

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 80 *CutBank 80*

Article 37

Spring 2014

The Guru

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Recommended Citation

Allio, Kirstin (2014) "The Guru," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 80 , Article 37.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss80/37>

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THE GURU

The Guru was once a baby boy, and He was born to worldly parents.

At least His mother was present; His father had walked off in the most profane manner. The baby boy was full of the knowledge of human suffering. His mother was an old gray horse at twenty-six, and His father's curses were drowned out on the factory floor in a different city.

His fresh baby tissue was made of old human letters. Bleary lead, clogged ink, brittle paper.

There was no star over His cot, no herbal fug of cow breath moistening His blankets. Stars were brass and valor in Soviet Russia, stars were because there were so few streetlamps. Cows were starved and slaughtered. Why weren't they slaughtered before they starved? the baby boy already wondered.

But He wasn't to be an expert on world hunger.

There were no nurses in the provincial hospital. (His mother had traveled south to her mother to have Him.) Only shuffling babushkas who quit chewing their lips to stare at Him.

But the baby boy wasn't born to save the class of kerchiefs, He wasn't born to light dead streetlamps. The baby boy had the knowledge of a billion stars already. He knew a billion souls of suffering.

Hospitals then you brought your own soap and your own towel. You brought the chicken leg in a jar of broth. Do you hear Me? said the Guru.

You squat to shit—squat? said the Guru—the walls of the shitter like falling down a well.

Do you hear Me? Nobody told you when you were finished giving birth. Not the babushkas. The trees outside were black spires.

My own mother hoped to die, said the Guru. Even so, My baby urine did not trickle but splashed like a baptismal fountain.

Lay your subhuman at My feet, people, said the Guru. My feet are just feet, formed from a baby's pudding. The little bobs and yellow crystals. My feet can take it, people.

There was a lot of weeping. A lot of laughter after sorrow.

A boy from the baby. It was clear He was different. When they went to the "uncle's" dacha in summer, the boy dreamed the figs on the platter. Cucumbers came to be as a result of His dreaming. His body was golden in the farm pond. The drunkard farmer saw an angel and quit drinking. There were a thousand other drunkard farmers, pensioners, everybody, but the boy did not want to attract attention. He already had with His gift for piano. The uncle was all accordion and bluster.

When the boy was nineteen He went to Altai in the Himalayas. He went to Kyoto.

At some point He showed up in Berkeley, California.

Then He made His hermitage-sanctuary in the shell of an old farm behind the Atlantic.

We found Him where He had built His lair against that dour seascape.

Plenty of people had come before us.

Devotion was free. Practice would cost you everything.

An aromatic deck made a fan around the low waist of the zendo. We sat on the soft cedar skirt, we learned how He had curled His hand inside His mother's and transmitted the Great Happiness of His being.

His wives wept long gray tears when they told us. Dark eyes were gopi-girl, were Hindu goddess. If we closed our eyes we could see into the kohl-dark corners of temples slicked with clay-tasting waters, the crown of a red tower redder than sunset, and the pale hairs rose, pulling the flesh of our forearms into tiny starpoints.