an underground passage straight from his cellar using a plastic spoon from children’s yoghurt. Dug long, a long-longest-extra-long tunnel, dug till he near buried himself, but burrowed through and found himself there, in the nettleless land of sands, in a land where by day — scorching sun, air vibrates, by night — eternal night, in between — their shared custody,

round the clock — dunes, camels, a couple of oases, Bedouins, sandstorms, sandworms, a feeling of everything being filled with nothing, which hitherto he hadn't experienced. There they don't feed you nettle soup, don't brew nettle beer, don't press nettle juice, don't squeeze you out of the house to walk about for your mental health, and don't chase after you with nettle branches — nowhere from, nowhere to, no one to, and why anyway? There are no rakes, no grass, nothing to step on, nothing to touch, you just walk along, sinking in sand up to your knees. And it's shifting, bastardous sand, pulls you down, sucks you in.

— Clever, well-read people write that you just need to go outside, and then the algorithm's simple: whether there's grass nearby or not, you direct your eyes towards the green colour, walk towards it, stretch out your hand and that's it.

— What's "it"?

— Something! You touch! Calm arrives. Tranquility.

— I see, and if someone's pissed there?

— If you want — I'll piss! Barkeep, mate, another round for us, we humbly request!

— Touch grace!

— Touch grace, indeed!

Nettles — that's the kind of grass which, if you don't touch for long, you want to touch again, as if you miss the nettle touch, the welts, their colour, size, the burning sensation, skin dissolving in nettle juices. Skin blazes, throbbing, as if someone really does live in it! Even Boy, who with all his little heart hated nettles, finding himself alone in the desert, having become a Bedouin, having tamed a camel, after years passed, wanted to touch grass himself. Boy grew up, shot up, matured, buried fear in the sand along with nappies, like a cat, in a word — ready. Bedouined about the dunes — not a blade of grass, stumbled upon nettle oases — alas, a mirage! Hired in one Saharan village a swarm of mosquitoes to work as a nettle ersatz, shut himself in a tent, mosquitoes stung him to exhaustion — alas, not quite that at all, mosquitoes aren't grass. This thought only drove Boy to despair, but he didn't give up, kept bedouining. There, in sandy expanses, between two horizons, sand serves the service of greenery, people rake it with rakes, so that until the next sandstorm everything has a mounded and striped texture, neat and proper, and grass, as a rare phenomenon in those parts, still exists somewhere, somewhere enclosed in nature reserves, behind natureprotectiony fences round the perimeter, two metres high, on top — barbed wire, every couple of metres a sign — "DO NOT TOUCH THE GRASS".

This piece happened to be the author's contribution to the Symposium, a Substack-based community mag publishing everything including fiction, essays, poetry, visual art and film (and much more), with July's theme being "Touch Grass".

Notes

1. Here it's important to raise a question for those in the know: did unicorns of the female sex possess a horn?

Read next part

Phobokenosis

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