



POETRY DESK

## Meeting

**Maria Batova**

Translated by Olga Jarman

*For Dr. Mark Burno*

The grey-haired physician  
is standing  
head bowed  
near a monastery church in Zvenigorod  
with his eyes  
closed  
the Orthodox Christians  
are nodding their heads  
well, come along  
you are a  
Christian Anonymous  
aren't you  
come on  
follow us  
and you will be  
like us  
pious  
Thou shalt not  
write or listen to  
any poetry  
Thou shalt not  
meditate about God  
Thou shalt not  
read anything of  
Chekhov, Bulgakov, or Elliott

Thou shalt not  
listen to anything by  
Mozart or Mahler.  
Thou shalt not  
watch anything by  
Fellini or Bergman  
Thou shalt not  
see any Botticelli and the nudes  
Thou shalt learn  
how to make the sign of the Cross  
to kiss the priest's hand  
to frown upon  
modern morals  
theatre  
and democracy  
to praise  
the Russian idea—  
oh your surname isn't Russian  
we're perfectly okay  
with that  
for you  
belong to us  
you  
have got the main possession of yours –  
that is  
your beard  
your materialistic ideas  
are no trouble  
they will dissolve  
by the way  
Thou shalt be  
doctoring away now  
in an Orthodox manner  
no poems  
only  
the Holy Fathers

Lo!  
you're a rummy old bird,  
you fellow,  
you are getting old  
fancy thinking  
about the hereafter

but the doctor  
couldn't hear anything of that  
as he  
was contemplating  
the silence  
deep in his thoughts

well  
he  
tossed his head back  
looked once again at the cupolas  
and went  
to the patient's home  
she was crying in despair  
all last night  
praying  
Lord, if you exist, send me  
a doctor!

the physician walked along his path  
Christ looked at him kindly  
through the eyes  
of a baby with a blue cap from her baby carriage  
Christ looked  
with the eyes of a sad old lady with varicose veins  
she was wearing  
a second hand outworn cardigan  
the last bunch of those cheap flowers of the fall  
in her hand  
the physician  
has bought the flowers  
Christ looked at him  
from his memories  
with the eyes  
of a schizophrenic  
who kept carrying  
buckets of feces  
with joy  
thinking himself unworthy of anything else  
"delusion of culpability, but what moral sanity!"—  
the physician thought  
at the same time this patient was praying  
for him  
looking at the physician from Heaven  
—he was a great Saint, you know

Christ  
was showing  
the doctor  
The Nettle and The White Dead Nettle  
and funny tricks  
of The Pup and The Kitten  
keeping him warm  
with food and clothes  
giving him books as a present  
helping to meet people  
caressing with the sun's warmth

rejoicing with the aroma of the forest  
tickling the finches to make them sing louder  
helping with the zoom of the doctor's old camera

giving a cue  
what to say to whom

and  
was smiling  
all the time –

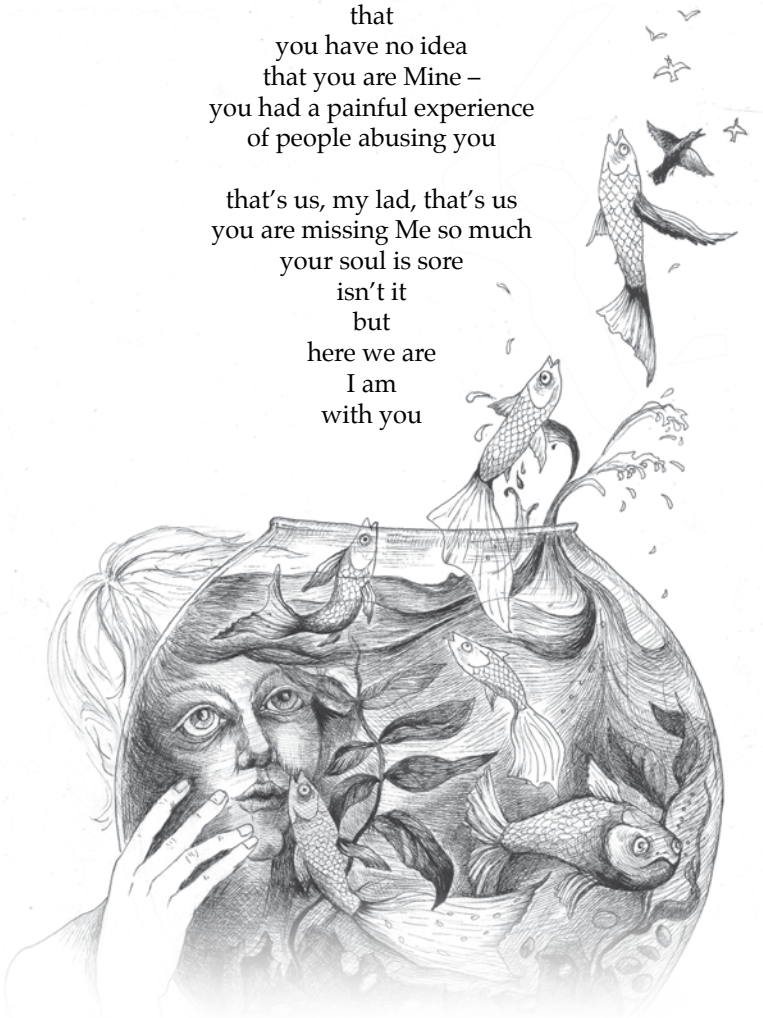
"It doesn't matter  
that  
you don't believe in Me,  
O Physician  
I can shine through you  
it is perfectly OK with Me

I can  
for you are  
transparent  
absolutely transparent  
it is OK

that  
you have no idea  
that you are Mine –  
you had a painful experience  
of people abusing you

that's us, my lad, that's us  
you are missing Me so much  
your soul is sore

isn't it  
but  
here we are  
I am  
with you



every day  
this makes you  
so happy  
inside  
but  
guess what  
when  
we get together at last  
and no one will take your joy away from you  
you will not question Me about anything  
but it will be I  
who  
will share secrets  
with you

do you remember  
that little fish bowl  
of your childhood  
when you had risen and saw  
that bowl  
full of colorful guppy fish  
we were so happy  
you and Me  
we were laughing  
with joy

Hark!  
here's My secret  
guppy revelation  
I had made them  
with My own hands  
on the occasion of your seventh birthday  
brought them up  
tried My best  
to make  
the colors match  
I see I did it not too bad  
You still remember  
them

don't be angry  
my sonny  
with the Orthodox  
they are  
My beloved children  
especially  
those of post-Soviet Russia  
they are in pain, too  
they are  
unhappy

sometimes  
they can't see Me  
sometimes  
let alone each other  
by the way  
here is a patient  
for you  
she has been bullied  
at the same parish  
and she's lost Me  
but  
you  
will help her to find  
Me  
a delicate work  
nobody would do it  
for Me  
please  
don't let Me  
down  
I'm missing her terribly  
coming to My Holy Cup  
the priest there  
is  
very kind, too  
I'll introduce you to him  
one day  
you are  
from the same mould"

the physician  
was walking  
along the lane  
hurrying to catch  
the train  
thinking  
"what a special kind of wind this is  
a sound of a gentle blowing!  
I'll make a note  
in my diary  
as soon as I come  
home"

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**Maria Batova** is a classical musician and poet. She is the founder of the early music ensemble *Musica Humana*, an educator in early music performance at the Moscow Conservatory, and one of Moscow's preeminent church choir directors. Her poetry has been published in various journals, including *Le Messenger orthodoxe*. Her first book of poetry is being prepared for publication.