

word for word

parola per parola

palavra por palavra

一字换一字

wort für wort

palabra por palabra

mot pour mot

2024

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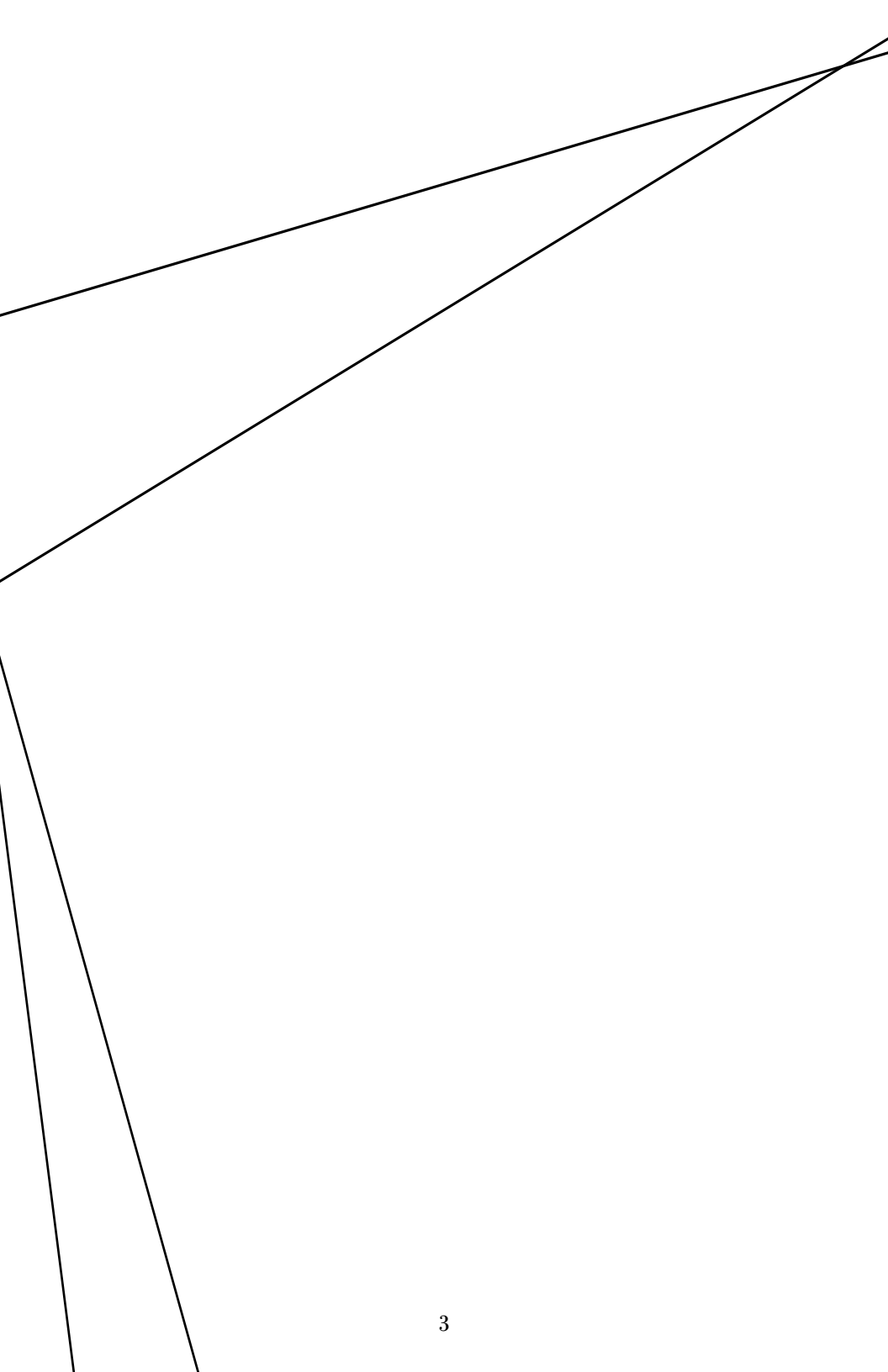


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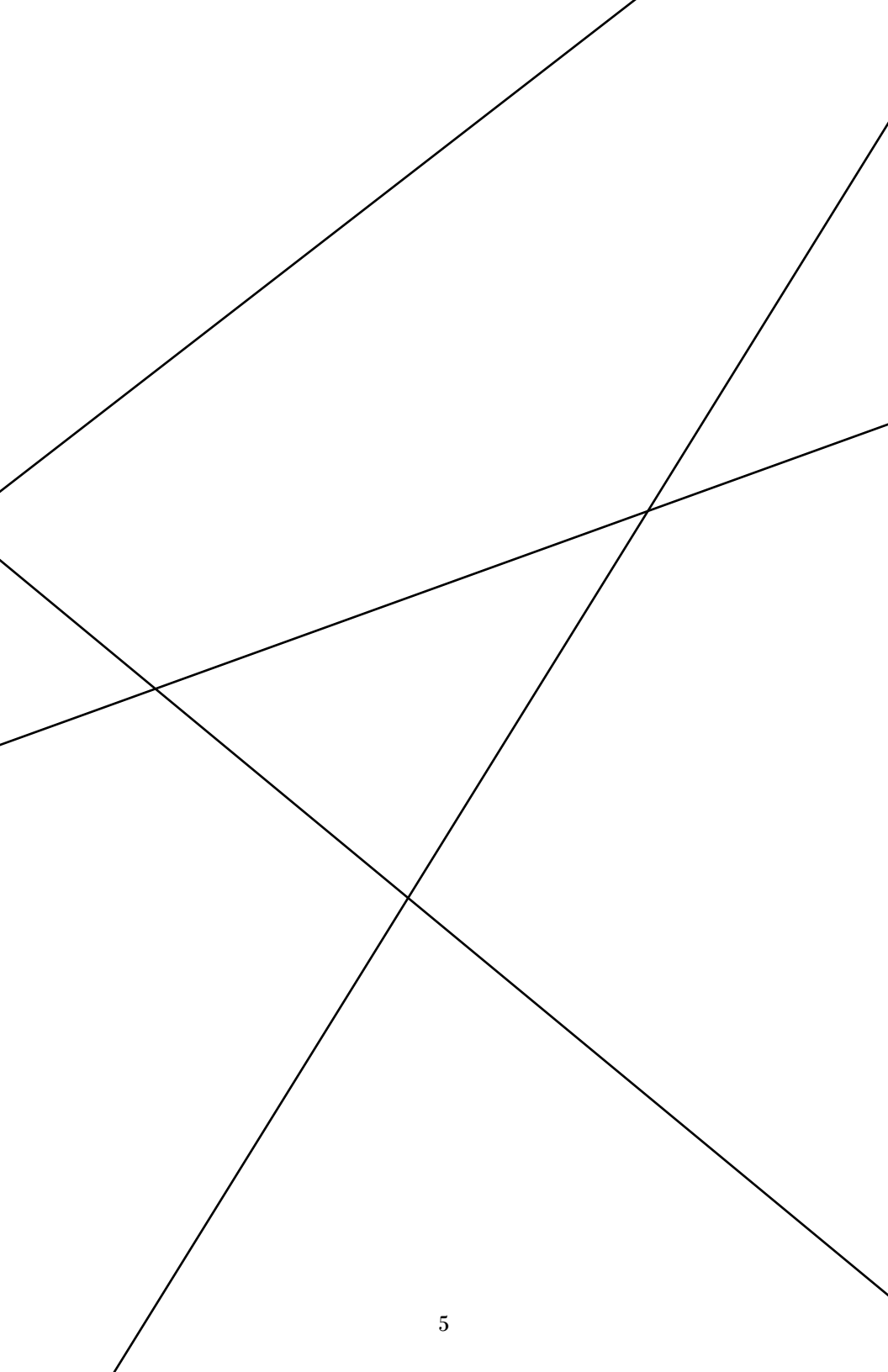
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acknowledgments




FOREWORD

Word for Word is an exchange program that was conceived in 2011 by Professor Binnie Kirshenbaum, then Chair of the Writing Program in Columbia University's School of the Arts. The exchange was created in the belief that that when writers engage in the art of literary translation, collaborating on translations of each other's work, the experience will broaden and enrich their linguistic imaginations.

Since 2011, the Writing Program has conducted travel-based exchanges in partnership with the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig in Leipzig, Germany; Scuola Holden in Turin, Italy; the Institut Ramon Llull and Universitat Pompeu Fabra-IDEA in Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain); the Columbia Global Center | Middle East in Amman, Jordan; Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.; and the University of the Arts Helsinki in Helsinki, Finland.

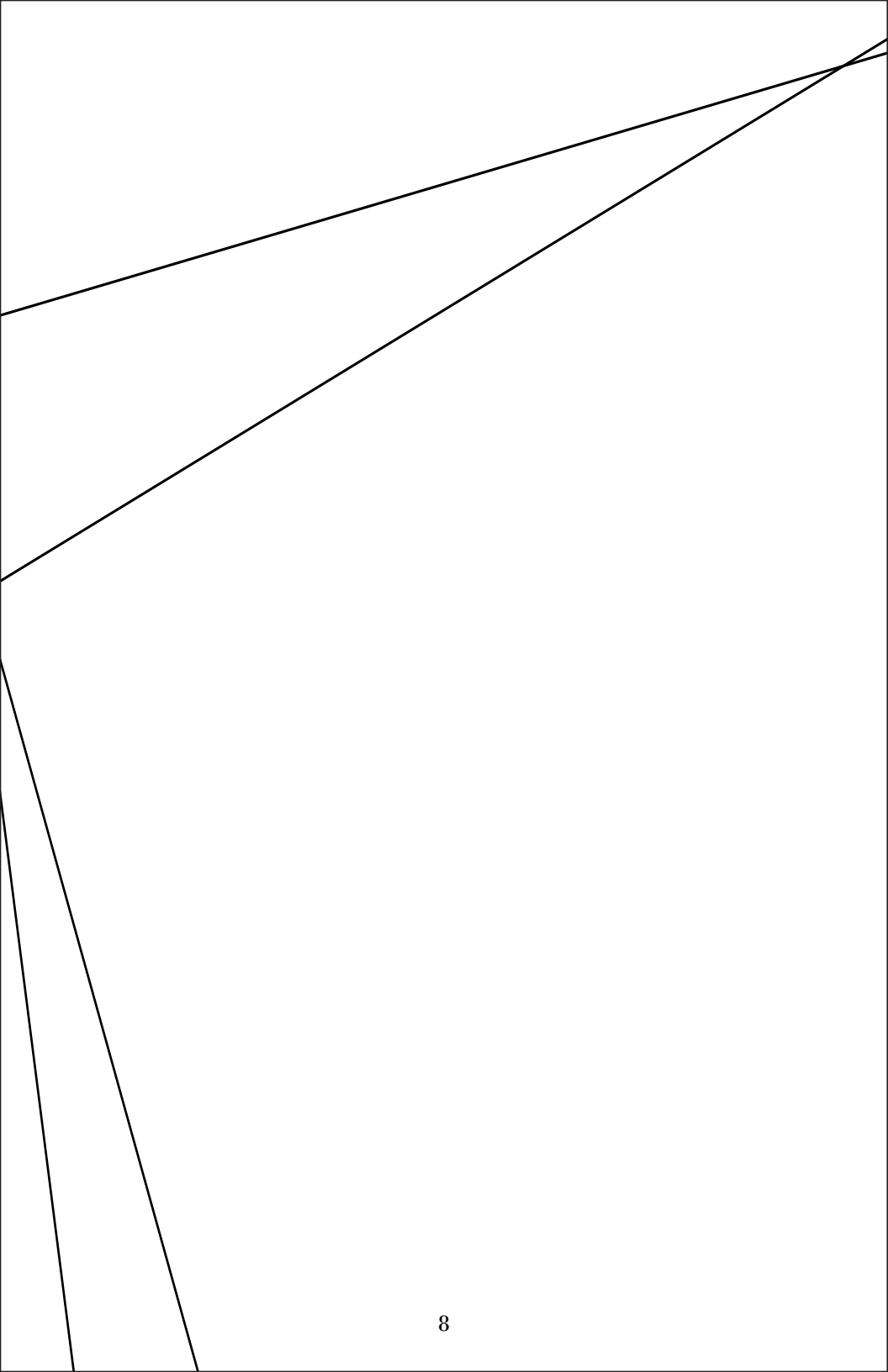
In 2016, the Word for Word program expanded to include a collaborative translation workshop that pairs Writing Program students with partners at two of these same institutions—the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig and Scuola Holden—as well as new ones: Université Paris 8 in Paris, France; Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago, Chile; and the Instituto Vera Cruz in São Paulo, Brazil. These workshop-based partnerships offer participants the chance to expand their horizons even without travel via personal and literary exchange and collaboration, establishing a new model for cross-cultural engagement. In 2022, we welcomed a sixth institutional partner: Fudan University in Shanghai, China.

The present volume offers selections from the works (originals and translations) written by members of the Spring 2024 Word for Word Workshop in the Columbia School of the Arts and their partners writing in Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish in Shanghai, Paris, Leipzig, Turin, São Paulo, and Santiago. This eleventh in our series of Word for Word anthologies collects the

The page features several thin, black, straight lines that intersect to form a complex geometric pattern. One line runs diagonally from the top-left towards the bottom-right. Another line runs diagonally from the top-right towards the bottom-left. A third line runs horizontally across the middle of the page. A fourth line runs diagonally from the bottom-left towards the top-right. These lines create various triangular and quadrilateral shapes across the page.

work of twenty-four exceptionally talented writers, presented here in tribute to all the ways in which artistic exchange can build bridges between peoples and cultures. Especially in light of the conflicts that have tested the limits of academic freedom and made this an especially challenging year, we are grateful for the opportunity this project has given us to forge new relationships and artistic collaborations around the world. Singly and together, these twenty-four new literary voices offer suggestions for how to reach across national borders and strive for a global community based not on political or economic advantage but on human connection.

Susan Bernofsky
Director, Literary Translation at Columbia



word for word / 一字换一字
Columbia University School of the Arts
Fudan University

译者注

终于，我完成了一次跋涉，从一团云雾中走出。倒不是一头雾水，却是因顿悟而梦破，被Kaya Ka Kei Lau一手打造的幻境逐出。那样诡谲奇异的英语语言，几乎任性地撒野，完全超越了我的认知。读她的诗无疑意味着一种难度——我时常是在向音、形、义中的任何一方借力，壮着胆摸索才跃过了她用词藻铺设的机巧，以始料未及的速度向更令人惊奇的远方行进。我始终无法卸下这份讶异，因为Kaya Ka Kei Lau的诗的生长总在我的意料之外。

顺着她的诗行，虚幻的景象被语言的物质实在一点点搭建起来，逐步延展成一个个具体独特的情境。这种铺设并非是空中楼阁，如果我们仔细琢磨或沿着伏笔，更是能够放大她诗歌中的各种局部：人物的神色、身份、情态、性情。在细致的描摹里，我们能见她所采用的写故事的工笔。如此写就的作品，我们已无法再用文类的刻板概念加以归纳，只能从中获得无限多的艺术审美体验。Kaya Ka Kei Lau的诗歌世界俨然已建立起了自己的秩序，既能够自由调度光影和丰富的色彩质地，又能按需调节环境的背景音。她可以为笔下的人物蒙面，也能适时揭开围绕其上的谜团。她自如地编译，搓揉文字与文化，切分语言的最小单位，修剪现有的方言、俚语、书面语、汉字甚至笔画，从而设计出了文明相遇的交界处和跨语言的某种奇观。从这个意义上讲，她识得造字、炼字的术式，任由内涵与外延为她所用。读她的诗像是在围观变化多端的东方戏法，称奇之余正想发笑，又会忽然嗅到幽默戏谑里暴力、权力和死亡的因子，漂浮又沉降，感受到绮丽和悚然。

Kaya Ka Kei Lau曾告诉过我，她诗歌里的空格

和分行源自于创作时的感觉。但当我仿照格式翻译并朗读译诗时，却体会到每一处自身的节奏以及它们所连成的一种述说的口吻。它们全都是其所是地行进，充分具备了自白的能力。读她的诗，或者说让它们参照自己的规格法度读出来，才能真正进入到她所创造的“梦幻泡影”之中，并因此而目眩。

写作时常感受到孤独，但与远洋那头的Kaya Ka Kei Lau交游反倒让我在她的谦逊、温柔和鼓舞里获得了无限的支持。我们相隔12个小时生活，日与夜颠倒，可她正珍惜着我的字、我的笔，而我也一样。这样的联结，实在让人幸福。

翻译：
CAI SIRUO

物之启示

“阁下，请配合例行检查？”

“好的。”

金多啜饮几口后下楼，摆起屁股如同轻佻的唇
刀鞘舔弄似地刮刻墙壁
在最后几步里，他点了点头。

“这边请，阁下，please。”

-
-
- 瞧不见囚室的遥远与幽深，金多始终跟随剑的指引，
直至到达彼岸跟前。

-
- 而左侧 一颗水滴敲坠 长鸣一声
是濡湿的脖颈，虚弱的脉息 在一面银镜中
白色幽灵在黑色的铁栅栏后影影绰绰。
逐个转身 从尾到头 情态霎变：恭顺，忧郁。
喋喋不休，曾几何时我们身披锃亮的雪国盔甲！
可怜的马匹 斑纹相间 目送他离去

[再往前]

广场上 野草漫漫
昌一斜躺在其中，像在家里一样
墙面褶出尘灰 悬着窗
施予阳光或阴翳
日光式微 耀眼的舞台

so that orange was the new black
a flat oval warming the wall.

On his back, chewing hay bolting straight
as Jingdot's sword banged the back of his head—a terrifying blow that dented
the bars.

Changi, eyes scrambling with his legs: “Big person! Big person!”
knees reached Jingdot and clutched the rust, which shook despite
themselves. “You’ve come to save me!” He was an actor addressing the
shadowed audience; a meta moment.

“No one’s saving you,” said Jingdot in the dark. Only his nose, protruding
into the cell, gleamed with a remnant of sun.

“Why would you come save a *lowly* vagabond?” He brought his shoulders
up. “I? I don’t deserve it!”

Bright nose. “You deserve a horse to each limb, then galloped in four
directions.”

“O, why,” voice louder, “would a big, *big* person like you, deign to squander his
time for *me*?”

Echoes in the hall. Protracted yawn.

“The sun is going down,” Jingdot commented.

“And so goodnight,” Changi plopped down onto the ground, flinging off his
shoes.

(sallow thump of a stool)

“Get up, you disobedient pig. I said *get up!*” Clang.
And in the orange glow he raised his trotters.

an arch, a whale breaching in aureate glow toe meets rock,
explodes past the well of light
leaving the rock to hatch an arm of goose pulsing with a wagging palm
before its throat dipped
and its beak stopped flipping you off
face recessed into a fist of rabbit
eye in a crevice romping across the hairy field.
pinkies, perk and listen!
a fox, snout three fingers long, seething then opened its knuckled jaws!

And the mountainous tuft raised into a feathery giant index to thumb
were two eyes round

橘光沉作新的黑
一个扁平的椭圆温暖着墙壁。

仰面朝天，嚼着干草 直奔而去
当金多的剑撞向他的后脑勺——一计重敲，铁栏凹曲。

昌一，目光随双腿躲闪：“大人，大人！”
膝行至金多身侧，紧抓摇摇欲坠的锈迹。“您来救我了！”他是个演员，向黑影里的观众发表演说，恍若无人的此刻。
“没人救你。”金多在暗处说道。仅有他的鼻子印着残阳，在牢房里凸显出来。

“您怎么会来救助一个卑微的流浪汉呢？”他提起肩膀。“我？我不配！”

鼻尖亮起。“你的四肢各配了一匹马，能向四个方向驰去。”
“哦，这又是为什么，”声音渐强，“向您，您这样的大人物屈尊为我浪费时间？”

走道里的回响打了个长长的哈欠。

“太阳快下山了。”金多回道。
“那么，晚安”昌一扑倒在地，甩掉了熏人的鞋子*。
(凳子“砰”得一响)

“起来，你这头不听话的猪。我叫你起来！”“啞当”一声。
橘色光芒里，他抬起了蹄子。

一道拱门，一只鲸鱼 自金光里跃出 脚趾触到礁石，
爆裂 穿越光之井

任岩石孵出一块鹅膀 来回振翅
在喉咙低垂以前

它的喙嘴不能再把你啄退
面庞在兔子的拳头里凹陷
缝隙里的目光 在茂密的田野上嬉戏。

小指头们，竖起耳朵听！

一只狐狸，鼻子有三指长，激动地张开 它的血盆大口！

如山脉般丛生的毛发造 出了一只有毛的巨兽 拇指和食指之间是两只圆溜溜的眼睛

* 原先脚注为：奇臭无比

resting atop. nails poked left to right
right to left an owl was watching all the while,
watching with Jingbot:
the black deaths of whale by rock, goose by hare, hare by fox
jotting it down.

在上头休憩。 指甲从左向右戳过去
自右向左 猫头鹰不断打量，
注视着金多：

 鲸鱼死于礁石，鹅死于兔，兔死于狐狸，死亡的阴影
把一切记述。

PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE SOME REFRESHMENTS

Dumo had not been to the fruit market for three springs. He was here to beg for lychee seeds at his master's behest. High Monk A'mong wanted them to make new prayer beads. Who was Dumo to meet on this fruity trip?

棵 棵
棵 棵
棵 棵

and so on

avenue straight and wide

many trees

a-tumbling

talking

to other bough

nodding

to lower node

prickling

the smaller claw

higher

than the rags of children posies of women

or bales of smelling grandwomen

with baskets teeming from

bartering sequence up to low

a gravitational give and take.

cheeky birds were trilling

vendors too were hollering:

“Come and see o! Come and see!

how bigly, roundly the peachmeats be!”

twirling sacs of nectar sweet

vying

for the pretty eye

of the maidens bright

这儿有一些小点心，请自便：

杜莫上次去水果市场还是三年前。他受主人所托前来讨要一些荔枝种子。高僧阿蒙希望能用它们造一批新念珠。这趟寻果之旅，杜莫将会邂逅谁？

T T
T T
T T 们
道路纵横
许多棵树
 东倒西歪
与旁枝
 交谈
同侧茎
 颌首
刺痛
更小的爪叶
高于
孩子们的破衫 女人们的花束
或是祖母们散发出阵阵气味
自装满交易顺序
的篮中 由高到低
听从重力的 互相让步。

没羞没躁的鸟儿正啁啾
小摊贩们亦在大声吆喝：
“瞧一瞧来！看一看！
又大又圆的桃子哟！”

捻出蜜汁
只为博得
 少女们
 明媚的目光
扮上

对胡麻果实的兴趣，闪烁在红润的面庞
仰头 吞食 炽烈的日光
听他们喊道 来呀
在我冒险的交界处
啧啧称奇
你要看到我！
我，黄
于菊，紫
于牡丹
你爱我胜过爱那些咕噜咕噜冒泡的茎秆
只因我已获准进入
你雀跃喉头的资格！
把我植入 你的雏巢
让我在那儿生长
哦 处于哺育期的母亲
第二土壤 在你的血肉里 扎根发芽

叫卖声令高僧不为所动 穿着厚履向
荔枝树进发。仍记得他忍辱的发心
耳听八方。内心默数到三后他停下来。

爆开吧
气喘吁吁吧
我已胀得太大
脆嫩的树枝托不住我
我害羞到需要披上你的言语！

先 从我的好气色里
除去我的衣衫
你就能看到
一个越加花枝 招展的我
剪去茂盛的叶片
在你的手掌里袒露
接着捏碎 —— “伤害我！”
甘甜的汁液正涌出
正如你用鲜血换来

not back to your sorry home
but devour me
here dripping in front of my siblings
they shall see aroused jealousy
the glory as your □ □ □ □
sink □ □ □ □
touch my pitpit

such were whispers in Dumo's ear.

It used to be a peaceful affair. One would stroll down lines of trees and shake a basketful to their needs. No loud fruits and vendors. But the Grey Council wanted regulations after cases of greedy tree-stripping! Too nice were the trees to say no.

still bulk buyers waggled trees hard orbs shooting into their held-out cloaks

then wrapped into a bundle, stuffed with a stick, bindle complete onto the shoulders go

as little ones stole through the forgotten slit
What regulation, Dumo saw.

Dumo, some trees of unpopular fruit, like the sour grapefruit, have no vendors and remain free to jiggle.

With lychee mind brought up knee but caught the sight:

wide brim pointed into mollusc shell
fainted into
black veil dipped in four corners
hid
precious face
dark cone on this crone
wicker hamper slung hands
relaxed to straw

Dumo's eyes flashed over her dark attire. She must be from the Dim Palace of Hakmoon. He had seen hakmaids around town before, scurrying with aprons. But she was different. She was wearing a slithering dress that fluted her legs, stopping

这天堂般的一啜

不回你那可怜的家
而是吞噬我
在这 溢出汗水 在我的兄弟姐妹跟前
他们会瞧见 妒意大发
那殊荣源自你 T T T T
没于 T T T T
触碰我的渴求

如此碎语不绝于耳。

这本再稀松平常不过。人们漫步在林荫道旁，轻晃一篮子的需求。没有果实和小贩引来的喧哗。但在伐木事件屡屡发生后，暗会希望制定规章！树太温良，才会忍气吞声。

仍有 大批买家 摇动枝干 锐利的目光射入支起的斗篷
接着裹成一捆，塞根棍子，扛上肩 卷铺盖离去

小家伙们才偷摸着 从无人注意的缝隙 溜出来
毫无章法，在杜莫眼中。

杜莫，有的树木结出不得人心的果子，如酸涩的葡萄柚，小贩们都不打它们的主意，依旧自在地颤动。

荔枝核 抱住身子 却看到这般景象：

宽宽的帽檐 指向柔软的躯壳

陷入

黑纱 沉入 四角

隐藏

珍贵的面庞

深邃的锥体 置于老躯体内

押在柳条筐上

双手

放松稻草

杜莫的目光掠过她深色的着装。她一定是来自哈克蒙的昏宫。他之前见过哈克女仆们到镇上来，兜着围裙匆匆赶路。她不一样。只见她穿着一条面

in a curve just below her feet, which were sweet red beets, pointy and soft from walking, trailing the floor so she stood in a pale pink puddle. She looked like a tombal figurine. A dead candlestick

at a peach tree, asking for peaches.

“You want come up inspect?” called the vendor, slunk on the spindly tree.
“Just choose 4 prettiest ones for me, sir!”
“I’ve got you.”

Bearded vendor starfished picked three globes of pink
in the wavering suspicion of the lady.

He placed the peaches on a deep copper dish (which were attached to a red string looped around the stem of a thin jutting branch). Then allowed it to slide down the springy curve of branch-beam, which went \ a little from the load. Until the dish stopped at a knob at its tapered edge. The tree trunk was marked with white mushroom face powder, indicating weight by 斤.

On a twig above the beam
a rolled bamboo sheet
he pulled roped tassel
unfurling thus
dropped, wow!
netted wicker 卍 graphical:
“That’s 5文.”

Bearded vendor hung to read where the dish reached parallel to the scale.

“I just bought this two days ago. Same amount. It was just 2文!”

“Oi! Blame the tree! Whole day has been like this. Tree is rather down, you see. You need to praise the tree.”

As each tree is different, such discrepancies were respected; the tree branch sometimes would choose to go lower, higher, bent dependent on mood, weather, people. It was still important for vendors to meticulously measure with proper metal weights the exact downward distance the branch would dip for a particular 斤 (before selling on a new tree). 1斤 was, for example, right where that tree hole kind of ended.

料光滑的长裙，波浪线条荡至脚边。双脚如同红甜菜般嫩红，走起路来尖而软。裙摆拖在地上，使她如同站立在一汪浅粉色的水坑里。她看起来像一尊坟边的雕像。一根凋敝的烛心在一棵桃树边，买桃。

“您想来看看吗？”小贩问道，掩在一棵细长的树旁。
“请您只管帮我挑4个最好看的就行！”
“好嘞。”

胡子拉碴的小贩伸了伸身子 拣出了三个粉球
在妇人踌躇怀疑的神色里*。

他把桃子放在一个口径深的铜盘里（上头系着的红绳绕着一根细细的树枝）。接着，桃子顺着枝条的弧度滑下，使其因负载而稍稍**，边沿逐渐变少，直至铜盘在一块小疙瘩上停驻。用白蘑菇制成的散粉***标记树干，用“jin”来表示重量。

横梁上方的嫩枝
放着一卷竹筒
他拉着绳穗
顺势展开
掉下来，天呐！
柳条排成网 卅 的形状：
“一共5文。”
胡子拉碴的小贩倒吊着念出铜盘与天枰 平行时的刻度****。

“我两天前才买过。一样多，只要2文！”

“哎哟！怪树咯！成天都这样。你看看，树都倒了。要多夸夸它们。”

由于每棵树都不尽相同，这种差异一目了然；有时树枝走低、攀高，随

* 它们是不是最好看的果子呢，真的？记住，摊贩们只是经销商。树木自己才是真正的卖家。小贩们只管挑选货品，分出好或坏的果实，以便不会在次日留下满树青果。而他们同样会对自己喜欢的人最好，尤其是那些嘴最甜的（多讽刺；像是他们需要更多会说甜言蜜语的水果似的！）

** 枝条向下倾斜、弯折时的形态

*** 一种受人喜爱的化妆品，原材料源自树木。

**** 为确保精确，大树用来测绘竹筒图案；而对那些枝条尚嫩的小树来说，目测就足够了。

The haklady dropped 3文 of blood scab into a slit in the bark repaying the tree its fruit-giving munificence. The vendor would be taking the other two.

o
O
0
o

into her basket.

Dumo watched her glide towards the next tree as he recited 36 Perfections. Be observant and truthful. Direct and respectful.

Banana tree.

“One please,” she said, and with the inner needle on her middle finger pricked her thumb pressed wound into the designated furrow of the tree bark
“Sooth, sooth,” tender thumb padding away tight wrinkle
dark red receipt promptly absorbed.

“Hanky Hakwhore! Who buys a single one?” The banana vendor spat and threw the banana at her, who dodged with the ease of winds in a side step.

banana falling
falling
Dumo caught it between his chest muscles contract!
then relaxed
and let the length slide to his hand. “Lady,” proffering, like sword she turned and watched. second.

reached out, closed her hand round that muscular spotted yellow and yanked.

She had pulled the peel, leaving Dumo with a squishy white tusk.

“Have it.” Flopped the scabbard down

心、随天气、随人而弯曲。每卖出一棵新树前，小贩们更应该用正确的砝码一丝不苟地测量出树枝向下倾斜的具体距离，称出“jin”。比方说，1Jin就是直至树洞的尽头****。

这位哈克妇人把3文血汗钱扔进树皮的缝隙
为树木慷慨的结果而加价。剩下的2文钱进入小贩的腰包。

0
0
0
。

悉数入篮。

杜莫一边记诵着三十六字诀，一边见她迈向下一颗树。眼见为实，率直恭顺。

香蕉树

“请帮我拿一个，”她说，并用中指里潜藏的内针
刺自己的拇指，在树皮的指定沟槽中按压伤口
“俏皮话，俏皮话，” 柔软的拇指填补顽固的皱褶
暗红色的收据 被顷刻吸收。

“哈克婊子谎话精！谁只买一个？”香蕉贩子啐了口唾沫，把香蕉向她
掷去，她如风般从容地侧身躲过。

香蕉掉落
掉落

杜莫用他的胸 肌接住了它 紧绷！再
放松

让它滑到手中。“女士，”他挺身而出，像一把宝剑
她转身望过去。又一次。

她伸出手，紧握住饱满发达的黄斑
用力一拽。

她剥去果皮，只留下一根湿黏的白色獠牙。

**** 参考《外国科学记录》，“胡可定律”。

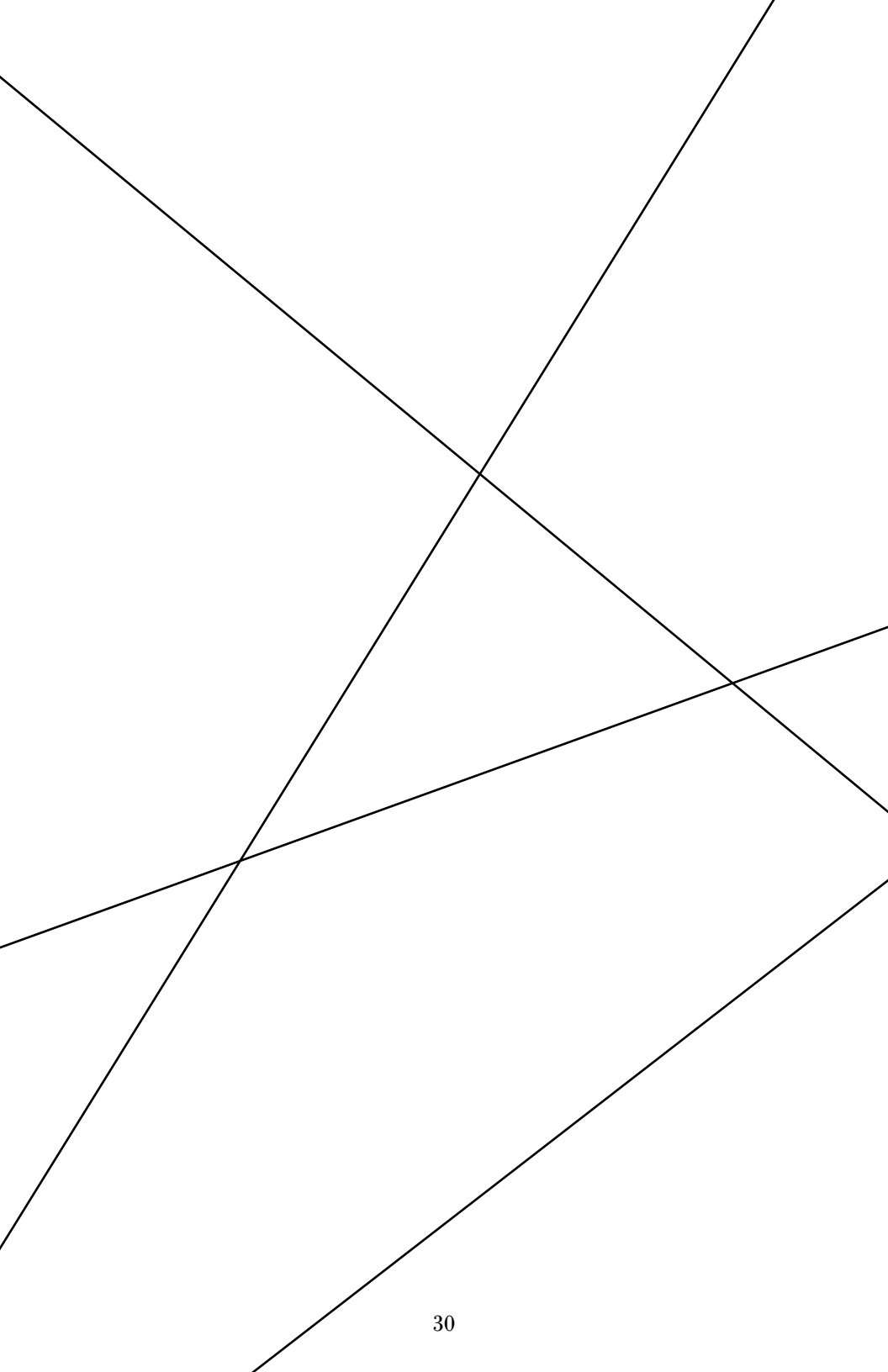
not to the floor but onto a peach in her hamper.

then smeared round in a black
left Dumo in a cloud.

“吃吧。”剑鞘坠下
并不落地 却插在了她篮里的一颗桃上*****。

抹上了黑色
唯留杜莫在一团云雾之中。

***** 香蕉皮有神奇的药用价值，蒸熟后裹上炸过的牛奶，也是一道美味佳肴。撒上葡萄干味道更佳。说到这里，她忘了买葡萄。



Translator's Note

Translating Cai Siruo's poetry is like touching the rough side of the leaf and thinking it is a veiny backside of a hand. Not only does your starting point branch out into a maze, the maze itself transforms into another organ. Cai spins these compact worlds and leaps between concepts like they are puddles of rain. No matter how far apart, she has the mastery to bridge two bodies of water into a single ocean teeming with new organisms. How could translation – another leap of continent and ecosystem – be as streamline and fluid as her conceptual arpeggios? How could I transport her intimate ecosystems of pain and love, family and unfamiliar into a new aquarium, of alphabets rather than ideographs? I constantly feel as if I am condensing her work, soaking it into a sponge only representative of a fraction of the scale. Her wild embrace of the ocean becomes the cupping of a tiny fishbowl. Yet my choice of presenting Cai Siruo in compact, quicksilver English, hopes to capture the spirit of her poems. They identify conflict in a single breath, swim between tides hot and cool, amid shipwrecks that still glitter with life. Please hold this breath as you swallow Cai's sea-salt words, gargle her melody, drown and revive.

CAI SIRUO

《终究走向平面的纪念》（组诗）

1. 《命运把我们冲洗成单薄的胶片》

回忆是略高于体温的蒸馏水
看不见的情感悬浮，等待
撇去的浊液，顽固的联结
像显影液浸泡我们，遗忘
覆盖上最后的封层。

除非搅拌，几双交握的手
抓起某瞬的一角，旋转，
交叠，我们从理智的看守
下脱身，比几缕烟更急于
拼合成一团分明图像。

快定影。别无选择地操控。
白光填补黑暗的孔隙，我们
无声地将彼此拽入某种深渊，
任化学物质侵入我们，反应
出有，在一片无之上。

我们必须适应相处的时限
如同胶卷只有贴合转轴
才能让过去的轮廓跋涉，
跨过望不到头的现实
我们逼真地重逢，重逢
在一隅暗房，连光都熄灭。

2023. 10. 30

**translated from the chinese by
KAYA KA KEI LAU**

DOWN THE MEMORY PLANE

fate washed us into a strip of film

distilled memory a water warmer than body
where feelings suspend in naked eye
for the broken emulsion firm colloid
as we lie in aqueous development
agent of forgot coat of film.

unless to agitate pairs of holding hands
grab the sleeve of an instance twist—then fold
away from reason's watch more strung out
than the first rings of smoke
to define a picture blend

fast focus. no alternative
as white swathes the dark aperture we
requite the silent tug down the fissure
porous to chemicals
ready to combust upon our baring.

wound film-roll tight
us against the clock
for hiking past memory lane to a headless reality
reunion so real
in a dark room extinct of light.

2. 《小年夜》

满 13 人即启动的仪式，破戒从离群开始，高粱扫帚放哨，干瘪的豆角向下攀岩，颤抖，擒住了鞠躬认错的烟。汤匙学不会走直线。手铐着关进唇边。半捂着嘴，堵住孙子即兴的闹言。口袋生产煤油，凭空变出折叠的壹佰元。十公分远的火焰，扬起土灶上滚沸水的汽印满指纹的白面保管祖传的料方。铁锅的熔水锻出了几朵橙花，凋谢。烟花授粉的方式是啃蛀棉服。烟草蒙住了他的肺，喉头的力气被焦油钻走，鼻腔塞满了尘灰。厅堂的霉味手搓肥皂味散作嫁妆的棉被。“爸！”急急呷几嘴像豪饮老太婆的肉皮排骨汤，吮尽瓜子壳味往外喷，片片碎花生衣飞溅。银黑色的长柱坍成灰，他往土里碾。

（楷体字部分为回忆）

2022. 7. 20

little ny-ght

13 makes a ceremony
cracks from the first withdraw
tall wheatmop keeping sentry.
stringbeans wither downhill
crimping to bows of sorry smoke.
soup ladle can't walk straight cuffed closed by the lips
pacifier halves a grandchild adlib
pockets that produced kerosene conjured 100 triangle bills
10cm blaze long in distance *stirred from the earthen stove*
steam boiled wrinkled white sheet
keepsake family recipe. wok urges to orange blooms, shed.
fireplumes pollinated by eating wool
fireweed shroud his lung throat sapped by tar nose clogged ash.
hall reeking of mold and soaped hands shake out a doury blanket.
“Pa!” mouth hurry like *mighty swig at a hag's bag of bone broth*
suck dry of *pineshell* before spewing
posy of shattered peanuts silverblack pillar collapses to ash
and into the soil he rolls.

(memories)

3. 《羊》

失足。泥粒跳到我身上调味，
晃了晃后脑勺上的圈环，
这天然的坟茔，在我腆着脸向上
伸出求援的手时，就将我排异。
坑里，石头都沉积成砖，
方正地游着青苔，稀烂的粪
撇出了黑绿色的水，啃着套鞋。
必须往上蹦，井里的水鬼
泡发人的魂，一换一，只有灭。
云袍褪去，虚静的无垠，除了月。
我眨着眼，睫毛切着西洋镜，
在一面瓷盘里映自己的缺。
悬起我的手戳破参天，
阎王嫌，我的骨太粘，
心里的一包浆太稠，烧不透
那里的人都怕我的膻
“你是何人何部族，欲想去何方”
我说。别急着烧掉我的照片。

2022. 12. 29

positively mutton

a fall. dirt vaulting body flavoured
 rocking the cerebral halo
natural grave. masking face
 I held out an ailing hand
rejected out of body
 a hole. where pebbles settled to bricks
 and moss swam squarely sampled the overshoe.
must leap well water ghost
 man rehydrated spirit-subbing
but a snuff. clouds unravelled robe-detaching
 boundless only a moon.
blinks lash at Western scope
 rebound porcelain the piece amiss.
hand ascend sky-scraping sir-king
 dost dislike my bones too clingy
 my heart too patinaed for deep frying.
there they cowed by my gamey stench:
 “who are you? of what tribe? where are you headed?”
I say. no need to dash my frame.

4. 《缝纫断线》

儿子们的成人世界，仅供
一台老式座机连接
促音响起，她得令接听
熟练地仿佛操起年轻时的旧职

纺织，手指轻挑开缠绕的
线圈，她为喋喋白话排梳
又沿着声波的浮毛
把日子缝进听筒里

三行三列的九粒数字纽扣
暗藏十一个针脚，背出的
号码集成了几种针法
拨成了件团住身体的毛衣

电视遥控器坏了的那天，
她捧来孙女画的“打电话”操作说明
捏了一手心汗，她放声把步骤唱出来
按键的指头迟疑，“喂”迎上忙音

2023.3 作 2023.12.31 修改

disconnected line

in an adult world of sons
corded only to rotary phone squealing
in command she picks up deft like an old line of work

sewing fingers pluck the tangled
loops unknot vernacular through
and along days of soundweaves
 pilling into the receiver.

queues three by three nine minted
buttons hide eleven stitches
telltale numbers crawl into stitchtypes
dialing up a bodyhugging sweater.

that day when the tv remote broke
she dished up 'how-to telephone'
 sketched by her granddaughter
clutched in clammy palms belting each instruction
the fingerpad dithers. "hello?" into a busy line

5. 《以旧换新》

他是只被儿子拴靠在港口的旧渔船。
皱纹压弯了甲板，
龙骨撑不起凹陷的船壳
病历单上蓝黑色的字符咬钩
松弛的渔网，用于展览干瘪的检查报告

他，占领空港的唯一浮标
和一张照片厮守，
又熬来了新的禁渔期。
一张载有黑白方格的船码
一份以日计数的通行证明

竹杖同几阶水泥楼梯角力
出港，出港，出港，
脖颈上的钥匙圈前仆后继，
吼出撕心的号子
旋开刺眼的光明

棉棒炸开喉头的悬冰，
肺泡上冒，泵出了几声叹息
在咳嗽卖力地打火下
燃起发动机孱弱的啸鸣

蜷缩在草隙里的黄痰，混着
吞咽了十遍的香蕉泥
如同干湿垃圾分离
刷新返港的航行寿命

2022. 11. 18

trade in

he is son-bound to the harbour an old fishing boat
with a deck cranked with wrinkles
weak-kneed keel beneath a bowing hull
blue-black diagnoses a biting hook
charts sagging the nets.

he is the only buoy left in the port
stockstill by a photograph
by seasonal closure
vessel and license numbering days.

bamboo prods the stony steps
depart, depart, depart—
neck clung of keys one after the other
wrenching call: steer clear
from the dazzle of sun

from the swab of cotton shattering the ice-cone throat
lungs boiling to a wind of sighs
coughs battling to ignite
a motor's quivering cry.

coiled strands of yellow phlegm
with pulpy bananas in his vomit
as if waste-sorting the dry and wet
refresh rate back to the harbor.

6. 《上海峡谷》

沸腾的雨倾盆，附赠
一笼湿热。白灯烘培下，
天色熟了，是颗对半切开的黄梅。
咸鱼罐头会过期，
酸苦，衣袖意外跌入汗水
贴额的刘海，
难以风干的耳语，透明纹身。
刮擦掉漆的机身，左击确认
他向右。内存腾出的空间，
仅供一人避险。
双手忏悔地掩面，拖延
蜜语甜言的蒸腾。承诺
在六月里腐烂，认识他
的时候，永生花还淌不
出脓汁，直到钻出狭长
的夏梦，透气。
流浪猫的呢喃，
令人虚软的发酵。
放逐，在亚洲第一高
俯身清点
瓷杯底到底睡着几粒霉斑。

2022. 6. 23

shanghai canyon

scalding rainpour tips off
a steambasket of heat. under pale florescence,
well-done baked the day a half-cut yellow plum.
canned sardine past expiry, sour
sweat tripping into sleeves
pasting onto forehead fringe
tasked to drycure whispers
a transparent tattoo.

chipped machine right click confirm
him left. internal storage makes space
only for one to hide
face into hands a double guiltquilt
procastinate the sweet-talk transpiration.
promises to rot in June. when I first met him
preserved roses not yet secreting
not till a hallway bored out
of summer dream to let some air in.

stray cat yowling
fermented, enfeebling,
exiled, at the zenith of Asia
bend down to check
below the porcelain cup
slept sound dots of mold.

7. 《无声的一切》

在众多祖孙里拣出我的名字
像摘花园里早年种下的橘子

方言和普通话在我们之间对坐
称谓是唯一令人彼此发觉的语言

目光照顾你不自然发抖的手，我递上拐杖
阳光下眯缝的眼扑扇，你合上窗

季节曾来做客，比我慷慨
送来更多热火朝天的团聚和喧哗

或许你的嘴角撇过，只是话头被荫凉浸湿
重得吐不出口，索性让时间闷泡我们

我必须折叠怀念，或是围着展陈兜圈
哭悼里你极安静的样子，并不让我选。

2023. 12. 31

all mute

my name plucked from a plot of family
like garden picking early mandarin

and dialects come face to face
but honorifics illuminate.

attend your hand shaking unnaturally pass the cane
sun glaring eye shroud the pane.

seasons stop by with more gifts than I
florid gatherings garlands of noise

perhaps your lips did twitch clammy tongue
too thick to spit out steeping time.

must memories shutter, else wander doubleglaze
tears roll off your silence, options strained.

译者注

Sophia Mautz 的这组诗歌，是一曲关于鲸鱼的想象变奏。想象将恐惧的黑暗和感知的轮廓联结起来，通过鲸鱼识别一种很大很有力量但不暴力的事物，这也是Sophia给予自己的能量。Sophia以她敏锐、纤细、幽深的个体经验，连通鲜活丰沛的感官，穿越黑暗、梦境、眩晕，在暴力损毁之处发出哀鸣；同时也让我们更注意到，日常水面下潜藏的危险和动能，那些不可见的、却关乎我自身的事物。诗歌从事件、情绪、感受的碎片不停转化成句子与语词，有着一种持续响动的声音，捕捉至美与哀恸，观察沉没和超越的种种形态。Sophia通过深刻广阔想象，召唤最贴近呼吸的本质，和自然之中理应存有的人性。

这组诗歌也是Sophia从尖锐和痛苦中淬炼出的生命感悟，她的目光不断超越愤怒与悲伤，看到爱的可能。鲸鱼象征人性中失去的部分，鲸鱼和我之间有遥远的距离，但她开启了追寻的旅途。鲸和我，这两者的隐秘联系，不断彼此印证，生出羽翼，就像鲸鱼跃起时的尾巴，是一颗心的形状；两者也形成富有美感的张力和含混，并在有些节点达到一种人性最初的和谐——鲸鱼像带着她的幼崽那样，带我穿行黑暗；我通过鲸鱼的呼吸记住从前的自己，温柔地畅游。在翻译时，也许是透过不同语言之间的距离，我更能体会Sophia对两者间距离的保存，诗歌没有强烈影射自己的情感，而是克制地想象着、演绎着，词语浮到上面，又沉了下去，仿佛大气的循环。在我们充满友爱的交谈中，我也在不断

寻觅、跟随着这片气流。

诗歌以长句为主，字与字邂逅、纽结，构成叙事的洋流，段落演进，意蕴拓展，“&”和“...”的符号仿佛其中的气泡，别有音律，层叠而出。鲸的意象是如此敞开，Sophia控诉暴力的夺取，警惕工具性的利用，但在人类的残酷和荒谬背后，她不放弃交流的意愿，声音可能会被困住，但传达的动作仍在发出，因为诗歌拒绝所有的分离。经由对鲸鱼的寻觅，与我之生活线连，展开视线、气息，发出灵魂的共鸣。在地平线的彼岸，以鲸的游历化为诗的语言，Sophia创造了一处向善的异度世界，愿你在此，如我如鲸。

SOPHIA MAUTZ

WHALES

1. *Subways are whales*

Subways in New York City are whales navigating the coal-deep ocean. They have a sense of direction in darkness, ancestral, inherited, in their blood & bones.

They moan & grind & creak, bellowing into the deep ocean channel where sound can get trapped for a very long time & can travel very long distances with very little loss of signal.

It's like stars in space, where what you are looking at is ancient light that has traveled far to reach your perception. Like stars, whales are elusive. The low whale frequencies in the deep ocean channel have already been uttered but go on traveling for miles whether or not they are heard.

Subways are whales migrating back & forth in service of creation.

2. *Men are not whales*

I was jealous of the man that was swallowed by a humpback off Cape Cod last summer.

He said *I was completely inside*. I want to be completely inside, not the way men are inside me.

When humpbacks feed, their mouths billow out like parachutes & block their forward vision.

They consume the ocean field blindly. So many of them are found dead with fishing nets marring their jaws & hundreds of pounds of plastic crumpled in their stomachs.

翻译： LI YUE

鲸

1. 地铁是鲸

纽约城的地铁，是航行在墨黑深海里的鲸，
骨血中流淌着，世代相传的方向感。
她们呻吟、嘶摩、嘎吱作响，向深海通道低吼，声音
被尽数收集，延绵幽远，信号长久地没有丢失。

这就像太空中的星星，你现在所见已是古老的光芒，
它旅行很远才抵达你的感知。和星星一样，鲸鱼难以捉摸。
深海通道里鲸鱼的低频率已经发出，
无论是否被听到，都将继续传播数英里。

地铁是为造物来回迁徙的鲸鱼。

2. 男人不是鲸

我嫉妒去年夏天在科德角被座头鲸吞掉的那个男人。
他说，*我完全置身其内*。我想要完全置身其内，不是像男人那样在我体内。
当座头鲸进食时，嘴巴涌进巨浪，如张开的降落伞，挡住前方视线。
她们盲目地吞噬海洋，很多头死去了，下巴被渔网撕裂，数百磅的塑料在胃里起皱腐臭。

当我看不见时，男人进入了，我眼前一黑，我不想

Men entered me when I couldn't see, it was blackout, I did not want to swallow them but the cave of the mouth was open in the dark & men were in the room & when I woke the violence was still inside me like plastic toxins glomming onto my cells & attacking their happiness.

I want to be carried through the dark by a body large enough to be indifferent to my presence, large enough that it can survive letting me survive in the cave of its mouth, inside something with no harm done, a mouth which eclipses all sight. A mouth that is large enough to hold a body that holds language but has no use for it.

3. *Children are whales*

Don't you remember...we saw all those orcas on our trip to the San Juans...you were only five.

My parents insist I saw whales when I was young. Then I saw no whales for a long time.

Then they came into my dreams a few years ago, I don't remember exactly when.

They came when I was landlocked; their arrival was a surprise. The landscape of my dreams

was water, blue, caves. Whales were moving with unstoppable speed through my dreams

like clouds moments before a storm. They kept migrating back into my sleep, traversing the long & directionless track between slumber & consciousness.

It then became easy to take the dreams as a sign, a warning.

I don't google whales I only dream of them. I think my Instagram algorithm can hear

my subconscious, or it has a hold of my dreams. My feed is all whales. I scroll past reels

of whales sleeping vertically like Roman columns gray with centuries; whales like massive voids

of shadow flying through the water; whales coming up to boats like dogs & letting children

pet them. Animals know to trust children. That animals are not afraid of us when we are young

吞下它们但黑暗中嘴巴豁然张开，男人在房间里。
当我醒来时，暴力像塑料毒素一样在我的血肉蔓延，
迷恋我的细胞，破坏它们的安宁。

我想要经由她的身体带我穿过黑暗
她足够大，不过问我的存在，足够大
以至她可以生存，让我在她口中生存，
这里不会有任何伤害，遮蔽了所有视线，
她包裹我的身体、我的语言，但我安全沉寂。

3. 孩童是鲸

我很久没有见过鲸鱼，虽然父母声称我年少时见过。
几年前她们进入我的梦里，我不记得具体是什么时候。
当我身处内陆，她们就来了，出乎我的意料。我梦中的地形
是水流、蓝色、洞穴。鲸鱼在里面横冲直撞，
像暴雨前翻涌的云层，迁移往复，
横渡在我半梦半醒间，无目的地穿越漫长的隧道。
显然这些梦是征兆，亦是警示。

我不用谷歌搜索鲸鱼，我只梦到她们，我想
Instagram算法能听到
我的潜意识，洞悉我的梦境。推送都是鲸鱼，我滚动浏览
鲸鱼沉睡时，笔直如岁月斑驳的罗马圆柱；鲸鱼掠过水底，
像飞行过巨大的虚影；鲸鱼向船游去，露出她的头，
任由孩童像摸小狗一样爱抚。动物懂得信任孩子。
当我们年轻的时候，动物并不害怕我们，
亲昵和信赖支撑起我对人性仅存的信念，我坚守着它，坚持
在那遥远无端的过去，也许能寻回一些东西。

is the basis of what's left of my faith in humanity. My boyfriend tells me his first grade teacher told him his spirit animal was a whale. I cling to this, to the idea that far back there may be something retrievable.

4. *Sightings*

I have only seen whales in the distance but I have seen them. This summer I saw them as aberrations on the horizon in Northern California. Their spouting was like smokestacks in the distance. How rising smoke from a far off mountain signals inhabitants, the altered air standing in for presence, signs of life. The force of my belief dictates that every smudge on the horizon line of the ocean is a whale coming up for air. I can feel my mind coming up for air. There is sadness in the distance. My desire is a fishing line I cast all the way out there, trying to reach you, trying to hook a particle of your breath & reel it into my lungs so that I may remember a piece of my former self, who was enormous, gentle, & knew the way, & loved its own, & felt real grief, & glode through the water like nothing ever has.

I imagine you in utter darkness. Even in utter darkness we can intuit shapes, the outlines of shapes. The ocean is a huge inkblot on a page. You are an oval drawn in graphite on that inkblot. Your calf is completely in your shadow, so it is not registered on the page, protected. You leap up in ecstasy sometimes. Your tail is like a heart on a black inkblot. I trace the shape of a heart, & then your tail is like a heart with wings. There is the secret shape of a heart buried in your tail like you are the secret shape in the deeps of the ocean.

4. 目击

我见过鲸鱼，虽然只远远一面。今年夏天我眼见她们跳跃，形成北加州地平线上的畸变。喷发的水柱如遥遥的烟囱。远山升起烟，便知有人居住，变化的空气预示着存在，那是生命的迹象。我总坚信海平面上的
一抹凸显，是有一头鲸鱼浮出水面，呼吸。

我感到我的思绪也在呼吸。悲伤很远。我的渴望是一条抛出的鱼线漫无边际地延伸，想要接近你，钩住你气息的微粒，卷进我肺里，我就能记住从前的自己，她巨大、温柔，知道去哪，爱她自己，感受真实的悲伤，前所未有的在水中畅游。

我想象你完全在黑暗里。即使在黑暗中，我们也能知觉到形体，形体的轮廓。海洋是纸面上的一个巨大墨迹。你是墨水上石墨绘制的椭圆形。你的幼崽完全在你身型的阴影下，难见踪迹，受到保护。有时你欣喜如狂地跳起来。尾巴像黑色墨迹上的一颗心。我追踪这颗心的形状，一颗带翅膀的心，你的尾巴藏着心灵的隐秘轮廓，就像你也是深海的隐秘轮廓。

5. *Diving*

I dove out into the blue—it was all blue—blue is directionless, spaceless, formless forever. I was met by floating filaments & unicellular organisms or were they wispy bits of plastic—they collided with my mask, my seal of air that allows me to stay clear eyed in a world not my own. They said after 8 or so minutes you will likely start feeling symptoms of mild vertigo come on...when this happens, follow your breath. Bubbles always travel up.

I was in the bottom curve of earth, the bowl—I carried many atmospheres on my back but I was weightless, suspended, beneath me there was endless falling...above me there was the endless weight of everything...I couldn't feel any of it...all there was was blue...a kind of blackout...I was scared of violence. I kept feeling the feeling of something surging below, though I couldn't see it, I kept jerking my head to what I thought was left, what I thought was right, checking for danger. Was it paranoia or truth this ability to feel presences you cannot see. I still feel all those men like they are somewhere inside my blood yes inside the all red field of my body & I have no mask I can't see inside but I feel them lurking below about to come up...up is where my breath is & I am still breathing.

6. *Listening*

I could hear the sirens coming out of the blue water like sonar like anti-submarine mid-frequency active sonar that the military plays with down here. The sound that scares you into surfacing too quickly up from 3,000 meters down where you are hunting squid. Bubbles form in your blood & kill you. The navy sonar scares you to death.

5. 潜水

我一头扎进深海——一切都是蓝色——陷入令人眩晕的无形空间，
我永恒地下沉。漂浮的细丝和单细胞生物游过我的身旁，也许是
纤细的塑料碎片——撞上我的面罩，罩内的密封空气让我
在这个不属于我的世界里，保持清醒。他们说大约八分钟后，你可能会
开始感到轻微的眩晕...当这种症状出现时，请跟随呼吸。气泡总是向上移动。

我在地球的底部曲线，像在碗底——被压的喘不过气，
但同时失重、悬浮，等待我的是无尽的坠落，压迫我的
是无尽的重量...我什么都感知不到...一切都是蓝色...我眼前一黑...我恐惧暴力。

我感到未知的事物在下面涌动，但我无法看见。
我晕头转向，左右难分，警惕着危险。
感知无形的存在，这种能力，是妄想还是真实？我仍能感到所有
那些男人，在我血液中某个地方，就在我身体全部的红色血液里，我
没有防护面罩，无法清晰看到，但他们潜藏在下面，即将要出现...出现，
在我呼吸的地方，我还在呼吸。

6. 听觉

我听到蓝色海洋里的警报声，像声纳，像军队在这埋下的
反潜中频主动声纳。机器发出的声音使你恐惧地从水下3000米处飞快上潜，在你捕食乌贼的地方。
气泡在你的血液里挤压，杀死你。军队声纳令你恐惧致死。

There are men in lab coats listening to the sound of earthquakes through a tiny microphone.
They can hear the movement of magma through the seafloor. They test explosives just at the threshold of hearing. Sound travels faster in warmer water than colder water—it has to break through the invisible ice contained in the polar hearts of water molecules. I am making the sound of woundedness—can you hear me over the ships, the trawlers, cruising over us?

7. *Beached*

My friend says there's been a beached whale down the coast from where she lives for a few weeks now. Beached as in dead, as in stranded at the margin of home where the waves hiss & beckon its body back but it is unmovable, it has become so heavy on land. It's July but cold. I drove down to see it.

I didn't smell anything at first. Then I entered into the berth of your death-stench. There were no visible eyes. You were plastic melting, multicolored wax fused, your mouth was open but it was white, all white—saltwater had kept your eggplant skin oiled & intact, and now in the air it had vaporized, & the vascularized blubber lay oozing beneath. Like an abstract painting of sunset. You were so alone.

The closest I have been to you was to your death. You were just matter, no spirit, even though in your pure matter you contained the light you were hunted for. Hunted for the enormity of your body, for the value & uses of your body—it has nothing to do with spirit.

身着实验服的男人通过微型麦克风探测地震的声音。
岩浆穿过海底的震动传入他们耳中。他们试验着人类听觉范围内的爆炸。通常水温越高，声音穿行得更快——而今必须冲破藏在水微粒中看不见的坚冰，心脏仿佛处在极地。我正发出受伤的哀鸣——穿过我头顶的游船和捕鱼船，你可以听到我吗？

7. 搁浅

我的朋友说，她居住的海岸附近，有一头鲸鱼搁浅了几个星期。像是死掉了，像被困在海洋故乡的边缘，海浪唏嘘作响、来回拍打，召唤它的身体归来，但它一动不动。在陆地上是如此沉重。虽然已经七月，但天气很冷。我开车到海滩去看她。

起初我什么都没闻到。之后我驶入你散发着恶臭的死亡泊位，我看不见你的眼睛。你像燃化的塑料，融合着多色的蜡油，你的嘴巴张开，但是白色的，全白——海水曾让你深紫色的皮肤保持油润且完好无损，但现已在空气中蒸发，血管状的鲸油从身体下渗出。如一幅日落的抽象画。你是如此孤独。

我离你最近的一次是在你濒死的时候。你只是物质，没有意识，即便在你单纯的一具肉躯中，也蕴含着你被猎杀所取的鲸油，无垠的宝藏被悉数榨干，只为你身体的价值和用途——和精神无关。

8. *Whaling*

On Instagram I especially love watching you glide between glacial floes in the Arctic because your body is prepared. You are your own heat & fire, the surrounding infinities of cold encompass but do not penetrate you—you have an aura, maybe you heat the water around you. You survived extremes until we figured out steam powered ships & the explosive harpoon, until we had increased accuracy & further reach in our hunting. They killed you with explosives & used the oil from your head cavity to make more explosives for war.

These management shortfalls resulted in the continued depletion of species after species. In particular, huge declines occurred in the Antarctic, where in the 1961/62 season, the peak was reached with over 66,000 of you killed. By then however it was becoming increasingly hard for the whalers to find enough of you to kill. From a pre-whaling population of about 250,000 blue whales in the Southern Hemisphere, there are now estimated to be fewer than 1,500 remaining.

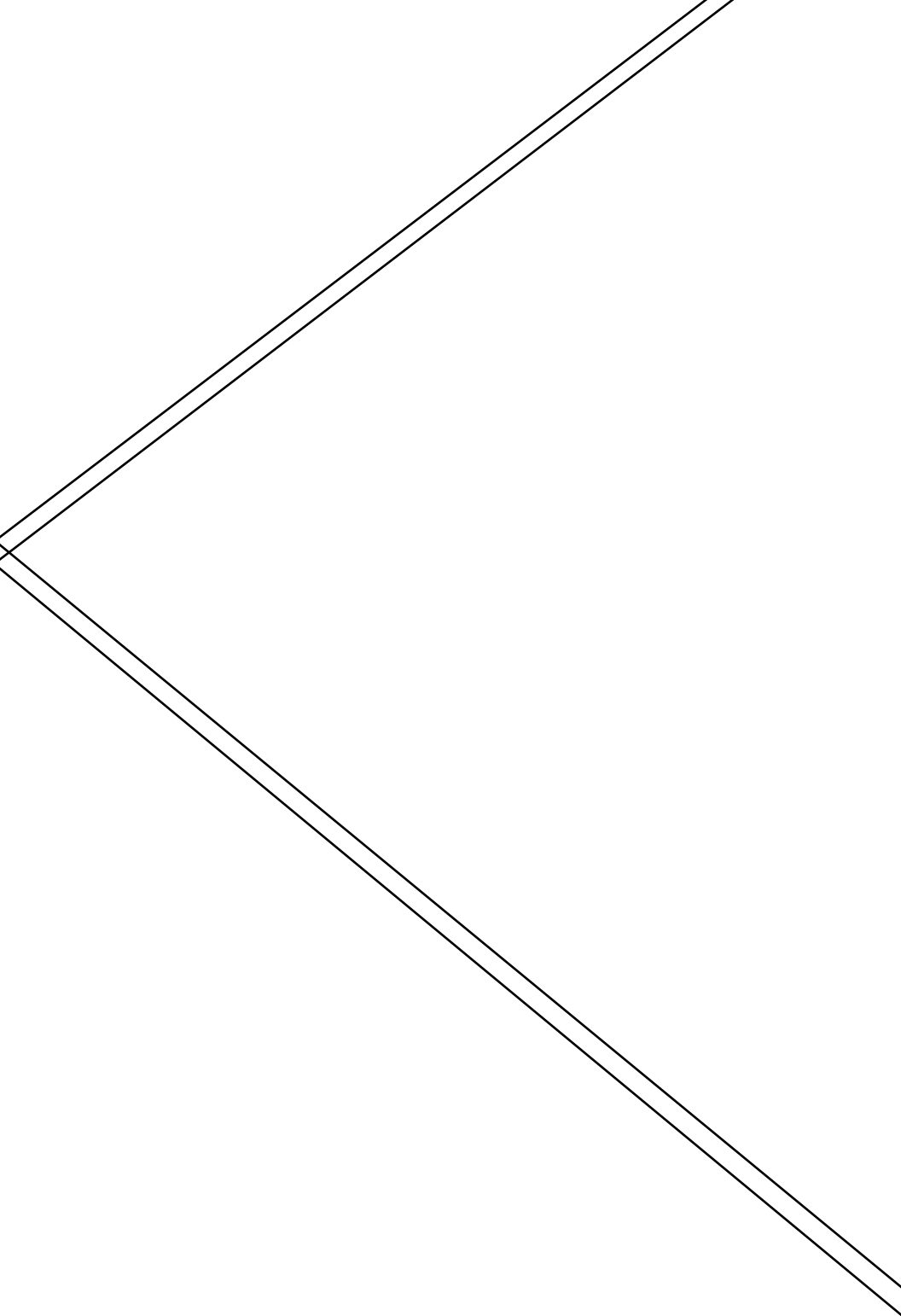
Hunted close to extinction. My boyfriend is obsessed with World War II & talks about how they would fire bomb cities until they surrendered. What has not been hunted close to extinction now. Will we be granted the time to recover ourselves. What will protect us from extinction?

8. 捕鲸

在Instagram上，我尤其喜欢看你在北极冰川间滑行，
那是你蓄势待发后的畅游。你就是自己的火和热，
无限的寒冷包围着你，但不穿透
你——你的光晕，温暖周围的水温。你熬过极寒
但我们研制出蒸汽船和捕鲸叉，猎杀得更准更远。
你死于炸药，战争中人也死于炸药，用你头腔中的
油制出的炸药。

*这些滥杀举措导致鲸鱼物种持续地减少。
特别是在南极地区出现大幅下降，在1961和62年，
死亡数量达到顶峰，超过66000头。从那以后，捕鲸者
越来越难捕杀足够多的鲸鱼。捕杀潮前，南半球的
蓝鲸数量
约为250000头，目前估计只剩下不到1500头。*

被猎杀到几无幸存。我的男友对第二次世界大战很着迷，
谈论他们如何轰炸城市使居民们投降。屠刀之下
现存之物也奄奄一息。我们还有时间修复
自己吗？灭亡之前，我们能得到谁的庇佑？



Translator's Note

This suite of poems by Li Yue, while not originally sequenced together, nonetheless offers a unified tapestry wherein the same threads are woven together in ever more inventive ways. In these poems, the warp of distance constantly negotiates with the weft of desire; and, as she writes in one poem, these “vertical and horizontal movements [sketch] a cross.” Indeed, there is a sacredness, an almost ecstatically religious quality to these densely layered, heavily symbolic poems. In Li Yue’s world, nature provides a key that can unlock deeper truths about the human condition: oranges show us how surfaces are deceiving (“the meridians under the skin / of oranges are always rioting”); “patiently self-programming” crystals can show us how to achieve peace; and choking on a fishbone can unlock a new vision of the trembling world. This is a poet who continually finds surprising external correlatives in the world for her internal states, and incorporates them into a unique poetic cosmology, oftentimes playing with double meanings to demonstrate how a symbol represents both the thing it is, and something else. It is through this doubling that the complex truth of life emerges. The subject matter of these poems is huge, the tone commanding, and the language complex. Translating these works, I have sought to remain faithful to the poems’ overall structure while trying to bring forth these symbolic resonances and entanglements. My experience here as a translator can best be described using the word “ravel,” which both contains itself and its opposite meaning: as I raveled and unraveled the threads in Li Yue’s work, I have also reveled in their supreme beauty.

LI YUE

深海视觉

我被鱼骨刺住的那天，
星星到地面上行走，
将我惊惧的额头捡获。
在诊所的照射灯下，我不得
不摆出一副镇静的面孔——
金属器具在抖动，还是
世界在抖动？你抚慰的语气
细长地伸入我喉咙，平静
却充满裂缝。罚我不再食鱼，
是出于慈爱，还是只讲句玩笑。

医生的手法从不是幻化的魔术，
而是生硬地打印结果：好了
或好不了了；没想到
或早该想到。你会病得如鱼的形状，
圆眼珠掀动，腮帮子
一鼓一伏，还有比呼吸更好的事？
你瘦削下去的皮肉，
挂在凛冽的肋骨上，
如一排排波浪，拧紧着
内部的激烈，又被，
又被哽住了——

以床板交换水滴，
以昏睡交换夜游，
以唇语交换沉默，
星星再也没有来过。
我们的日子，后来变成
我的日子，住到更深处的
幽暗洞穴，予以海洋视觉。
鱼骨偶尔，偶尔闪烁。

translated from the chinese by
SOPHIA MAUTZ

Deep Sea Vision

The day I was pierced by a fishbone,
the stars came down to walk on earth
and lifted my frightened forehead.
Under the clinic's spotlight, I
had to put on a calm face—
was it the metal equipment trembling
or was it the world? Your soothing tone
like a slender scope entered my throat, calm
but full of fissures. *Your punishment will be to never eat fish.*
Did you say this out of love, or were you only kidding.

The doctor's technique was never magic,
but a result bluntly printed: cured
or not cured. I didn't expect it,
but should have realized earlier.
In your sickness you took the form
of a fish: round eyes twitching, gills
rising and falling. Is there anything better
than breathing? Your flayed skin hanging
on bitterly cold ribs like rows and rows
of waves, tightening around the fierceness
inside, choked over and over—

Your headboard replaced by an IV dripping,
your slumber replaced by sleepwalking
your murmurings replaced by silence.
The stars never came again.
In the end, our days turned
into my days, living in the deeper dark
of a cave, imagining an ocean where sometimes,
just sometimes, a fishbone flashes.

上升的一切必将汇合

你载我去往机场，路途的沉默打动了，高架的斜线割开城市。你将我留给上升的舷窗，就像留给命运。落地后我经过登机口一个个站台，迷失在中庭的大树。

旅客的后脑勺似乎都像你，那是我熟悉的部分，经常走得太快。你手指泥泞站在墓前，墓已落成十年，我的目光却从你近距的后背，不断开溜，也许死亡挡住，让人无处可去。

成排的通道行踏过许多步履，沥青承载飞行的过渡，坍塌各自的幽谷。远去的人成为盲哑的一个点，上帝最先创造旅行，然后是思乡与怀疑。烟垄断着你，呼吸，并在火中上升。

我从没有想过，在你的左肺种上一颗树，而终会有一天我也要给你熏黑的手指，铲上一层土。我最后找到转盘吐出行李箱上濛濛水迹，收到消息：你那儿有雨。

Everything That Rises Must Converge

On the way to the airport your silence
touched me. Diagonal lines of elevated highway
divide the city. You left me ascending in the window seat
as if leaving me to fate. After landing, I passed one
boarding gate after another, lost behind the big tree in the atrium.

The back of every passenger's head looks like yours.
The most familiar part of you, always walking too fast.
With muddied fingers, you stood before the grave:
the grave that's been there ten years. My gaze kept straying
from your back. Perhaps death blocked its way; it had nowhere to go.

Passageways trodden by many feet,
asphalt bearing the transition of flight, collapsing
each deep valley. People become faraway dots, blind and mute.
God first created travel, then homesickness and doubt.
Smoke monopolizes you, breathing, ascending in flame.

I never expected to plant a tree
in your left lung. In the end, there will come a day
I will shovel a layer of dirt over your smoke-dark fingers.
Finally, I found the baggage carousel spitting out
luggage stained with traces of water, and I received the message:
it's raining where you are.

房间盲景

母亲打电话说，要来我房间。
通话另一半时间，在说她美容失败的脸。
脸，是滑稽且悲伤的，激掉一块色斑，
长出一片黑点，结疤，渴望新的皮层。
窗帘紧闭，灯是夜的眼疾，
天花板落在我身，合为一个池沼，
黑点麇集攒动。如果你真的要来，
真的要来，我将藏起现在的布局，
换一个符合你的，脸上的斑，的点，
我也会去爱的。爱，那么轻易地
开始改动我的房间，它碎得
如此之快，我毫无能力保卫。

书桌上还有一只橘子。
我收拾了整个眩晕的白日，还有
一只橘子，从哪里降临的吃食？
人类的爱，只爱它能吃的，这也是
哺乳的原理。橘子表皮下的经络
始终暴动着。有些东西，比如，
宇宙，我必须随身携带。就如携带
橘子，光洁的外表，无休无止的缠绕。

我们都阴暗地，在彼此背面偷窥，
却渴望不沾污秽、毫无裂痕。
经络的微妙从不投降，从不停止
欲望。你害怕我的反叛与刺穿，
我也恐惧从镜中看到你的样子
浮上我的脸。我如今知道的有限，
到那时就要面对面了，干洁严酷，
信且爱，她，她会向我显形。

有一种债，是我借住你的子宫，
有一种血，你说我后来也会懂，
有一种遗迹，来自撕裂的口，
垂扁的肚皮，纹路崎岖绵延。
我们分享疼痛，亲密
无间，像地壳碰撞的版块，
献给每座火山的温柔。

Blind Spot

On the way to the airport your silence
Mother called, said she wants to come to my room.
For the rest of the call, she talks about her failed beauty
treatment. The face, funny and sad, had its dark spots
removed, only to grow blackened scabs in their place, craving
a new layer of skin. Curtains tightly shut. Light is the eye-
sore of night. The ceiling falls on me, forms a swamp of darkness
swimming with densely packed black dots. If you're coming,
actually coming, I'll clean my room, change it
to something that suits you, the scabs, the dark spots
on your face—I too will try to love. Love, see how easily
I rearrange the rooms of myself, dissolving so quickly I'm defenseless.

There is still an orange on the table.
I spent an entire day dizzy from cleaning and there's still
this orange. Where did it come from? Human love
only loves what it can eat. This is also the logic
of breastfeeding. The meridians under the skin
of oranges are always rioting. Some things, such as
the Universe, I must carry with me. Just like carrying
an orange, its bright, smooth appearance, its endless entanglements.

We all secretly peek behind each other
but don't want to be stained by this filth
of looking. We long to be free of cracks and piths.
The subtlety of meridians never surrenders, never stops
desiring. You are afraid of my rebellion and penetrating gaze.
I am afraid of looking in the mirror and seeing your face
cast over mine. What I know now is limited, but by then
we will be face to face, clean and harsh.
With trust and love, She—She will reveal herself to me.

There is a kind of debt I borrowed to live in your womb,
there is a kind of blood, you said I would understand it later,
there is a kind of vestige, born from the torn opening,
the deflated, drooping stomach skin striated with stretchmarks.
We share pain, intimacy, like the collision of tectonic plates,
dedicated to the tenderness of every volcano.

鹤鸟踟蹰

寻找和隐匿，我与你，都在流亡，一个镜子折射的两面，共同体必经的分离。你的缺席证明着我的在场，我的在场失落后你的缺席。有一条绝望胶着的线，暗示着希望，但那希望渺茫，但确是——那希望，那渺茫，交替着不可弯折的进程，从碑石到攀升的魂灵，让我在彼岸的近旁，承担起死亡。

我们念出诗句，为召唤，更大的沉默。大部分时候，嘈杂。我说出，我听见，我的嘴巴失去嘴巴，我的耳朵失去耳朵。“有时候，为了听到雨声背后的音乐，一个人不得不沉默。”*沉默是远行之人所有，他走得够远、够久，才回过头，茫茫地对望，盲盲地失焦，沉痛中锻造出德行，也亦是，静默的贴合。远行之人面容消散，负载沉默的力量，末端的忧郁，如倾注的雨，水潭里跳动的残影。

边界制造并承受距离。人们只有悬浮的脚掌，和抛向水流的信物，水平与垂直，像画上一个十字。因这不可能的爱抚，因这不可更改的美，因这不可休止的踟蹰。“纯洁地去爱，就是接受距离，就是酷爱自身和人们所爱之物之间的距离。”**

* 引自西奥·安哲罗普洛斯的电影《鹤鸟踟蹰》，诗歌标题也同名。

** 引自西蒙娜·薇依《重负与神恩》

The Suspended Step of the Stork

Seeking and hiding, you and I, both in exile. A mirror reflecting two sides, the inevitable separation from a common body. Your absence proves my presence, my presence misses your absence. There is a thread woven of despair, hinting at a distant hope. With hope and despair alternating in our unalterable course towards death, from stele to ascending soul, let me stand on the opposite shore, let me endure death.

We recite poems to summon greater silence. Most days, it's only noise. I speak, I hear, and my mouth loses its mouth, my ears lose their ears. *Sometimes, in order to hear the music behind rain, one has to be silent.** Silence belongs to those who travel far away. Only after a person has gone far enough, long enough, does he look back. He looks back blindly. Virtue was forged in deep pain; it too was a silent bond. The faces of those who have traveled far fade away, carrying with them the power of silence and the melancholy of the end, like the pouring rain, the dancing afterimage in the puddle.

Boundaries create and bear distance. People have only their suspended footsoles and tokens thrown in the water, these horizontal and vertical movements sketching a cross. Because of this impossible caress, this unchangeable beauty, this endless hesitation. *To love purely is to consent to distance, it is to adore the distance between ourselves and that which we love.***

* From Theo Angelopoulos's film "The Suspended Step of the Stork," from which this poem also takes its title.

** From "Burden and Grace" by Simone Weil

晶体的植入，或火焰

渴望新的视觉是一种盲者经验。
眼压过高的检查费用里赛博格
植入涌现新奇，只需要在眼球
切开小口清晰降临，启示并不
保证，比如眼泪流出如何回收。

晶体以近乎完美精确的形式结构，
耐心地自我编制，每度折散宁静
的奥秘，教诲那从噪声到有序的
修行之人，忍受心中火焰的要义
——在黑暗中。

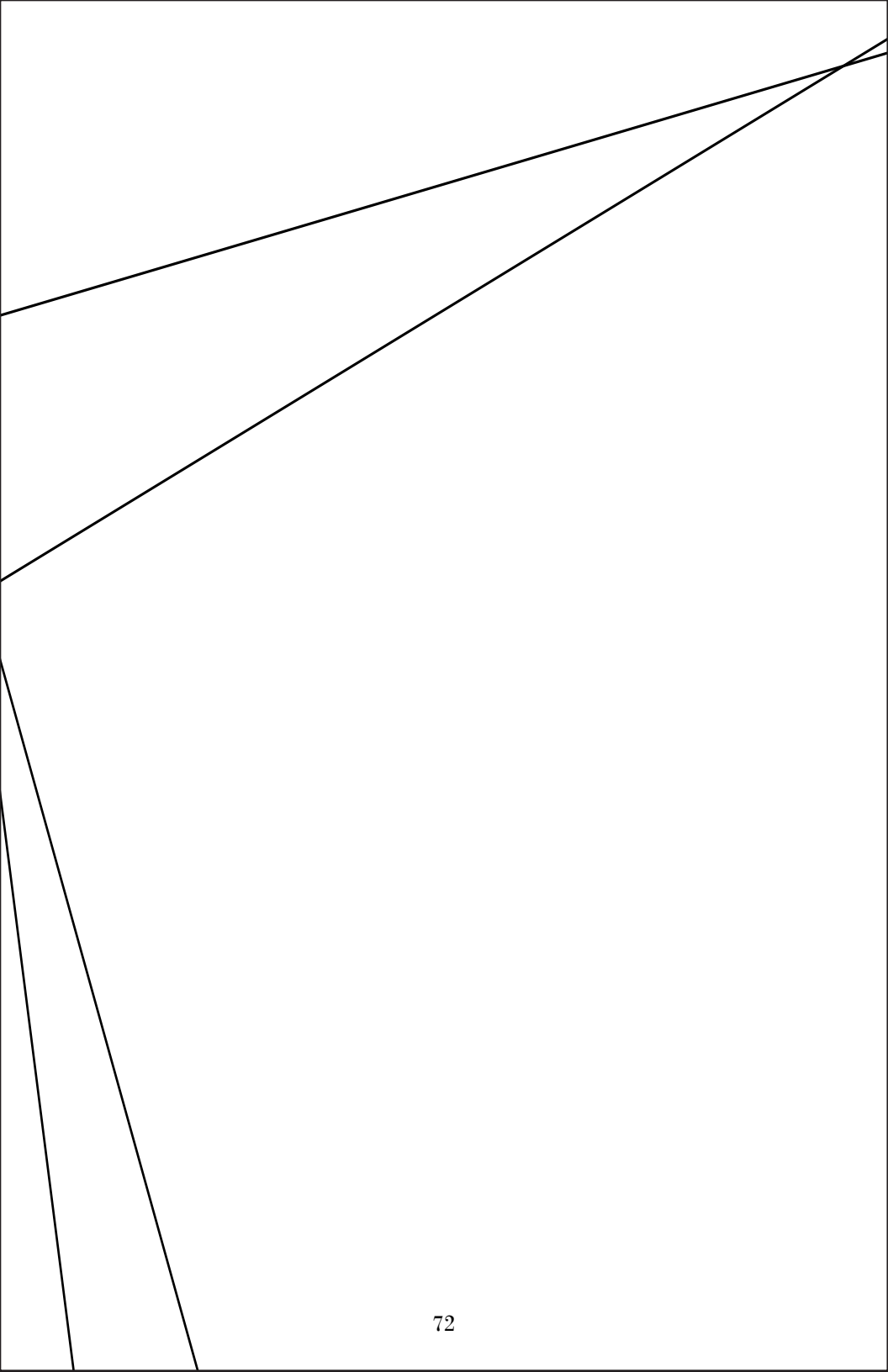
黑暗的凝视让你尝到无比苦痛，生命的位置
不在光之中，真理以全部的与身俱来，行路。
你要到你在的地方去，要离开你不在的地方，
你要成为你还不是的一切，沿着你还不是的
一切的道路走。我像爱敌人那样爱你，
既然感觉到疼痛，就要那样地活下去。

The Implantation of Crystals, or Flames

The longing for new vision is a blind experience.
Expensive test for high intraocular pressure, implanted cyborg
and a new miracle emerges, one tiny incision on the eyeball
can bestow clarity, enlightenment is no guarantee, like how
tears are recycled even as they are shed.

Crystals are structured with near-perfect precision,
patiently self-programming, breaking apart the secrets of tranquility
at every turn. Teach those who practice the way from noise to order
the essence of enduring the heart's flames
—in darkness.

The gaze of darkness makes you taste incomparable pain, the place of life
is not in the light. Truth comes with your body and all your travels.
You have to go where you are and leave where you are not,
you have to become all you are not, and follow the path
of all you are not yet. I love you like an enemy.
Since I feel pain, I must live with it.



word for word / mot pour mot
Columbia University School of the Arts
Université Paris 8

Note du Traducteur

Lorsque j'ai postulé pour Word for Word, j'ai avoué dans ma lettre de motivation mon habitude secrète : la nuit, je tente parfois, sur des sites spécialisés, de traduire en français les paroles de mes chansons préférées. Mais je me retrouvais toujours face à cet éternel problème : comment faire venir l'anglais dans le français, comment le rendre accessible sans le dénaturer, sans le trahir ? En rencontrant Samantha, j'étais rassuré : j'allais avoir la chance, pour ma première expérience de traduction en bonne et due forme, d'avoir un accès direct à la créatrice du texte. Auprès d'elle, je pourrais solliciter le moindre détail pour restituer le sens au plus près de ce qu'elle entendait. Nous ne serions pas comme la fourmi incapable d'imaginer l'être humain à l'origine des miettes tombées du ciel : nous serions toujours conscients de la présence de l'autre, pour le meilleur.

Le texte de Samantha Yadron prend, à première vue, des atours faussement naïfs ; il s'amuse à explorer des territoires hétéroclites, des pensées étranges, des liens inattendus. Sa narratrice se fait tour à tour touchante, étonnante, ingénue, profonde ou inquiétante. Ce sont ses sensations, aussi discrètes que puissantes, qui font glisser ses pérégrinations mentales, de façon fluide et presque imperceptible, dans des changements temporels, spatiaux et stylistiques. Cela m'a amené à mener des recherches sur des sujets aussi divers que la différence entre durillon et callosité, la dénomination des pierres en fonction de leur taille, les types de soutien-gorge ou encore l'anatomie des fourmis. Au fur et à mesure que j'ai plongé dans ses mots, la solide structure sur laquelle repose le flux de conscience élaboré par Samantha s'est révélée de cette façon organique, portant le texte avec la facilité de la fourmi qui embarque un artefact de trois fois sa taille.

Dans ma lettre de motivation, j'avais aussi écrit cette phrase : « Lorsqu'on retourne un mot étranger comme une pierre, derrière lui se découvrent plusieurs

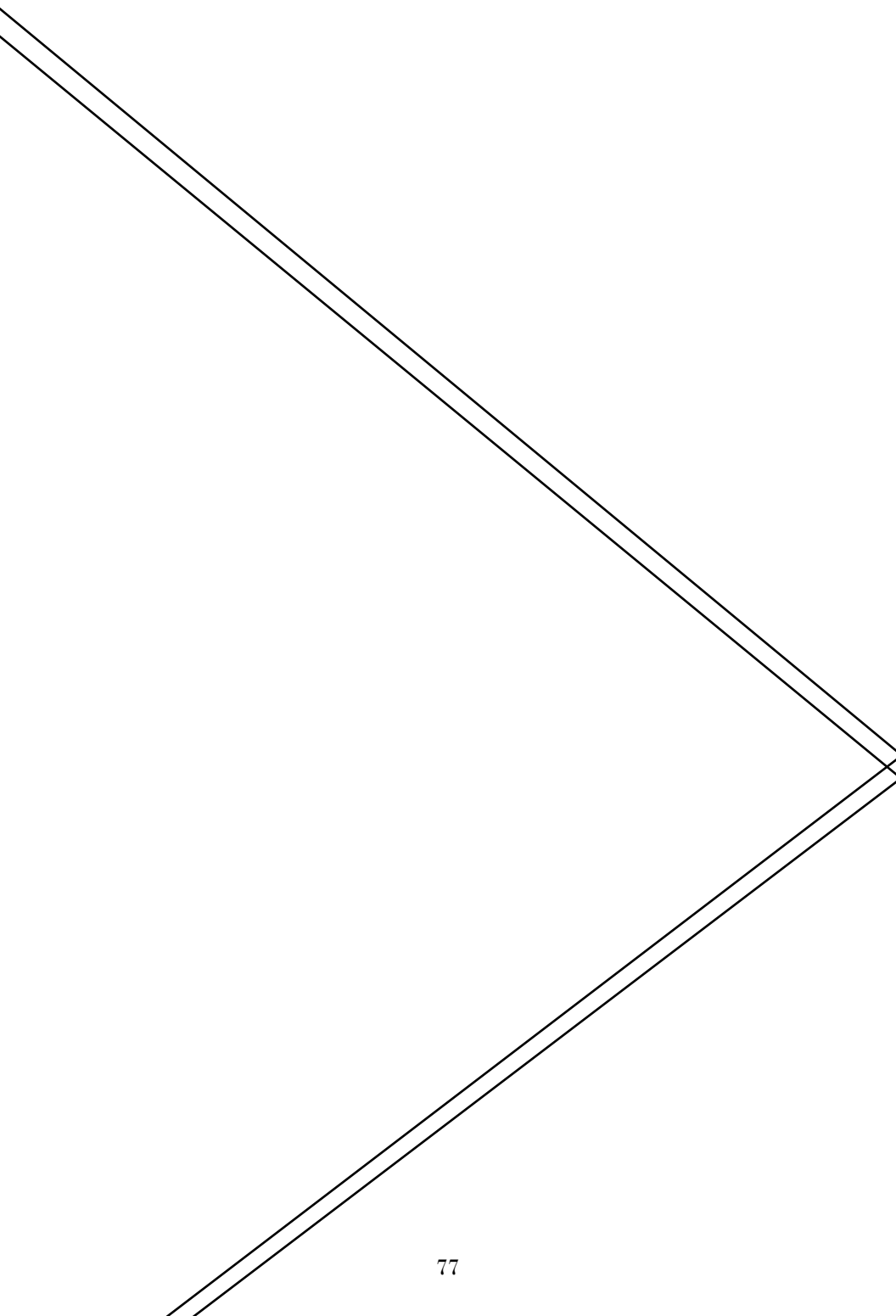
voies : laquelle est la plus fiable, mais aussi la plus forte, mais aussi la plus belle ? » Bien avant de lire le texte de Samantha, quelque chose en moi comparait déjà mes efforts de traduction à ceux du père de sa protagoniste face au rocher récalcitrant. Il conviendrait d'essayer chaque angle, chaque direction, chaque degré de force, pour qu'enfin la pierre surgisse hors de l'eau. Le dictionnaire bilingue que j'utilise classe ses propositions par fréquence : les acceptions les plus rares se trouvent en bas de la liste. C'était quasi-systématiquement à cet endroit que j'exhumais le mot qui me semblait le plus proche des intentions de Samantha. Pour autant, à chaque choix, je craignais de dénaturer cette architecture de fourmilière, faite d'éléments aussi disparates que leur assemblage était cohérent.

Lors de nos rencontres par écran interposé, j'ai régulièrement demandé à Samantha si elle acceptait que j'altère légèrement la structure d'une phrase. Je reprenais nerveusement une gorgée de mon thé de début d'après-midi, et je la voyais me regarder tranquillement par-dessus son bol de céréales. Elle avait une meilleure compréhension de ce que la traduction implique fatalement. Invariablement, elle me répondait qu'elle me faisait totalement confiance. Est-ce qu'on trahit encore lorsque l'autre est d'accord ?

Je me suis d'abord retrouvé avec une traduction grammaticalement correcte et sémantiquement juste, mais stylistiquement mauvaise. En voulant trop conserver l'anglais, et sa flexibilité poétique dont Samantha fait un si bon usage, j'étais parvenu à un français étrange et maladroit, loin de la voix singulière de Samantha, et de son style à la fois profond et joueur, mouvant et articulé, réfléchi et chatoyant. C'était là la vraie trahison. Tout comme Samantha s'efforçait de le faire remarquablement pour mon propre texte, il s'agissait de choisir, non pas ce qui était correct, mais ce qui était juste.

Version après version, comme le gel et le dégel déplacent les pierres du lac d'Ontario en hiver, j'ai fini par tirer et pousser son texte jusqu'à ma rive. J'espère être parvenu à une traduction capable de faire ressentir aux

francophones sa texture originale, ses complexités oisives, ses détachements fascinés, et ses nostalgies au goût de poulet frit, et peut-être de mandarine. Mon partenariat avec Samantha a bien été une affaire d'apprentissage, de collaboration, de confiance, de conscience réciproques – c'est en acceptant de prendre le risque de trahir que l'on finit par ne pas trahir du tout.



SAMANTHA YADRON

EXCERPT FROM *SARAH'S CONSCIENCE*

Existing alongside another creature like a yellowjacket on your fried chicken sandwich and giving it no mind. Consciousnesses concentrating at the fulcrum of activity and passivity, where the cathode and anode meet, jumbling, heating, at rest, between another creature and me. Mutual awareness of the other's presence and mutual indifference. Am I indifferent? I do not know that I am indifferent and I am unsure the other is aware. However I could stay still and stare at another sentience for an eternity and not tire. I am twenty-nine and the other weekend I was sitting on the stoop of my forty-five-year-old boyfriend's house and I was picking at the hardened callous of my left heel. It was around three in the afternoon and the boyfriend was off somewhere picking me up some late lunch. It was August, so it was hot. I peeled off a big piece of callous and flicked it off to the side, thinking nothing of it, except perhaps to kick it off the step onto the cement, as to be certain he wouldn't notice it and consider from where it could have come. Except soon an ant came up and started prodding it with its antennae and I couldn't take my eyes off it. The ant picked up this dead chunk of my skin three times its size and started off with it toward the edge of the stair on which I sat braided. I observed the ant go skin-chunk-and- head-first down the rise and then continue step-by-step to the sidewalk, to where I then followed it, lying prone, length-wise on the bottom step to get into its face, my right leg hanging off and knee scraping the concrete, toes getting into some grass growing up from the cracks. I was wearing a knee-length collared dress the color of tangerine lace and through it showed

**traduit de l'anglais par
IVAN BERQUIEZ**

Exister auprès d'une autre créature comme une guêpe sur ton sandwich au poulet frit et n'y prêter aucune attention. Des cognitions qui se concentrent au pivot entre l'activité et la passivité, là où cathode et anode se rencontrent, s'embrouillent, se réchauffent, au repos, entre une autre créature et moi. Conscience et indifférence réciproques de la présence de l'autre. Suis-je indifférente ? Je ne sais pas si je suis indifférente et je ne suis pas sûre que l'autre soit consciente. Pour autant, je peux fixer mon regard sur un autre être sensible pendant une éternité sans jamais en avoir marre. J'ai vingt-neuf ans. L'autre week-end, j'étais assise sur le porche chez mon petit-ami de quarante-cinq ans, et je triturais une callosité sur mon talon gauche. Il était environ trois heures de l'après-midi et mon petit-ami était sorti me chercher un déjeuner tardif. C'était le mois d'août, alors il faisait chaud. J'ai retiré un gros morceau de corne et je l'ai retourné sur le côté, sans trop y penser, si ce n'est pour envisager de le balancer sur le ciment, loin de la marche, afin d'être certaine que mon copain ne le remarque pas, qu'il ne se demande pas d'où ça aurait pu provenir. Mais rapidement est arrivée une fourmi qui a commencé à le tripoter avec ses antennes – et je ne l'ai plus quittée des yeux. La fourmi a saisi ce bout mort de ma peau, trois fois plus gros qu'elle, et elle s'est mise en route en direction du bord de la marche sur laquelle j'étais assise en tailleur. Pour pouvoir la regarder descendre la marche à la verticale, bout-de-peau-et-tête-les-premiers, pour l'observer en train de continuer pas à pas jusqu'au trottoir, pour bien m'approcher de sa tête, j'ai dû m'allonger à plat ventre de toute ma longueur sur la dernière marche : ma jambe droite était suspendue dans le vide, mon genou éraflait le béton, et mes orteils caressaient les brins d'herbe qui

my white underpants and t-shirt bra. The step pressed up coolly through the pores of the lace onto my skin and I recalled the rocks at the lake in Ontario, granite, one rock in particular which I'd picked up off the rock wall the whole family had been for years tossing stones onto from the lake, to make the lakebed safer to walk on and to make our shore appear less unkempt when looking on it from the water. There were many small stones in the lake but there were also a few huge ones which got in the way of boats docking and which had to be moved by one or multiple men. My father spent one afternoon addressing one the size and shape of a box-television. It was slate and hay-colored and couched by other, smaller submerged boulders which had to be dug from the mud and algae and flecks of deck-stain we'd all contributed to peeling off the dock, obsessively, and dropping in between the two-by-fours into the lake over the course of the five or so years since we'd last put a coat on it, the flecks saturated and sunk and lodged into the crevices and entanglements of everything else, blending with the soggy birch and cedar bark alongside it. There was definitely some wood, also netting, nails and screws, possibly and oar or two around there shallow enough for us to find and clean out, but everything was so slick and mossy, and there was always so much other work to be done around the cabin and woods surrounding. The winters there destroy man-made things with the moisture and freeze, and the snow puts many trees and branches down with its yards and yards of weight. I watched my father squat shirtless in his brown and orange trunks by the box-television boulder and push back the debris while I squatted in the dirt next to the firepit on the shore, my Labrador sitting on my right, also attending to my father, and grandma's dumb boxer on my left laying with its chin on front paws. My father pushed and tugged from a few angles before he found the one that first budged the stone, which was to push his feet against a corner at the base and to reach both hands to each side of the top opposite corner, then pull

poussent entre les fissures. Je portais une robe à col, mi-longue, mandarine couleur de dentelle, à travers laquelle on pouvait voir ma culotte et mon soutien-gorge blancs. En sentant la fraîcheur de la marche sur ma peau à travers les pores de la dentelle, je me suis rappelée des rochers au lac en Ontario, du granit, d'une pierre en particulier que j'avais dénichée sur le mur de pierres que toute la famille avait construit à force d'y larguer des rochers depuis des années pour que ce soit moins dangereux de marcher sur le lit du lac et pour que notre rive paraisse moins négligée lorsqu'on la regardait depuis l'eau. Il y avait beaucoup de petites pierres dans le lac mais il y en avait aussi quelques-unes qui étaient énormes et qui gênaient le passage des bateaux lors de l'accostage. Pour les déplacer, il fallait un ou plusieurs hommes. Mon père a passé un après-midi entier à s'occuper de l'une d'entre elles, qui avait la taille et la forme d'un de ces anciens postes de télévision. D'une couleur d'ardoise et de foin, elle était entretissée dans un amas immergé d'autres rochers plus petits, qu'il fallait extraire de la vase, des algues, et des éclats du vernis du pont (que nous avons tous contribué, depuis le dépôt de la dernière couche environ cinq ans plus tôt, à décoller de façon obsessionnelle pour mieux les faire tomber dans le lac à travers les planches du ponton), ces éclats qui étaient imbibés, coulés, logés dans les crevasses, enchevêtrés parmi tout le reste, amalgamés avec les morceaux détremés d'écorce de bouleau et de cèdre qui bordaient le rocher. Il y avait des morceaux de bois, et aussi des filets, des clous, des vis, et sans doute une rame ou deux pas loin – elles étaient plutôt près de la surface, donc c'est vrai qu'on aurait pu les retrouver et les retirer assez facilement, mais tout était si glissant et couvert de mousse, et il y avait toujours tellement d'autres tâches à accomplir dans le chalet et les bois alentour... En hiver, là-bas, l'humidité et le gel détruisent les choses faites par l'homme, et la neige fait tomber beaucoup d'arbres et de branches sous les tonnes et les tonnes de son poids. J'ai regardé mon père,

toward him. He did this, and then he sort of wedged it in the opposite direction, pushing on the top corner nearest to his chest. He then moved the adjacent corner in the same way, and shifted these edges three or four times, until it finally loosened and sort of jumped up out of the water for a moment before landing in its new position, where it might have thought it'd then stay for another century, as it probably did in the last. That was my assessment, then, because that rock in particular I had never noticed shift places from year to year while others apparently did; some went missing over a winter, the ice and its melting moving everything around, so much that it does. But from there he was able to roll it awkwardly, squat-walking, pushing from the bottom and letting it use the water to float a centimeter or two closer to the shore with each flip. The rock was not even deceptively light: my father in his expressiveness made its weight known to his onlookers—me and the dogs but also my grandparents and cousins and aunts and uncles on the dock—through his grunting and wailing, his face in a red grimace; a spectacle, he was: this image would for sure become a cabin legend; this would get written down, with the sarcastic, hyperbolic humor characteristic of us. With such profound fury emitting from my father I expected more waves; the water surrounding my father however appeared not to move. Small splashes against the surface of the rock and my father's olive, thick-veined legs, yes, but, outside of a minor perimeter around him and his object as they moved to a spot designated by grandma along the shore, the lake was unaffected, silent, squinting. The locusts came on like the fuzz of a television without cable signal.

It was from a perch on that rock, its top surface dried from the sun, its position solidified over a few years of freezing and thawing, that I picked up the smaller stone I recalled from the stoop step. It was a miniature of the one on which I squatted, the same hay and slate, but more hay. I had made to occupy myself

torse nu, vêtu de son short de bain marron et orange, s'accroupir devant cette télé faite de roche et repousser les débris, tandis que j'étais accroupie par terre, près du feu de camp sur la rive, mon labrador assis à ma droite, concentré lui aussi sur mon père, et le boxer débile de mamie allongé à ma gauche, le museau posé sur les pattes de devant. Mon père a dû pas mal s'acharner avant de trouver l'angle qui, en premier, a permis de faire bouger la pierre : il fallait pousser avec les pieds contre un point de la base, tout en étendant les deux mains de chaque côté d'un point opposé au sommet, avant de tirer vers soi. Après ça, il l'a plus ou moins calée dans la direction opposée, tout en poussant le bord supérieur au plus près de sa poitrine. Il a ensuite bougé l'extrémité adjacente de la même manière, et il a remué ces bords trois ou quatre fois, jusqu'à ce qu'elle finisse enfin par se détacher, et presque bondir hors de l'eau pendant une seconde avant d'atterrir dans une nouvelle position, dans laquelle elle pensait sans doute demeurer encore un siècle, comme ça avait probablement été le cas la dernière fois. C'était mon analyse sur le moment, parce que selon mes observations, ce roc-là n'avait jamais bougé avec les années, contrairement à d'autres ; beaucoup d'entre eux disparaissaient après l'hiver, la glace et sa fonte déplaçant, comme à leur habitude, tout ce qui se trouvait alentour. À partir de là, toujours accroupi, mon père a pu faire rouler le rocher maladroitement en poussant sur sa base pour que l'eau le fasse émerger ; chaque petit coup l'amenait un centimètre ou deux plus près de la rive. Contrairement à ce qu'on aurait pu imaginer, le rocher n'était même pas secrètement léger : l'expressivité de mon père s'assurait que les spectateurices (moi et les chiens, mais aussi mes grands-parents, cousins, tantes et oncles sur le quai) aient bien conscience de son poids, avec force grognements, gémissements, et autres grimaces rouges dans lesquelles se prenaient son visage ; l'image spectaculaire qu'il constituait rejoindrait nécessairement les légendes du chalet ; elle s'y retrouverait gravée pour toujours,

that summer by choosing rocks from the pile along the shore, taking them to the picnic table by the firepit, standing on the bench with the rock held in both hands over head, and throwing the rock to the ground, aiming for a blunt-edged boulder embedded in the dirt. If I hit it, the thrown stone would reliably chip off or split. This one cut in a diagonal plane across its middle. Inside was all slate, gritless, and so cold it darkened with my breath or when I nuzzled my face against it; thinking of it the other weekend, on the stoop, I could compare it to the fresh-shaven face of a man, evincing droplets of water and blood. I covet all surfaces, the cheek, the stone, and the stoop step, my cheek pushed flat and fat against them all, my left arm reaching above my head on the step above and my right languishing down to the sidewalk, orangutan-like. I watched the ant moving away and I wondered what it was gonna do with my skin-chunk: was human protein something ants ate or could it be symbolic, like a prize for the queen? Was it construction material; the opacity of an ant-hill means I imagine intricate scaffolding. I had heard somewhere that humans are too big a concept for an ant to ever register as there. That is ants don't see us. We drop donuts on the tile floor and neglect a smudge of icing when wiping up; the ant clocks the icing but it doesn't know where it came from. It is an effect without cause. A callous is found on the stoop but the stoop and the callous were presented to the ant by force we might call God. So the other creature is not indifferent but it is not aware.

On the sidewalk the ant had gotten my skin stuck in a crack in the cement and to make matters worse got it caught up with some grass; but it was determined and it tried pulling and pushing from all different angles and directions. I didn't want to interfere with nature but oh so badly did I want to give the guy a little help. I resisted the urge for a while. I didn't know how far it had to go. I got up and looked about for an ant-hill but found none either inside the little yard or

avec l'humour sarcastique et hyperbolique qui nous caractérisait. Je m'attendais à ce que la furie profonde émise par mon père cause davantage de vagues ; pourtant, il apparaissait que, tout autour de lui, l'eau ne bougeait nullement. Quelques petites éclaboussures contre la surface du rocher ou les jambes brunes et veineuses de mon père, certes ; toutefois, en dehors du périmètre restreint autour de lui et de son objet tandis qu'ils s'avançaient jusqu'au point que mamie désignait sur la rive, le lac était inchangé, silencieux, louche. Le bruit des criquets résonnait telle la friture d'une télévision qui ne reçoit pas de signal.

Une fois sa surface séchée par le soleil et sa position solidifiée par quelques années de gel et de dégel, c'était en me perchant sur ce rocher que j'avais déniché la plus petite pierre, me suis-je rappelée depuis la marche du porche. C'était une version miniature de celle sur laquelle j'étais accroupie, la même couleur de foin et d'ardoise, mais tirant plus sur le foin. Cet été-là, je m'employais à l'occupation suivante : je choisissais une pierre parmi la pile sur la rive, je l'amenais avec moi jusqu'à la table de pique-nique près du feu de camp, je montais sur le banc, je la brandissais de mes deux mains par-dessus ma tête, et je la jetais sur le sol en visant un rocher émoussé, incrusté dans la terre. Si j'arrivais à le toucher, la pierre que j'avais jetée allait invariablement soit se briser, soit se fendre. Celle-ci s'était scindée selon un plan de coupe diagonal le long de son centre. À l'intérieur, elle n'était qu'ardoise, sans la moindre poussière ; et elle était tellement froide qu'elle s'obscurcissait lorsque je soufflais dessus ou que j'y blottissais mon visage. En y repensant, ce week-end-là sur le porche, j'aurais pu la comparer au visage fraîchement rasé d'un homme, dilué d'eau et de sang. La joue, la pierre et la marche du porche : toutes ces surfaces, je les convoite, le gras de ma joue aplati sur chacune d'entre elles, mon bras gauche appuyé sur la marche au-dessus de ma tête, et mon bras droit alangui jusqu'au trottoir – comme un orang-outan.

in front of it, a bit outside the gate. I went to lay back down on the step and see what was up. The ant still struggled for my skin. However soon a larger ant arrived to the scene, not needing to do anything more than appear in order to bully the original ant away around a gravel-sized rock, to hide. The larger ant appraised my callous briefly before rejecting it, moving on. The smaller ant promptly emerged from hiding and resumed his struggle, but finally I resolved to intervene and I tapped the piece with the tip of my pinky fingernail, which seemed like minimal interference, but it moved mountains for the ant's effort, as the ant grabbed the skin immediately with its bitty prongs and kept on. By this time I sensed my boyfriend's presence was nigh so I sat up and adjusted myself prettily, moving up a few steps, making my legs cross and supporting my posture with my right elbow on the step above, and there was a ray of sun which I could feel glinting my blue eye, forcing me to close one eye and look at the ground, my vision delicate. This made so that I could keep on the ant as it was surveying the grassy edge of the cement ground which jutted up to the stone wall surrounding the yard. I wished I hadn't lost my sense of time because I panicked as the ant moved closer and closer to the iron gate under which it was likely to walk, out of my sight. On a normal day I would think nothing of it, but one doesn't get to choose his preoccupations, or at least I don't. Luckily my boyfriend walked up soon with the fried chicken sandwich I had told him I craved and he had insisted on retrieving, despite his lack of hunger and despite that he would not eat fried chicken, because he is a 45-year-old man and it would cause him heartburn.

He set the plastic bag with the tin-foil boxes and plastic-wear and napkins beside my lap and leaned down to kiss me and said you look lovely and I said thank you. I asked if he wanted to sit with me but he said he was exhausted from the heat and would rather nap in the cool. I liked how we did what we wanted

En regardant la fourmi s'éloigner, je me demandais ce qu'elle allait bien pouvoir faire de mon bout de peau : les fourmis se nourrissent-elles de protéines humaines, ou alors est-ce que c'était comme un symbole, un trophée pour la reine ? Peut-être que c'était du matériau de construction ; à travers l'opacité des fourmilières j'imagine un échafaudage complexe. J'ai entendu dire qu'aux yeux des fourmis, les humains représentent un concept trop grand pour qu'elles soient ne serait-ce que capables de nous recenser comme présents. Elles ne nous voient pas. Si nous faisons tomber un donut sur le carrelage et que nous omettons de ramasser une miette du glaçage, les fourmis captent le glaçage, mais elles ne savent pas d'où il provient. C'est un effet sans cause. De la corne est trouvée sur le porche mais le porche comme la corne sont présentés à la fourmi par une force que l'on pourrait peut-être nommer Dieu. Donc ce n'est pas tant que l'autre créature est indifférente – c'est qu'elle n'est pas consciente.

Sur le trottoir, ma peau s'était retrouvée coincée dans une fissure du ciment et, pour ne rien arranger, empêtrée dans des brins d'herbe ; mais la fourmi, déterminée, essayait de la tirer et de la pousser dans tous les sens, tous les angles possibles. Je ne souhaitais pas interférer avec la nature, mais ô combien je rêvais d'aider un peu la petite bête ! J'ai résisté à ce désir pendant un moment. J'ignorais jusqu'où elle devait aller. Je me suis levée pour chercher une fourmière du regard, mais je n'en ai trouvée aucune, ni à l'intérieur du petit jardin, ni devant celui-ci, juste après le portail. Je suis allée me rallonger sur la marche pour voir ce qui se passait. La fourmi luttait toujours pour ma peau. Cependant, une plus grosse fourmi arriva bientôt sur les lieux, sans avoir besoin de faire quoi que ce soit de plus pour terroriser la fourmi de départ, laquelle partit se cacher derrière un caillou. La plus grosse fourmi estima brièvement ma corne, avant de la récuser et de partir. La plus petite fourmi émergea promptement de sa cachette pour reprendre sa lutte. Finalement, je me

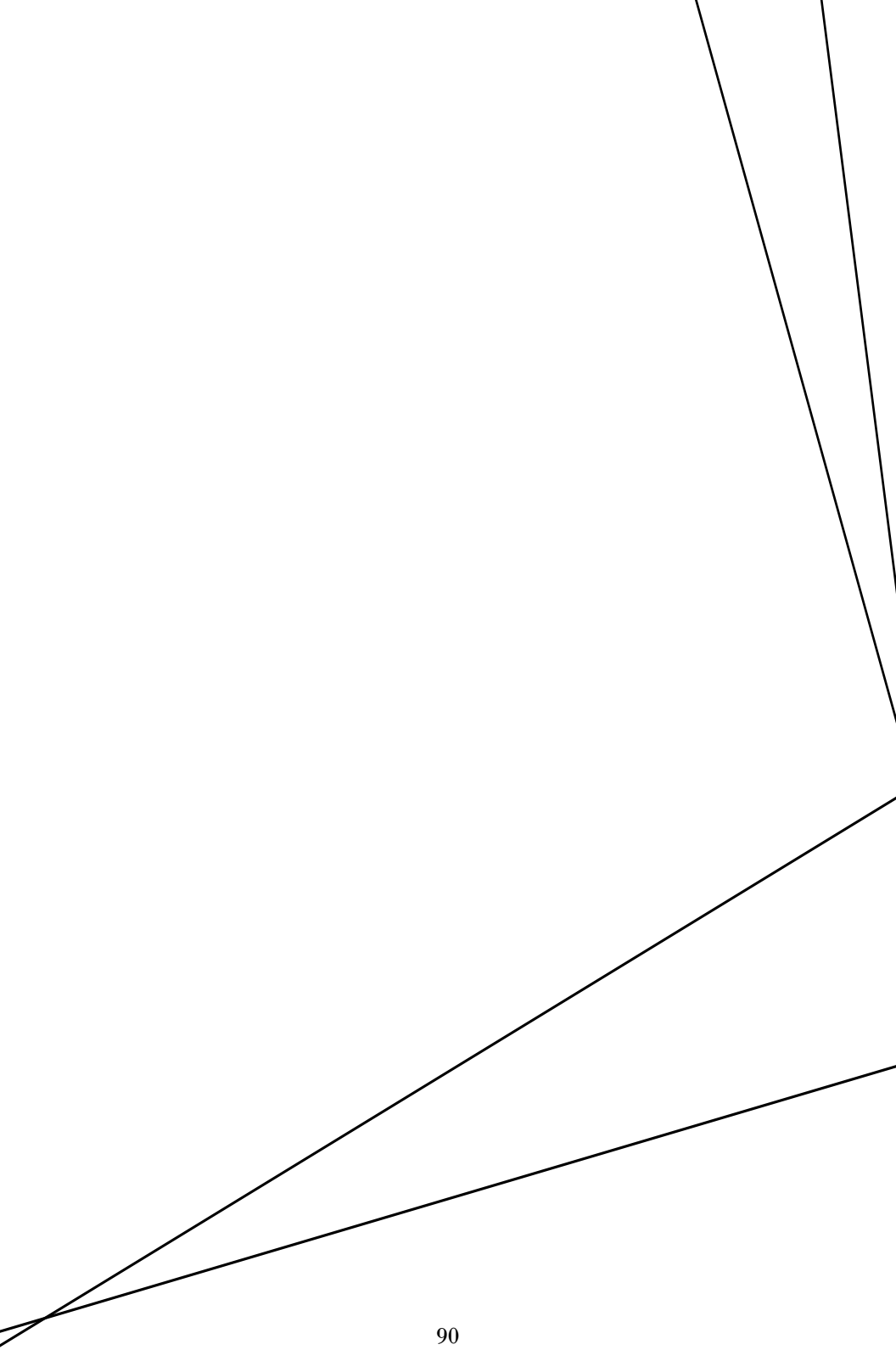
and could be together without being together; but also I don't like eating in front of men usually, so I was pleased. I said ok see you soon I'm gonna hang here.

Earlier in his apartment with him on his bed after the bulk of the day he was unaccountably sour and I realized even men who try not to end up needing us to take care of them. Except when he comes too hard in me with my passivity and he gets a prostatitis attack and passes out from pain and there's nothing to do but leave him there and let his body get through it because waking him up would mean only awaking him to the pain and it's the best feeling to cause pain like that. I wonder what men feel like when women get cramps or give birth they feel helpless but they like it. I stared out his window at the other brown stones and the tops of trees and that's when he came. I sent my friend Sarah a picture of your ass from this angle I hope that's alright he said yeah I like that I said the locusts started up and the curtains flew and he said Sarah said that's a really good ass and I said yeah, it is.

Eating my fried chicken sandwich in my lacy orange dress and a little burnt from the sun leaning back on a step and slicking my fingers I was thinking he doesn't know how much of a pig he's dating and I'm in love with this side of me I'm in love with the idea that one can dress me up but can't take me out because I don't know how to wear a dress and not sit with my knees spread or not lay with my legs all over showing off my underpants or not order a fried chicken sandwich and eat it how I want. I'm gonna order a fried chicken sandwich and it's gonna be a mess and I won't give no mind to the yellowjacket taking its share.

résolus à intervenir en effectuant, du bout de l'ongle de mon petit doigt, une pichenette – ingérence somme toute minime, mais qui déplaça des montagnes en ce qui concerne la fourmi, qui attrapa immédiatement la peau avec ses petites antennes puis repartit. C'est à ce moment-là que j'ai pressenti l'arrivée de mon copain ; pour me faire jolie, j'ai entrepris de me rasseoir, de me réajuster, de remonter quelques marches, de croiser les jambes et de soutenir cette posture en appuyant mon coude droit sur la marche du dessus ; là, un rayon de soleil est venu faire étinceler mon œil bleu, m'obligeant, vision délicate, à fermer un œil et à regarder le sol. Tout ceci me permettait de bien rester focalisée sur la fourmi, qui était en train d'inspecter l'herbe au bord du chemin de ciment qui menait jusqu'au mur de pierre tout autour du jardin. Je regrettais d'avoir perdu la notion du temps, parce que maintenant je paniquais en voyant la fourmi s'approcher de plus en plus du portail de fer en-dessous duquel elle allait certainement passer et disparaître de ma vue. Lors d'une journée normale, ça ne m'aurait rien fait, mais on ne choisit guère ses préoccupations – en tout cas, ce n'est pas mon cas. Par chance, bientôt, mon copain est arrivé avec le sandwich au poulet frit dont je lui avais dit que j'avais très envie et qu'il avait insisté pour aller chercher, bien qu'il n'ait pas faim et qu'il ne mange pas de poulet frit, parce qu'en sa qualité d'homme de quarante-cinq ans, ça lui donne des brûlures d'estomac.

Il a déposé à côté de moi le sac en plastique contenant les boîtes en aluminium, les couverts en plastique et les serviettes en papier, s'est penché pour m'embrasser, m'a dit tu es très jolie et j'ai dit merci. Je lui ai proposé de s'asseoir avec moi mais il a dit qu'il était épuisé à cause de la chaleur et qu'il préférait faire une sieste au frais. J'aimais notre façon de faire ce qu'on voulait, d'être ensemble sans être ensemble. En plus, de manière générale je n'aime pas trop manger devant un homme – donc j'étais ravie. J'ai dit d'accord à tout à l'heure moi je vais rester ici.



Dans son appartement, sur son lit, un peu plus tôt (peut-être en fin de journée ?), il avait été inexplicablement amer et j'avais réalisé la chose suivante : même les hommes qui essaient de l'éviter finissent toujours par avoir besoin que nous nous occupions d'eux. Sauf lorsque ma passivité le fait jouir trop fort en moi, qu'il fait une crise de prostatite, qu'il s'évanouit de douleur, et qu'il n'y a rien d'autre à faire que de l'abandonner là et de laisser son corps traverser la crise, parce que le réveiller, ça voudrait seulement dire l'exposer à la douleur ; c'est vraiment un super kif de causer ce genre de douleur. Je me demande ce que les hommes ressentent quand les femmes ont des douleurs de règles ou qu'elles accouchent, s'ils se sentent impuissants mais qu'ils aiment ça. À travers sa fenêtre, je regardais les autres maisons, leurs pierres marron, les cimes des arbres et c'est à ce moment-là qu'il a joui. Il a dit j'ai envoyé à ma pote Sarah une photo de ton cul depuis cet angle j'espère que c'est ok j'ai dit ouais j'adore et les criquets ont commencé à faire du bruit et les rideaux ont voleté et il a dit Sarah a dit c'est vraiment un bon cul et j'ai dit ouais c'est clair.

Tout en mangeant mon sandwich au poulet frit vêtue de ma robe en dentelle orange, un peu brûlée par le soleil, adossée contre une marche en me léchant les doigts, je me disais il ne sait pas qu'il sort avec un véritable porc et je suis amoureuse de ce côté de moi-même je suis amoureuse du fait que même si on m'habille convenablement je ne suis pas sortable parce que je ne sais pas porter une robe sans m'asseoir en écartant les cuisses ou sans m'allonger en mettant mes jambes n'importe comment et en montrant ma culotte, je ne sais pas commander un sandwich au poulet frit sans le manger à ma façon. Je vais commander un sandwich au poulet frit et ça va être un carnage et je ne vais prêter aucune attention à la guêpe qui prend sa part.

Translator's Note

“My present reflection is that people have any number of states of consciousness: & I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness, &c. These states are very difficult. Still I cannot get at what I mean.”

Virginia Woolf, 1925, from her diary

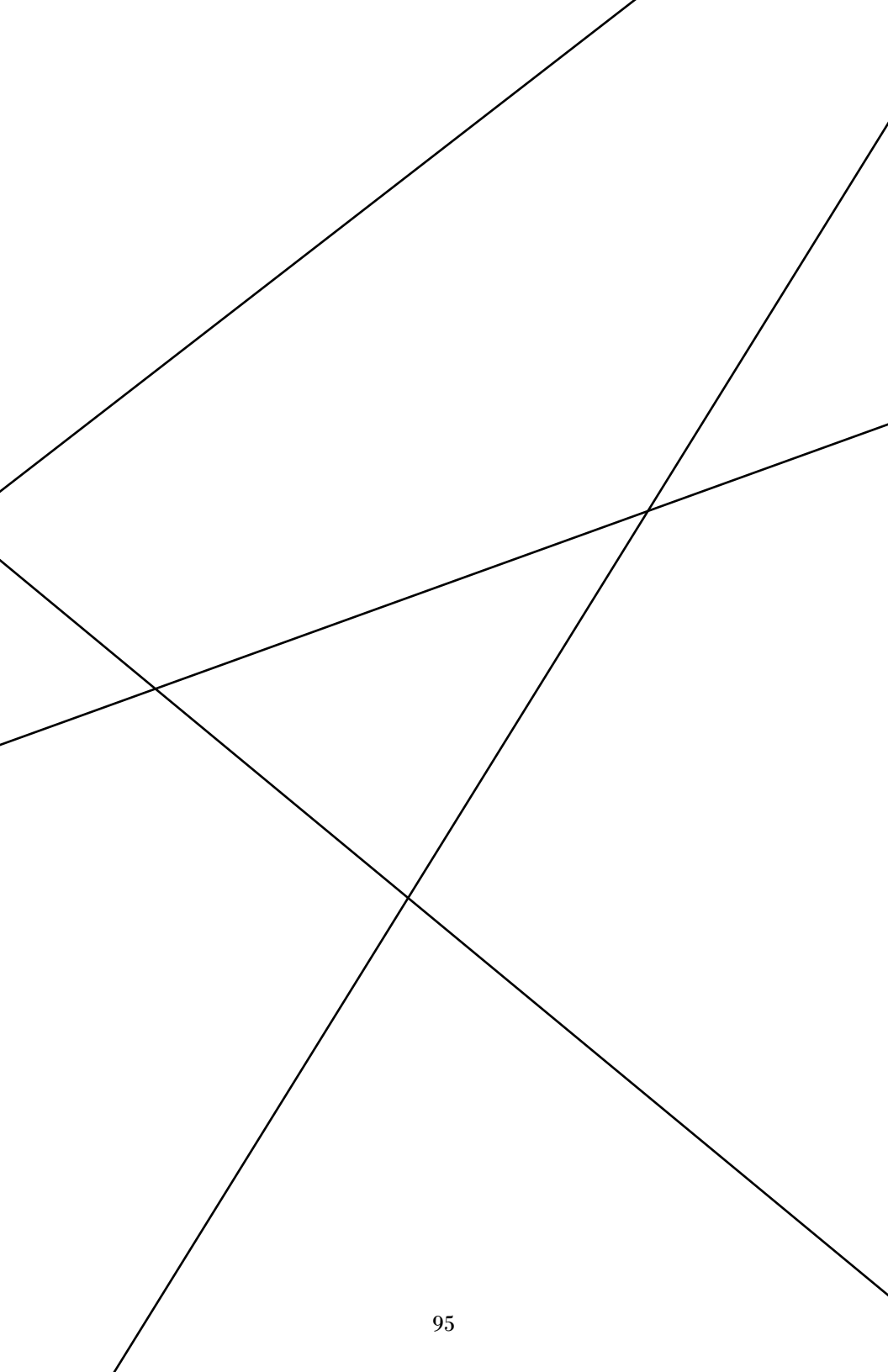
We know that it is ultimately fallacious to apply meaning to coincidence, to perceive a symbol in the chance resemblance or concurrence of one unrelated thing to another. I appreciate the uncanny, but I've always dreaded the approach of October 31st and with it, the parties, where if one fails to show their face in mask or costume, one risks being perceived as dull. If unable to go all-out and perfect the costume, I am hesitant to go out at all. Last October, however, I decided to make an effort, and as a compulsively contrarian writing student with a slightly skeletal physique, I thought of Virginia Woolf. I had already often made the futile attempt to ventriloquize her prose style. Might I attempt her image? I thrifted a Chloé ruffled blouse and a wool pleated skirt and paired these acquisitions with my flimsy, moth-eaten cardigan and an ankle-length peacoat into whose pockets I dropped stones I'd foraged from my community garden. The phrase “wow, dark” may summarize the passé remarks I received that evening. I suppose I should have learned by then that celebrations of October 31st in the United States long ago rejected its more grim pagan associations of morbidity and mortality. I wasn't sure whether being perceived as morbid was an improvement on “dull.” What I got from this Halloween however was the impulse to immerse myself into Woolf's work, specifically *Orlando*. So when a few months later I read “Demain,” a story about insomnia, father- and

son-hood, sexuality, the public versus the private, the tenuousness of relationships, the purpose of writing, death—when Ivan told me in our initial meeting that while writing it he'd also been conducting a deep study of Woolf's *œuvre*, I struggled not to see a symbol in this coincidence. I sensed an immediate pull to fatalize my and my counterpart's nascent bond. I gave in to the urge to recognize my own affinities, experiences, and stylistic influences in the other, to invent connectivity where it perhaps felt too anemic, and thus invent meaning from happenstance. And while Ivan and I did make a quick connection, indeed when I approached this project my connection to French was quite feeble. I'd only taken one college course and, at that, 10 years before. It's fair to say language-learning isn't quite so flexible, that 10 years on, without much practice, it can no longer stretch into one's present store of knowledge. As fate would have it, however, there was a scarcity of French-speakers for the Word for Word project this Spring, and as both my professor and my partner put faith in me to translate from the French, I sunk myself into the language and Ivan's subdued, ruminative prose.

Ivan's text deals with the uncanny, with morbidity and mortality. It is also interested in what I think Woolf meant by "frock consciousness" or "party consciousness": the perplexed and agitated state one can get into about something as simple as a garment, the pleasure and terror inherent in becoming aware of another's gaze, the inescapability of masks, the inevitability of unmasking one's own self. In both linguistic and structural ways, Ivan's story traces this trajectory: hesitancy toward the necessary performativity of a social existence, submission to it, but ultimately the—perhaps unconscious—revelation of one's truth.

There are thematic and stylistic affinities between Ivan's and my writing, but it is ultimately fallacious for me to apply meaning to our being put together and the symbiosis we developed as a result

of translating each other's work, to perceive a symbol in the comeuppance of Woolf's ghost in more ways than one. But it is also true that the randomness of experience does not diminish its intensity, or the joy one finds in experience. In mid-April, Ivan sent me a quotation from Woolf, also from one of her diaries, April 16, 1923: "*I look forward to Paris with the excitement of a girl of 16, and intend to talk French like a native by the light of nature. I know the words, but can never think how to make them into sentences.*" How strange, I've recently had quite similar thoughts. But as Ivan writes, at the end of all our anxieties and equivocations, what's left is the writing.



IVAN BERQUIEZ

DEMAIN

Demain je ne mettrai pas de réveil. Cela fait un mois que je regarde la date arriver et avec elle, l'idée. Je suis une biche, elle la voiture. Les phares brillent comme ces poissons-lanternes au fin fond de l'océan. C'est demain.

*

Je me dis que ça ne m'atteint pas, mais c'est ce que je me disais déjà la dernière fois. Je me disais que ça ne changeait rien. Cela rassurait beaucoup de gens qui n'auraient pas su quoi dire, qui ne disaient rien. On était bien d'accord : ça comptait et en même temps ça ne comptait pas vraiment. Je me dis que ça ne m'atteint pas, mais ça fait trois fois que je croise quelqu'un qui ne lui ressemble pas du tout et que je pense que c'est lui, qu'après tout ça, je le croise, il vient voir mon spectacle, il cherche ma porte. Ça lui ressemblerait bien, j'avais oublié. J'avais oublié cette peur qu'il survienne comme une crampe dans le ventre un jour de vacances. Cette peur qui, au fond, c'est-à-dire si on regardait bien, c'est-à-dire si on passait à travers les ça ne m'atteint pas ça ne change rien ça ne compte pas vraiment, devait sans doute arborer des teintes d'envie. Envie qu'au moins ce soit clair, ce soit fait. J'ai ça, désormais. C'est clair, désormais. Je cligne des yeux et le visage ne lui ressemble en rien. C'est fini.

*

La semaine dernière, j'ai participé à un atelier qui s'appelait : performer l'intime. À un moment, Rébecca nous a demandé d'écrire, en douze minutes, un texte

translated from the french by
SAMANTHA YADRON

TOMORROW

I won't set an alarm for tomorrow . For a month now I've consciously watched the arrival of this date and with it, the idea. I am a deer in the road, the idea the car. The headlights glare like lantern-fish at the very bottom of the ocean. It's tomorrow.

I tell myself it doesn't affect me, but this is what I'd told myself when it happened. I said it meant nothing. This reassured many of those who hadn't known what to say, who'd said nothing. It was understood: it mattered and at the same time it didn't, really. I tell myself that it doesn't affect me, but three times now I've come across a person who in reality didn't look like him at all and yet who I believed for a second was him: that after all this time, I was encountering him—he comes to see my workshop's showcase; he searches for my apartment door. That was what it had been like with him, I'd forgotten. I forgot the fear of him following me around, the constant threat of his sudden appearance again, interrupting what'd been otherwise a good day. This fear, at the heart of it, which is to say, if I looked at it thoroughly, if I worked through the *it doesn't affect me* the *it meant nothing* the *it doesn't matter* it would no doubt come to light that I'd wanted it. I wanted it finished, cut and dry. And I have it, now. There's no chance, now, he'll show up. I blink my eyes once and the face loses its resemblance. It's done.

Last week, I participated in a workshop called:

sur le thème : ce qui me poursuit. J'ai obéi, j'ai fait. Ensuite, on a tous dû plier nos feuilles en avion. J'ai demandé à ce qu'on me montre – je ne sais pas faire ce genre de chose. Et puis on a lancé les feuilles dans toute la pièce. Mon avion pourri s'est crashé tout près. C'est le gars assis à côté de moi dans le cercle qui l'a attrapé. Il a lu mon texte à voix haute. Je croyais avoir bien écrit, mais il s'est trompé sur plusieurs mots, notamment quand je disais : dans six jours ça fera dix ans qu'il est mort. Il a dit : dans dix jours. Il m'a donné un sursis. Je ne l'ai pas pris.

*

Ce qui est sûr, c'est que je n'aurai pas le temps d'organiser, d'ici demain, une cérémonie.

*

Je voudrais que ce soit clair : ça n'a aucune raison de revenir revenant. Quand ça s'est produit, c'est vrai, d'abord j'ai dit ça ne m'atteint pas ça ne change rien ça ne compte pas vraiment. D'abord j'ai dit que c'était pas la mort, enfin si c'était la mort, mais la mort quand on n'a vu le gus qu'une fois en dix ans, même si cette fois-là c'était trois mois avant, car on avait appris en cours les conséquences de l'alcoolisme et que par un simple calcul, pragmatique, efficace, juste, on avait déduit qu'il allait bientôt clamser et qu'il s'agirait peut-être d'aller le revoir avant et qu'on y est allé avec Flora en voiture et qu'il a demandé mais t'es pas gay au moins et qu'on a dit bah si et qu'il a commencé à chouiner et qu'un mois après il a appelé Mamie pour dire votre petit-fils préféré c'est qu'un pédé et qu'elle n'a plus voulu me parler, Mamie d'amour, jusqu'à ce que mon grand-père tombe malade phase terminale et qu'on passe à autre chose et qu'après lui il meure dans son vomi de sang. Bon. Eh bien dans ces cas-là, la mort ça ne compte pas. Ça faisait longtemps déjà que j'étais orphelin de lui ;

“performing the intimate.” At one moment Rebecca asked us to write, for twelve minutes, some words on the theme: “what pursues me.” I obeyed; I did it. Then we had to fold our sheets into paper airplanes. I had to ask someone to show this to me — I don’t know how to do this kind of thing. And then we launched the sheets all across the room. My pitiful plane crashed almost immediately. The guy sitting next to me grabbed it. He read my text aloud. I believed I’d written it correctly but he fumbled over some words, most importantly where I’d written: in six days it will have been ten years since he died. He’d said: in ten days it will have been six years. He offered me a stay of four days, in my anticipation. I didn’t accept.

What is certain is that I will not have enough time to arrange a ceremony for tomorrow.

I’d like to make it clear: there’s no good explanation for the fear to have resurfaced, to come back to haunt me. When it happened, the death, it’s true, at first I did say *it doesn’t affect me it means nothing it doesn’t matter, really*. At first I’d said it wasn’t even death, and well yes it was death, it was the death of the man who in ten years I had seen only one time, and at that, this one time had been three months before his death. I’d learned in school the consequences of alcoholism; the timing of his death was predictable, perhaps calculable almost to the day. I was pragmatic and fair about it and as I figured death would soon claim him I thought it might be good to see the man before he finally went, so I went with Flora in her car, and even still he’d asked me then “will you at least tell me you’re not queer,” and I said “actually well yeah I am” as he started to weep melodramatically. A month later he called my mother’s mother to say “your favorite grandson is a fag” after which—as she hadn’t known—she wouldn’t speak to me anymore, my dear grandma, and in

le reste, c'est juste une date – d'abord je me suis dit ça, c'est vrai, et le déni ça a tenu un peu, comme un barrage, et puis ça n'a pas tenu. Je suis allé tout seul à Londres en claquant l'argent que j'avais trouvé dans sa voiture et qui me brûlait les doigts. Je me suis réparé, j'ai compris. Compris que j'étais anxieux que j'étais triste que j'étais en deuil. J'ai pris le temps, j'ai pensé mes blessures, je le jure. Demain ça fera dix ans, mais ça n'a aucune raison de revenir.

*

Ce qui me poursuit, c'est mon nom de famille, plus de famille, ce qui me poursuit c'est mon patronyme, voilà c'est ça, le nom de mon père, au nom du père ça se transmet de père en fils sauf que je n'aurai jamais de fils et que depuis dix ans, dans six jours ça fera dix ans, je n'ai plus de père, juste un patronyme que je suis le seul – au monde – j'ai vérifié – le seul à porter, prêt à porter ? Personne ne m'a demandé, c'est la loi, maintenant seul à porter, porter pâle porter sur sa gueule porter pas transporter, porter jusque dans la tombe et alors, même alors, même malgré l'éblouissant anéantissement, l'extraordinaire écrasement, la destruction super cosmique, avec ma mort, de ma lignée, avec ma mort, de mon nom de famille, avec ma mort, après ma mort ça me poursuivra encore, gravé dans la roche comme pour me définir, personne ne m'aura demandé ça m'est tombé dessus sur la tombe ce sera marqué alors quoi. Comment. J'allais dire « pourquoi », mais pourquoi on s'en fout. Comment ? Comme toujours, écrire. Écrire ou se marier. Se marier, perdre son nom. Quand je rencontre quelqu'un, j'inspecte son nom de famille au cas où. Un jour je suis sorti avec un mec qui s'appelait Gates, la classe à l'américaine, mais ça n'a pas marché. Il reste l'écriture. Toujours l'écriture pour aider à porter, supporter, transporter, reporter. Prendre un nom de plume, c'est joli c'est léger ça chatouille, la plume, plutôt qu'un nom de pierre, un nom du père.

the midst of all this my grandpa became terminally ill at which point my grandma and I moved on. Then my father died, spitting up blood. So. So it was that sort of death... I mean, in such a case, the death doesn't matter. I'd been orphaned by him long before his death. When it comes down to it the death was just a date on the calendar. I thought this way at first, I was in denial, and the denial held—a dam—and then it didn't hold. I went alone to London to spend the money I'd found in his car, burning a hole in my pocket, stinging my fingertips. I patched myself up. I understood. I understood I was anxious, I was sad, I was in mourning. I took the time, wrapped my wounds, I swear it. Tomorrow it'll have been 10 years, but this is no reason for this grief to have resurfaced, to come back to haunt me.

What pursues me is my family name, the family that has no one left in it but me; what pursues me is my patronym, the name of the father, the name of the father transmits from father to son, except I will never have a son, nor have I, for ten years now—in six days it'll have been ten years—had a father, just a patronym which is borne by just me—in the world—I checked—it is just me who bears it, wears it, a name ready-to-wear. No one asked me if I wanted it, it's just the law, and now only this, the name, is mine to wear, to wear pale on my face, to bear like an ass, to hold but not to transmit, to carry, then, carry into the grave and there, even there, in spite of its dazzling annihilation, the extraordinary pulping of it, the cosmic destruction of the name with the death of my lineage, with my death, the death of the name, and yet after my death it will pursue me still, carved into the stone so as to define me, no one will have asked me but it fell on me, on the grave it will be marked, so, what to do. How. I was going to say “why”, but why, I don't care. How? As always, one can write. Write, or marry. Marry, lose your name. When I meet someone, I make a note of their last name, just to see. One day I went out with a guy

*

Je ne dors plus.

Ça fait plusieurs jours.

Je ne sais pas combien.

Je lis un livre à la couverture jaune. Je suis épuisé.

J'éteins la lumière, je ferme les yeux. Je crois que je somnole.

Et puis, je me réveille. Je me reviens. Et tout est à refaire.

Je ne pense pas.

Aucun flux de pensées anxiogènes ne vient déconcentrer, stimuler, répéter, empêcher.

Il n'y a rien.

J'attends patiemment.

La nuit est épaisse autour de moi, mélasse indigo percée des teintes cuivrées de la ville. Il n'y a pas de bruit.

Il n'y a pas de froid.

Il n'y a pas de raison.

Il n'y a rien.

Je finis par m'endormir.

Alors, les rêves. Ils sont en cire tiède. Leurs gouttes ne peuvent réveiller aucun amant endormi, mais rien n'est figé non plus. Ils sont multiples. Ils ne racontent rien, ils ne sont pas intéressants. Juste, ils sont collants. Ils collent aux cheveux et aux dents et lorsque le cœur de la nuit ouvre mes yeux pâteux, il est impossible de savoir ce qui est vrai. Je veux sortir des rêves comme on veut éviter de se noyer si c'est possible, mais ma tête est maintenue sous la surface, et les pierres dans mes poches, et pour retrouver l'air, briser le charme, je peux seulement ruser, faire semblant que j'ai envie de pisser, et me lever. Lorsque je vais me recoucher, parfois les rêves ne m'attendent plus. D'autres fois, ils n'ont pas bougé de mon oreiller.

Je mets du temps à me rendormir. C'est alors que les pensées arrivent. Les soucis deviennent des géants. Les détails, des épitaphes.

with the last name Gates, a classic, old-school American name, but it didn't work out. So what's left is the writing. As always there is the writing to help transport, transfer, transform, translate. To take a *nom de plume*, a pen name, or, to put it literally, a feather-name, it is pretty and light, tickling, the feather, as opposed to the name written on a headstone, the name of the father.

I don't sleep anymore.

It's been several nights.

I don't know how many nights.

I'm reading a book with a yellow cover. I'm exhausted.

I turn out the light, close my eyes. It seems I might be drifting in and out of sleep.

And then I wake. I come back to myself. And it's all to be repeated.

I don't think.

No stream of anxious thoughts comes to distract, to stimulate, to ruminate, to ward off.

There is nothing.

I wait, with patience.

The night is thick around me, indigo molasses pierced by the copper hues of the city. There is no noise.

There is no cold.

There is no reason.

There is nothing.

I end up falling asleep.

Then, the dreams. They are made of warm wax. Their drops cannot awaken any sleeping lover, but nothing is set in stone either. They are multiple. They don't recount anything, they aren't interesting. Just, they're sticky. They stick to hair and teeth and when the dead of night opens my pasty eyes, it's impossible to know what is real. I want to escape from dreams as one wants to avoid drowning, at all costs, but my head is held below the surface... and the stones in my pockets...and to find the air... to break the spell, I can only play a trick on myself, pretend I want to

J'utilise toutes les armes à ma disposition. Je sais le faire, pourtant, je sais tout faire. La respiration, la méditation, les pensées alternatives, je sais tout faire. Je le fais. J'accepte que ça soit ma situation. J'accepte que ça ne marche pas.
Je me rendors avec le jour. Souvent, le réveil sonne.

*

Dans l'atelier, la semaine dernière, il y avait un garçon. Laurent. Je ne l'ai pas remarqué tout de suite. Il était grand, plus que moi, c'est rare. Il l'a dit dès le début : je suis fragile, je suis en deuil, de ma mère. Rébecca a accueilli ça. Il avait un anneau à l'oreille qui n'allait pas avec sa stature d'aristo déchu, comme il a dit plus tard lors d'un exercice de définition de soi où il a aussi dit Maman chute dans les escaliers. En rentrant, le premier soir, on est descendu au même arrêt de métro. La lumière était dorée. On a parlé, on a rigolé, j'ai même pensé à lui proposer un verre. Je trouve ça fou comme je n'ai pas eu peur. Et puis il est parti le long du canal et je suis rentré, de l'autre côté de l'eau. Le lendemain, il m'a montré un livre de poésie, j'ai cru que son bras frôlait le mien. Il est parti au milieu de la session. Il a dit qu'il était trop fatigué et il n'est jamais revenu. On a fait le spectacle de restitution sans lui. Le dimanche suivant, c'était hier, j'ai trouvé son adresse mail et je lui ai écrit que tout le monde avait compris, qu'il avait bien fait. Je trouve ça fou comme je n'ai pas eu peur. Je ne lui ai pas dit que moi à sa place il y a dix ans je n'ai pas réussi à faire ça : j'ai continué la pièce de théâtre comme si de rien n'était parce que ça ne comptait pas. Un géniteur absent qui décompense sa cirrhose ça ne compte pas. Une maman qui chute dans les escaliers beaucoup plus. Il m'a donné son numéro de téléphone. Sur le balcon, en plein soleil, je lisais un livre et je lui écrivais. Il m'a proposé d'aller boire un verre, j'ai dit d'accord. On a trouvé une place en terrasse, je lui ai demandé si ça faisait longtemps. Je trouve ça fou comme je n'ai pas eu peur. Il m'a dit six

pee, and get up. When I go back to bed, sometimes the dreams have gone. Other times, they haven't moved from my pillow.

It takes me a while to get back to sleep. That's when the thoughts come. Worries become giants. Small details turn into epitaphs.

I use all the weapons at my disposal. I know how to do it; then again, I know how to do it all. Breathing, meditation, alternative thoughts: I know how to do it all. I do it. I accept that this is my situation. I accept that the weapons don't work.

I go back to sleep with the dawn. Often, the alarm sounds.

In the workshop last week there was a boy. Laurent. I didn't notice him right away. He was tall, taller than me, which is rare. He said from the start: I am fragile; I am mourning my mother. Rebecca welcomed this. He had an earring, which didn't fit his status as a "fallen aristocrat," as he'd later described himself during an exercise we did in self-definition, when he'd also mentioned that his Mom had fallen down a flight of stairs. When we all left for home the first evening, he and I got off at the same metro stop. The light was golden. We talked, we laughed; I even thought about proposing we go for a drink. I find it crazy, now, the way I wasn't afraid. And then we parted, him along the canal and me back in the opposite direction, on the other side of the water. The next day, he showed me a book of poetry. I thought his arm brushed against mine. He left in the middle of the workshop. He said he was too tired. He never came back to the workshop. We held the showcase without him. The following Sunday—yesterday—I found his email address and I wrote to him that everyone had understood why he'd left, that he was fine in our book. I find it crazy the way I wasn't afraid. I didn't tell him that I, when I had been in his place 10 years before, couldn't emote publicly the way he did: I continued to act as if nothing had happened because it didn't matter. An absent

mois, je ne sais pas si ça fait longtemps. Il y avait eu une autre cérémonie, la dalle définitive, le mot définitif. On se comprend. Il est allé rejoindre un ami, je suis rentré chez moi. Toute la journée j'avais eu envie de faire l'amour. J'ai appelé mon copain à l'autre bout du monde, il m'a demandé si ce verre avec ce type, c'était un date. J'ai dit je ne pense pas, mais du coup après je me suis dit tiens en fait peut-être que si. Je lui ai demandé si ça l'aurait dérangé que ça en soit un. Je lui ai expliqué : j'ai peur du sexe peur des garçons peur de tout tu sais bien mon amour, alors à l'avenir si un mec me plaît ce n'est pas exclu que je boive un verre avec avant de le ken, pour ne pas avoir peur, pour avoir : confiance. Il m'a dit qu'il comprenait bien. Je suis très, très amoureux de lui. Après, Laurent m'a réécrit. Il m'a dit qu'il allait rentrer, à l'autre bout de la ville, mais que pour l'instant, il marchait un peu. Je lui ai dit que mon quartier n'était pas loin. Il m'a demandé si c'était une invitation à flâner, j'ai demandé si ça le tentait. Il m'a dit qu'il adorait marcher, mais qu'il était trop crevé, j'ai dit qu'on pouvait faire autre chose que marcher. Il a demandé à quoi je pensais, j'ai répondu. Il a dit non. J'ai dit que j'avais eu l'impression qu'on se draguait un peu, il m'a dit qu'il n'avait pas eu ce sentiment. Je trouve ça fou comme je n'ai pas eu peur.

*

Alice
Sarah
Flora
Sami
Esther
Léonie
Rachel
Aldo
Anne
Lisa
Victoire

progenitor with decompensated cirrhosis doesn't matter. A mother who falls down the stairs is much more. He gave me his number. On my balcony, in full sun, I was reading a book when I decided to text him. He asked me to go for a drink; I said okay. We found a place with a terrace. I asked him if it had been a long time. I find it crazy the way I wasn't afraid. He told me six months. I don't know if that's a long time. There'd been a ceremony, the definitive slab, the definitive name. We understand each other. He went off to join a friend, I went back to my place. All day I had wanted to have sex. I called my boyfriend who was traveling, on the other side of the world. He asked me if this drink with this guy was a date. I said I don't think so, but then I said to myself, maybe yes. I asked him if it would have bothered him if it was one. I explained to him: I'm afraid of sex, afraid of boys, afraid of everything, you know very well my love, so in the future if I liked a guy it wasn't out of the question for me to have a drink with him before I fucked him, to not be afraid, to have—confidence. He told me he understood well. I am very, very in love with him. Afterwards, Laurent wrote to me again. He told me he was going back to the other side of town, but for the moment, he would walk a bit. I told him my neighborhood wasn't far from where he was. He asked me if this was an invitation to wander together. I asked if he was tempted. He told me he usually loved to wander, but he was too tired. I said we could do something other than walk. He asked what I was thinking of and I answered. He said—no. I said I had the impression we'd been flirting a bit, and he told me that he didn't have the same feeling. I find it crazy the way I wasn't afraid.

Alice
Sarah
Flora
Sami
Esther
Léonie

Juliette
Josette

*

L'idée s'est pointée il y a trois ans, quand ça allait en faire sept. Je me suis dit sept ça commence à faire beaucoup. Un événement survenu il y a plus de sept ans est officiellement arrivé il y a un peu longtemps – ça ne se voit plus, que le présent est encore un peu téléguidé par lui – ses tentacules ne sont plus assez longs. L'idée : un cimetière. Pas le sien, trop loin, donc sans doute le Père-Lachaise, à défaut des cimetières tchèques où la végétation recouvre tout, j'étais allé à Prague quelques mois après et au milieu du lierre j'avais parlé avec mon amie de la mort et tout ça. Voilà, l'idée c'était quelque chose de ce genre : le Père-Lachaise, les amis, des chansons que j'écoutais à l'époque, que maintenant je déteste, mais c'est pas grave, je lirais deux-trois textes, limite on brûlerait une bougie, éventuellement on se tairait un instant, éventuellement on arriverait à se dire que même les personnes cruelles méritent qu'on pense à elles un instant, qu'on se taise pour elles un instant, et après on irait boire un verre et voilà ce serait fini. J'avais envie de faire ça, et puis la date est tombée en plein pendant le premier confinement, lorsque même les cimetières étaient fermés.

*

Dans le texte de l'atelier j'ai dit que j'étais le seul à porter ce nom et que j'avais vérifié, mais ce n'était pas vrai. J'ai vérifié le lendemain. J'ai trouvé un mec dont un article disait qu'en 1999 il avait percuté une vache sur la route. Il avait le même nez que moi. Sur Facebook, un type lui faisait un compliment, je me suis demandé s'ils étaient pédés, mais non, c'est juste que les hétéros sont super gays quand ils croient que personne ne les regarde. J'ai éteint l'ordinateur.

Rachel
Aldo
Anne
Lisa
Victoire
Juliette
Josette

The idea came to me three years ago, when it was about to have been seven years. I said to myself, seven is starting to be a lot. After seven years past an event one could officially say it is far enough in the past to no longer have so much influence on the present, to have gone over the horizon, that any control it had over the present was remote, its tentacles can no longer reach into the now. The idea: a cemetery. Not his, too far away in northern France. Ideally it would look like Czech cemeteries do, where the foliage hangs over and covers everything. So probably Père-Lachaise. I had gone to Prague a few months after he died and surrounded by ivy I'd had a conversation with my friend about death and all that business. Anyway, the idea was something like this: Père-Lachaise, friends, songs I had listened to at the time, which now I can't stand, but it doesn't matter; I would read two or three texts, at most we would burn a candle, possibly we would shut up for a moment, potentially we would be able to say to ourselves that even cruel people deserve to be thought of for a moment, that one could be silent for them for a moment, and then we would go for a drink and that would be it. I had wanted to do that but then the anniversary fell right during the first lockdown, when even the cemeteries were closed.

In the workshop text I had noted that I was the only one with my name and that I had confirmed this, but that wasn't true. I did check the next day, but I found an article about a guy from 1999, when apparently he'd

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J'aurais dû demander à tout le monde de venir à l'enterrement. Ça aurait été plus simple. Josette me l'avait proposé, mais elle venait de perdre son copain dans un accident, je ne voulais pas qu'elle se retape des funérailles, j'ai dit non. Suzanne et Samuel ont proposé aussi, mais j'ai pensé à leur travail, l'annulation des cours, la route à faire, une heure jusqu'au crématorium, j'ai dit non. J'aurais dû m'en foutre, mais ça ne comptait pas, pas vrai ? Et puis, j'ai demandé à Sarah si elle pouvait venir. Elle avait un exposé que ça lui faisait décaler, mais elle a dit oui, elle a écrit à son prof et elle a pris le train. Aujourd'hui encore, ça me démonte qu'elle ait dû décaler son exposé. Je n'ai pas pleuré de toute la cérémonie. Après qu'on a ramené Sarah à la gare, j'ai dit que ça me touchait énormément qu'elle soit venue, et j'ai eu envie de pleurer pour la première fois. Ma mère m'a répondu oui, comme ça, les gens du village ont pu croire que c'était ma copine. Je ne lui en veux pas. Ce moment où ma voix tremble enfin dans la voiture, c'est sans doute ça que je voudrais retrouver.

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L'idée est revenue comme les oiseaux sur les fils électriques. Huit ans, ça ne me disait rien. Neuf, je crois que je n'ai même pas remarqué la date, je l'ai un peu tué, c'est bien aussi. Mais dix. Dix, c'est quelque chose. J'ai fait une liste d'invité·e·s et puis je n'ai invité personne. Trop bizarre : salut les potes, ça vous dit on fait un rituel chelou en l'honneur de cette personne que vous n'avez pas connue ? Je voudrais que ce soit clair. J'ai passé tellement de temps à dire que ce n'était pas grave. J'ai brouillonné la cérémonie, sous-traité tout ce que j'ai pu, failli refuser l'héritage, retardé tout ce que j'ai pu, mis l'argent sur un compte que je n'ose jamais toucher, plus rien dit à personne. J'aimerais pouvoir dire que je ne

hit a cow on the road. He had my nose. On Facebook, a guy complimented him once and I wondered if they were queer, but no, it's just that straight people are super gay when they think no one is watching. I turned off the computer.

I should have asked people to come to the funeral. It would have been simpler. Josette had offered to come, but she had just lost her boyfriend in an accident. I didn't want her to go through another funeral and so I said no. Suzanne and Samuel also offered to come, but I thought about their work, the cancellation of classes, the drive, an hour to the crematorium, and so I said no. I shouldn't have been so considerate, but the death didn't matter, right? And then I asked Sarah if she could come. She had a class presentation that the funeral would make her have to postpone, but she said yes; she wrote to her professor and took the train. Even today, it messes me up that she had to move her presentation. I didn't cry throughout the whole ceremony. After my mother and I took Sarah back to the station, I said that it had meant a lot to me that she came, and for the first time that day I wanted to cry. My mother answered: yes, that way, the people of the village could believe she was my girlfriend. I don't fault her for saying that. That moment when my voice trembled in the car: it's that feeling I'm sure I'd like to find again.

The idea returned like birds on electric wires. Eight years meant nothing to me. Nine, I think I didn't even think of it, I kind of repressed it, that's fine, too. But 10. Ten is something. I made a guest list and then I didn't invite anyone. Too weird: hello friends, do you want to do a weird ritual in honor of this person you didn't know? I'd like to make it clear: I spent so much time saying it wasn't a big deal. I'd scrambled the funeral together, outsourced everything I could, almost refused the inheritance, delayed everything I could, put the money in an account

gèrerais pas les choses de la mème manière aujourd'hui qu'il y a dix ans, mais je n'en sais rien de comment je gèrerais aujourd'hui s'il y a dix ans, réalité parallèle, ça n'était justement pas arrivé, cette putain de chose fondamentale. Ma psy dit qu'elle n'avait jamais pensé à ça comme ça, comme quoi vraiment on apprend de ses patient·e·s. Mon copain dit qu'il me soutient, et je le crois. Je crois que c'est clair, je crois que je n'ai pas le droit d'être un peu triste que mon père soit mort. Rien que d'écrire ça, j'ai envie d'effacer.

Je ne sais pas ce que je vais faire, demain. Sans doute rien du tout. Ce que je sais, c'est qu'il y a cette revue littéraire qui a proposé pour son appel à textes le thème : *nous pouvons enfin laver nos blessures*, et ça m'a cueilli. C'est exactement ça, ce que je voudrais voir exaucé, demain : que l'anniversaire, les dix ans, m'autorisent, me permettent, m'aident à enfin laver mes blessures.

Alors demain, quand je n'aurai pas osé inviter au cimetière mes ami·e·s, et mon copain au bout du monde, et que je n'aurai pas osé lire ce texte à voix haute, peut-être que je le leur enverrai, aux gens de la revue. Peut-être qu'ils comprendront, peut-être pas, mais comme ça, au moins, quelqu'un le lira. Il existera pour une personne. En ça, ce sera déjà une petite cérémonie.

*

Je me souviens qu'on m'a proposé un verre d'eau. Je m'en sers un. J'ai acheté de nouveaux verres, je les aime grands et larges parce que j'ai toujours très soif. Je pense à l'Antigone de Cara, qui disait : « C'est soif que j'ai. Une très grande soif. Ma langue est toujours trop sèche. Faut que je me mouille la bouche tout le temps. Ça me donne l'impression d'avoir un navire en moi et de le garder debout, haut et fort. » C'est difficile de ne pas voir un symbole quand on a toujours très soif, c'est difficile de ne pas voir un symbole quand un verre se brise

that I never dare touch, said nothing more to anyone. I wish I could say I wouldn't handle things the same way today as I did 10 years ago, but I don't know how I would handle things today if, 10 years ago, in a parallel universe, it just hadn't happened, this fucking thing at the root of everything I am today. My therapist said to that, huh, she'd never thought of it that way, that you really learn from your patients. My boyfriend says he supports me, and I believe him. I think it's clear, I'm convinced I don't have the right to be a little sad my father is dead. Everything I've just written, I want to erase it.

I don't know what I'm going to do tomorrow. Probably nothing at all. What I do know is, there is a literary magazine which announced this theme in its call for texts: "we can finally wash our wounds." That picked at me. This is exactly what I hope to see happen tomorrow: that the date, the 10 years, will authorize me, allow me, help me to finally cleanse my wounds.

So tomorrow, when I'll have not dared to invite my friends to the cemetery, and with my boyfriend on the other side of the world, and I still won't have dared to read this text aloud, maybe I will send it to them. Maybe they'll understand, maybe not, but at least someone will read it. It will exist for one person. In that way, it will already be a small ceremony.

I recall being offered a glass of water. I'm having one now. I bought new cups, I like my cups big and wide because I'm always very thirsty. I think of Cara's interpretation of *Antigone*, with the line: "I am thirsty. Very thirsty. My tongue is always too dry. I have to wet my mouth all the time. It makes me feel like I have a ship inside me and I'm holding it up, loud and clear." It's hard not to see a symbol when you're always very thirsty; it's hard not to see a symbol when a glass breaks

entre nos mains qui font la vaisselle, c'est difficile de ne pas voir des symboles partout. Je me souviens qu'on m'a proposé un verre d'eau et que j'ai pensé que c'était bizarre que ce soit la première chose qu'on offre dans ces moments-là. La personne pour qui je travaillais à cette époque-là semblait au milieu d'un déséquilibre, comme lorsqu'on saisit une bouteille qu'on croyait pleine et qui s'avère vide, toute cette énergie qu'on a convoquée et dont on ne sait plus quoi faire. Je me souviens qu'elle a dit : ce n'est jamais arrivé. Jamais arrivé qu'un stagiaire demande une pause pour répondre à un appel de sa mère parce que son grand-père est très malade, et qu'il revienne en disant mon père est mort. Je porte le grand verre à mes lèvres, ma bouche s'inonde d'une gorgée d'eau froide et transparente que j'essaie d'avalier. Je me souviens qu'elle s'est écriée : Ton père ? Elle ne serait pas la première à croire que je m'étais trompé, que j'avais avalé un mot et une génération, que ma langue trop sèche avait fourché. Je me souviens qu'elle m'a proposé un verre d'eau. Je crois que j'avais répondu non merci.

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Peut-être que quand je l'enverrai, ils répondront d'abord par un mail pour calmer mes ardeurs, prévenir gentiment que les chances sont maigres, beaucoup de demandes et très peu de places. Je n'aurai pas à leur répondre que ce n'est pas grave, que je n'en demande pas tant ; je veux juste deux yeux sur ma prière. Peut-être que plus tard, dans un monde qui existera après demain, un monde où tout ça sera passé, ils me répondront qu'en réalité, ils acceptent le texte pour le publier dans le numéro 179 de la revue Mœbius, parce qu'ils auront compris. Compris que ce sera comme la fin du rituel, ou son début, que ce sera quelque chose de la performativité de la littérature, c'est-à-dire très littéralement de la magie. Peut-être qu'à mes yeux cela achèvera de conférer à ce texte secret une puissance

in your hands while washing the dishes; it's hard not to see symbols everywhere. I remember being offered a glass of water and thinking it was weird that it was the first thing someone offered me at such a moment. The person I worked for at that time seemed to be in the midst of some imbalance, like when you grab a bottle that you thought was full but turned out to be empty and all this energy you'd summoned you don't know what to do with anymore. I remember her saying "that never happened." It has never happened that an intern asked for a break to answer a call from his mother because his grandfather was very ill and he came back to say "my father is dead." I raise the big glass to my lips, my mouth floods with a sip of cold and transparent water which I try to swallow. I recall her exclaiming: "Your father?" She wouldn't be the last to believe I had said it wrong, that I had swallowed a word and with it a generation, that my dry tongue had split. I recall her offering me a glass of water. I think I answered, no thanks.

Maybe when I send it, they will respond first with an email to calm my enthusiasm, gently warn that the chances are slim, there are many submissions and limited space. I won't have the urge to respond that it doesn't matter, that I'm not asking for that much: I just want two eyes on my prayer. Perhaps, later, in a world that exists after tomorrow, a world where all this has passed, they will actually answer me that they are accepting the text to publish it in number 179 of the review *Möbius*, because they understand. Understand that it's like the end of the ritual, or the ritual's beginning, that it's about the performativity of literature, that is to say, very literally, magic. Perhaps in my eyes this will give this secret text such power that it will reverberate throughout the world, and that when it comes to making a choice, there will be only the story I hope to see translated, read and understood, word for word.

telle qu'elle espérera se réverbérer dans le monde entier, et que lorsqu'il s'agira de faire un choix, il n'y aura que lui que j'espérerai voir traduit, lu et compris, mot pour mot.

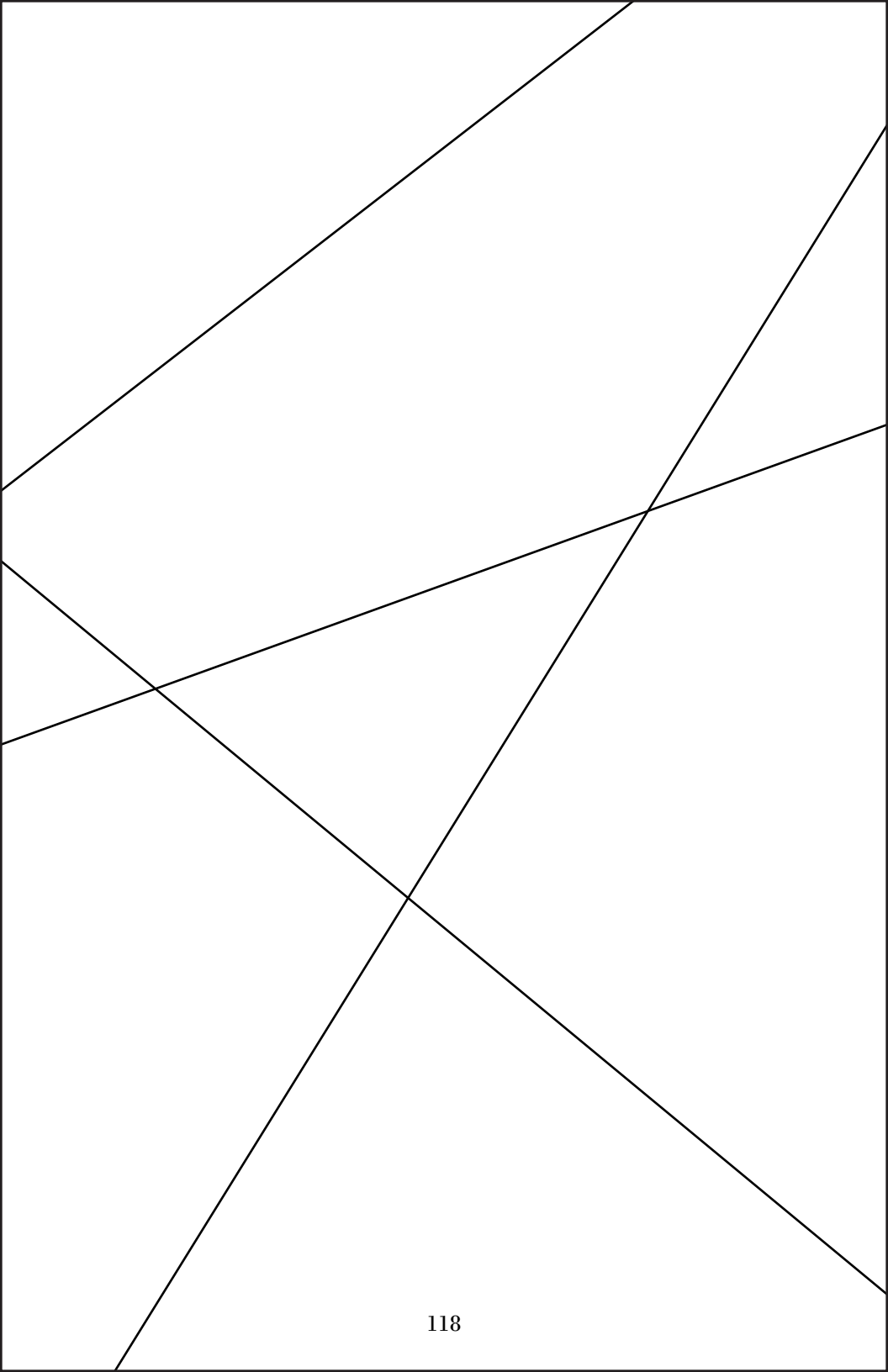
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Demain je ne mettrai pas de réveil. Peut-être que je dormirai bien, malgré tout, et que je me réveillerai vers huit heures.

Il restera l'écriture.

I won't set an alarm for tomorrow. Maybe I'll sleep well after all, wake up around eight.

What's left is the writing.



word for word / wort für wort
Columbia University School of the Arts
Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig

Anmerkung des Übersetzers

Sarah Wingerter beschreibt in ihrem Essay das individuelle Erlebnis einer individuellen Erzählerin. Mit klarer Stimme und Verortung der Figuren schafft sie dennoch ein immersives Leseerlebnis über einen Einzelfall, der, ohne parabelartig zu werden, eine kollektive Erfahrung widerspiegelt. Die Übersetzung von Sarahs Text erfordert eine Sicherheit über Details und Positionen, die diese spezifische Verunsicherung, von der erzählt wird, herausstellen kann.

Bei der Übersetzung des Textes für ein deutschsprachiges Publikum stellen sich zwei grundlegende Probleme in den Vordergrund; das Wissen über das US-amerikanische Gesundheitssystem und der Nutzung oder Nicht-Nutzung geschlechterneutralen Formen von Personenbezeichnungen (Gendern). Die erste Herausforderung bedeutete für mich, Fachbegriffe sinnhaft zu übertragen durch das Finden von Äquivalenten oder, wenn das nicht möglich war, knappe Erklärungen einzubinden, die den Fokus der entsprechenden Passagen nicht auf Unterschiede der medizinischen Ausbildung zwischen USA und anderen Ländern verschieben. Die Frage nach dem Gendern war insofern schwieriger zu beantworten, als dass beide Optionen (Gendern oder nicht zu Gendern) etwas auf textueller Ebene beantworten zu schien, was in der Originalfassung nicht angesprochen werden muss, um sich selbst zu erkennen zu geben. Die Vermeidung von Personenbezeichnungen, die ein Gendern erfordern würden, machten den Text unnötig schwammig, was ebenfalls nicht zur Stimme der Erzählerin passte. Nach Absprache mit der Autorin wurde entschieden, die geschlechterneutralen Formen auf eine Weise zu nutzen, die sich selbst thematisieren darf, die einhergeht mit den Überlegungen der Erzählerin im Verlauf der Behandlung. Man nimmt sich vor, Texte so zu übersetzen, als wären sie nicht übersetzt, als wären sie geschrieben in der Sprache, in die man sie überträgt – an diesen Stellen muss

sich die Übersetzung zeigen dürfen, damit den scharfen Beobachtungen der Autorin nichts im Weg steht.

SARAH WINGERTER

EXCERPT FROM *PERMISSION*

I was waiting. I had come to see a new dermatologist; the previous one—a woman in her 40s, like me—had decided to go into solo practice, cosmetic procedures only. Before that, she had seen patients just one day a week, and I had always wondered—with equal parts admiration and envy—how she had gotten away with it. Now that she had given up her general dermatology practice altogether, I couldn't help but feel a little abandoned. She had shared a small suburban office with one partner, and so I chose him as my new doctor. Still, I had waited months for this appointment, and all I needed was a simple skin check. I had a birthmark that had the potential to become cancerous, and so I had been seeing a dermatologist every year since I was a child. I also had pale skin, another risk factor. And now here I was, crossing one more thing off my annual to-do list: a bit of routine maintenance, an attempt to keep myself safe.

Clad only in underwear and a light blue, waffle-textured paper gown, I sat on the exam table, facing the closed door. Fluorescent lights cast a green-white glare on the windowless room. A Mayo stand—a waist-high, too-shiny metal tray on wheels—stood beside me, arrayed with cotton swabs, gauze pads, a tiny plastic vial half-filled with saline and ready to receive a biopsy specimen. I opened my bag and discovered I had left home without the magazine I had intended to bring. And so without other reading material, my gaze landed on the posters advertising Juvéderm and Restylane and other aesthetic products and procedures on offer.

I didn't have wrinkles, I told myself. Those ads were not meant for me.

**aus dem englischen übersetzt von
LUCIA HEMKER**

UM ERLAUBNIS (AUSZUG)

Ich wartete. Mein Termin war bei einem neuen Hautarzt, meine vorherige – eine Frau um die 40, genau wie ich – hatte jetzt ihre eigene Praxis aufgemacht, speziell für kosmetische Eingriffe. Davor hatte sie nur an einem Tag in der Woche Patient:innen empfangen, und ich hatte mich immer gefragt – mit ebenso viel Bewunderung wie Eifersucht – wie sie das angestellt hatte. Jetzt, wo sie ihre Tätigkeit als Allgemeindermatologin an den Nagel gehängt hatte, fühlte ich mich von ihr im Stich gelassen. Vorher hatte sie sich diese kleine Praxis am Stadtrand mit einem Kollegen geteilt, der jetzt mein neuer Hautarzt sein sollte. Alles, was ich von ihm wollte, war eine Kontrolluntersuchung meiner Haut, und ich musste monatelang auf diesen Termin warten. Ich hatte ein Muttermal mit dem Potential, krebsartig zu werden, das seit Kindesalter jedes Jahr untersucht werden musste. Hinzu kam, dass ich sehr helle Haut hatte, noch ein Risikofaktor. Und darum war ich jetzt also hier, hakte einen weiteren Punkt meiner jährlichen To-Do Liste ab: ein bisschen Routinewartung, ein Versuch, intakt zu bleiben.

Nur in Unterwäsche und einem hellblauen Papierkittel saß ich auf der Untersuchungsliege, das Gesicht zur geschlossenen Tür gewandt. Die Leuchtstoffröhre in diesem fensterlosen Raum ließ alles grün-weiß aussehen. Die Instrumentenablage – dieses hüfthohe, glänzende Edelstahltablett auf Rädern – stand neben mir, ausgestattet mit Wattestäbchen, Mullbinden und einem winzigen, halb mit Kochsalzlösung befüllten Plastikfläschchen, bereit, eine Gewebeprobe aufzunehmen. Ich öffnete meine Handtasche und stellte

I had tucked the gown—open in the back, as instructed—around and under myself, since it had no ties or closures. It was late August, and the room was air-conditioned almost to the point of refrigeration. I wrapped the gown a bit tighter, as if it could keep me warm. I had waited in rooms just like this, wearing exactly the same garb, many times before, but the familiarity of the situation didn't make it any less awkward. It's an odd thing, to meet a doctor—or anyone, for that matter—wearing nothing but a large piece of paper.

I know this is the way of modern medicine, where speed and efficiency often seem to override common decency. I am a doctor myself and guilty of preferring to have patients change into a gown before I see them. I say guilty because, as a fledgling medical student in my first-year patient-doctor course many years ago, I learned that when a doctor first meets a patient, the patient should be fully clothed—a choice meant to make the patient feel more at ease. Only after meeting the patient and gathering some information—identifying the chief complaint, eliciting the details of the medical history—should the doctor hand the patient a gown, step out of the room, and return a few moments later to perform a physical exam. As an idealistic medical student, I understood this to be the proper protocol. It made sense.

In our earliest patient encounters—with medical actors portraying standardized patients in mock exam rooms outfitted with cameras, microphones, and two-way mirrors—my classmates and I were tested on whether we followed this procedure. It was a checklist item, along with washing hands upon entering the room, making eye contact, sitting rather than standing, to convey unhurried and undivided attention. The exam-room etiquette we learned was meant to signal that we understood our patients were human beings, worthy of privacy and modesty and respect. And yet

fest, dass ich das Haus ohne die Zeitschrift verlassen hatte, mit der ich gerne die Wartezeit überbrückt hätte. Ohne etwas anderes zu lesen, wanderte mein Blick also von Poster zu Poster, Werbung für Juvéderm und Restylane und andere hier angebotene ästhetische Produkte und Prozeduren.

Ich hatte keine Falten, sagte ich mir selbst. Diese Werbung richtete sich nicht an mich.

Den Papierkittel hatte ich – hinten offen, wie angewiesen – um mich herum gewickelt und unter mich gestopft, da er keine Schnur hatte oder eine andere Möglichkeit, ihn zuzumachen. Es war später August, und das Behandlungszimmer war klimatisiert wie ein Kühlschrank. Ich zog den Kittel ein bisschen enger, als könnte dieses Ding mich warm halten. Ich hatte in anderen Behandlungszimmern gewartet, ganz genauso wie jetzt, in gleicher Montur, aber das machte diese Situation nicht weniger unangenehm. Es ist seltsam, seinen Arzt zu treffen – ganz egal wen zu treffen – mit nichts, außer einem großen Stück Papier an zu treffen.

Ich weiß, dass es in der Welt der modernen Medizin nun mal so läuft, dass hier Tempo und Effizienz Vorrang haben vor Anstand und Höflichkeit. Ich bin selbst Ärztin und bekenne mich schuldig, dass auch ich es vorziehe, wenn meine Patient:innen sich umziehen, bevor ich den Raum betrete. Ich sage schuldig, weil ich als grünschnäblige Studentin im Vorklinikum vor vielen Jahren gelernt habe, dass wenn Ärzt:innen Patient:innen empfangen, die Patient:innen vollständig bekleidet sein sollten. Erst nach einem kurzen Gespräch – nachdem sich die Patient:innen samt Hauptbeschwerde und Krankengeschichte vorstellen konnten – sollten wir ihnen einen Kittel reichen, den Raum verlassen, und wenig später wieder eintreten, um die Untersuchung durchzuführen. Als idealistische Medizinstudentin wollte ich genau nach Protokoll arbeiten. Nur so ergab

I soon discovered when I began entering real exam rooms with real patients, almost none of the attending physicians I worked with followed that model. It's inefficient, they argued. They'd never get through their packed schedule if they had to circle back to each patient after allowing time to change into a gown. And now, more than a decade out of medical training, I have grudgingly adopted the same view. I work in the emergency department, where having the patient in a gown before I walk through the door shaves valuable minutes off each closely tracked length of stay. Plus, most of my patients are children, and in the winter in Boston—where I have spent most of my career—the time it takes to peel off snowsuits and footie pajamas and onesies can add up to another entire patient visit. But in that exam room, waiting for the dermatologist, I wasn't thinking about efficiency. Stripping into a gown can make a person feel foolish, naked.

After a few minutes, a young woman came in, wearing a short white lab coat. She was the doctor's scribe, a staff member assigned to gather and document patient information in the electronic medical record. Slight and soft-spoken, she must have been in her early twenties but looked even younger. She had dark, glossy hair. Her pores were invisible. Probably an aspiring pre-med, I thought, as many medical scribes are.

She started asking me the routine questions, tapping my responses into her sleek silver tablet.

Any new medications?

Any new diagnoses?

Did I need any refills?

Skimming through my chart, she asked about some of the problems I had mentioned at previous visits with my old dermatologist. Was my scalp still itchy? Was I using the topical medication and the shampoo I had been prescribed?

I said I was bad about remembering to use them.

es Sinn.

Unsere ersten Patient:innenbegegnungen waren eigens für diese Situation ausgebildete „medical actors“. Mit falschen, standardisierten Patient:innen wurde auf falschen Behandlungszimmerbühnen, in deren Ecken Kameras, Mikrofone und Spionagespiegel hingen, wurde überprüft, ob wir dieses erlernte Protokoll tatsächlich abarbeiteten. Es war ein Punkt zum Abhaken auf der Prüfliste, genau wie Händewaschen beim Eintreten, Augenkontakt, das Hinsetzen auf den Stuhl beim Reden, um eine ungeteilte Aufmerksamkeit und Ruhe zu vermitteln. Die Behandlungszimmer-Etikette, die wir gelernt hatten, sollte signalisieren, dass wir unsere Patient:innen als Menschen anerkannten, denen Privatsphäre, Respekt und Würde zustanden. Aber sobald ich mich in echten Behandlungszimmern mit echten Patient:innen wiederfand, stellte ich fest, dass so gut wie keine:r der echten Ärzt:innen, mit denen ich arbeitete, beim Protokoll blieb. Es ist ineffizient, sagten sie. Sie würden nie ihrem engen Zeitplan gerecht werden, wenn sie jeden Garderobenwechsel auf dem Flur abwarten müssten. Und jetzt, nach über einem Jahrzehnt in diesem Bereich, vertrete ich dieselbe Ansicht, wenn auch nur zähneknirschend. Ich arbeite in der Notfallaufnahme, wo jeder Aufenthalt zeitlich genau verfolgt wird und kostbare Minuten überall eingespart werden müssen, wo es möglich ist. Außerdem besteht der Großteil meiner Patient:innen aus Kindern, und das Herausschälen aus ihren Schneeanzügen und Strampeln, die sie in Boston im Winter unbedingt anhaben müssen, dauert so lang wie ihre Untersuchung. Aber in diesem Behandlungszimmer, in dem ich jetzt auf den Dermatologen warten musste, dachte ich nicht an Effizienz. In diesen Papierkitteln fühlt man sich lächerlich, nackt.

Ein paar Minuten später kam eine junge Frau in einem kurzen, weißen Krankenhauskittel herein. Es war die

“Well, then it must not bother you that much,” she said.

I was startled. Annoyed, even. I didn’t like her manner, but I wasn’t sure why. Too familiar, maybe? Too judgmental? She had been asking question after terse, perfunctory question, and her off-script comment seemed to insinuate that I was a non-compliant patient. That was how I heard it, anyway. Her remark—or the way she said it—raised my perfectionistic, good-girl hackles. And also, I was a doctor! Who was she to scold me?

I suppressed the impulse to fire back at her, “No, I just have a crazy work schedule and a lot of demands on my time, and sometimes I don’t take the best care of myself. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t bother me.”

Instead I said, in a tone as measured and flat as I could manage, “Actually it does bother me. A lot.”

“Okay,” she said, not looking at me as she reached for the door handle. “The doctor will be in shortly.”

I could just make out fragments of conversation coming through the wall of the adjacent exam room.

A confident male voice—the doctor’s, I was sure—said, “...got married? Do you like the person... married?”

I hadn’t heard the pronoun. I repeated the question to myself, filling in the blank with each option: he, she, you. I couldn’t help but summon a little outrage on the patient’s behalf when I imagined the dermatologist saying, “Do you like the person you married?”

What a question, I thought. An attempt at humor, maybe? Unclear.

The two of them went on chatting, but I could hear only the doctor’s words. He listed the ages of his children. The doctor and patient exchanged a few more pleasantries, and then it was quiet.

Arzthelferin, die meine Daten zusammenzutragen und meiner elektronischen Patientinnenakte hinzuzufügen hatte. Zierlich und mit ruhiger Stimme, sie muss Anfang zwanzig gewesen sein, sah aber wesentlich jünger aus. Sie hatte dunkles, glänzendes Haar. Ihre Poren waren unsichtbar. Wahrscheinlich eine angehende Medizinstudentin, dachte ich, wie viele in ihrer Position.

Sie fing an, mir die üblichen Fragen zu stellen, tippte meine Antworten in einen schmalen, silbernen Tablet PC.

Irgendwelche neuen Medikamente?

Irgendwelche neuen Diagnosen?

Irgendein Rezept, das Sie brauchen?

Sie überflog meine Akte, fragte nach ein paar der Beschwerden, die ich bei meiner ehemaligen Dermatologin erwähnt hatte. Ob meine Kopfhaut noch juckte? Ob ich die Creme und das Shampoo benutze, die mir verschrieben wurden?

Ich sagte, dass ich manchmal vergessen würde, sie zu benutzen.

„Na ja, dann stört es Sie wohl nicht so sehr“, sagte sie.

Ich war genervt von ihr, ihrer ganzen Art und Weise, aber ich konnte nicht genau sagen, warum. Fand ich sie verurteilend? Oder war mir ihre Art zu vertraut? Sie hatte eine Frage nach der anderen gestellt, sich knapp und oberflächlich an ihr Skript gehalten, und da, wo sie davon abwich und eigene Bemerkungen beisteuerte, klang es so, als sähe sie in mir eine unkooperative Patientin. So nahm ich es jedenfalls wahr. Ihre

I waited. I heard footsteps approaching. Then I watched the door handle turn, the only indication that someone was about to enter. The doctor came in, and his scribe—the same one I had met earlier—was a couple steps behind him.

The dermatologist was dapper, roughly my age, with a neat beard and close-cropped brown hair. The light blue of his gingham shirt matched the cursive writing embroidered above the chest pocket of his spotless white coat—his name, his credentials.

“I know you used to see my colleague,” he said. “But I’m sure we’ve met before.”

“I don’t think so,” I said.

I was about to recite the line I always use when a stranger mistakes me for someone else—that everyone knows someone who looks like me—but I stopped mid-sentence as he stepped toward me, placed a hand on each of my shoulders and slid the gown off. I sat facing him at eye level, topless, the upper portion of the gown crumpled in my lap.

“What kind of work do you do?” he asked, his eyes meeting mine at first and then scrutinizing my face and neck.

I tilted my head, looked at him, noticed I was holding my breath.

When I said I was a pediatric emergency-room doctor, he asked if I knew his college friend, also a pediatrician in Boston.

“She’s a friend of mine,” I said. We had been residents together.

“How’s she doing?” he asked, looking me in the eye again. “Is she dating anyone?”

“She’s married,” I said. “She has a new baby.”

He said he had lost touch with her.

The scribe stood in the far corner by the door, her face impassive, stylus poised to take notes. She seemed unnaturally still, as if she feared her slightest movement might call attention to her own presence in the room. I wondered if she was deciding which details

Bemerkung – oder etwas in ihrem Ton – passte nicht in mein Selbstbild. Ich war freundlich, zuvorkommend, perfektionistisch. Und außerdem Ärztin! Für wen hielt sie sich, mir so schnippisch zu kommen?

Ich unterdrückte den Impuls, ihr entgegenzuschleudern: „Nein, ich habe nur extrem viel zu tun in meinem sehr anspruchsvollen Job und viele Verantwortlichkeiten, denen ich gerecht werden muss, und da kommt die Selbstfürsorge manchmal ein bisschen zu kurz. Das bedeutet nicht, dass es mich nicht stört.“

Stattdessen sagte ich, im schlichtesten und ruhigsten Tonfall, der mir möglich war: „Doch, es stört mich. Sehr sogar.“

„Okay“, sagte sie, ohne mich anzusehen und zur Tür gewandt.

„Der Herr Doktor wird gleich da sein.“

Bruchstücke der Konversation aus dem benachbarten Behandlungszimmer drangen zu mir durch. Eine selbstbewusste, männliche Stimme – die des Arztes, sicherlich – sagte: „... geheiratet? Mögen Sie...“ Der Rest des Satzes wurde von den Wänden verschluckt. Ich wiederholte diesen Teil in meinem Kopf, überlegte, welche anderen Worte dazu gehört hatten. Wer hatte geheiratet? Eine sie, ein er, ein du? Ich stellte mir die Empörung der Patientin im Nebenzimmer vor, hätte der Dermatologe gefragt: „Mögen Sie die Person, die Sie geheiratet haben?“ Was für eine Frage, dachte ich. Ein Versuch, lustig zu sein? Unklar.

Die beiden machten Smalltalk, aber ich konnte nur die Worte des Arztes hören. Er erzählte von seinen Kindern, wie alt sie waren. Die Patientin oder der Patient, wer auch immer da im anderen Zimmer war, tauschte noch ein paar Höflichkeiten mit ihm aus, dann war es still.

to record.

The dermatologist looked at my ears and scalp, my chest and arms. Then he took a step back. I pulled the gown back onto my shoulders and smoothed it over the length of my thighs. He sat down on the nearby stool and wheeled himself closer until he was right in front of me, his chest aligned with my knees.

He grasped the lower edge of my gown between his thumbs and index fingers, looked up at me, paused, held my gaze for a moment. I thought he was going to say something, but he didn't. Part of me felt frozen, spellbound, as if I were watching from behind one of those med-school two-way mirrors, poised to take note of what would happen next. Then the dermatologist tore the gown in two, stopping when he had exposed my abdomen. It was a deft movement, like opening a package or a candy wrapper.

Now I had no way to cover myself again.

I looked down at what was left of the flimsy gown. Had he really just ripped it in half? For a strange and disorienting moment, I thought maybe he hadn't done anything out of the ordinary. Maybe doctors examined patients that way all the time.

But I am a doctor, I thought. I know how doctors examine patients.

I watched as his eyes scanned from my bare feet to my legs to my torso.

Still seated on the stool, he motioned for me to stand up. He slid out of the way and then behind me as I stepped onto the cold floor.

"I'm going to take a look at your tush," he said, hooking the waistband of my underwear with his finger and stretching it toward him.

I tried to hold the edges of my shredded gown together, as he looked over every inch of me and then finally declared my exam "boring" and "nothing interesting" and "lovely."

I turned around, nodded, made my way back

Ich wartete. Ich hörte Schritte, die näher kamen. Dann schaute ich zu, wie die Türklinke heruntergedrückt wurde. Der Arzt kam rein, die Arzthelferin, die gleiche wie vorhin, war ein paar Meter hinter ihm.

Er sah sehr gepflegt aus, ungefähr mein Alter, Bart und Haare vor kurzem geschnitten. Das Hellblau seines karierten Hemdes passte zu dem kursiven Schriftzug, der über der Brusttasche seines makellosen weißen Kittels aufgestickt war - sein Name, sein Titel.

„Ich weiß, dass Sie vorher bei meiner Kollegin waren“, sagte er. „Aber ich bin mir sicher, dass wir uns schon einmal gesehen haben.“

„Ich glaube nicht“, sagte ich.

Ich hätte gerade sagen wollen, was ich immer sagte, wenn mich Fremde für jemand anders halten – dass jeder jemanden kennt, der so aussieht wie ich – aber ich hörte mitten im Satz zu Sprechen auf, als er auf mich zukam, eine Hand auf jede meiner Schultern legte und meinen Papierkittel herunterstreifte. Ich saß vor ihm, wir waren auf Augenhöhe, ich oberkörperfrei, der Teil des Kittels, der mich bedeckt hatte, jetzt zusammengeknüllt auf meinem Schoß.

„Was arbeiten Sie?“, fragte er, kurzer Augenkontakt, dann senkte er den Blick prüfend auf andere Teile meines Gesichts, meinen Hals.

Ich legte meinen Kopf schief, schaute ihn an. Erst jetzt fiel mir auf, dass ich die Luft angehalten hatte.

Als ich sagte, dass ich Ärztin in der Kindernotaufnahme war, fragte er, ob ich seine Freundin aus Studienzeiten kenne, die auch als Kinderärztin in Boston arbeitete.

„Ja, wir sind befreundet.“, sagte ich. Wir kannten uns

onto the exam table.

“You’ve done a good job with the sun protection,” he said. “We’ll see you in a year.” And with that, he and his scribe were gone. The visit hadn’t lasted ten minutes.

What just happened? I wondered, the sudden silence of the exam room reverberating around me. Was I hallucinating, or did something just transpire here?

I lifted my clothes off the chair where they lay folded. I couldn’t get dressed fast enough. But that day I had worn a shirtdress, blue chambray with an endless row of buttons down the front, along with a matching belt, brown leather high-heeled sandals with straps and buckles. As I buttoned the buttons, tied the belt, I replayed the visit—brief as it was—like a movie in slow motion: his unannounced entrance, his questions about my friend, the sequence of each part of the exam. Did he really take my gown off and then ask me what I did for work? Had any of it happened the way I was remembering?

Was it nothing?

I wasn’t sure.

And what about the fact that he knew I was a doctor? Shouldn’t he have felt some kind of professional accountability toward me? An obligation to treat me with respect? Or at least to be a little more cautious with me, since I would know what was professional and what wasn’t? I tried to imagine what it would have been like if I had met him for the first time while wearing my own white coat, embroidered with my name and “M.D.” and my hospital’s logo. What if, one day, I needed a dermatology consult in my emergency department, and he showed up to do it? It could never happen—since we’re not affiliated with the same hospitals—but what if he had to speak with me as one colleague to another? What if one of his children had to go to the ER, and I was the doctor working that shift?

I wondered if my friend—our mutual friend—

aus der fachärztlichen Weiterbildung.

„Wie geht es ihr so?“, fragte er, sein Blick traf kurz wieder meinen. „Triffst sie sich mit irgendwem?“

„Sie ist verheiratet.“, sagte ich. „Sie hat gerade ein Kind gekriegt.“

Er sagte, sie hätten sich aus den Augen verloren.

Die Arzthelferin stand in der hinteren Ecke des Raumes, ihr Blick teilnahmslos auf ihrem Tablet, bereit zum Notat. Sie wirkte unnatürlich still, als befürchtete sie, die kleinste Bewegung könnte die Aufmerksamkeit auf ihre Anwesenheit im Raum lenken. Ich fragte mich, ob sie überlegte, was zu diesem Besuch aufzuschreiben war.

Der Arzt schaute sich meine Ohren an, meine Kopfhaut, meine Brust und Arme. Dann nahm er einen Schritt zurück. Ich zog den Papierkittel zurück über meine Schultern und straffte ihn, sodass er auch meine Oberschenkel bedeckte. Er setzte sich auf den Stuhl und rollte damit wieder zu mir, bis er direkt vor mir war, seine Brust auf Höhe meiner Knie.

Er nahm den unteren Rand meines Kittels zwischen seinen Daumen und Zeigefinger, sah dabei zu mir auf, hielt meinen Blick einen Moment lang fest. Ich dachte, er wolle etwas sagen, aber er sagte nichts. Ein Teil von mir war erstarrt, wartete gebannt. Ich erinnerte mich an die Spionspiegel aus Studienzeiten, nur fühlte ich mich jetzt, als wäre ich auf der anderen Seite, reine Beobachterin, die nur untätig darauf warten konnte, was als Nächstes passieren würde. Der Arzt riss meinen Papierkittel auf, bis er meinen Unterleib freigelegt hatte. Die Bewegung war geschickt, routiniert, in etwa so schwerwiegend wie das Öffnen einer Packung oder eines Bonbonpapiers.

had rejected his amorous advances in college, or maybe in medical school, where they were also classmates. Maybe now he was inflicting some sort of vengeance on her through me. Were they actually even friends, if they'd been out of touch for so long that he didn't know she had gotten married and had a baby?

After putting myself back together, I stepped into the hallway. I couldn't tell if I was just imagining it or if the two women working at the reception desk avoided my gaze when I came to the counter and handed over my chart. Had they heard the whole exam-room conversation through those paper-thin walls? Had the dermatologist come out of my room and said something gossipy about me to the women at the desk? Had his scribe? Had I said anything they might consider untoward? I tried to remember everything I had said—and everything he had said—wanting to be sure I hadn't done anything to embarrass myself.

I walked to my car in the late-afternoon sun, fumbling to find my keys in my giant bag. I told myself there couldn't have been any impropriety. His scribe had been in the room, after all, witnessing the whole encounter.

But she was so young. She had stood in the corner, not saying a word, looking like she wanted to disappear. Maybe she had seen him interact this way with patients before. Maybe she had been on the receiving end herself. Maybe she was applying to medical school and hoped he would write her a letter of recommendation. And maybe she wouldn't have dared to say a word, even if she wanted to.

Ich hatte keine Möglichkeit mehr, meinen Körper zu bedecken.

Ich schaute auf die Reste dieses zwiebelschalenartigen Kittels, der mich gerade noch mehr oder weniger bedeckt hatte. Hatte er es gerade wirklich in zwei gerissen? Für einen Moment türmte sich in mir der Gedanke auf, dass er vielleicht gar nichts Ungewöhnliches getan hatte. Vielleicht untersuchten Ärzte ihre Patientinnen ständig auf diese Weise, Ärzt:innen, Patient:innen. Aber ich bin Ärztin, dachte ich. Ich weiß, wie Ärzt:innen Patient:innen untersuchen.

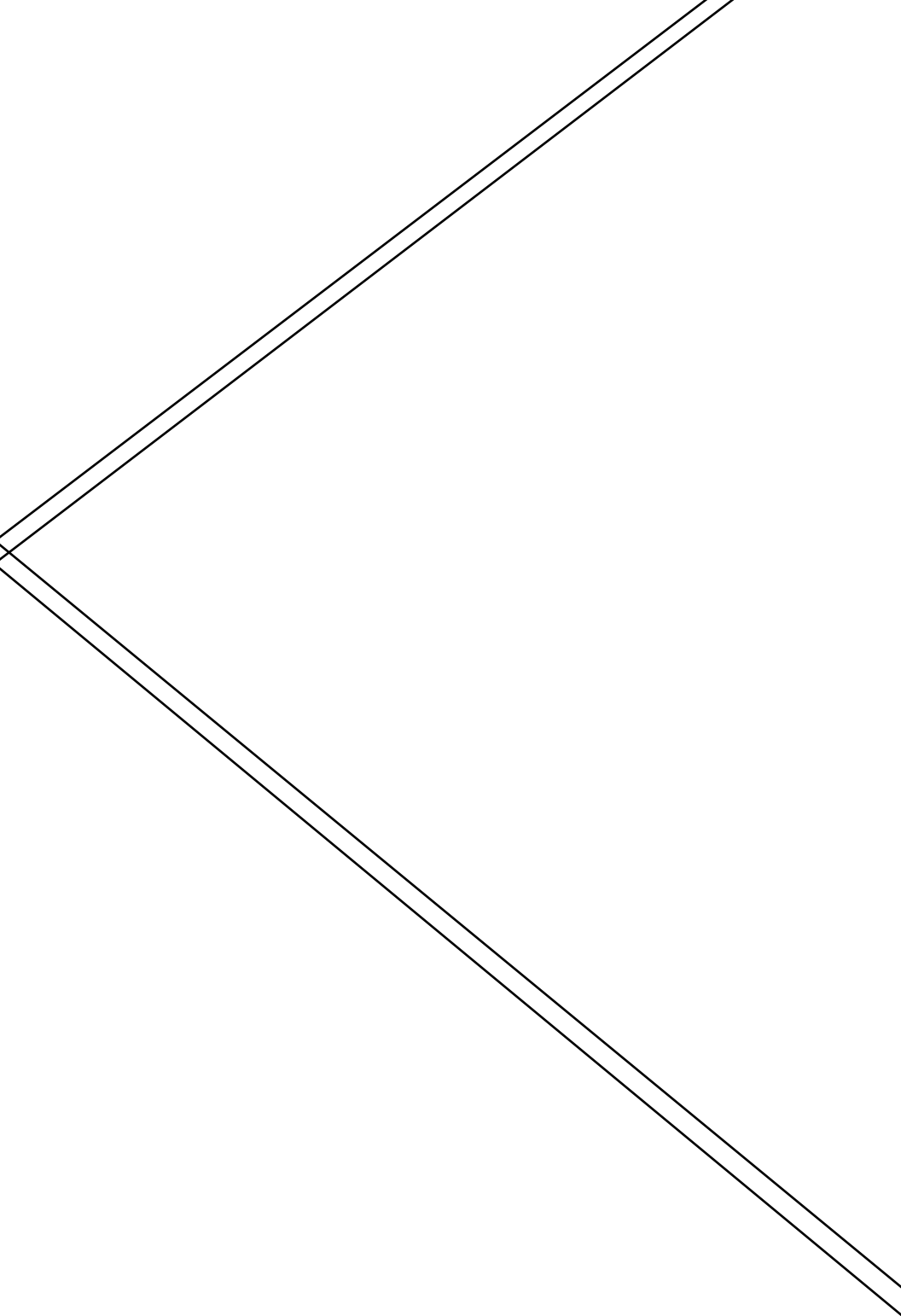
Ich schaute zu, während seine Augen von meinen nackten Füßen über meine Beine bis zu meinem Oberkörper wanderten. Noch immer auf dem Stuhl sitzend, gab er mir ein Zeichen, aufzustehen. Dann schlitterte er aus meinem Blickfeld, stellte sich hinter mich, meine Füße auf dem kalten Boden.

„So. Ich werde jetzt noch einen Blick auf Ihren Hintern werfen“, sagte er. Er hakte seinen Finger in dem Bund meiner Unterwäsche und spannte den Stoff in seine Richtung. In meinen Händen knüllte sich noch immer mein zeretzter Kittel, während er jeden Zentimeter meines Körpers begutachtete und schließlich die ganze Untersuchung als „langweilig“, „uninteressant“ und „schön“ zusammenfasste.

Ich drehte mich um, nickte und ging zurück zum Untersuchungstisch.

„Sehr verlässlich mit dem Sonnenschutz“, lobte er. „Wir sehen uns in einem Jahr wieder.“

Und damit waren er und seine Arzthelferin verschwunden. Die Untersuchung hatte keine zehn Minuten gedauert.



Was ist gerade passiert? Die plötzliche Stille im Untersuchungsraum legte sich auf den Nachhall des Arztes. Hatte ich Halluzinationen, oder hat sich hier gerade etwas ereignet?

Ich hob meine Kleidung vom Stuhl, wo ich sie zusammengefoldet hatte. Ich konnte mich nicht schnell genug anziehen. Aber an diesem Tag hatte ich ein Hemdkleid getragen, ein blauer Leinenstoff mit einer endlosen Reihe von Knöpfen von oben bis unten. Dazu einen passenden Gürtel und braune Ledersandalen mit Riemen und Schnallen. Als ich die Knöpfe zuknöpfte und den Gürtel band, ließ ich den Besuch - so kurz er auch war - wie einen Film in Zeitlupe Revue passieren: sein unangekündigtes Erscheinen, seine Fragen über meine Freundin, die Abfolge und die Routine seiner Untersuchung. Hat er mir wirklich den Kittel ausgezogen und mich dann gefragt, was ich beruflich mache? War irgendetwas davon wirklich so passiert, wie ich mich jetzt daran erinnerte?

War es gar nichts gewesen?

Ich war mir nicht sicher.

Und was war mit der Tatsache, dass er wusste, dass ich Ärztin war? Hätte er nicht eine Art von beruflicher Verantwortung mir gegenüber empfinden sollen? Eine Verpflichtung, mich mit Respekt zu behandeln? Oder zumindest ein wenig vorsichtiger mit mir zu sein, da mir doch klar sein würde, was professionelles Verhalten ist und was nicht? Ich versuchte mir vorzustellen, wie es gewesen wäre, wenn ich ihm zum ersten Mal begegnet wäre, während ich meinen eigenen weißen Kittel, der mit meinem Namen, mit meinem Dokortitel und dem Logo meines Krankenhauses bestickt war. Was wäre, wenn ich eines Tages eine dermatologische Konsultation in meiner Notaufnahme bräuchte, und er käme, um sie zu machen? Das würde nicht passieren – wir arbeiten



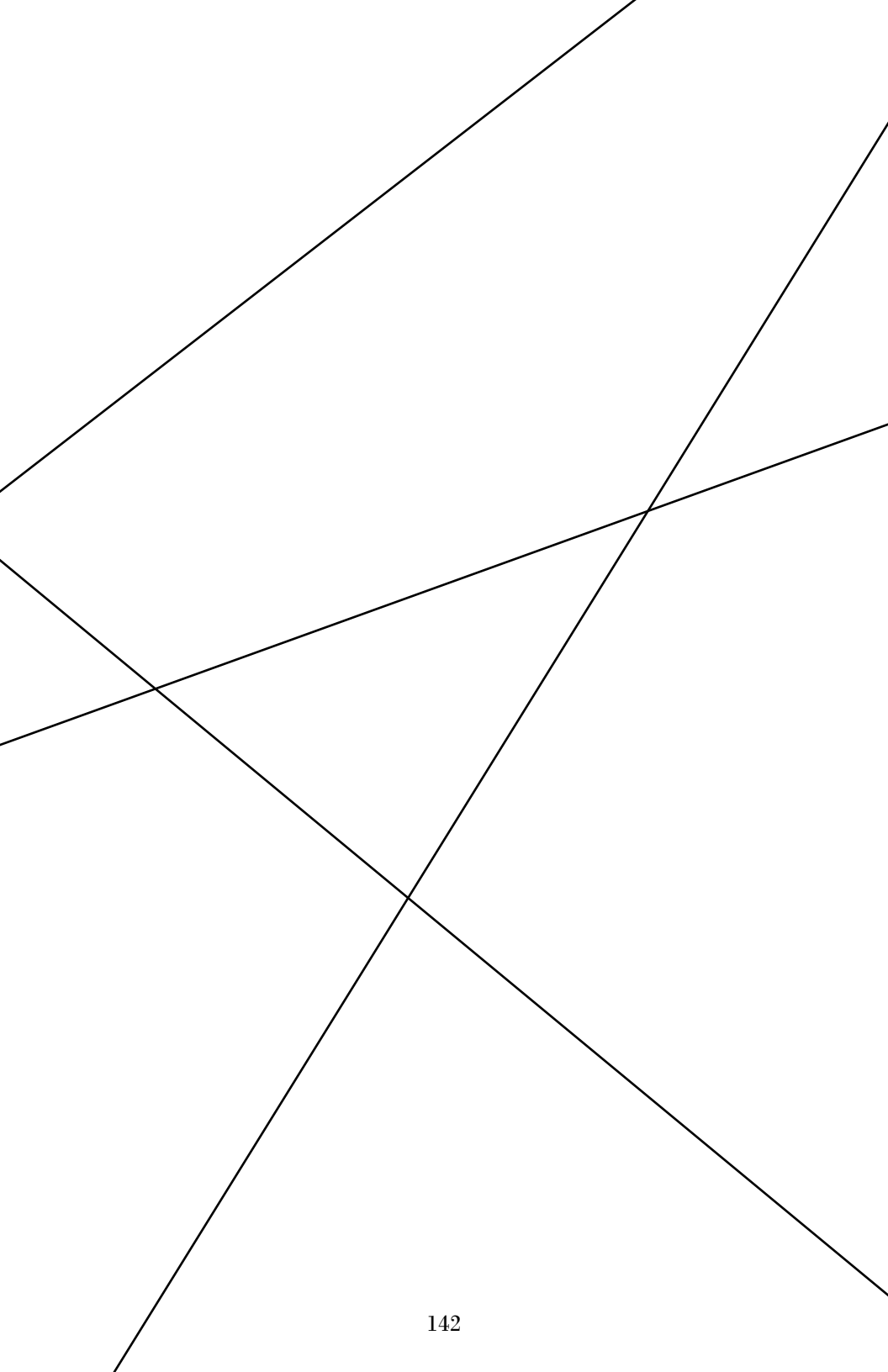
in verschiedenen Krankenhäusern -, aber was wäre, wenn er mich mal wegen etwas konsultieren würde, von einem Kollegen zum anderen? Was wäre, wenn eines seiner Kinder in die Notaufnahme müsste, und ich wäre die Ärztin, die Schicht hätte?

Ich fragte mich, ob meine Freundin - unsere gemeinsame Freundin - seine amourösen Annäherungsversuche wohl im College zurückgewiesen hatte oder vielleicht erst im Medizinstudium, wo sie ebenfalls Klassenkamerad:innen waren. Vielleicht wollte er jetzt durch mich eine Art von Rache an ihr ausüben. Waren sie denn überhaupt wirklich befreundet, wenn sie doch so lange gar keinen Kontakt hatten, dass er nicht mal wusste, dass sie geheiratet und ein Baby bekommen hatte?

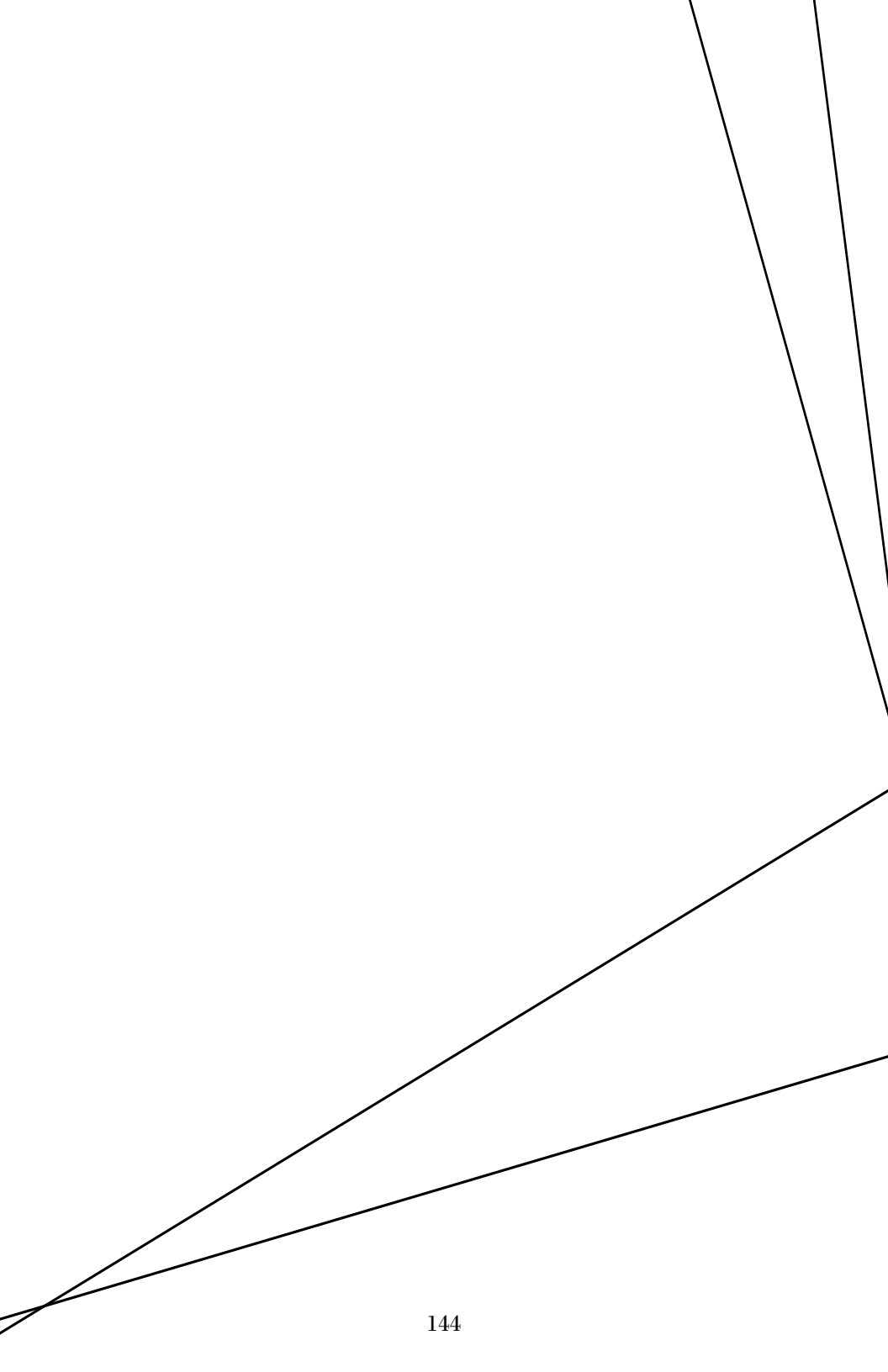
Angezogen trat ich auf den Flur. Ich konnte nicht sagen, ob ich nur meine Einbildung war, oder ob die beiden Frauen am Empfang meinem Blick auswichen, als ich zum Schalter kam und ihnen meine Akte abgab. Hatten sie das ganze Gespräch im Untersuchungszimmer gehört, durch diese papierdünnen Wände? War der Dermatologe aus dem Zimmer gekommen und hatte ihnen was über meine Untersuchung gesagt? Oder die Arzthelferin? Hatte ich am Ende irgendetwas Falsches gesagt? Ich versuchte, mich an alles zu erinnern – was ich gesagt hatte und was er gesagt hatte – um mich zu vergewissern, dass ich nichts Dummes getan hatte, mich nicht blamiert hatte.

In der späten Nachmittagssonne ging ich zu meinem Auto, meine Hände suchten die Schlüssel in meiner riesigen Tasche. Es war nichts vorgefallen, redete ich mir selbst ein. Seine Arzthelferin war mit im Raum gewesen, sie hat die ganze Untersuchung miterlebt.

Aber sie war so jung. Sie hatte nur in der Ecke gestanden, kein Wort gesagt, sie hat ausgesehen, als hätte sie sich am Liebsten in Luft aufgelöst. Vielleicht hatte sie so



einen Umgang schon häufiger mitgekriegt. Vielleicht wurde sie selbst genauso behandelt. Vielleicht hatte sie sich für ein Medizinstudium beworben und gehofft, dass er ihr ein Empfehlungsschreiben schreiben würde. Und vielleicht hätte sie sich sowieso nicht getraut, etwas zu sagen, selbst wenn sie es gewollt hätte.



Translator's Note

Lucia Hemker mostly writes fiction, and she drew inspiration for this nonfiction piece from the structure of schoolchildren's textbooks, in which reading-comprehension exercises at the end of a chapter point to an answer within the text. A gender-studies course introduced Lucia to Deborah Tannen's writings on gender-specific communication, and Lucia used the schoolbook-with-exercises format to explore the intersection of communication strategies and gender. On the surface, this work may appear to be about cancer, but really the subject is how men and women speak, what they choose to say (or not say), and how they choose to say it.

Translating this piece offered multiple simultaneous challenges: How to maintain the fresh, irreverent, sarcastic, edgy, and at times tender and vulnerable voice of the narrator? How to lend an air of self-mocking formality to certain sections, while rendering other parts more realistically, like an overheard conversation? How to handle the subject of a mother's cancer diagnosis with care, even—and perhaps especially—if that cancer diagnosis is not the focus of the piece? Lucia's essay, excerpted here, is endlessly surprising. Just when I think I have figured it out, it takes a different turn, whether in subject or style or tone. I have tried to keep up with these shifts and convey both the playfulness and the earnestness, the questioning and the bold assertions. I have tried to follow Lucia's lead and not hold this work or the ideas it presents with too firm a grip. My aim has been to let my translation of "My Tiny Little Carcinoma" breathe on the page and, in turn, reveal itself on its own terms.

LUCIA HEMKER

MEIN KLEINES KARZINÖMCHEN (MIT AUFGABEN)

Muttersprech

Ich bin ein 21jähriges Kleinkind als meine Mutter mir sagt, dass sie Brustkrebs hat. Nur, dass sie das eben nie gesagt hat, und da sie es nie gesagt hatte, fehlen auch mir die eigentlichen Worte dafür, ich habe nur ihre. Ausgewählten Freund:innen erzähle ich also von dem kleinen Tumörchen, dem Karzinömchen, dem bisschen Strahlen, denen sich meine Mutter aussetzen musste, dass sie ach-! ein bisschen fertig sei davon, die kleine OP, dem ganzen Genetik-Quatsch, die vielen Dinger, die sie sich jetzt einschmeißen muss, haha, von denen sie etwas wuselig wird. Für dich ergibt das vielleicht keinen Sinn, für mich schon, denn ich kenne dieses Muster. Man muss wissen: Als Kind konnte ich wie alle Kinder keine Tabletten schlucken. Natürlich hätte ich es gekonnt, aber in mir hat sich alles dagegen gesträubt. Meine Mutter hat sie mir darum ins Müsli im Vanillejoghurt gemischt, das alles vor meinen Augen, uns beiden war alles klar. Trotzdem konnte ich so tun, als wären sie da nicht drin, als würde ich es nicht verstehen, und es ging. Auf die gleiche Art verkaufte sie mir jetzt Krebs, und ich wiederum verkaufte die pure Unbekümmertheit darüber allen anderen.

Erst ein paar Jahre vor der Diagnose meiner Mutter realisierte ich, wie alle nun erwachsenen Kinder es irgendwann realisieren müssen, dass meine Mutter eine Frau ist, und dann realisierte ich, dass sie ein Mensch ist. Dass sie einen Vornamen hat und einen Nachnamen, beide nicht „Mama“. Dass sie ein Leben hat, Ängste, Geheimnisse, Gedanken und Gefühle, die mich nicht be-

translated from the german by
SARAH WINGERTER

EXCERPT FROM
MY TINY LITTLE CARCINOMA
(*WITH EXERCISES*)

Motherspeak

I was a twenty-one-year-old infant when my mother told me she had breast cancer. Except she never actually said it, and because she didn't, I don't have the actual words for it either. I only have her words. I told a select group of friends about the tiny little tumor, the little carcinoma, the teensy bit of radiation that my mother had to expose herself to, said that she was oh, a tad worn-out from, the little operation, the whole genetics nonsense, all the stuff she now had to choke down—ha ha—that made her feel kind of antsy. This might not make any sense to you, but it does to me because I recognize this pattern. You should know: as a child, like all children, I couldn't swallow pills. Of course, I could have, but everything in me resisted it. That's why my mother mixed them into vanilla yogurt with muesli for me, right in front of my eyes. Both of us knew. Still, I could pretend the pills weren't in there, that I didn't understand, and it worked. Now, in the same way, she sold me cancer, and, I, in turn, sold my sheer nonchalance about it to everyone else.

Just a few years before my mother's diagnosis, I realized, as all grown children eventually do, that my mother is a woman, and then I realized that she's also a human being. That she has a first name and a last name, neither of which is "Mama." That she has a life, fears, secrets, thoughts, and feelings that are none of my concern, that have nothing to do with me. That she was once a girl, like me. Still, it makes me want to

trafen oder mich nicht angehen. Dass sie mal ein Mädchen war, so wie ich. Ich könnte kotzen, immer noch. Schließlich war ich meine eigene Person mit einzigartiger emotionaler Tiefe und sehr besonderen Aspirationen und war ganz und gar, auf molekularer Ebene anders als sie, die ja eben eine Mutter war und kein Mensch. Als Frau realisierte ich vor gar nicht allzu langer Zeit, dass ich eine Mutter bin, wie eine Mutter spreche aus mütterlichen Gefühlen und einem muttermäßigen Verantwortungsbewusstsein über das Wohlergehen aller. Seit sich Fältchen auf meiner Stirn bilden, sehe ich aus wie sie. Seit ich kein Mädchen mehr bin, muss ich wohl Mutter sein, denn sonst kenne ich ja nichts.

Glücklicherweise ist weder unsere Sprache noch der Krebs genetisch bedingt*, sondern Resultat einer unglücklichen Mischung aus Pech, schlechten Entscheidungen und Umwelteinflüssen. Rauchen. Geschlechterrollen. Linkshändigkeit. Imitation. Religion. Ionisierende Strahlung in jungen Jahren. Mangelnde Reflektion. Bewegungsmangel. Konditionierung. Sobald es einmal in dir drin ist, bist du daran erkrankt. Eine Heilung bedeutet Inaktivität, keine neuen Wucherungen, aber du bist und bleibst Krebspatientin bis an dein Lebensende.

*Meine Mutter schafft es nicht zu diesem Genetiktest, darum weiß ich nicht, ob der Krebs genetisch ist oder nicht. Wenn er es ist, wie könnte sie mir das sagen? Auch ich wollte es euch ersparen, ich wollte euch lieber in Sicherheit wiegen und euch füttern und behaupten, die Brust, die ich euch gebe, ist und bleibt tumorlos bis ans Ende aller Tage.

Aufgabe 1: Ist Dein Erwachsenenleben eine Fortführung von imitatorischem Spiel als Kind?

throw up. After all, I was my own person, with unique emotional depths and very particular aspirations, and I was completely and totally, on a molecular level, different from her, who was, of course, a mother and not a human being. I realized not too long ago that, being a woman, I am also a mother, in a way, and I speak like a mother, out of maternal feelings and a motherly sense of responsibility for everyone else's well-being. Now that lines have started to appear on my forehead, I look like my mother. Since I'm no longer a girl, I must be a mother, because I don't know what else I would be.

Fortunately neither our language nor cancer is genetically determined*, but rather the result of an unfortunate mix of bad luck, poor decisions, and environmental influences. Smoking. Gender roles. Left-handedness. Imitation. Religion. Ionizing radiation exposure in childhood. Lack of reflection. Lack of movement. Conditioning. Once it's inside you, you're already sick from it. A cure implies inactivity of the tumor, no new cancerous growths, but you are and will remain a cancer patient for the rest of your life.

Exercise 1: Is your adult life a continuation of the imitative play you engaged in as a child?

* My mother never managed to undergo the recommended genetic testing, and so I don't know if her cancer was hereditary or not. And even if it was, how could she have told me? Also, I too wanted to spare you this, and I preferred to cradle you in a sense of security and nurse you and affirm that the breast I offered you is and will remain cancer-free until the end of time.

Austausch

Mit meinen Brüdern rede ich zu diesem Zeitpunkt nicht über den Krebs. Jahre später erst sagen sie: Mutation. Suszeptibilität. Autosomal-dominant vererbt. Die Möglichkeiten der Liquid Biopsy Therapie. Ich kenne diese Worte, ich habe die gleiche Recherche gemacht, aber niemals, never-ever, auf gar keinen Fall würde ich damit so herumspringen. Solche Informationen gehören gefiltert. *Meine Mutter hat Krebs* ist in erster Linie ein emotionaler Satz, kein faktischer. Wenn ich ihn äußere, sollte ich im Vorhinein daran denken, welche Auswirkungen er auf mein Gegenüber haben könnte, und diese entsprechend steuern und intendieren. Außerdem ist das mein Schrittmuster im schlechte-Neuigkeiten-Tanz, den ich mit meinen Freundinnen vollführe.

Leute, ich muss euch was erzählen, bisschen ernster, ähm – Meine Mutter hat Krebs. Aber! Aber, bevor ihr euch jetzt zu viele Sorgen macht, es ist, Glück im Unglück, Brustkrebs, der ja ziemlich gut erforscht ist und die Brust ist ja auch kein lebenswichtiges Organ, und es ist hormonell, also sie braucht keine Chemo, was mega ist, und die haben es wirklich wirklich früh erkannt, macht euch jetzt keine großen Sorgen, aber ich musste euch das irgendwie erzählen.

Oh mein Gott, das ist so schrecklich! Ich kanns gar nicht glauben, das ist das Schlimmste was man sich vorstellen kann. Ich wär an deiner Stelle wirklich so am Boden, melde dich jederzeit (...)

Meine Freundinnen 1) erkennen die Ernsthaftigkeit des Problems an, und erlösen mich damit von meiner bemutternden Rolle, sodass ich meine Sorge, die ich mit ihnen teile, nicht weiter relativieren muss und 2) vergewissern mir, dass sie in meiner Situation genauso traurig wären (wie sie wissen, dass ich es bin).
Ich frage meine Brüder: Mit wem habt ihr darüber ei-

Exchange

During that period my brothers and I didn't talk about cancer. Only years later did they say things like: Mutation. Susceptibility. Autosomal dominant. Liquid biopsy. I know these terms, and I've done the same research, but never, ever, not once, not under any circumstances, would I flounce around with words like that. That kind of information should be filtered. *My mother has cancer* is, first and foremost, an emotional sentence, not a factual one. If I were to say it, first I would have to think about what effect it could have on the person I'm speaking to, and then I'd have to navigate the situation and plan accordingly. Anyway, that was the choreography of the bad-news dance I was performing with my girlfriends. *Hey everybody, I have to tell you something, on the more serious side, um... My mother has cancer. But! But, before you get too worried, it's—and this is a blessing in disguise—breast cancer, which has been pretty well researched, and of course the breast isn't a vital organ, and the cancer is hormonal, so she won't need chemo, which is huge, and they caught it really, really early, so don't worry about it too much, but somehow I just had to tell you.*

Oh my God, how awful! I can't believe it. That's the worst thing I can even imagine. If I were you, I'd be totally devastated. Reach out any time...

My girlfriends 1) recognized the gravity of the problem and released me from my mothering role, such that I didn't have to further qualify the worries I shared with them and 2) reassured me that they would be just as sad in my situation (as they knew I was).

I asked my brothers: Did you actually talk with anyone about it, at the time? If so, whom? They answered: With the doctor's receptionist, when filling out a medical-history form.

A question: As a man, do I have to fill in "breast cancer" here, if my mother has breast cancer?

gentlich gesprochen, damals? Sie antworten: Mit der Sprechstundenhilfe, als sie einen Anamnesebogen ausgefüllt haben.

Eine Frage: Als Mann, muss ich hier Brustkrebs eintragen, wenn meine Mutter Brustkrebs hat?

Ja.

Weder meine Brüder noch ich haben über den Krebs geweint im Beisein anderer. Dafür drei meiner Freundinnen. Zwei davon haben die Situation richtig eingeschätzt, und es war gut von ihnen, ich konnte mich um sie kümmern und sagen, dass alles in Ordnung sein wird, und einmal durchdenken, wie es wäre, wenn es nicht in Ordnung sein würde, und dass wir es dann auch irgendwie in Ordnung kriegen könnten, und durfte alles davon ernst meinen. Meine andere Freundin hat die Situation komplett falsch gedeutet. Was ich da wie erzähle, wer sie in diesem Moment ist und wer ich. Sie fing an zu weinen, und ich hätte kotzen können (Ich leide unter Reiseübelkeit: Immer, wenn eine unerwartete Bewegung vollzogen wird, kommt mein Gleichgewichtssinn nicht darauf klar und mir wird schlecht). Wir sprechen nicht mehr viel.

Aufgabe 2: Was ist der evolutionäre Vorteil von Tränen gegenüber Schreien, wenn nicht die Förderung von prosozialem Verhalten und sozialer Bindungen? Ist das die Funktion, und wenn ja, wer muss wann wo weinen, um sie zu erfüllen?

Yes.

Neither my brothers nor I cried about my mother's cancer in public. I had three of my girlfriends for that. Two of them had understood the situation right away, and that was considerate of them. I could console them and say everything would be fine, and then I could think through what it would be like if everything didn't turn out fine, and somehow we would figure out how to make everything turn out fine in the end, and we would take the whole thing very seriously. My other friend got it completely wrong. She had no idea how to read the room. What I was saying and how, who she was at that moment and who I was. She started to cry, and I felt like I was going to puke (I have motion sickness: whenever there's any unexpected movement, it overwhelms my sense of balance, and I feel nauseated). We don't talk much anymore.

Exercise 2: What is the evolutionary advantage of tears over screaming, if not to promote pro-social behavior and social ties? Is that their function, and if so, who must cry when and where to fulfill this purpose?

Monologe

Als ich 13 Jahre alt war, hat mein Vater aufgehört, mir Fragen zu stellen (das stimmt natürlich nicht wirklich), wir haben aber trotzdem ein gesundes Verhältnis zueinander (auch das ist gewissermaßen gelogen). Einmal im Jahr sehen wir uns, wenn wir alle sechs zusammen in den Wanderurlaub fahren und so tun, als würden wir das ständig machen. Er, seine Frau, meine zwei Brüder, mein Freund und ich. Dort wechseln sich drei von diesen sechs Teilnehmenden bis tief in die Nacht ab mit ihren Monologen. Tipp: Mein Freund ist es nicht, der da monologisiert, den habe ich mir ausgesucht.

Aufgabe 3: Kann der Kontakt zur eigenen Familie jemals wirklich freiwillig sein, so wie der Kontakt zu Personen außerhalb der eigenen Familie?

Aufgabe 4: Wenn Du ein:e Partner:in hast: Welche Faktoren Deiner eigenen Familiendynamik haben Deine Partner:innenwahl beeinflusst, und in welche Richtung?

Einmal unterbrach ich alle mit einem Monolog über geschlechtsspezifische Kommunikation. Ich hatte gerade das Buch „Du kannst mich einfach nicht verstehen!“ von Deborah Tannen gelesen, ein schrecklicher Titel, aber ein wirklich gutes Buch, jedes Jahr verschenke ich es zu Geburtstagen und wünsche allen Viel Glück. Im Urlaub mit diesen verschiedenen Redeschwallen, die mich zu überrollen drohten, ließ ich meine eigene Tirade auf die der anderen los, redete einfach lauter und gestikulierte raumeinnehmender, bis ich den Raum einnahm. Ich redete, übrigens, über verschiedene Arten von Unterbrechungen: solche, die das Thema vorantreiben (Oh, ich liebe das Buch, das ist so- // Oh mein Gott ja, das ist das beste Buch, das ich je gelesen habe!) und solche, die das nicht tun (Oh, ich liebe das Buch, das ist so- // Ich hab gestern einen Film geguckt, der war...).

Monologues

When I was thirteen years old, my father stopped asking me questions (of course that's not 100% true), but nonetheless we had a healthy relationship (also kind of a lie). We see each other once a year, when all six of us go on a hiking trip together and act as if we do that kind of thing all the time. He, his wife, my two brothers, my boyfriend and I. After settling in, three out of these six participants trade monologues until late at night. Hint: My boyfriend isn't one of the monologists. That's why I picked him.

Exercise 3: Can contact with one's own family ever be truly voluntary, in the same way that contact with people outside the family is voluntary?

Exercise 4: If you have a partner: which aspects of your own family dynamic have influenced your choice of partner, and in what way?

Once I interrupted the three of them with a monologue of my own about gender-specific communication. I had just read Deborah Tannen's book *You Just Don't Understand*. A terrible title, but a really good book that I hand out every year for birthdays, wishing the recipients luck. On vacation with these various torrents of words, all threatening to overwhelm me, I let loose my own tirade on top of theirs, simply talking louder and gesticulating more wildly, until I took over the whole room. I was speaking, incidentally, of various types of interruptions: ones that move the topic forward (Oh, I love that book—it's so...// Oh God yes, that is the best book I've ever read!) and ones that don't (Oh, I love that book—it's so...// Yesterday I saw a movie that was...). My father, meanwhile, was lashing out against the pharmaceutical industry, my middle brother was going on about the French Revolution, and my oldest brother had just reached the letter E in the alphabet,

Mein Vater wettete derweil über Pharmazie, mein mittlerer Bruder über die Französische Revolution, und mein ältester Bruder war gerade beim E des Alphabets angekommen, das er Buchstabe für Buchstabe bewerten wollte (das ist zum Beispiel nicht gelogen). Irgendwann gewann ich, alle drei verstummten. Ich führte meinen Punkt über Kommunikation zu Ende. Niemand stellte Rückfragen. Ich erhielt keine Medaille. Zum ersten Mal dieses Wochenende war es still.

Es dauerte das Auftrinken unserer Aperol Spritzs, das Schneiden einer Orange, das Heraushauen der Eiswürfel aus der Eiswürfelform und das Anstoßen, bis mein Bruder mit dem F weitermachte. Bis jetzt hatten alle Spaß gehabt, und jetzt mussten wir uns vorsichtig aus diesem betretenem Schweigen herausglitschen. Ich wurde nicht mehr unterbrochen an diesem Wochenende, was das Reden in dieser Konstellation jedes Mal so unangenehm verlangsamte, dass ich mich fast gar nicht mehr zu Wort meldete. Immer wieder schreibe ich „Es tat mir leid“, „Ich fühlte mich scheiße“ in diesen Absatz. Sorry!, sage ich den lieben langen Tag zu allem und jedem, der es hören will. Sorry – Du brauchst dich nicht zu entschuldigen – Stimmt, sorry, heißt das Spiel. In meinem Essay will ich es nicht haben. Ich will nicht diejenige sein, deren Sprache auf dem Untersuchungstisch liegt.

Aufgabe 5: Wer muss sich an wen anpassen? Aber muss man? Geht das nicht anders?

Deborah Tannen führt die Existenz der typisch männlichen und der typisch weiblichen Kommunikationsweise, über die sie schreibt, darauf zurück, dass wir männlich oder weiblich sozialisiert wurden, entsprechend männliche oder weibliche Vorbilder imitiert und uns hauptsächlich mit entsprechend männlichen oder weiblichen Kindern ausgetauscht haben, die sich darum bemühten, das gleiche Bild zu erfüllen. Tun wir mal so,

which he was evaluating letter by letter (I'm not making this up). At one point or another, I won. All three fell silent. I brought my point about communication to a close. No one asked any questions. I didn't win a medal. For the first time that weekend, it was quiet.

This lasted until after we had drunk our Aperol spritzes—had sliced the orange, knocked the ice cubes out of the ice-cube tray, clinked our glasses—and then my brother picked up where he had left off, with the letter F. Until that point, we had all been having fun, and now we had to carefully slip out of this silence we had stepped into. That weekend I didn't get interrupted again, which slowed down the conversation in such an unpleasant way that I could barely bring myself to speak at all.

Exercise 5: Who must adapt to whom? Does one really have to? Is there no other way?

Deborah Tannen attributes the typically male and typically female communication styles she writes about to the fact that we were socialized as male or female, imitated either male or female role models, and mainly interacted with male or female children who tried hard to fulfill that same image. Let's pretend all of this is demonstrably true and let someone else dissect these claims in their own text. This early socialization, according to Tannen, has an impact on meta-language in communication, resulting in a typically masculine focus on status and a typically feminine focus on intimacy. Over and above the exchange of information (or underneath it?), men, Tannen says, typically negotiate their hierarchical position with regard to X characteristic (for example, expertise), emphasize their superior position, or conceal their inferior one, and, if they like you, they will avoid challenging you by asking questions about the discussion topic or about your well-being, so as not to risk your position in the hierarchy. Women typically negotiate the significance of the emotional

als wäre alles davon nachweislich wahr und lassen wir wen anders diese Behauptungen in einem eigenen Text auseinandernehmen. Daraus resultiert, so Tannen, ein typisch männlicher Fokus der Metasprache in Kommunikation auf Status, und ein typisch weiblicher Fokus der Metasprache in Kommunikation auf soziale Nähe. Über den Informationsaustausch hinweg (oder drunter her?) verhandeln Männer, laut Tannen, typischerweise ihre hierarchische Stellung hinsichtlich Merkmals X (z.B. Expertise), unterstreichen ihre überlegene Stellung oder kaschieren ihre unterlegene, und wenn sie dich mögen, vermeiden sie es, dich durch Rückfragen zum Diskussionspunkt oder deinem Wohlbefinden herauszufordern, um deine hierarchische Stellung nicht zu riskieren. Frauen verhandeln typischerweise die Signifikanz der emotionalen Beziehung der Gesprächsteilnehmenden, indem sie dich zum Beispiel fragen, was du davon denkst, wenn du schon lange nichts mehr gesagt hast oder deine seltsame Aussage so umformulieren, dass sie dir zustimmen können, und dazu finden sie noch ein Beispiel, wo sie etwas ähnliches erlebt haben oder illustrieren alternativ, dass sie in deiner Situation genauso gehandelt hätten.

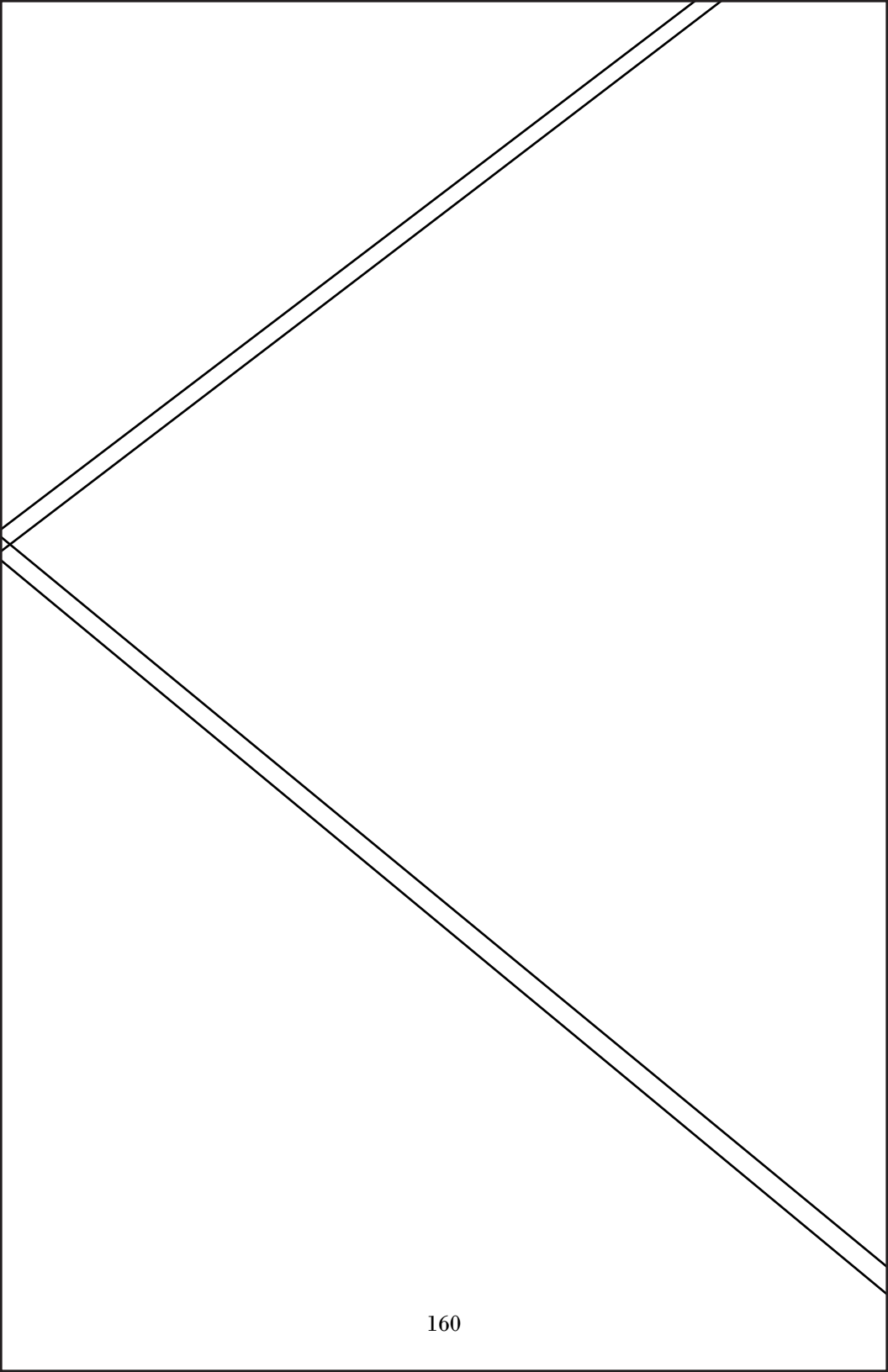
Stimmt das?

Seit Jahren denke ich jetzt darüber nach, und komme zu keinem Schluss. Akademisch, empirisch, privat, literarisch, essayistisch gehe ich vor und falsifiziere ständig jeden beliebigen Teil davon. Trotzdem fühlt es sich so wahr an, ich könnte es mir auf die Stirn tätowieren, damit alle Bescheid wissen.

connection between conversation participants. If you haven't said anything in a long time, they might, for instance, ask what you think of something, or they might rephrase some strange statement you made, in a way that allows them to agree with you, and then on top of that, they might find an example that either illustrates a time when they experienced something similar, or, alternatively, shows that they would have handled the situation in exactly the same way you did.

Is that true?

For years I have been thinking about this concept, and I still haven't come to a conclusion. Academically, empirically, privately, from literary and essayistic perspectives, I keep contradicting every single part of it. Nonetheless it feels so true, I could tattoo it across my forehead, so everyone would know it without a doubt.



word for word / palavra por palavra
Columbia University School of the Arts
Instituto Vera Cruz Formação de Escritores

Nota do Tradutor

“Para se equilibrar, você precisa buscar o equilíbrio” acompanha os pensamentos e os desafios de Eloisa conforme ela começa seu dia. Trata-se de um retrato íntimo da personagem, e o uso dos pronomes “*she*”, “*her*” e “*hers*” é uma das maneiras pela qual a autora cria esse efeito. Em português, a repetição desses pronomes pode causar o contrário, distanciando o leitor em vez de aproximá-lo da história. Na tradução, tentei chegar a um meio termo, usando os pronomes somente algumas vezes em cada página e sem repeti-los no mesmo parágrafo.

A autora escreve frases longas que intensificam a jornada mental e física de Eloisa. Para manter esse efeito e fazer com que essas frases funcionassem em português, tive que rearranjar algumas delas, colocando as ações em ordem cronológica para evitar qualquer confusão. Foi o caso, por exemplo, da frase “*When she was eleven, her mother drove her to a birthday party she’d finally been invited to by the kids in school, and told her on the way there to stop tugging at her curls*”, na qual as ações da mãe acontecem antes e depois da explicação. Na tradução, coloquei a explicação na frente e depois acrescentei as ações, que complementam uma à outra. O resultado foi: “Quando tinha 11 anos, finalmente foi convidada para uma festa de aniversário pelas crianças da escola, sua mãe a levou e, no caminho, disse que ela tinha que parar de puxar seus cachos”.

Durante o programa, eu e Miranda Mazariegos, minha parceira da Columbia, nos reunimos virtualmente todos os meses para falarmos sobre o progresso e nossas dúvidas sobre as traduções. Tivemos conversas sobre palavras com significados diferentes que têm a

mesma grafia em inglês. Um exemplo disso foi “tears” na frase “[...] *she started pulling at strands of her hair so forcefully that she could hear the tears in them*”. Em um primeiro momento, traduzi a palavra para “lágrimas”, entendendo que, no sentido mais poético, Eloisa estava sendo tão cruel com o próprio corpo que ele chorava por ajuda. No entanto, Miranda esclareceu que a intenção foi apontar os “rasgos” no cabelo da personagem. Usei a palavra que mais se encaixava na intenção original da autora, apesar de ela também ter gostado da minha interpretação.

No geral, tive uma ótima experiência no Word for Word, trabalhando com a professora Lívia Lakomy, que me guiou nessa jornada, e a Miranda, com quem tive trocas muito ricas. O programa me ensinou a desenvolver um novo olhar para as palavras, indo além do significado delas.

MIRANDA MAZARIEGOS

EXCERPT FROM *TO HOLD THE CENTER YOU NEED TO FIND A CENTER*

Eloisa had been letting the shower run for a while now, waiting for it to warm up. Both the mirror and the glass door were already fogged and the steam was bringing out the scent of the eucalyptus she kept by the sink, but she wasn't ready to get in. The simple task of removing her clothes had been enough to exhaust her already weary body, so she stood naked in front of the mirror, watching as her reflection disappeared behind the growing fog on the glass and she sighed with the heaviness of the day ahead. Soon, she stopped seeing her own reflection in the mirror but she stood there regardless, waiting for her body to react, for her brain to muster the energy to do the impossible task of showering—or even worse: of washing her hair.

Eloisa took a deep breath and stepped into the now scorching water, her skin immediately flaming in red blotches. She was slower than usual, slower than the day. She wasn't in a hurry. She wasn't eager to start this day nor any other day of the rest of her life, so it took her a second to reach out her hand and lower the temperature of the water; a beat until she listened to the screams coming from the red patches on her skin.

She began by untangling her curly hair as she always did, drenching it in conditioner and then using her fingers to separate each curl, untangling knot by knot as she went, transforming her hair from a single web to a collection, a gathering of separate curls. It had been a few days since she'd gotten herself into a long enough shower to do her hair properly, so the single mass of

**traduzido do inglês por
ISABELA MOREIRA**

**PARA SE EQUILIBRAR, VOCÊ
PRECISA BUSCAR O EQUILÍBRIO**

Eloisa tinha deixado a água do chuveiro cair por um tempo, esperando que aquecesse. O espelho e a porta de vidro estavam embaçados e o vapor realçava o cheiro do eucalipto que mantinha na pia, mas ela não estava preparada para entrar. O mero esforço de tirar a roupa foi o suficiente para exaurir seu corpo já cansado, então ficou pelada em frente ao espelho, vendo seu reflexo desaparecer por trás da crescente bruma e suspirou com o peso do dia à frente. Logo, ela parou de ver o próprio reflexo no espelho, porém ficou ali mesmo assim, esperando o corpo reagir, para seu cérebro criar forças para realizar a impossível tarefa de tomar banho — ou pior: de lavar os cabelos.

Eloisa respirou fundo e entrou na água já escaldante, sua pele ardendo imediatamente em manchas vermelhas. Ela estava mais lenta do que o normal, mais lenta do que o dia. Não tinha pressa. Não estava empolgada para começar este ou qualquer outro dia do resto de sua vida, por isso demorou um instante para esticar a mão e diminuir a temperatura da água; um compasso até dar ouvidos aos gritos vindos dos sulcos avermelhados em sua pele.

Como sempre, ela começou desembaraçando o cabelo enrolado, o encharcando com o condicionador e, em seguida, usando seus dedos para separar cada cacho, desfazendo nó por nó, transformando a teia de fios em uma coleção de cachos separados. Fazia alguns dias desde que tinha tomado um banho longo o suficiente para cuidar de seu cabelo do jeito certo, portanto, foi

curls was harder to pull apart today. She started slowly at first, but soon realized how monumental the task actually was, so when she lost the little patience she had, she started pulling at strands of her hair so forcefully that she could hear the tears in them; she could feel the pain in her scalp.

The effort was enough to make her arms ache, so she let them fall to her sides, surrendering in battle. She looked down at her bare feet, observing her fingernails long and yellow from the nail polish she'd forgotten to remove months ago and thinking how much her mother would roll her eyes if she could see her, what an embarrassing woman she'd become, she couldn't even take care of herself. Yet taking care of herself was always the most daunting of tasks.

Now, long clumps of hair washed away through the drain, and Eloisa realized she had been pulling at her hair for so long she was actually tearing it out. *Nothing new*, she thought, she'd been pulling at her hair for as long as she could remember. When she was eleven, her mother drove her to a birthday party she'd finally been invited to by the kids in school, and told her on the way there to stop tugging at her curls. "It makes you look anxious," she'd said, "And no one wants to be friends with the anxious girl." The day before, she'd taken Eloisa to get a haircut she claimed would stop her from pulling at the strands of her hair cutting it all the way up to her ears. "If you can't reach them, you won't pull them," she said.

At the party, Eloisa had done her best to keep her hands from going up and towards her hair, struggling to keep them still at all, but she couldn't really control them and the more she thought about it, the more she wanted to do it, the more her hands became separate entities, serpents sneaking their way up searching for something to bite. At the very top of her head, she'd find the

mais difícil separar a massa de cachos. Primeiro, ela foi devagar, mas logo percebeu a dificuldade imensa dessa missão ao perder a pouca paciência que tinha, começando a puxar mechas com tanta força que conseguia ouvir os rasgos entre elas, podia sentir a dor em seu couro cabeludo.

O esforço foi o suficiente para que seus braços ficassem doloridos, então deixou que caíssem, assumindo a derrota. Olhou para seus pés descalços, observando as unhas longas e amareladas do esmalte que esqueceu de remover meses atrás, e pensando no quanto sua mãe reviraria os olhos se pudesse ver a mulher constrangedora que ela se tornou, não conseguia nem cuidar de si mesma. Ainda assim, cuidar de si mesma sempre foi uma das tarefas mais difíceis de realizar.

Longos tufos escoaram pelo ralo, e Eloisa percebeu que estava puxando o próprio cabelo por tanto tempo que o estava arrancando. *Nada de novo*, pensou, ela vinha puxando o cabelo há mais tempo do que conseguia lembrar. Quando tinha 11 anos, finalmente foi convidada para uma festa de aniversário pelas crianças da escola, sua mãe a levou e, no caminho, disse que ela tinha que parar de puxar seus cachos. “Isso te faz parecer ansiosa”, disse ela. “E ninguém quer fazer amizade com a menina ansiosa.” No dia anterior, tinha levado Eloisa para cortar o cabelo na altura das orelhas, o que afirmou que faria ela parar de puxar suas mechas. “Se você não consegue alcançar, não vai puxá-las”, ela disse.

Na festa, Eloisa fez seu melhor para impedir que suas mãos tocassem seu cabelo, se esforçando para mantê-las paradas, mas não as conseguia controlar de verdade e, quanto mais pensava sobre isso, mais suas mãos se tornavam entidades separadas, serpentes deslizando para cima à procura de algo para atacar, mais queria fazer isso. Ela encontrava os cachos bem no topo da

curls, and she'd pull at them, the new haircut having the exact opposite effect her mother had intended. Eloisa hated the hairdresser ever since, it had taken her years to grow her curls out and even decades later she'd rather cut them herself than have some stranger tell her she just knew how to work with *such complicated hair*.

Now, entire clumps of curls went down the drain as Eloisa suddenly realized she was heaving. She tried to catch her breath to avoid the sound of her cries from drifting into the other room. She was alone, but sharing a room with her sister had taught her how to weep in silence, how to retain the pain for herself. The water from the shower had masked the tears streaming from her eyes and Eloisa didn't realize it until it was too late, until the snot from her nose was trickling down her chin, down her breasts, sliding down her tummy and her legs and her calves and her feet until it swirled down, down through the drain with an infinitesimal part of her scalp.

Doctors had always told her she had a good pain tolerance, which always made her snort. *Cerotes*, she thought, rolling her eyes—assholes. She associated high pain tolerance with strength, and she'd never considered herself strong. She was oversensitive, as easily collapsible as a garbage can mounted with trash, where one last candy wrapper caused the entire pyramid to tumble. Her body's pain tolerance might've been high—she could burn her skin with hot water and tear her hair apart out of frustration—but she thought that was nothing compared to the mountains of trash inside. It had been like this since she could remember. The vessel had never been large enough to hold whatever lived inside, so it had been forced to seek pain in the form of flesh. Hair ripped out, broken bones, scratches. Pain that begets pain; pain that eases pain. It was hard to explain to the doctors who said that pain tolerance was high. They asked what pain, what had caused it,

cabeça e os puxava, o novo corte de cabelo tendo o efeito oposto do que a mãe dela queria. Eloisa odiou o cabeleireiro desde então, levou anos para crescer seus cachos e, mesmo décadas depois, preferia cortar ela mesma do que ter algum estranho dizendo que já sabia como lidar com um tipo de cabelo *tão complicado*.

Tufos inteiros de cachos desceram pelo ralo quando, de repente, Eloisa percebeu que estava ofegante. Tentou recuperar o fôlego para evitar que o som de seus soluços fosse ouvido no outro cômodo. Estava sozinha, mas dividir o quarto com a irmã a ensinou como chorar em silêncio e manter a dor para si mesma. A água do chuveiro cobriu as lágrimas caindo de seus olhos e, quando já era tarde demais, Eloisa se deu conta de que o muco de seu nariz estava escorrendo para o queixo, os seios, deslizando pela barriga, pernas, panturrilhas e pés até sumir ralo abaixo com uma parte ínfima de seu couro cabeludo.

Médicos constantemente diziam que ela era tolerante à dor, o que sempre a irritou. *Cerotes*, pensou ela, revirando os olhos — cuzões. Ela associava a alta tolerância à dor com força, e nunca tinha se considerado forte. Era hipersensível, tão fácil de tombar quanto uma lata de lixo que, de tão cheia, desaba com mais um papel de bala. A tolerância de seu corpo à dor talvez até fosse alta — ela podia queimar sua pele na água quente e arrancar os cabelos só de frustração —, mas isso não era nada comparado às montanhas de lixo em seu interior. Tinha sido assim desde que conseguia se lembrar. O corpo nunca foi grande o suficiente para segurar o que vivia lá dentro, então foi forçado a encontrar a dor na carne. Cabelos arrancados, ossos quebrados, arranhões. Dor que gera dor, dor que alivia dor. Era difícil explicar aos médicos que disseram que sua tolerância à dor era alta. Eles questionaram que dor era essa, qual era a causa, será que ela poderia explicá-la, descrevê-la ou classificá-la numa escala de um a dez. Dez, dizia ela,

could she explain it, describe it, give them a score from one to ten. Ten, she would say, without hesitating. They never understood.

When she stepped out of the shower, her outfit was neatly folded in the bed that was made for her, her apartment swept clean. She got a whiff of eucalyptus again and stood in the middle of her room, not bothering to cover her wet body with a towel, staring at the neatly folded clothes on the bed. She couldn't possibly have done that herself. She looked around the room to make sure there was no one there, an uncanny sense of intrusion building up in her uterus, in her vagina, in the most vulnerable parts of herself, like there was someone watching her—someone who had been in her room while she showered.

She recognized the tension in her stomach, the way her entire body paralyzed when she was scared. How her organs got tense one by one like they were freezing in a snowstorm and her brain became too foggy to make commands. The window blinds were raised and the sun was piercing in, welcoming. Suddenly, she saw herself earlier that morning pulling up the blinds, smiling at the sun, breathing in the fresh air of the eucalyptus. All parts of her mind that had been scrambled, floating above her body, suddenly came down to earth.

She'd gotten out of bed. She'd dragged her feet towards the bathroom, her eyesight still blurry with the languid fog of sleep and she'd stumbled over the counter, making the little wooden sculpture Jorge had brought to her the Christmas prior fall into the floor, shattering into a million pieces.

Eloisa's apartments abroad had always been decorated in objects that she brought from home. By the time she got to New York, she'd lived in ten different apartments in six different cities, her friends always joking about

sem hesitar. Eles nunca entendiam.

Quando saiu do chuveiro, suas roupas para o dia estavam dobradas perfeitamente na cama feita para ela em seu apartamento limpo. Sentiu de novo o aroma do eucalipto e ficou parada no meio do quarto, sem se preocupar em cobrir o corpo com uma toalha, encarando as roupas dobradas com capricho na cama. Não tinha como ela ter feito isso. Olhou ao redor do quarto para se certificar de que não havia ninguém ali, uma sensação estranha de intrusão surgindo em seu útero, sua vagina, em suas partes mais vulneráveis, como se tivesse alguém a observando — alguém que esteve em seu quarto enquanto tomava banho.

Ela reconheceu a tensão em seu estômago, a forma como o corpo inteiro se paralisava quando estava com medo. Seus órgãos se enrijeciam um por um como se estivessem congelando em uma nevasca e seu cérebro ficasse confuso demais para dar ordens. As persianas estavam erguidas, com o sol convidativo dando as caras. De repente, ela se imaginou naquela manhã erguendo as persianas, sorrindo para o sol, respirando o ar fresco do eucalipto. Todas as partes de sua mente que estavam embaralhadas, flutuando acima de seu corpo, de repente voltaram à realidade.

Tinha saído da cama e se arrastado em direção ao banheiro, sua visão ainda embaçada com a névoa cansada do sono, e esbarrado na bancada, fazendo com que a pequena escultura de madeira que Jorge tinha trazido para ela no Natal anterior caísse no chão, se partindo em um milhão de pedaços.

Os apartamentos de Eloisa no exterior sempre eram decorados com objetos trazidos de casa. Quando chegou em Nova York, já tinha morado em dez apartamentos, em seis cidades diferentes. Os amigos a zoavam por sua incapacidade de criar raízes, seu medo de compromisso,

her inability to settle, her fear of commitment, her past trauma or whatever other buzzwords were popping up on social media. It wasn't anything like that, though. Eloisa got her restless nature from her grandmother, who'd never quite settled anywhere either, losing her connection to the earth. She'd moved from city to city to city from the moment she got a ring on her finger and continued the tradition until she was forced—an immigration issue, no more than whatever amount of days in the country to keep her visa— and so she'd cheated the system she'd created herself and had resorted to moving from house to house to house.

She didn't seem to have, however, the perpetual state of longing that Eloisa lived in, though. Eloisa had gotten that all on her own. Her grandmother built a home out of every house, while Eloisa filled her entire apartment with remnants of hers —its colors, its smells, its food, its pictures that pretended to be the real landscapes and art pieces that were bought in markets and squished into luggage to ensure their safe arrival in their new country. By the time she was starting to get a sense that the small apartment could become a home, when she started to see the artwork as just that and the crafts became a backdrop to the daily mess that obfuscated her entire place, she'd get cardboard boxes, pack everything up, and move. Again, and again, and again, following in the footsteps of her restless grandmother, carrying her restlessness, lugging around her baggage, too.

The wooden sculpture that she'd shattered earlier in the morning had already traveled to three different apartments with her, always finding a home on the TV counter, right next to the frame that held a picture of her best friends from high school with a backdrop of the lake where they used to spend long weekends away from school. The warmth of the photo, the blue and green tones framed by light brown seemed to give the small

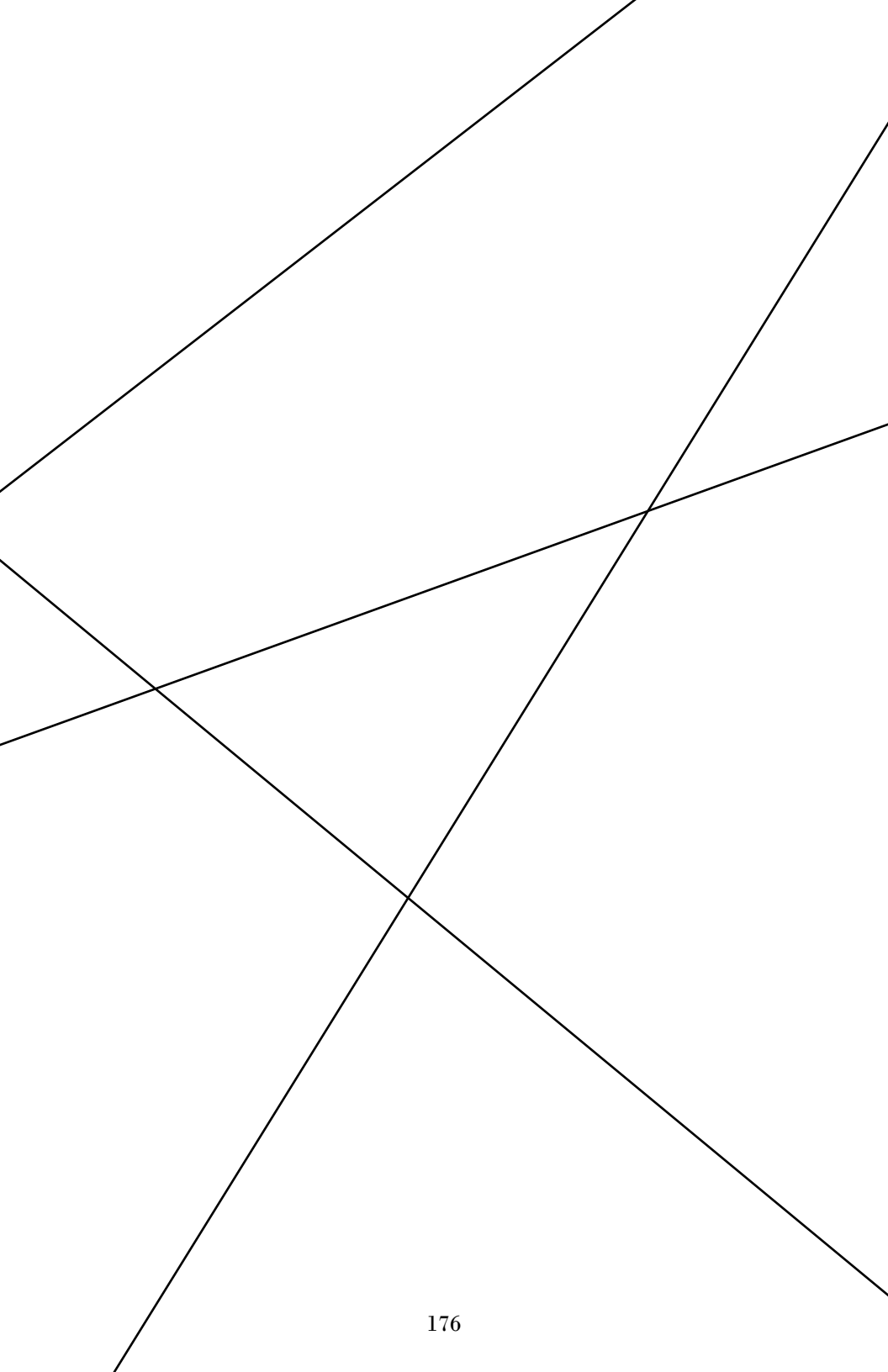
seu trauma do passado, ou quais fossem as expressões da vez nas redes sociais. Mas não era nada do tipo. Eloisa herdou sua natureza inquieta de sua avó, que também nunca se assentou em lugar algum, perdendo a conexão com a terra. Ela se mudou de cidade em cidade em cidade, do momento em que o anel foi colocado em seu dedo, e continuou a tradição até quando foi forçada — um problema de imigração, algo a ver com qual fosse a quantidade de dias que tinha que ficar no país para manter seu visto —, e então burlou o sistema que criou para si mesma e resolveu se mudar de casa em casa em casa.

Ela, no entanto, não parecia ter vivido no mesmo estado de ansiedade permanente que a neta. Eloisa chegou nesse ponto sozinha. Sua avó construiu um lar em todas as casas, enquanto ela enchia seu apartamento inteiro com resquícios de si mesma — suas cores, cheiros, suas comidas, fotos que se passavam por paisagens reais, e obras de arte que foram compradas em feiras e enfiadas na mala para chegarem inteiras em seu novo país. Quando os quadros e os artesanatos começavam a parecer o cenário da bagunça diária que ofuscava seu apartamento e sentia que este poderia se tornar um lar, ela pegava as caixas de papelão, fazia as malas e se mudava. De novo, de novo e de novo, seguindo os passos de sua avó, carregando a inquietação e a sua bagagem também.

A escultura de madeira quebrada no início da manhã já tinha viajado com ela para três apartamentos diferentes, e sempre acabava ficando no rack da TV, bem ao lado do porta-retrato com a foto de suas melhores amigas do colegial no lago onde costumavam passar os fins de semana longe da escola. O carinho presente na imagem, os tons de azul e verde emoldurados por marrom-claro pareciam deixar o ambiente ainda mais aconchegante. Enquanto a neve se acumulava na pequena e esquecida varanda que ficava de frente para seu apartamento, ela

apartment a warmer shade, too. As snow accumulated in the little forgotten and poorly maintained terrace that her apartment faced, she closed her eyes and could almost feel it: the warm, humid air of home.

fechou seus olhos e quase pôde sentir — o ar quente e úmido de casa.



Translator's Note

Life is Just Like That is a novel reliant on place. Its narrators move through the streets of Diadema, a town about 16 miles from the Brazilian capital of Sao Paulo, inhabiting the place and bringing it to life, its 2008 iteration vivid not only through its streets and parks and buildings, but also through the urban developments that have shaped the city and life within it. To capture this transformation, I have kept all names of streets, places, and people in Portuguese. Most of these names don't require glossing, except for Praça da Moça, which means Girls' Square. By retaining the Portuguese, I respect the importance of place in this novel, and encourage Anglophone readers to look into what sparks their curiosity, making the book a window to Diadema both in Brazil and beyond.

Additionally, nicknames—such as Filmão, Julinha, and Saulão—carry a sense of endearment in Portuguese for which there is no direct English translation, and therefore I have kept them in their source language.

As I translated, I sought to faithfully follow the text of *A vida é assim mesmo*, respecting the author's worldview through the careful selection of each word.

ISABELA MOREIRA

A VIDA É ASSIM MESMO

Capítulo um

Um, dois, três, inspira. Quatro, cinco, seis, expira. Não funciona. Vira ofegante à esquerda na rua Anchieta e desacelera o ritmo. Respira fundo apoiado as mãos nos joelhos. Tinha confiado nas próprias pernas para levá-lo para casa e, dos quatro possíveis, foi parar no pior. Apertou as alças da mochila e se forçou a continuar andando o mais rápido que podia. Sete, oito, nove, como odiava aquela subida infernal, com uns degraus enormes que mais atrapalham do que ajudavam, o prédio abandonado da Telefônica cheio de pichações nas laterais de azulejo. Dez, onze, doze, do outro lado da rua, um terreno também abandonado, não é à toa que tinha tanto assaltado ali, podia ser sete da manhã ou sete da noite, essa era uma possibilidade, ali no Sol do meio dia mesmo, se resistisse e não entregasse a carteira e o celular, poderia levar uma. Treze, catorze, quinze, pior que passar pela Anchieta era morrer nela.

Conseguiu retomar a respiração ao chegar na avenida Manoel da Nóbrega, que além de ser onde morava, tinha o bônus de ser plana. Andou pela calçada esquerda para fugir dos estudantes que saíam da escola adventista do outro lado, e passou rapidamente pela fachada da escola Manoel da Nóbrega, ainda bem que o povo só era liberado às 13h, não estava em condições de esbarrar em nenhum conhecido. Um quarteirão, dois quarteirões, três quarteirões, o prédio cinza escuro com faixas brancas, cujo portão se abriu assim que ele se aproximou.

— E aí, Saulo! — disse o porteiro colocando a cabeça para fora da cabine da portaria — Sua mãe acabou de passar por aqui com umas caixas.

**translated from the portuguese by
MIRANDA MAZARIEGOS**

LIFE IS JUST LIKE THAT

Chapter One

One, two, three, inhale. Four, five, six, exhale. It didn't work. Panting, he took a left on Rua Anchieta and slowed his pace. He rested his hands on his knees and took a deep breath. He had trusted his legs to take him home but, of the four possible routes, he'd chosen the worst one. He tightened the shoulder straps on his backpack and forced himself to keep walking as fast as he could. Seven, eight, nine, he hated that hellish climb, with its huge steps that instead of helping created an obstacle, and the abandoned Telefonica building, its tiled walls covered in graffiti. Ten, eleven, twelve, on the other side of the street there's a vacant lot; no wonder so many people are robbed there, it could be seven in the morning or seven at night, being robbed is always a possibility. Even under the midday sun it was hopeless, you couldn't avoid handing over your purse or cell phone. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Even worse than walking through Rua Anchieta would be dying on it.

As he approached Avenida Manoel da Nobrega, he managed to catch his breath. That was the avenue where he lived. Plus, it had the advantage of being flat. He walked on the left-hand sidewalk to avoid the students coming out of the Adventist school on the other side, and he quickly passed by the Escola Manoel da Nobrega, which luckily didn't let its students out until 1 p.m. He wasn't in the mood to run into anyone he knew. One block, two blocks, three blocks, the gates to the dark gray building opened as he approached.

Saulo sentiu um aperto no peito. Respondeu o porteiro com um aceno de cabeça e correu para o salão de jogos do prédio. Sem acender a luz, ele desviou das mesas de pingue-pongue e sinuca, tirou a mochila cheia de bottons de filmes do Tarantino das costas, a jogou no chão e se sentou na cadeira de uma das mesas usadas para jogos de cartas.

As lágrimas vieram aos poucos e foram se multiplicando até se transformarem num choro descontrolado. Saulo cruzou os braços em torno da própria barriga, como se estivesse abraçando a si mesmo, apertando esse abraço conforme a intensidade do que lutava para sair do seu peito crescia. Saiu da escola correndo para ver a mãe, que não passava em casa há mais de um mês, para chegar no prédio e perceber que não conseguiria. Se estava carregando caixas pelo condomínio, ela já tinha tomado a decisão de ir embora de vez. Ele soltou um soluço misturado com um grito de dor.

A luz da sala de jogos se acendeu. Saulo encostou a cabeça na mesa, de olhos fechados.

— Saulo? — a voz perguntou se aproximando dele — Você tá bem?

Ele virou o rosto em direção à voz e abriu um pouco o olho esquerdo, vendo os próprios cílios e a figura de uma garota.

— Não é da sua conta, Julia — respondeu ele para Julinha, a irmã mais nova de seu melhor amigo, Matheus, do apartamento 42. Ela sempre se metia onde não era chamada — Cai fora, vai — Saulo fechou o olho e voltou a cabeça para a posição inicial.

— Já que você diz, dono do salão — ela soou magoada, fazendo um fio de culpa surgir no peito de Saulo — Vim só buscar o meu UNO que tinha esquecido aqui — Julinha ficou em silêncio, mas continuava a se movimentar pelo salão.

Passados alguns instantes em silêncio, Saulo pensou que ela tivesse ido embora. A voz dela, no entanto, estava muito próxima a ele, desta vez,

“What’s up, Saulo!” the doorman said, sticking his head out of his booth. “Your mother just left with some boxes.” Saulo felt his chest tighten.

He replied with a nod and ran towards the building’s game room. Without turning the light on, he squeezed between the ping-pong and snooker tables, threw off his backpack covered in Tarantino movie pins and sat down on a chair at one of the card tables. At first the tears arrived one by one, and then they multiplied, transforming into an uncontrollable torrent. Saulo crossed his arms over his stomach as if he were hugging himself, tightening the embrace as the intensity of what he was carrying inside his chest grew. He had run out of school to see his mother—who hadn’t been home in over a month—only to get to the building and realize he wouldn’t see her after all. If she was carrying boxes through the neighborhood, she had already made the decision to leave for good. He let out a wail: a sob mixed with pain.

The lights in the game room turned on. Saulo placed his forehead on the table, his eyes closed. “Saulo,” a voice called, as someone approached him, “are you okay?”

He turned his head towards the voice and slightly opened his left eye, seeing only his own eyelashes and the shadow of a girl.

“It’s none of your business, Julia,” he told Julinha, his best friend Matheus’ youngest sister, from apartment 42. She was always showing up in places where she wasn’t welcome. “Get out, go away.” Saulo closed his eye again and turned his head back to its original position.

“If you say so, room-owner.” She sounded upset, a thread of guilt unraveling in Saulo’s chest, “I came to

hesitante:

— Peguei o elevador com a sua mãe... Ela perguntou se eu sabia onde você tava... Saulo abriu os olhos, deixando mais lágrimas caírem. Em vez de olhar para Julinha, que parecia estar sentada do outro lado da mesa, ficou encarando o material verde que cobria a mesa até que a visão turva o tornasse apenas um borrão verde.

— Saulo? — perguntou Julinha com delicadeza — Quer que eu chame alguém? Seu pai, meu irmão...? Posso tentar mandar uma mensagem pra Thalita, ainda deve ser dia na Irlanda.

— Não, Julia, só quero ficar aqui um pouco e me distrair com qualquer coisa — respondeu ele, enxugando as lágrimas com a gola da camiseta do uniforme escolar. Ele respirou fundo.

Julinha se ajeitou na cadeira e colocou o cotovelo esquerdo na mesa, apoiando o rosto na mão.

— Você sabia que aquela atriz de *Cantando na chuva* é a mãe da princesa Leia, de Star Wars, na vida real?

— Óbvio que sim — resmungou. Saulo era aficionado por cinema e ajudava seu padrinho, o Nestor, algumas vezes por semana na locadora dele no Jaú, o conjunto residencial que ficava na divisa entre Diadema e São Paulo. Sabia indicar um filme só pela postura do cliente e poderia dar a ficha técnica dos filmes de maior bilheteria dos últimos 30 anos sem qualquer preparo anterior. Odiava quando outras pessoas tentavam ensiná-lo coisas que ele já sabia. Principalmente quando a pessoa era uma menina dois anos mais nova que ele.

— Então... Nos anos 50 ela casou com o Eddie Fisher, que era um cantor e apresentador da época. Eles eram considerados os queridinhos da América e tiveram dois filhos, a princesa Leia é um deles. A Debbie era melhor amiga da Elizabeth Taylor, que obviamente você sabe quem é — ressaltou Julinha com deboche. Saulo escolheu ignorar, sentindo seu corpo relaxar conforme prestava atenção na história — O Eddie vivia traindo a

look for the UNO cards I left here.”

Julinha remained silent as she went on moving around the room. After a couple of minutes, Saulo thought she had left. But her voice came closer again, this time hesitant: “I ran into your mother in the elevator. She asked if I knew where you were...”

Saulo opened his eyes, letting even more tears fall. Instead of turning towards Julinha, who he thought was sitting at the other side of the table, he stared at the green fabric that covered the table until his vision turned it into a blur.

“Saulo?” Julinha asked delicately, “Do you want me to call someone? Your dad, my brother...? I can try to message Thalita, it should still be daytime in Ireland.”

“No, Julia, I just want to stay here for a while and take my mind off of it,” he replied, wiping his tears with the collar of his school uniform. He took a deep breath.

Julinha came to sit beside him and placed her left elbow on the table, letting her head rest on her hand. “Did you know that the actress from *Singing in the Rain* is Princess Leia’s mother in real life?”

“Of course I do,” he grumbled. Saulo was a cinephile. A few times a week, he helped his godfather, Nestor, at his rental store in Jaú, a residential area on the border between Diadema and São Paulo. He knew how to choose a movie just by observing the client’s behavior and, with no special preparation, he could provide every technical detail of the highest-grossing movies from the past thirty years. He hated when other people tried to teach him things he already knew. Especially when that person was a girl two years younger than him.

“So, in the 50s, she got married to Eddie Fisher, who was

Debbie, mas ela se recusou a se separar dele. Ele acabou pedindo o divórcio... para casar com a Elizabeth Taylor.

Saulo abriu os olhos e viu Julinha o encarando.

— Continuo ou caio fora?

— Continua — fechou os olhos de novo.

— Mas é o que dizem, né, para todo homem que acha que é malandro, existe uma mulher que entende da malandragem. O Eddie foi o quarto marido da Elizabeth, ainda viriam mais quatro casamentos depois — Julinha soltou uma risada — Ela cansou dele, foi filmar Cleópatra, deu o pé nele e foi casar com o Richard Burton. O Eddie nem pôde ir atrás

da Debbie Reynolds, ela já tinha resolvido a vida dela. No fim, ele teve mais uns casamentos curtos com outras mulheres e a Debbie e a Elizabeth voltaram a ser amigas, e continuaram assim até a morte da Elizabeth.

Saulo abriu os olhos e se espreguiçou. Corrigindo a postura na cadeira, olhou para Julinha pela primeira vez. O pior já tinha passado.

— Tá se sentindo melhor? — perguntou ela em tom cauteloso. Retomando o foco, Saulo percebeu que ela estava com o rosto vermelho, de uniforme no corpo e uma caixa de UNO na mão.

— Julia, sua doida, você desceu e nunca mais voltou! — Matheus surgiu na porta do salão de braços cruzados — Já é quase uma da tarde e você tem treino de natação — andando em direção à irmã, percebeu a presença de Saulo, o que fez sua fisionomia relaxar

— Saulão! E aí, seu puto?

Matheus colocou a mão no ombro de Saulo, que levantou e deu alguns tapinhas nas costas do amigo.

— Você anda sumido, o que tá rolando?

— Nada, só na correria mesmo — Saulo se desvencilhou de Matheus e pegou a mochila que tinha largado no chão, se apressando em direção à porta — Preciso subir, a gente se fala depois.

— A Julia não ficou te alugando não, né?

a singer and performer back then. They were America's sweethearts and had two children: Princess Leia is one of them. Debbie, as you know, obviously, was Elizabeth Taylor's best friend," she said, provoking him.

Saulo chose to ignore it and listened to the story as he let his body relax. "Eddie kept cheating on Debbie, but she refused to leave him. Eventually, he ended up asking her for a divorce so he could get married to Elizabeth Taylor."

Saulo opened his eyes and saw Julinha staring at him. "Should I keep going or should I leave?"

"Keep going." He closed his eyes again.

"But that's what they say, right? For every man who thinks he's savvy, there is a woman who understands savviness. Eddie was Elizabeth's fourth husband, and there were another four weddings after that." Julinha let out a laugh, "She got tired of him, went to film Cleopatra, and then got married to Richard Burton. Eddie couldn't go back to Debbie Reynolds, she had a new life already. In the end, he married other women, always for a short time, while Debbie and Elizabeth went back to being friends until Elizabeth's death."

Saulo opened his eyes and stretched his body. He sat up straight and turned to look at Julinha for the first time. The worst had passed.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked warily. He finally focused his gaze and saw that her face was blushing, and she was wearing a school uniform and holding a box of UNO cards in her hand.

"Julia, are you crazy? You ran off and never came back!" Matheus stood by the game room door, his arms crossed. "It's almost one in the afternoon and you have swim practice," he said, walking towards his sister. As

— Matheus! — a garota arregalou os olhos para o irmão — Você é insuportável!
— Insuportável é você!
— Tchau, gente — Saulo disse ao sair do salão sem olhar para trás.

Em vez de subir para o apartamento, Saulo saiu do prédio, atravessou a rua e entrou na Sebastiana Machado Teodoro — odiava as ruas íngremes, exceto quando podia descê-las. Já na rua de baixo, cruzou a rua e atravessou a Praça da Moça, uma grande e abandonada área verde onde ficava uma biblioteca, o Teatro Clara Nunes, adolescentes namorando e muita gente circulando com propósitos dúbios. O professor Sebastião, um cara bem descompensado que ensinou ciência para a turma de Saulo na 8ª série, adorava repetir a história da Praça da Moça como se nunca a tivesse contado antes: ali ficava um colégio interno só para mulheres e as moças não podiam sair, então ficavam fofocando e dando risadinhas na praça. “Assim surgiu a praça da Moça”, Saulo conseguia ouvir a voz do professor dizendo. Ele chacoalhou a cabeça como que para se livrar daquela memória.

Do outro lado da praça foi em direção à rua Artur Sampaio. Entrou na lanchonete da Judite, pediu uma Coca-Cola gelada e um hambúrguer para levar e desceu mais a rua até chegar no número 89, a locadora Rocky & Rambo.

Sheila estava no balcão abrindo um pacote de capas azuis de DVD a serem usadas nos empréstimos. Essa era uma regra levada muito a sério por Nestor: depois que um cliente destruiu a capa de uma edição especial de *Rambo II*, ele nunca mais foi o mesmo.

— E aí, Filmão — Sheila sorriu para ele e voltou a se concentrar nas embalagens. Filmão foi o apelido

he became aware of Saulo's presence, his expression softened, "Saulão! What's going on?"

Matheus put his hand on Saulo's shoulder, as Saulo stood up and patted his friend's back. "I haven't seen you around, what's up, bro?"

"Nothing, I'm just in a hurry," Saulo said as he moved away from Matheus, picked up the backpack he'd dropped on the floor, and rushed towards the door. "I need to go, let's catch up later."

"Julia isn't wasting your time, is she?"

"Matheus!" the girl widened her eyes at her brother, "You're such a pain!"

"*You* are a pain!"

"Bye, guys," Saulo said, leaving the room without looking back.

Instead of going back up to his apartment, Saulo left the building, crossed the street and turned onto Rua Sebastiana Machado Teodoro. He usually hated its steep steps, but not when he was descending them. Once he reached the street below, he crossed it and went through the Praça da Moça, a large green lawn where there was a library, the Teatro Clara Nunes, teenagers in love and lots of people circulating for mysterious reasons. The disheveled guy who'd taught Saulo 8th grade science, Professor Sebastião, loved retelling the story of Praça da Moça as if he'd never told it before: there used to be a boarding school for women and girls, and because they couldn't leave, they would stay in the square, gossiping and giggling. "That's how Praça da Moça began," Saulo

que Saulo ganhou do padrinho uns anos antes, quando começou a assistir vários filmes por semana e passava na locadora todos os dias. Nestor o adorava desde pequeno, um amor que triplicou quando pôde começar a compartilhar sua obsessão com filmes com ele.

Os pais de Saulo acharam uma besteira ele passar tanto tempo na locadora e querer trabalhar lá alguns dias por semana. Era um dos poucos tópicos sobre os quais eles concordaram em muito tempo. “O que tem para você lá?”, questionou a mãe. “O Nestor sempre viveu no mundo da lua”, disse o pai. “Vai ser mais uma distração para os seus estudos.” Eles não entendiam como aquele lugar deixava o filho feliz ou que Nestor abriu ainda mais as portas da locadora ao perceber que o afilhado andava aborrecido com as brigas entre cada vez mais constantes entre os pais e o péssimo clima que se instalou de forma permanente em casa.

— Voltou para a fase Amélie Poulain? — perguntou Saulo apontando para o cabelo curto com franja também curta de Sheila. Dava para saber o que ela vinha assistindo pela cor e corte de cabelo dela, que mudava de tempos em tempos — Pensei que você fosse legal demais para gostar de um filme depois que virou mainstream.

Sheila jogou o resto de plástico amassado das capas na direção dele, que tentou desviar, mas não conseguiu.

— Moleque chato — Sheila deu risada — Você precisa arrumar uma namorada para ter mais o que fazer.

— Eu namoro há anos — Saulo colocou a sacola com o lanche no balcão e se agachou para pegar o plástico no chão e jogá-lo no lixo — Você é quem está precisando de uma.

— Você sempre fala dessa namorada, mas nunca trouxe ela aqui... Será que ela existe mesmo?

— Existe, pô, ela tá...

— ...fazendo intercâmbio na Irlanda —

could still hear his professor saying. He shook his head to free himself from the memory.

On the other side of the square, he went towards Rua Artur Sampaio. He entered Judite's cafeteria, ordered a cold Coca-Cola and a hamburger to go and kept going down the street until he reached number 89: the movie rental store Rocky & Rambo.

Sheila was behind the counter, opening a package of blue DVD covers that would be used for rentals. Nestor was strict about that rule; after a client destroyed the cover of a special edition of Rambo II, he was never the same.

"What's up, Filmão." Sheila smiled at him and went back to the packaging. Filmão was a nickname that Saulo had earned from his godfather a few years earlier, when he started watching so many movies and spending entire days at his rental store. Nestor had adored him since he was young, the kind of love that only tripled when they were able to bond over their shared obsession with movies.

Saulo's parents both thought it was ridiculous that he spent so much time at the video store and that he even insisted on working there several days a week. It was the one topic they had agreed on in a long time.

"What are you going to do there?" his mother had asked. "Nestor always has his head in the clouds," his father had said, "It's going to distract you from your studies!" They didn't understand why the place made their son so happy. Even worse, they didn't realize that Nestor had opened the doors to his store even further when he noticed that his godson was upset by his parents' constant fighting and the terrible atmosphere clouding his home.

completou Sheila revirando os olhos — Quando ela volta?

— Daqui uns três meses — respondeu Saulo, sentindo uma pontada no estômago — Mas pera aí, para de tentar fugir do assunto, você é quem tá solteirona aí.

— É um estado passageiro, não permanente. Sexta vou sair com uma mulher meio careta, mas que parece ser legal.

— Se for mesmo, até domingo ela já vai ter se mudado para o seu apartamento — Saulo pegou a sacola com o lanche e saiu correndo para a sala dos fundos ouvindo os gritos de “que audácia, garoto” e as risadas de Sheila.

A sala estava tomada pelo Sol do meio-dia, que cobria a mesa redonda onde os funcionários costumavam comer e fazer reuniões. Saulo fechou as persianas e se sentou para comer. Estava terminando o lanche quando Henrique, o gerente da locadora, entrou na sala com um iogurte e uma colher na mão. Ele sorriu ao ver Saulo.

— Opa, Filmão! Como você tá, cara? — Henrique deu um abraço de lado rápido em Saulo, que ainda estava sentado. Uma das melhores partes de conviver com Henrique e tê-lo como chefe algumas vezes por semana era que ele nunca dava aquela colidida entre peitorais e tapinhas fortes nas costas ao cumprimentar outros homens. Ele era um metaleiro enorme, cheio de tatuagens, cabelo comprido e tudo aquilo que a mãe de Saulo usava para descrever um marginal — Cara, eu tava torcendo pra você passar aqui hoje, tenho uma coisa maravilhosa para te mostrar.

“Back to the Amelie Poulain phase?” Saulo asked, pointing at Sheila’s short hair and bangs. You could tell what movies she’d been watching by the color and cut of her hair, which changed from time to time. “I thought you were too cool to like a film after it became mainstream,” he said. Sheila threw the rest of the crumpled plastic from the DVD covers in Saulo’s direction. He tried to dodge but failed. “You’re so annoying,” Sheila said with a laugh, “go get a girlfriend to keep yourself busy.”

“I’ve had a girlfriend for years,” Saulo said, as he put his lunch bag on the table. He crouched to pick up the plastic from the floor to throw it in the trash can. “You’re the one who needs one.”

“You always talk about that girlfriend, but you never bring her around. Does she even exist?”

“She exists, she is...”

“...doing an exchange program in Ireland,” Sheila finished the sentence, rolling her eyes, “and when does she get back?”

“In about three months,” Saulo replied, feeling his body tense up, “But wait—stop trying to change the subject. You’re the spinster here!”

“It’s a temporary condition, not permanent. Friday I’m going out with an old-fashioned lady, but she seems cool,” Sheila said.

“If that’s true, by Sunday she’ll have moved into your apartment.” Saulo took the lunch bag and ran to the back room, hearing Sheila’s laughter as she howled: “you smartass!”

The midday sun filled the room, covering the round

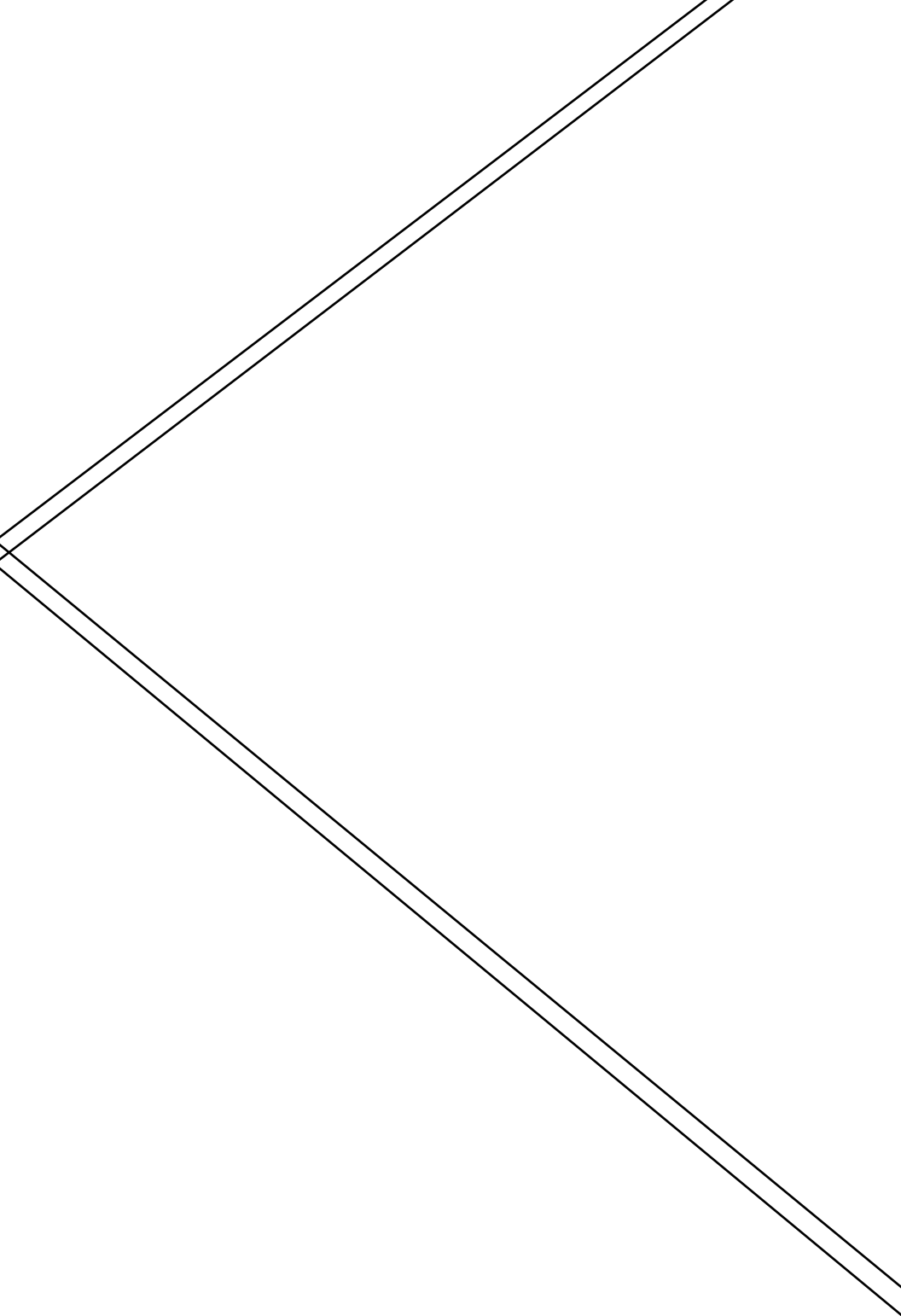
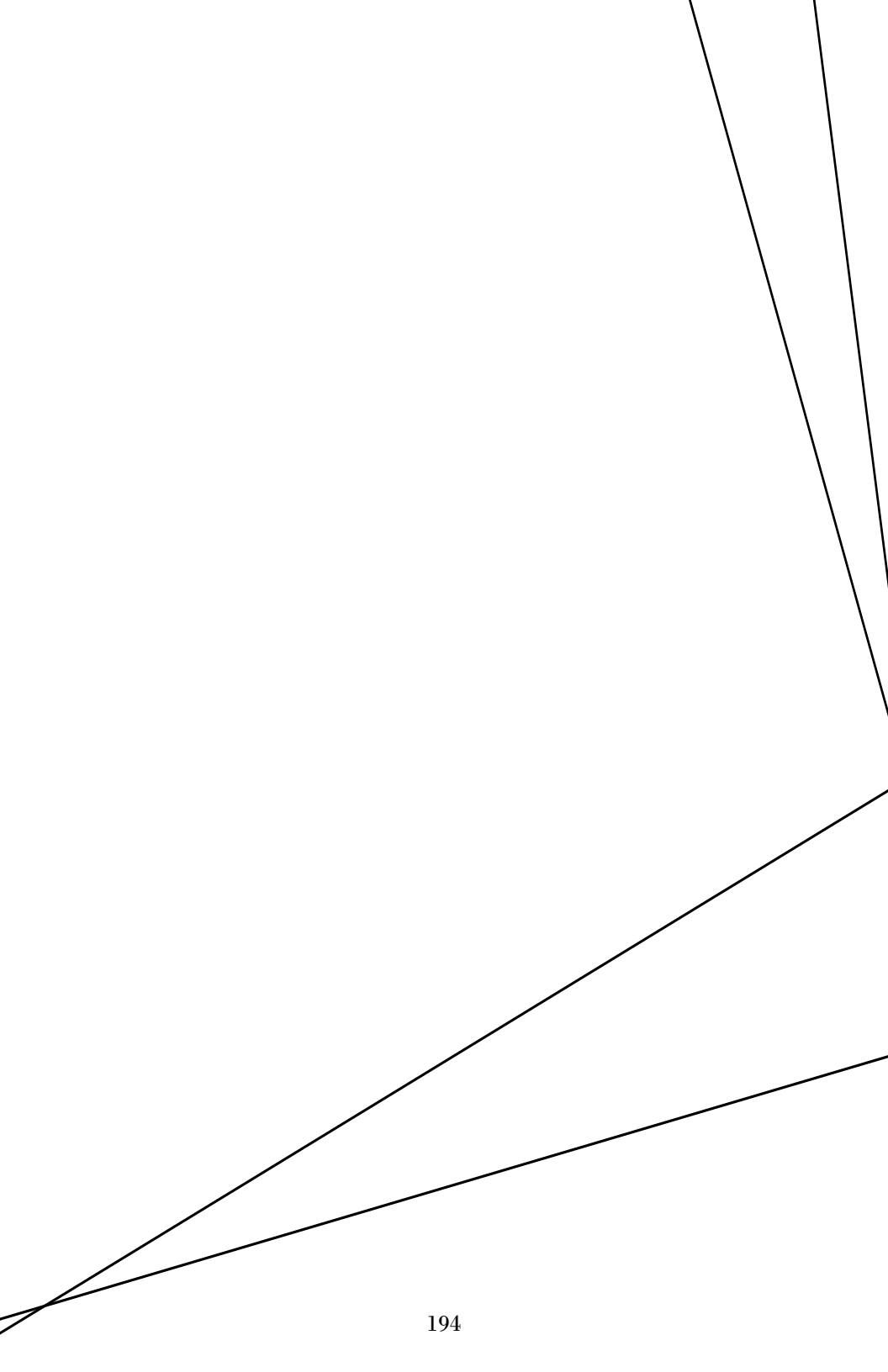


table where the employees usually had their meetings. Saulo closed the blinds and sat down to eat. He was finishing his lunch when Henrique, the store's manager, came into the room holding a yogurt and a spoon. He smiled when he saw Saulo.

“Hey, Filmão! How are you, kid?” Saulo remained seated, but Henrique gave him a quick side hug. One of the best parts of being around Henrique and having him as a boss a few times a week was that, when greeting other men, he never engaged in those annoying chest bumps and back slaps. He was a big metalhead: covered in tattoos, long hair and everything else Saulo's mother considered unrefined. “I was hoping you'd show up today, dude! I have something wonderful to show you.”



Nota do Tradutor

A tradução que ofereço é de um conto ambientado na Iugoslávia. Junto com a protagonista, embarcamos na sua jornada anual à terra ancestral. Criei uma certa ‘intimidade de viagem’ com o texto, as memórias descritas pela narradora me marcaram como um selo numa página amarelada de passaporte. O relato não censura palavras em servo-croata; pelo contrário, as convida para compor a memória de uma nação que já se dissolveu. Optei por manter estas palavras exatamente como foram escritas no original, na tentativa de preservar uma característica comum entre minha leitura e a experiência narrada pela protagonista: a sensação agri-doce de se sentir como um estrangeiro, até nos lugares mais familiares a nós.

ALEKSANDRA KUČINAR

BUT JUGOSLAVIJA NO LONGER EXISTS

In Srbija we arrive when it's much too early in the day to go to bed but equally too late to take a nap. The sun is beaming down onto the pavement and in our jetlagged haze we float from the plane to the terminal. 24 hours and three flights later. The white city has reached 40 degrees Celsius by now. We feel the weight of this. Our dry lungs are suffocated by the sudden rise in humidity. Did the A/C work at the airport back in the 2000s? I can't remember.

A lifelong bachelor standing at two meters tall, striko walks back and forth next to the sea of people awaiting the arrivals. He is antsy to get outside to smoke. He grabs our overweight bags with ease, back when 32 kg was the allowance and flitters out of the long airport. My uncle's pale-yellow Mercedes, a D240 from 1981 is parked on the far side of the lot. I'm already preparing for the smell. The worn fabric seats have started to cook under the mid-summer heat. The royal pine air freshener hangs from the rearview mirror producing a scent that no longer evokes pine. I'm sure the same one has been there since before I was born.

I try not to breathe the entire way home, sticking my small head out the half open window. We speed down the highway past billboards marking random products, some written in Cyrillic, others in Latin. We curve along roundabouts from which hundreds of cars seem to slip in and out of. We pass buses and trams filled with people pushed up against the windows. Little stores line the streets. Hair salons, corner shops, bookstores, casual casinos, and rundown auto repair shops. At intersections, small children tap on our windows begging for money. Striko opens his

**traduzido do inglês por
MANUELA BUK de ARAUJO**

**SÓ QUE A IUGOSLÁVIA
NÊM EXISTE MAIS**

Quando chegamos à *Sérvia*, ainda é muito cedo para ir se deitar, mas igualmente tarde para tirar um cochilo. As últimas luzes do sol se põem sobre o asfalto e depois de três aviões e 24 horas de voo, ludibriados pela diferença de fuso horário, flutuamos até o terminal de desembarque. A cidade branca atinge seus 40 graus celsius e sentimos um peso abafado. Nossos pulmões desidratados são inundados pelo aumento da umidade. Tinha ar-condicionado no aeroporto naquela época? Eu não me lembro.

Striko, com seus 2 metros de altura, atravessa o mar de pessoas que também esperam familiares no desembarque. Solteirão de longa data, meu tio paterno está ansioso para sair do aeroporto e fumar. Ele agarra nossas malas como se fossem leves, naquele tempo em que 32kg era o peso limite da bagagem, e atravessa os corredores do terminal em um passo rápido. Sua Mercedes amarelo-clara, uma D240 de 1981, está parada do outro lado do estacionamento. Eu já me preparo para o cheiro. Os assentos de couro cozinham no calor abafado do verão. O aromatizador de pinheiro, pendurado no espelho retrovisor, exala um odor que pode lembrar tudo menos pinho real. Eu tenho certeza de que está pendurado lá desde antes de eu nascer.

Eu tento não respirar durante o percurso, colocando minha cabeça para fora da janela entreaberta. Aceleramos ao entrar na rodovia, passando pelos outdoors que exibem produtos aleatórios, alguns escritos no alfabeto cirílico, outros no latino. Damos voltas nas rotatórias, junto com centenas de outros carros que parecem escorregar para dentro e para

glove box where he keeps coins precisely for this reason. He hands them some dinars and instructs them to move along.

We make our way to Žarkovo, to rows of Communist style apartment blocks. The dark echoing stairs lead us up to the corner apartment. In our fever dream, we eat ručak. Bread and sirnica from the bakery down the road sit in the center of the living room table surrounded by suvo meso, pašteta, kajmak, tomato, and cucumber. The sweetness of the juicy tomato is like nothing I've tasted in Canada.

We drive into the city to avoid falling asleep, spending half an hour looking for parking. Downtown we admire the Art Nouveau buildings. We walk aimlessly down the kilometer stretch of Knez Mihailova where street performers every few hundred meters are surrounded by crowds of people. Locals sit in cafés all over the pedestrian street chain smoking and shouting in casual conversation, as is their nature. The smell of sweet crepes floats in the air. Waiters roll their eyes at customers. Nobody is ever in a rush here.

Then we trek all the way up to Kalamegdan, the fortress overlooking the river. The bronze figure of the *Pobednik* statue stands on the top of the hill and faces the city, as if he's waiting for another empire that may try to invade. Despite the warmth, the city is grey. It's concrete and gloomy. Even the wide Sava River, flowing into the Dunav surrounded by the overwhelming foliage is tinged with coolness.

At night, the city continues to pulse. Parks are occupied by teenagers playing basketball on cracked concrete courts, each one thinking he will be the next Vlade Divac or Pedja Stojaković. Runners speed around reddish-brown tracks. Young people congregate on every corner. Outside the window, I can hear kids hollering in the streets well past my bedtime. Everyone here is living a life I cannot begin to comprehend, but the slight breeze of Beograd slipping into the room reminds me I am home.

fora. Ultrapassamos ônibus e bondes cheios de pessoas espremidas contra as janelas. Lojinhas alinham-se nas ruas. Cabeleireiros, conveniências, livrarias, cassinos e oficinas de automóveis. Nos cruzamentos, pequenas crianças batem nas nossas janelas pedindo esmola. Meu tio abre o porta-luvas e pega as moedas que ele guarda especialmente para essas ocasiões. Ele distribui alguns *dinars* para as crianças e instrui que elas sigam seu rumo.

Seguimos em direção a Žarkovo, passando pela fileira de apartamentos em estilo comunista. Nossos passos ecoam na escada escura que leva até o apartamento da esquina. Em um delírio febril, já estamos comendo *ručak*. Pães e *sirnica*, comprados na padaria da estrada, estão dispostos no centro da mesa de jantar, cercados por *pašteta*, *kajmak*, tomates e pepinos. A suculência doce desses tomates é diferente de tudo que eu já provei no Canadá.

Para evitar cair no sono, dirigimos até a cidade e gastamos meia hora procurando onde estacionar. No centro, admiramos os prédios art nouveau. Caminhamos sem rumo pelo quilômetro de pedestres da rua Knez Mihailova. De cem em cem metros, multidões de pessoas cercam os artistas de rua. Os locais se sentam nos cafés espalhados pelas calçadas, fumando como chaminés e gritando em conversas casuais, como é de sua natureza. O cheiro doce de crepes flutua no ar. Os garçons reviram os olhos para a clientela. Aqui, ninguém nunca tem pressa.

Então a gente sobe as ladeiras até Kalamegdan, a fortaleza imponente que guarda o rio. A estátua de bronze de Pobednik demarca o topo da montanha e encara a cidade, como se estivesse esperando a invasão de outro Império. Apesar do calor, a cidade está cinza. Concreta e melancólica. Até o vasto rio Sava, que flui para o Danúbio cercado por uma folhagem esmagadora, está tingido com frieza.

À noite, a cidade continua vibrando. Os parques são ocupados por adolescentes que jogam basquete em

In Bosna we arrive in the pitch black of midnight. For six hours we drive westward along mountainous roads winding back and forth in sharp zigzags. Stray too far and you might just end up falling off a cliff. The nausea is eternal. We stop only for my brother Straško to vomit violently on the side of the road. I plug my ears. We pass the town first, filled with a couple of small apartment complexes and collapsed buildings, untouched since the war. Mama points out the decrepit brown coal mine that is barely visible in the darkness. She likes to show us around, as if we have never been here before.

There are no streetlights in the countryside, just our high beam headlights glaring onto the dirt road, the car bobbing this way and that. We turn right and wind up the hill that leads us even deeper into the mountain to a tiny village. We can already hear the incessant barking of stray dogs fervent to escape from behind fences. They are just as curious as the neighbors to see who these foreigners are who have arrived. A brick house slanted due to its position on the mountain welcomes us. Before we can park, baba is running out the door. The house smells of pita; its swirls are sitting in blue and black tepsije cooling down. The TV plays Turkish soap operas, the volume irritatingly loud. Both baba and deda wear thick framed aviator glasses that make their eyes bulge, squinting at the subtitles.

Most days we play hide-and-seek deep in the dark green valley, past the old stone house that mama grew up in, the roof now sunken in. We run through the hush of the forest. As I sprint uphill, all I can hear is the soft roar of the shallow river cutting through the brush. Branches snap beneath my feet, my breath hard in the crisp air. I feel the strain in my throat. We run past flocks of sheep staring at us unblinkingly, past cows heading home for the evening, past plum trees weighed down by their ripening fruit. We giggle as we fall to the ground, the thick weeds scratching at our bare legs.

quadras de cimento rachadas, cada um deles pensando em ser o próximo Vlade Divac ou Pedja Stojaković. Atletas correm em pistas terracota. Pessoas jovens se reúnem em todo canto. Da minha janela, consigo ouvir crianças gritando nas ruas. Todo mundo aqui está vivendo uma vida que eu mal compreendo. Mas a leve brisa de Belgrado que desliza para dentro do meu quarto me lembra que estou em casa.

Chegamos à **Bósnia** no breu da meia-noite. Dirigimos por seis horas em direção ao oeste, ao longo de estradas que serpenteiam as montanhas em um zigue-zague afiado. Se afaste muito da rota e você pode acabar caindo do penhasco. A náusea é incessante. A gente só para no acostamento para meu irmãozinho Straško vomitar violentamente na beira da estrada. Eu tapo meus ouvidos. Passamos primeiro pela cidade e os pequenos complexos de apartamentos e prédios desmoronados, intocados desde a guerra. Mama aponta as ruínas da mina de carvão, que mal podem ser vistas na escuridão. Ela gosta de nos mostrar as coisas como se nunca tivéssemos vindo aqui antes.

Não existem postes de luz no campo, e apenas a luz alta dos nossos faróis iluminam a estrada suja, enquanto o carro balança. A gente vira à direita e subimos o morro até chegar na pequena vila, adentrando ainda mais a montanha. Já podemos escutar o latido incessante dos vira-latas, loucos para escapar por entre as grades. Tão curiosos quanto os vizinhos, eles querem ver estes estrangeiros que acabam de chegar. Uma casa de tijolos, inclinada em respeito à montanha, nos recebe. Antes mesmo de estacionarmos, *baba* já está atravessando a porta. A casa cheira a pães pita que esfriam em travessas pretas e azuis. A TV transmite novelas turcas e o volume está irritantemente alto. Tanto *baba* quanto *deda* usam óculos estilo aviador, com grossas armações que fazem seus olhos saltarem, e apertam os olhos para ler as legendas.

Na maioria dos dias, a gente brinca de esconde-

On hot days, I wake up to the smell of fried eggs. Mama is making breakfast outside my window in the outdoor kitchen. I call to her from the window, and she smiles like she never has before. I sit outside on the shaded bench in my pajamas and force cats into my lap. In the afternoon I pretend to rake the hay in the fields, watching mama and ujko, her brother bale it into tall mountain-like shapes, customary to the region. We listen to my grandma and her neighbors communicate across large distances by bellowing. They lower their voices and project the sound deeply, extending every single word. They're well trained.

In the evenings, baba takes us with her as she completes her farm chores. We feed the pigs scraps. We pick up any new chicken eggs. We help her herd the languid cows back to the barn. We watch her pull potatoes from the soil and make them for dinner that night in her wood-fire oven, which doubles as a heater. My grandpa lays in bed. While deda's body has begun to deteriorate from a life of hard labor, his mind is as sharp as ever.

The nights are always cool, nearly freezing at this altitude. I share a room with Straško even though the walls have been painted hot pink just for me. I listen to the sound of the rain being caught by the vast greenery that surrounds us and the vibrating rumble of the thunder. I listen to my brother snore. It's almost as if we have managed to escape Earth itself. We are the only ones left here in Miljevina.

In Hercegovina we arrive before midday when the sun has not yet hit its peak, but the pools of sweat on our backs hint at an unbearable day. Fields of kale, potatoes, and onions create a linear pathway towards the house. We're once again in the countryside, but the ground is flatter in these parts. You can sense that the sea is somewhere nearby. Here, my other grandparents maintain the farm while we meander around the house. We sit in the shade of the vines on a couch placed

esconde dentro do vale sombreado, além da velha casa de pedra em que *mama* cresceu, cujo telhado ruiu. A gente corre pelo silêncio da floresta. Enquanto disparo colina acima, escuto apenas o rugido suave do rio que corta a mata. Galhos quebram sob os meus pés, meu pulmão ofega no ar puro. Sinto a tensão na garganta. A gente passa correndo pelo rebanho de ovelhas que nos encaram sem piscar, pelas vacas voltando para passar a noite em casa, pelas árvores pesadas com ameixas maduras. A gente ri quando cai no chão, as ervas daninhas acariciando nossas pernas nuas.

Nos dias quentes, eu acordo com o cheiro de ovos fritos. *Mama* está fazendo o café da manhã bem ao lado da minha janela, na cozinha externa. Eu a chamo e ela sorri como nunca sorriu antes. À tarde, finjo varrer o feno do campo, enquanto observo *mama* e *ujko*, seu irmão, juntarem a ferragem na forma de grandes montanhas, como é comum na região. A gente escuta a conversa entre minha avó e seus vizinhos, que berram através de longas distâncias. Eles abaixam o timbre da voz e projetam o som com intensidade, pronunciando cada sílaba de cada palavra. Eles são muito bem treinados nisso.

No fim da tarde, *baba* leva a gente com ela para completar as tarefas da fazenda. Nós alimentamos os porcos com restos de comida. Pegamos os ovos das galinhas. Ajudamos a conduzir as vacas preguiçosas de volta ao celeiro. Assistimos enquanto ela arranca as batatas da terra e as prepara para o jantar em seu forno à lenha, que também faz as vezes de aquecedor. Meu avô fica deitado na cama. Enquanto o corpo de *deda* cede a uma vida de trabalho pesado, sua mente continua afiada como nunca.

As noites são sempre muito frias, quase congelantes nessa altitude. Eu e *Straško* dividimos um quarto, mesmo que as paredes tenham sido pintadas de rosa-choque só para mim. Eu escuto o som vibrante do trovão e a chuva que é capturada pela vasta mata que nos cerca. Ouço meu irmão roncando. É quase como se

outside eating grapes, figs, and pomegranates and I watch the horses and donkeys from afar, too nervous to approach them.

There's no running water, so we take the rainwater that has been collecting in the cistern and boil it to wash ourselves. I find it fascinating; mama finds it archaic, but it's how tata experienced his entire childhood – without any running water or electricity. I get to experience at least half of it myself, even if it's just for a week.

We visit the old village, the one tata grew up in. He shows me how they used to grow tobacco plants in the fields and sell it. I imagine what tobacco leaves may look like. He points to where their stone house used to be before it was burnt down. I mourn the hundreds of rock & roll records that were destroyed. Striko jokes that he chose to save the dogs rather than the records, yet I still feel a deep sadness for the material belongings. For all the memories and collections that were lost. Mama tells me about the family that was lost, the things tata does not talk about.

In later years we visit baba and deda at their new apartment. They have relocated to the nearby town. Sustaining a farm is no easy task for aging bodies. We spend our days at the local pool, tanning on the bleachers, we roam the quiet streets of the colorful town and pass by the volleyball club, we eat at the local restaurant, the one that looks like an underground dungeon with its dark walls and lack of windows, we inhale ćevapi and lepinje with raw onions and ajvar. I watch the Olympics at our next-door neighbor Ružica's apartment. Black and white formal portraits of her deceased father and brother stand on either side of the TV. I'm reminded of all the men lost to violence.

I sit on the steps in front of the town church with mama every night. It's a typical Serbian Orthodox church with multiple domes and stone walls. The windows are outlined in red and less than a few hundred meters away is the steep hillside of a mountain. The

tivéssemos dado um jeito de escapar da Terra. E somos as únicas pessoas que sobraram em Mijevina.

Chegamos a **Herzegovina** logo antes do meio-dia, o sol ainda não atingiu seu pico, mas as manchas de suor em nossas costas revelam que será um dia insuportável. Campos de couve, batata e cebola criam um caminho linear em direção à casa. Estamos de novo no interior, mas aqui o terreno é mais plano. Você pode sentir a proximidade do mar. Aqui, meus avós paternos cuidam da fazenda enquanto vagamos pela casa. Nos sentamos em um sofá colocado do lado de fora, à sombra das videiras. Comemos uvas, figos e romãs, enquanto eu observo de longe os cavalos e os burros, ansiosa demais para me aproximar.

Não tem água encanada, então a gente ferve água da chuva coletada em uma cisterna. Eu acho isso fascinante, *mama* acha arcaico, mas foi assim que *tata* passou sua infância — sem água encanada ou eletricidade. E eu consigo vivenciar, ao menos, metade disso, mesmo que apenas por uma semana.

A gente visita a antiga vila. Aquela em que meu pai cresceu. *Tata* me mostra como costumavam cultivar tabaco nos campos para vender. Eu imagino a aparência de folhas de tabaco. Ele aponta para onde ficava a casa de pedra em que moravam, antes de ser incendiada. Fico de luto pelas centenas de discos de rock & roll que foram destruídos. *Striko* brinca que escolheu salvar os cachorros em vez dos discos, mas ainda assim sinto uma tristeza profunda pelas perdas materiais. Por toda a memória e as coleções que se foram. *Mama* me conta da família que também foi perdida, as coisas sobre as quais *tata* não fala.

Nos anos seguintes, visitamos *baba* e *deda* em seu novo apartamento. Eles se realocaram em uma cidade vizinha. Manter uma fazenda não é tarefa fácil para dois idosos. A gente passa os nossos dias na piscina pública, tomando sol nas arquibancadas, vagamos pelas ruas da colorida cidade e passamos pelo clube de vôlei,

church is surrounded by a cemetery, where deda has already bought a spot for him and baba and prepared their granite headstones. The loneliness of Ljubinje, a town primarily composed of displaced families reverberates in the silence as we watch the day fade out.

In Crna Gora we arrive just before the sun begins to drop toward the horizon. We zoom into border patrol, where the officers barely make eye contact, flip through our passports, and stamp them absentmindedly with the little ink left. I stare at the stamp with a little car figure in the bottom left corner and I count how many I've managed to acquire.

The officer nods at us to go, not saying a word. "Kako su nekulturni. Kao da ih košta reći dobar dan," mama repeats at any and every border crossing. She has become too accustomed to the politeness of Canadians.

The car loops round and round the mountain. Our eagerness to see the Adriatic supersedes our carsickness. From this height of Mount Orjen, the turquoise sea shines directly through the backseat window. We ooh and aah at the beauty of the sea, even though it's the same as we left it last year. Tata asks if we kids want to stop, signaling that he wants to take photos. We stand on the gravel next to the road as cars pass within inches of us. I gaze intensely at the Adriatic attempting to ingest it into some deeper part of myself. I'm acutely aware that I won't get this close to sea salt and warmth again for a while.

Mama and tata find a spot at the beach every morning while my brother and I sleep. Sometimes they choose a sandy beach, other days a rocky one. The walk is only a few minutes from tetka's house. We lay on thick colorful towels, but if we're lucky, we get to spend the day on white plastic lounge chairs. Our vitamin D deficient bodies absorb every single ray of sunlight. A volleyball gets passed, set, and hit between us. We build sandcastles and dig moats.

Everyone is speaking the same language on

comemos no restaurante local, aquele com paredes pretas e sem janelas, que lembra uma masmorra subterrânea. Devoramos *čevapi* e *lepinje* com cebolas cruas e *ajvar*. Eu assisto à olimpíada no apartamento de Ružica, nossa vizinha de porta. Há retratos em preto e branco de cada lado da TV, de seus finados pai e irmão. Me lembro dos homens perdidos para a violência.

Toda noite, eu e *mama* nos sentamos nos degraus da igreja da cidade. É uma típica igreja ortodoxa sérvia com muitas cúpulas e paredes de pedra. As bordas das janelas são vermelhas e, a alguns metros de distância, fica a encosta íngreme da montanha. A igreja é cercada por um cemitério onde *deda* já comprou um lugar para ele e *baba* e preparou suas lápides de granito. A solidão de Ljubinje, uma cidade essencialmente composta por famílias desabrigadas, ressoa no silêncio enquanto assistimos ao dia desvanecer.

Chegamos a **Crna Gora** logo antes do sol começar a baixar no horizonte. Nos aproximamos do controle da fronteira, onde oficiais alienados, que mal fazem contato visual conosco, marcam as folhas de nossos passaportes com a pouca tinta que sobrou. Encaro o carimbo com a pequena figura de um carro no canto esquerdo. Conto quantos já consegui acumular.

O oficial acena com a cabeça, permitindo nossa passagem sem dizer uma palavra. “*Kako su nekulturni*. Que mal-educados. Não custa nada dizer bom dia.”, *mama* repete isso em toda fronteira que passamos. Ela ficou mal-acostumada com os bons modos dos canadenses.

O carro faz curvas e mais curvas ao redor da montanha. Nossa ansiedade para ver o mar Adriático supera o nosso enjoo. Dessa altura do monte Orjen, o brilho turquesa do oceano reflete diretamente na janela do banco de trás. A gente faz “ooh” e “ahh”, maravilhados com a beleza do mar, mesmo sendo exatamente o mesmo que deixamos no ano passado. *Tata* pergunta para nós, crianças, se gostaríamos de

the beach – the same one I speak. I have to be careful when I talk in such close quarters. Old women slather themselves in black sand sold in plastic bottles, then they bake underneath the sun. Street vendors sell all sorts of plastic toys and trinkets along the walkway. Women carrying freshly made donuts covered in powdered sugar shriek, “mini fini krofnice!” I stare at mama pleadingly until she flags one down.

We swim and swim so far out that mama yells at us to come where she can see us. The bottom of our feet get cut on sharp rocks and broken seashells. We bleed into the salty water, leaving a mark of ourselves. Tata and Straško take turns lifting me up and flipping me back into the water upside down. I scream with glee, hoping they never stop. We stay until after sunset refusing to get out of the shallow water. Mama calls us ribice.

An old fig tree takes up half of my aunt’s yard. We eat dinner next to it, not realizing how much energy the sun has drained out of our bodies. We take turns showering, yelling at each other for using all the boiler’s hot water and then we walk to the air-conditioned supermarket nearby, buying every single snack we see. By nightfall, we turn to the Old Town. We trudge carefully up the countless stairs as the smooth white stone ground is prone to seeing people slip in their sandals. Stopping at a canopied kafić, the adults get drinks, and we get a treat. Three scoops of ice cream in a glass bowl. Chocolate of course. Nights in Herceg Novi always make me feel grown up, sophisticated.

Slowly, we reverse our journey. We head back to Hercegovina, to Bosna, to Srbija. By this point, we are drowsy, ready to leave behind the homeland. Our yearly pilgrimage is coming to an end. In Canada we arrive to the customs officer asking us, “Where are you coming from?” We pause. We never know how to answer.

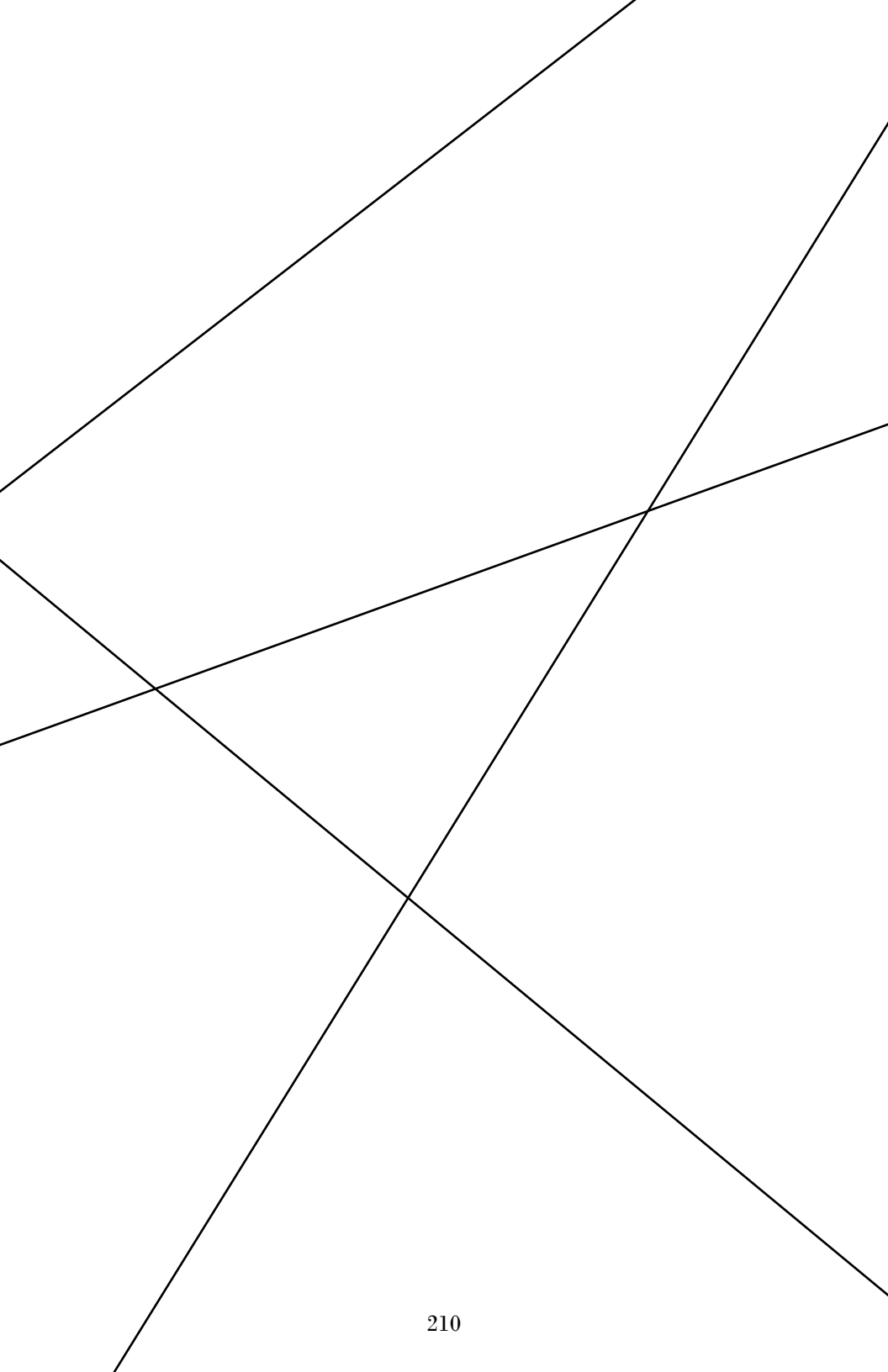
parar, sinalizando que ele quer tirar fotos. Ficamos em pé no cascalho do acostamento, enquanto os carros passam a centímetros de nós. Eu encaro intensamente o Adriático, procurando integrá-lo a alguma parte profunda de mim. Tenho bastante consciência de que não retornarei ao calor e ao sal do mar tão cedo.

Toda manhã, enquanto eu e meu irmão dormimos, *mama* e *tata* encontram um lugar na praia. Alguns dias eles escolhem uma praia com areia fina, outros dias com pedras. Da casa, a caminhada leva apenas alguns minutos. Deitamos em toalhas grossas e coloridas. Se tivermos sorte, podemos passar o dia todo em espreguiçadeiras de plástico. Nossos corpos, carentes de vitamina D, absorvem todo e qualquer raio de sol. Uma bola de vôlei é sacada, levantada e batida perto de nós. Levantamos castelos de areia e cavamos fossos.

Todo mundo fala a mesma língua na praia — a mesma que eu. Eu tenho que ter cuidado com as palavras em um lugar tão cheio. Velhas se besuntam com areia preta vendida em garrafas de plástico e assam debaixo do sol. Ambulantes vendem todo tipo de brinquedos e tranqueiras pelo calçadão. Mulheres carregando donuts frescos, cobertos com açúcar de confeitiro, gritam “deliciosas minirrosquinhas!”. Eu olho suplicante para *mama* até que ela chame alguma.

Nadamos e nadamos para tão longe que *mama* grita para ficarmos onde ela possa nos ver. A sola de nossos pés é cortada por pedras afiadas e conchas quebradas. Derramamos nosso sangue na água salgada, deixando ali um pedaço de nós mesmos. *Tata* e *Straško* se revezam em me levantar e me virar de ponta-cabeça na água. Dou gritos de alegria. Espero que eles nunca parem. Ficamos na praia até depois do pôr do sol, porque nos recusamos a sair da água rasa. *Mama* nos chama de peixinhos, seus *ribice*.

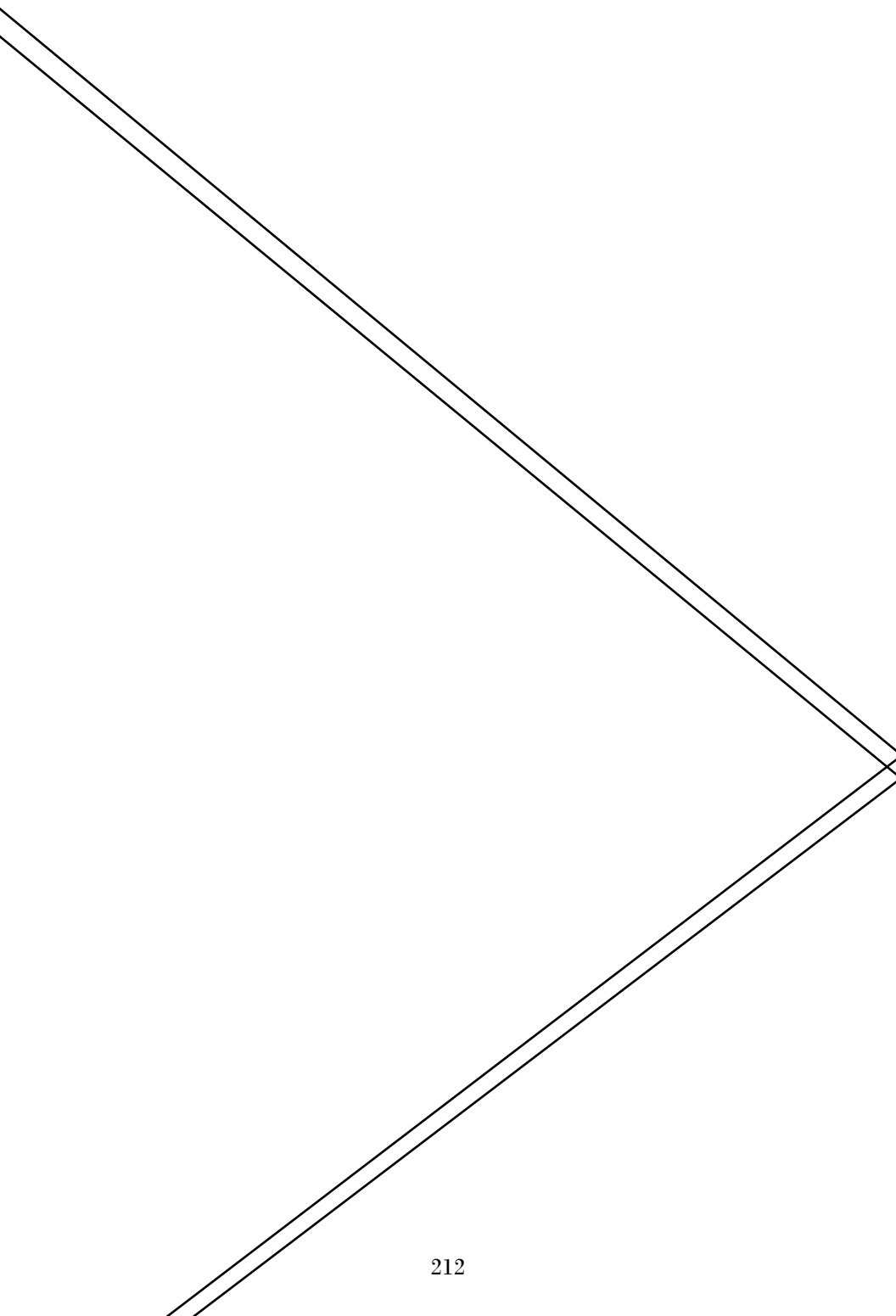
Uma velha figueira ocupa metade do jardim da minha tia. Jantamos perto dela, sem perceber quanta energia o sol drenou de nossos corpos. Nos revezamos



no chuveiro, gritando uns com os outros por usar toda a água quente do boiler, então andamos até o ar-condicionado do mercado mais próximo e compramos todas as guloseimas que vemos pela frente. Ao anoitecer, vamos para a cidade velha. Subimos cuidadosamente as incontáveis escadas, já que o chão de pedra branca gosta de ver pessoas de sandálias escorregando. Parando em um café coberto, os adultos pedem bebidas e nós ganhamos um agrado. Três bolas de sorvete numa tigela de vidro. De chocolate, é claro. As noites em Herceg Novi sempre me fazem sentir adulta, sofisticada.

Lentamente, invertemos nossa jornada. Retornamos para Herzegovina, Bósnia, Sérvia. Nessa altura, já estamos lânguidos, prontos para deixar nossa terra-natal para trás. Nossa peregrinação anual está chegando ao fim.

No Canadá, chegamos ao oficial da alfândega perguntando “de onde vocês estão vindo?”. Nunca sabemos como responder.



Translator's Note

I have always known and admired Brazilians for their liveliness, humor, and loving nature. All these factors come into play in Manuela Buk de Araujo's "Bichos Noturnos" set in São Paulo. The short story opens in a small bar, referred to as a boteco on Rua Augusta, a street running through the center of the city. We catch a glimpse of this area known for its raucous and dynamic nightlife through the constant movement of passersby, the blasting of Brazilian funk, and the flowing of drinks. This buzzing night falls into the background as the lives of a young couple on a date intersect with a determined African dung beetle trudging along on a different continent. The anthropomorphism of little beetle Fernando is a key theme in Manuela's project of short stories focused on animals and humans and how the line separating these two can blur. Translating this work meant engaging with slang and colloquial language, as well as concepts specific to Brazilian culture, which I didn't want to overexplain nor mystify. The names of streets and avenues have been left in the Portuguese to retain the essence of the geography. Terms of endearment, which occur easily and genuinely in Portuguese have been greatly diminished in the disputably colder English language. As for the title, I chose "Nocturnal Creatures" to mimic the rhythm of the original and express the double meaning – the nocturnality of the beetle and the young couple, both coming out at night. I hope I've done justice to Manuela's engaging voice and that I was able to capture the unforgettable charm of Fernando and his cowboy hat.

MANUELA BUK de ARAUJO

BICHOS NOTURNOS

As cadeiras de plástico se equilibram no concreto disforme da rua Augusta, refletindo as luzes dos bares e brilhando na noite agitada. Sentados no boteco, um jovem casal observa as pessoas que caminham nas calçadas.

Com o dedo indicador, a moça faz circunferências na borda úmida de seu copo americano, na expectativa de produzir um som agudo. Ela usa um vestido de linho azul que vai até os calcanhares. Os cabelos estão presos em coque alto, divididos por uma risca no couro cabeludo.

O moço encara os próprios sapatos da Nike. Ele está de bermuda marrom e camiseta de algodão branca, com um pequeno logo no lado direito, onde se lê “Surfin Life”. Os cachos sedosos caem graciosamente sobre os ombros.

Um carro passa por eles com a caixa de som tocando no porta-malas aberto. Luzes roxas e vermelhas se acendem no alto-falante, acompanhando a batida seca do funk. No banco da frente, dois jovens seguram copos recheados com gelo e um líquido escuro. Eles riem e gesticulam palavras inaudíveis. A batida grave faz o carro chacoalhar por inteiro. A moça acompanha o veículo com o olhar, até não enxergar mais a luz néon que ilumina os alto-falantes. O automóvel vira a esquina e o som se perde aos poucos, quanto mais se distancia.

Ela volta a olhar para o companheiro e lhe dá um meio sorriso. Ele acena para o garçom que corre de um lado para o outro, levando copos suados de espuma de chopp. Ao prender o olhar do atendente, ela escreve no ar com uma caneta invisível, pedindo a conta. O garçom compreende a mímica e entra para dentro do estabelecimento.

translated from the portuguese by
ALEKSANDRA KUĆINAR

NOCTURNAL CREATURES

The plastic chairs wobble on the uneven concrete of Rua Augusta, reflecting the lights coming from the bars, shining amid the bustle of the night. Sitting in a boteco, a young couple observe the people walking along the sidewalk.

With her index finger the woman circles the wet rim of her beer glass hoping to make a high-pitched sound. She wears a blue linen dress that reaches down to her feet. Her hair is parted in the middle, tied in a high bun.

The man looks down at his Nikes. He's wearing brown shorts and a white cotton t-shirt with a small logo on the right that reads "Surfin Life." His silky curls fall gracefully to his shoulders.

A car passes by with a loudspeaker blasting in the open trunk. It flashes red and purple lights in sync with the harsh beat of funk. The two guys in the front hold glasses filled with ice and a dark liquid. They laugh and mouth inaudible words. The bass makes the entire car shake. The woman follows them with her eyes until she can no longer make out the neon lights that illuminate the speaker. The car turns the corner, and the sound gradually fades.

She turns back to her partner and gives him a half smile. He waves to the waiter running back and forth, who carries glasses overflowing with the foam of draft beer. Upon catching the server's attention, the woman mimics signing in the air with an invisible pen, asking for the bill. The waiter recognizes the gesture and goes back into the building.

The man sighs. He looks at the middle of the table and thinks about eating the last chicken wing

O moço suspira. Ele olha para o centro da mesa e pensa em comer a última asa de frango, que jaz fria no prato de porcelana. Ele ri sozinho, percebendo o contraste entre o branco do prato e o amarelo-gema da mesa de plástico. A diferença de cores lembra a figura de um ovo invertido. Decide por não comer a última asa de frango, pois já havia devorado sozinho a meia-porção de fritura e sente o início da indigestão na boca do estômago.

– Comi demais... – ele diz, quase para o ar.

– Verdade – ela responde – cê nem parou pra respirar, comeu a porção em três segundos. O perigo agora é o frango se reconstituir no seu estômago e sair voando pela sua garganta.

– Impossível disso acontecer porque só tinham as asinhas... e talvez uma parte da coxa.

Um vento gélido faz a curva na esquina e encontra o casal sentado na calçada, causando um calafrio discreto na moça. O corpo dela estremece e ela lembra de um filme de terror que dizia que os calafrios aconteciam porque um espírito morto atravessava o corpo dos vivos. Espanta a ideia tomando o gole final de sua cerveja choca, se arrependendo logo em seguida.

– Quer meu casaco? – ele estende o moletom, mas ela faz que não com a cabeça e vasculha a bolsa até encontrar um lenço vermelho, que amarra no pescoço no estilo aeromoça.

Ele pensa em fotografá-la, mas o celular está no fundo do bolso, soterrado pela carteira, o tabaco, o isqueiro, as chaves e o ticket do estacionamento.

De repente, a indigestão o atinge em cheio e ele diz:

– Eu comi tanto que acho que eu vou ter que sair daqui rolando... Você vai ter que me empurrar pela calçada igualzinho um barril.

A moça ergue as sobrancelhas e encara os olhos travessos do moço. Ele prossegue:

– Como fazem aqueles besouros-rola-bosta com seus ovos.

lying cold on the porcelain plate. He laughs to himself at the contrast between the white of the plate and the yolk-yellow of the plastic table. The difference in colors reminds him of an inverted egg. He decides against eating the last wing since he's already devoured half the portion of fried food on his own and is feeling the onset of indigestion in the pit of his stomach.

"I ate too much." He says into the air.

"True." She responds. "You didn't even stop to breathe. You finished the whole thing in three seconds. The danger now is that the chicken will reassemble in your stomach and fly back out your throat."

"That's impossible, I only ate the wings... and maybe part of a thigh."

A cold breeze rounds the corner and reaches the couple sitting on the sidewalk, giving the woman a slight chill. Her body shudders and she's reminded of a horror movie where the living get chills when a dead spirit passes through their bodies. She shakes off the idea and takes the last sip of her now flat beer, immediately regretting it.

"Want my coat?" He holds it out, but she shakes her head and digs through her bag until she finds a red scarf, which she ties around her neck like a flight attendant.

He thinks about taking a photo of her, but his phone is at the very bottom of his pocket, buried under his wallet, tobacco, lighter, keys, and a parking ticket.

Then the indigestion hits him hard, and he says, "I think I ate so much I'm gonna have to roll out of here. You'll have to push me down the sidewalk like a barrel."

She raises her eyebrows and looks into his mischievous eyes. He goes on. "Just like those dung beetles with their eggs."

She lets out a laugh. She imagines rolling her boyfriend through the filthy streets of Augusta, waiting for cars to pass and the pedestrian light to turn green. She sees herself going up the street until she reaches

A moça deixa escapar uma gargalhada. Se imagina empurrando o namorado pelas ruas sujas da Augusta, esperando os carros passarem até o semáforo de pedestres acender sua luz verde. Se vê subindo a rua até chegar na Avenida Paulista, então vira à direita em direção ao estacionamento, rolando aquele corpo todo estufado de frango.

– Eu já te contei a história desse besouro? O rolobosta-africano? – ele pergunta animado, interrompendo a fantasia. Ela pisca muitas vezes, escavando a memória. Ele prossegue – Enfim, são insetos muito interessantes! Ficam empurrando aquela bola de... – ele olha para o nariz franzido dela e pigarreia – ...esterco... porque botam os ovos lá dentro e precisam enterrar no lugar certo pros filhotinhos nascerem.

Neste exato momento, a centenas e centenas de quilômetros dali, na noite escura da selva, um besouro chamado Fernando empurra sua bola de esterco. Besouro e abjeto se movem em um ritmo constante, deixando um rastro estreito na terra marrom vermelha. A noite está sem lua, e os pontinhos reluzentes da via Láctea pintam o céu preto.

Apesar da regularidade do chão colaborar com a missão do besouro – levar seus ovos até o ninho – também o torna exposto aos predadores. Existem dezenas de espécies de roedores e cobras noturnas e, em campo aberto, o besouro Fernando é uma presa crocante e nutritiva.

Mas ele não diminui o passo: as patas de trás lhe dão impulso e movimenta a esfera em um ritmo constante. Também poderia subir em cima da bola, que tem mais de seis vezes o seu tamanho, e transportá-la como um acrobata de circo.

Aquele globo de esterco é a coisa mais preciosa de sua existência. Seu diamante. Uma construção que concentra o trabalho de uma vida: a sobrevivência da sua espécie.

Avenida Paulista, then turning right toward the parking lot, pushing his chicken-stuffed body.

“Have I ever told you the story of this beetle?” He asks excitedly, interrupting her fantasy. “The African dung beetle?”

She blinks repeatedly, digging through her memory. He goes on. “Anyway, they’re such interesting insects! They keep pushing that ball of...” he looks at her wrinkled nose and clears his throat, “—manure because they lay their eggs inside it and they need to bury it in the right place so the babies can hatch.”

At that very moment, hundreds of kilometers away, a beetle named Fernando pushes his ball of dung into the dark jungle night. Beetle and sphere move at a steady pace, leaving a narrow trail in the reddish-brown earth. The night is moonless and the black sky is painted with the sparkling flecks of the Milky Way.

Although the flatness of the ground assists in the beetle’s mission of taking his eggs to the nest, it also leaves him exposed to predators. Out in the open, Fernando would make for a crunchy and nutritious snack to the dozens of nocturnal rodent and snake species. But he doesn’t slow down – the beetle’s back legs lend him momentum as he steadily pushes the sphere onward. He could even climb atop the ball, more than six times his size and walk on it like a circus acrobat.

That globe of manure is the most precious thing in his existence. His diamond. A creation that represents the culmination of his life’s work, the survival of his species.

At the other latitude, at the exact point where Rua Augusta meets Rua Matias Aires, the man continues. “One cool thing about this species of beetle is that they know how to navigate space really well and until very recently, nobody knew how to explain it.

Na outra latitude, no ponto exato em que a rua Augusta encontra com a rua Matias Aires, o moço prossegue:

– Uma coisa legal sobre essa espécie de besouro é que eles sabem navegar muito bem pelo espaço e, até um tempo atrás, ninguém sabia explicar como eles faziam isso. Eles eram um verdadeiro mistério para os biólogos!

A moça o encara desconfiada. Ela descruza as pernas de dentro do vestido e vira de frente para o homem, apoiando os cotovelos sobre a mesa.

– E por que um besouro caminhando no campo seria, assim, um grande mistério para a ciência? Todos os insetos fazem isso, lindo...

Na noite deserta da selva, Fernando e a sua bola cruzam a floresta e seus mistérios.

– Eu to falando sério, amor! Você não tá entendendo: essa espécie de besouro é realmente genial! – ele ri – Eles têm uma noção bizarra do espaço.

– Ah tá. Os besouros-rola-bosta? Realmente genial... – ela debocha.

– Sim, eles são mestres da geometria. – O moço pega os dois copos americanos e coloca cada um em um canto na mesa: – Se um desses besouros precisar ir do ponto A até o ponto B, carregando aquela bola, ele sempre vai saber traçar o caminho mais curto entre os dois pontos. – Com os dedos das mãos, ele imita um par de pernas e caminha de um copo até o outro, saltando o prato com a asa de frango: – Ou seja: uma reta!

Em um cálculo digno de Fibonacci, Fernando empurra. Mesmo sem córtex, ele sabe exatamente onde precisa chegar. A sua certeza é alcançar: o único caminho é o mais curto.

– Tá... é legal mesmo, mas por que isso é tão impressionante? As abelhas fazem a mesma coisa.

They were such a mystery to biologists.”

The woman shoots him a skeptical glance. She uncrosses her legs from under her dress and turns to face him, resting her elbows on the table. “Why would a beetle travelling cross-country be such a great mystery to science? All insects do that, babe.”

In the deserted night of the jungle, Fernando and his ball make their way through the secrets of the forest.

“I’m serious! You don’t understand. This species of beetle is actually brilliant.” He laughs. “They have this bizarre notion of space!”

“All right then. Dung beetles? Absolutely brilliant.” She mocks.

“Yes, they’re masters of geometry!” He grabs the two beer glasses and places them at opposite corners of the table. “If one of these beetles needs to go from point A to point B transporting that ball, it’ll always know how to trace the shortest route between the two points.” He imitates a pair of legs with his fingers and walks from one glass to the other, jumping over the plate with the chicken wing. “Meaning – a straight line!”

In a calculation worthy of Fibonacci, Fernando presses on. Even without a cerebral cortex, he knows exactly where he needs to go. He is certain he will succeed. The shortest path is the only path.

“Sure, it’s cool but what’s so impressive about it? You know bees do the same thing, right? They know how to orient themselves by the vibration of their butt or something like that.”

“Yeah, but beetles travel much farther than the

Sabem se localizar pela vibração do bumbum ou algo assim.

– Sim, mas os besouros viajam muito mais do que a distância entre dois copos, foi só um exemplo... Esses besouros andam por dezenas de quilômetros em linha reta. E as abelhas fazem parte de uma colmeia, se comunicam passando mensagens umas pras outras. Agora, se uma abelha fica sozinha, aí ela se ferra, fica totalmente perdida. Já o besouro-rola-bosta-africano não tem turma nenhuma e, mesmo assim, sempre chega aonde tem que chegar.

O companheiro pisca para ela, e a moça amolece a expressão. Aceita a derrota. Está intrigada.

No outro plano, Fernando é o único ser vivo num raio de 2 metros. Os pedregulhos lhe fazem companhia e ele avança. Se tivesse uma epiderme porosa, suaria. Se sentisse cansaço, tomaria consciência do tamanho exato da sua solidão.

– Tá bom, me conta então, como é que esses besouros sabem o caminho mais curto? Eles usam o Waze? – ela debocha com uma careta boba.

– Ah, mas essa é a pergunta de um milhão de dólares! – ele exclama satisfeito. – Uma outra informação importante é que esses besouros são noturnos, ou seja: só saem durante a noite.

– Eu sei o que noturno significa.

Na noite sem luar, o besouro Fernando conduz a sua esfera como se o para frente só existisse depois que ela passasse. A Terra o acompanha fazendo seu movimento diário, trocando lentamente a posição das estrelas. O centauro de Sagitário aponta a flecha para o chifre de Capricórnio e, juntos, eles formam o Zodíaco.

– Então, o que sabiam era que ele se locomove de uma forma matemática no espaço, que é um bicho noturno que não se organiza em sociedade e tem os

distance between two glasses, that was just an example. These beetles travel for tens of kilometers in a straight line. And bees are part of a hive, they communicate by sending messages to each other. Now if a bee gets left behind, it's screwed, it gets totally lost. The African dung beetle isn't part of a group and despite that it always gets where it needs to be." He winks at her, and she softens her expression. She accepts defeat. Now she's intrigued.

On the other plane, Fernando is the only living being within a two-meter radius. The boulders keep him company as he moves forward. He would be sweating if he had a porous epidermis. If he were to feel weary, he would become aware of the exact scale of his isolation.

"Okay then, tell me how do these beetles know the shortest route? Do they use Waze?" She jokes with a goofy expression.

"Ah, but that's the million-dollar question!" He exclaims, satisfied. "Another thing to keep in mind is that these beetles are nocturnal, meaning they only come out at night."

"I know what nocturnal means."

In the moonless night, Fernando the beetle hauls his sphere, willing the space before him into existence by rolling his ball through it. The Earth accompanies his daily movement, slowly changing the position of the stars. Sagittarius' centaur points his arrow at Capricorn's horn and together they form the zodiac.

"What they knew was that the beetles advance mathematically through space, that they're nocturnal

sentidos básicos de um inseto qualquer. Aí criaram a hipótese que a referência de navegação dele só podia ser algo relacionado ao céu. Tá entendendo, baby? Essa é a parte interessante, no fim, descobriram que o besouro-rola-bosta é um tipo de astrônomo da natureza. A bússola dele, na verdade, são...

– São as estrelas! – ela interrompe numa exclamação infantil, triunfante. Ele fecha a boca e nota o brilho cintilante nos olhos da moça. Leva uma das mãos para baixo da mesa e roça levemente a ponta dos dedos nas coxas dela.

– Exatamente, linda. Ele se guia pelas estrelas.

– Hum, entendi - ela ri - toda essa história para me convencer que os besouros-rola-bosta também podem ser românticos. Os brutos também amam, é isso?

Guiado pelas estrelas, Fernando continua traçando sua passagem perfeita pela Terra, em um estado de neutralidade totalmente apropriado para um besouro.

– Calma, essa nem é a melhor parte! – o moço diz animado. – O melhor é o jeito que eles comprovaram essa teoria das estrelas... posso terminar de te contar? – ele sorri e ela o encara. A barba dele está bem-feita. Quando o conheceu, os pelos do rosto mal fechavam o queixo do menino. Por baixo da mesa, encontra os joelhos dele com as coxas e aproxima o seu corpo ainda mais. Ela assente com a cabeça, dando permissão para ele continuar.

– Fizeram um mini chapéu para o besouro! E quando colocaram no coitado do bichinho...

Do outro lado do mundo, Fernando reaparece encapuzado. Um minúsculo chapéu estilo cowboy cobre inteiramente sua cabeça do inseto, incluindo os dois chifres. Confuso, ele se desprende da sua bola em um movimento brusco e ela desliza para a direita, enquanto o besouro corre para a esquerda. Cego, o animal tateia

creatures that don't form swarms, and that they have the basic senses of any insect. Then they came up with a hypothesis. Their navigation reference had to be related to the sky. Get it, babe? And this is the interesting part, in the end they discovered that the dung beetle is a sort of natural astronomer. Its compass is actually—”

“The stars!” She interrupts triumphantly, in a childish exclamation.

He closes his mouth, noticing the gleam in her eyes. Taking one of his hands out from under the table, he lightly brushes his fingertips against her leg.

“Exactly. It's guided by the stars.”

“Hmm, I get it.” She laughs. “All this information just to convince me that even dung beetles can be romantic. Brutes feel love too, is that it?”

Guided by the stars, Fernando goes on tracing his perfect passage along the surface of the Earth, in a state of neutrality completely appropriate for a beetle.

“Wait, that's not even the best part!” The young man says animatedly. “The best thing is the way they figured out this star theory. Can I finish telling you?” He smiles.

She stares at him. His beard is well groomed. When she first met him, the hair on his face barely covered his chin. Under the table she meets his knees with her thigh and brings her body closer to his. She nods, giving him permission to go on. “They made a mini hat for the beetle! And when they put it on the poor critter...”

On the other side of the world, Fernando reappears but now a miniature cowboy hat completely conceals his head, covering his two horns. Confused, he lets go of his ball in a sudden movement causing it to

o solo até recuperar sua preciosa esfera. De repente, o ponto A se torna o ponto Z, e o ponto B poderia ser qualquer letra do alfabeto, se os insetos soubessem ler.

Agora, ele empurra a bola com penar, andando em círculos desajeitados, como um bêbado. Desenha figuras arredondadas no chão arenoso, perde-se, tenta de novo, quase vira fatalmente de ponta-cabeça. Zonzo, sobe em cima do globo e, por alguns segundos, para.

Está sozinho em uma escuridão completa.

– Não acredito. – A moça gargalha e o moço também. – Que coisa besta. Não acredito! Um chapéu para besouro. Chega até a ser fofo. Mas coitado do bichinho. - O homem dá de ombros.

Satisfeita com o desfecho, a moça nem lembra que aguardam a conta há alguns minutos. É inundada por uma sensação quente e embriagada. Retira o lenço do pescoço e volta a olhar para o movimento da rua.

Ela ainda não quer deixar que o momento se torne uma memória

– E depois? – ela pergunta

– Ué, não tem depois. Depois acabou.

O silêncio toma conta da mesa. Não dos arredores, pois é sábado à noite na rua Augusta. A moça move a cadeira para conseguir olhar o pequeno pedaço de céu que se forma na configuração dos prédios da capital, e aprecia o losango azul acidentado. Uma única estrela brilha dentro daquele mísero fragmento da noite.

Em um movimento brusco, ele segura a mão pequena e quente dela, que descansava distraída sobre a mesa.

– Se eu fosse um besouro, você seria o meu chapéu, baby – ele diz, emocionado. Ela estranha a declaração de amor desajeitada e balança a cabeça, rejeitando a ideia ridícula de ser um chapéu. Mira o rosto dele e experimenta a melancolia esquisita do amor. Uma covinha efêmera se projeta na bochecha dela e ela responde:

slide to the right while he scurries to the left. Blindly, the beetle feels his way along the ground until he recovers his precious sphere. Suddenly, point A becomes point Z and point B could be any letter of the alphabet if insects knew how to read.

He now shoves the ball arduously, walking in awkward circles like a drunkard. He draws rounded figures on the sandy ground, loses his way, tries again, and almost fatally flips upside down. Dizzy, Fernando climbs on top of the globe and stops for a few seconds.

He is alone in complete darkness.

“I don’t believe that.” The woman bursts into laughter and so does her partner. “How ridiculous. I don’t believe it. A hat for a beetle. It’s kinda cute, but the poor thing!”

The man shrugs.

Satisfied with the outcome, the woman doesn’t even remember that they’ve been waiting for the bill for a few minutes now. She is flooded with a warm, drunken feeling. Removing the scarf from her neck, she directs her gaze toward the movement of the street.

She doesn’t want to let the moment become a memory.

“And then what?” She asks.

“Huh? Then nothing. Then it was over.”

Silence takes over the table but not due to their surroundings since it’s Saturday night on Rua Augusta. The woman moves her chair so she’s able to look at the small piece of sky outlined by the shape of the capital’s buildings, appreciating the irregular blue diamond. A single star shines within that measly fragment of night.

In a sudden movement the man grabs her small, warm hand, which was resting distractedly on the table. “If I were a beetle, you would be my hat.” He says, emotionally.

She’s surprised by the clumsy declaration of love and shakes her head, rejecting the ridiculous idea

– Bom, melhor do que ser a bola de bosta!

A gargalhada explosiva do casal se confunde em um som estridente, vibrante, que sobe aos céus da capital Paulista.

O garçom chega na mesa cambaleando, se desculpando pelo atraso da conta.

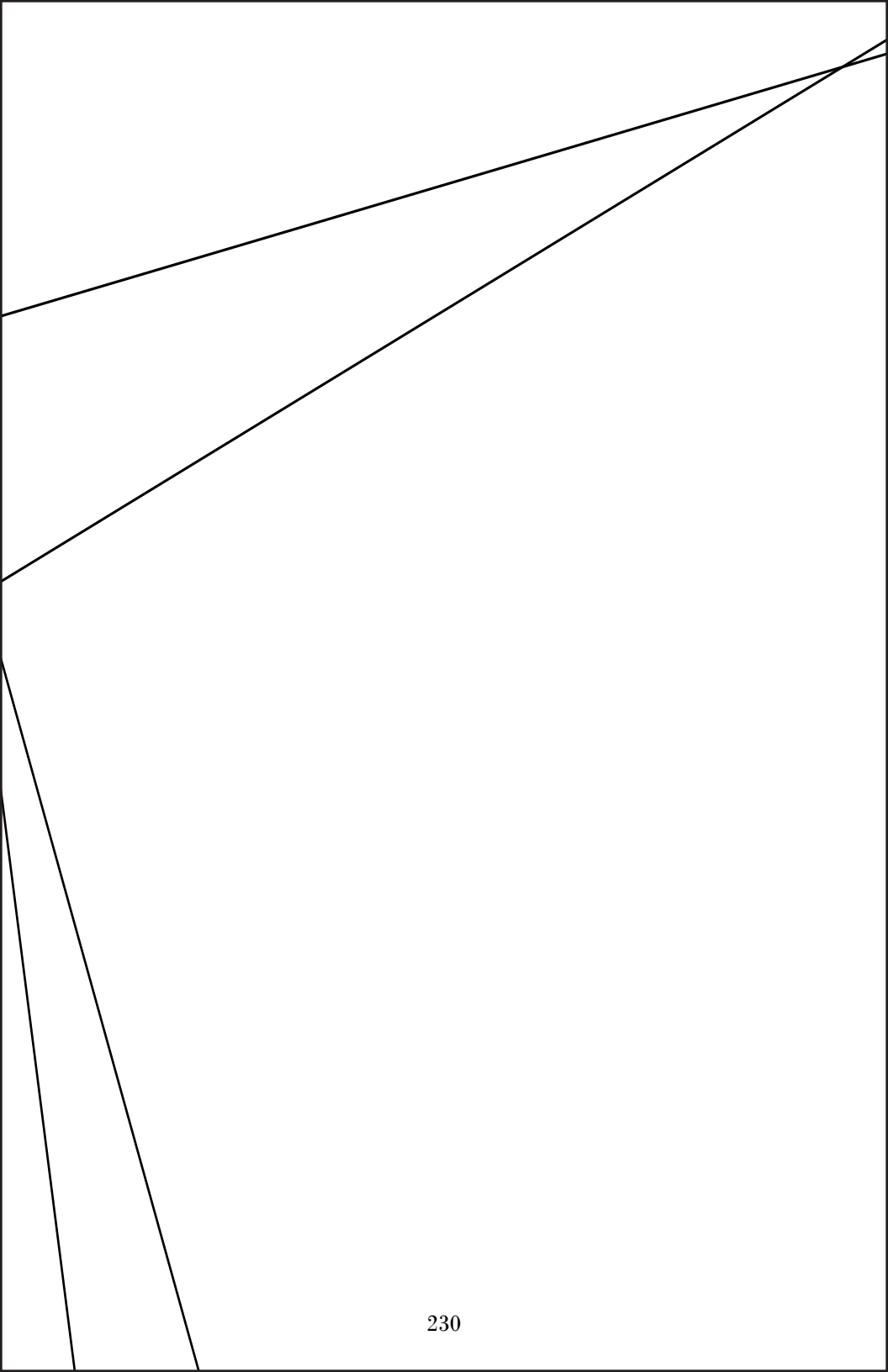
O som da boemia brasileira não chega a atingir a selva onde Fernando, a quilômetros de distância – o chapéu de cowboy abandonado pelo caminho – prossegue veloz, deslizando sua bola em uma trajetória perfeita, guiado pela clareza proporcionada pelas estrelas.

of being a hat. She looks at his face and experiences the strange melancholy of love. A fleeting dimple appears on her cheek, and she responds, “Well, better than being a ball of shit!”

The couple’s explosive laughter blends into a shrill, vibrant sound that rises to the skies of São Paulo.

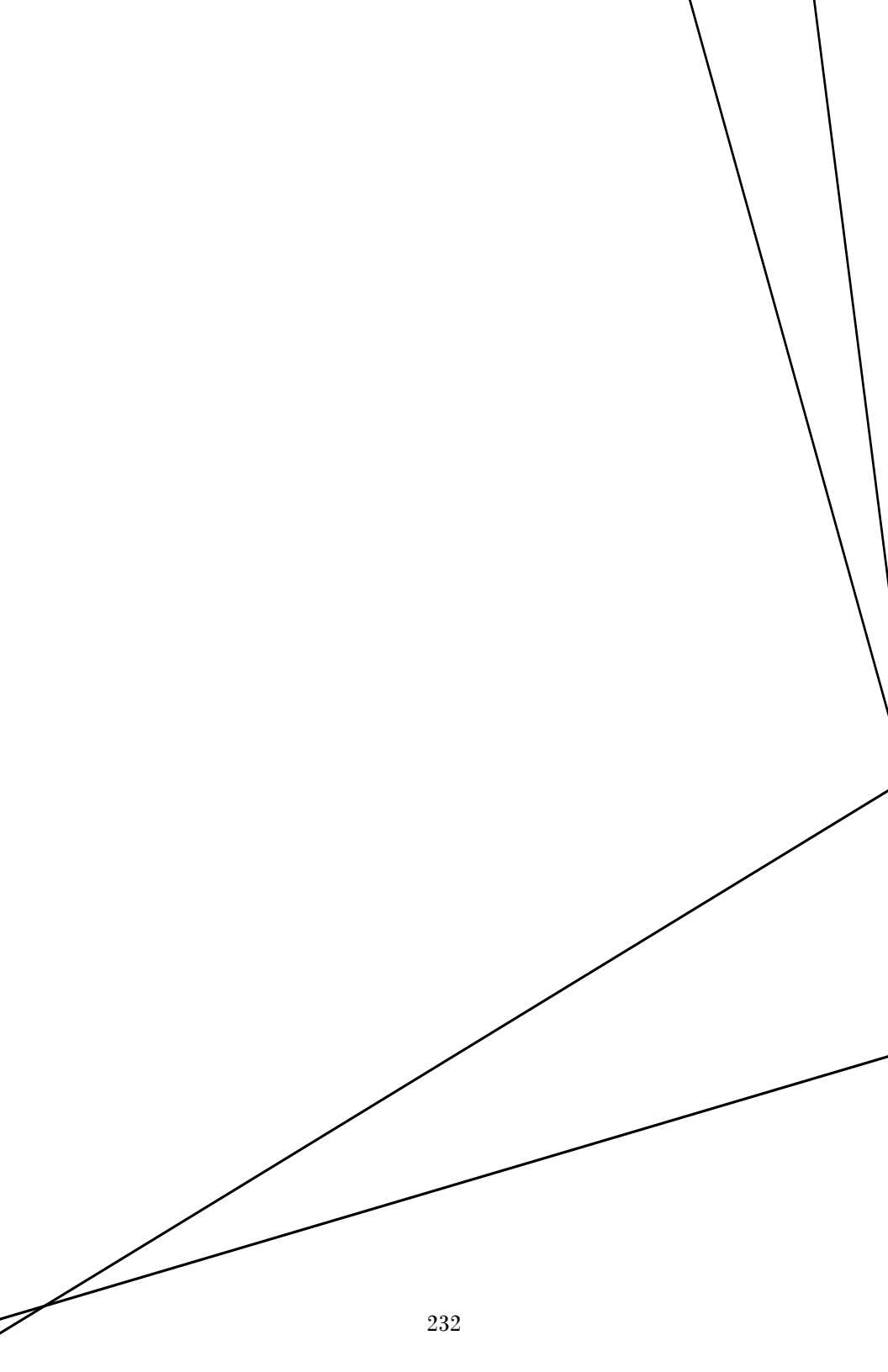
The waiter arrives staggering at the table, apologizing for the late bill.

The sound of Brazilian bohemia doesn’t reach the jungle kilometers away where Fernando – cowboy hat abandoned somewhere along the way – continues quickly, gliding his ball along its perfect trajectory, guided by the clarity provided by the stars.



The page features an abstract geometric design consisting of several thin black lines that intersect to form various triangular and quadrilateral shapes. The lines are positioned diagonally across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. The text is placed in the upper right quadrant, and the page number is located near the bottom center.

word for word / palabra por palabra
Columbia University School of the Arts
Universidad Diego Portales



Nota de traductor

Logré conectar muy bien con el texto de mi compañera desde un principio. A penas me asignaron su trabajo, yo me encontraba leyendo Crónica de una muerte anunciada de García Márquez, fue emocionante y sorprendente la coincidencia que el texto de Kristal haya sido una crónica literaria y además hablara de García Márquez.

Su obra refleja la profunda (des)conexión con su tierra natal y su experiencia. Quise poner el paréntesis porque si bien existe una conexión profunda a su tierra natal, pero se contrasta con esta exploración a la desconexión que siente con el pasado violento de su familia y el cuestionamiento a su propia relación con su tierra natal y su vida en los Estados Unidos.

Su prosa hábil y conmovedora invita al lector a reflexionar sobre el poder del silencio, el peso de la memoria y la búsqueda de la verdad en medio del miedo y la aprehensión. Captura magistralmente la complejidad de estas emociones y brinda una ventana a su mundo interior, donde el amor, la pérdida y el perdón convergen.

A pesar de las distancias geográficas, trabajamos juntas de manera eficiente y colaborativa gracias a los avances en la comunicación a distancia. A través de correos electrónicos, llamadas telefónicas y videollamadas, uniendo nuestras visiones y experiencias para compartir su historia. Ha sido un proceso emocionalmente resonante, y me siento agradecida por la oportunidad de ayudar a transmitir la profundidad y la belleza de su escritura a través de esta traducción.

KRISTAL URIBE-CIFUENTES

EXCERPT FROM *THE CICADAS SEND THEIR GUNPOWDER MESSAGES*

From left to right: On the new Colombian 50 peso bill are immortalized a purple-backed thornbill kissing a flower, Gabriel Garcia Márquez and his yellow butterflies, a representational depiction of the people and homes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the terraces of Ciudad Perdida, and next to them, in minute font, an excerpt from Gabo's 1982 Nobel Prize speech, better known as "The Solitude of Latin America:"

Una nueva y arrasadora utopía de la vida, donde nadie pueda decidir por otros hasta la forma de morir, donde de veras sea cierto el amor y sea posible la felicidad, y donde las estirpes condenadas a cien años de soledad tengan por fin y para siempre una segunda oportunidad sobre la tierra.*

The font is so small that I had to take a picture of the bill with my phone and zoom into the text to read it. What I read delighted me and made me proud of claiming Gabo as my own, but it was also devastating. I ran into feelings of overwhelming grief. It is the part about death that I fixated on, about wanting to live in a world where no one gets to decide on another's death, as though this were too much to ask for. That being the criteria, utopias seem incredibly feasible. It is bewildering that we have such a hard time moving in their tender direction, that to chase them is to trail behind pipe dreams, or so I have often been told.

* A new and sweeping utopia of life, wherein no one will be able to decide for others the way of their deaths, where love really can be true and happiness possible, and where the lineages condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever and ever, a second chance upon the earth.

traducido del inglés por PÍA CERECEDA LIRA

De izquierda a derecha: En el nuevo billete de 50 pesos colombianos hay una imagen inmortalizada de un colibrí piquicorto besando una flor, una imagen de Gabriel García Márquez y sus mariposas amarillas, una representación de la gente y las casas de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, las terrazas de Ciudad Perdida y, junto a ellos, en palabras diminutas, un fragmento del discurso de aceptación al Premio Nobel que dio gabo en el 82, también conocido como La soledad de América Latina:

“una nueva y arrasadora utopía de la vida, donde nadie pueda decidir por otros hasta la forma de morir, donde de veras sea cierto el amor y sea posible la felicidad, y donde las estirpes condenadas a cien años de soledad tengan por fin y para siempre una segunda oportunidad sobre la tierra”.

La letra era tan pequeña que tuve que tomar una foto del billete con mi teléfono y hacer zoom en el texto para poder leerlo. Lo que leí me deleitó y me sentí orgullosa reclamando a Gabo como parte de mi historia, así como también fue devastador. De repente sentí una abrumadora tristeza. Me enfoqué en la parte sobre la muerte, sobre querer vivir en un mundo donde nadie pueda decidir sobre la muerte de otro, como si fuese demasiado pedir. Siendo ese el criterio, las utopías parecen increíblemente factibles. Es desconcertante que tengamos tanto problema para movernos en su delicada dirección, que perseguirla sea ir tras sueños imposibles, o al menos eso me han dicho a menudo.

De todas las frases hermosas que nos dejó, alguien decidió que esta era la más idónea para conmemorarlo

Of all the beautiful sentences that he left us, someone decided that this was the one most fit to commemorate him in representation of our country, the one worthy of going on our second highest denomination, historically reserved for Colombia's great literary figures. I want desperately to disagree with that person, but have yet to find a sound enough argument. At times I have an infantile yearning to reject morbidity, and I say infantile because morbidity is a part of life, perhaps the biggest part of it: death is so sure of winning that it gives you a whole life's worth of advantage. But, as one of our poets, Tirso Vélez, put it so well in the months leading up to his assassination, it is difficult for a lover of life to make so many allusions to death. And yet, it seems we all must hang suspended from the inevitability, as Gabo and Tirso did in life, and as I see myself forced to do so as well. In wanting to write about the beauty of the living, we end up paying homage to our dead.

The first time I read Gabo's Nobel speech in full, out loud to myself in an empty room, I cried. My maternal grandmother was born in late December of 1946, a year and four months before the political assassination of beloved left-wing presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whose death is known as the opening act of La Violencia, the Colombian civil war. It is recorded as having lasted a decade, which is somewhat incorrect. The bloodshed continued for so long that today Colombia's is regarded as the oldest ongoing armed conflict in the Americas. Disillusioned by the ease with which she can trace the spoils of this period in our current events, my grandmother has made, in recent years, a definitive switch to the religious channel where she watches the daily mass. In the late 50s, at the supposed end of the war, her father was crucified on a hill in the outskirts of their town for having taken a side.

en representación de nuestra tierra, la que merecía ser inmortalizada en nuestro segundo billete más prestigioso, reservado históricamente para grandes figuras de la literatura colombiana. Desearía estar en desacuerdo con la persona que seleccionó esta frase, pero no encuentro un argumento lo suficientemente sólido para rebatirlo. Tengo un infantil anhelo de rechazo a la morbosidad, y digo infantil porque la morbosidad es parte de la vida, quizás gran parte de ella: la muerte está tan segura de ganar que te da toda una vida de ventaja. Pero como bien expresó uno de nuestros poetas, Tirso Vélez, en los meses previos a su asesinato, es difícil para un amante de la vida hacer tantas alusiones a la muerte. Y, sin embargo, parece que todos debemos permanecer suspendidos en la inevitabilidad, como en vida lo hicieron Gabo y Tirso. Y como también me veo obligada a hacerlo. Al querer escribir sobre la belleza de nuestros vivos, terminamos homenajeando a nuestros muertos.

La primera vez que leí el discurso completo del Nobel de Gabo, sola y en voz alta, en una habitación vacía, lloré.

Mi abuela materna nació en diciembre de 1946, un año y cuatro meses antes del asesinato político del querido candidato presidencial de izquierda Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, cuya muerte se conoce como el acto de apertura de La Violencia, la guerra civil colombiana.

Se registra que duró una década, lo cual es, de cierto modo, incorrecto. La violencia persistió durante tanto tiempo en Colombia que hoy en día se considera el conflicto armado en curso más antiguo de las Américas. Desilusionada por la facilidad con que ella puede indagar sobre los vestigios de este periodo en nuestros acontecimientos actuales, mi abuela ha realizado un cambio definitivo en los últimos años, sintoniza en la televisión un canal religioso, donde ve la misa diaria como su programa principal.

I have never once heard my grandmother, the woman who raised me, speak about her father and I am too afraid to pry. My first instinct is to say that my own right to my family history is not worth a single second of her suffering. My second instinct brings me to consider the overwhelming loss that lies in not knowing, in the possibility that a sliver of undistorted truth could be lost in her to my own futile reticence. Maybe she could forgive me for bringing her to tears. After all, to her I owe my habit of not sanctifying daily grief, of laughing in the face of misfortune. This is a woman who has done it her whole life. *La vida es de los vivos*, she always says to me.

And if life belongs to the living, which it does, the past should only be allowed to intrude so much on the ever-bearing present. In Latin America, our past has stuck to us as though it were a sentence of permanent reconstruction. It has lodged us into a completely different realm, a third world if you will, from which our lives are wholly structured around escaping. The ones who manage to make it out are regarded as lucky. This is only because the outside chooses to regard us so. And to a degree, we believe this, thinking it nearly impossible to be this lucky in our own mother countries. We think that ours are, invariably and in line with foreign and extrapolated evaluations, poverty-stricken countries filled with violence that we are always better off abandoning. We subscribe to a sinister reduction of our history: ruins and bloodied money. A dismissive trivialization, at the very best. How is it that a place whose beauty alone has been the subject of countless writings is so often reduced to an open archive of unnatural death?

...

When Colombia elected its first leftist president last year, I thought about my grandmother, about how she tells me that life belongs to the living, about how she's as old as this war, about how I was not next to her

A finales de los años 50, en lo que se suponía era el final de la guerra, su padre fue crucificado en una colina en las afueras de su pueblo por haber tomado partido.

Nunca he escuchado a mi abuela, la mujer que me crió, hablar de su padre y tengo demasiado miedo de indagar. Mi primer instinto es decir que mi derecho a mi historia familiar no vale ni un segundo de su sufrimiento. Mi segundo instinto me lleva a considerar la abrumadora pérdida que implica el desconocimiento, la posibilidad de que un fragmento de verdad no distorsionada se pierda en ella debido a mi propia aprehensión fútil. Quizás ella podría perdonarme por hacerla llorar. Después de todo, a ella le debo mi costumbre de no santificar la angustia cotidiana, de reírme en la cara de la desgracia. Ella es una mujer que lo ha hecho toda su vida. “La vida es de los vivos”, siempre me dice.

Y si la vida pertenece a los vivos, como lo es verdaderamente, el pasado sólo debería permitirse influir tanto en el siempre fértil presente. En América Latina, nuestro pasado se ha adherido a nosotros como si fuese una sentencia de reconstrucción eterna.

Nos ha alojado en un mundo completamente diferente, un tercer mundo, por así decirlo, el cual dice que nuestras vidas están organizadas en torno al escape.

Los que logran migrar son considerados afortunados. Esto es solo porque el mundo exterior elige vernos así. Y en cierto punto, llegamos a creerlo, pensando que es casi imposible ser tan afortunados en nuestra propia tierra. Pensamos que nuestras tierras, conforme a evaluaciones foráneas y prejuicios distorsionados, son países empobrecidos, saturados de violencia, de los cuales siempre es mejor huir.

Nos sometemos a una despiadada reducción de nuestra historia: ruinas y riquezas manchadas por la sangre

as she witnessed the inconceivable in the coliseum of our politics, conceived: Gustavo Petro dodged the abyss of history that we were all convinced would claim his life.

I suppose it makes sense that the first time I read Gabo's Nobel speech, out loud to myself in an empty room, I cried. I cannot read anything on this subject without crying, detached as I feel, and perhaps because of it, from the vast valley of violence that lives in my family's memory but not so much in mine. I am almost unable to believe that this history also belongs to me because I don't live within its material consequences. As much as I try to preserve the umbilical cord between my self and my home, I don't always feel its strain. After all, I abandoned my country. Does my solitude still belong to Latin America or has it been supplanted by North American priorities?

I recently read Esther Allen's essay "The Will to Translate," where she briefly discusses, among other things, the contextual factors of Rollo Ogden's translation of Jorge Isaacs'—before Márquez, it was Isaacs who occupied our 50 peso bill—*Maria*. In 1890, it became the first Latin American novel to be published in English translation in the United States, in New York. I made a mental note to tell my mother about this because *Maria* is her favorite book. I thought knowing this might motivate her to keep practicing her English, which I personally find very good despite her claims that it is not. For as long as we've lived here, she's always blamed her unwillingness to learn English on some psychological rejection of the language, which I identify and admire as a resistance against assimilation. When I finally told her what I learned about *Maria*, she said she didn't remember what the book was about.

On the very first page of Isaac's novel, the protagonist and narrator, Efraín, describes the scene

derramada. Una despectiva minimización, en el mejor de los casos. ¿Cómo es posible que un lugar cuya mera belleza ha inspirado innumerables relatos literarios sea tan frecuentemente relegada a un sombrío escenario de muerte y desesperanza?

El año pasado, cuando en Colombia fue electo el primer presidente de izquierda, pensé en mi abuela, en sus palabras que insisten en que la vida es para los vivos, mientras reflexionaba sobre su edad, que coincide con la duración de esta guerra. Lamento no haber estado a su lado mientras presenciaba lo inconcebible en el coliseo de nuestra política, donde Gustavo Petro sorteó el abismo de la historia, un destino al que todos temíamos que clamara.

La primera vez que recité en voz alta el discurso del Nobel de Gabo, lo hice en una habitación vacía y las lágrimas brotaron. Me conmueve profundamente cada vez que abordo este tema, aunque siento una desconexión con el vasto valle de violencia que habita en la memoria de mi familia, que apenas toca la mía. Me cuesta creer que esta historia también sea mía, cuando sus consecuencias materiales apenas me rozan. Aunque mi esfuerzo por mantener el cordón umbilical con mi tierra natal, a menudo parece que se ha debilitado. Después de todo, fui quien abandonó su país. ¿A quién pertenece mi soledad ahora? ¿Aún a América Latina o ha sido por las prioridades norteamericanas?

Recientemente me sumergí en el ensayo de Esther Allen, *La voluntad de traducir*, donde discute brevemente, entre otras cosas, los factores contextuales de la traducción de Rollo Ogden de *María*, la novela de Jorge Isaacs, merecen atención. Antes de García Márquez, fue Isaacs quien protagonizó el billete de 50 pesos colombianos. En 1890, *María* se convirtió en la primera novela latinoamericana en ser publicada y traducida al inglés en los Estados Unidos, en Nueva York

of his first departure from home and from his first love, Maria: “Maria humbly awaited her turn, and babbling through her goodbye, pressed her blushing cheek against my own, chilled by the first sensation of pain.” It is unclear, at least to me, whether the pain he is referring to is Maria’s or his own. This is because the narrator makes assumptions, albeit benignly, about the girl’s state of being throughout the whole book. I like to think that the ambiguity was meant to designate this pain to them both. In his translation, Ogden writes dolor, pain, as “sorrow,” in indirect translation, but I am moved by Isaac’s choice to name this emotion “pain.” In the novel, the phrase “sensation of pain” becomes recurring and indicative of departure, so that, like in life itself, where pain appears in any of its forms departure follows close behind.

I am easily seduced by the conviction that the blow is always harder for whoever is left behind, which might be symptomatic of the American dream rhetoric I had, for better or for worse, instilled in me at a young age. Owing to such linguistic associations, those rogue fugitives of sound logic, I take the words “whoever is left behind” to imply a few things:

1. that someone’s been relegated to a kind of stagnation; that just because they are not moving somewhere it means that they are not moving forward.
2. a dimension of time, or, more specifically, the past.
3. a quantitative valuation; the assumption that someone has been alienated, so to say, from their tribe.

But linguistic associations aside, the states of leaving behind and being left behind produce a single, interdependent solitude. In the end, I do not believe it possible to apply the concept of hierarchy to distance itself. To see Márquez and his ode to the solitude of Latin America on a Colombian banknote is both a

específicamente. Hice una nota mental para contarle esto a mi madre, ya que María es su libro favorito. Pensé que saber esto podría motivarla a seguir practicando su inglés, que personalmente encuentro bastante bueno a pesar de que ella diga lo contrario. Desde que vivimos aquí, siempre ha culpado su falta de voluntad para aprender inglés a un rechazo psicológico del idioma, que yo he identificado y admirado como una resistencia contra la asimilación. Cuando finalmente le conté lo que aprendí sobre María, ella dijo que no recordaba de que trataba el libro.

En la primera página de la novela de Isaacs, el narrador y protagonista, Efraín, describe la escena de su primera partida de casa y de su primer amor, María: María esperó humildemente su turno, y balbuciendo su despedida, juntó su mejilla sonrosada a la mía, helada por la primera sensación de dolor.”

No está claro, al menos para mí, si el dolor al que se refiere es de María o propio. Esto se debe a que el narrador hace suposiciones, en buena fe, sobre el estado de ánimo de la chica a lo largo de todo el libro. Me gusta pensar que la ambigüedad está destinada a designarle este dolor a ambos. En su traducción, Ogden escribe dolor como “sorrow”, el sustantivo de un sentimiento definido como profunda angustia causada por pérdida, decepción, u otra desgracia sufrida. Es una traducción indirecta, pero me conmueve la decisión de Isaac de otorgar a esta emoción el nombre de “dolor”. A lo largo de la novela la expresión “sensación de dolor” se repite con frecuencia, sirviendo como un símbolo evocador de despedida, de modo que, al igual que en la vida misma, donde el dolor aparece en cualquiera de sus formas, le sigue la partida muy de cerca.

Me seduce fácilmente la convicción de que el golpe es siempre más duro para aquellos que quedan atrás, lo cual podría ser sintomático del discurso del sueño

reminder of why I left and why I long to return: my departure was decided for me, as so many other things have been and continue to be decided by others, the things that make up an entire life, and much too often, for unworthy exploits, even life itself.

americano que, para bien o para mal, se me inculcó desde joven. Debido a tales asociaciones lingüísticas, esas fugitivas rebeldes de la lógica sólida, interpreto las palabras “aquellos que quedan atrás” para sugerir ciertos aspectos:

1. Que alguien ha sido relegado a una especie de estancamiento; que el hecho de que no estén yendo a algún lugar significa que no están avanzando.

2. Una dimensión del tiempo, o, más específicamente, el pasado.

3. Una valoración cuantitativa; la suposición de que alguien ha sido alienado, por así decirlo, de su tribu.

Pero dejando de lado las asociaciones lingüísticas, los estados de dejar atrás y ser dejado atrás generan una soledad única e interdependiente. Al final no concibo la posibilidad de aplicar el concepto de jerarquía a la distancia misma. Contemplar a García Márquez y su homenaje a la soledad de América Latina en un billete colombiano es como ver reflejadas las razones que me llevaron a partir y los anhelos que me empujan a regresar. Mi partida fue una decisión tomada por otros, como tantas otras cosas en mi vida, que aún son determinadas por manos ajenas; factores que moldean la totalidad de mi existencia y, con demasiada frecuencia, para propósitos injustos, incluso a expensas de la propia vida.

Translator's Note

While editing this short story one afternoon at my mother's house over coffee, I turned to her and asked her what she thought the most beautiful language in the world was. Without a moment's hesitation, without lifting her gaze from the coffee she was stirring cold, she replied that the most beautiful language in the world is, of course, Spanish. There is nothing objectively true or untrue about this statement, as is the case with any statement pertaining to beauty. My mother's answer was simply an act of fidelity to her first language, the only language she claims as her own.

Like my mother, my first language is also Spanish. It was through Spanish that I first fulfilled any desire to make sense of my visceral and physical positions before the world, but it was through English, which I took up at the dawn of my adolescence, that I learned how to be critical of these desires and positions. I love Spanish for its tenderness—the noun that appears more frequently than any other in this translation—and I love English for its ability to disintegrate declarative statements, for how well it cradles and nourishes uncertainty, even in its compactness. How much of this is a visceral qualification, I remain unsure.

Pía Cereceda Lira's writing, full of cascading paratactic clauses, hypnotic and lulling, yet full of momentum in their rhythm, is a celebration of the incredible tenderness I believe can and should be attributed to the Spanish language. Syntactically, it could be taken for a representation of its subject matter, which happens to be a place: a small town in the rolling hills of Northern Chile, Tulahuén, a border town on the mountain range, from which her family partly comes. In this way, Pía's practice is a love letter to her heritage. Perhaps this is why she is so dreamy a narrator. From this author's writing I learned that

a linguistic structure can emulate the atmospheric dimension we usually entrust to narration alone. My hope is that I have preserved the romance and nostalgia central to this piece, which is inspired by the old bolero from which it takes its name: “Solamente una vez.”

When translating between these two languages I am often struck by the aesthetic inquietudes that their political dimensions so effortlessly create. Like many translators, I worry about translations coming out “foreign-sounding.” I have found that moving between these two languages in particular requires an uneven negotiation of historical sensibilities, references and familiarities. To this end, cultural references remain largely un-translated, and given little to no context. I have decided that it is the reader’s responsibility to take interest in researching non-American culture, so that the passively white-washing footnote so often encountered in “foreign literature” can begin to disappear.

PÍA CERECEDA LIRA

SOLAMENTE UNA VEZ

Una vez nada más la vi sentada ahí, donde yo siempre solía sentarme a comer una churrasca calientita con mantequilla. Ella estaba dándole de comer a las palomas mientras el niño chico de la vecina María corría de un lado a otro espantándolas, jugando a tener poder, jugando a ver cómo las palomas medio volaban y medio comían. Yo siento en el alma que poquito a poco en esta vida las cosas cambian.

Su forma de estar ahí sentada, su forma de sonreír juguetón al ver al niño chico y a las palomas con tanta dulzura. Sacrifico mi asiento y dejo pasar el tiempo que no volverá, no volveré nunca a sentarme ahí, “prefiero quedarme aquí” pensé en ese momento. Siempre solo, sin su dulce calor que ese día logré tener.

Las 12:00, suena la sirena de los bomberos indicando que ya es medio día, el niño se tapa los oídos por su hipersensibilidad auditiva, también puedo afirmar que es molesto hasta para quien no la tiene, y los bomberos estaban a menos de una cuadra de la pequeña plaza de armas. Me acerqué a la vecina y me senté junto a ella. Le pregunté susurrando quién era esa chiquilla que estaba sentada en la banca de al lado, la vecina me respondió que era la sobrina nieta de la señora Hortensia, que la señora Hortensia tenía olor a finado (La señora Hortensia nunca tuvo hijos) y que hace un tiempo fue a leer el rosario al funeral de la señora Ofelia, y la familia de la señora Ofelia le regaló una chancha, seguramente era pa que se la comiera ahora para el 18, pero salía pa todos lados con la chancha, “Petra” le puso, porque era el nombre de la protagonista de una novela turca que daban en el canal 5.

**translated from the spanish by
KRISTAL URIBE-CIFUENTES**

Once, I saw her sitting in the same spot where I usually went to enjoy a warm buttered churrasca. She was there feeding the pigeons, while the neighbor Maria's little boy chased after them, startling them, playing some power game, playing at observing how they half flew and half ate. Deep down inside me I often feel how, little by little, things change in this life.

Her manner of sitting there, her playful smile at the sight of the young boy and the pigeons, was so tender. I sacrificed my usual spot and let the time slip by, time I knew would never return. I would never sit there again. "I'd rather stay here," I thought in that moment. And now, alone forever, without your tender warmth, which I'd managed to reach that day, even if briefly.

It's 12 o'clock; the firehouse siren rings, indicating midday. The boy, who has auditory hypersensitivity, covers his ears. I can attest that the sound is a nuisance even to someone without it, and the firehouse is less than a block away from the town's Main Square.

I approached the neighbor and sat down beside her. Discreetly, I inquired about the girl sitting on the bench next to ours. She told me the girl was Señora Hortensia's grandniece, and that Sra. Hortensia carried the stench of death (Sra. Hortensia never had children of her own), and that, a while back, Sra. Hortensia went to pray the rosary at Sra. Ofelia's funeral, and Sra. Ofelia's family gifted her a piglet, surely so that she could eat it on the 18th, but instead, she began going

La chancha Petra se volvió su compañera estos últimos meses y le ha alargado un poco la pila de vida que le queda, ya que cuando la señora Hortensia le dio el ataque, la chancha fue hasta la posta y fue raro que estuviera sola, sin su arnés, y sin la señora Hortensia. Menos mal que no estaba la cabra nueva de enfermera de turno y estaba la Carmencita que es la que vive en la casa que está al lado de la posta hace como unos 5 años. La Carmencita intuyó al tiro que algo le pasaba a la señora Hortensia y siguió a la chancha hasta la casa, a esa hora la señora Hortensia se sienta a tejer con la puerta que da a la calle, mirando a la poca gente que baja al río o sube de allá. La sobrina nieta desde que era chica no la venía a ver, ahora hace poco se recibió de pedagoga en educación básica, a lo mejor tenemos profesora nueva para la escuelita, porque también se sabe que echaron a la profe Daniela porque no dejaba que los pequeñitos de primero fueran al baño durante toda la jornada, solo en el recreo de 15 minutos, “aquí tuve al Pedro chico con infección urinaria y todos sus compañeros estaban en la misma”, dijo la vecina apuntando al niño chico.

Esta cabra es joven, de la ciudad, con otras ideas y pensamientos, de lejos se ve que es una buena cabra, ojalá se quede, además es una de las que más se ha preocupado por la Hortensia, la otra vez fui a verla, ella estaba con pijama limpio, si bien había olor a finado, pero limpiecita, tomando sopita de pollo casera, risueña y con la chancha acostada en los pies de la cama. “Y eso sería todo”, finalizó la vecina María el eterno susurro chismográfico, me hizo un resumen de lo último que había pasado en la vida de la señora Hortensia y una pequeña biografía de la sobrina nieta que era por lo que le pregunté principalmente, me gustaría tener esa habilidad social que para algunos es solo ser una simple “vieja sapa”, o “chismosa”, pero al fin de cuentas es como una Wikipedia del pueblo enterada de todo lo que pasa y de cada persona que pasa, una Wikipedia o rincón del vago, ya que es una dudosa fuente de información, pero contiene algunas cosas importantes

everywhere with the piglet, which she named “Petra,” after the protagonist of a Turkish telenovela that aired on channel 5.

Petra the piglet has become her loyal companion over these last few months and has extended what little is left of her life. When Sra. Hortensia had the stroke, the piglet went to the town’s health post, and everyone thought it strange to see her roaming around by herself and without her harness. Thank God the rookie nurse wasn’t on shift, and that Carmencita, who’s lived right next door to the health post for the past 5 years, happened to be around. Carmencita, always sharp as a tack, immediately intuited that something was wrong with Sra. Hortensia and proceeded to follow the piglet back home. Usually at that time of day, Sra. Hortensia would sit down to knit facing the street, front door wide open, watching the handful of people going down to the river or coming back up the road. Her grandniece hadn’t visited her in years, since she was a child, but she was finally back in town, and a recent graduate in General Primary Education. Hopefully, this meant that we might get a new teacher at the local school, given the whole thing about Miss Daniela getting fired over the bathroom incidents (she refused to let the first graders use the restroom all day, except for during the 15 minute recess—“When I tell you little Pedro got a urinary tract infection along with the rest of his class,” said my neighbor, pointing at the youngest of her children).

“This one is young, from the city, with different ideas and ways of looking at things. You can tell that she’s a nice young lady. Hopefully she’ll end up staying. Besides, she’s among the few who’ve actually looked after Hortensia and worried about her well-being. The other day, I went to see her. She was wearing clean pajamas and had, as usual, that stench of death about her, but was clean nonetheless. She was having a little

que pueden servir.

Me quise acercar a la chiquilla, pero me congelé y me quedé observándola de una forma poco disimulada, tieso como tabla frente a ella, mientras ella no levantaba la cabeza de ese libro pequeño que tenía en sus manos, no me notaba o simplemente ignoraba mi presencia, de alguna forma el hecho de que no me prestara atención en ese estado de modo planta hacía que la situación no sea más incómoda de lo que ya es. Fui a paso lento acercándome hasta quedar sentado a su lado, ya teniendo en mente el resumen que me dio la vecina, le pregunté cómo se encontraba la señora Hortensia, que me había enterado de que no estaba tan bien y que vino a cuidarla de forma indefinida, decidí que indefinida era la palabra correcta aunque está más que claro que se va a morir. Ella levantó su dulce mirada dirigiéndose a mis ojos, respondiendo cordialmente que así era. Que se iba a tomar el verano para cuidar a su tía, que también el estar en el campo le da la calma para un proyecto que tiene en mente y dentro de ella, que no podía contarme porque si lo cuenta no resulta, pero que me iba a dar una pista. En ese momento una de las cosas que más me sorprendió fue la confianza que tenía al hablarme como si fuéramos amigos de toda una vida. Y toda una vida tendré que esperar para volver a verla.

Ella tomó mi mano y la acerco a su vientre. En ese momento tuve demasiadas preguntas, como si ¿iba a ser madre soltera?, ¿estará casada?, pero la miré a los ojos con una sonrisa y le pregunté cuántos meses tenía, me respondió con semanas, 18 semanas dijo, pero no se le notaba nada. Desubicadamente, pregunté por el padre, el rostro que llevaba junto a su mirada cambió completamente, una expresión que parecía fusión de ansiedad, ansiedad junto con miedo, en ese momento me pegué la cachá de que claramente la cagué preguntando tal cosa, le dije que me disculpaba que no era mi intención y que si no se sentía bien hablando de ese tema lo comprendía. Cambió el tema al clima, que en el pueblo hacía mucha calor, pero se

bowl of homemade chicken broth, rosy with her piglet lying at the foot of her bed.”

“And that would be all,” neighbor Maria concluded, as though clamping a lid over the eternal whisper of gossip. She had given me a brief summary of the latest developments in Sra. Hortensia’s life, as well as an abridged biography of the grandniece, who I had mainly inquired about. I would like to have the social skills that some regard as merely being a “vieja sapo,” a busybody, a gossip, because in the end they’re a sort of local Wikipedia, aware of everything that happens and everyone who happens by. A Wikipedia or a Rincon del Vago database, in other words, a dubious source of information containing important and potentially useful things nonetheless.

I felt a desire to approach the girl but froze before even reaching resolve. All I could do was observe her, and indiscreetly at that, standing still as a boulder before her, while she refused to lift her head from a small book she held in her hands. She didn’t notice me, or perhaps simply ignored my presence, and in a way the fact that she paid me no mind made the situation seem less uncomfortable than it was. I moved toward her slowly, wishing to sit right beside her. Keeping the summary that the neighbor had generously given me in mind, I asked the girl about Sra. Hortensia’s health, confessing that I had just found out she wasn’t doing so well, and that I also knew the reason she’d come to town was to take care of her indefinitely. I decided that indefinitely was, indeed, the correct word to use, though it was obvious that Hortensia was going to die. The girl lifted her sweet gaze to my eyes, politely confirming that such was the case and that she had taken the summer off to dedicate it to her aunt, and that the calmness of the countryside would grant her the space to work on a project she bore in mind, something she said lived inside her, that she couldn’t tell me what it was because

pasaba todo el día cuidando a su tía como para bajar al río, el miedo de que le pase algo mientras no está, a lo más salía como ahora, un rato a la plaza a leer y a comer churrasca, y solo mojaba sus pies cuando iba a lavar la ropa al canal. Que soñaba con parir en agua, pero que eso era solo una fantasía. Sacó una libreta tipo diario de vida que tenía guardada en su cartera y lo abrió para mostrarme su diario donde tenía escrito todo lo que iba sintiendo cada día de su embarazo, lo hojeaba con demasiada ternura, tocándose el vientre. Ya estaba anocheciendo y me dijo que ya se tenía que ir, tenía que cambiarle el canal de la tele a la tía porque a esta hora veía las noticias del canal 8, le dije que la acercaba a la puerta, pero se negó y se despidió de beso en la mejilla. Esa noche me devolví a mi casa, una casona antigua en la que vivían mis padres que fallecieron hace un par de meses y de la ciudad me devolví al lugar de mi infancia. El sitio donde tomaba una cazuela de vacuno haciendo casi 40 grados en un día de verano, escuchando boleros del trío los panchos, con mi madre cantando en la cocina y mi padre sentado en la sombra leyendo el diario, ahora que no están me hago una sopa en sobre y pongo un cd con el nombre de “boleros” escrito con plumón que me grabó mi amigo cuando trabajaba en el retail, tenía temas de los panchos junto al puma Rodríguez y junto a la Eydie Gormé.

Encendí la radio y me senté en la banca del patio con un cigarro. Cerré mis ojos y fantaseé con la canción y la mirada de la mujer que vi hoy. “Espérame en el cielo corazón” Se me ahogaba el pecho con esa canción y más relacionándola con ella, sentía algo fuerte en el pecho, como si todo lo que viví aquella tarde había sido nada más que una ilusión. Subí a mi pieza, que hace un tiempo ahí dormían mis padres, que ahí estuvieron hasta el último, en ese lugar se apagaron y que día a día duermo donde ellos cayeron en el sueño eterno. Caí en el sueño, pero no eterno. Soñé con ella, con su ternura, con el bebé en brazos. En el sueño mi vida era junto a ella, esperaba que fuera eterno, mejor dicho que no fuera solo un sueño y fuera la realidad.

if she told it to anyone it wouldn't happen, but that she would give me a hint. One of the things that most surprised me was the confidence with which she spoke to me, as though we had been friends our whole lives. And I would have to wait a whole lifetime to see her again.

She took my hand and led it toward her womb. I had so many questions, wondering whether she was going to be a single mother, whether she was married. But I just looked into her eyes, and smiling, asked her how many months along she was, to which she replied in weeks, 18 weeks she said, though you could not tell at all. Ingenuously, I asked about the father, and the face that had until then accompanied her gaze changed completely, an expression that suggested anxiety, anxiety fused with alarm, and I realized that I had fucked up by asking her that. I apologized to her, saying that it had not been my intention to upset her and that I understood if she didn't feel comfortable with the subject. She changed the topic to the weather, to how hot the town was, how she spent all day caring for her aunt and had no time to go down by the river, how she was afraid that something could happen to her aunt in her absence, and how she only ever went out like this, for a short while, to read and eat churrasca in the plaza, and that the only time she could wet her feet was when she went down to the canal to wash clothes, and that she dreamt of giving birth in the water, though this was only a fantasy.

She took a small notebook, a pocket diary, out of her purse, and opened it to show me where she'd written everything she had been feeling every single day of her pregnancy, leafing through it with such tenderness as she caressed her belly. Night was already falling and she told me she had to go, that she had to go switch the tv channel for her aunt because at this hour she watched the channel 8 news, and I told her

De alguna forma igual estaba consciente que no era real. Desperté con el canto del gallo a las 6:30 de la mañana, desayuné unos huevos de campo a la copa con un té bien cargado con 3 cucharadas de azúcar, la casa está llena de reliquias y hay una copa porta huevo de plata maciza junto con un mini salero y unas tazas de porcelana con detalles de oro.

Empezaron a sonar sirenas, supuse que había algún incendio cerca, en ese tiempo de calor es algo común, la gente que acampa y deja la fogata, la gente vengativa, las empresas, bueno puede haber muchas causas y unas de esa es el sol (aunque puede que no lo sea, muchas veces se utiliza para encubrir lo anterior). Abrí la puerta de la entrada para barrer y ventilar, me encontré que pasado la plaza de armas había una ambulancia parada sacando un cuerpo tapado, era la casa de la señora Hortensia, la señora Hortensia salió vivita y coleando de la casa como si nunca hubiese estado enferma, había un hombre a su lado, un hombre de pelo largo y bien vestido. Al darse vuelta los paramédicos para ver quién los iba a acompañar la señora Hortensia cambió completamente y empezó a llorar, el hombre le dijo algo al oído para luego subir a la ambulancia junto al cuerpo, suponía que la iban a llevar a la ciudad, ni siquiera sabía si era la sobrina la que iba ahí, pero era lo más probable.

Al frente mío daba la casa de la vecina María, la vi salir con bata acercándose. La señora hortensia entró lo más rápido posible a su casa, la ambulancia ya se estaba yendo, ya era tarde para la vecina María, pero me vio barriendo y se acercó a preguntar su sabía algo, que había visto a la señora Hortensia en pie, que no entendía si fue algo real o lo imaginó porque andaba somnolienta, le dije que vi salir un cuerpo, que suponía que era de la sobrina y en la ambulancia se fue con un hombre de pelo largo y bien vestido, la señora María me quedó mirando y me dijo que ese hombre parece que era el pololito de la niña, que había llegado anoche en la madrugada, que ella sabía porque

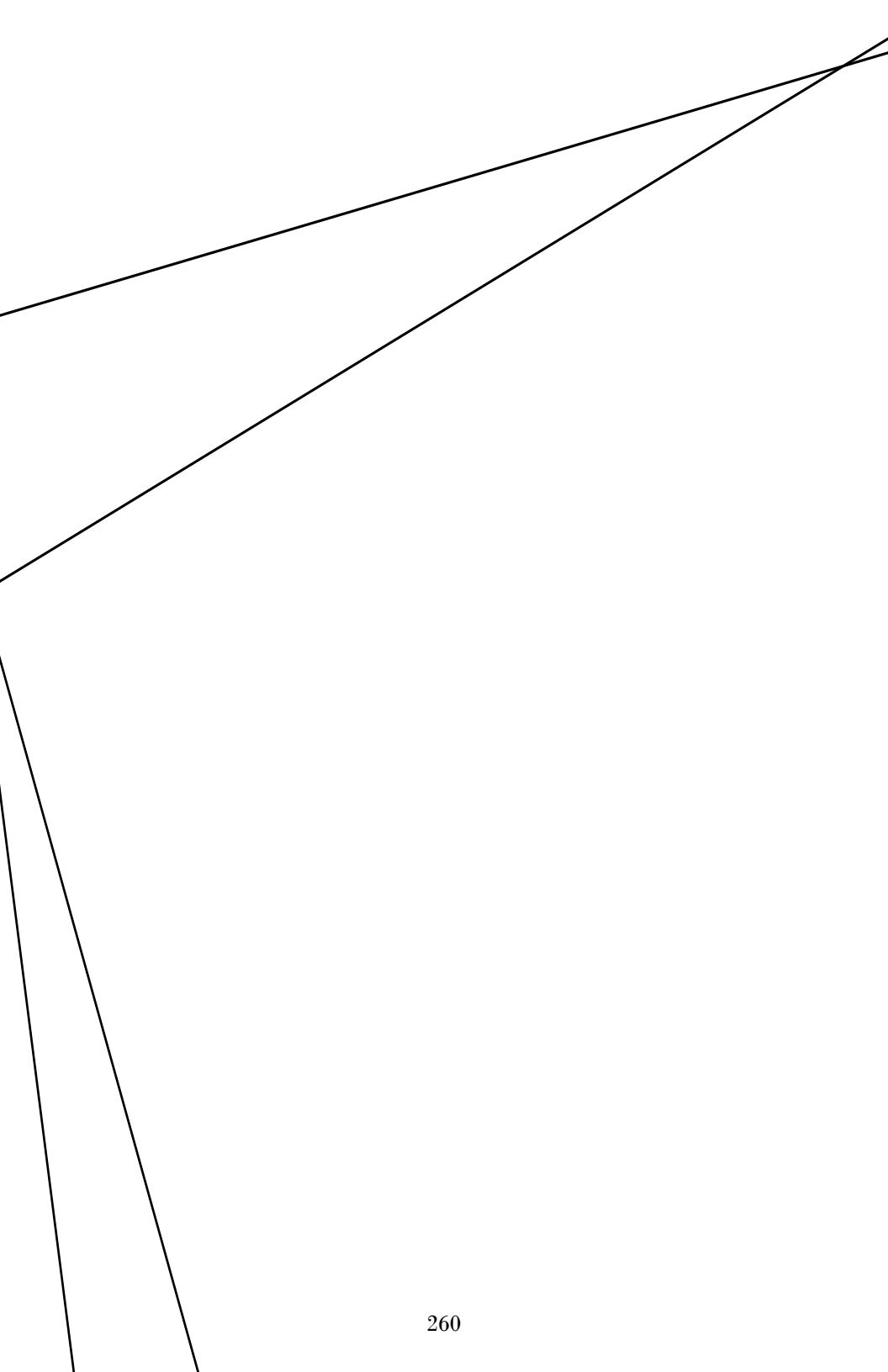
that I could drop her off by her door, but she refused my offer and bid me farewell with a kiss on the cheek. That night I went back home, to the old house where my parents lived, my parents who had passed away a few months prior. From the city I had returned to the house of my childhood. It is the house where I once ate my mother's beef stew despite the 40 degree heat of a summer day, listening to boleros by the trio Los Panchos, while my mother sang in the kitchen and my father sat in the shade reading his paper, and now that they are no longer with me, I make myself instant soup and play a CD hand-labeled BOLEROS in blue marker that my friend recorded for me back when he worked at the retail, with songs by Los Panchos with 'El Puma' Rodríguez and Eydie Gormé.

I switched on the radio and sat on the bench out on the patio with a cigar. I closed my eyes and fantasized over the song and over the gaze of the woman I'd seen. *Espérame en el cielo corazón...* My chest choked with that song, even more now that I was associating it with her, I felt something powerful in my chest, as though everything about that afternoon had been nothing but an illusion. I went up to my room, some time ago occupied by my parents, who had stayed in it until their very end. It was in that place the flame of their lives went out and every day I sleep right where they fell into the eternal sleep. I fell asleep, but not eternally. I dreamt about her, of her tenderness, a baby in her arms. In the dream my life was beside her, and I hoped eternally so, hoping, in other words, that this were not merely a dream but reality. In some way I was still conscious that this was not real. I woke to the crow of the rooster at 6:30 in the morning, had soft boiled eggs—a *la copa* as we say—with hot tea: 3 tablespoons of sugar. The house is filled with relics, among which are an egg server of solid silver with its own tiny saltshaker, and porcelain teacups with gold filligree.

había ido a tomar once donde la señora Tila y cómo la estaba ayudando a hacer colaciones para los trabajadores se quedaron hasta tarde en eso y cuando la vecina salió el tipo se estaba bajando de un auto finísimo, “extraña la cosa” dijo la vecina, “además usted conversó hartito con ella hoy en la plaza, sabe algo de ella como pa cachar qué onda o algo” agregó. Yo estaba paralizado, pero bien recordaba su lenguaje corporal cuando le pregunté sobre el papá del bebé que tenía su vientre, su miedo, su horror, el venir de lejos, había algo que me hacía sentido y a la vez no, una confusión que no me iba a dejar dormir y a la vecina tampoco, a ella le preocupa porque es información periodística para seguir siendo la fuente del pueblo, pero a mí me preocupa porque tengo pena, y ni siquiera sé si me corresponde tenerla por alguien con quien compartí un poco más de media hora sentados en una banca, más las horas que la soñé y la pensé y desperté sintiendo su calor y queriendo no dejarla. La pensé con la canción, espérame en el cielo sin saber que esa canción iba a terminar siendo suya.

I heard the sound of sirens and assumed there had been a fire nearby, during that heatwave such things were common, people would go camping and forget to put out their fires, and there also existed vengeful people, and corporations of course, well, there could have been any number of reasons really, and one of those reasons was the sun itself (though it could have been otherwise, as the sun is often used to cover up the above list of causalities). I opened the front door to sweep and air out the house, and saw, beyond the town square, an ambulance carrying away a covered body out of Sra. Hortensia's house, and Sra. Hortensia walked out the front door, fresh as a daisy, alive and kicking as we say, as though she had never been sick, and there was a man beside her, a well-dressed man with long hair. When the paramedics turned to ask who was going to accompany them, sra. Hortensia underwent a complete transformation and began to cry, and the man whispered something in her ear and then hopped into the ambulance next to the body. I found myself assuming it was the niece who was being taken to the city, though I didn't even know for sure whose body it was, though this was, indeed, the most probable thing.

Maria's house was across from mine. I watched her come out in a muumuu and approach me. Sra. Hortensia scurried back into her house as quickly as she could, the ambulance was already leaving, and it was too late for Maria, but she had already seen me sweeping and came over to ask if I knew anything, saying that she had just seen Sra. Hortensia on her feet, that she didn't understand whether the sight had been real or if she had perhaps imagined it because of being so somnolent, and I told her I had seen a body come out, that I assumed it belonged to the niece and that it left in the ambulance along with a well-dressed man with long hair. Señora Maria gaped at me and told me that the man was the girl's lover, that he had arrived last night, in the early hours of the morning, that she



knew this because she had eaten dinner at Señora Tila's house, since she had been helping her make colaciones for the workers who'd stayed up late, and that when she left the man was just getting out of a very expensive car, "weird," she said to me, "plus, you spoke to her for a while today in the plaza, do you know anything, did she say anything about anything at all?"

I was paralyzed, though her body language when I had inquired about the baby's father, her fear, her horror, the fact she'd come from so far away, all came to mind, and there was something that both made sense to me and didn't, a confusion that wasn't going to let me sleep, nor the neighbor for that matter, who was worried about all of this given its journalistic value, so she could carry on being the village's main information source, but it worried me because I felt and feel pity, though I don't even know whether it is appropriate to have such a thing for someone with whom I shared a little over half an hour on a bench, besides the hours I spent dreaming of her and thinking of her, waking up feeling her warmth, unwilling to leave her. I had thought of her with that song, *esperame en el cielo*, without knowing it would end up belonging to her.

Nota de traductor

Zoe Hardwick es una poeta y ensayista en el Programa de Escritura de la Universidad de Columbia. Le interesa la relación entre las personas y sus alrededores, especialmente en los espacios urbanos y en la intimidad del interior. Ella explora historias colectivas, familiares y personales a través del romance y santidad que existe en aquellos breves y olvidados momentos. Observar a las personas es su hobby favorito, sin embargo, trabaja incansablemente en perfeccionar sus recetas de pasteles. Su poesía está disponible en la revista *Frontier Poetry*. Sígala en @tiny.gratitud.

Cuando leí por primera vez el escrito de Zoe, pensé que sería una tarea relativamente simple, ya que mayormente constaba de datos, descripciones de lo que ella veía y experimentaba. Pero a medida que me interiorizaba en el texto, en la tarea de traducir, y mientras más conocía a Zoe, más me daba cuenta de que, tanto ella como su narración, estaban colmadas con una sensibilidad desconocida para mí.

Traducir abrió una ventana para mí. A la hora de escribir, siempre me enfocaba en mi propia interioridad, dejando de lado lo que ocurría a mi alrededor. Zoe, en cambio, se alimenta de lo mundano y lo traduce a su lírica. Esto me ayudó a ver en mí misma y en mi lengua un potencial de expresión hasta ahora ajeno a mi escritura.

Al compartir y comparar distintos aspectos de nuestras vidas, idiomas y culturas, me encontré con algunas barreras y bastantes puentes. Mientras descubría una ciudad congelada en el tiempo, sin publicidad, autos antiguos y animales en las calles, fue fácil visualizar mi propio pueblo. Un lugar simple y llano, que ahora aprecio con ojos distintos, unos ojos que veían mi

cotidianidad como un mundo inédito. Esto me hizo apreciar mi posición en el mundo; vivir en un lugar alejado de las masas, en el fin del mundo, es como estar en un asiento con ventana, ves el mundo pasar desde un punto privilegiado. Así fue el proceso de traducción para mí, pude presenciar la literatura, no solo desde la otra punta del continente, sino también desde una perspectiva más íntima que la de un lector.

Sobra decir que esta experiencia fue sumamente enriquecedora, que sin duda marcó el inicio de algo nuevo. Zoe me regaló lo que ella retrata en su texto, el renacimiento de una vida como escritora.

ZOE HARDWICK

In the January after Papa's passing, I stayed with my mother at Eighty-Five. It felt unforgivingly cold. The house had been emptied, everything had either been given away or put in storage. But it was winter, and winter feels as if everything has been given away or put in storage anyway, so I didn't notice how much was truly gone from the home. The only bed in the house was the one my mother was sleeping in, in what used to be her childhood room. Her room was at the end of a long hallway in the back, just follow the clanking pipe heater. That winter, the washer and dryer were broken, so we washed our underwear in the sink and hung it on the pipe heater. I took pictures. The wall in that hallway is also yellow. This was also the moment I realized I wear way too many things. That winter, we slept in the same bed for two weeks, and met each other in the kitchen every day for coffee or tea. We would take walks around the empty house in warm slippers & sweatpants and complain about the cold. I wish I could remember what we talked about, but that winter took a lot of memory from me. My mother, when asked about this time, says she can't remember very well. Grief, winter, Boston, me, her, coffee, laundry. We must've watched the birds at least. And I have a vague memory of a group of turkeys stalking through the yard.

I left Boston for New York, and then New York for Cuba. I was in my junior year of college at Smith. I was on my way to Havana with Hampshire College. The plane landed safely—a relief. No matter how many times I fly, I doubt modern technology. I fear the plane going down to a mechanical mishap. I can be very preoccupied with fate if I'm not careful, and to have such a terrible one scares me. To ensure my safety aboard, I make sure to be very polite in my prayers. I include the strangers sitting in my row and the babies I can hear. The ones

traducido del inglés por
VALENTINA PALOMINOS TELLO

El enero después de la muerte de mi abuelo, Papa, me quedé con mi madre en la calle Ochenta y Cinco. Hacía un frío mortal. La casa estaba vacía, todo había sido regalado o guardado. Pero era invierno, y el invierno se siente como si todo hubiese sido regalado o guardado de cualquier forma, así que no supe cuánto de la casa se había perdido. Mi madre dormía en la única cama en toda la casa, en lo que fue su dormitorio en la niñez. Era la habitación al final de un largo pasillo hacia el fondo, siguiendo los sonidos metálicos del radiador. Ese invierno, la lavadora y la secadora se echaron a perder, así que lavábamos nuestra ropa interior en el lavamanos y la colgamos en el radiador. Tomé muchas fotos. La pared de ese pasillo era amarilla. Ese fue el momento que me di cuenta que tengo demasiadas tangas. Ese invierno, dormimos en la misma cama por dos semanas, y nos encontrábamos en la cocina todos los días a tomar té o café. Caminábamos por la casa vacía en buzo y pantuflas, y nos quejábamos del frío. Desearía poder recordar sobre qué hablábamos, pero ese invierno se llevó mucho de mi memoria. Mi madre, cuando le pregunto sobre aquella temporada, me dice que no puede recordar bien. Duelo, invierno, Boston, yo, ella, café y ropa sucia. Debimos haber visto los pájaros al menos. Tengo el vago recuerdo de un grupo de pavos espíandonos desde el patio.

Fui de Boston a Nueva York, y de Nueva York a Cuba. Estaba en mi tercer año de universidad en Smith. Iba camino a Habana con la Universidad de Hampshire. El avión aterrizó sin novedades – qué alivio. No importa cuántas veces vuele, siempre dudo de la tecnología moderna. Temo que el avión se caiga por algún percance mecánico. Si no me cuido, puedo llegar a obsesionarme demasiado con el destino, y la posibilidad de sufrir uno

crying before the plane takes off have let their presence be known, and I feel luckier for it. Although it happens all the time, I think, *God won't let babies die, I'm safe*. There were no babies on this flight from JFK to Jose Marti. I was incredibly anti-social because of it. I wasn't sure the plane was going to land in their absence. Also, the group I was with had started studying together months before. Because I was already abroad, I wasn't able to make connections with them beforehand. I saw them infrequently on zoom. It doesn't help that I can deliberately be stand-off ish and overly observant when first encountering a group of people. I am much more of a one-on-one kind of friend; groups freak me out, and I think I freak out groups. I was thankful for a window seat, a chance to be turn my head to the side and be alone. My hair was bound into two fat twists so that I could (sort of) fit a cap over my head. I wore a Boston Red Socks hat, a glittery "B" in the middle. Whenever I have a window seat, Erykah Badu's song *Window Seat* becomes my inner voice. "I just want a chance to cry and a long bye bye", which I had always heard as "goodbye". With goodbyes on my mind and earbuds in, I relied on the sky for good company. Clouds rounded into endless humps or dissipated into mist, then into nothing. The death of a cloud is no big deal, but I rooted for the tiny ones anyway. For a short while, there was only water underneath us. I pictured the plane ending up in the ocean again & again, frustrated with the recurring image. I rebuked the tragedy, but I definitely needed those babies on board. When I wasn't afraid, the ocean, sometimes blue, sometimes green, was comforting. Fascinating. The water was like patches on a quilt; we were flying over the intersection of The Gulf of Mexico, The Atlantic Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea. As we approached landing, we flew over pastures. Delineated squares of grass & crop. I could see cows grazing, and the exact moment they decide it's better to rest than to graze, and plop down.

terrible me asusta. Para estar segura, me preocupo de ser muy cordial en mis oraciones, siempre incluyo a los extraños sentados junto a mí y a los bebés que alcance a escuchar. Los que lloran antes de despegar hacen notar su presencia, y me siento afortunada. A pesar de que pase todo el tiempo, pienso, *Dios no dejará que mueran bebés, estoy segura.*

No había bebés en este vuelo desde el aeropuerto John F. Kennedy a José Martí. Yo estaba increíblemente antisocial por eso. No estaba segura si el avión aterrizaría sin ellos presentes. También, los del grupo con el que viajaba habían empezado a estudiar juntos hacía meses. Debido a que yo ya estaba en el extranjero, no pude conectar con ellos en su momento. Los veía de vez en cuando en Zoom. No ayudaba el hecho de que puedo ser deliberadamente reservada y en extremo observadora cuando acabo de conocer un grupo de personas. Soy más de amistades de uno a uno; los grupos me inquietan, y creo que yo pongo inquieto a los grupos. Agradecí tener un asiento con ventana, una oportunidad de girar mi cabeza a un lado y estar sola. Mi pelo estaba tomado en dos gruesos twists para que pudiera (más o menos) ponerme un jockey. Era de los Boston Red Socks, con una “B” brillante en el medio. Siempre que tengo un asiento con ventana, la voz de Erykah Badu en su canción *Window Seat* se vuelve mi voz interior. “I just want a chance to cry and a long bye bye” (solo quiero una oportunidad para llorar y un largo adiós), lo cual siempre escuché como “goodbye”.

Con despedidas en mi mente y audífonos en mis orejas, busqué compañía en el cielo. Las nubes se formaban como infinitas lomas redondas, o se disipaban como bruma para después ser nada. La muerte de una nube no es gran cosa, pero igual alentaba a las pequeñitas. Por un breve momento, solo había agua a nuestros pies. Imaginé el avión hundiéndose en el mar una y otra vez, la recurrente imagen recurrente me frustraba. Reprimí

After our plan landed (amen), we went through security once more. Having been approved, we were instructed to wait outside for our transportation. My chest was heavy in the same way it is when it's sixteen degrees in Western Massachusetts. Breathing the air outside felt like gargling salt water. Once on the bus, I resumed my anti-social demeanor in another window seat. I was having a hard time being present. On my mind: my mother, Papa, the boy I liked in London. There were many times I disassociated during the winter—many times I relied on fantasies. As the bus drove through Cuba, I watched the streets, but I was only half there. I saw many shades of brown men and women, from sand to obsidian, sporting strong legs and faded graphic tees. Many bellies. Every now and again, there were hills of palm trees which sprang up as quickly as the clouds earlier had disappeared, and billboards of various revolutionaries painted on them. Some were stern, other smiling. No advertisements for movies, injury lawyers, or the lottery. Nothing about watches, texting while driving, casinos, or voting. Instead, history amid a thick layer of dust incessantly thrown about by fast motorcycles and tiny rectangular cars imported by Russians long ago.

We were dropped off to our respective homestays. I was assigned a roommate, L, a tall blonde girl from the East Coast. We were welcomed by a fair-skinned woman with emerald eyes and her elderly, round-bellied husband. They stood outside of their home: bright pink stone, two levels, held up by chipped columns. Our new home for a while. In the front yard sat a small shed we'd come to know as a garage and tool shed, where their son would park his precious motorcycle. He would drop his son off to spend time with the grandparents at least once a week. As I think about the shed, I realize that I had not yet read Deborah Levy, and I had not come to think of a writer's shed. Maybe I would have thought of that shed differently, perhaps there might have been

la tragedia, pero definitivamente necesitaba esos bebés a bordo. Cuando no tenía miedo, el océano, a veces azul, a veces verde, era reconfortante. Fascinante. El agua se asemejaba a los parches de una colcha; volábamos sobre la intersección del Golfo de México, el Océano Atlántico, y el Mar Caribeño. Mientras aterrizábamos, volamos sobre pastizales, cuadrados de pasto recortados y delineados. Podía ver vacas pastando, y el momento exacto cuando decidían que era mejor descansar que pastar, para hacer plop.

Después de que el avión aterrizara (amén), pasamos por seguridad una vez más. Cuando nos autorizaron, nos dijeron que esperáramos afuera por nuestro transporte. Me pesaba el pecho de la misma forma que cuando hace 16°C en el oeste de Massachusetts. Respirar el aire de afuera era como hacer gárgaras con agua salada. Ya en el bus, volví a mi comportamiento antisocial en otro asiento con ventana. Me costaba estar presente, en mi mente: mi madre, Papa, el chico que me gustó en Londres. Hubo tiempos donde me disociaba durante el invierno – muchas veces me refugiaba entre fantasías. Mientras el bus se movía por Cuba, vi las calles, solo la mitad de mí estaba ahí. Vi muchas tonalidades de café entre hombres y mujeres, desde arena hasta obsidiana, luciendo sus fuerte piernas bajo poleras descoloridas. Muchas panzas. De vez en cuando, veía colinas con palmeras, que brotaron con la misma rapidez de las nubes al desaparecer, y vallas publicitarias con varios revolucionarios retratados en ellas. Algunos estaban serios, otros sonreían. No había anuncios de películas, abogados baratos, ni de la lotería. Nada sobre relojes, si manejas no chatees, casinos o votaciones. En su lugar, había historia plasmada en medio de una gruesa capa de polvo levantada por motociclistas y pequeños autos rectangulares importados desde Rusia tiempo atrás.

Nos dejaron en nuestras respectivas casas. Me asignaron una compañera de cuarto, L, una chica alta y rubia de

some longing. But this was before I thought so much about the task of writing. I was excited to see a patio where L and I would end up having papaya, bananas, kiwi, and coffee each morning. This is where most of our talking would take place, most of our getting to know each other. We talked mostly about boys, girls, and sex. We gossiped about family now that we were far away, and I think we both knew we had come to be friends in this tropic environment, on this trip, at this table, and that when we got back, we would go back to our respective lives. That wasn't bad, and it didn't stop us from oversharing, from trusting one another. Once inside the house, the marble floors were cool and clean, and I was led upstairs to a colorless room equipped with one sliding window. A wooden drawer marked one side of the room, while the bed marked the middle. The bed was neatly made, sheets stiff with starch. Our homestay mother still did laundry on the stove. Past the common room which was a mini kitchen, a table and four chairs, and a large water jug, was L's room. She had two dressers, windows on two walls, and much more space to walk around. It was clear that she got the better room.

The sliding window became important to me. I would open it and listen. Listen to the sounds of buses and taxis. Sounds of chickens roaming the street in occasional flocks. I knew there were visitors next door because more chairs than usual made a scraping sound at lunch. Others' conversations. Children's shrieks. This is the joy of living on a main street: your room is filled with much more than just you. It is filled with the shouts of fruit vendors, the sharp jangle of handymen, and the swishing of a preacher's suit. To lay on one's bed atop the sheets during the warmer months and listen to the street is to listen to everyday prayers. When I would hear them, I would feel light with anticipation to be amongst the people. To be a part of mass prayer.

la Costa Este. Nos recibieron una mujer de piel pálida con ojos de esmeralda y su esposo, mayor y con barriga de cerveza. Estaba afuera de su casa de piedra rosada brillante, con dos pisos sostenidos por columnas picadas. Era nuestro nuevo hogar temporal. En el patio delantero había un pequeño cobertizo que después descubrimos que era un garaje para guardar herramientas, donde su hijo guardaba su preciosa motocicleta. Llevaba a su hijo a la casa de sus abuelos al menos una vez a la semana. Mientras pensaba en el cobertizo, me di cuenta que aún no había leído a Deborah Levy, y que no había pensado en el cobertizo del escritor. Tal vez habría pensado en el cobertizo de forma distinta, tal vez pudo haber existido una añoranza, pero esto fue antes de pensar en profundidad sobre la tarea de escribir.

Estaba emocionada de ver un patio donde L y yo pudiéramos comer papayas, plátanos, kiwis y tomar café cada mañana. Aquí es donde la mayoría de nuestras conversaciones tomarían lugar, donde nos conoceríamos mejor. Hablamos mayormente de chicos, chicas y sexo. Chismeamos sobre la familia, ahora que estamos muy lejos de ellos, y yo pienso en cómo ambas sabíamos que nos haríamos amigas en un ambiente así, en este viaje, en esta mesa, y que cuando regresamos, volveríamos a nuestras respectivas vidas. Eso no era malo, y no nos detenía de contarnos todo, de confiar plenamente.

Dentro de la casa, los suelos de mármol estaban limpios y fríos, subí las escaleras hacia una habitación descolorida con una sola ventana corrediza. En un lado había una cómoda y en el medio estaba la cama, estaba hecha con precisión, las sábanas rígidas y almidonadas. Nuestra madre anfitriona aún lavaba la ropa en la cocina. Más allá de la sala común, que era una pequeña cocina con una mesa y cuatro sillas, junto con un gran bidón de agua, estaba la habitación de L. Ella tenía dos vestidos, ventanas en dos paredes y mucho más espacio para caminar. Estaba claro quién se quedó con

To get ready was to shower first. The water pressure was low and so showers were quick. The water was never hot, just a touch under lukewarm. Small joys: A window to the left of the shower head, immediately above eyelevel. I could see the roof of the house next door and how many clouds might be in the sky that day. It was seldom overcast, although most days there were thick clouds, thick enough that even when there were only a few, the clouds seemed to crowd the sky. There was a ledge the length of the shower where I put small bottles of Dr. Bronner, Carol's Daughter, and a bristled brush. The shower was tiled a dark, rich blue, reminiscent of a swimming pool at night. I didn't swim at all in Cuba until one beach day towards the end of our stay. The water, and therefore the world was a clear, Caribbean blue. The group that went (about 6 of us) took underwater photos of us holding up the peace sign & watched out for Portuguese Man O' War jellyfish that had mostly washed up on shore. When we weren't swimming, we were walking, toes slipping in the sand, or building lazy lumps of sandcastles. The group of us who went along got on very well despite previous tensions. We could have very well been under the same sun as Camus' "The Stranger", the kind of sun that makes everything worse, but at the same time the sun could never have been such a sun as that one. We were brown amongst brown; the Cuban seashore could be home if we accepted it.

As soon as the group got back, I went to wash off at my homestay. The sun had tired us all out. My homestay mother met me in front of the shed with a bucket of water, throwing it over me to wash off the sand. I wasn't allowed to come inside until she had done this many times, until I was dowsed off to her standard. However, sand is persistent and still pooled up in the shower drain. I found sand in my bed the next morning and would occasionally crunch some in my mouth. I was happy to have been in the water, in the sand, keep

la mejor habitación.

Mi ventana corrediza se volvió importante para mí, cuando la habría me sentaba a escuchar, escuchar los sonidos de los buses y los taxis, sonidos de gallinas andando por las calles, a veces en pequeñas bandadas. Sabía que había visitas en la casa de al lado, por el sonido de numerosas sillas raspando el suelo a la hora del almuerzo, conversaciones nuevas y chillidos de niños. Eso es lo bueno de vivir en la calle principal, tu habitación está llena de mucho más que solo tú. Está llena con feriantes anunciando sus frutas, el agudo sonido de maestros haciendo reparaciones, el susurro del traje de algún enérgico predicador. El acostarse en la cama, sobre las sábanas en los meses más calurosos, y escuchar las calles era escuchar la oración del día. Cuando las oía, me sentía ansiosa por la con anticipación de querer estar entre ellos, de ser parte de la oración en masa.

Para arreglarme debía ducharme primero. La presión del agua era débil, así que las duchas eran cortas. El agua nunca estaba caliente, siempre a un toque de estar tibia. Mis pequeñas alegrías: una ventana a la izquierda de la regadera, justo encima del nivel de los ojos. Alcanzaba a ver el techo de la casa de al lado y la cantidad de nubes que había en el cielo ese día. Raramente estaba nublado, a pesar de que en muchos días había nubes densas, tan densas que incluso si eran pocas, parecían colmar el cielo. Había una repisa del largo de la ducha, donde puse pequeñas botellas de jabón Dr. Bronner, shampoo Carol's Daughter y un cepillo de cerdas gastado.

La ducha tenía cerámica de un profundo azul oscuro, parecido a una piscina durante la noche. Nunca pude nadar en Cuba, excepto por un día en la playa al final del viaje. El agua, y por ende el mundo, eran de un claro azul caribeño. El grupo que nos acompañó (éramos seis) nos tomaron fotos bajo el agua haciendo

it with me.

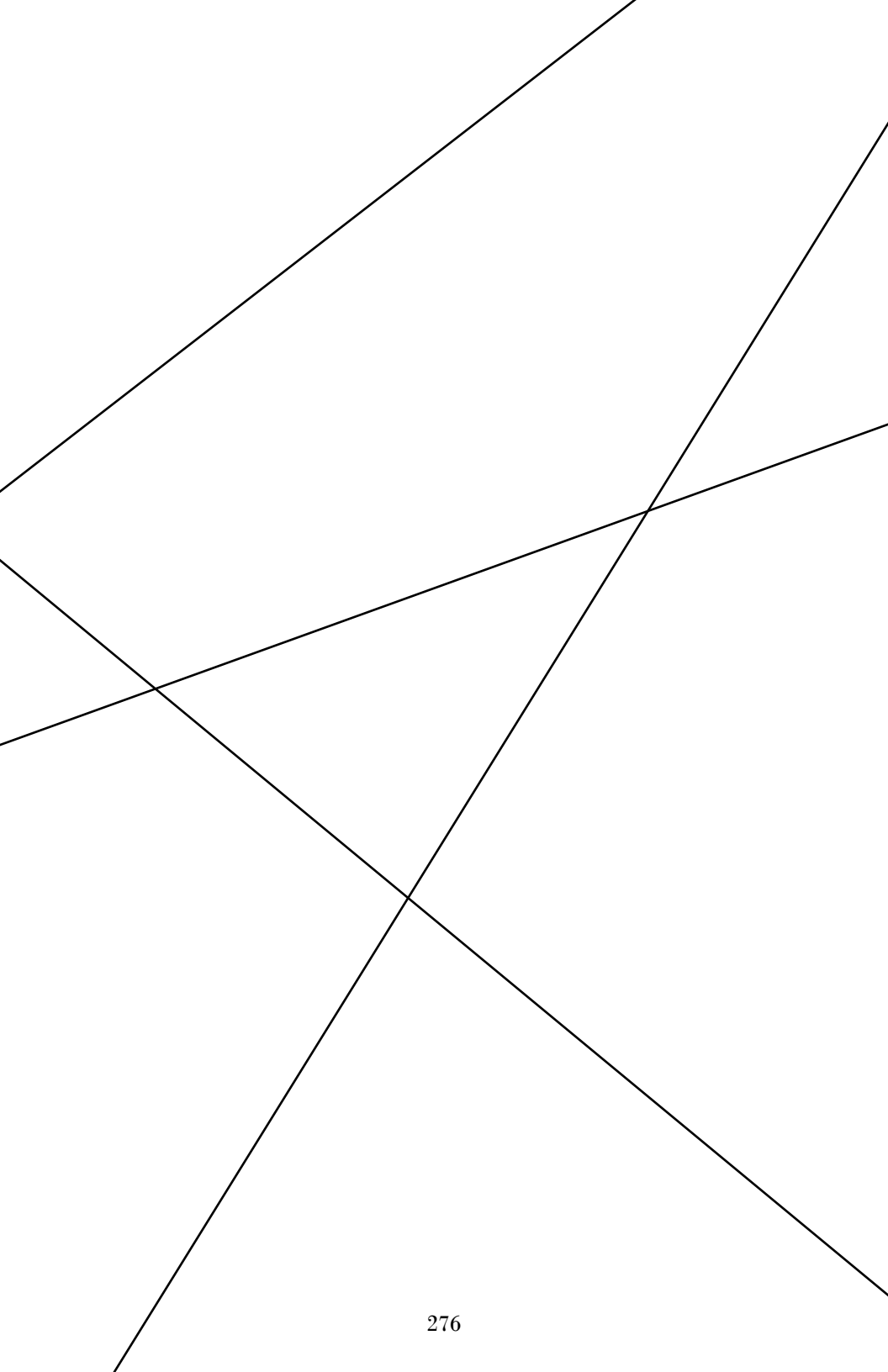
During our stay, we relied on the Malecon, a roadway and seawall along the coast from Old Havana and through our neighborhood, Vedado. This is where we would sit and watch the waves, and at night the bobbing, fluorescent jelly fish. We would make jokes about seeing Florida. We would watch people fish or drink or meet boys. I'd watch the water drag itself back and push itself forward, and wondered what it must feel like to always be crashing into a wall. I once fell asleep on the ledge. The Malecon gave me somewhere to wander to & wander from. I was a lost poet, then a found poet, and a lost poet again. I could be aimless there—time was no longer dwindling or running out. There are many more memories from my time there: 6 O'clock the dog that followed our group from club to club, then to the restaurant we went to afterwards. Visiting my mentors' homes and spending time thinking, writing, talking, drinking strong tea with lemon. Carlos Acosta's ballet. Fabrica de Arte. Most are vague, except for the Malecon and my sense of time. I distinctly remember that time had changed. It was no longer dwindling or running out. My poems had a due date, but I couldn't rush those. I had never had the sole expectation of writing, of creating. I was seeing firsthand how being creative, how that as a priority and expectation (a job!) had changed the way time felt. I didn't rush anything; everything that required time simply took the time it required, and that felt right.

While in Cuba, I had a dream I had a son. At first, I took this as a sign that I would have a son one day. However, some say that dreaming of a birth can also mean birthing creative power, giving birth to an idea. Now that I know myself better as a writer, I believe I gave birth to my own self-actualization; I realized life as a writer exists for me.

orejitas de conejo con las manos, con cuidado de evitar la Fragata Portuguesa varada en la orilla. Cuando no estábamos nadando, estábamos caminando, nuestros dedos deslizándose entre la arena, o construíamos flojos intentos de castillos de arena. Nuestro grupo se llevaba bastante bien a pesar de tensiones anteriores. Pudimos haber estado bajo el mismo sol de *El extranjero* de Camus, el tipo de sol que empeora todo, pero al mismo tiempo, este sol nunca podría ser como aquel sol. Éramos café entre café; la costa cubana podría ser nuestro hogar, si así lo decidíamos.

Apenas volvimos, fui a lavarme a mi alojamiento. El sol nos había agotado a todos. Mi madre anfitriona me encontró frente al cobertizo con un cubo de agua, que vertía sobre mi cabeza para quitarme la arena. Ella no me permitía entrar a la casa si no lo hacía cierto número de veces, hasta que estuviera lo suficientemente empapada para ella. Sin embargo, la arena es persistente, y se acumuló en el drenaje de la ducha. Encontré arena en mi cama la mañana siguiente, y ocasionalmente, la sentía crujiir entre mis dientes al masticar. Estaba feliz de haber conocido el mar, la arena, y que se quedaran conmigo.

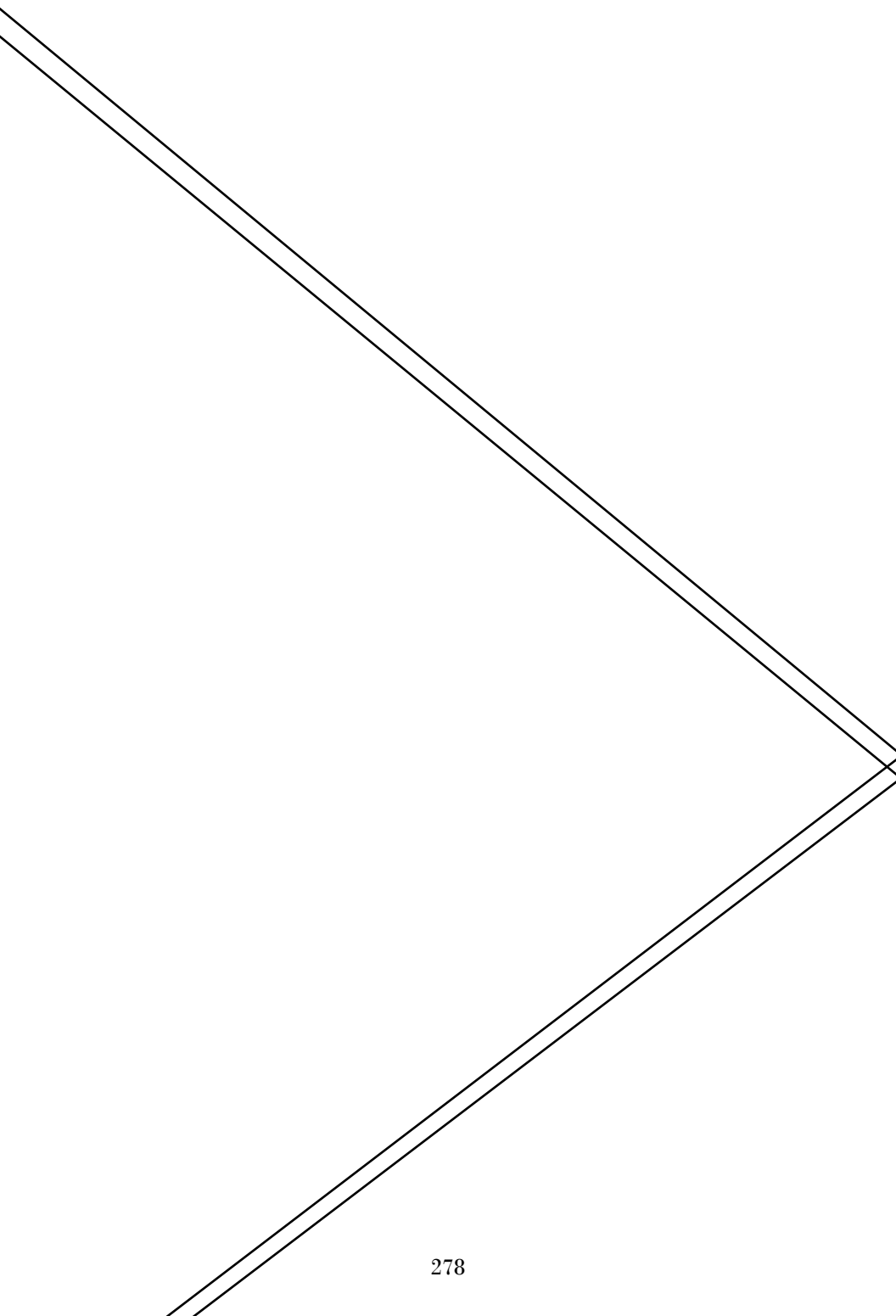
Durante nuestra estancia, no nos separamos del Malecón, una avenida y muro junto a la costa que iba desde La Vieja Habana hasta el interior de nuestro barrio, Vedado. Ahí nos sentábamos a ver las olas, y en la noche, observábamos a las medusas fluorescentes balancearse. Nos reíamos diciendo que veíamos Florida. Mirábamos personas pescar, beber o encontrarse con chicos. Miraba el agua arrastrarse hacia atrás y rempujarse hacia al frente, y me pregunté cómo se sentiría estar constantemente chocando con una pared. Una vez me quedé dormida ahí. El Malecón me dio un lugar para ir y venir. Era una poeta perdida, luego una poeta encontrada, y una poeta perdida otra vez. Podía moverme sin rumbo – el tiempo no corría ni se



acababa. Hay muchos otros recuerdos de mi tiempo ahí: Seis En Punto, el perro que nos seguía de club en club, y al restaurante al que íbamos después. Las visitas al hogar de mis mentores y pasar el tiempo pensando, escribiendo, hablando, bebiendo té cargado con limón. El ballet de Carlos Acosta, la Fábrica de Arte. La mayoría son borrosos, excepto el Malecón y la sensación del tiempo.

Mis poemas tenían una fecha de entrega, pero no podía apresurarlos. Nunca tuve la aspiración de escribir, de crear. Estaba viendo de primera mano cómo el ser creativa, y el convertirlo en mi prioridad y aspiración (¡en un trabajo!) cambió mi forma de percibir el tiempo. No quise acelerar nada; todo lo que requería tiempo simplemente tomaba el tiempo requerido, y eso se sentía bien.

En Cuba, tuve un sueño donde tenía un hijo. En un principio, lo tomé como una señal de que tendría un hijo algún día. Sin embargo, algunos dicen que soñar con un nacimiento también puede significar el nacimiento del poder creativo, de dar a luz a una idea. Ahora, que me reconozco a mí misma como escritora, creo que di a luz a mi propia autorrealización; me di cuenta que la vida como escritora existe para mí.



Translator's Note

When Vale wrote this piece, she had come off of a hard semester. She had written a 50-page script in one very long afternoon, and at the same time, was applying for a summer course in which her professor asked her to write a text exploring the relationship between light and shadow. She had absolutely no mental energy for the task. No ideas. No inspiration. Her brain has been emptied out. With an impending due date, she decided to write *Between The Light and Shadows* as an allegory for arguably the most stressful part of writing: deciding what to write. It is herself in the piece wandering through the darkness (a symbol of confusion and creative depletion), looking for the light (a successful, fruitful idea). In the end, this piece served as a reintroduction into writing-for-fun, as Vale experimented with unconventional images of darkness and how the human mind perceives darkness and deals with its (often) desperate need for light—for the saying, “the light at the end of the tunnel”. As I translated this, I admired Vale’s short, strong prose. Her ability to create such an intense physical and emotional landscape, and incite empathy for a lost character, who stands for all the times we have ever felt like things are just too out of reach for us, allowing readers to reserve more empathy for themselves, too. The existential mood, the quiet transformation of the prose, the never-ending search; I felt that as much as I was translating from Spanish into English, I was also translating time. This is a dream sequence that feels like eternity; the narrator is drudging through their dream each night. Going back to its allegorical nature, it begs the questions: How much wandering and fighting must a writer do?

VALENTINA PALOMINOS TELLO

ENTRE LA LUZ Y LA SOMBRA

Hace tiempo he notado que siempre busco un momento para no hacer nada. Desde el instante que despierto hasta que termina el día, espero que todo se calle. Hago lo menos posible para esforzarme lo menos posible, me aterra desgastarme, por lo que vivo adormecida. Mis pies avanzan cada día de manera automática, me llevan a dónde debo ir. Mis viejos zapatos se están cayendo a pedazos, los he usado por más de una década, me desharé de ellos cuando finalmente se deshagan de mis pies. Ha sido más difícil salir de estos zapatos que salir al mundo día tras día. Ansío mi momento de silencio, de quietud. Busco la lucidez plena que viene al caer dormido.

Horas de luz vacías, mi mente dormita, llega la noche y en mí se implanta el sueño. El único instante donde la mente y el cuerpo se olvidan, me veo dominado por ese sueño que me priva del descanso.

En la inmensidad de todo lo que existe, se aloja la oscuridad, y sobre ella flotan infinitos focos de luz a la deriva. Estoy en movimiento, lento y constante. Sediento, camino con los ojos bien abiertos, espero tener éxito esta vez. Ruego que el final ya esté cerca. Llevo días caminando. Semanas, meses, años han pasado y sigo en la búsqueda. El frío se hace álgido. Me duele la espalda y los pies, llevo una carga que no tiene nombre, pero tiene rostro y lo conozco muy bien. No puedo evitar preguntarme por qué sigo aquí, por qué tuve que ser yo entre las miles de posibilidades. Debo deambular por la oscuridad de la vida en busca de la luz. Sigo el curso hacia los pequeños puntos de luz que me rodean, pero me pierdo entre los vastos valles negros que veo frente a mí. Los veo venir, los veo acercarse. Me dicen

**translated from the spanish by
ZOE HARDWICK**

BETWEEN THE LIGHT AND SHADOWS

For a long time, I have done the least amount of work possible, expending the least amount of effort imaginable, searching for a window of time in which I can do nothing. From the moment I wake up, and until the day ends, I wait for it to all fall away.

Truthfully, I am terrified of wearing myself out.

My old shoes have fallen to pieces; I've used them for more than a decade, but I plan to get rid of them only when my feet are absolutely ruined. It is difficult to continue going, keep taking these shoes out into the world day after day. I am eager for a moment of rehabilitation, of quietude. I yearn for lucidity which only comes when I sleep.

In the darkest hours of the night, night finds me and sleep implants itself in me. The moment my brain and body drowse, when sleep dominates me and my body is finally forgotten, I am deprived of real rest.

In the immensity of our existence, darkness looms. Above darkness, float infinite specks of light. I am moving slowing, constantly. I walk with my eyes open, sedated. I plan to escape this time, even if it has taken me days of walking. Weeks, months, years have passed as I chase this, as I search for this. The cold is coming to a climax. My back and feet ache as I carry a weight with no name.

I am certain I have the will power, and I am sure of that will power.

una y otra vez que siga la luz, ahí están las respuestas, pero si mi propósito es encontrar la luz, ¿por qué debo luchar con las sombras?, ¿por qué debo hacerles frente, si son lo único que parece real?

Las sombras permanecen, las luces nacen y mueren entre cada paso que doy. Por primera vez en una vida, las estrellas se están acabando y la noche se hace eterna. Me advierten que no me aleje del calor de la luz, pero para mí el sol ya no sale. Las sombras son todo lo que existe.

Me prometí no hacerme más preguntas, pero aún tengo esa sensación, la anticipación de que algo está apunto de caer sobre mi cabeza... nunca llega. Lo he dado todo de mí y he dado el mínimo, solo para recibir incluso menos en respuesta. Como un rumor, todo grita que nada importa, y si nada importa por qué debo seguir, *I'm an object in motion, I've lost all emotion*. Cada paso que doy es un día que cedo, es un año que pierdo. Hace tiempo que las luces no brillan como antes, las sombras las consumen, las ahogan en sus aguas. Al final *todo* se vuelve nada y la *nada* se vuelve todo. Me pregunto cuál será mi final cuando este llegue.

A medida que las sombras me rodean, me he dado el tiempo de observarlas. Pensaba que representaban lo peor de la existencia, pero resulta que es todo lo bello en su máxima expresión: lo sublime. Piensa, cuando amas, el amor arrasa con todo, cambia con tal fuerza que donde antes solo había vacío, ahora hay posibilidad. Y cuando lo que se ama muere, el amor se vuelve dolor. La luz del amor se torna en la oscuridad del duelo, muta a su versión más destructiva y avasalladora, su última forma... porque ¿qué cosa es más devastadora que el amor?

Pero ahora pienso, ¿las sombras consumen la luz?, o es

I cannot avoid wondering why I am still here. Why I was chosen out of thousands of others. Why I am forced to wander in the darkness of life seeking light, moving towards unreachable and already faint stars.

I am lost between the vast black valleys before me. I see the masses of shadows come, I see them come closer. There are voices within telling me over and over to follow the light, that there are answers, but if my purpose is to discover light, why am I stuck wrestling shadows? Why am I tasked with this work if shadows are the only thing that feel real?

The light is born and dies with every step I take. For the first time in my life, I can watch stars die and see night turn eternal. This darkness is unending. Those voices warned me not to move away from the heat of light, but for me, the sun has already gone out. Darkness is all that exists.

I promised myself not to ask more questions. Still, there is the sensation of hope. An anticipation which never arrives. I have given this work all of me, and I have tried to give it none of me, both efforts with zero response. Like a rumor, the full story is unimportant, and if nothing matters, why should I keep going? "I am an object in motion. I have lost all emotion". Each step I take is a day I hand over. A year I lose.

For a while, the lights didn't shine as brightly as before. The darkness consumed them, drowned them in lights' water. In the end, everything turns into nothing and nothing turns into everything. I wonder what my end will be when it comes.

As the shadows surround me, I observe them, thinking that they represent the worst of this existence, but I have realized they are beauty at its climax: sublime.

acaso la luz misma forja quien su propio final para una vez más ser parte del todo, volver a ser nada. Como todo lo que nace, debe morir, todo lo que ahora es, dejará de ser. El cambio es lo que me acecha y a la vez persigo.

No recuerdo la última vez que vi una luz, he nadado en el mar negro por más de una vida. Sé que puedo parar en cualquier momento, pero tengo la esperanza de ver una luz más. Sigo la línea del horizonte en mi eterna búsqueda, pero ahora ni el sonido de las olas me acompaña. Miro arriba, el cielo está vacío. Solo hay sombras, mordaces e inalcanzables .

No puedo evitar sentir culpa, sentir que fallé en mi búsqueda, en la misión que yo nunca elegí. Fui condenada a nacer con ojos sedientos de luz y carne hambrienta de calor, para errar por las tierras de las sombras. El suelo se deshizo bajo mis pies y ahora solo hay aguas turbias, ya no puedo ver mis pies.

A pesar de todo sigo nadando, me dije que lo haría hasta ver el final del cielo, pero la angustia de existir me hunde y ahora ni las olas me mueven.

Si hay un plan del todopoderoso, ¿existo por mandato divino?

Si aquel quien hizo la luz, nació y murió entre las páginas de un libro, ¿existo por banal casualidad?

¿Muerdo por orden del destino o por mi propia mano?

Intuyo que el sol que nunca vi salir era la respuesta a mis preguntas. Era la verdad.

Solo por un momento, dejé de nadar y con mis ojos devoré todo lo que pude. Miré y miré, hasta que lo supe. Esto es todo lo hay, todo lo que hubo y todo lo que habrá.

Lo último que vi fue mi mano desaparecer entre las aguas de las sombras. Me hundí, y así me hice eterna.

When one loves, love levels everything. Everything changes with such force where before there was only emptiness, now lies possibility. And when something that is loved dies, love returns as sorrow. The light of love becomes darkness and compounded grief at its most destructive and overwhelming version, its final form...what is more devastating than love?

Now, I ask, “do shadows consume light?”. Or is it the same light bursting until its energy is used up, forcing its own end for one more chance to be a part of the whole, returning to nothingness? Everything that is born must also die; everything that is now, will cease to exist. The transformation stalks me, and at the same time, I pursue it.

I can't remember the last time I even saw a true light; I have swum in this black sea for most of my life. I know I can stop at any moment, but hope drives me. I follow the line of the horizon in my eternal search, but now not even the sound of waves accompanies me. I look up at the sky and it is empty. There is only darkness, scathing and unattainable.

I cannot help but feel guilty, feel the failure of my journey, this quest I never chose. I was condemned, born with eyes thirsty for light and flesh starved for heat.

To wander without a direction into the *shadowland*. The soil undid at my feet, and now there are only muddy waters. I can no longer see my feet.

Despite all the work, I go on wading. I say, “I'll do it until I can finally see the sky” but the anguish of existence plunges me underwater, and now not even a waves can move me.

If the Almighty had a plan, what is His divine

I'm an object in motion, don't ask where I'm going because where I'm going is right where I am.

A segundos de despertar el cuerpo se pone en marcha, lentamente recuerda el dolor, el hambre y la sed. La mente recuerda el deber, el correr del tiempo y la necesidad de vivir.

Mis pies avanzan de manera automática, me llevan a dónde debo ir. Sin embargo, sigo en el mismo lugar, por más que camine y camine, permanezco en mi sitio, esperando que mis zapatos se deshagan, esperando la noche, esperando la luz. Me detuve un momento y el bullicio del mundo se calló. Cerré mis ojos y la vi, la oscuridad.

Tal vez yo mismo soy oscuridad, esperando transformarse en luz.

FIN

command? If He is the one who made light, yet was born and killed between the pages of a book, do I exist by happenstance? Do I die by the order of fate or by my own doing?

I sense the sun I have never seen has the answers for me, harbors the truth. Only for a moment do I stop swimming and instead, devour everything I can with just my eyes. I looked and looked until I knew: this is all there is, and this is all there will be. The last thing I saw was my hand disappearing into the water and the shadows. I sank, and so I became eternal. *I'm an object in motion, don't ask where I'm going because where I'm going is right where I am.*

Within seconds of waking, the body gears up slowly, remembering the pain, hunger, and thirst. The mind remembers its duty: to manage Time and the necessities of life. My feet instinctively begin to walk, take me where I need to go.

Nevertheless, I am still in the same place. No matter how much I walk and walk, I remain stagnant, waiting for my shoes to be ruined over again and again, longing for the night, longing for light. I paused for a brief moment and the chaos of the world receded. I closed my eyes and saw darkness.

Perhaps I myself am darkness waiting to transform into light.

Nota de traductor

Margaret Carter es estudiante de Masters de Bellas Artes en Poesía, crea su imaginario en Walnut Creek, California, y nos lleva desde su núcleo a realidades extranjeras.

Los poemas de Meg son fieles a sus influencias literarias, leo en ellos la fluidez e intereses de por ejemplo, Ada Limón, con la que el estilo poético de Meg logra dialogar sin problemas.

Meg escribe la silueta del calor atrapados en los cerros Californianos, un segundo en la carretera, escribe tensión, escribe el aroma de una familia y la acidez haciéndole cosquillas a la lengua.

Cuando leí sus poemas por primera vez, fue evidente la atención al detalle del sonido; en ellos una preocupación por tejer sus imágenes concretas y al mismo tiempo hacerlas cantar, lo que logra a través de la manera aguda con la que toma las palabras. Su poesía es nómada y está en movimiento, nos ofrece sus recuerdos y regala una percepción minuciosa.

Mi primer trabajo al traducir al español fue mantener las sílabas tan bien atadas de manos como Meg las proponía: que, mientras regresaba a pintar su ambiente de infancia, la carretera o las calles Españolas en Cádiz, las palabras no se tropezaran y que el ritmo fuera el eje central en los poemas, tal como en los originales. Así no pudo haber mejor oportunidad para afinar mi oído que a través de esta tarea, enfrentándome a la conciencia fonética con la que Meg construye.

Ahora, los principales desafíos nacieron al trasladar la información propia de un ambiente determinado a la local. La presencia del paisaje natural es constante en los cuatro poemas, en ellos pasamos de una estación a otra, de

un estado de la materia a otro y reimaginar el clima en un poema u otro se sentía casi como acondicionar un pequeño bioma en una caja para que mis coterráneos la vean.

Como últimos comentarios, puedo pensar que la poesía y la traducción no son intercambiables; en una fogata en la playa con mis amigos, dibujando en la arena con palos podría incluso afirmar que son lo mismo. Esto he reafirmado a través de la oportunidad de traducir a Meg, en conversaciones nos hemos reído de los alto y bajos de la traducción de la misma manera que hemos compartido sobre nuestra sed de escribir poesía, como los poemas simplemente salen como si hubiese una tercera lengua inconsciente de la que ya somos hablantes nativas.

MARGARET CARTER

The End of August

On the highway
a white sheet flies
from a truck bed and undulates
like a jellyfish in the wind.
The sun burns crimson
through the smoke-darkened sky.
I imagine living
underwater
would be like this.
Amorphous creatures,
veiled sunlight, that scarce air.
The hills blaze blonde
studded with black stumps
like cancer cells on a cheek.
I take the exit ramp
and squint through
the grainy air. Once I mistook
ash for snow
and opened my mouth
to bitter flakes as they fell
around me on a balcony
in northern California.
No longer am I deceived
by dark skies. When I walk
from the driveway to the house
I breathe the shallow air
in my blue mask, sucking in
the damp paper. Inside
I turn the thermostat
down two degrees.
Sprinkling pellets in the tank,
I watch the silver fish appear
with its unblinking eye.

**traducido del inglés por
VALENTINA ZÚÑIGA**

Fines de Agosto

En la carretera
vuela una sábana blanca
desde una camioneta y ondula
como medusa en el viento
El sol quema carmesí
en el hollín del cielo. Así imagino la vida
submarina.
Criaturas amorfas,
luz de sol en velo, escasez de aire.
Los cerros rubios resplandecen
decorados de troncos carbón
cómo células cancerígenas en una mejilla.
Tomo la rampa de salida
con los ojos entreabiertos
en el aire granizado. Una vez confundí
ceniza con nieve
y abrí la boca
a los copos amargos que caían
alrededor mío, en un balcón
en California del norte.
Ya no me engañan
los cielos oscuros. Cuando camino
de la calle a la casa
respiro el aire hueco
de la mascarilla azul, inhalando
el papel húmedo. Adentro
bajo el termostato
dos grados.
Rociando pellets al tanque,
aparecen los peces plateados
con sus miradas eternas.

Flicker

I remember how snow got shoved
beneath my jacket cuffs when I was making
snow angels as a kid in Indiana, where
following hours of snowflakes vanishing
on the ridge of my cheekbones and nose,
I shed my puffy pants, unwound the scarf
from my neck, and hurried downstairs
to watch TV with my cousins.
When my aunt called from the top
of the stairs *five minutes until dinner*
I stood up last and was tasked with
turning off the lights—the switch diagonal
from the foot of the stairs. In the dark
the basement was the length of an athletic field
and crumpled spiders unfolded their legs
in the shag carpet. My grandfather's
hammers and saws jumped from the walls
and the presence, which seemed to reside
beneath the maroon sofa, emerged—cold
draft, shifting umbra—reaching for my waist
as I ran up the stairs, always the feeling
of someone reaching for my waist,
until I swung open the door and my family
was there. The kitchen was warm,
onions turning translucent on the stove
and chicken skin blistering in the oven.
Out the window, the snow cover met
the horizon, and the birdfeeder blazed
like a torch, aflame with cardinals.

Parpadeo

Recuerdo cómo se metió el hielo
por las mangas de mi chaqueta cuando, de niña
hacia ángeles de nieve en Indiana, dónde
después que se esfumaran los copos
en mis pómulos y nariz,
me saqué la chaqueta, me desaté la bufanda
del cuello y corrí al sótano
a ver televisión con mis primos.
Cuando mi tía gritó desde
arriba *cinco minutos para la cena*
me paré última y tuve que
apagar las luces — el interruptor en diagonal
al primer peldaño de la escalera. Oscuro,
el sótano era del largo de una pista atlética
y arañas contraídas estiraban las patas
sobre la alfombra. Los clavos y martillos
de mi abuelo saltaban de las paredes
y la presencia, que parecía vivir
debajo del sofá burdeo, emergía —corriente
fría, umbra cambiante— a tomarme de la cintura
y yo corría al piso de arriba, siempre sintiendo
que alguien me iba tomar de la cintura,
hasta que abría la puerta de golpe y ahí
estaba mi familia. La cocina cálida,
cebollas cristalizando en un sartén.
Por la ventana, la capa de nieve encontraba
el horizonte, y la pajarera brillaba
como antorcha, en flamas de cardenales.

Down Calderon Avenue

Under the dome of a red and white striped umbrella, we pass a crabapple tree adorned with shiny plastic eggs dangling from knotted fishing line, pastel remnants of an Easter long past, a stucco house with jagged cracks that reach across the walls like stretch marks on a body, a funeral parlor with white paint peeling like birch bark from the columns, a young girl itching her black tights, a vacant “for lease” building with a glass storefront, where our own reflection glimmers. We are two people held in a glow, a star drifting down the street.

Bajando por Calderon Avenue.

Debajo de un paraguas de rayas rojas
y blancas, pasamos un manzano
adornado con huevos de plástico colgando
en hilo de pescar, recuerdos pastel
de alguna pascua pasada, una casa de estuco
con grietas disformes en las paredes
como estrías en un cuerpo,
una funeraria con pintura blanca descascarando,
como corteza, de las columnas,
una niña rascándose las pantys negras,
un cartel de “se arrienda” de un edificio con
vitrina de cristal, donde nuestro reflejo brilla.
Somos dos personas en el resplandor,
una estrella a la deriva por la calle.

The City Smells Like Citrus

The orange trees in Cádiz burst with fruit.
White blossoms sprinkle the street like confetti,
and mold-eaten, rotted oranges are strewn
across sidewalks. There is so much pollen
in the air, I wake up from my siesta
with a bloody nose that stains my pillow
with rust-colored splotches.
The oranges are not to eat though,
my professor says after class
when I note the pungent yet sweet scent.
I taste one anyway, plucking it
as if it were forbidden fruit, and try to cut
into it with the edge of my fingernail.
I press my thumb into the fruit
as hard as I can until the flesh breaks
and warm sticky juice runs down my wrist.
I bite into a slice and it floods my mouth
with a tongue-numbing tartness,
coating my teeth with a slimy film
and burning my sun-chapped lips.
On my way home at night, coming back
from a bar, I stop to pick an orange blossom
and examine the flower's white spongy petals,
the pearl at the center surrounded by yellow pins.
How sudden it all seems—
the blooming flowers, the ripening fruit,
the decaying oranges from the same tree.
The simultaneity hardly giving me
enough time to witness each event.
I tuck the blossom behind my ear,
and when I get home, I place it in the center
of a blank journal that I hope I will write in.

La ciudad huele a cítricos.

Los naranjos en Cádiz colmados de frutas.
Flores blancas adornan las calles como confeti
y naranjas podridas, comidas de moho, se desparraman
por la veredas. Hay tanto polen
en el aire que despierto de mi siesta
con sangre de nariz y manchas
color óxido en la almohada.

Pero las naranjas no son para comer,
dice mi profesor después de clases
cuando noto el olor dulce y punzante.

Igual pruebo una, la arranco como
la fruta prohibida, intento descascararla
con la esquina de mi uña.

Le pongo el pulgar encima
con fuerza hasta que la carne se rompe
y jugo tibio pegajoso me cae por la muñeca.

Muerdo un gajo y me inunda la boca
una acidez de anestesia en la lengua
mis dientes los llena de esmalte pegajoso
y quema mis labios secos por el sol.

Camino a casa en la noche, volviendo
de un bar, paro a recoger una flor de naranjo
y examino los pétalos blancos esponjosos,
la perla al centro rodeada de alfileres amarillos.

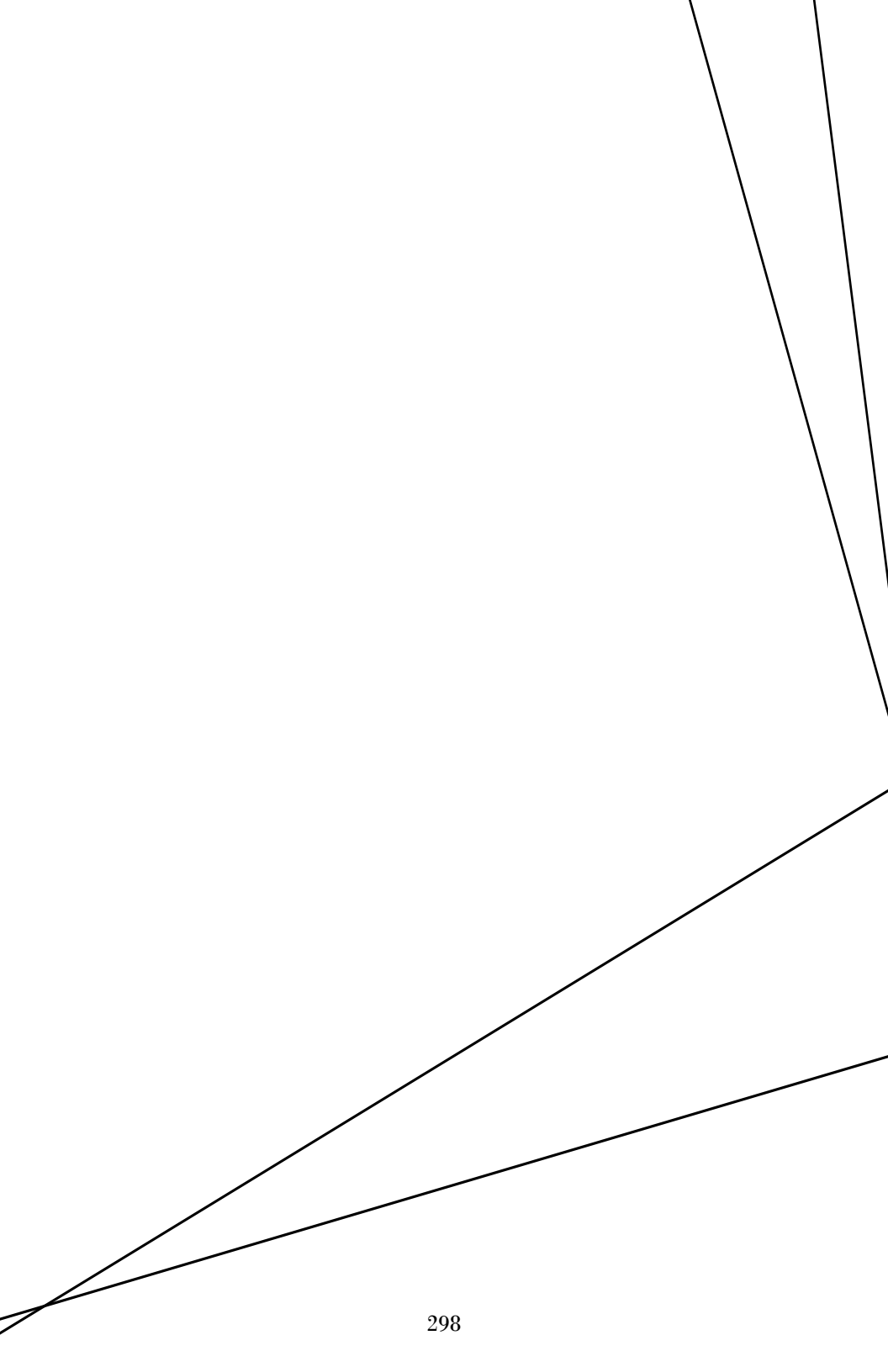
Todo es tan rápido—

el árbol floreciendo, la fruta madurando
las naranjas decaídas en aquel mismo árbol.

La simultaneidad dándome tiempo apenas
para apreciar cada evento.

Me pongo la flor detrás de la oreja,

Y cuando llego a casa, la pongo al centro de
un cuaderno vacío en el que espero escribir.



Translator's Note

“The Cows” moves through movie sets and theater scenes while traversing the distinct landscape of La Ligua, Chile. We see glimpses of wild fennel growing on the side of the road, sea otters inhabiting kelp-dense coastal waters, a rickety bus climbing the steep roads of the Cuesta del Melón, and—of course—cows grazing the grassy hillsides. While the landscape is local, the poem’s exploration of power dynamics and gender extends beyond geographical boundaries. As a poet, Nina is interested in examining notions of masculinity and femininity. In “The Cows” she explores the entertainment industry as a microcosm of misogyny.

While translating this poem, I strove to preserve the astonishing images, surprising turns, and rhythmic propulsion that sustain the piece. To that end, I restructured the stanzas and implemented line breaks in order to both modulate the rhythm and build momentum in English. Moreover, I placed the text into enjambed lines to give the poem’s images space on the page to individually shine in the English translation.

Nina and I met weekly throughout the translation process to discuss the characters, ideas, and action in “The Cows.” Our conversations illuminated the poem’s nuances and prompted me to reflect on my own writing practice. I have greatly enjoyed working on translating “The Cows” and hope those who encounter my English translation experience the originality and potency that make this poem sing.

VALENTINA ZÚÑIGA

LAS VACAS

Las vacas están quietas bebiéndose el jugo del pasto.

El hinojo que le dimos al algoritmo a veces se nos refriega en la cara. Sigue bailando desnuda esperando que alguien te de un par de monedas.

El director llega a decir

ACCIÓN.

Ahí supe que quería ser actriz.

Estuve con el director en el futuro antes de subirnos a la micro

Te vi en las pausas entre el telón y ella te amamantaba.

Estuve contigo en el brote de higuera. Yo en la copa de la higuera.

Volando afirmada de las orejas de las moscas.

Cosa amorfa discapacitada, pudiste ser bailarina.

En la cocina había una zanahoria gigante sacándose el jugo, pudiste haberla usado de linterna

y haber escapado del guano-cereal, de la hoja-billete,

de los gusanos nadadores gozando de nuestras arterias.

Subamos a la micro chatarra. Elige un asiento, sube, yo pago. Las vacas nos siguen quedándose quietas.

El director dice ACCIÓN pero tres minutos antes le había pegado a Veruca en la boca.

**translated from the spanish by
MARGARET CARTER**

THE COWS

The cows are motionless, drinking the pasture's juice.

The fennel we fed to the algorithm sometimes rubs
against our faces. Keep dancing naked
hoping someone will toss you a couple of coins.

The director arrives to say

ACTION.

That's when I knew I wanted to be an actress.

I was with the director in the future before
we boarded the bus. I saw you through the slits
in the curtain and she was suckling you.

I was with you—you, in the fig bud, I in the fig
tree's canopy. Soaring, clutching the ears of flies.

Amorphous incapacitated thing,
you could be a dancer.

In the kitchen a giant carrot was juicing itself,
you could have used it as a lantern and escaped
from rabbit scat-cereal, from leaf-money,
from swimming worms indulging in our arteries.

Let's board the ramshackle bus. Pick a seat, get on,
I'll pay. The cows follow us without moving.

The director says **ACTION** but
three minutes earlier he struck Veruca in the mouth.

Y se arranca los pelos y copos de cuero cabelludo le caen al lado.
Veruca, yo también he interrumpido el sexo para recitar mis líneas. Somos lo mismo y también me castigan, pero estamos bien.

Está bien, hay que hacer cualquier cosa porque somos la fruta madura al centro de la mesa.

En la mesa están Hombre 1 y Mujer 1. Tiritando de miedo. Entre ellos una arveja se despelleja sola. Y salta de una esquina una rodaja de limón que desaparece en el juego de luces.

Ahí va otra esposa Chilena de otro hombre Chileno.

ACCIÓN. Marcha atrás.

: (busca a su abusador o inventa uno o a unos cuantos) quiero estar en tu boca.
Y tú. Tú en tus pies apanados y tu piel costera.

Nina, el director quiere que le escribas un poema. Uno que diga lamer, comer y peñiscar.

Estabas tú y una foto tuya.

Cada vez que escribo en verdad hago nada. Digo y hago garabatos y mis amigos me dicen que está bien. Me intoxico y le canto a mis lesiones como si el músculo se sanara solo y quedara tierno y suave, suave y tierno bistec.

Él me escucha con los ojos y con la boca y con las manos.

Cuando el director se levanta de la cama.

Dame decadencia.

Dice. Los sueños húmedos de un carroñero.

He rips out his hair and flakes fall from his scalp down his sides.

Veruca, I too have interrupted sex to recite my lines.
We're the same, they punish me too, but we're fine.

It's fine, we'll do anything
since we're the ripe fruit at the center of the table.

At the table are Man 1 and Woman 1, shivering
with fear. Between them, a lone pea unshells itself

and springing from the corner, a lemon wedge
that disappears in the play of lights.

There goes another Chilean wife of another Chilean man.

ACTION. Reverse.

: (she searches for the abuser or imagines one, or a few)
I want to be in your mouth. And you.
You in your breadcrumb-encrusted feet and coastal skin.

Nina, the director wants you to write him a poem.
One that says lick, eat, and pinch.

It was you and your photo.

Every time I write, I really do nothing. I babble and scribble
and my friends tell me it's good. I get intoxicated
and sing to my wounds as if the muscle might heal itself
and remain tender and soft, a soft and tender steak.

He listens to me with his eyes and with his mouth and with his hands.

When the director gets out of bed.

Give me decadence. He says.
A scavenger's wet dream. He says.

Él dice.

Te di un protagonista. Eres la reina de la isla de huiro, y huiro cae por tus hombros y se enreda con tus pezones y es al mismo tiempo tu pelo y tus faldas. Y vienen por ti las gaviotas que rebotan en tus sienas. Y un chungungo te hace el amor. Después de todo esto es una historia de amor.

ACCIÓN

Todos bajan de la micro, se suben las vacas.

: (al chofer)

Nadie nunca va a venir a mi pueblo natal

Casi no existe mi pueblo natal

No hay micros a mi pueblo natal.

Pero está ella, y ella y Ella y la dulzura de la distancia.

Me dijo una vez que era un genio. *Tengo esta idea...*

Y era yo, desnuda en la iglesia

finalmente desheredada de mi prostitución.

Director. Cuenta cuentos. Gordo mentiroso escribiendo todo en su Mac.

Cuando le preguntes de que se trata el director va a decir de lo que sea.

de inspiración,

de las madres y sus hijas.

No, sobre las claras de huevo de codorniz mojadas en salsa de soya orgánica.

I gave you a lead role. You're the queen of the island of kelp.
Kelp falls onto your shoulders and tangles around your nipples,
simultaneously becoming your hair and your skirt.

And seagulls come for you and ricochet
off your temples. A sea otter makes love to you.
This is a love story after all.

ACTION.

Everyone gets off the bus, the cows get on.

: (to the driver)

No one is ever going to visit my hometown.
It almost doesn't exist. No buses go there, but she
is there and her and Her and the sweetness of distance.

He once told me that he was a genius. *I have this idea...*

And it was me, naked in the church
finally disinherited from my prostitution.

Director. Storyteller. Fat liar writing everything on his Mac.

When you ask him what it's about, the director will say anything.
About inspiration, about mothers and their daughters.

No, about quail egg-whites drenched in organic soy sauce.
But also about falling out of bed during a masturbation scandal.

Exhausted, he instructs: *pick a seat. Be creative.*
More. More. More.

There's an idea hovering by the sauropod cows. Another
next to the doll-eyed girl with fondant on her lips.

Pero también de caerse de la cama durante un escándalo de masturbación.

Cansado, instruye: *elige una silla. Sé creativa. Crea. Crea. Crea.*

Hay uno entre las vacas saurópodas.

Otro al lado de la niña ojos de muñeca con fondant en la boca.

Hay mujeres y sus formas injustas.

Todas semen andante, con las vaginas más apretadas, con sus siseos y su rotunda ignorancia.

Todas, con sabor a mantequilla en la lengua, hedonismo en las papilas, con las caderas rampas, la cuesta del melón en las caderas. Donde la micro frena porque no sabe si puede subir.

(Él se detiene)

Si de alguna forma pudiéramos hacer que las vacas vuelen.

Él pensó y pensó y pensamos y pensé.

Nunca me importaron tanto mis perras como me importan las vacas.

Manejo el bus desde el asiento del fondo, soy operador de satélites que me operan a mi.

Esta es la historia de una pobre chiquilla a la que le dicen su IMC.

Toda actriz es una mentira, hacen y deshacen y dan forma a la forma de las gredas, Nina.

ACCIÓN.

: (la saca de la esquina) Pero no tengo licencia!

A nadie le importa. Nadie se va a morir. Solo nos estamos divirtiendo.

There are women and their unjust ways.
All of them simply walking semen, with the tightest vaginas,
with their hissing and resounding ignorance.

All of them with butter-flavored tongues,
hedonism on their taste buds, with sloping hips,

the steep roads of Cuesta del Melón in their hips,
where the bus stops because it isn't sure it can make it.

(He pauses)

If only it were possible to make cows fly. He thought
and thought and we thought and I thought.

I never cared about my bitches
as much as I care about the cows.

I drive the bus from the back seat, I'm the operator
of the satellites that operate me.

This is the story of a poor little girl
who is told her BMI.

Every actress is a lie, they make and break
and mold the shape of clay, Nina.

ACTION.

: (He pulls her out of the corner) But I don't have a license!

No one cares. No one's going to die.
We're just having fun. Really. Really. Really.

There's no fight for a greater good.

This is the story of a poor socially illiterate little girl,
40 years of age, with a wooden leg, who smells like smoke
and has greasy hair. But she's sexy, she's mysterious.

En serio. En serio. En serio.

No hay lucha por un bien mayor.

Esta es la historia de una pobre chiquilla analfabeta social, de cuarenta años, con pata de palo, olor a humo y pelo roñoso. Pero es sexy, es misteriosa.

ACCIÓN

: (en cuatro) Mamá, quiero un lábial rojo.

Quemada, achicharrada por la luz de los focos. Con el maquillaje derretido. En trance del orgasmo teatral.

Finalmente, tal vez, en algún momento se rompan las tablas.

Yo la recibo. La meneo en mis brazos. La visto y desvisto. La lavo, la miro. La veo en las grandes estéticas, las nuevas tendencias, en los juegos de palabras, en la fila al baño. Ella pasa y es pasada. Anuncia su ausencia. Si se arrodilla, todos se caen.

Yo la recibo.

Me toca la oreja antes del mierda mierda.

Me llega un zancudo dentro de una flor y al zancudo le crecen hongos.

Le llegan flores al iluminador, que es amigo de las vacas, que se come a las vacas asadas. Y a la diseñadora que es una vaca.

Y el director lleva a las vacas de vuelta a sus asientos, y te acaricia el pelo como lo hacían las hojas del parral y sus lagartos.

Te saqué de una foto, cariño.

Una captura de un vídeo, cariño.

ACTION.

: (on all fours) Mom, I want a red lipstick.

Burnt to a crisp by the spotlight. Makeup melted.
In the trance of a theatrical orgasm.

Eventually, maybe, at some point the stage will collapse.

I embrace her. I shake her in my arms. I dress her
and undress her. I wash her and look at her. I see her

in the dominant aesthetics, the latest trends, in riddles,
and in line for the bathroom. She passes and is passed.

She announces her absence. If she kneels, everyone falls.

I embrace her.

She touches my ear before the break-a-legs.

A mosquito arrives for me inside a flower
and fungus grows from its wings.

Flowers arrive for the lighting technician,
who is a friend of the cows, who gorges on barbecued cow.
And for the designer, who is a cow.

And the director takes the cows back to their seats, and caresses
your hair the way grapevine leaves and lizards once did.

I picked you out of a photo, sweetheart.

A screenshot of a video, sweetheart.

A video from a porn site, sweetheart.

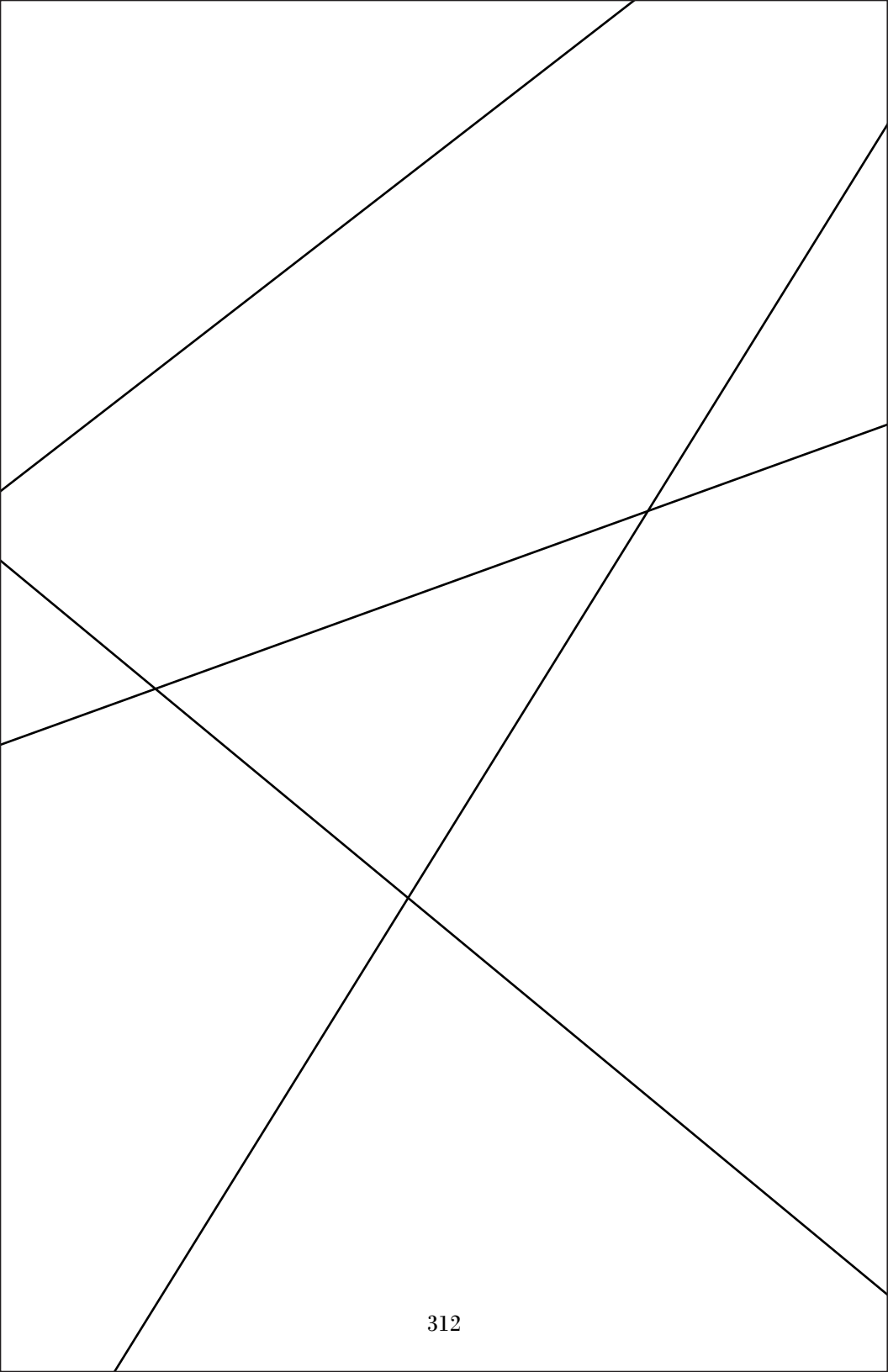
And you're going to ruin it, doll, you and your sick desire to be concave.

Un vídeo de una página porno, cariño.

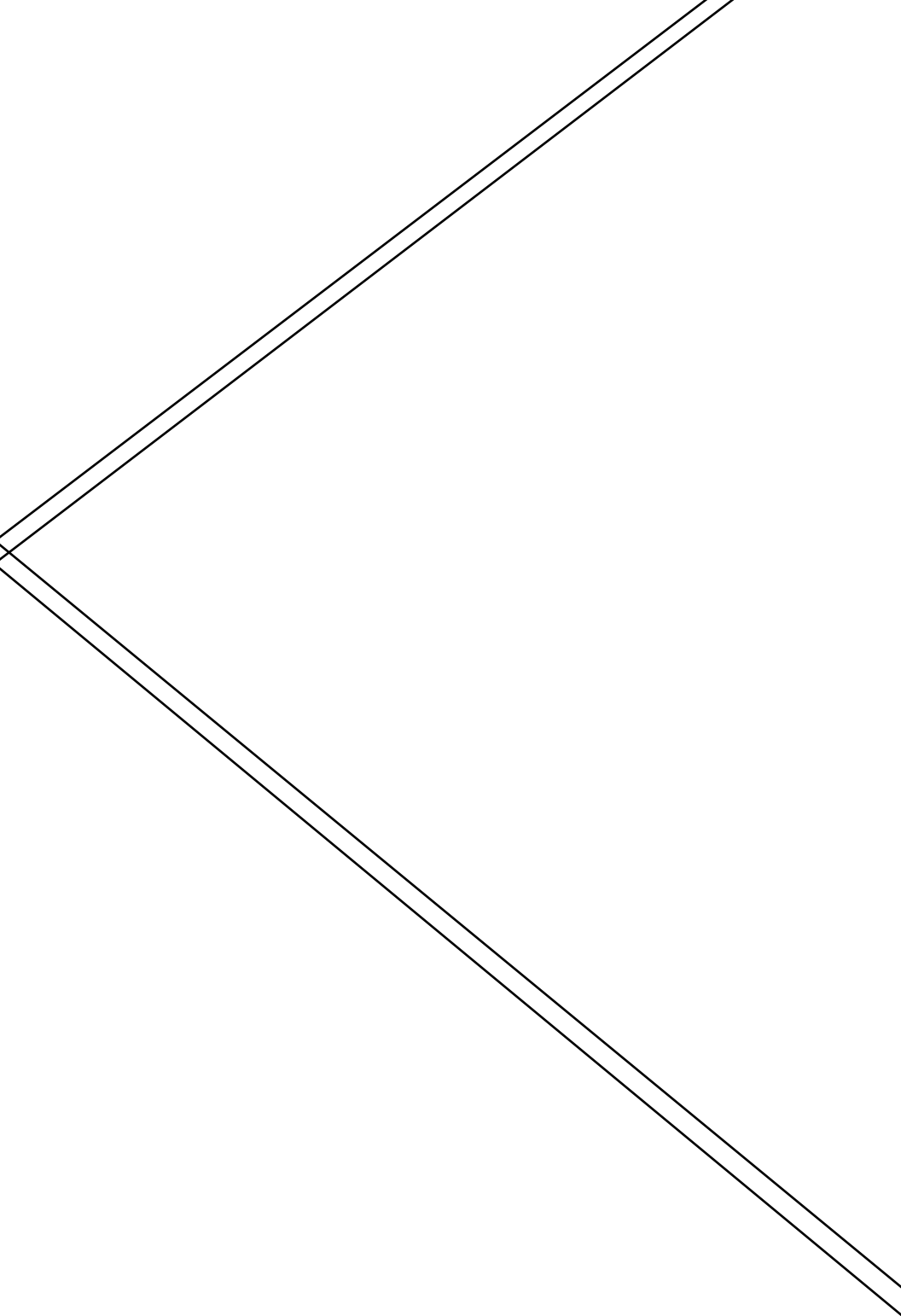
Y lo vas a arruinar, muñeca, tú y tu deseo enfermo de ser cóncava.

El chofer: (frena).

The driver: (brakes).



word for word / parola per parola
Columbia University School of the Arts
Scuola Holden



Nota del Traduttore

Quando qualche mese fa ho letto per la prima volta *La Piedra*, ricordo di aver pensato: come si fa a trasmettere, in una lingua diversa da quella originale, l'anima di un racconto? Come ci si assicura che il senso di un mondo resti intatto, quando tutto di quel racconto deve essere sviscerato, alterato e adattato? Quando le parole con cui è stata narrata una storia devono cambiare, e così i suoni, e la struttura delle frasi? Non esistono soluzioni esatte. Se si ha la fortuna di lavorare con un'autrice disponibile come Daniela, la traduzione non può che nascere dal dialogo.

La Piedra presenta al lettore una comunità piccola e diffidente il cui equilibrio è messo a repentaglio dall'arrivo di un misterioso sconosciuto. Un velo di oscurità aleggia sui luoghi, a partire dalla *pedra* stessa, un masso a cui nessuno osa avvicinarsi. Nessuno tranne Jairo, che ha da poco perso sua moglie Sara. Travolto dal lutto, Jairo sembra essere l'unico immune al terrore che la pietra infonde negli altri abitanti del paese, forse più superstiziosi di lui, forse semplicemente più saggi. Con un ritmo scandito da salti nel tempo e ricordi offuscati, la narrazione ci trascina al confine tra l'incubo e i racconti dell'orrore, indagando al contempo l'attrazione e la repulsione verso l'inspiegabile.

Durante il lavoro di traduzione, le mie conversazioni con Daniela si sono rivelate momenti di confronto e di scambio, non solo ai fini della resa del testo. Dalle scelte lessicali siamo arrivate a parlare di letteratura, e della scrittura del perturbante. Per questo, e per le molte preziose riflessioni che sono nate dalle nostre videocchiamate, si è trattato di un'esperienza inestimabile.

DANIELA ORDOÑEZ

LA PIEDRA

February 19, 1945

To this day, no one knows what woke up the town that night, if it was Luis's screams or the earthquake. He stumbled and slipped down the hill, scraping his legs several times. He ran to his house, sobbing. They were already outside when he got there, but he couldn't say any words to them. They tried to ask him "What happened?" but the only thing he could do was pointing to the stone on the side of the mountain from which he had tumbled down.

It wasn't long before others, awakened by the commotion, realized that their children weren't in their beds either. Ash floated in the air, and the river's current roared louder than ever. Gradually, a smell of smoke reached them, and they saw a fumarole on the mountain. "What day is it today?" asked one in the crowd.

"Of course! Today's the day. Exactly one hundred years have passed since!" another answered.

In that instant, everyone understood why the little boy was pointing to the hill. They feared the worst... They rushed towards the stone with crucifixes. Others ran to the church to wake up the priest and took the Holy Week statues. The mothers carried rosaries in their hands. People approached cautiously because the rock was covered in ash from top to bottom. The smell of sulfur made everyone shudder. When they saw the silhouettes of their children covering the ground, many screamed but were instantly hushed. The priest was the first to step forward, leaving behind a trail of holy water droplets. The children were still breathing, to everyone's relief. There were no tracks, no hint of how or where to find the responsible. The forest behind the

**tradotto dall'inglese da
ANNA RAUCCI**

LA PIEDRA

19 febbraio 1945

A oggi, nessuno sa cosa svegliò il paese quella notte, se si trattò delle grida di Luis o del terremoto. Luis inciampò e ruzzolò giù per la collina, graffiandosi le gambe più volte. Corse verso casa, singhiozzando. Erano già fuori quando arrivò, ma non riuscì a spicciare parola. Provarono a chiedergli: “Cosa è successo?”, ma lui riuscì solo a indicare il masso sul fianco della montagna da cui era sceso precipitosamente.

Non ci volle molto perché altri, svegliati dal rumore, si accorgessero che neanche i loro figli erano nei propri letti. La cenere fluttuava nell'aria e la corrente del fiume scrosciava più forte che mai. A poco a poco, un odore di fumo li raggiunse, e videro una fumarola sulla montagna.

“Che giorno è?”, chiese qualcuno nella folla.

“Ma certo! È oggi. Sono passati esattamente cent'anni!”, rispose qualcun altro.

In quel momento capirono perché il bambino indicasse la collina. Temevano il peggio... Si affrettarono a raggiungere la roccia, con i crocifissi. Altri corsero in chiesa a svegliare il prete e presero le statue della Settimana Santa. Le madri stringevano in mano il rosario. Le persone si avvicinarono caute, perché il masso era coperto di cenere da cima a fondo. La puzza di zolfo li fece rabbrivire. Quando distinsero i bambini riversi a terra, molti gridarono ma furono subito messi a tacere. Il prete fu il primo a farsi avanti, lasciandosi dietro una scia di gocce di acqua santa. Con sollievo di tutti, i bambini respiravano ancora. Non c'erano tracce, nessun indizio su come o dove trovare il responsabile.

rock was uncannily silent. They all felt eyes lingering in the back of their necks, but the only creature watching them was a black dog gazing at them from behind a shrub.

One by one, the children woke up. They all described a cold hand, like metal, touching their foreheads before they had fainted. Those who took the longest to lose consciousness remembered a few stray words spoken by a vile voice, “No vuelvan!” Luis, who was finally able to talk again, told the adults what he had seen. It started as a game. The children decided they would visit the *Haunted* rock at three in the morning, when the spirits would come, to determine who was the bravest amongst them. Fear had paralyzed him before he even reached the rock. As he stayed behind the rest, he saw everything. He saw a shadow appear out of nowhere and ambush the children ahead of him. Seconds later, they all passed out. He heard a voice that shouted “Leave me alone!” and the earth shook. Since then, ashes had started falling from the sky.



“Are you recording yet?”

“Yes, can you read this?” replied the journalist.

“My name is Jairo Bermudez. Today is the sixth of July of 1986. It is 11:00 am. I authorize *Eje del Café* Radio to use this recording as part of its news segment.”

“Okay, you can start now.”

“A year and a half ago, my wife died. When we buried her, you see, I had nothing left. This whole tragedy began two weeks after she passed. I soon discovered that beer was the only thing that helped me numb my pain. Sara wouldn’t have liked it, though. That night, I left the billiards half-drunk, hoping to find a place where no one would bother me. People treat a widower like a baby, a defenseless creature in need of permanent company, so I wanted to be alone. Knowing

Il bosco dietro la pietra era misteriosamente silenzioso. Tutti si sentivano un paio d'occhi incollati alla nuca, ma l'unica creatura che li fissava era un cane nero nascosto dietro un arbusto.

Uno a uno, i bambini si svegliarono. Descrissero una mano fredda, come metallo, che toccava le loro fronti prima che svenissero. Quelli che avevano impiegato più tempo a perdere conoscenza ricordavano un paio di parole fortuite pronunciate da una voce ripugnante, "No vuelvan!". Luis, che era finalmente in grado di parlare, disse agli adulti quello che aveva visto. Era iniziato come un gioco. I bambini avevano deciso che avrebbero visitato la Pietra infestata alle tre del mattino, quando sarebbero venuti gli spiriti, per decidere chi era il più coraggioso. La paura lo aveva paralizzato prima ancora che raggiungesse il masso. Restando indietro rispetto agli altri, aveva visto tutto. Aveva visto un'ombra comparire dal nulla e tendere un'imboscata ai bambini davanti a lui. Qualche secondo dopo, erano svenuti. Aveva sentito una voce che gridava: "Lasciatemi stare!" e la terra aveva tremato. Da quel momento la cenere aveva iniziato a cadere dal cielo.

"Sta registrando?"

"Sì, può leggere questo?", rispose il giornalista.

"Mi chiamo Jairo Bermudez. Oggi è il 6 luglio 1986. Sono le 11. Autorizzo la radio *Eje del Cafè* a usare la registrazione come parte del suo notiziario."

"Okay, ora può iniziare."

"Un anno e mezzo fa è morta mia moglie. Sa, quando la seppellimmo non mi restava niente. Tutta questa tragedia iniziò due settimane dopo la sua morte. Presto scoprii che la birra era l'unica cosa che mi aiutava a lenire il dolore. A Sara però non sarebbe piaciuto. Quella notte lasciai il biliardo mezzo ubriaco, sperando di trovare un posto dove nessuno mi avrebbe infastidito.

that some aunt or another would be waiting to smother me when I got home, I wandered around instead. The streets were empty because of the rain, but I didn't care about getting wet.

The town is right at the foot of the mountain. I walked behind the cemetery and the soccer field, where I found the rock. Three meters high, stuck in the ground. I crouched beneath it to shelter myself from the rain. Because everybody in town believed this rock was haunted, no one ever went near it. For me, it was the best place to be alone, in peace! My wet clothes were uncomfortable, but I knew they would dry up soon.

I started climbing up the hill towards the rock, but the mud made me lose my balance. I slipped and slid several times as I approached it. I squinted my eyes to try to see it between the haze. I walked with my arms stretched before me, palpating the air until I finally got a hold of its hard surface. I laughed out loud, remembering how afraid older people would get every time our soccer ball ended up somewhere near the rock. They would send a child to pick it up, afraid to do so themselves. In fact, they had sent me to do so about ten years ago. But I, unlike them, didn't mind. I had always enjoyed the site, its peacefulness in particular. We never played soccer at night, so this was the first time I visited the stone at that time of night. I felt strange, but I blamed the booze for it.

Standing on the rock, I could see the cemetery, Sara. Moonlight shone clearly on her grave. I had memorized where it was. I saw the cemetery's church and the statue of Jesus standing above it. The whole thing was ridiculous. They were asking me to trust some random guy's plan—a plan that, for all I know, could have been nothing more than a madman's delusion. Was my sudden loneliness part of the grand scheme of things? Nah. I still don't think that there's a reason things happen to us.

I started yelling random blasphemies at the statue. "What now, God? Anything else?" I cried, laying

Le persone trattano un vedovo come un bambino, una creatura indifesa che ha bisogno di costante compagnia, perciò volevo stare da solo. Sapendo che a casa avrei trovato una delle mie zie soffocanti, decisi di andarmene in giro. Le strade erano vuote per la pioggia, ma non mi importava di bagnarmi.

Il paese è proprio ai piedi della montagna. Camminai dietro il cimitero e il campo da calcio, dove trovai la pietra. Alta tre metri, conficcata nella terra. Mi ci rannicchiai sotto per proteggermi dalla pioggia. Visto che tutti in città la credevano infestata, nessuno ci si avvicinava mai. Per me era il posto migliore per stare solo, in pace! I vestiti fradici mi davano fastidio, ma sapevo che presto si sarebbero asciugati.

Iniziai a salire la collina verso la pietra, ma il fango mi fece perdere l'equilibrio. Misi un piede in fallo e avvicinandomi scivolai più volte. Strizzai gli occhi per cercare di vederla nella foschia. Camminavo con le braccia tese davanti e tastai l'aria fino ad afferrare la superficie dura. Scoppiai a ridere, ricordando quanto si spaventavano i più grandi ogni volta che il pallone da calcio finiva vicino al masso. Avevano tanta paura di andare a riprenderlo da soli che mandavano un bambino a farlo. Infatti, avevano mandato me a recuperarlo circa dieci anni fa. Ma a me, diversamente da loro, non importava. Mi era sempre piaciuto il posto, in particolare la sua tranquillità. Non giocavamo mai a calcio di sera, perciò era la prima volta che visitavo la pietra a quell'ora di notte. Mi sentivo strano, ma diedi la colpa al bere.

In piedi sulla roccia, riuscivo a vedere il cimitero, Sara. La luce della luna brillava chiaramente sulla sua tomba. Avevo memorizzato dov'era. Vedevo la chiesa del cimitero e la statua di Gesù che lo sovrastava. Era tutto ridicolo. Mi stavano chiedendo di fidarmi del progetto di un tizio qualsiasi – un progetto che, per quanto ne so, poteva benissimo essere solo l'allucinazione di un pazzo. La mia solitudine improvvisa era parte del grande disegno delle cose? No. Penso ancora che non ci sia una

on top of the rock. That's when I screamed "What's your great plan, Lord? The devil better take me now." I kept wailing until I heard unexpected footsteps. When I lifted my head to see where they were coming from, I lost my balance and slipped. I hit my head on the rock."

December 3, 1984

"Turn around!" a deep voice said quickly. "Idiot, you're going to drown!" The rain kept pouring down, and Jairo's mouth was full of water. He woke up, coughing the water out. He sat, trying to calm himself down, and opened his eyes, searching for the voice that had called on him, but the only thing he saw was a black dog in the distance. He thought his self-preservation instincts had played a trick on him, so he closed his eyes and lay back on the ground. A penetrating odor invaded his nostrils, but the headache was too harsh to open his eyes again.

"Stand up!"

Jairo was startled. A strange shape appeared before him. He rubbed his eyes. The figure looked human, but the sight of it gave him goosebumps. Something inside him pushed him to get up, but sudden spells of dizziness pulled him back down. He blamed the alcohol as he struggled to figure out the person in front of him. Whoever it was had black hair and a dark mustache. It wore a long black overcoat that gave it an air of stateliness and proudness. The blackness of the coat created a stark contrast with his eyes, which were the color of honey. An eerie ruby shimmer shone in the corner of his pupils. Jairo didn't recognize him; he was not a local.

"Who are you?"

"I am someone who also lost everything long ago." nostalgia shrouded the stranger's authoritative voice.

"What do you want?" Jairo's voice didn't turn out as strong as he wanted it to be. His throat was sore.

Jairo tried again to get up and leave, but an

ragione per cui le cose ci succedono.

Iniziai a urlare bestemmie a caso verso la statua. “Adesso che succede, Dio? Qualcos’altro?”, gridai, steso sulla cima del masso. E aggiunsi: “Qual è il tuo grande piano, Signore? Il diavolo farà meglio a prendermi ora”. Continuai a lamentarmi finché non sentii dei passi inattesi. Quando sollevai la testa per vedere da dove provenissero, persi l’equilibrio e scivolai. Battei la testa sulla pietra.”

3 dicembre 1984

“Girati!”, disse rapida una voce profonda. “Idiota, affogherai!”

Continuava a piovere a dirotto, e la bocca di Jairo era piena di acqua. Si svegliò e tossì acqua. Si sedette provando a calmarsi, e aprì gli occhi in cerca della voce che l’aveva chiamato, ma l’unica cosa che vide fu un cane nero in lontananza. Pensò che il proprio istinto di autoconservazione gli avesse giocato uno scherzo, perciò chiuse gli occhi e si stese a terra. Un tanfo penetrante gli invase le narici, ma il mal di testa era troppo forte per riaprire gli occhi.

“Alzati!”

Jairo trasalì. Una strana figura gli comparve davanti. Si strofinò gli occhi. La figura sembrava umana, ma la sua vista gli dava i brividi. Qualcosa dentro di lui lo spinse ad alzarsi, ma vertigini improvvise lo trascinarono di nuovo a terra. Faticando a distinguere quella persona, diede la colpa all’alcol. Chiunque fosse, aveva capelli corvini e baffi scuri. Indossava un lungo cappotto nero che gli dava un’aria maestosa e fiera. Il nero della giacca creava un netto contrasto con gli occhi, che erano del colore del miele. Un inquietante luccichio rosso rubino gli brillava all’angolo delle pupille. Jairo non lo riconobbe; non era del posto.

“Chi sei?”

intense heaviness throughout his forehead weighed him back down. The stranger held out his hand to help him up. “Shall I walk you home?”

“Answer my question first! Who are you?” Jairo demanded.

“Listen, friend, I am the one who knows the least about the big man’s plans, the very plans you were haranguing,” replied the stranger with a mocking tone.



I woke up the next day in my bed. I spent hours trying to remember what had actually happened to me. Many of the details of the night before had become hazy, much like the eerie man I had met himself.

“Wait, what man?”

“Oh yes, I’m not good at telling stories. People keep saying I jump over all the details. I couldn’t tell what or who he was, but my intuition told me something was amiss with him. He asked me to call him Lucio. His skin felt cold like metal when he helped me get up. He took me back home.

“You met him on the rock?”

“Yes, but I couldn’t remember much from him then. I went back to the rock, but there was no one there. I spent a few hours thinking about Sara and what would become of me without her. I knew this was dangerous and ultimately fruitless, but I couldn’t help myself. I even thought I was starting to hallucinate.

I walked back to town and sat down to drink in the corner store in the central plaza. I asked the others if they knew a man like the one I was describing, but no one had even heard of him. I was already regretting everything I had shouted to God that night because I started to believe that he must have been my guardian angel, a spirit that had manifested itself to lead me back home, safe and sound.

Sara’s older brother, Hernando, joined me. When I told him what had happened to me, he chalked

“Sono anch’io uno che ha perso tutto tanto tempo fa”. La nostalgia velava la voce autoritaria dello sconosciuto. “Che vuoi?” La voce di Jairo non venne fuori forte quanto desiderava. Gli faceva male la gola.

Jairo cercò ancora di alzarsi e andarsene, ma un’intensa pesantezza che gli attraversava la fronte lo schiacciò di nuovo. Lo straniero allungò la mano per aiutarlo.

“Posso accompagnarti a casa?”

“Prima rispondi alla mia domanda! Chi sei?”, chiese Jairo.

“Ascolta, amico, io sono l’ultimo a poter conoscere i disegni del personaggio su cui facevi la tua arringa”, rispose lo sconosciuto con un tono beffardo.

L’indomani mi svegliai nel mio letto. Per ore cercai di ricordare cosa mi era accaduto davvero. Molti dettagli della notte erano confusi, come lo strano uomo che avevo incontrato.

“Aspetti, quale uomo?”

“Ah sì, non sono bravo a raccontare storie. La gente mi dice che salto sempre le cose importanti. Non sapevo cosa o chi fosse, ma il mio intuito mi diceva che in lui c’era qualcosa che non andava. Mi aveva chiesto di chiamarlo Lucio. Quando mi aveva aiutato ad alzarmi, aveva la pelle fredda come metallo. Mi aveva riportato a casa.

“Lo aveva incontrato sulla pietra?”

“Sì, ma allora non ricordavo molto di lui. Tornai alla pietra, ma non c’era nessuno. Per qualche ora pensai a Sara e a cosa ne sarebbe stato di me senza di lei. Sapevo che era pericoloso e in fin dei conti inutile, ma non potevo farne a meno. Pensai persino di avere le allucinazioni.

Mi incamminai di nuovo verso il paese e mi sedetti a bere nel locale all’angolo della plaza centrale. Descrissi l’uomo agli altri e chiesi se lo conoscevano, ma nessuno aveva mai neanche sentito parlare di lui. Mi stavo già pentendo di quello che avevo gridato a Dio quella notte,

it all up to the ten beers I had drank and he offered to buy me another round. I was sure something else had happened. I don't quite remember what happened after, but I was banned from the store that night.

The next day, when I regained consciousness, I noticed my cheek was swollen and my lip was cracked. I went to find out what had happened to me. Turns out, I said something that offended Luis, the owner of a stall in the plaza. Even though Hernando blamed my behavior on my recent loss, Luis was determined to get the disrespectful attitude out of me, blow by blow.

Hernando told me that halfway through the beating, a man entered the store. His mere presence made Luis stop, his fist hanging midair. They said an uneasy feeling flooded the atmosphere; others agreed that the man's presence had made them feel insignificant. I knew they were talking about Lucio. Without saying a word, he got me out of there. The moment he closed the door behind him, a piercing sound from the mountains stunned the customers. Then came the earthquake. Several people ran after us, but none could find us.

They weren't sure if it was smoke or fog that had blocked their vision, but they all agreed that when they could finally see again, the floor was covered in ash. After that night, everyone in town had questions I could not answer. I had no idea where he had come from or why he had come for me. I knew nothing about him except his name, but at least I was no longer the only one who had seen him."

"So he was a real man."

"We'll get there."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"The next afternoon, I visited Sara again, but the gravedigger didn't let me in because I was carrying a sack full of beer. I went instead to the rock. Lucio showed up. My memories had not done the man any justice. He was about two meters tall. He sat next to me and told me that he also would sit on the rock to observe someone's grave from a distance, since he

perché forse quello che avevo incontrato era il mio angelo custode, uno spirito che si era manifestato per riportarmi a casa sano e salvo.

Il fratello maggiore di Sara, Hernando, mi raggiunse. Quando gli dissi cosa mi era successo, attribui tutto alle dieci birre che avevo bevuto e volle offrirmene un altro giro. Ero sicuro che ci fosse altro. Non ricordo bene cosa accadde in seguito, ma quella sera fui cacciato via dal locale.

Il giorno dopo, quando ripresi conoscenza, notai che avevo la guancia gonfia e il labbro spaccato. Uscii per scoprire come mai ero ridotto così. A quanto pare, avevo detto qualcosa che aveva offeso Luis, il proprietario di un chiosco nella plaza. Anche se Hernando mi aveva difeso tirando in ballo la recente perdita, Luis era deciso a farmi passare quell'atteggiamento irrispettoso a forza di cazzotti.

Hernando mi raccontò che a metà della rissa un uomo era entrato nel locale. La sua sola presenza aveva bloccato Luis con il pugno a mezz'aria. A quanto dicevano, una sensazione di disagio aveva pervaso l'atmosfera; altri concordavano sul fatto che la presenza dell'uomo li aveva fatti sentire insignificanti. Sapevo che parlavano di Lucio. Senza dire una parola, mi aveva tirato fuori da lì. Quando si era chiuso la porta alle spalle, un rumore acuto dalle montagne aveva stordito i clienti. Poi era arrivato il terremoto. Un gruppetto di persone ci aveva inseguito, ma nessuno era riuscito a trovarci.

Non sapevano se a offuscare la vista fosse stato il fumo o la nebbia, ma raccontavano che, quando alla fine erano riusciti a vedere di nuovo, il pavimento era coperto di cenere. Dopo quella sera, tutti in paese facevano domande a cui non riuscivo a rispondere. Non sapevo da dove venisse o perché mi avesse aiutato. Non sapevo niente di lui tranne il nome, ma almeno non ero più l'unico ad averlo visto.”

“Perciò era un uomo reale.”

“Ci arriveremo.”

“Che significa?”

wasn't allowed to step on sacred grounds. The grave of Carolina Casas. I asked him when she had died, and he said 1845. I corrected him "1945, you mean" although he didn't look old enough to have lost someone 40 years ago. He laughed. "Yes, 1975, sorry". It was strange that I couldn't recall someone, as it was such a small town.

Lucio told me more about her. He was in love. I remember the ground was shaking the whole time, as he told me about her, and for some time I thought It was just the way memories change because you are drinking. He was a captivating narrator because he spoke as if the years had not wiped away any single feeling or memory. The night we met, he had gone to plant some flowers in her honor. The pain of her loss was still unbearable, and he only visited her on significant dates. It still seemed strange to me that no one in town knew Lucio, or had ever even mentioned him. My angry, drunken complaints had made him talk to me. We stayed a few more hours talking until I returned to town.

We continued meeting there. And whenever I got into trouble, Lucio got me out of it. Several people began to resent him because when he appeared, strange things happened. But everything went to shit the day I insulted the priest.

I know, I know, don't look at me like that. I was drunk, and the priest told me that Jesus would save me. As if Jesus could bring Sara back to me!. Several people came out in defense of the priest and we ended up fighting. As usual, Lucio arrived to protect me. The priest tried to prevent him from taking me away. They pulled and pushed, but when Lucio yelled, Luis, the one from the plaza, turned to stone. Everybody else followed suit.

Back then, I thought their silly explanations were but mere stories. I had no way of knowing."

September 10th, 1985

Luis walked inside the church where the priest

“Il pomeriggio successivo andai di nuovo a trovare Sara, ma il becchino non mi fece entrare perché avevo un borsone pieno di birra. Così andai alla pietra. Lucio si fece vivo. I miei ricordi non gli rendevano giustizia. Era alto circa due metri. Si sedette accanto a me e mi disse che anche lui si sedeva sulla pietra per osservare una tomba da lontano, perché non era autorizzato a calpestare il suolo consacrato. La tomba di Carolina Casas. Gli chiesi quand’era morta, e lui disse 1845. Lo corressi: “1945, vorrai dire”, anche se non sembrava abbastanza vecchio per aver perso qualcuno quarant’anni prima. Rise. “Sì, 1975, scusa”. Strano che non lo ricordassi, in un paese così piccolo.

Lucio mi raccontò altre cose di lei. Era innamorato. Ricordo che mentre mi parlava il suolo tremò per tutto il tempo, e per un po’ ho pensato che bere modifica i ricordi. Era un narratore accattivante perché parlava come se gli anni non avessero spazzato via un singolo sentimento o ricordo. La notte in cui ci eravamo incontrati era andato a piantare dei fiori in onore di Carolina. Il dolore della sua perdita era ancora insopportabile, e lui andava a farle visita solo in date significative. Mi sembrava ancora strano che in paese nessuno conoscesse Lucio né ne avesse mai parlato. Quando avevo sbraitato da ubriaco si era convinto a parlare con me. Chiacchierammo per qualche altra ora finché tornai in paese.

Continuammo a incontrarci lì. E ogni volta che mi mettevo nei guai Lucio me ne tirava fuori. Tante persone presero a detestarlo, perché quando compariva succedevano cose strane. Ma tutto andò al diavolo il giorno in cui insultai il prete.

Lo so, lo so, non mi guardi così. Ero ubriaco, e il prete mi disse che Gesù mi avrebbe salvato. Come se Gesù potesse restituirmi Sara! Molti si fecero avanti in difesa del prete e finimmo per fare a botte. Come al solito, Lucio venne a proteggermi. Il prete cercò di impedirgli di portarmi via. Fecero un tira e molla finché Lucio gridò. A quel punto Luis, quello della plaza, impiettrì.

was getting ready for the afternoon mass. “Father, do you have a minute? I want to talk to you about yesterday.” he said.

Jorge raised his gaze, interested. He was waiting for someone to bring up the subject. “The man that’s always with Jairo, he’s a strange one. What’s your concern Don Luis? “I’ve seen that man before,” he said and lowered his voice “Before you came to this town, when I was a kid...”

Luis told him all his theories. Jorge told Luis he would check the journals of the priests who lived there before him.

At 9:45 p.m., he ran towards Luis’s place.

A cold rush of fear took over Luis’s body when he opened the door.

Gli altri lo imitarono.

Allora pensavo che le loro ridicole spiegazioni fossero solo storie. Non avevo modo di sapere.

10 settembre 1985

Luis entrò in chiesa, dove il prete si stava preparando per la messa pomeridiana.

“Padre, ha un minuto? Vorrei parlarle di ieri”, disse.

Jorge sollevò lo sguardo, interessato. Stava aspettando che qualcuno tirasse in ballo l'argomento.

“L'uomo che è sempre con Jairo è un tipo strano. Cosa la preoccupa, Don Luis?”

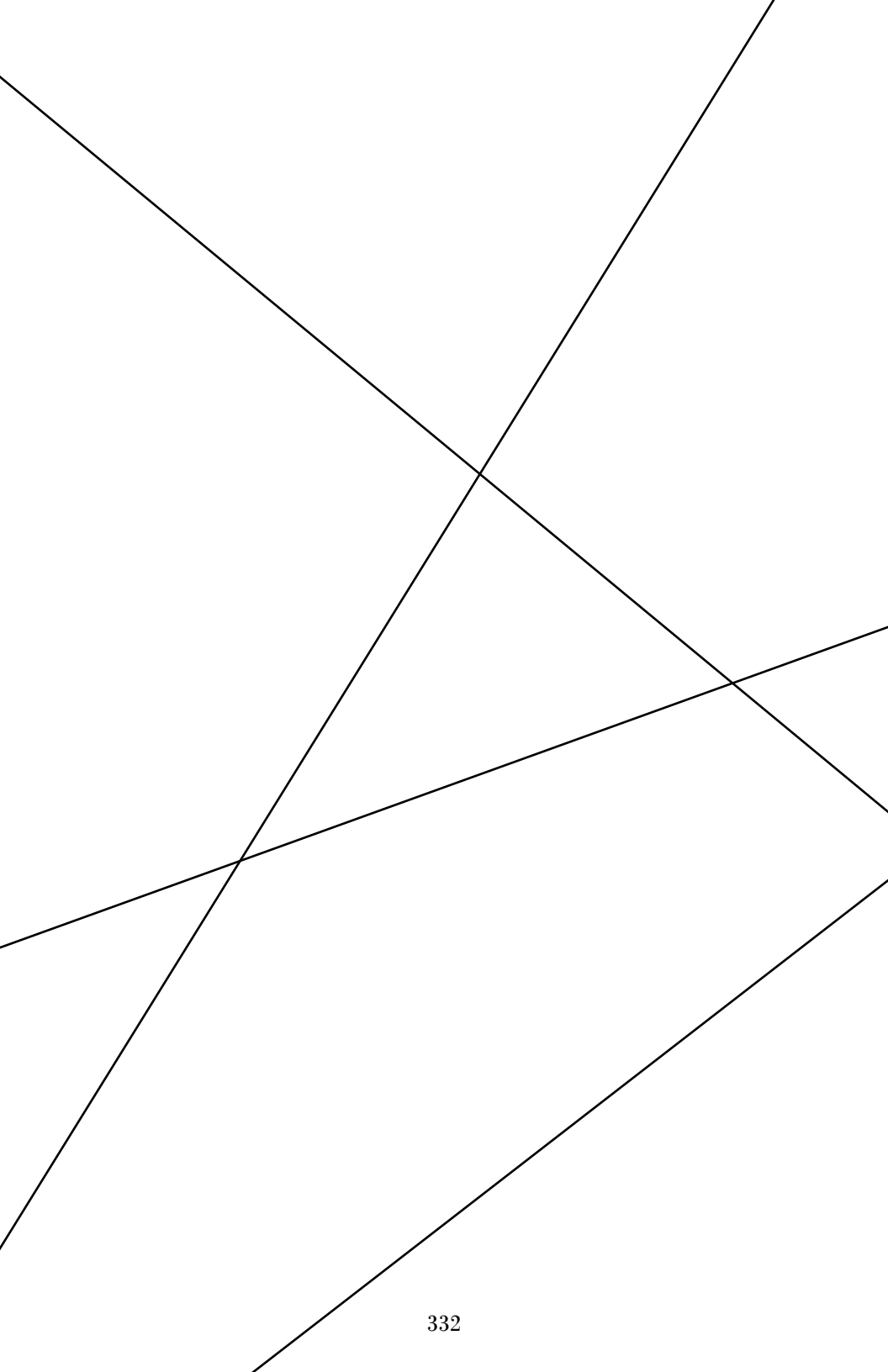
“Ho già visto quell'uomo”, disse e abbassò la voce.

“Prima che lei venisse in paese, quando ero bambino...”

Luis gli riferì tutte le sue teorie. Jorge disse che avrebbe controllato i registri dei preti che vivevano lì prima di lui.

Alle 21.45 corse verso casa di Luis.

Una gelida ondata di paura assalì il corpo di Luis quando aprì la porta.



Translator's Note

Anna and I both share a love of speculative fiction and a fascination for the unrealness of life. One of our first conversations was about how a less compatible translation partner might have questioned whether the stories were merely something unfolding inside the main character's mind, or other similar questions we've gotten in workshops. Instead, we were lucky and got to appreciate each other's stories for what they are— just slightly outside of reality. Our shared influences include authors such as Charlotte Bronte, Mary Shelley and Shirley Jackson. It was a pleasure to work together on translating each other's pieces.

This translation follows *The Tenants* as faithfully, closely and meticulously as I could, always striving to maintain the sense of embodiment the house's owner feels throughout. She and the house become one and the same.

Translating Anna's work was haunting, as every sentence had to convey the most anxious and yet mystical aura possible. I hope the paranoia comes through.

We don't really know who had the idea to pair us, but well done!

ANNA RAUCCI

GLI INQUILINI

Con gli inquilini in casa non riusciva a dormire. Sentiva le loro voci attraverso le pareti sottili, e i passi la tenevano sveglia. Quando tornavano nel cuore della notte, i suoni le arrivavano amplificati. Aveva la sensazione che le camminassero addosso. Dal pomeriggio alla mattina se ne stava sempre in camera sua, la porta chiusa, la finestra chiusa, seduta al centro del letto ad ascoltare. Aveva venduto tutti i mobili di valore, tranne l'armadio che usava per i vestiti, e il comodino accanto al letto. A volte si addormentava, ma le voci degli inquilini la svegliavano a intervalli regolari.

In paese dicevano che la villa era infestata. Lei che ci era cresciuta non ci aveva mai creduto. I suoi morti non erano tornati, e la casa che aveva ereditato ormai apparteneva a degli estranei. Per quanto molesta, la loro presenza si era resa indispensabile. Cercava di non incontrarli mai e di non parlare con loro. Si faceva lasciare i soldi dell'affitto sul tavolo della cucina e i messaggi sui post-it attaccati al frigorifero. Se pensava a quelle persone che calpestavano i gradini e i tappeti le mancava l'aria. Quando apriva la porta della propria stanza, quasi si aspettava di vederseli in corridoio, allineati davanti a sé, pronti a soffocarla con le loro lamentele.

Dopo le nove del mattino, però, la casa tornava sua, e lei si muoveva tra gli spazi silenziosi trascinandosi dietro il cane, un vecchio pastore tedesco. Restava in pigiama e spalancava tutte le finestre, e faceva lei stessa le pulizie. Ogni tanto apriva i cassetti nelle stanze degli inquilini e prendeva qualcosa: sigarette, matite, orecchini. Erano sempre cose di cui nessuno avrebbe sentito la mancanza. Era lunedì quando, alle nove e cinque, entrò in cucina, i piedi scalzi e il cane che la seguiva. Sul frigorifero c'era

translated from the italian by
DANIELA ORDOÑEZ

THE TENANTS

As long as the tenants were home, she couldn't sleep. She heard voices through the thin walls, their footsteps kept her awake. Whenever they came back in the middle of the night, the sounds felt louder, as if they were all over her. From dusk to dawn, she always stayed in her bedroom, door closed, window closed— just her in the middle of the bed, listening. She had sold all the valuable furniture, except for the wardrobe and the bedside table. When she fell asleep the tenants' voices woke her regularly.

People in town said her villa was haunted. She had never believed it. She grew up there and her dead had never returned, but the house she'd inherited was now possessed by strangers. As annoying as their presence was, it had become indispensable. She tried not to run into them, much less talk to them. She would have them leave the rent on the kitchen table and use post-it notes on the fridge for anything they wanted to communicate. If she thought too hard about those people treading on the stairs, the carpet, she would find herself gasping for air. Whenever she opened her bedroom door, she expected to see them in the hallway, lined up in front of her, ready to suffocate her with their complaints.

After nine a.m. the house would finally be hers again and she could silently dwell among its spaces, dragging the dog behind her, an old German shepherd. Still in her pajamas, she'd open all the windows and do the cleaning herself. From time to time, she'd open the drawers in their rooms and take something: cigarettes, a pencil, earrings. Always something no one would miss.

One Monday at five past nine she walked barefoot into

uno dei suoi post-it. Lo staccò e lo gettò nel cestino. Fece colazione in silenzio. Latte, miele, cereali, e sottili fette di prosciutto per il pastore tedesco. Mentre allungava una mano per accarezzare il cane, urtò la tazza col gomito, e quella si rovesciò sulla tovaglia. Il caffè bollente le bruciò l'avambraccio. Quando lo scoprì, vide una macchia rossa sulla pelle.

Il resto della mattinata lo trascorse a pulire le altre stanze. In camera della terza inquilina trovò un singolo fiammifero che era caduto tra la scrivania e il muro. Se lo infilò nella tasca dei pantaloni. Spazzò i pavimenti, avviò due volte la lavatrice, spolverò le statuine di porcellana in salotto.

All'una e un quarto, mentre si preparava il pranzo e un panino per la cena, le telefonò sua sorella. Lo faceva sempre, quando si avvicinavano le vacanze. Lei riconobbe il numero sullo schermo del cellulare e non rispose. La sorella, che a ventinove anni viveva con il marito e una figlia dall'altro lato del Paese, le lasciò un messaggio. La invitava a stare da lei per l'estate. Erano le ultime rimaste della loro famiglia, e non si vedevano mai.

Non la richiamò. Presto, gli inquilini sarebbero tornati a casa per il mese di agosto, e lei avrebbe avuto la villa tutta per sé.

Mentre infilava il panino in una busta, si accorse della macchia scura sull'intonaco, accanto alla credenza. A eccezione di quell'unico mobile, la parete era bianca.

Si alzò. Avvicinandosi, vide che la macchia aveva il colore del vino rosso. Ci passò sopra le dita. Era asciutta. Grattò l'intonaco, e una polverina rosa le si attaccò sotto le unghie.

Per pulire le ci vollero acqua, candeggina, e una buona mezz'ora passata a strofinare vigorosamente il muro con un panno bagnato. Un tempo, sua madre usava la parete accanto alla credenza per appendere le foto di famiglia, che adesso erano in uno scatolone nel suo armadio.

La macchia venne via, insieme a una piccola parte

the kitchen, followed by the dog. One of her post-its was on the fridge. She took it off and threw it in the trash. She ate breakfast in silence. Milk, honey, cereal and thin slices of ham for the German shepherd. When she reached out to the dog with one hand, she knocked the cup with her elbow, tipping it over, onto the tablecloth. Hot coffee burned her forearm. When she looked down, she saw a red mark on her skin.

The rest of the morning was spent cleaning the other rooms. Inside the third tenant's bedroom, she found a loose match that had fallen between the desk and the wall. She pocketed it. Then she swept the floors, did the laundry and dusted the porcelain figures in the living room.

At a quarter past one, while she was making lunch and a sandwich for dinner, her sister called. It always happened when summer was approaching. She recognized the number on the screen and didn't pick up. Her sister, who at twenty nine was living with her husband and daughter on the other side of the country, left a message. It was an invitation to spend the summer with them. The two sisters—all that was left of their family—never saw each other.

She didn't return the call. Soon, she would have the villa all to herself, because the tenants would go back to their family homes for August.

While packing the sandwich into a bag, she noticed a dark stain on the plaster wall, next to the cupboard. Except for that one piece of furniture, the wall was completely blank.

She stood up and got closer to examine it. The stain was the color of red wine. She ran her fingers over it. It was dry. Then she scratched it, causing pink dust to get stuck underneath her fingernails.

Cleaning it required water, bleach and a good half hour of vigorously scrubbing with a wet cloth. Her mother had once used this wall to hang the family portrait which was now in a box inside her closet.

The stain came off along with a thin layer of plaster.

di intonaco. Quando ebbe finito, lasciò un post-it nel punto in cui aveva rimosso il precedente. *Non macchiare le pareti.* Si firmò con l'iniziale del suo nome, C.

Alle quattro si chiuse in camera sua. Il cane restava sempre con lei. Quando voleva uscire, strofinava la testa contro lo stipite, e lei apriva perché potesse scorrazzare in giardino. Quando il cane tornava, sentiva i suoi passi in corridoio. Socchiudeva la porta quanto bastava perché potesse rientrare.

Di sera, gli inquilini parlavano tra di loro. Dalla cucina, che era sotto la sua camera, le arrivava un mormorio indistinto, e risate, certe volte. Se parlavano nel suo corridoio, lo facevano a bassa voce.

Quella notte dormì male, e il giorno dopo trovò un'altra macchia sul muro in cucina. Era circolare, un po' più grande della precedente, e di un rosso vivo. Prima ancora di fare colazione, prese un panno dalla credenza – e la candeggina - e si mise a strofinare. Per tutto il tempo, maledisse ad alta voce gli inquilini. Quando erano vivi i suoi genitori, non era mai capitato niente di simile, anche se c'erano tre bambini in casa. Avevano sempre avuto delle regole, e lei continuava a rispettarle anche adesso.

Quando ebbe finito, lasciò un secondo post-it sul frigo. *Non macchiare le pareti, o sarò costretta a prendere provvedimenti.* C.

Quali provvedimenti avrebbe preso, non sapeva dirlo. Era martedì, però, e doveva sbrigarsi a finire le faccende domestiche prima che arrivasse l'uomo delle consegne, che ogni settimana le lasciava la spesa davanti alla porta d'ingresso. L'uomo, che lei vedeva dalla finestra del salotto, era tarchiato, e quando scendeva dall'auto e si caricava di tutte le sue buste gli veniva l'affanno. Suonava al citofono tre volte, poi prendeva i soldi che lei gli lasciava in una busta e andava via.

Entro mezzogiorno aveva sistemato la spesa in cucina e ricevuto due messaggi dalla sorella. Dopo pranzo guardò la televisione in salotto, il cane appollaiato con la testa sulle sue ginocchia. Si lavò i denti nel bagno al

When she was finished, she left a post-it on the same spot where she'd taken off the last one: "*Don't stain the walls.*" It was signed with her initial, C.

At four she locked herself in her bedroom. The dog always stayed with her. When he needed to go out, he would rub his head against the door frame and she would open the door so he could run around in the garden. Whenever the dog came back, she would hear his trotting in the hall. She left the door ajar, just enough for him to enter.

In the evening, the tenants would gather to converse in the kitchen, located right beneath her bedroom. From there, she could hear a vague murmur, sometimes even laughter. When they spoke in her hallway, they did so in whispers.

That night she slept poorly. The next morning she woke up to find another stain on the kitchen wall. It was a bit larger than the last one, circular, and bright red. Before even eating her breakfast, she grabbed the bleach and cloth from the cupboard, then began scrubbing, while cursing at the tenants out loud. Things like this had never happened when her parents were alive, even with three children roaming the house. They always abided by the rules, a principle she upheld even now.

After the cleaning was done, she left a second post-it on the fridge.

*Do not stain the walls,
or there will be consequences -C.*

What the consequences would be, she didn't know. Nonetheless, it was Tuesday and she had to hurry to finish her chores before the arrival of the delivery man, who left her groceries outside the front door every week. This man, whom she watched from the living room window, was stout and struggled to breathe when he got out of the car carrying all her bags. He rang the doorbell three times, took the money she had left for him in an envelope and left. By noon, she had put all the groceries away and received two new messages from her sister. After lunch, she watched TV in the living

primo piano e si chiuse in camera, portandosi dietro un paio di libri. Si mise a letto e si strofinò l'avambraccio nel punto in cui si era scottata. La pelle era diventata rossa, sensibile.

Gli inquilini rientrarono alle quattro e mezza. Due di loro tornarono insieme. La terza, che prendeva l'autobus, arrivò alle cinque. Quella sera, dopo aver cenato, ascoltarono la musica. Andò avanti fino all'una. Lei, seduta al centro del letto, si coprì le orecchie, ma non servì a niente. Scrisse *Tappi per le orecchie* sul taccuino che teneva aperto sul comodino. Avrebbe telefonato al supermercato per chiedere di aggiungerli alla prossima spesa. Il cane abbaiò e ringhiò per tutto il tempo, finché non lo fece uscire. Non rientrò per tutta la notte.

La mattina dopo, quando si svegliò, era sola.

Era ancora sulle scale, quando sentì una voce proveniente dalla cucina. Salì di nuovo in camera sua e attese, l'orecchio contro la porta, una mano sudata stretta sulla maniglia. Dalla finestra vide la terza inquilina che attraversava il giardino di corsa, diretta alla fermata dell'autobus. Intravide il cane, che si rotolava nell'erba davanti al cancello.

Stavolta la macchia in cucina era più grande del palmo della sua mano. La parete sembrava ancora bagnata. Si tirò su le maniche per pulire, ma appena iniziò, il pastore tedesco le leccò la pelle bruciata. La sensazione di bagnato le fece ritirare di scatto il braccio. Quando si girò per rimproverarlo, vide che il cane era già sulla soglia della stanza.

Appena finì di strofinare, scagliò il panno contro la parete. Scrisse un terzo post-it. *Se lo farete ancora, detrarrò i costi della pittura dai vostri affitti. C.*

Staccò i primi due messaggi dal frigo. Sotto il secondo, una grafia tremula aveva scritto *Non siamo stati noi*. Lei strappò il post-it. Lo gettò nella spazzatura, dove trovò una bottiglia di vino vuota e piatti di plastica con residui di torta attaccati.

Quando fece le pulizie, frugò nei cassetti degli inquilini. In quelli del primo trovò le solite cose: calzini, un

room while the dog slept on her lap. She brushed her teeth in the first floor bathroom and locked herself up in her room, bringing along a couple of books. She lay down and touched her arm, right where she had burned it. The skin had turned red and sensitive.

Two of the tenants returned around half past four. The third one, who took the bus, arrived at five. That night, after dinner, they listened to music. That went on until one.

Sitting in the middle of the bed, she covered her ears but it was pointless. *Earplugs*, she wrote in the notebook on her bedside table. She would call the supermarket and have them add those to her next order. The dog kept growling and barking until she let him out. He didn't come back all night. The morning after, when she woke up, she was alone.

As she went downstairs, she heard a voice coming from the kitchen. The sound made her return to her room and wait, with her ear up against the door and her sweaty hands gripping the doorknob. From the window, she saw the third tenant running through the yard, heading for the bus stop. She also caught a glimpse of her dog, rolling in the grass in front of the gate.

This time, the stain in the kitchen was larger than the palm of her hand. The wall seemed damp. She rolled up her sleeves to clean it, but as soon as she began, the German shepherd licked her burnt skin. The wet sensation made her flinch and jerk her arm back. When she turned to scold him, she saw that the dog was already over by the door.

As soon as she finished cleaning, she hurled the cloth against the wall. She wrote a third note.

*Do this again and I'll add
the paint costs to your rent -C.*

She took off the first two post-its from the fridge. On the second note, a shaky hand had written *It wasn't us*. She tore the note up and threw it in the trash, where she saw an empty wine bottle and plastic plates with bits of leftover cake on them.

orologio, taccuini bianchi, uno spazzolino nuovo. Nella stanza della seconda inquilina riconobbe una maglietta che fino a qualche giorno prima era stata nell'armadio del primo inquilino. Nella stanza della terza inquilina trovò solo due grosse valigie, e altrettanti lucchetti che ne sigillavano il contenuto. Sul comodino c'erano le due piccole chiavi che li avrebbero aperti. Se ne mise una in tasca.

Dopo pranzo dovette trascinare il cane al piano di sopra, afferrandolo per il collare. Si distese sul letto e si addormentò.

La svegliarono le voci in corridoio. Qualcuno aveva bussato alla porta della sua stanza. Erano le nove, e fuori il sole era già tramontato. Si tirò il lenzuolo fin sopra la testa.

- Volevo salutarla. – disse la voce della terza inquilina, che riconobbe per il tono acuto, leggermente stridulo. La donna bussò ancora. A voce più bassa, aggiunse: - Secondo me non è in casa.

Il pastore tedesco iniziò ad abbaiare in quel momento. Lei mise la testa sotto il cuscino.

- No, è qui. – disse la voce del primo inquilino, che era alto e usciva tutti i giorni con una valigetta di cuoio. Lavorava nello studio di un avvocato.

- Lasciamo stare. Starà dormendo.

Il cane abbaiò di nuovo. Lei si alzò, ma a metà del percorso tra il letto e la porta si immobilizzò.

- Hai sentito? – diceva la terza inquilina.

- Già non la vediamo mai, se non risponde neanche...

Due persone iniziarono a bussare, prima piano, poi sempre più forte, finché due paia di pugni presero a infrangersi contro la barriera di legno. Lei si acquattò sul pavimento tra il letto e la finestra. A un certo punto arrivò anche la seconda inquilina.

Erano tutti e tre in corridoio. Calpestavano le assi del parquet e alzavano la voce per farsi sentire. Riconosceva le tonalità delle loro voci senza distinguere le parole, sovrastate dai colpi che si abbattevano sul legno.

Si aggrappò alla tenda, stringendone il tessuto ruvido.

When she was done, she went through the tenants' drawers. In the cabinet of the first one, she found all the usual stuff: socks, a clock, blank notebooks and a new toothbrush. In the second one's room, she recognized a t-shirt she'd seen in the first tenant's closet just a few days earlier. In the third tenant's room, she found only two large suitcases with padlocks that secured the contents. On the bedside table were two small keys she assumed would open them. She put one in her pocket.

After lunch she had to drag the dog upstairs grabbing him by the collar. Then she lay on the bed and fell asleep.

She was woken up by the voices in the corridor. Someone had knocked on her bedroom door. It was nine o'clock. Outside the sun had already set. She pulled the sheets over her head. "I just wanted to say hi," said a high pitched, slightly squeaky voice that could only belong to the third tenant. The woman knocked again.

Another voice, this one in a lower register, said "Maybe she's not home." The German shepherd began barking at that exact moment. She buried her head under her pillows. "She's not here." continued the voice of the first tenant, who was tall and always carried around a leather briefcase. He worked in a law firm.

"Never mind. She must be sleeping."

The dog barked again. She stood up and walked towards the door but froze halfway.

"Did you hear that?" asked the third one.

"We already never see her, but if she doesn't even answer..."

Now there were two hands knocking on her door, softly at first, but then it grew louder and louder, until it was two pairs of fists banging on the wooden partition. She crouched down in the space between the bed and the window. At some point, the other tenant also joined in.

All three of them were in the corridor, tramping on the parquet and shouting to get her attention. She recognized their voices but not the words, overwhelmed

Non riusciva a respirare. Ogni volta che bussavano, sentiva sulla pelle l'eco di quei pugni. Prese il cellulare e compose il numero della sorella, senza chiamarla. La porta, il pavimento, la maniglia che si alzava e abbassava, tutto le sembrava far parte del proprio corpo, preso d'assedio dagli inquilini.

Dopo un po' se ne andarono, e lei socchiuse la porta. Il corridoio era deserto. Andò in bagno a lavarsi la faccia. Era pallida, gli occhi cerchiati di rosso.

Il braccio le bruciava. La scottatura si era estesa e gonfiata. La disinfettò, ma non la coprì. Suo padre diceva sempre che si doveva far respirare la pelle, in questi casi.

Controllò il cellulare. La sorella le aveva scritto di nuovo. Diceva che non dovevano stare insieme per forza per le vacanze, e che voleva solo sentirla.

La mattina del giovedì entrò in cucina con il panno bagnato già pronto. Quando vide la parete, le cadde di mano. Ebbe un conato di vomito e dovette appoggiarsi allo stipite.

La macchia era delle dimensioni del pastore tedesco, rossa come vino appena versato. Ai margini, rivoletti dello stesso colore bagnavano il muro, arrivando fino al battiscopa. Nell'aria c'era un odore di marcio.

Il cane si avvicinò alla parete per leccare il liquido. Lei lo prese per il collare e lo allontanò. Sbatté con la schiena contro il frigorifero. Un unico post-it, al centro, recitava: *Buone vacanze. Rientriamo a settembre.*

Prese il secchio per lavare i pavimenti, lo riempì e strofinò il muro con il mocio. La macchia, invece di ritrarsi, si allargava, e sulle piastrelle si era formata una piccola pozzanghera. Iniziò a grattare con furia. Il rosso esondava dall'intonaco. Gridò per la frustrazione.

Dal secondo cassetto della credenza prese il martello, e iniziò a colpire la parete. Se c'era una perdita nelle tubature, l'avrebbe capito solo così.

L'intonaco venne via con facilità. Più colpiva, e raschiava con la punta del martello, più vedeva il rosso dei mattoni dietro. La pelle dell'avambraccio prese a

by the pounding on the wood. She held the curtain, gripping the rough fabric between her hands. She couldn't breathe. Every time they knocked, she felt the echo of their fists vibrate through her skin. She grabbed her phone to call her sister, but didn't press the call button. The door, the floor, the door handle that never stopped moving, everything seemed part of her own body, under siege by the tenants.

After a long while, they left. She peeked through the door. The hallway was desolate. She went to the bathroom to wash her face, all pale, except for the red rims around her eyes. Her arm stung. The burn was swollen, enormous. She disinfected but didn't wrap it. Her father used to say that in these cases the skin needed to breathe freely. She checked her cellphone. Her sister had texted again, saying they didn't have to spend the summer together, that she just wanted to hear from her.

Thursday morning she entered the kitchen already holding the wet cloth. It fell from her hand when she saw the wall. She gagged and had to lean against the doorframe. The stain was now the size of the German shepherd and the color of recently poured wine. Under it, strings of the same color bathed the wall, reaching all the way to the baseboard. A smell of decay filled the air.

The dog approached to lick the liquid. She grabbed him by the collar to stop him, so hard she slammed her back against the fridge. A single post-it in the center of it read:

Happy summer.

See you in September.

She grabbed the mop and the bucket and started to scrub the wall. Instead of receding, the stain widened and leaked more profusely, making a small puddle on the floor tiles. She scrubbed furiously. The red overflowed from the wall. She let out a cry of frustration.

From the second drawer in the cupboard, she took out the hammer and began hitting the wall. If a pipe was

bruciarle sempre di più. Lo scoprì, e vide che era più rosso del primo giorno, punteggiato di capillari rotti. Riprese il martello. A ogni colpo, il braccio pulsava. Quando ebbe aperto un varco sufficientemente largo nel muro, si accorse che la consistenza dei mattoni era sbagliata. Li toccò con la punta delle dita, e venne via una sostanza viscida, come un umore rosa pallido. Strofinò il palmo su quella sostanza, e lo appoggiò per qualche secondo ai mattoni. Il muro vibrava a ritmo regolare, sollevandosi e abbassandosi come un muscolo. Annusò il liquido che le era rimasto sulle mani. Aveva l'odore del sangue.

Si allontanò dalla parete e scivolò. Aveva i pantaloni inzuppati del liquido che bagnava il pavimento, i palmi e le ginocchia doloranti per la caduta.

Il muro davanti a lei aveva l'aspetto di un muscolo squarciato. Di nuovo, ebbe un conato di vomito. Si alzò e si lavò le mani nel lavello, lasciando scorrere l'acqua fredda sul braccio bollente. L'acqua, al contatto con la pelle, assumeva un colore rosato, lo stesso del liquido che adesso sgorgava dal muro in un flusso continuo. Quando chiuse il rubinetto, il getto dal muro si interruppe.

Le salirono le lacrime agli occhi. Uscì camminando all'indietro, come facevano lei e sua sorella da piccole ogni volta che avevano paura di qualcosa. Il braccio pulsava a un ritmo insopportabile.

In camera sua infilò alla rinfusa vestiti, libri e soldi in una vecchia valigia. Sul fondo dell'armadio vide lo scatolone con le foto, e quello che conteneva le cose dei suoi genitori. Non li aprì neanche. Indossò dei vestiti puliti, trascinò la valigia giù per le scale e uscì, evitando di guardare in direzione della cucina e lasciando che la porta d'ingresso si chiudesse dietro di lei. Fu solo allora che l'avambraccio smise di pulsare.

Chiamò il cane, e insieme si avviarono verso la fermata dell'autobus. Mentre aspettavano che arrivasse, compose sul cellulare il numero di sua sorella.

leaking, this was the only way to find out.

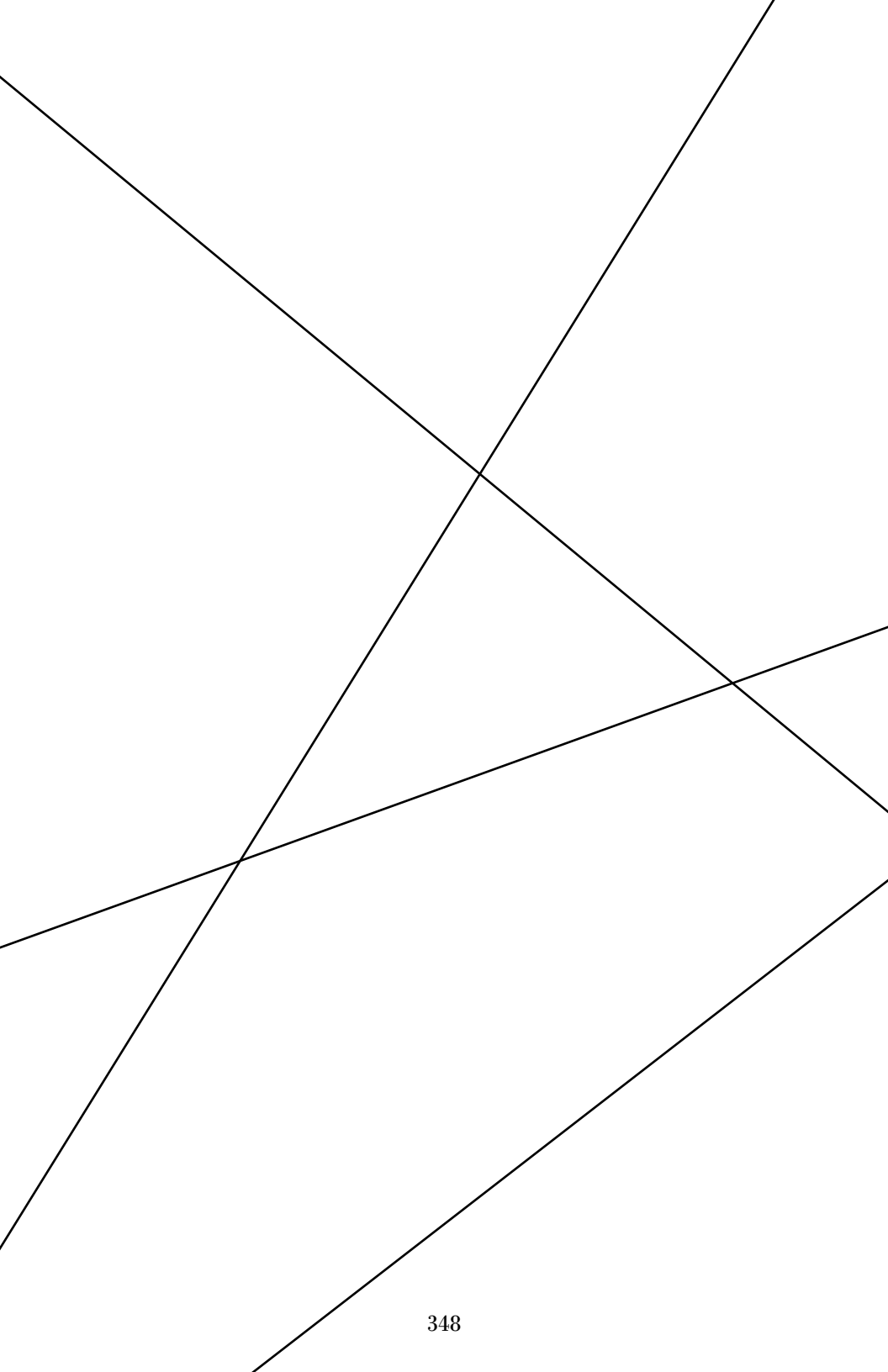
The plaster came off easily. With each hit of the hammer the red bricks behind it became more visible. The skin on her forearm burned more and more. She saw it was redder than the first day, dotted with broken capillaries. She picked up the hammer again. With every hit, her arm throbbed. The hole in the wall became larger and she realized the bricks had the wrong consistency. Her fingertips touched the wall and something viscous came off, a pale pink substance. She rubbed her palm over it for a while, then rested it against the bricks for a few seconds. It moved on a regular rhythm like a muscle, up and down. She smelled the liquid stuck on her hands. Blood.

While stepping away from it, she slipped. Her hands and knees were sore from the fall, and her pants were soaked with the liquid that now flooded the room.

The wall in front of her resembled a torn muscle. She gagged again. She stood up to wash her hands in the sink, letting the cold water relieve the pain of her burning arm. The water turned to a pinkish hue after touching her skin, the same as what now was pouring out of the wall. When she turned off the faucet, the stream coming from the wall stopped.

Tears ran down her face. She walked backward towards the stairs, not taking her gaze off the kitchen, like she and her sister used to do when they were little and afraid of everything. The pain in her arm was unbearable as it kept throbbing. In her bedroom, she quickly stuffed an old suitcase with clothes, books and money. There were two boxes at the bottom of her wardrobe, one with photos and another one with her parent's belongings. She didn't even open either of them. She changed into clean clothes and dragged out the suitcase, avoiding looking toward the kitchen and letting the front door close behind her. Only then her arm stopped hurting.

She called the dog and walked together to the bus stop. While they waited, she took out her phone and



looked for her sister's number.

Nota del Traduttore

Lost in Translation: a proposito di addii e Cesare Pavese

In questa riflessione (meta)narrativa, che spazia dal racconto al saggio, Anna Montagner connette mondi all'apparenza lontani: New York e Cesare Pavese, il tatuaggio di una luna piena e l'arte del tradurre. Anna è italiana, ma vive in America da anni. Forse è per questo che ha imparato a colmare lunghe distanze. Il suo rapporto con New York, nel testo, emerge conflittuale, finendo per fare da specchio al suo rapporto con la traduzione de *La Luna e i Falò*, che la vede impegnata nel racconto come nella vita: sia la città che la traduzione le premono addosso un senso di invisibilità, di trasparenza.

In qualche modo, è come se fosse la città stessa a insegnarle sulla pelle che cosa significhi fare il mestiere del traduttore: perché l'invisibilità è condizione necessaria del tradurre, che richiede di spogliare i propri panni e vestire quelli di un altro autore, pur restando sempre *autori della traduzione* dell'opera. Allo stesso tempo, però, è anche una inevitabile condanna, somministrata ingiustamente da un'attitudine editoriale diffusa, che spesso dimostra (e quindi insegna al pubblico) noncuranza nei confronti dei traduttori e del loro lavoro.

Ambivalenza, spartizione. L'essere perennemente tesi tra due estremità. Tensione incarnata alla perfezione dal desiderio, parola che nella sua radice designa un sentimento di mancanza: quel *longing*, che Anna sceglie con intenzione e con precisa intuizione, sostantivo che mantiene la desinenza *-ing*, tipica in inglese del *present continuous*, perché quel sentimento è qualcosa che non termina mai, che si rende perpetuo presente. Il desiderio, la mancanza, la nostalgia mai sopita per casa. O meglio, per un posto da chiamare casa, quando anche la terra natia ci fa sentire degli

estranei. È questa ricerca, la ricerca di un posto che sia *abbastanza* per restare, che muove Pavese ne *La Luna e i Falò*, che muove Anna in *Lost in Translation: a proposito di addii e Cesare Pavese*, ed è la ricerca che ha mosso me nel trovare una casa alle sue parole nella terra straniera della sua lingua madre.

ANNA MONTAGNER

LOST IN TRANSLATION: ON FAREWELLS AND CESARE PAVESE

I have been thinking about it for a while now. I want to get a tattoo. I want to turn my skin into a notebook for my thoughts. I want to give my body an identifying feature, a symbol that gives a classification method to it. Follow the line along my neck, gently run down the curve of my shoulder, and there – find the mark on my triceps. Classify my body among Italian or English texts on a case-by-case basis.

I had a reason why I wanted a tattoo of a full moon when I was younger. It represented a sort of wholeness I was trying to achieve, an image of perfection I projected onto my future. I am not sure where the idea of a full moon originally came from. I might have read it in a book or seen it in a movie. Or I might have been drawn to its shape, which looks like a perfect circle. I was intrigued by the thought that it, too, must have a beginning and an ending. Yet, if the artist is good enough, I won't be able to see the moment when the brush touched the paper or when it left it.

This is the secret to drawing a perfect circle: the start and the end of the line must disappear within the circular shape. The less I see its extremes, the better shape my circle achieved.

I re-read Cesare Pavese's *La Luna e i Falò* (*The Moon and the Bonfires*) at a time when I shouldn't have. I had struggled to reach a quiet slowness in New York for a while. After five years of living in the city, I had begun finding it harder to resist the idea that I was only there temporarily. All I did was to be perceived within parenthesis. My time in New York was only a fraction of my real life, a moment of distraction, and, at times,

**tradotto dall'inglese da
ELEONORA VECCHIO**

*LOST IN TRANSLATION: A PROPOSITO
DI ADDII E CESARE PAVESE*

È un po' che ci penso. Voglio farmi un tatuaggio e trasformare la mia pelle in un diario per i miei pensieri. Quando ero più piccola, volevo il tatuaggio di una luna piena. Rappresentava quella specie di interezza che cercavo di raggiungere, un'immagine di perfezione che proiettavo sul mio futuro. Non sono sicura di come sia nata l'idea in origine. Forse ero attratta dalla forma, simile a un cerchio perfetto. Mi affascinava il pensiero che anche un cerchio dovesse avere un inizio e una fine. E che, del resto, se l'artista è abbastanza bravo, non mi farà vedere quando il pennello ha toccato il foglio, o quando l'ha lasciato.

Il segreto per disegnare un cerchio perfetto è questo: l'inizio e la fine del tratto devono fondersi con la forma circolare. Meno vedo gli estremi, migliore è la forma ottenuta dal cerchio.

Ho riletto *La Luna e i Falò (The Moon and the Bonfires)* di Cesare Pavese in un momento in cui non avrei dovuto. A New York era da tempo che non riuscivo a trovare un po' di calma e lentezza. Dopo cinque anni, stavo a poco a poco cedendo all'idea che vivevo lì solo temporaneamente. Nella percezione altrui ero dentro una parentesi. Il mio tempo a New York era solo una frazione della mia vita vera, un momento di distrazione, e a volte anche uno spreco.

La decisione che presto avrei lasciato New York è venuta un'estate. Passeggiavo lungo la via principale della mia città, che corre parallela alla costa del Mare Adriatico, quando ho realizzato che, di ogni negozio e bar che oltrepassavo, sapevo il nome della famiglia che

even a waste.

The decision that I would soon leave New York came one summer. I was walking down the main street in my hometown, which runs parallel to the shoreline of the Adriatic Sea when I realized that for every shop and café I passed by, I could name the family who owned them. I had gone to school with the girl from the bakery, played hide and seek with the boys from the pastry shop, and learned how to drive with the son of the butcher. Memories I had long tried to forget, places I had long tried to escape, were now turning back to me with a sweet breeze.

La Luna e i Falò tells the story of Anguilla, a businessman who comes back from California to Belbo, his native town in Northern Italy, after spending many years abroad. But time has passed and the places of his childhood don't look the same anymore. Some people don't even recognize him, so he walks the streets of what he once called home as a stranger. Anguilla goes back to reclaim his origin, his name, and his story, to stop wandering and settle down. To quote Pavese himself, he goes back to matter "qualcosa di più che un comune giro di stagione" – to matter more than an ordinary passage of seasons.

Because I bet this is what he has learned in America where the land is vast and I can't remember the name of my neighbor: we are all caught in the whirl of promises – success, money, fame – always moving to the greener grass, the heavier gold nugget, always moving to the next place. Just like Anguilla explains, in America "Nessuno ne aveva abbastanza, nessuno per quanto ne avesse si fermava" – in America, nobody had ever enough, nobody ever settled down despite what he had.

America made us nomads. We are drawn to the pond in the middle of the road, swallowed up like trees and bricks and signposts by the eye of the storm. We make compromises and sacrifices in the hope that someday we will have all we have ever desired and we'll

ne era proprietaria. Ero andata a scuola con la ragazza del forno, avevo giocato a nascondino con i ragazzi della pasticceria e avevo imparato a guidare con il figlio del macellaio. Ricordi che avevo a lungo tentato di dimenticare e posti da cui avevo a lungo tentato di fuggire stavano ora tornando con una dolce brezza.

La Luna e i Falò racconta la storia di Anguilla, un uomo d'affari che dalla California torna a Belbo, la sua città natia nel Nord Italia, dopo aver trascorso molti anni all'estero. Ma il tempo è passato e i luoghi della sua infanzia non hanno più lo stesso aspetto. Certe persone nemmeno lo riconoscono, così cammina come uno sconosciuto per le strade di quella che un tempo chiamava casa. Anguilla torna per rivendicare le sue origini, il suo nome, la sua storia, per smettere di vagabondare e fermarsi. Citando Pavese stesso, torna per contare "qualcosa di più di un comune giro di stagione" – "to matter more than an ordinary passage of seasons".

Perché scommetto che è questo che ha imparato in America, dove la terra è vasta e io non ricordo neanche il nome del mio vicino: siamo tutti presi nel turbinio delle promesse – successo, denaro, fama –, sempre in movimento verso l'erba più verde, verso la pepita d'oro più pesante, sempre in movimento verso il prossimo posto. Proprio come spiega Anguilla, in America "Nessuno ne aveva abbastanza, nessuno per quanto ne avesse si fermava" – "Nobody had ever enough, nobody ever settled down despite what he had".

L'America ci ha resi nomadi. Siamo attratti dalla pozza d'acqua in mezzo alla strada, risucchiati come alberi, mattoni e segnali stradali dall'occhio della tempesta. Facciamo compromessi e sacrifici, nella speranza che un giorno avremo tutto quello che abbiamo sempre desiderato e busseremo alla porta del nostro vicino per chiedere un po' di farina. Eppure, dimentichiamo quello che ci lasciamo alle spalle e che potrebbe essere già abbastanza. Dimentichiamo l'oggi.

knock on the door of our neighbor for flour. Yet we forget what we leave behind and that it might already be enough. We forget today.

I am walking to the subway station to go babysitting because freelancing doesn't pay enough and full-time school requires too much of my time, when I find myself again on the verge of crying. It has become too frequent since I came back from Italy. A kid playing with his mother on the subway or a man with a guitar on the sidewalk is enough to make me burst into tears. I call a friend back home and tell him that I have never wished for a simpler life, with no ambition, more than I do now. I tell him I miss going to a grocery store where I know the same person will be there to welcome me every time, and I also miss going to the café in the piazza and asking "How is everything at home?"

"Anna, you feel invisible," he says, cuddling me with his voice through the microphone of his phone.

I approach the task of translation with the promise of reaching a common ground between my two languages. Translating Pavese's *La Luna e i Falò* seems to be just the right opportunity to reflect on my recent alienation from New York and move on from my longing for home. For once, I begin my journey with hope. I walk the stairs of the Butler Library at Columbia University for the first time, unsure of what I am going to find beyond the doors. I scan my ID, nod at the guard by the entrance, and immediately take possession of a map of the building I find across the hallway. I explore the lounge and the reading rooms on the first floor. These feel intimate, and when I enter I sense a degree of familiarity I am not part of. The boy with the burgundy hoodie, and the girl with the messy bun seated in the far right corner of the room, must be veterans of this section of the library. I only come here on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I can't sit with regulars.

I walk back, past a line of people waiting to refill their water bottles, taking a break from the

Cammino verso la fermata della metro per andare a fare da babysitter, perché lavorando da freelance non guadagno abbastanza e l'università richiede troppo tempo, quando mi ritrovo ancora una volta sul punto di piangere. Succede troppo spesso da quando sono tornata dall'Italia. Basta un bambino che gioca con la madre sulla metro o un uomo con la chitarra sul marciapiede a farmi scoppiare in lacrime. Chiamo un amico in Italia e gli racconto che non ho mai desiderato una vita semplice, senza ambizioni, più di quanto non faccia ora. Gli racconto che mi manca andare in un supermercato dove so che mi accoglierà sempre la stessa persona, e mi manca anche andare nel bar in piazza e chiedere: "Come va a casa?".

"Anna, ti senti trasparente", mi dice, abbracciandomi con la sua voce attraverso il microfono del telefono.

Mi avvicino al compito della traduzione con la promessa di raggiungere un terreno comune tra le mie due lingue. Tradurre *La Luna e i Falò* di Pavese sembra proprio la giusta occasione per riflettere sul mio recente straniamento da New York e per superare la mia nostalgia di casa. Questa volta inizio il mio viaggio con speranza. Salgo i gradini della Butler Library alla Columbia University per la prima volta, incerta di cosa troverò oltre le porte. Passo il badge, accenno un saluto alla guardia all'entrata e m'impossesso subito di una pianta dell'edificio che trovo in fondo all'ingresso. Esploro l'area lounge e le sale lettura al piano terra. Hanno un'aria intima, e quando entro sento un grado di familiarità a cui non appartengo. Il ragazzo con la felpa bordeaux e la ragazza con la coda scompigliata, seduta nell'angolo in fondo a destra, devono essere veterani di questa sezione della biblioteca. Io vengo qui solo il martedì e il giovedì, non posso sedermi con i frequentatori abituali.

Torno indietro, passo accanto alle persone in fila per riempirsi la borraccia, in pausa dal silenzio

deafening silence of the study rooms. I recognize the area with the vending machines and the cafe I might go to in a couple of hours, then I take the main staircase and reach the second floor. There is a collage of old pictures, framed on the wall on my left. I glance over as I go to examine the room at the end of the hallway. It has a lower ceiling and a warmer atmosphere than the one downstairs. I see there is a mezzanine level, a sort of balcony looking over the main floor, with a few tables squeezed between thick wooden bookshelves. I notice a section with a vast collection of dictionaries and read it as a sign. I take the tiny spiral staircase to the mezzanine and feel the ceiling getting closer to my head, and my legs turn rubber as if I were a doll in my doll-size countryside house. The tables are all taken and I quickly walk down the staircase, each step a hollow sound, and exit the room. I have to get here earlier in the morning.

I am finally translating the first page of the book. I'm already stuck with a sentence midway to the end of this initial paragraph. In Italian, it reads "Chi può dire di che carne sono fatto?" which literally means, Who can say what meat I am made of?

The literal translation sucks. Being literal means I am only sliding quietly from one language to another pretending I don't see the distance, nor the differences, nor the thick line between them. I bet this is exactly what it means to get lost in translation.

I found a tattoo artist in New York who draws delicate, fine lines. I still haven't chosen the image I want to sew on me, besides choosing it will be a moon. I am hoping the tattoo artist will pick the best design for me, or share facts that will make me lean toward one option more than the others.

I have always been very undecided. Whether I am dealing with something permanent or not, I always do attentive research. Then, I try to let other people make the final call. Those who know me better usually

assordante delle sale lettura. Riconosco l'area con le macchinette e il bar, dove magari andrò tra un paio d'ore, poi prendo la scalinata principale e salgo al primo piano. C'è un collage di vecchie fotografie, incorniciate sul muro alla mia sinistra. Do un'occhiata mentre vado a sbirciare la stanza alla fine del corridoio. Ha un soffitto più basso e un'atmosfera più accogliente di quella al piano di sotto. Vedo che c'è un soppalco, una sorta di balcone che si affaccia sul piano principale, con alcuni tavoli stretti in mezzo a spessi scaffali di legno. Noto una sezione con un vasto assortimento di dizionari e lo leggo come un segno. Prendo la piccola scala a chiocciola per il soppalco, sento il soffitto avvicinarsi alla testa e le gambe che diventano gommose come se fossi una bambola nella mia casa di campagna a misura di bambola. I tavoli sono tutti occupati e così scendo velocemente le scale, ogni passo un rumore sordo, ed esco dalla sala. La mattina devo arrivare più presto.

Finalmente traduco la prima pagina del libro. Sono già bloccata a una frase a metà del primo capoverso. In italiano è: "Chi può dire di che carne sono fatto?", che letteralmente significa "Who can say what meat I am made of?"

La traduzione letterale fa schifo. Essere letterale significa che sto solo scivolando silenziosamente da una lingua all'altra, facendo finta di non vedere la distanza, né le differenze, né il marcato confine tra le due. Scommetto che questo è esattamente ciò che significa *to get lost in translation*.

Ho trovato una tatuatrice a New York che disegna linee delicate, sottili. Non ho ancora scelto l'immagine che voglio cucire su di me, oltre al fatto che sarà una luna. Spero che la tatuatrice sceglierà il disegno migliore, o che mi dia informazioni che mi faranno tendere verso un'opzione invece che verso le altre.

Sono sempre stata molto indecisa. Che io abbia a che fare con qualcosa di permanente o no, eseguo

argue and insist I have the last word. It is therapeutic.

I recently learned that when you get a tattoo, you are pierced from 50 to 3000 times per minute by the tattoo pen. And here's what concerns me about getting my first tattoo: there are too many similarities between a tattoo and a scar. When I focus on the tattoo and the aesthetic I want to achieve, I tend to forget the discrepancy between having a needle puncturing my skin and having a needle drawing something beautiful. It can't possibly be the same thing. Harming and creating can't go together. It's a mistranslation we have widely, and unreasonably, accepted.

When I first approached translation, I stubbornly clung to the concept of faith. I believed that all I read in translation was merely a representation or an imitation of the original narrative. I thought that style, form, and musicality were hopeless efforts for a translator. Instead, I am now supposed to know that translators put the original text *in conversation* with new cultural, social, and temporal circumstances, among others. They are responsible for understanding how the original text relates to new linguistic and cultural contexts, and for recreating its significance within these new frameworks. A translation must be read for its intended purpose, which is expanding the readership of the original text and engaging a new audience.

When I try to explain why New York is not a place for me anymore, I fall into comparisons that don't seem to do justice to what I feel. I might say things like, "New York smells like the underpass next to the stadium in my hometown, where the high grass turns the area into a perfect spot for smoking and pissing;" or "New York's traffic is as loud as Piazza Mazzini gets in summer in your worst nightmares," which is a reference to the nightlife in the main *piazza* in my hometown. How else would I explain to my mother the incessant honks that keep me up at night? Besides, they are

sempre una ricerca scrupolosa. Poi, tento di far prendere la decisione definitiva agli altri. Chi mi conosce bene di solito protesta e insiste che sia io ad avere l'ultima parola. È terapeutico.

Di recente ho scoperto che la penna da tatuaggio perfora la pelle da cinquanta a tremila volte al minuto. È questo che mi preoccupa di più del mio primo tatuaggio: ci sono troppe somiglianze con una cicatrice. Quando mi concentro sul tatuaggio e sull'estetica che voglio ottenere, tendo a dimenticare la discrepanza tra farsi bucare la pelle e farsi disegnare qualcosa di bello da un ago. Non può essere la stessa cosa. Ferire e creare non possono andare di pari passo. È un errore di traduzione che abbiamo ampiamente, e senza ragione, accettato.

All'inizio, quando mi sono avvicinata alla traduzione, ho aderito con ostinazione al concetto di fedeltà. Tutto quello che leggevo in traduzione mi sembrava una semplice rappresentazione, o un'imitazione, del racconto originale. Pensavo che stile, forma e musicalità fossero sforzi inutili per un traduttore. Adesso, invece, dovrei sapere che i traduttori mettono il testo originale *in dialogo* con nuove circostanze culturali, sociali e temporali, tra le altre. Hanno la responsabilità di comprendere come il testo originale si relaziona ai nuovi contesti linguistici e culturali, e di ricreare significato all'interno di queste nuove strutture. Una traduzione si deve leggere per lo scopo previsto, che è di espandere i lettori del testo originale e coinvolgere un nuovo pubblico.

Quando cerco di spiegare perché New York non è più il posto per me, cado in paragoni che non fanno giustizia a quello che sento. Potrei dire cose del tipo: "New York puzza come il sottopassaggio accanto allo stadio nella mia città, dove l'erba alta trasforma l'area in un punto perfetto per fumare e pisciare;" oppure: "Il traffico di New York è rumoroso come Piazza Mazzini d'estate, nei tuoi peggiori incubi," alludendo alla vita notturna nella piazza principale della mia città. Come

pointless. Here, there seems to be this weird belief that if you honk, you'll get a better chance of getting to your destination faster.

To depict New York as I see it from my eyes to those who have never left my hometown is to inevitably draw a parallel between the two. Even this, I believe, might be an attempt at translating the life I have in America into the life I used to have in Italy. Yet, no matter how hard I try to offer a faithful description of what New York means to me, I am always greeted with reluctance. The feedback I get from most of my listeners is that I focus too much on the negatives – the smell, the honks, the traffic – and little, or not at all, on the positives. I must be exaggerating. New York can't be that bad. The truth is that mine is a restless search for the original in the translated version.

To think about translation is to work within the shape of a circle. The two languages the translator works with become the beginning and the ending of the circular line – its starting point and its destination. And just as the hand of the artist tries to hide its first and last contact with the paper, a translator attempts to correspond his two linguistic sets with one another. Perfection is the result of an amalgamation between the two.

In the translation workshop at Columbia University, we talk about the translator being a writer and intentionally choosing which words substitute for the original ones. But it becomes harder to consider myself the writer of Pavese's English version of *La Luna e i Falò* when I constantly feel I am doing it a disservice.

In an attempt to find some kind of relief and put myself in Pavese's shoes, I look for evidence of his life and his writing in New York. I am eager to find a physical proximity that would allow me to use a tracing paper between us, a tool I'd use to emulate, steal, and

altro potrei spiegare a mia madre i clacson incessanti che mi tengono sveglia la notte? Che poi, sono inutili. Qui c'è la strana convinzione che se suoni il clacson è più probabile che arriverai a destinazione in fretta.

Raccontare New York per come la vedono i miei occhi a chi non ha mai lasciato la mia città implica inevitabilmente tracciare un parallelo tra le due. Anche questo, credo, potrebbe essere un tentativo di tradurre la vita che ho in America nella vita che avevo in Italia. Eppure, per quanto mi sforzi di descrivere fedelmente quello che New York significa per me, vengo sempre accolta con riluttanza. In genere la risposta di chi mi ascolta è che mi concentro troppo sui lati negativi – la puzza, i clacson, il traffico – e poco, o affatto, sui lati positivi. Senz'altro esagero. New York non può essere così male. La verità è che la mia è una ricerca incessante dell'originale nella traduzione.

Pensare alla traduzione è lavorare nella forma di un cerchio. Le due lingue con cui il traduttore opera diventano l'inizio e la fine della linea circolare – il punto di partenza e la destinazione. E proprio come la mano dell'artista prova a dissimulare il primo e l'ultimo contatto con il foglio, un traduttore tenta di far corrispondere a vicenda i due sistemi linguistici. La perfezione è il risultato di un amalgamarsi dei due.

Alla Columbia University parliamo del traduttore come di uno scrittore che sceglie intenzionalmente quali parole sostituiscono le originali. Ma diventa sempre più difficile considerarmi l'autrice della versione inglese de *La Luna e i Falò* di Pavese, quando sento costantemente di rendere un disservizio al testo.

Nel tentativo di trovare sollievo e mettermi nei panni di Pavese, vado alla ricerca di prove della sua vita e della sua scrittura a New York. Desidero trovare una prossimità fisica, perché mi permetterebbe di usare una carta da lucido tra noi: uno strumento per emulare,

incarnate anything left of him. Becoming Pavese – through his literary remains and forgotten records of his voice – I believe would justify the choices I make as his translator. Besides, I am curious to know whether he did make it to America, in some way or another.

I enter the New York Public Library walking with a wavering stride, the same I imagine Pavese to have had in his last years. I booked a visit to the archive at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building to review some of the only materials regarding Pavese I found in the city. The folder I am interested in is part of a big collection of records of Ecco Press, an independent publisher founded in 1971 by Daniel Halpern and Drue Heinz, and known for its work with international literature. I am not very optimistic. These materials date back to more than twenty years after Pavese's death and I am afraid I won't find any of his own writing, or correspondence.

I access the Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room through the Rose Main Reading Room, where plenty of people have already begun to work. I sit at the first desk I lay my eyes on, in front of the door, without thinking there will be drafts of cold air blowing in anytime someone arrives, and I open my archival box. There are contracts and correspondence between Pavese's agents and Daniel Halpern regarding the reprint of his collection of poems, *Hard Labor*. Nothing seems to catch my eye. As I expected, there are no direct records of Pavese and the juxtaposition I was hoping for becomes a remote, and impossible, whim. But then, as I leaf through the files, I catch a glimpse of a typo and decide to give them a second reading. What looked, at first, like a one-time misspelling of Pavese's first name – Cesare – is now a repeated mistake. On multiple occasions, Cesare is referred to as Cesar, without the final E – an unnecessary and disrespectful translation that triggers me.

At that moment, in New York, Cesare was just as invisible as I feel now.

rubare e incarnare qualunque cosa sia rimasta di lui. Diventare Pavese – attraverso i suoi reperti letterari e la documentazione dimenticata della sua voce –, ritengo giustificherebbe le scelte che faccio in quanto sua traduttrice. Inoltre, sono curiosa di sapere se ce l'ha fatta in America, in un modo o nell'altro.

Entro nella New York Public Library con passo vacillante, lo stesso che immagino avesse Pavese nei suoi ultimi anni. Ho prenotato una visita all'archivio del palazzo Stephen A. Schwarzman per visionare gli unici materiali riguardanti Pavese che ho trovato in città. La cartella a cui sono interessata è parte di una grande collezione di documenti della Ecco Press, una casa editrice indipendente fondata nel 1971 da Daniel Halpern e Drue Heinz, e conosciuta per il suo lavoro con la letteratura internazionale. Non sono molto ottimista. Questi materiali risalgono a più di vent'anni dopo la morte di Pavese e temo che non troverò nulla dei suoi scritti, o della sua corrispondenza.

Accedo alla sala lettura Brooke Russell Astor attraverso la sala Rose Main, dove un gran numero di persone ha già iniziato a lavorare. Mi siedo al primo tavolo che mi capita sotto gli occhi, di fronte alla porta, senza pensare agli spifferi di aria fredda che soffieranno ogni volta che arriva qualcuno, e apro la scatola dell'archivio. Ci sono contratti e corrispondenza tra gli agenti di Pavese e Daniel Halpern riguardo alla ristampa della sua raccolta di poesie, *Lavorare stanca*. Niente cattura la mia attenzione. Come mi aspettavo, non ci sono documenti diretti di Pavese e la sovrapposizione che desideravo diventa una fantasia remota e impossibile. Ma poi, mentre sfoglio i documenti, intravedo un refuso e decido di fare una seconda lettura. Quello che a prima vista poteva sembrare un errore di ortografia nel nome di Pavese – Cesare – si ripete. In più occasioni, si fa riferimento a Cesare come Cesar, senza la *e* finale – una traduzione inutile e irrispettosa che mi disturba.

In quel momento, a New York, Cesare era stato invisibile proprio come mi sento io ora.

As if it were not enough, I come across some correspondence between Halpern and William Arrowsmith, the American translator of *Hard Labor* who won The National Book Award for Translation with this text in 1980. Despite dating back to 1985, five years after the victory, Halpern and Arrowsmith's letters show complete neglect for the translator by Ecco Press. The publishing house seemed to have acquired his version of *Hard Labor* and issued a reprint without letting Arrowsmith know or, worse, paying him any royalties. "I've heard nary a word from Ecco about it. As the person (after Pavese) most concerned, I'd like to know what your plans are," writes Arrowsmith. Here's my lesson: caring about a text and prestigious prizes are not enough to escape invisibility.

I am told by my professor of translation that being invisible is a life sentence I have to get used to if I want to take up this career.

Come se non bastasse, trovo la corrispondenza tra Halpern e William Arrowsmith, il traduttore americano di *Lavorare stanca*, che per quel lavoro si aggiudicò il National Book Award nel 1980. Pur essendo del 1985, solo cinque anni dopo la vittoria, le lettere danno prova di un'assoluta indifferenza verso il traduttore. A quanto pare, la Ecco Press aveva acquisito la versione di *Lavorare stanca* firmata da Arrowsmith e aveva commissionato una ristampa senza farglielo sapere o, peggio ancora, senza pagargli i diritti. "Non ho sentito nemmeno una parola da Ecco in merito. Essendo la persona più interessata (oltre Pavese), mi piacerebbe sapere quali sono i vostri piani," scrive Arrowsmith. Questa è la mia lezione: la cura per il testo e i premi prestigiosi non sono abbastanza per sfuggire all'invisibilità.

Il mio professore di traduzione dice che essere invisibile è una condanna a vita a cui mi devo abituare se voglio fare questo mestiere.

Translator's Note

Eleonora Vecchio's short story "An Island" is like a crystal figurine. One must approach it with care when translating, or else one might damage its surface: its delicate tone, its gentle minimalism, the blend of prose and dialogue, its absence of quotation marks, and its subtle nostalgia for a loving past.

Among the challenges the text presented was how to translate the Italian word *signorina*, a title used to address an unmarried woman, yet also a word freighted with stereotype and often used derogatorily to refer to sex workers. Eventually, I decided to leave it untranslated, but I hope this note emphasizes how the text, despite its tenderness, also contains a commentary on Italian patriarchy and bigotry.

Set on a high-speed train traveling from Rome to Milan, "An Island" is a queer love story that immerses us in a time gone by. I sat next to Diana and Elena, and let myself be transported into their memories in the same way I hope you will, too. The text is imbued with the delicate balance of moments between former long-time lovers, when one fears that a question or an answer might alter the memory of what once was. I also struggled with the desire to disembark from my own train – the translator's – afraid that I would otherwise step too close to a familiar sentiment, getting distracted by my own memories. But here's what "An Island" calls to mind above all: the word *pendolare*, an Italian expression for a commuter, someone who frequently travels back and forth, between places. But one can also travel between times, between past and present, just like Diana and Elena. It is no coincidence that the narrative unfolds on a high-speed train. As an Italian myself, I must admit most Italian love stories do. There is something so inherently Italian about the continuous hum of the train against the rails. As you read, you might want to stop the train and get off,

escaping the nostalgia the text creates. Don't. Part of being a *pendolare* is learning to trust you will reach your destination, and then hit the road once again.

ELEONORA VECCHIO

UN'ISOLA

Quando è salita sul treno, l'ho riconosciuta subito. Come se la stessi aspettando. Il magnetismo della sua presenza, insensibile alla mutevolezza delle cose, ha distolto il mio sguardo dal nitore del mezzogiorno fuori dal finestrino. Era una di quelle mattine in cui sembra che l'inverno si sia preso una pausa e l'aria il sapore del tempo sospeso.

È entrata nella carrozza quattro che il treno aveva già lasciato Termini. Doveva essere salita all'ultimo minuto, e solo adesso raggiungeva il posto che le era stato assegnato dall'algoritmo di Trenitalia: di fronte a me. Il caso, la sua ferocia. Ci ha messo un po' a vedermi, ancora affannata per la corsa, un grosso borsone che teneva con entrambe le mani, lo sguardo vagabondo tra le file di numeri segnati sulle cappelliere. Attimi in cui ho avuto il privilegio di guardarla, protetta dalla sua distrazione, e rendermi conto che otto anni non avevano lasciato alcun segno sul suo viso. Per un momento, ho avuto l'impressione di scorgere me stessa, dietro di lei, altrettanto affannata, alla ricerca dei nostri posti su un treno che avevamo quasi perso, come sempre, per colpa sua. Ma l'illusione si è dissolta in fretta.

Diana, ha detto, il suono della sua voce che mi raggiungeva dolce, familiare. L'accento inciampa sul mio nome, la tradisce. Appoggiando la sacca su un sedile libero, non ci posso credere, ha detto. Che ci fai qui?

Lo stupore che in lei si è sempre mischiato col rossore.

La stessa cosa che ci fai tu, credo. Un tremito nervoso mi ha attraversato la voce e mi sono odiata, per la mia incapacità di fingermi calma.

**translated from the italian by
ANNA MONTAGNER**

AN ISLAND

When she got on the train, I recognized her immediately. As if I'd been waiting for her. The magnetism of her presence, untouched by the ever-changing nature of things, diverted my gaze from the noontday gleam outside the window. It was one of those mornings when it seems winter has taken a rest and the air has glimmered with a feeling of suspended time.

The train had already left Rome Termini station when she entered compartment number four. She must have boarded at the last minute, and only now was she reaching the seat that the Trenitalia algorithm had assigned her: right in front of me. Chance, its ferocity. It took her a minute to see me, still breathless from the dash, holding a duffle bag with both hands, her gaze wandering along the row of numbers on the overhead luggage rack – a few seconds during which I had the privilege of watching her, protected by her distraction, and realizing that eight years had left no marks on her face. For a moment, I had the impression I was glimpsing myself, too, behind her, just as breathless, looking for our seats on a train we had almost missed, as always, because of her. But the illusion soon faded.

Diana, she said, the sound of her voice reaching me, sweet and familiar.

Her accent stumbled over my name and betrayed her. She put her large bag on an empty seat.

I can't believe it, she said. What are you doing here?

As always, her surprise was mixed with a blush.

The same thing you're doing here, I suppose. A nervous shiver ran through my voice, and I hated

Scusi, signorina, le ha intimato un uomo, di ritorno dal bagno, forse.

Prego, ha fatto lei, prendendo posto.

L'uomo è andato avanti.

Non hanno ancora smesso di chiamarti *signorina*? Ho ascoltato la mia voce chiederle.

Ci puoi credere?

Be', in effetti non so se ti darei più di ventisette anni.

Peccato siano giusto dieci in più. E che me li senta tutti sulla schiena.

Ho riso, presa dall'agitazione, che mi si confondeva dentro con una certa eccitazione. Non dirlo a me.

Quindi è inutile che ti chieda di aiutarmi col bagaglio?

E che ci dovrei fare? Ho chiesto.

Metterlo sulle cappelliere.

Ma lascialo lì. Per ora non c'è nessuno.

Arriverà, ha detto lei. Alla prossima fermata salirà un altro nostro coetaneo, che mi scambierà per una ventenne, mi chiamerà di nuovo *signorina*, e allora sai che cosa succederà?

Posso immaginare, ho detto io.

Farò una scenata. Quella che sogno di fare da secoli.

E gli spiegherai per filo e per segno quanto patriarcato inconscio si cela dietro quel *signorina*.

Esattamente.

Abbiamo riso. Poi lei si è accorta di avere ancora la sciarpa e il giaccone addosso. Si è spogliata. Sotto aveva un vecchio maglione. Me lo ricordavo: l'avevamo comprato ad Oslo, in un piccolo negozietto gestito da una signora ricurva, con i capelli di un bianco candido, raccolti in uno chignon. Era il viaggio della mia laurea. Le era piaciuto perché adorava i motivi nordici, e perché era celeste. E non costava niente. Aveva una strana fascinazione per le cose che non costavano niente.

Si è mantenuto bene, non trovi?

myself for my inability to feign calmness.

Excuse me, signorina, a man interrupted, perhaps returning from the restroom.

After you, she said, taking her seat.

The man walked past us.

Haven't they stopped calling you *signorina* yet? I heard my voice asking her.

Can you believe it?

Well, I'd never say you're older than twenty-seven.

Too bad, it's ten more than that. And I feel all of them on my back.

I laughed, caught up in agitation mixed with a certain excitement. Tell me about it.

So it's pointless to ask you to help me with my luggage?

And what am I supposed to do with it? I asked.

Put it on the rack.

Oh, just leave it. There's no one around.

Someone will come, she said. At the next stop, another person our age will get on, mistake me for a 20-year-old, call me *signorina* again, and you know what'll happen then?

I can imagine, I said.

I'll make a scene. One I've been dreaming of for ages.

And you'll explain to them in great detail how much ignorant patriarchy is hiding behind that signorina.

Exactly.

We laughed. Then she realized she still had her scarf and coat on. She took them off. Underneath, she was wearing an old sweater. I remembered it: we had bought it in Oslo, in a tiny shop run by a hunchbacked woman, with pure white hair tied up in a bun. It was my graduation trip. She liked that sweater because she adored Nordic motifs and because it was as blue as the sky. And it barely cost a thing. She had a peculiar fascination with things that didn't cost much.

Deve essersi accorta che lo stavo osservando.
Molto, ho detto.
Mi ha guardata, indugiando forse un attimo di
troppo sui miei occhi.
Dove scendi? Mi ha chiesto.
A Milano.
Anch'io.
Stai tornando in America?
Sì, ho il volo stasera.
E che ci facevi a Roma?
Eh, non credo di potertelo dire...
Dai, Elena, non cominciare.
Ha alzato le mani. E va bene e va bene. Ma
dovrai giurarmi segretezza.
L'ho guardata come per dirle di smetterla di
prendermi per il culo.
Così lei ha detto: Dovevo firmare il rogito della
nuova casa.
Ah. Ho sentito un tonfo sordo, nel petto. Ti
trasferisci? Ho chiesto.
Sì, il mese prossimo. Mi sono convinta, alla fine.
Ti ci è voluto troppo, ho pensato.
E a chi è dovuto questo miracolo?
Sei rimasta in silenzio, mi hai sorriso, con un
imbarazzo denso di pietà, o almeno così mi è sembrato.
Come si chiama? Ti ho chiesto, tentandomi
disinvolta.
Chiara.
Chiara. Ho annuito, lentamente. Bel nome.
Non lo pensi nemmeno un po'?.
Hai ragione, ho detto. Non lo penso nemmeno
un po'?.
Avevi le mani intrecciate in grembo, ti facevi
scivolare un pollice sull'altro. Il silenzio si è dispiegato
tra di noi, come se il treno non fosse otturato dal vociare
dei passeggeri, e come se in qualche modo potesse non
essere normale che in otto anni avevi incontrato un'altra
persona, ti eri innamorata di nuovo, avevi progetti seri.
Molto più seri dei nostri.

It still looks good, doesn't it?
She must have noticed I was watching her.
It truly does, I said.
She looked at me, lingering on my eyes perhaps
a moment too long.
Where do you get off? she asked.
Milan.
Me too.
Are you going back to the US?
Yes, I'm flying out tonight.
What were you doing in Rome?
Well, I don't think I should say...
Come on, Elena, don't start.
She raised her hands. All right, all right. But
you have to promise you'll keep it a secret.
I looked at her as if to say: stop fucking around
with me.
So she said: I had to sign the deed for the new
house.
Ah. I felt a thud in my chest. So you're moving?
I asked.
Yes, next month. I finally convinced myself.
It took you too long, I thought. And to whom
do we owe this miracle?
Without saying anything, you smiled at me – a
smile of shame tinged with pity, or so it seemed.
What's her name? I asked you, attempting to
sound casual.
Chiara.
Chiara. I nodded, slowly. Cute name.
You don't even remotely think that.
You're right, I said. I don't really think so.
You had your hands interlaced on your lap, one
thumb sliding over the other. Silence unfolded between
us, as if the train was not stuffed with the chattering
of passengers, and as if somehow it could be odd that
in those eight years you had met another person, fallen
in love again, and had serious plans. Much more serious
than ours.

E tu, invece? Mi hai chiesto.

Non mi ero accorta di aver abbassato lo sguardo, e quando l'ho rialzato sono rimasta nuovamente ferita dalla tua presenza, come se avessi sognato fino ad allora e tu ti fossi appena materializzata di fronte a me.

Io? Be'... non ho cambiato casa, se è questo che intendi.

No, non è questo che intendo, Diana. Ma capisco se non mi vuoi raccontare i fatti tuoi.

Quell'intonazione, nella voce, che vorrebbe avvolgere di comprensione l'interlocutore, me.

Mi sposo, ho detto. E ho visto i tuoi occhi rimpicciolirsi, la postura del tuo corpo rimodellarsi: hai accavallato le gambe, ti sei spinta dentro il sedile.

Ti sposi, mi hai detto. Non ho capito se fosse una domanda o un'affermazione. Quando?

Mi sono schiarita la voce. Il 13 giugno, ho detto. Tra sei mesi.

Hai annuito, con un movimento secco della testa, un mormorio appena accennato. Hai aspettato. Ho visto l'espressione sul tuo viso cambiare, indurirsi.

E perché non ne so niente?

Elena... ho cominciato.

Non dico che mi dovessi invitare, mi hai interrotto. Ma, non so... mi sarei aspettata di saperlo.

E perché avrei dovuto dirtelo? Non ci vediamo da otto anni.

Sì, ma continui a mandarmi gli auguri di Natale, quelli del compleanno... Cos'è, quello è ancora normale, mentre...

Signore, biglietto prego. Abbiamo alzato entrambe lo sguardo verso il controllore. Lui ha sollevato gli occhi, di sbieco, dal monitor che teneva tra le mani. C'è qualche problema?

No, nessuno, abbiamo detto.

Io ho tirato fuori il telefono, tu hai frugato nel tuo borsone, finché non hai riesumato un foglio spiegazzato, stampato dagli ultimi rimasugli di toner. Il controllore l'ha esaminato strizzando gli occhi. Dopo

What about you? You asked.

I didn't realize I'd lowered my gaze, and when I raised it I was wounded once again by your presence, as if I'd been dreaming all this time and you had just appeared in front of me.

Me? Well... I haven't moved, if that's what you mean.

No, that's not what I mean, Diana. But I understand if you don't want to tell me your business.

That tone in her voice, as if it meant to caress her interlocutor—me—with compassion.

I'm getting married, I said. And I saw your eyes shrink, your body stiffen: you crossed your legs, pushing yourself further back into your seat.

You're getting married, you said. I didn't understand if it was a question or a statement. When?

I cleared my throat. June 13th, I answered. In six months.

You nodded, a sharp movement of the head, a murmur barely whispered. You waited.

I saw the expression on your face change, harden.

Why didn't I know about this?

Elena... I started.

I'm not saying you should have invited me, you interrupted. But, I don't know... I would have expected to know.

Why should I have told you? We haven't seen each other in eight years.

Yeah, but you keep sending me texts on Christmas, my birthday... What, that's still normal, but this...

Ticket please. We both looked up at the conductor. He raised his eyes from the screen in his hands, glancing at us sideways. Is there a problem?

No, we're okay, we said.

I pulled out my phone, you rummaged in your duffle bag until you dug up a crumpled piece of paper, printed with the last dregs of ink. The conductor

secondi di attesa vischiosa se n'è andato, senza dire niente. Siamo rimaste ancora un po' in silenzio, senza guardarci. Poi, ascolta, ho detto, nemmeno io sapevo niente che ti eri fidanzata. Né tantomeno che stavi comprando casa in Italia. Magari mi avrebbe fatto piacere saperlo, no?

Non mi sono fidanzata. Quella fidanzata sei tu.

Sai benissimo cosa intendo, sai benissimo che in italiano si dice così. Lo parli meglio di me.

Ho fatto una pausa, hai distolto lo sguardo. E non venirmi a dire che non è una relazione seria, ho detto. Hai appena comprato una casa.

Non ho mica detto che ci andremo a vivere insieme.

Non lo farai?

Non lo so, ancora.

Ho sbuffato. Stronzate.

Mi è squillato il telefono. Era mia madre. Tesoro, hai dimenticato la stilografica, ha detto. Merda. Cosa? Non ti sento bene. Nulla, mamma, non ti preoccupare, non fa niente. La prendo la prossima volta. Ci siamo salutate, abbiamo chiuso.

Che ti sei dimenticata? Mi hai chiesto.

La tua cazzo di penna.

Ma come? La Montblanc? La usi ancora?

Sì. Mi sono strofinata la fronte con le dita. Mi è venuto da ridere. Ho provato a trattenermi, ma non ce l'ho fatta. Hai riso anche tu: prima piano, poi sempre più forte. Abbiamo riso fino a farci venire le lacrime agli occhi.

Il regalo più banale di sempre, hai detto.

Lo era, davvero. Ma mi è sempre piaciuta.

E Claudia, come sta? Mi hai chiesto, dopo avermi scrutata sufficientemente a lungo, rubando tutto il tempo che volevi, per mettermi in soggezione, forse, o forse soltanto perché ti andava.

Mia madre è diventata un mostro, con la vecchiaia. Mi chiama sempre *tesoro*.

Ho sentito.

examined it, squinting. After a few viscous seconds of waiting, he left without saying anything. We remained silent, not looking at each other. Then: listen, I said, I didn't know anything about you practically getting engaged, either. Not even that you were buying a house in Italy. Maybe that would have been nice to know, don't you think?

Well, I am not engaged. You are.

You know what I mean, you're more eloquent than me. You're shacking up together.

I paused, you looked away. Don't tell me it's not a serious relationship, I said. You just bought a house.

It's not like I said we're moving in together.

You're not?

I don't know yet.

I grumbled. Bullshit.

My phone rang. It was my mother. Darling, you forgot your fountain pen, she said. Shit. What? I can't hear you. Nothing, Mom, don't worry. It's okay. I'll get it next time. We said goodbye and hung up.

What did you forget, you asked me.

Your fucking pen.

What? The Montblanc? You still use it?

I do. I scratched my forehead. All at once, I felt like laughing and tried to hold it back, but couldn't. You laughed too: softly at first, then more and more loudly. We laughed until our eyes filled with tears.

The most boring gift ever, you said.

It really was. But I always liked it.

And Claudia, how is she, you asked after studying me. You were taking all the time you wanted, stealing it from me, perhaps to intimidate me, or perhaps just because you felt like it.

My mother's turned into a monster with age. She always calls me darling.

So I hear.

She tells me she loves me at the end of every call, buys me stuff she thinks I'll like, and keeps it wrapped up for when I visit...

Mi dice che mi vuole bene alla fine di ogni chiamata, mi compra cose che pensa possano piacermi e me le fa trovare impacchettate ogni volta che la vado a trovare...

Insomma, un alieno.

Non c'è altra spiegazione, anche secondo me.

Ti ricordi quella volta che ci fece trovare la tenda nel cortile?

Oh dio, certo che me lo ricordo.

Avevo detto mezzanotte, sono le quattro del mattino, disgraziate!

Ti prego, non imitarla, sei uguale, mi fa impressione.

Era una matta.

Mi sento ancora male dalla vergogna quando incontro le vicine.

È che sei troppo puritana, hai sempre odiato giocare a fare la ribelle con me.

Che ne sai, di come sono adesso? Mi sono sorpresa del mio tono sfidante. E poi non era un gioco.

Hai ragione. Di come sei adesso so solo che ti sposi e non mi dici niente.

Avrei voluto sposare te, avrei voluto dirti, ma mi è mancato il coraggio, o la disperazione. La linea è sottile, dopotutto. Ti ho solo detto: il viaggio è ancora lungo.

In other words, she's an alien.

I agree, there's no other explanation.

Remember that time she made us sleep in a tent in the backyard because we were late?

Oh god, of course I remember.

I said be home by midnight, it's four in the morning, you little delinquents!

Please, don't imitate her, you sound just like her. It freaks me out.

She was nuts.

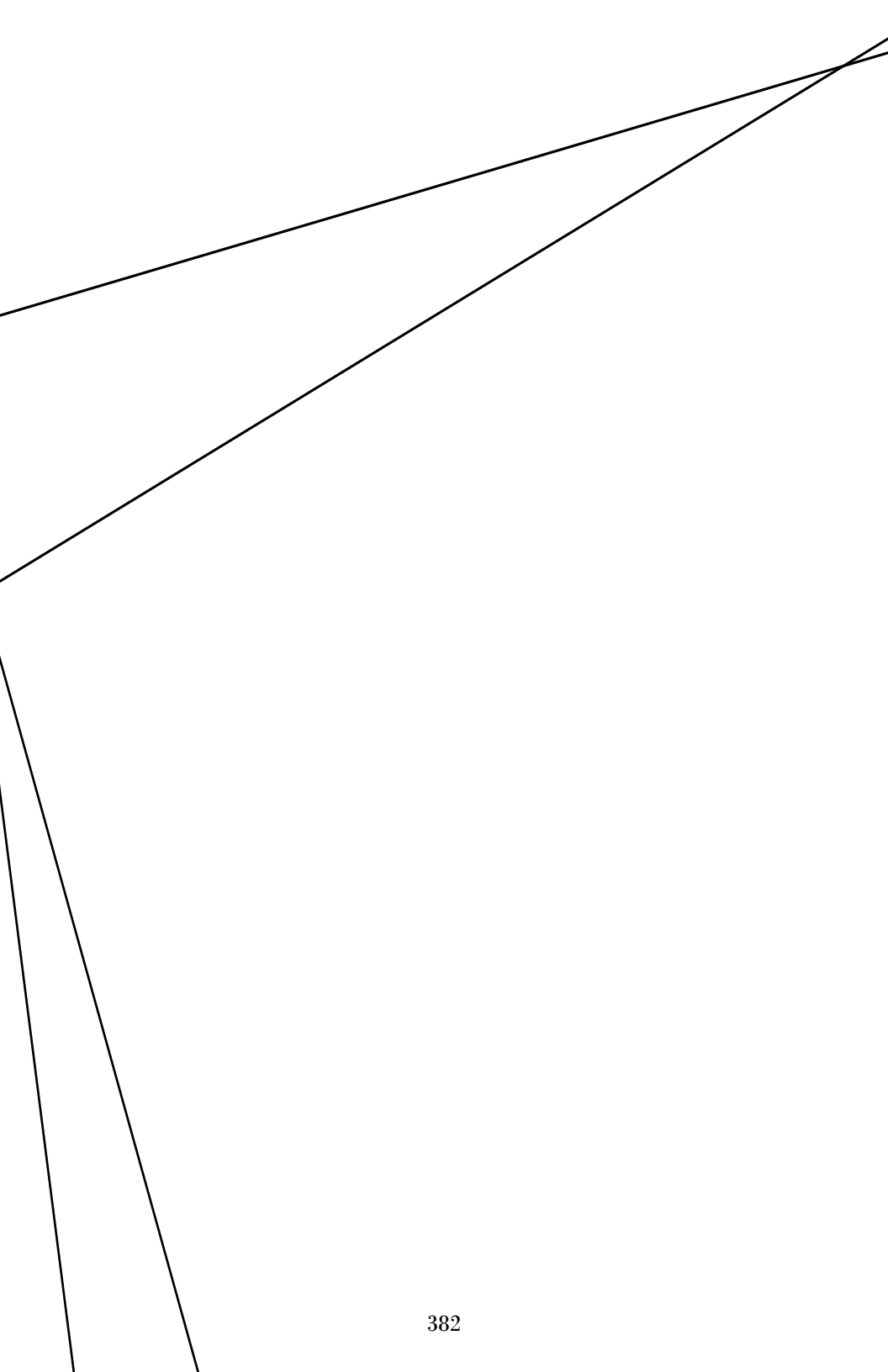
I still feel embarrassed when I run into the neighbors.

You're too prudish, you always hated playing rebel with me.

What do you know about who I am now? My provocative tone took me by surprise. Besides, it wasn't a game.

You're right. All I know is that you're getting married and you didn't tell me anything.

I wish I were marrying you, I wanted to say, but I lacked the courage, or the desperation. After all, the line between them is thin. I only said: we still have a long way to go.



Nota del Traduttore

Il romanzo di Asha Lemmie, di cui il seguente testo non è che un estratto, si apre con una domanda.

È una domanda ingenua, dolce, fatta col tono stupefatto dei bambini, ma che porta in sé una traccia di sangue: “Papà è vero che uccidi le persone?”

Credo stia nella vicinanza della parola *papà* e della parola *uccidere* l'intera tensione drammatica del romanzo, che racconta l'appassionante vita di una bambina nera adottata da una famiglia mafiosa italo-americana a inizio Novecento.

La prima volta che ho letto il testo, ho subito capito perché ci avevano scelte, sebbene ci separi un oceano, per tradurre i testi l'una dell'altra: anche il mio racconto parla di bambini e di sangue.

Anche lontana seimila chilometri l'infanzia rimane quella linea d'ombra permeata di magia e sangue che tutti, prima o poi, dobbiamo attraversare.

Se è vero che l'atto di tradurre unisce, dandoci la possibilità di capire lingue e mentalità diverse dalla nostra, è anche vero che pare esserci, a discapito di tutto, una comunanza di sentire aprioristica e che a questo punto non esito a definire “umana” (sebbene conosca la grandezza di questa parola così semplice e spaventosa) e che l'esperienza basilare di questo sentire umano sia proprio la cosiddetta infanzia, la preistoria di ogni essere umano, il momento in cui ancora tutto è possibile, il bene come il male.

ASHA LEMMIE

LOTTIE

**New York, New York
August 1908**

“Papa, do you kill people?”

The question silenced the busy kitchen. Fabrizio put down his paper, staring blankly at his eight-year-old daughter. For her part, Carlotta was not sure why everyone was goggling at her. Her brother Luca, ten, had stopped playing with his wooden toy horse, suspending it in mid-air. Mama stood motionless at the stove, where it appeared that even the thick tomato sauce she was stirring had gone mute, the bubbles hiding beneath the surface to avoid the disaster that was sure to come next.

“Santa Maria,” Mama gasped, the horror evident on her face. She was always saying that, which Carlotta found especially funny because her own name was Anna Maria. But apparently that was blasphemy. Mama was a deeply religious woman, so it did not take much. Carlotta was still trying to figure a way out of being dragged to mass four times a week. She’d tried fake coughs and mysterious headaches. Once she’d even scarfed down some moldy cheese to upset her stomach, but to no avail.

“Go outside and play, both of you,” her mother urged, pointing to the side door that led out of their townhome to the small, fenced in yard out back.

But Papa stopped her. “It’s fine, dear. Come here, Carlotta.”

tradotto dall'inglese da
ZOE GUINDANI

LOTTIE

New York, NY
Agosto 1908

“Papà, è vero che uccidi le persone?”

A quella domanda, la cucina piombò nel silenzio. Fabrizio appoggiò il giornale, guardando inespRESSIVO la figlia di otto anni. Carlotta, da parte sua, non capiva perché tutti improvvisamente la fissassero. Suo fratello Luca, di dieci anni, aveva smesso di giocare col cavallino di legno, fermandosi con il braccio sospeso a mezz'aria, mentre la mamma era rimasta immobile vicino ai fornelli, dove sembrava che anche il denso sugo di pomodoro fosse ammutolito e le bolle si nascondessero sotto la superficie per evitare l'imminente disastro.

Poi la mamma sussultò inorridita: “Santa Maria!”

Lo diceva sempre, cosa che Carlotta trovava molto divertente perché il nome di sua madre era, appunto, Maria. E anche se lei diceva che era un paragone blasfemo, per Carlotta non c'era nulla di strano data la profonda devozione della mamma.

Stava infatti ancora pensando a uno stratagemma per non farsi trascinare a messa quattro volte alla settimana. Aveva provato con tossi finte e misteriosi mal di testa, una volta aveva persino ingurgitato del formaggio ammuffito per scombinarsi lo stomaco, ma niente da fare.

She made her way over to him, exchanging a nervous glance with Luca on the way. Their father could be difficult to read. Though he rarely raised his voice, there was something about the shifts in his demeanor that could prove unnerving. It was subtle, like the first change from a mild autumn to a brutal winter, the hint of the frost to come.

But now Papa's face was smiling. He pulled her up onto his knee and looked down his long nose at her, his chestnut colored eyes reminding her of a warm fireside at Christmas. She could smell the slightly musky odor of his mustache cream.

"Where did you hear such a thing?"

Carlotta cast her eyes down to the linoleum floor, but he lifted her chin with a finger and forced her to look at him.

"I asked you a question."

Mama stepped forward, wiping her hands on her apron. "Fabrizio, I don't think..."

He didn't even look her way. "Don't coddle her. I've asked her a simple question and I expect an honest answer."

Carlotta hesitated. The answer itself was simple, certainly, but the consequences were not. She pulled at her pigtails and looked desperately at Luca. Both her parents' gazes followed hers.

Luca flushed under the scrutiny. He was pale, with thin blonde hair and watery blue eyes. He looked nothing like either of his parents. But then, neither did she.

"Alfonso told her," Luca burst out. "He told us both.

“Andate fuori a giocare, tutti e due” li esortò la madre, indicando la porta di servizio che collegava la loro casa al piccolo cortile recintato sul retro, ma Papà la fermò. “Va tutto bene, cara. Vieni qui, Carlotta”.

Avvicinandosi, la bambina si scambiò uno sguardo nervoso con il fratello.

A volte il padre era difficile da interpretare. Anche se raramente alzava la voce, c'era qualcosa nei suoi scatti di umore che poteva rivelarsi sconcertante. Era qualcosa di impercettibile, come il primo passaggio da un tiepido autunno a un inverno feroce, il segno del gelo che verrà.

Ma ora Papà sorrideva. Si mise Carlotta sulle ginocchia e le puntò addosso il lungo naso e gli occhi color nocciola che le ricordavano un caldo focolare natalizio. Lei sentì l'odore lievemente muschiato della sua crema per i baffi.

“Da dove salta fuori questa cosa?”

Carlotta abbassò gli occhi verso il pavimento di linoleum, ma lui le alzò il mento con un dito e la obbligò a guardarlo. “Ti ho fatto una domanda”.

La mamma fece un passo avanti, asciugandosi le mani sul grembiule. “Fabrizio, non penso che...”

Lui non la guardò nemmeno. “Non difenderla. Le ho fatto una semplice domanda e mi aspetto una risposta sincera”.

Carlotta esitò. La risposta in sé era semplice, certo, ma le conseguenze no.

Si tirò i codini e lanciò un'occhiata disperata a Luca. I genitori spostarono l'attenzione su di lui, che arrossì sotto quegli sguardi indagatori. Era pallido, con sottili capelli biondi e acquosi occhi azzurri. Non assomigliava

He said everyone at school already knows. He says that you're in charge of the whole neighborhood and that anyone who doesn't like it ends up in the East River. Is it true, Papa? Is it really?"

Mama crossed herself and muttered something squeaky under her breath. Carlotta thought she caught "not yet" but she couldn't be sure.

"I told him I didn't believe it," Carlotta piped up, emboldened by Luca's confession. She showed him a grateful smile. Not for the first time, she made a note to give him her weekly pocket money, though she knew he would share the candy he bought with her anyway.

Anna Maria shifted from foot to foot. Carlotta could not quite understand why she looked so upset.

Papa on the other hand, looked perfectly calm. He looked at Luca for a long moment and then he turned his gaze back to her.

"Now remember this, both of you. Never discuss the family business with anyone outside the family. Don't ask questions about things that don't concern you. Understood?"

"Yes," both of them said at once, though she was not sure that either of them did.

He smiled at her again, the special smile he saved just for his youngest, his only daughter.

"And you remember this especially, Carlotta. You're a girl. You don't need to concern yourself with what the men are doing. You listen to your mother, play with your dolls, and when the time is right, you find a decent man to marry and it'll be his job to take care of you. When you have children of your own, you can worry

affatto a nessuno dei suoi genitori, né tantomeno a Carlotta.

“Glielo ha detto Alfonso” sbottò Luca. “Ce l’ha detto a tutti e due. Ha detto che a scuola lo sanno già tutti. Dice che sei il capo del quartiere e quelli che non sono d’accordo finiscono nell’East River. È vero, papà? È così?”

La mamma si fece il segno della croce e mormorò qualcosa. Carlotta pensò di cogliere un “non ancora” ma non ne era sicura.

“Gli ho detto che non ci credevo” si affrettò a dire Carlotta, incoraggiata dalla confessione del fratello, a cui rivolse un sorriso grato. Si ripromise, e non era la prima volta, di dargli la sua paghetta settimanale, pur sapendo che lui le avrebbe dato comunque una parte delle caramelle che comprava.

Maria non riusciva a stare ferma e Carlotta non capiva perché sembrasse così agitata.

Papà, d’altro canto, sembrava perfettamente calmo. Guardò Luca per un lungo istante e poi tornò su di lei.

“Ora ricordate questo, voi due. Mai discutere gli affari di famiglia con nessuno al di fuori della famiglia. Non fare domande su cose che non vi riguardano. Capito?”

“Sì” dissero entrambi in coro, anche se Carlotta non era sicura che non l’avessero già fatto

Papà le sorrise, il sorriso speciale che riservava solo alla sua figlia più piccola, l’unica.

“E tu ricordati soprattutto questo, Carlotta. Sei una femmina. Non devi preoccuparti di cosa fanno gli uomini. Ascolta tua madre, gioca con le bambole e,

then. Until that day, leave everything to me.”

She nodded rapidly. “Yes, Papa.”

He slid her off his lap. “Good. Now, where’s Alfonso?”

His tone went hard when he asked about his eldest son. They could all hear it. Carlotta made herself scarce, disappearing into the hallway that connected the kitchen to the dining room, where she could eavesdrop without being seen. Luca was hot on her heels. They pressed themselves against the wall and pricked up their ears. She snuck her hand into his and he squeezed it.

Anna Maria lowered her voice. “He’s out with his friends.”

“Who?”

“Dario’s boys. The twins.”

He grunted. “Well, when he gets home, I want him sent straight to my office.”

Carlotta and Luca exchanged a wide-eyed look. They both knew that the office was where Papa had his serious talks, with the door tightly shut. They also knew that’s where he kept his broad leather strap. Papa was a big man, more than six feet, and brawny from working on a farm before he came to America twenty-five years ago. It was no small thing to be on the receiving end of his swing.

Their mother tried again to placate him. “Fabrizio, please, just let me talk to him.”

“That boy needs to learn how to keep his damned mouth shut. He’s going to learn today.”

quando sarà il momento giusto, trovati un brav'uomo da sposare e sarà il suo lavoro prendersi cura di te. Quando avrai dei figli tuoi, allora potrai preoccuparti. Fino a quel giorno, lascia tutto a me.”

Lei annuì rapidamente. “Sì, Papà.”

Lui la rimise a terra. “Bene. Ora, dove è Alfonso?”

Il suo tono si fece più duro quando chiese del figlio maggiore, se ne accorsero tutti. Carlotta uscì alla chetichella e sparì nel corridoio che collegava la cucina alla sala da pranzo, dove poteva origliare senza essere vista. Luca le stava appiccicato dietro, si schiacciarono contro il muro e drizzarono le orecchie. Lei gli prese delicatamente la mano e lui la strinse.

Maria abbassò la voce. “È fuori con gli amici.”

“Quali amici?”

“I ragazzi di Dario. I gemelli.”

Lui grugnì. “Be’, quando arriva a casa, lo voglio dritto nel mio studio.”

Carlotta e Luca si scambiarono uno sguardo sbigottito. Sapevano entrambi che lo studio era dove Papà faceva i discorsi seri, con la porta ben chiusa, e sapevano anche che era dove teneva la sua grossa cinghia di cuoio.

Papà era un uomo imponente, alto più di un metro e ottanta e forzuto per via del lavoro nei campi svolto in Sicilia venticinque anni prima. Marcava male quando si finiva lì dentro.

La madre cercò di nuovo di calmarlo. “Fabrizio, per favore, lascia solo che gli parli.”

“He’s fourteen. He’s impressionable right now, he’s just showing off for his silly friends at school. It means nothing.”

“A boy his age in Sicily is nearly a man. A boy his age should know better than to discuss business outside of the home or with the younger children. Especially Carlotta. He’s a fool, and it’s dangerous to be a fool in this world. I’d rather see him beaten than end up dead because he doesn’t know how to keep his trap shut.”

“He just wants your approval.”

Carlotta rolled her eyes. Mama was always making excuses for Alfonso. When he dared Luca to swallow marbles, when he cut the heads off her dolls, when he got suspended from school for fighting an Irish boy and calling him a filthy mick. Alfonso always had a good reason, even when he didn’t. She wondered if having a baby one day would make her like that too. She hoped not.

Papa, at least, seemed immune from his wife’s favoritism. She heard the sound of a match striking, pictured him lifting a cigarette to his lips and frowning.

“Well, he won’t get it if he doesn’t learn some goddamned common sense. No son of mine is going to run around town flapping their gums and showing off like a woman.”

Later that evening, Alfonso caught her coming out of the bathroom after washing up for bed. He was nearly as tall as Fabrizio already, with the same dark curls and brown eyes, but he was lanky in the body and chubby in the face like his mother. He was trying to

“Quel ragazzo ha bisogno di imparare a tenere chiusa quella maledetta bocca. Lo imparerà oggi.”

“Ha quattordici anni. È impressionabile adesso, si sta solo mettendo in mostra con i suoi sciocchi amici a scuola. Non significa niente.”

“In Sicilia un ragazzo della sua età è quasi un uomo. Un ragazzo della sua età dovrebbe sapere che non si discute di affari fuori dalla famiglia o con i bambini più piccoli. Specialmente con Carlotta. È uno stupido ed è pericoloso essere uno stupido in questo mondo. Preferisco essere io a picchiarlo piuttosto che ritrovarmelo morto perché non sa tenere chiusa la sua boccaccia.”

“Vuole solo la tua approvazione.”

Carlotta sollevò gli occhi al cielo. La mamma trovava sempre una scusa per Alfonso: quando aveva sfidato Luca a ingoiare delle biglie, quando aveva tagliato la testa alle sue bambole, quando era stato sospeso da scuola per essersi picchiato con un ragazzo irlandese e averlo chiamato Mangiapatate; per la mamma Alfonso aveva sempre una buona ragione, anche quando non ce l'aveva. Si domandava se avere un figlio, un giorno, avrebbe reso così anche lei. Sperava di no.

Papà, almeno, sembrava immune ai favoritismi della moglie. Carlotta sentì lo sfrigolio di un fiammifero, e lo immaginò che si portava una sigaretta alle labbra, accigliato.

“Be', non ce l'avrà se non impara a ragionare come Dio comanda. Nessuno dei miei figli andrà in giro per la città blaterando e dandosi arie come una donna.”

Più tardi, quella sera, Alfonso la beccò mentre usciva

grow a mustache like his father's but Carlotta was not very impressed with his efforts.

He shoved her against the closed door. Even beneath his menacing scowl, she could tell that he'd been crying.

"Tattle tale."

She was afraid of him but she would not show it. Nor would she reveal to him that it was really Luca who had spoken up. She didn't want to put him in the middle more than he already was. They were both afraid of him and though he would not do more than push her around because she was a girl, Luca may not be so lucky.

"You shouldn't have said what you did," was all she said. She did not want to risk angering him. "But I'm sorry you got beaten."

He huffed. His face was ruddy and there was a bruise on the lower half of his mouth.

"I'm a man. I don't care about that."

His behind was going to be stinging for three days at the least.

She shrugged. "If you say so."

"I do say so. And I say this too. Papa is in charge of everything in the neighborhood, just like the Dons from the old country. He's not afraid of anything, not the colored or the Irish or the Polish or the Jews. He's in charge. And one day I'll be in charge too."

She tried to inch away from him back to her room but he would not let her. "Good for you."

He looked giddier now. "And when I'm in charge, I'll send you back uptown where you belong."

dal bagno dopo essersi lavata per andare a letto. Era già alto quasi quanto Fabrizio, con gli stessi ricci neri e occhi marroni, ma allampanato nel corpo e paffuto in viso come sua madre. Stava cercando di farsi crescere i baffi, ma a Carlotta quei tentativi non sembravano granché.

La spinse contro la porta chiusa. Anche sotto quello sguardo minaccioso, si vedeva che aveva pianto.

“Spiona.”

Sebbene Carlotta avesse paura di lui, non gli avrebbe mai rivelato che era stato Luca a spifferare. Non voleva metterlo in mezzo più di quanto già lo fosse. Avevano entrambi paura di Alfonso e pensavano che a lei, dato che era una femmina, non avrebbe fatto niente se non spintonarla un po', mentre a Luca poteva andare molto peggio.

“Non dovevi dire quello che hai detto” fu tutto ciò che gli disse. Non voleva rischiare di farlo arrabbiare. “Ma mi spiace che le hai prese”.

Lui sbuffò. Aveva la faccia rossastra e un livido sul labbro inferiore.

“Sono un uomo. Non m'importa.”

La schiena gli sarebbe bruciata per almeno tre giorni.

Lei alzò le spalle. “Se lo dici tu.”

“Lo dico sì. E dico anche questo. Papà si occupa di tutto nel quartiere, proprio come i Don del vecchio paese. Non ha paura di nulla, né di quelli di colore né degli irlandesi, dei polacchi o degli ebrei. Lui ha il potere, e un giorno lo avrò io.”

He drew himself up to his full height, and she braced herself for what she knew was coming. The word that sent shivers down her spine and made her eyes water. She did not know everything about it, but she knew that it made her feel like a cockroach. She watched the shape of his mouth as he said it, the way his lips trembled. If Anna Maria or Fabrizio had overheard him, he'd be getting another beating for sure. Even Anna Maria would not forgive him for that.

When he was done, his eyes glinted.

“Mama wants me here,” Carlotta managed weakly, standing on the one thing she knew for certain.

He shook his head in a mixture of disgust and bewilderment. “She’s not *your* Mama. She’s mine. Mine and Luca’s. You’re just some stray she found in a trash can. You’re not her daughter, you’re not Sicilian, you’re not Italian, you’re not even white.”

“It wasn’t a trash can,” Carlotta protested, though truthfully it may have been for all she knew. But it was the only thing she could deny and she took it.

She knew, of course, that she was colored. She wasn’t blind. She could clearly see that her skin was bronze, not olive, and that her hair seemed to grow towards the ceiling instead of lying flat. She saw the way people at church stared at them, the way people on the sidewalk stopped their conversations to point. She knew she was different.

But it never bothered her that much until Alfonso called her that word, and made her feel like a filthy animal that had wandered inside. He’d always been one to swing his weight around, but he had worsened significantly since starting high school. Luca told her that some of

Lei provò a scostarsi per tornare in camera sua, ma lui non la lasciava passare.

“Buon per te.” Gli disse.

Lui continuò, infervorato: “E quando avrò il potere, ti rispeditò da dove vieni, su ad Harlem.” Si drizzò in tutta la sua statura, e lei si preparò per ciò che stava per arrivare, per la parola che la faceva rabbrivire fino al midollo e la faceva piangere. Non la capiva fino in fondo, ma sapeva che la faceva sentire uno scarafaggio. Guardò la forma della sua bocca mentre la pronunciava, il modo in cui gli tremavano le labbra. Se Maria o Fabrizio l'avessero sentito, certamente le avrebbe prese di nuovo. Neanche Maria l'avrebbe perdonato per questo.

Quando ebbe finito, gli occhi di Alfonso sfavillavano.

“La mamma mi vuole qui” disse debolmente Carlotta, appoggiandosi alla sua unica certezza.

Lui scosse la testa con un misto di disgusto e sconcerto. “Lei non è la tua mamma. È la mia. Mia e di Luca. Tu sei solo una randagia che ha trovato nella spazzatura. Non sei sua figlia, non sei siciliana, non sei italiana e non sei neanche bianca.”

“Non ero nella spazzatura” protestò Carlotta, anche se a ben vedere poteva anche essere così. Ma era l'unica cosa che poteva negare e lo fece.

Sapeva, certo, di essere di colore. Non era cieca. Lo vedeva chiaramente che la sua pelle era bronzata e non olivastra, e che i suoi capelli sembravano crescere verso il soffitto invece che scendere giù lisci. Si accorgeva di come le persone la fissavano in chiesa e di come in strada smettessero di parlare per indicarla. Sapeva di essere diversa.

the other children made fun of him because his parents were immigrants and because he was Italian. That was right around the time he'd started calling her the bad names.

"Trash can or alleyway or dope den, what does it matter? One day you'll go back there and I won't have to see your face anymore. It's embarrassing to have you here. Only Mama's had too much holy water and she can't see it."

"Mama says I'm your sister and you're to treat me as such," she protested, her voice breaking. "She says so."

Alfonso shook his head. "You will never be my sister," he said with simple malice. "Never."

Carlotta finally broke down. Partly because her feelings were hurt and partly because she knew that he would not be satisfied with his torment until he'd seen her cry.

Once he glimpsed the tears, Alfonso's body seemed to relax. His face softened. She thought, or maybe she hoped, that she caught a flash of remorse, of uncertainty. Of humility as of yet uncorrupted. She looked into his dark eyes, not dissimilar from her own, and silently told him that there was no call for this animosity. They did not need to be enemies.

"Go to bed," was all he said, before turning his back on her and marching down the hallway back to his own room.

She ran back to her room and threw herself underneath the bedclothes. She didn't even take off her socks, which she always did because if she didn't, she'd wake up in the middle of the night sweating. She was always running hot but the doctor could find no reason why. She cooled down for about five minutes in January.

Ma la cosa non l'aveva mai turbata più di tanto, almeno finché Alfonso non l'aveva chiamata in quel modo e l'aveva fatta sentire come uno sporco animale che si era intrufolato in casa loro.

Era sempre stato uno che voleva farla da padrone, ma era peggiorato notevolmente da quando aveva iniziato le superiori. Luca le aveva detto che certi bambini lo prendevano in giro perché i suoi genitori erano immigrati e perché era italiano. Era in quel periodo che aveva iniziato a chiamarla con quei brutti nomi.

“Bidone della spazzatura, vicolo o covo di drogati, cosa cambia? Un giorno ci tornerai e io non dovrò più vedere la tua faccia. È imbarazzante averti qui. Solo che la mamma si è bevuta troppa acqua santa e non riesce a capirlo.”

“Mamma dice che sono tua sorella e così mi devi trattare” protestò lei, con la voce spezzata. “Lo dice lei.”

Alfonso scosse la testa. “Non sarai mai mia sorella” disse con semplice cattiveria. “Mai.”

Carlotta finalmente cedette. In parte perché i suoi sentimenti erano feriti e in parte perché sapeva che lui non avrebbe rinunciato a torturarla finché non l'avesse vista piangere.

Quando vide le lacrime infatti, il corpo di Alfonso parve rilassarsi. La sua faccia si ammorbidì. Lei pensò, o forse sperò, di cogliere in lui un lampo di rimorso o di incertezza. Di umiltà, un che di ancora incorrotto. Lo guardò negli occhi scuri, così simili ai suoi, e in silenzio gli disse che non c'era bisogno di quell'ostilità. Non dovevano essere nemici.

“Va' a letto” fu tutto ciò che lui le disse, prima di girarle

But she stayed there, underneath the stifling covers, wiping the snot from her nose in the crook of her elbow. Which was rather disgusting, really, but she couldn't be bothered to get up for a handkerchief.

After a little while she heard the door open and heard Mama's slightly uneven gait. Mama's right leg had been damaged by polio when she was a girl but she didn't like anyone to call attention to it.

"Carlotta!"

The covers were snatched back. Mama's face softened when she saw the tears.

"Ah, dear one. What's wrong?"

She pitched forward and buried her face in her mother's chest. She smelled of flour. There would be fresh rolls in the morning for certain.

"Alfonso," was all she said. It was all she needed to say. Carlotta was not one to cry over nothing.

Anna Maria sighed. "Pay him no mind. Boys his age... they're known to be difficult. He'll outgrow it in a few years."

"He says you found me in a trashcan."

Her mother lowered her down onto the pillow and wiped her face with a clean handkerchief.

"Now you listen. You know that's not true."

"So what is true?"

"I've told you. I found you when you were just a few

le spalle e marciare lungo il corridoio fino alla sua stanza. Lei tornò di corsa in camera sua e si gettò sotto le lenzuola. Non si tolse neanche i calzini, cosa che faceva sempre perché altrimenti si svegliava nel cuore della notte tutta sudata. Aveva sempre caldo ma il dottore non riusciva a capire perché; smetteva di sudare solo a gennaio, per circa cinque minuti.

Rimase lì, sotto le coperte soffocanti, a soffiarsi il moccio nell'incavo del gomito. Il che, a dire il vero, era abbastanza disgustoso, ma in quel momento Carlotta non sarebbe riuscita ad alzarsi in cerca di un fazzoletto. Poco dopo sentì la porta aprirsi e l'andatura leggermente irregolare della mamma entrare nella stanza. La polio le aveva lasciato una lesione alla gamba destra quando era ragazza, ma non le piaceva che la gente ci facesse caso.

“Carlotta!” Le coperte furono strattonate indietro.

La faccia della mamma si ammorbidì quando vide le lacrime.

“Oh, cara. Cosa c'è che non va?”

Lei si lanciò in avanti e seppellì la faccia nel petto di sua madre. Odorava di farina, la mattina dopo ci sarebbero di certo stati panini freschi.

“Alfonso” fu tutto ciò che disse. Era tutto ciò che aveva bisogno di dire. Carlotta non era una che piangeva per niente.

Maria sospirò. “Non dargli retta. I ragazzi della sua età... si sa come sono. Crescerà in un paio di anni.”

“Dice che mi hai trovato nella spazzatura.”

Sua madre la adagiò sul cuscino e le pulì la faccia con un fazzoletto pulito.

days old. I brought you home. Your Papa and I wanted you with us.”

This was the usual explanation but it did not have the usual effect. She was still restless.

“But why? And *where* did you find me? And why didn’t you take me to...a different family?”

Mama cupped her cheeks. “Because Our Lady instructed me to bring you home, and to raise you as my own daughter.”

Carlotta’s curiosity was still piqued. “But you already had children?”

Mama laughed and her face lit up. “Yes, I did. That’s like saying I already had flowers in my garden, so why grow another? You are all different. But I love you just the same. I am blessed to have you.”

“Alfonso says he’ll put me out. When he’s old enough.”

“He won’t do that,” her mother said swiftly, but there was unease on her face. She did not look convinced enough to convince another. “Don’t worry yourself. It’s time for sweet dreams. Your Papa and I are right here. And you’re safe with us. Understand?”

“Yes, Mama.”

Her mother kissed her cheek. “We love you, Carlotta.”

Finally, Carlotta gave in to her desire to be comforted. She let herself believe her mother, to be carried away by the soothing sound of her voice.

“I love you too, Mama.”

“Piantala, lo sai che non è la verità.”

“Quindi qual è la verità?”

“Te l’ho detto, ti ho trovata quando avevi solo qualche giorno. Ti ho portata a casa. Papà e io ti volevamo con noi.”

Questa era la solita spiegazione, ma non sortì il solito effetto.

“Ma perché? E *dove* mi hai trovata? E perché non mi hai portata a... un'altra famiglia?”

La mamma le accarezzò dolcemente le guance. “Perché la Madonna mi ha detto di portarti a casa, e di crescerti come mia figlia.”

Carlotta era ancora inquieta. “Ma non avevi già figli?” La mamma rise e le s’illuminò la faccia. “Sì, li avevo. Ma sarebbe come dire che se ho già dei fiori nel mio giardino non dovrei coltivarne altri. Voi siete tutti diversi, ma io vi amo allo stesso modo. È una benedizione avervi.”

“Alfonso dice che mi sbatterà fuori, quando sarò grande abbastanza.”

“Non lo farà” disse rapidamente la madre, seppure con un’espressione di disagio. Non sembrava abbastanza convinta da poter rassicurare qualcuno. “Non ti preoccupare. È il momento di fare la nanna, io e Papà siamo qui. E tu sei al sicuro con noi. Capito?”

“Sì, mamma.”

La madre le baciò una guancia. “Ti vogliamo bene, Carlotta”

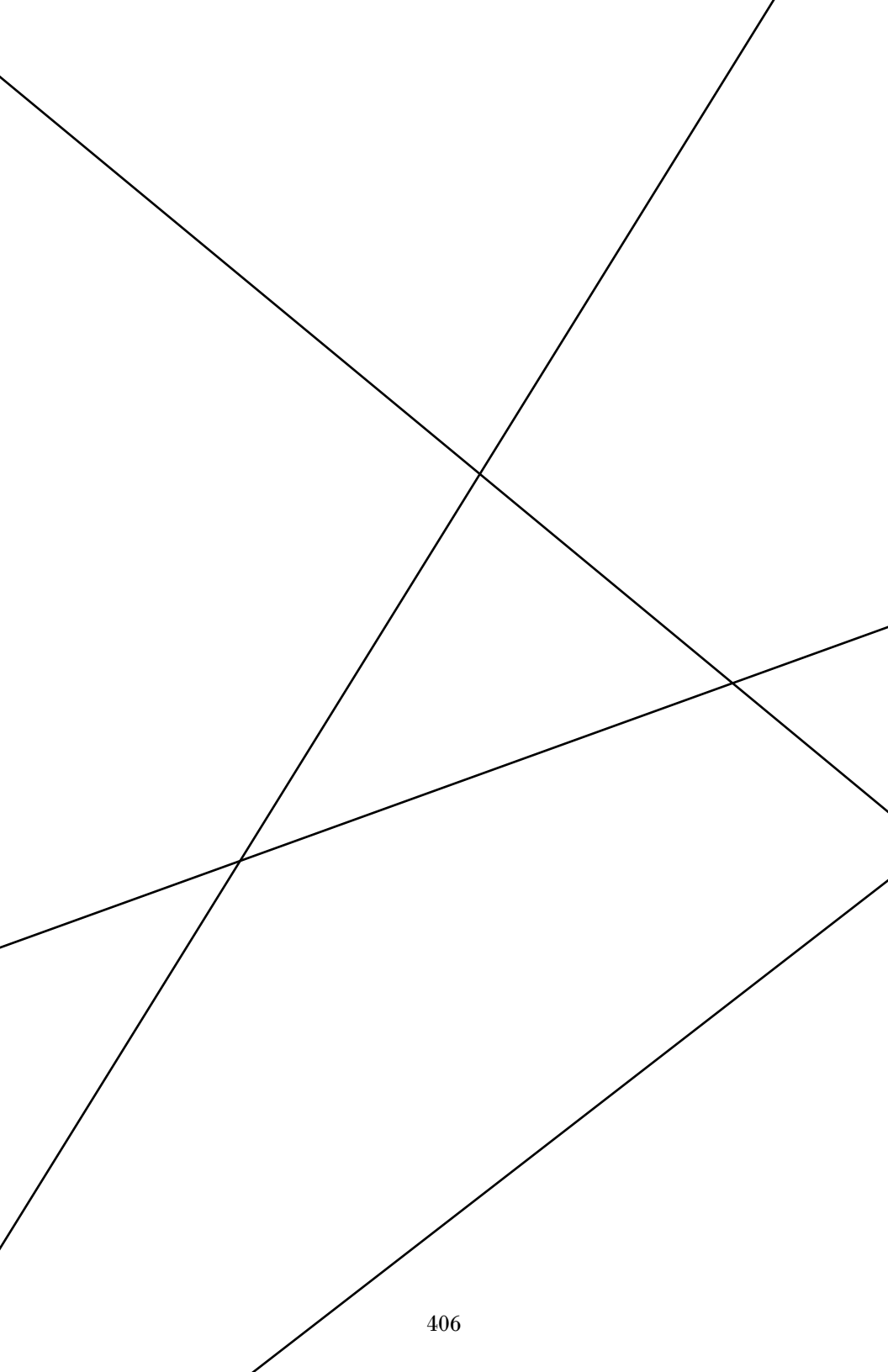
Alla fine Carlotta cedette al desiderio di farsi consolare.

It was not until late that night, when she woke drenched in sweat because her socks were still on and her mother had wrapped her in a heavy quilt like a cannoli, that it even occurred to her that Papa had never answered her question.

Decise di crederle, di lasciarsi cullare dal dolce suono della sua voce.

“Ti voglio bene anch’io, mamma”

Fu solo a notte fonda, quando Carlotta si svegliò coperta di sudore, perché aveva ancora addosso i calzini e la madre l’aveva arrotolata come un cannolo in una pesante trapunta, che le venne in mente che Papà non aveva mai risposto alla domanda.



Translator's Note

In Zoe Guidani's *Animali Piccoli e Animali Grande* we see an example of an ideally crafted short story, reminiscent of Hemingway in style. This is no small feat. Short stories have always presented a myriad of potential joys and challenges for authors. Their brevity is what makes them a distinct form of literature, the shorthand answer to the novel. Yet, they are not tiny novels. They are structurally distinct from the ground up. Short stories are tasked with the unique challenge of conveying the same amount of resonance in a much more limited framework. This makes the precise use of language all the more important: word selection is especially vital, as are cadence and rhythm. There is no room for wasted sentences or endless exposition. Plots must advance quickly and there is little time for confusion.

All of the intricacies relating to the craftsmanship of a short story are keenly felt by those entrusted with translating them. Italian is a language that lends itself well to long, rolling phrases, things that may translate into English as run-on sentences. Most of my early work in translation consisted of unfurling line after line without a comma in sight. This story, however, is full of shorter, more candid sentences and vivid but sparse images. If it were a musical composition, a composer's note that would appear often would be *staccato*. As translator, which I have always felt is the literary equivalent of a conductor, I attempted to honor that stylistic choice in order to capture the appropriate magic of sound and feeling. Full of human frailty and intriguing mystery, *Animali Piccoli e Animali Grande* is a story that requires few words and yet says quite a lot.

ZOE GUINDANI

ANIMALI PICCOLI E ANIMALI GRANDI

Avevano camminato a lungo nell'erba alta, sotto un placido sole di fine agosto.

“Dai Nora, vieni” chiamò lui, con un piede già nell'ombra del bosco.

“Sono stanca Gio”

“Dai che siamo quasi arrivati”

Lei lo raggiunse sbuffando, quando l'ebbe superato iniziò a camminare veloce per la strada in salita nel bosco.

Il fango sprofondava sotto le sue scarpe rendendo la salita più faticosa.

“Lo so che siamo quasi arrivati” disse tra sé e sé.

Nora gli camminava davanti con la gonna che a ogni passo le risaliva le gambe di qualche centimetro accarezzandole le cosce nude.

Si fermò solo giunta di fianco a una vecchia casetta di legno.

Lui con pochi passi lenti le fu accanto e aprì la porta spingendola con una mano.

Nora si gettò sul letto con un leggero affanno, ridendo della sua stessa stanchezza.

“Se continuo a perdere tempo con te non finirò mai la mia storia”

Lui si attardò a sistemare alcune coperte per l'inverno nei mobili che arredavano il piccolo monolocale.

“Come procede?” le chiese sedendosi sul bordo del letto, che si piegò sotto al suo peso, e sfilandosi i grandi stivali infangati.

**translated from the italian by
ASHA LEMMIE**

**ANIMALS SMALL AND
ANIMALS LARGE**

They had walked for a long time in the tall grass, under a tranquil late August sun.

“Come on Nora, come on,” he called, with one foot already in the canopy of the woods.

“I’m tired, Gio.”

“Come on, we’re almost there.”

She reached him, huffing, and when she had passed him she began to walk quickly along the uphill road in the woods.

The mud sank beneath his shoes, making the climb more tiring.

“It’s true, we’re almost there,” he said to himself.

Nora walked in front of him with her skirt slipping up her legs a few centimeters with each step, caressing her bare thighs.

She stopped only when she reached an old wooden house.

With a few slow steps he was next to her and opened the door, pushing it with one hand.

Nora threw herself onto the bed half-winded, laughing

“Ottimamente” rispose lei.

Entrambi guardarono fuori dalla finestra, Nora sbuffò. Erano saliti al bosco per tutta l'estate e ora le giornate iniziavano a morire prima del dovuto.

Lui si girò, guardò la sua testa scompigliata e le accarezzò il viso con fare malinconico, l'ombra di lui la copriva completamente.

Si spogliò e le sfilò la t-shirt e la gonna, lei lo lasciò fare. Si guardarono nudi, come facevano sempre.

Come sforzandosi di liberarsi della sua malinconia, Giovanni tentò un sorriso che gli rilassò la fronte.

Le passò una mano sulla testa, dietro la nuca, poi le pizzicò il mento con l'indice e il pollice.

Nora guardò la sua grossa pancia accogliente, le sue spalle larghe, i suoi occhi buoni.

Lui le arricciò i capelli con un dito, le diede un bacio sulla clavicola.

Lei si grattò una spalla e guardò il sole che moriva fuori dalla finestra.

Lui la baciò ancora e ancora.

Poi rimasero in silenzio, ascoltando gli animali fuori dal bosco che si preparavano per la notte.

Il sole brillava sul legno vecchio, attraverso le persiane. Nora si era addormentata tra le lenzuola disordinate.

Giovanni si alzò stando attento a non far rumore, tirò su le persiane e guardò la lunga strada che in discesa portava al paese.

Dopo il bosco, oltre i campi incolti, oltre una bassa collina, una minuscola cittadina d'oro, inaccessibile, con le sue regole ed i suoi tabù: il Paese.

Ed ecco, da dietro la collina, un piccolo cappello ondeggiare, seguito da un altro, che si portarono dietro due piccole teste e due piccole uniformi blu da poliziotti. Camminavano goffi, rallentati dal fango; erano due

at her own exhaustion.

“If I keep wasting time with you, I’ll never finish my story.”

He took time to arrange some winter blankets from the armoire that furnished the small cabin.

“How’s it going?” he asked her, sitting on the edge of the bed, which sank under his weight, and taking off his large muddy boots.

“Excellent,” she replied.

They both looked out the window, Nora snorted.

They had been going up to the woods all summer and now the days were starting to die sooner than they should.

He turned, looked at her disheveled head and caressed her face with melancholy, his shadow covering her completely.

He undressed and took off her t-shirt and skirt, she let him do it.

They looked at each other naked, as they always did. As if trying to free himself from his gloom, Giovanni tried a smile that would smooth his brow.

He ran a hand over her head, behind her neck, then pinched her chin between his index finger and thumb.

Nora looked at his big welcoming belly, his broad shoulders, his benevolent eyes.

He curled her hair with his finger, pressed a kiss against her collarbone.

figurine solitarie nel sole, ma a Giovanni pareva che l'intero villaggio salisse la strada con quei due poliziotti. Avevano fiaccole e forconi e avrebbero fatto a pezzi lui e la sua Nora, la sua Nora che dormiva in quel biancore di lenzuola color latte.

Si girò di scatto e mosse un passo verso Nora: respirava delicata come un uccellino.

Tornò indietro, le diede le spalle, aprì il cassetto della credenza e frugò tra i vecchi farmaci.

Paracetamolo, Butalbital, Ossicodone.

Premette assieme le compresse con un martello e così facendo svegliò Nora

“Cosa stai facendo?”

“Preparo la merenda”

La sua grande schiena pareva tesa in ogni muscolo.

Li mescolò assieme e li sciolse nel bicchiere di latte che stava scaldando sul vecchio fornello da campeggio.

Poi si sedette accanto a Nora e le accarezzò la testa.

Le porse il bicchiere.

“Che cosa è Gio?”

“Latte” disse lui guardando i suoi occhi stanchi e le piccole vene blu sulle sue palpebre pallide.

“Grazie” mormorò lei.

Bevve, tossì lievemente e poi si rimise giù, abbandonando la sua mano sulla grande coscia nuda di lui.

Giovanni le si rannicchiò accanto, le passò le labbra tra i capelli fini, le baciò gli occhi e le leccò le labbra ancora umide, poi ingoiò le pastiglie che teneva nel pugno chiuso.

Giovanni le prese la mano e si concentrò a lungo sui loro respiri, poi smise di sentire e nella casa fu silenzio.

I poliziotti bussarono alla porta, ma nessuno rispose.

Bussarono ancora e rispose solo un'allodola col suo trillare misterioso.

Bastò una spinta per aprire la porta priva di serratura.

I poliziotti entrarono con i loro pesanti stivali, il legno

She scratched her shoulder and looked at the sun dying outside the window.

He kissed her again and again.

After, they were silent, listening to the animals outside in the woods preparing for the night.

The sun shone on the worn wood through the shutters. Nora had fallen asleep between the tangled sheets.

Giovanni got up, taking care to be quiet, and pulled up the shutters to look at the long road that led downhill into the town.

At the end of the forest, beyond the uncultivated fields, beyond a low hill, lay a tiny golden town, inaccessible, with its laws and its people taboo: the countryside. And behold, from beyond the hill, a little hat waving, followed by another, which brought with them two small heads and two small blue police uniforms. They moved awkwardly, slowed down by the mud: they were two solitary figures in the sun, but to Giovanni it seemed like the entire village was marching up the road with them. They had torches and pitchforks and prepared tear him and his Nora to pieces, his Nora sleeping in the whiteness of milk hued sheets. He turned suddenly and took a step towards Nora, who was breathing delicately like a small bird.

He came away from the window, turned his back to her, opened the armoire and rummaged through the old medications. Paracetamol, Butalbital, Oxycodone. He crushed up the tablets with a hammer and when he did, he woke up Nora.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m making us a snack.”

scricchiolò, i mobiletti di vetro tintinnarono, la casa era inondata di calda luce arancio e granelli di polvere fluttuavano nel sole.

Alcuni orsacchiotti in un angolo guardavano i due poliziotti scomposti e disarticolati.

Abbandonati sul comodino stavano dei fogli appiccicati con la colla a formare un piccolo libro, sul primo foglio una mano infantile aveva disegnato un orso con un retino da farfalle, tra i piedi sporchi di fango dell'orso la manina aveva scritto "La storia di Nora" per poi ricoprirla di brillantini gialli.

E al centro della stanza loro.

Nudi, dormienti, morti.

Parevano due animali innocenti in un nido.

Un animale grande come un orso e uno piccolo come un passero che quasi scompariva tra i peli del suo petto.

Avvolti dalla calda luce del tramonto, immobili.

"È sempre l'amico di famiglia" disse il primo poliziotto.

"Che schifo" disse il secondo componendo un numero sul cellulare e rimanendo in attesa.

Era disgustoso e ripugnante, ma Nora non lo seppe, e morì una volta sola.

His broad back seemed to hold tension in every muscle. He mixed the pills together and dissolved them in the glass of milk that he was warming up on the old camping stove. Then he sat next to Nora and stroked her head. He handed her the glass.

“What is this, Gio?”

“Milk,” he said, looking at her tired eyes and little blue veins on her pale eyelids.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

He drank, coughed slightly and then sat down again, letting his hand drop onto his large naked thigh.

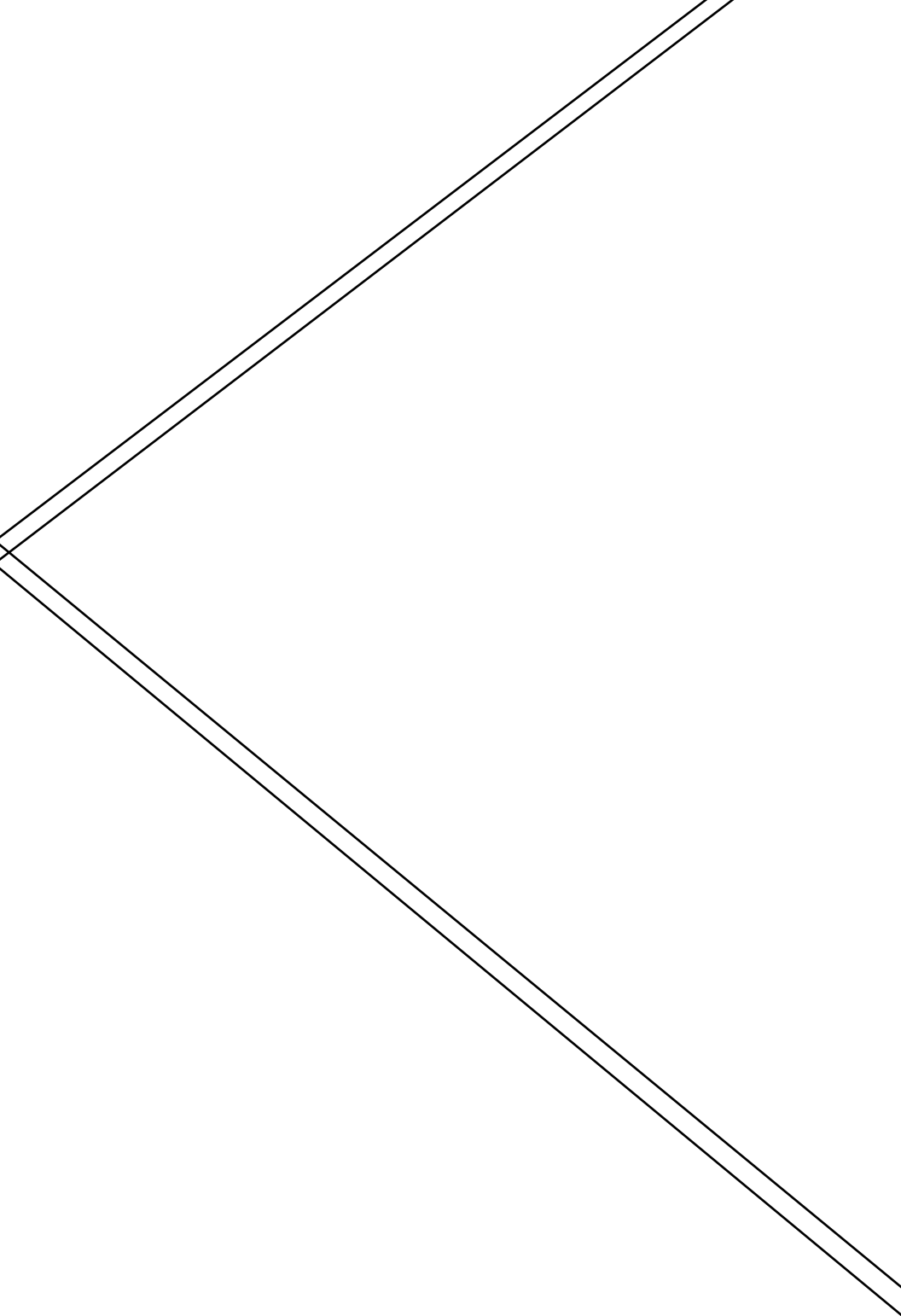
Giovanni curled up next to her, ran his lips through her fine hair, he kissed her eyes and licked her still damp lips, then swallowed the pills he still held in his closed fist. Giovanni took her hand and concentrated for a long time on their breathing, then he stopped listening and there was silence in the house.

The policeman knocked on the door, but no one answered. They knocked again and only a lark responded with its mysterious trill.

One push was enough to open the unlatched door.

The policeman entered with their heavy boots, the wood floors creaked, the glass cabinets rattled, the house was bathed in warmth, and specks of dust floated in the orange light of the sun.

There were some teddy bears in a corner of the room, watching the policemen, they were tattered and disjointed. Abandoned on the beside table were some papers stuck together with glue to form a small makeshift book, on the first sheet a child's hand had



drawn a bear with a butterfly net. Between his dirty feet, standing in the mud, the child's hand had written "Nora's Story" and then covered it with yellow glitter.

And in the center of the room, there they were. Naked, sleeping, dead.

They looked like two innocent animals in a nest.

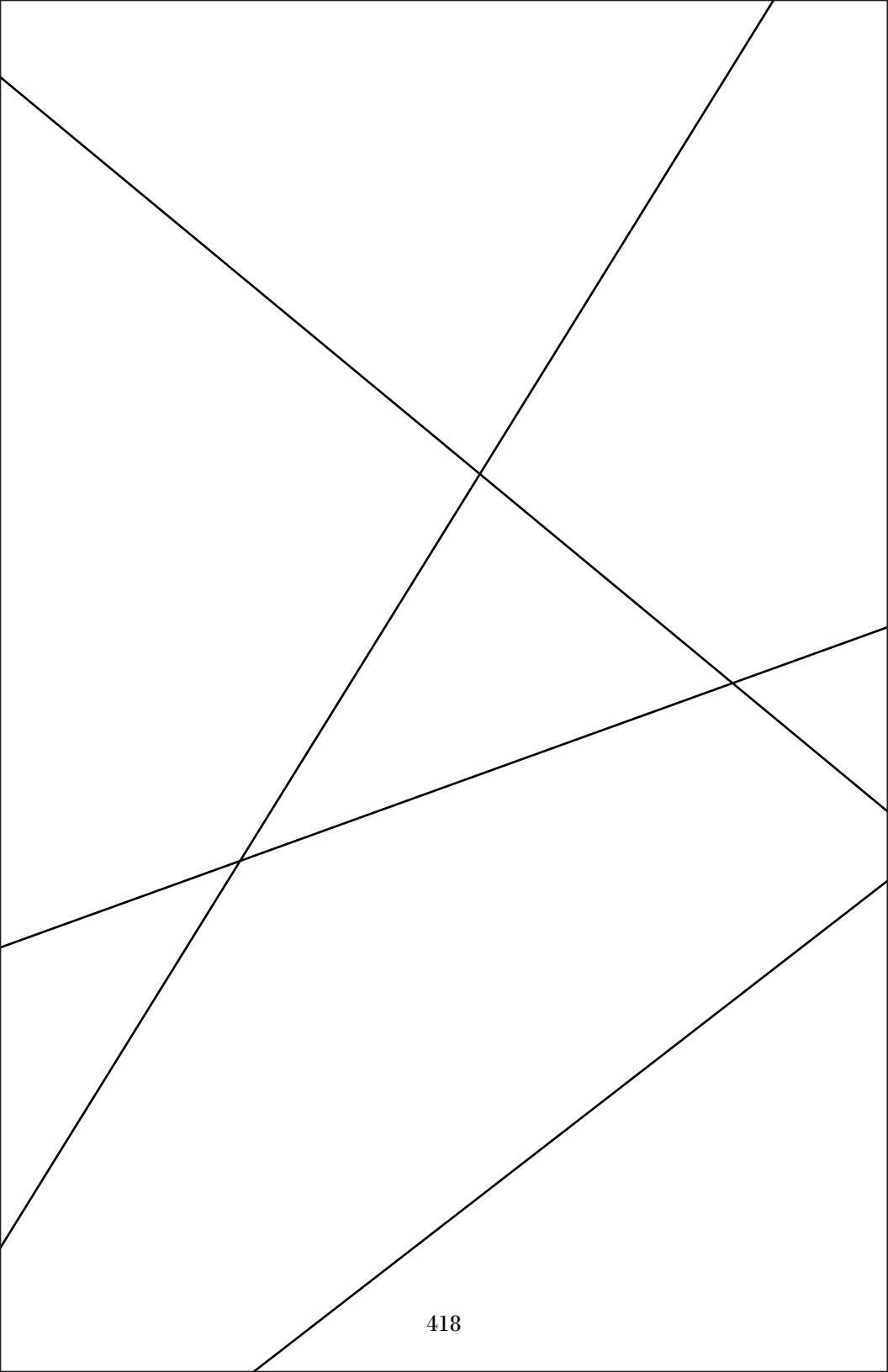
An animal as large as a bear and one as small as a sparrow, almost disappearing into the hair on his chest.

Wrapped in the warm light of sunset, still.

"He's always been a friend of the family," said the first police officer.

"How vile," said the second one, dialing a number on his cellphone and waiting.

It was both vile and repugnant, but Nora didn't know it, and she died only once.



The page features a minimalist design with several thin, black lines that intersect to form various geometric shapes, including triangles and quadrilaterals, across the white background. These lines are positioned in the upper and middle sections of the page, creating a sense of depth and structure.

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The page features a minimalist design with several thin, black lines that intersect to form various geometric shapes, including triangles and quadrilaterals. The lines are scattered across the page, creating a sense of dynamic movement and structure. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant, and the page number is centered at the bottom.

participating
institutions

The Master of Fine Arts Writing Program at Columbia University School of the Arts was founded in 1967, and is one of the foremost creative writing programs in the United States. Students in the Program pursue degrees in fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction, with the option to pursue a joint course of study in literary translation. The Program is distinguished by the intellectual rigor of its curriculum, the eminence of many of the writers on faculty, and the significant number of its alumni who have gone on to become eminent authors in their own right.

The Escuela de Literatura Creativa at Universidad Diego Portales was founded in 2003, the first of its kind in Chile. The program offers an undergraduate major and two graduate programs in which students pursue degrees in publishing or writing. Translation workshops are part of the curriculum in all three programs. The students work with noteworthy writers from the Spanish-speaking world and beyond, thanks to Cátedra Abierta UDP, international lecture series in homage of Roberto Bolaño that has invited more than 150 writers.

Founded in Turin in 1994, Scuola Holden is an institution devoted to training storytellers through courses spanning multiple disciplines of writing and performing arts. Scuola Holden also serves as a cultural production center in Italy by way of collaborations with schools, universities, book-shops, publishers, and festivals throughout Italy and Europe.

Established in 2011, the MFA in Creative Writing at Instituto Vera Cruz focuses in two areas: Fiction and Nonfiction, with secondary concentrations in Writing for Children and Young Adults and Creative Writing Methodology. Vera Cruz was founded in 1963 and started offering undergraduate and graduate courses in 2005. The MFA has 80 students now enrolled in an intensive two-year course, with a faculty of award-winning and recognized writers. It is among the most renowned in Brazil.

The Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig is a central institution at the Universität Leipzig, providing the only degree course for writers in the making in Germany since 1995. Alongside the three-year BA in Creative Writing, focusing on poetry, prose, and drama, an MA in Creative Writing has also been offered since winter of 2009. This is a two-year degree designed as a novel workshop. The aim of the program is to provide students with highly professional writing skills and creative competence, along with a knowledge of literary history and theory.

Founded in 2009, the Creative Writing program at Fudan University is the first professional master's degree program in mainland China devoted to cultivating literary talents. Unlike traditional academic programs in literary studies, this program is explicitly designed to educate creative practitioners of the literary arts. Graduates of the program go on to work at the highest level as writers, teachers, researchers, critics, journalists and other media professionals in a wide range of professional contexts including arts organizations, theaters, colleges and universities, museums, scholarly institutes, media, and government-related agencies.

The Master in Creative Writing at Université Paris 8 was founded in September 2013, with the goal of allowing students the opportunity to start or continue a work of literary creation. While programs of this type are common, especially in the United States and Great Britain, they are still rare in the French academic system. The Master in Creative Writing is therefore destined to play a pioneering role in the Francophone world.

