

Herr Luftinspektor.

A P O E M

b y

Andre Orbeliani.

**Luftinspector means 'thin air supervisor'. Andre Orbeliani PEng writes from Nelson, BC. and suggests that, because everyday news is so dull, a poem may be of some distractive value. We agree—Ed.*

THE LUFTINSPECTOR

*a poem by andre orbeliani**

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As dark as Hell!
This here is not Hell.
Then, what is it?
This is the Jersey mine near Salmo. BC.

And my headlamp went out.
I turned the button for the spare
Nothing happened/Thus darkness.

I am alone
because I am a Luftinspector
and I am a mile from the portal.

Nobody knows what a Luftinspector is
they call me a different name.
but I remember/how this name/was given to me.

I was also alone then
walking along the Corso
alone and in a joyful mood.
looking at the crowd
looking at the girls.

They were many
in groups of three/or four/sometimes five.

Croatian girls are pretty
you know.

The lads gathered in bands
shouting and joking.

I walked alone
full of self-respect
I was nineteen.

The girls called me the Luftinspector
I was told.
Because I walked alone
looking busy/on the Corso.

Now I am a Luftinspector
for good.
I inspect the air of the mine.
Once a week/for pollution
The air and the vehicle exhaust,
with my test tubes.

This time I am stuck
I cannot test the air in the darkness
I do not dare to walk either.

There could be an orepass
on my way/an orepass,
a vertical hole down three hundred feet.

I am here in the Forty-Two Hundred Drift.
Forty-two hundred feet above sea level.

What sea level?
The Mediterranean?/The North Sea?
No! Probably the English Bay.

Very pretty the English Bay.
Although I like the Adriatic best.
English Bay is not romantic.
I wonder why?

How long will I stay in this darkness?
I even can't sit down/it's wet.
I tried with my hand/water on the road.

I should be out at midday for lunch.
My lunchkit is on my desk.
Will somebody see?
and wonder where I am?
Maybe not./Maybe later.

I will probably stay marooned
to the end of the shift.
The foreman will see my tag on the board
and send someone to pick me up.
He does not know where I am.
I am not one of his men.
I am the Luftinspector.

I am in the Forty-Two Jersey Drift.
Forty-two hundred feet
above sea level.

Maybe the North Sea.
Dunes and bunkers
German bunkers from the Atlantic wall.
A poster. Beware of booby traps/Keep out.
Curiosity prevails.

Sanded-in rooms.
Narrow view on the sea.
Two metre thick walls.
And a mattress.
Somebody was sleeping here/or making love.
with a wartime poster/for privacy.

It is not curious
absolute darkness/and no mystical fear.
Why should I be frightened?
In childhood/sometimes
since then/never.
What if there would be . . . a scream!

I do not see.

I listen.

Water dropping somewhere.

Drip, Drip, Drip . . .

I remember how she was getting nervous
when the tap was dripping.

I tightened it solid

it still was dripping

and she could not get asleep.

I am happy that this water is dripping
absolute silence would be unbearable.
For another five hours/Maybe more.

I look at my watch

the pointer is luminous.

Quarter to eleven.

When will I write my report?

Hell, hell, hell.

Why did I remove my lamp from my hat?
and dropped it.

It did not hit the ground

it jerked the cord/and it went out.

I wanted to look at my notebook
what for?

To check the data on the ventilation door?

I did not need it right now.

Nothing I can do right now/but wait.

The water drips.

There is another noise.

It must be a truck/somewhere far away.

Closer./Definitely closer.

There it is.

Two headlights

Two smaller headlamps

A searchlight/pointing up.

They are checking the roof.

Maybe they stop for scaling

and they will hear me then.

I run agitating my notebook.

They expect a headlight

they don't expect a dark figure.

and they don't hear me

because of the noise of the truck.

I run and I cry

they are still far away

I run as fast as I can.

I see the road and I run.

The truck turned to the left
It's gone.

I still run/then I stop
I could knock myself out/hitting a wall.

I continue walking along a wall.
I feel the wall with my hand
and I feel the ground with my foot.
and I progress slowly.

If I reach the intersection
another truck can pick me up
or the same on the way back.

Complete darkness.
the blind they should be used to this:
they walk as I do.
They are more skillful.
I must look ridiculous if somebody could see.

There is no timbering in this mine
With the props, I could not progress.

Here is the end of the wall
It turns left.
This could not be the drift where the truck went.
Too close/I could not walk so far.

It must be a side drift/if I walk there
They will never find me.
Stop and wait.
Lean against the wall and wait.

If I make four steps in the right direction
I will cross the side drift.
It should be twelve feet wide.

Let us try.
The direction, I'm not sure.
Walking in the open space
Like at sea by night.
At sea there is a compass
and sometime a lighthouse/blinking.

I have seen a blink.
Just an imagination
because I have been thinking about a lighthouse.
Wait a bit/let us check/a little bit back.
There it is/I have seen it again.
a red light/ like a taillight of a car.

Now if I follow this light
and walk in a straight line
there should be no obstacle.
as long as I see the light.
If there is light there are people.

What if this light vanishes?

I will be in the midst of nowhere.

If this truck drives away?

Or maybe it isn't a real light.

What else can it be?

Let us concentrate on walking.

A step/Soil muddy/Nothing in front.

Clear on the sides.

Another step/two/three/twenty/fifty/

Oh God, what a slow progress.

I recall how I was once lost on the lake

Not dark, misty/And no compass/of course.

it was cold/so cold!

It's not cold underground.

They say that the wall is 42°F.

summer and winter/No cold, chilly.

The light is not a tail light.

It's much higher.

I have seen a reflection/in a pool of water.

Now I can see

this is an electric bulb

inside a red lantern.

I can see,/I can walk.

A wooden partition/and a door.

This must be the shiftboss's office.

Nobody inside,/nobody around./A phone.

Hello! Here is Andre,

my headlamp is out.

We come at once.

The electrician got a reprimand.