

# Nightfall

részegh botond & dragomán györgy





**Nightfall**  
Mixed media, canvas,  
60x60 cm, 2011

dragomán györgy

Detention

Tales from Beyond the Bars

For Botond

1. Fresco

The new prison warden is standing in his new office, looking at the wall.

He is happy.

He's at the top of his game, in his country's most important prison, the world's most important. To be in charge here is to be in charge of the world. Not just anyone is capable of bearing this responsibility, not just anyone is strong enough, not just anyone is worthy of such power.

He is.

The new warden stares at the freshly whitewashed wall. A faint, grayish brown stain is visible just above the back of the armchair, behind the desk, revealing the haste with which they sought to cover up the marks. It's better this way, he thinks, better that the paint job was not quite finished, for there will at least always be something to remind him of his predecessor's weakness.

He stares at the stain. It is like a face. As the whitewash dries, he knows, it will be ever more visible, ever clearer.

He walks to the other side of the desk, stops by the wall, reaches out his hand, and presses his palm against the stain. The wall's dank cold slowly permeates his skin as he thinks of his predecessor, of how the former prison warden is, in fact, there in the wall.

His predecessor shot himself in the head with his service weapon, right here in the office, while sitting at his desk.

Running his palm along the wall, the new warden thinks he should feel revulsion, but he does not, no, the wall is smooth and pleasantly cool.

He stares at the stain and thinks about how his predecessor will now be here forever, will now stay here forever between these walls, within these walls.

All at once a cold, metallic taste fills the new warden's mouth. He pulls his hand from the wall, but too late: a shiver passes down his arm and through his body. He shudders, his teeth chatter.

All at once he turns his back to the wall. His own service revolver, hanging at his side, suddenly feels very heavy. Reaching for it, he unclasps the holster and removes the weapon, holding it by the barrel, not the grip. The metal is so cold it burns his palm. He nearly trips on the rug as he hurries over to the open safe in the corner by the window. The top shelf clangs loudly as he sets down the weapon, as does the door as he slams it shut.

His palm seems frozen solid from the metal. He rubs it against his pants to warm it up. The door's clang still echoes through the room. Only when it is silent is complete again does the warden lift his gaze from the worn rug.

The stain is still there on the wall, darker and yet sharper, decidedly like a face.

The warden's face tightens as he stares again at the stain. It occurs to him that another coat of whitewash would be a good idea, after all. He raises his palm to his face, covers his eyes, and feels the cold radiating from his bones.







**Nightfall**  
acrylic, canvas,  
100x150 cm, 2012







**Nightfall**  
acrylic, canvas,  
100x150 cm, 2012







**Nightfall**  
acrylic, canvas,  
100x150 cm, 2012



**Nightfall**  
ink, paper,  
100x70 cm, 2011





## 2. Prank

The new prison warden is inspecting the pitch-black cell.

The cell is cramped, with barely enough room to stand. The warden looks into the darkness but sees nothing.

He opens his eyes wide, the walls' dank cold settling on his eyeballs. He sees nothing. His eyes are not shut, that's for sure. He turns his head back and forth looking for, but not finding, light. He tries crouching down but, no, there's no light there, either. Then he stands on his tiptoes. Not a thing.

The darkness is absolute.

He presses his face against the wall, but sees nothing.

He shuts his eyes, opens them again. Nothing. He does so once more, now pressing a palm hard against his lids, pressing his eyeballs so it hurts, so he can see if there are colors behind the pain. There are none.

The darkness is complete.

He might have gone blind, except he wouldn't know. Perfect—this is just what the pitch-black cell should be like. Those kept inside it for long enough forget light altogether.

The new warden slams a fist against the door and shouts into the darkness, he shouts for the guards to let him out. He is smiling, thinking of how his shouts sound just like the shouts of the prisoners who have been in this cell before him, and will be in the cell after him, thinking of how, for him the door will open, he is the warden, and he had himself locked up in here just to inspect the cell.

Indeed, already he can hear the bolts clicking as the key turns in the lock.

It's still dark. He recalls a prank they once played on an inmate in a pitch-black cell back in the days when he was a guard. They turned off all the lights in the hallway, and those they couldn't turn off, they covered with thick inner tubes, off a truck, to ensure complete darkness. Then they opened the cell door, put shackles on the inmate's feet, and let the man out into the hallway. When he began screaming that he didn't see a thing, they told him that he must have gone blind, that his optical nerves must have atrophied. Only when the prisoner was giving inhuman screams did they finally shine a flashlight in his face.

The new warden remembers the inmate's expression at that moment. Inhuman.

Suddenly the door opens. Even though he's prepared himself, the light makes the new warden dizzy all the same. He doesn't want to even blink, but in fact he shuts his eyes, bring his palms over his face. The light blazes white beyond his eyelids; in the light he sees that contorted, screaming face from long ago, the inmate's teeth chattering from the pain, so much so that the flesh seems to be practically flaking off the bone.

Slowly pulling his palms away from his face, the new warden decides that they'll pull the same prank on the next prisoner who stays in the pitch-black cell. His eyes still hurt from the light, but he doesn't care anymore, no, by now his grin is clear and sharp.





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