

word for word

parola per parola

palavra por palavra

一字换一字

wort für wort

palabra por palabra

mot pour mot

2022

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palavra por palavra

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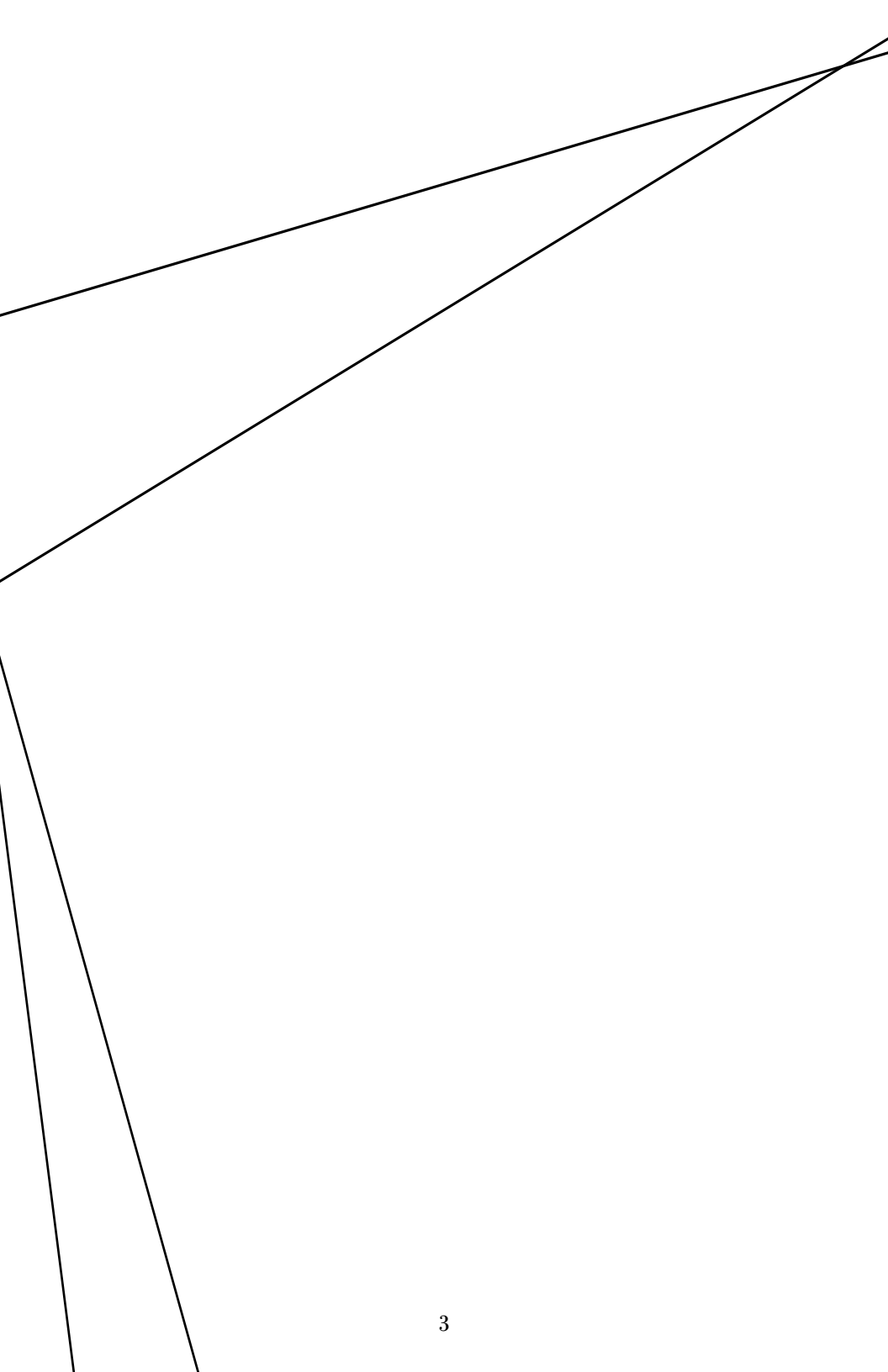


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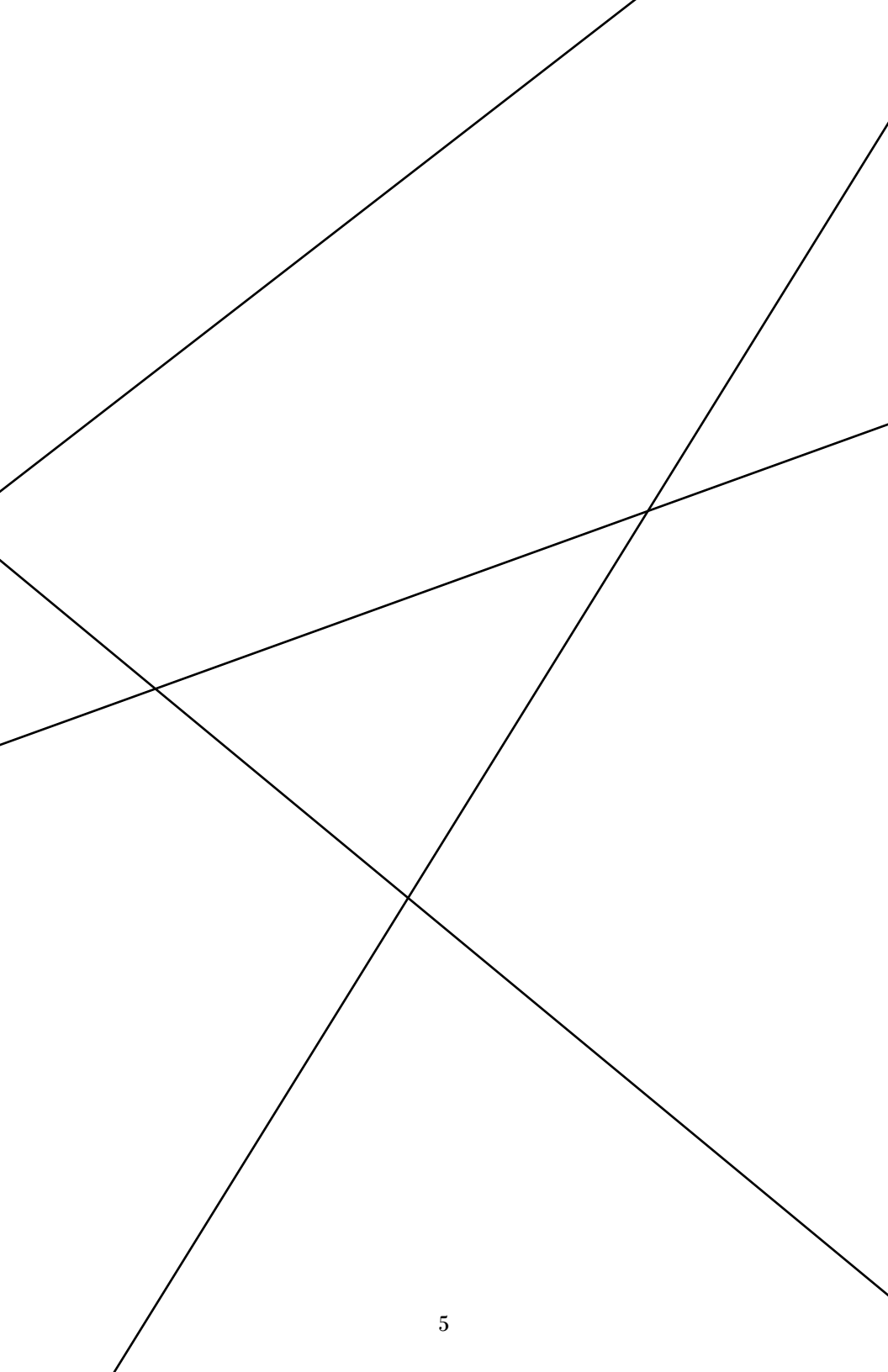
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FOREWORD

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-IDEIC 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.

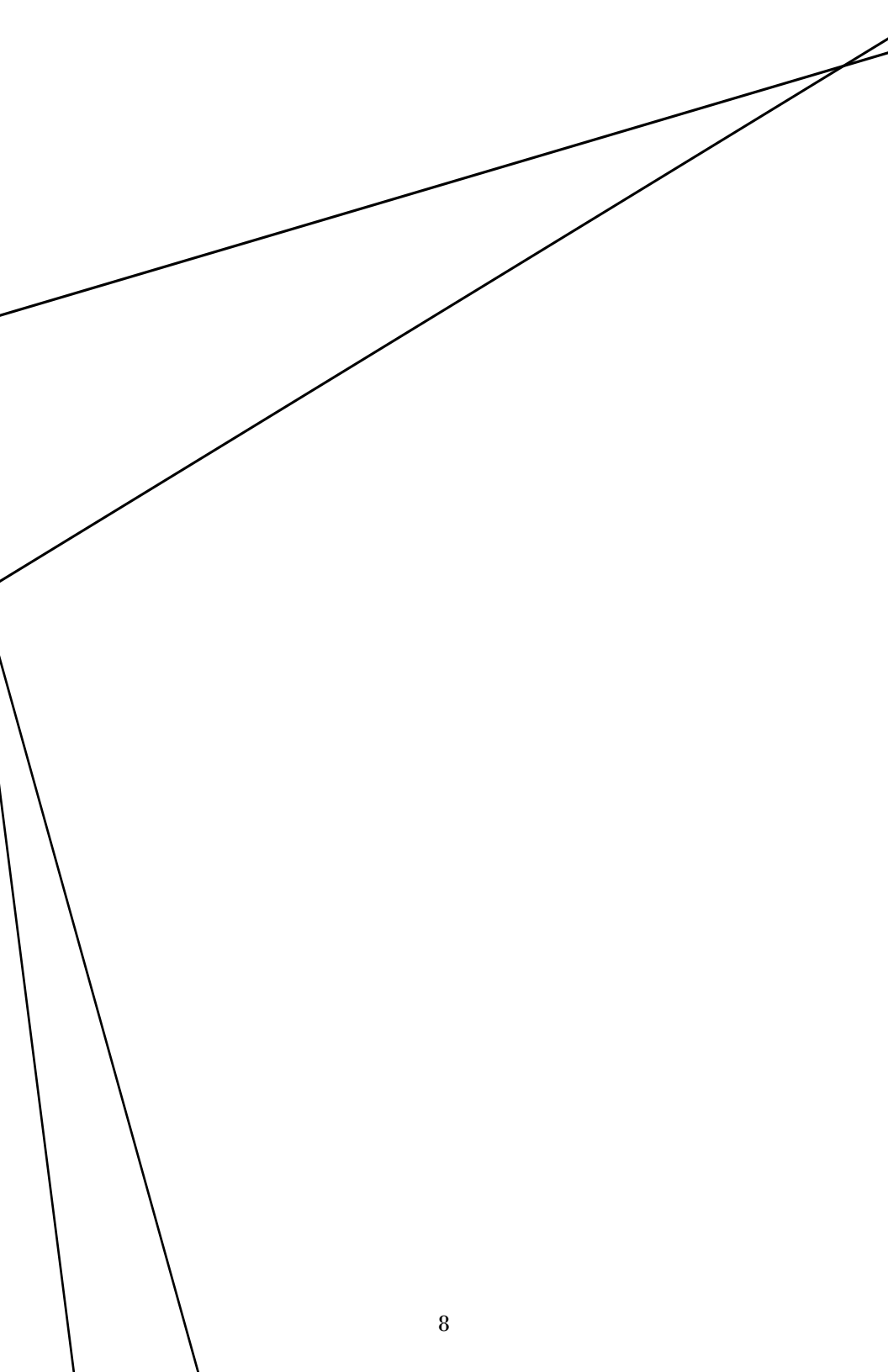
In 2016, the Word for Word program expanded to include a collaborative translation workshop that pairs Writing Program students with partners at two of these same institutions—the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig and Scuola Holden—as well as new ones: Université Paris 8 in Paris, France; Universidad 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 2022 Word for Word Workshop in the Columbia School of the Arts and their Chinese-, French-, German-, Italian, Portuguese- and Spanish-language partners in Shanghai, Paris, Leipzig, Turin, São Paulo, and Santiago. This ninth in our series of Word for Word anthologies

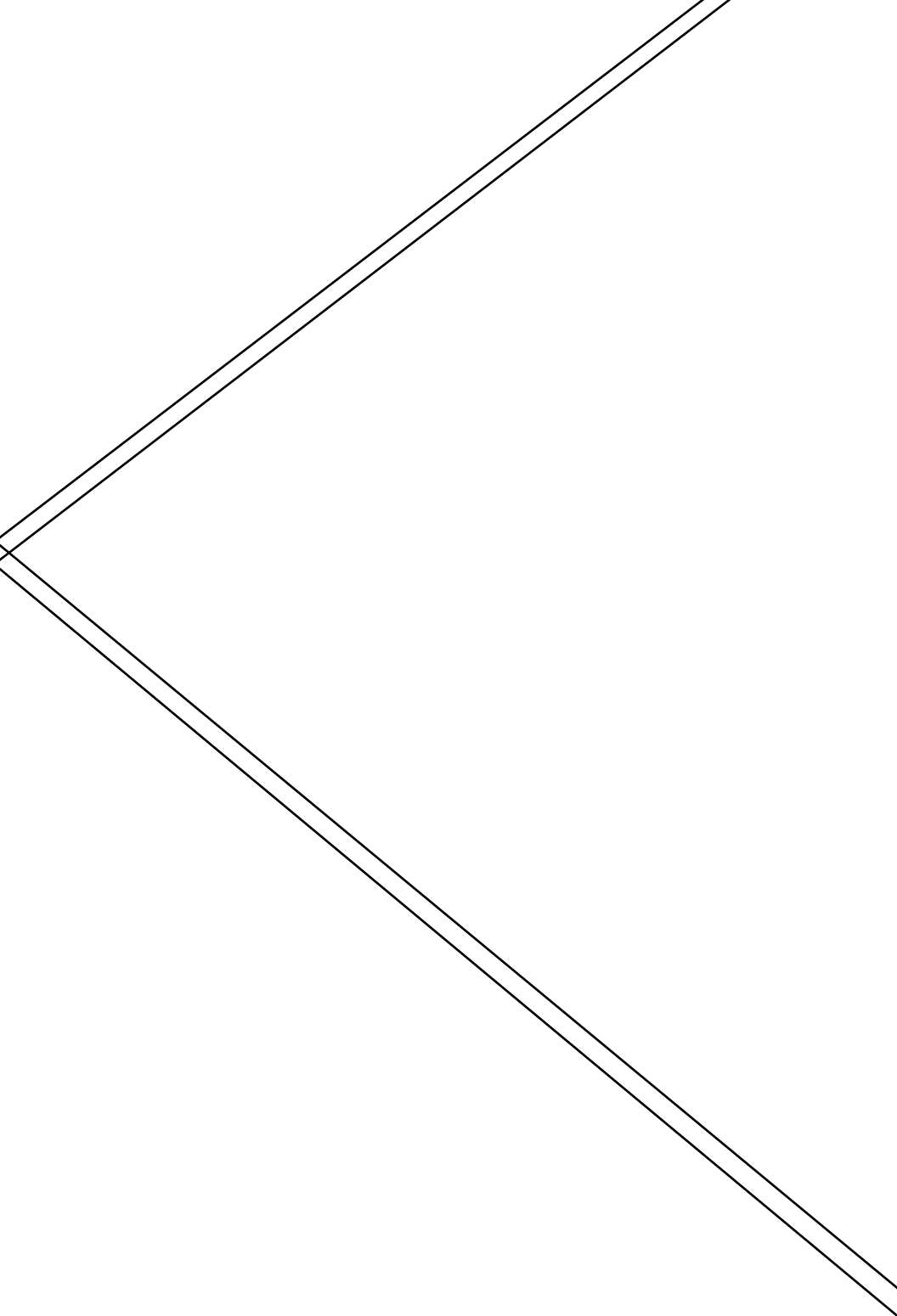
The page features several thin, black, diagonal lines that intersect to form a complex geometric pattern. One line runs from the top-left towards the bottom-right. Another runs from the top-right towards the bottom-left. A third line runs from the bottom-left towards the top-right. These lines create a sense of movement and structure across the white background.

collects the 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 challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on travel we've experienced, we are grateful for the opportunity this project gives us each year 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 the borders that divide us and strive for a global community based not on political or economic interests 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



Translator's Note

The short story “Lost Horse Mine” by Kevin Wang reminds me of some real masters such as Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, and even Kazuo Ishiguro. No doubt, this story is brilliant: elegant, charming, and delicate. This fiction reveals an acute understanding of the lives of Chinese immigrants in America. Their dreams, illusions, and imaginations are composed into a complicated literary image that reaches an ambiguous and mysterious point between history and reality, which is a most essential ability for a fine young writer.

When I was translating this story, the toughest challenge was to understand the main character. After communicating with Kevin, I started realizing that this story was more like an epic imagined by an adorable and innocent young “cowboy”. In the literary world, there are prototypes of these kinds of stories such as *Don Quixote*. Therefore, I tried to mimic an epic storyteller in my translation. I hope that my choice of elaborate words could create an atmosphere like a dream—a story told by a boy describing an imaginary world.

From my perspective, the experience of a gap between reality and imagination may be cause for suffering, yet only through enduring such suffering can writers and their characters find the courage to create a new world. In this story, we see the young cowboy pursued by historic ghosts. His naive and frivolous adventure is no match against an uncanny castle built by past hands. Despite this cowboy's failed adventure, I admired his courage. I think this character will continue to discover himself and his world, and so will Kevin Wang.

KEVIN WANG

LOST HORSE MINE

For a long time, I'd wanted to know what people were talking about when they talked about the "American west." My summer internship had just ended and I knew someone in LA with an apartment I could squat in for a week. A handful of novels had given me a cynical idea of their city: brutal, deluded, mill of make-believe. LA's saving grace, though, was its proximity to enchantment, to the myths of mobility and escape. One needed only to drive a few hours out to experience what one writer calls "California before the cowboys." There was no place like that around where I lived in New York, not in the Catskills or the Hudson Valley. I imagined I could play the cowboy. Not the cattle ranching kind, but the type that wore a poncho and chased down outlaws.

Looking at the mirror, I slipped on a khaki shirt that I'd bought when I started college and never wore. It was close to what I was going for, so I added it to the growing stack of shirts in the luggage, knowing I had to leave the designer brands behind to avoid certain judgments.

On a weekday morning, with the palm trees still glowing from daybreak, I left my friend's place and steered toward the hills. The backseat was filled with snacks and a gallon of water. One gallon, not two, for the challenge of scarcity. I could be tough like my grandparents, who survived two famines and three migrations before father got rich from the ore processing business.

The rental car from LAX accelerated with a roar that would have made me guilty if it hadn't been for the other cars doing the same. I followed their lead, passing

中文译者 余东昊

失马矿

很长一段时间，我都想知道人们谈论“美国西部”时在谈论什么。暑期实习刚刚结束，而我认识一个人，正好在洛杉矶有间能挤上一周的公寓。几本小说曾使我对他们这座城市有一种偏见：凶狠，狡黠，混沌着似是而非、弄命使运的风气。不过，尽管如此，洛杉矶那种触手可及的迷魅，颠簸与逃亡的神话，仍是它残存的优雅。一个人，只要开上几小时的车就能体味某个作家所称的“前牛仔加州”。在我纽约的居所附近，无论是卡茨基尔，还是哈德逊河谷，没有一个地方是像这样的。我想象着自己能做个牛仔。不是放牛的，而是披着斗篷，追击法外之徒那种。

看着镜子，我套了一件上大学时买的却从未穿过的卡其色衬衫。它跟我要做的事情挺配。我将它放在行李中一堆越来越厚的衬衫里面。得离那些大牌子远点，以免受人偏见。

一个平日的清晨，棕榈树还闪着破晓时分的光芒，我离开朋友的住所驶向群山。后座堆满零食，还有一加仑的水。一加仑，为了挑战缺水的困难，多一加仑都不要。父亲凭矿探生意发财之前，祖父母从两次饥荒和三次迁徙中活下来，我也能像他们一样坚韧。

要不是其它车也一样，这辆从洛杉矶国际机场租来的车给油时的轰响得让我愧疚得多¹。我跟着它们，超过一个近我们一半速度的白色旅行车。为了把注意力从胸间的搏撞上分开，我试着打开电台，听到一些祝福语圣音²

a white station wagon going nearly half our speed. To distract myself from the pounding in my chest, I tried the radio and, after hearing ecstatic voices, turned it back off.

A yellow sign on the side of the highway read:

AVOID OVERHEATING
TURN OFF A/C
NEXT 30 MILES

I have never ventured beyond the cold climes of my schools, so I obeyed for fear of catastrophic failure. My armpits were soon soaked in sweat, though I barely registered this. An enormous tug of gravity seemed to emanate from the elephantine hills. After slipping past the mess of malls and gas stations, what was left was strikingly simple, half beige, half blue.

In the bathroom of the Cottonwood Visitor Center, I was admiring the severity of the “Don’t Die Today” sign before a park ranger came in and joined me. We sized each other up across the urinals. The plastic partitions in between were so insubstantial that we had a full view of each other’s costume. The gold badge and boxy green pants made him look like a camp counselor. Under the wide-brimmed hat was a slim face, his chin framed by a pubey beard that grew in patches.

“How you doin’?” he asked.

“Trying to stay cool,” I said.

I went around him for the sink, staying clear of the gun on his hip.

In the gift shop I spun a shelf around to look at the postcards, retro illustrations in the optimistic style of WPA posters. A beat-up binder for guest sign-ins was open to today’s empty page. I picked up the blue ballpoint and added my name, having decided that I did not want to leave here without trace.

The ranger found me looking at a paper map of the park and asked if I wanted suggestions on where to

后，将它关掉了。

一个高速路边的黄色标牌写道：

前方30英里内

避免过热

关掉空调³

我从没冒险越过我读过的学校里的那些寒严之地⁴，如今也就屈服了对可能惨败的恐惧。尽管几乎没法接受，但是，我的腋窝很快就被汗水浸透了。一股巨大的引力似乎从群象般的山脉显生出来。穿过盘乱的购物中心和加油站，留在身后的，是一种简了得令人惊诧的一半米白，与一半蓝。

在卡顿伍德⁵游客中心的洗手间，我唾赏着严肃兮兮的标识“今日勿死”，直到公园巡查员进来，走到身边。透过小便池，我们相互打量。间隔的塑料挡板很虚，我们完全能看到彼此的扮装。金色徽章与方方正正的绿裤子让他看起来像个野营向导。宽檐帽下是一张纤瘦的脸，阴毛般的胡须星斑丛生，框着他的下巴。

“你怎么样？”他说。

“还不错，”我说。

我绕过他，向水池走去，和他胯上的枪保持距离。

在礼品店，我转着一副旋转架，看着那些明信片，那些公共事业振兴署海报乐观主义风格的怀旧图绘⁶。游客登记册让一只破破烂烂的活页夹夹着，敞着今日的空白页。我拿过蓝色圆珠笔写上名字，决定不想无所踪离地离开这里。

那个巡查员发觉我在看公园的纸质地图，问我是否要些出行建议。“为了你的安全，你或许想听听。”他从他的衬衫口袋拿出一根笔，简快地圈出我能走马观花的地方。

go. “You might want to hear them for your safety.” He took a pen from his shirt pocket and drew quick circles around places I could swing by.

I put a finger on the route to the Lost Horse Mine, a place I actually wanted to see. It was one of the abandoned things here, an artifact that a time-traveling cowboy from the 1800s would have paid homage to. “How about the mine?” I said.

“That thing? A whole loop takes half a day,” he said. “Just be sure to get out before sundown.”

Standing in a cactus patch, I felt a dry wind whip up around me. It was noon and the sky was cloudless. Far from being empty, the place teemed with growing things, the stubbornest characters of the plant kingdom. This harsh openness was what attracted the jaded artists, desert divas, and libertarians, or, in parts farther out, meth cooks, people who came to bury bodies, leaving dishonored beings behind to haunt these hills.

Along the path, dusty signs warned not to veer off the park’s boarded walkway, but what’s the harm in seeing a cactus up close? As I took a step onto the sand, a child coughed like an alarm clock somewhere on the other side of the patch. The guest book had misled me into thinking I’d be the only visitor this morning. The wind carried along their murmurs and laughter, a camera shutter, a door slam.

Back on the road, the other visitors rode ahead of me in a white station wagon. A scenic pulloff came into view where I could park and be educated by the signs. The car in front stopped too. A man and a kid stepped out. Both wore clunky hiking boots. They moved lightly, almost unsure of the ground, and whether from the shimmer of the asphalt’s heat or dehydration, I saw their forms blur along the direction of their motion, as if their bodies were not fully realized.

The unreal moment passed as the man held up a grey video camera and spoke a Mandarin that sounded as though he were narrating a documentary, a sound that

我将一根手指放在去失马矿的路线上，一个我真正想去看看的地方。它是这里被遗弃的东西之一，一个从1800年代穿越来的牛仔将致以崇高敬意的人迹。“这矿怎么样？”我说。

“那玩意儿？走一趟得半天，”他说。“确保日落前能赶出来吧。”

站在一小丛仙人掌旁，我感到身边激起一股干燥的风。那时是正午，天空少云。这里远非空旷之地，满是活物，那些植物王国最顽强的家伙们。正是这份粗砺的辽阔吸引着心灰意懒的艺术家，沙漠“名媛”，还有自由派，或者，更远些，制毒的，来掩埋尸体的，将那些脏秽的东西抛诸脑后，游猎这群山的人们。

沿着道路，积满尘灰的标牌警称不要偏离公园里铺着木板的人行道，可是，离近了看一株仙人掌又有什么坏处呢？当我踏上沙土，在另一边的什么地方，一个孩子闹钟般地咳起来。我让导览手册误导，以为自己是今早唯一一个游客了。风将他们的低语与笑带过来，一声快门，一声门响。

回到路上，一辆白色旅行车里的另一些游客走到了我的前面。一处观景点露出来，我可以在这里停车，还能在宣传牌前受受教。那辆车也在前面停下来。一个男人和一个小孩走出来。两人都穿着肥笨的登山靴。他们移动得很轻，几乎是试探着地面，并且，不知是否由于沥青热气闪烁的微光，还是缺水，我看见他们的身廓顺着动作的方向模糊了，好像身体不完全实在似的。

当男人举起一个灰色的摄像机，说着像给一部纪录片旁白的普通话的时候，这不真实的时刻才过去。一个声音碎灭了我沉浸的幻想：“我们已经来到另一个停车区了。据说以前这里有水。岸边住着印第安人。”他缓缓转着身体，面向整片景色。

“印第安人是印度来的，”男孩说。他不断地跳

shattered my fantasies of immersion: “We’ve come to another parking area. It says there used to be water here. Indians lived along the riverbank.” He turned slowly for the panorama.

“Indians are from India,” the boy said. He kept jumping into the frame to make faces at the camera until the man shooed him away.

A woman got out from the driver’s seat. She also had on hiking boots. She looked at me and her brows sunk into perplexity. I returned the look and thought, what are *you* doing here? Not wanting to break out into tedious talk about our native provinces, I walked the long way to my car.

There wasn’t much of a human presence on the road, just signs. They cautioned against flash floods and the feeding of coyotes. The first Joshua trees started showing up after another mile. Joshua, a figure I’d learned about in Catholic school, was handed the baton from Moses to lead his people out of the wilderness. I could not remember whether Joshua got to settle down—whoever named these trees after him either did it out of optimism or spite.

I’d lathered on a dollop of sunscreen every time I stepped out of the car, though I hadn’t bothered to spread it around. It sat on my face in chunks. After parking on the side of Park Boulevard, I flipped open the sun visor. I looked like Queen Elizabeth the First. I evened out the chunks and remembered the coronation scene in *Elizabeth*, the one with Cate Blanchett where her ladies-in-waiting worked paste onto her face as she pronounced: “I have become a virgin.”

The trees were shielded by thousands of little daggers, yet their postures were open. Their limbs reached out in a manner that was either whimsical or tortured. I ran my hand along the trunk and, soothed by the crackle of bark, continued absentmindedly until a splinter dug into my hand. I howled and leapt back. In the car, I dug out tweezers from my bag of toiletries.

着，让脸出现在摄像机里，直到男人将他推走。

一个女人从驾驶座里走出来。她也穿着登山靴。她看着我，眉毛困惑地拧作一处。我回敬她的目光，思忖着，你在这里做什么？我不愿挑起那种关于各自原籍省县的沉闷的交谈，便长长地走回去，上了车。

路上没有太多人迹，只有路标。它们义正辞严地面对暴洪与郊狼的餐猎。又一英里后，第一片约书亚树开始显露出来。约书亚，一位我在天主教学校学到的人物，从摩西手中接过指挥棒，带领他的子民走出荒野。我记不清约书亚是不是得其所终了——不管是谁，以他命名这些树的人，要么出于乐观主义，要么就是报怨。

每次从车里走出去，我都会涂上一小圈防晒霜，但不怎么在意将它抹匀。它在我的脸上结成了块。在林荫大道泊车场的边上停下后，我将遮阳板的小镜子翻开。我看起来就像伊丽莎白女王一世。我摊平双颊，记起《伊丽莎白》里加冕典礼的一幕，那场凯特·布兰切特⁸的戏，女官将粉浆⁹涂在她的脸上时，她开口颂言：“我已成处子。”¹⁰

这些约书亚树被数以千计的细小匕首般的树皮围覆着，姿态却是开放的。它们的枝杈以一种奇异或受折磨的模样伸着。我的手抚着树干，树皮噼啪作响，我心绪平静，始终心不在焉，直到一片木碎扎了进来。我叫着跳回去。在车里，我从盥洗袋翻出镊子。乌鸦尖嚎着，从巨石上飞起。

我愈攀愈高，向失马矿而去。郁沉的脚步间，我想着之前看见的家庭，读宣传牌时，他们脸上冷木的困惑，围着拥在一起就像一张深咖色的我父母的照片。

群山从米白变成鲜褐色。最初，那座矿机看起来像个小棚屋。接着它才露出实貌，一种密封在盒子里的，由锈朽的钢与沉重的木材构成的机器。它的体积和质料，让它变得比我想象的更有些特别。全不像州北¹¹的谷仓那样

Crows cackled as they flew up from the boulders.

I hiked on a gradual incline toward the Lost Horse Mine. Between pensive steps I thought about the family I saw earlier, the stony perplexity on their faces as they read the sign, huddled around it like a sepia-toned image of my parents.

The hills turned from beige to russet. At first, the mine looked like a small shack. Then it came into definition, a machine of rusted steel and heavy timber enclosed in a box. Its solidity and substance made it somehow more particular than what I'd imagined. Instead of being cracked and rotten like the barns upstate, which looked like they could be blown down by the wind, the planks that made up the walls did not seem that old and still had a yellow sheen.

The chain-link fence around the structure was as useless as one of those ropes guarding a museum exhibit. The bottom of one section was folded up and made enough space for someone to crawl through. The wheel on the side of the mill was covered with the etchings of hearts, dates, Chris, Rob, Megan. A sign by the fence read: stay out and stay alive.

There was a time when the valley was filled with the screeches and groans of this machine as it pulverized rock to powder. Like the cactus patch from earlier, this thing now also belonged to the park. Then, there was the problem of this place being called a "park," as if it were owned by the Walt Disney Company. Nothing really owned the land. So who was I within its borders, what kind of subject?

Cowboys did not ask these kinds of questions. There was not a soul from here to the horizon. I got down on all fours and scampered into the grounds. There must be something I could do here, a test to prove my daring. The entrance to the mill was boarded up, but through a sliver in the wall, I saw a dark space inside where people used to work and heard the beckoning groan of old ghosts from behind the wall.

开裂腐坏，看着能被风吹倒似的，那作墙的木板并不像那么旧，仍然有一种黄色的光泽。

绕着这座建筑的链式围栏像那种博物馆保护展品的绳子一样没什么用处。底部有一处折了起来，留出的空当正够一人爬进去。矿机一侧的轮子上，覆满了心形、日期、克里斯多芬、罗勃、梅根一类的刻痕。围栏旁的一处标记写道：保持远离，保护生命。

曾经有段时间，这架机器将石块碾打成粉的时候，山谷间充斥着它的厉声与哀鸣。就像早先的仙人掌丛，这东西现在也属于公园。那么，把这地方叫“公园”就成了一个问题，好像它属于华特·迪士尼公司一样。没谁真的拥有这块土地。所以在它的边界以内，我又是谁呢，是哪种类型的物品呢？

牛仔可不会问这种问题。在这里是神不知，鬼不觉。我四肢着地，扭蹦着爬了进去。一定有什么能在这儿做的，一项证明勇气的试炼。矿机的入口敞开着，但借墙里的一条裂缝，我看见内里人们曾工作的黑暗之地，听到墙后苍老的鬼魂诱召的鸣嚎。

我寻找着上面的踏脚点。墙里嵌着些罅隙，我爬上去便能透过它开放的上顶瞥见其中的构造。我在挑战我的肉体，挑战那些律条，却又是完全安于所规的。我将我的脚放入第一条裂缝。一只整路跟随着我的苍蝇让其它两只引到一起去了。我挥手将它们赶走。到下一条裂缝时，我想到了破伤风，那些所有的或许附生在这些表面上的细菌。

那是第三条裂口，在我的重量下，尽管看起来和其它缝隙坚固无异，还是崩断了。疼痛撼穿骨头，我的视线一片模糊。我在大庭广众之下摔过跤，好在如今身边一个人也没有，所以也是种宽慰。我透过卡其衬衫看着起起伏伏的腹部，现在盖着沙土。没摔破，只是手和腿遍布着擦痕，右膝有块深口，一小张血皮像道门似的豁开。后面是

I searched for footholds. There were slats nailed to the wall, and I could climb up to peek past the roofless top at the innards of the machine. I was testing my body, testing the law, all within reason. I put my foot on the first slat. A fly, which had followed me this whole way, was joined by two others. I waved them away. Reaching for the next slat, I thought of tetanus, all the bacteria that might be thriving on these surfaces.

It was the third slat that, under my weight, chose to give, though it had seemed as sturdy as the others. My vision blurred as pain shook the bone. I'd fallen on my ass before in public so it was a relief to have no one around. I watched my stomach rise and fall through the khaki shirt, now coated with sand. There had been no crack, just scrapes all over my hands and legs, and a gash on my right knee, a flap of skin that opened like a door. Behind that was either a sliver of fat or bone.

The wind was picking up and I shivered at the day's first hint of cold. I hopped to the fence and rolled back over, where I drank the last sip of water from the bottle in my drawstring pack. I had to get to a pharmacy. Jumping one-legged every few yards I would test the other foot to see whether I could put any weight on it.

Before starting the hike, I'd seen a sign, *lot closes at sundown*. Would there be a park ranger waiting at the end of the trail, one foot tapping? I remembered the gun on the ranger's holster, how easy it would be to see it as a prop from another century. But no, it held live rounds and implied something that shattered the innocence of our exchange. There were dangerous things he needed to protect his park from.

A pack of figures emerged on the path I'd taken to get here. My jaw dropped when I saw them clearly. It was the same family from earlier, the one whose car I'd followed. Were we so similar that they'd also chosen to visit the mine at this hour?

The low sun gave the slopes an eerie glow. The child bounced along as the other two walked steadily up

一片脂肪，要么就是骨面。

风大起来，我在这日的初寒中发着抖。我单腿跳向围栏，滚回去，喝下了拉绳包里水瓶的最后一口水。我必须去个药店。每跳过几码，我就要看看另一条腿能不能承些重量。

远足前我看过一张告示牌，停车场日落关闭。小径尽头会有个一边等着，一边轻轻叩着脚的公园管理员吗？我记起来他皮套里的手枪，多容易就能把它当成一柄来自其它世纪的道具啊。但并不，它上着实弹，暗示着某种破坏我们交谈的清白的东西。他得保护他的公园免受那些危险的东西之害。

一团人形在我到这里的路上露现出来。看清他们以后，我的下巴掉了下来。那正是之前遇见的一家人，我跟着他们的车的那家人。当他们也选择参观这座矿的时候，这一刻我们竟如此相像吗？

低低的太阳使山坡闪着怪诞可怖的光亮。那两人拄着登山杖，稳稳地攀上来，孩子蹦蹦跳跳地随着他们。我掸掉衬衫的灰尘，按下膝盖那块皮，蹒跚地向着他们走去，动作间尽是漫不经心。

“你怎么了？”女人用普通话说道。她似乎肯定这是我们共通的语言——直觉，或是某种我举止模式里无法错淆的标志。我不知道是不是被冒犯到了，因为我做这个国家的公民已经很多年了。

“我绊倒了，”我说，将血从胫部擦去。“当心点。”

他们要通知附近的一家医院或游客中心，兴许能派个人过来。我当然拒绝了，坚称那只是刮伤。“我车里有绷带，”我确定地说。男孩大笑着过来抱住一截枯树干，尽管这突如其来的热情使他一阵猛咳。

“你要点儿水吗？”父亲问。

“不了，”我说。

with hiking poles. I dusted off my shirt, pressed down on the flap of knee skin, and hobbled toward them with as much nonchalance as the movement allowed.

“What happened to you?” The woman said in Mandarin. She seemed sure that this was our shared language—instinct, or some unmistakable sign in my mannerisms. I didn’t know whether to be offended, since I’d been a citizen of this country for years.

“I tripped,” I said, wiping at the blood on my shin. “Be careful.”

They offered to call a nearby hospital or the visitor center, which might be able to send someone over. Of course I declined, insisting that it was a scratch. “I have bandages in my car,” I assured. The boy laughed and ran over to hug a barren trunk, though this sudden exuberance sent him into a coughing fit.

“You need some water?” The father asked.

“No,” I said.

He dug through his bag and handed me a full bottle. They lived in Los Angeles, he said, and were on a day trip like me.

The mother gave him a look. “The poles.” He blinked, then nodded and offered them to me.

“You need to save those knees more than I do,” I said.

“No, You’ll need them to get back.”

It was easiest to simply accept this kindness. We looked at the mine. The father raised his camcorder and I heard a digital shutter click.

“Why is it called lost horse?” The mother asked. “Do you know?”

I was surprised they’d missed the story at the entrance. A cowboy named Johnny Lang was camping out here some time in the 1890s and lost all his horses in the middle of the night. He travelled into the hills and, instead of horses, found gold. So he built the spot up and employed at least thirty, forty workers.

“Lose a horse, find forty more,” The child said. He was by the tree, spinning his arms from side to side

他掏着他的包，递给我一满瓶水。他们住在洛杉矶，他说，像我一样，正在一日游。

母亲看了他一眼。“登山杖。”他眨眨眼，接着点点头，将它们递给我。

“你比我更需要省着用那点膝盖骨，”我说。

“不，你必须得靠它们回去。”

直接接受这份好意是最简单的。我们看向矿井。父亲举起他的便携摄影机，我听见一下数码快门的聲音。

“为什么叫它“失马”？”母亲问。“你知道吗？”

我诧异他们错过了入口处所写的故事。1890年代的某个时候，一个名叫强尼·朗的牛仔在这里扎营并在午夜失去了所有的马。他行进山脉，没有马，却发现了金矿。所以他将这个地方建起来，雇了至少三十，四十个工人。

“丢掉一匹马，找回四十个，”小孩说。他在树边，将他的胳膊从一侧转到另一侧好像它们是意大利面。我惊讶他原来在听。“骑烈马，摔断腿，”我回道。

母亲轻声笑起来。接着她将她的下巴抬高，向着矿机，要么对我要么就是对那个孩子，说道，“那就是我们怎么在这个国家立足的，你知道的，整天对着石头晃。我们曾在一个这样的地方工作。”

当他们继续朝矿井前去时，那孩子曾短暂地折返。他毫无此前一丝的顽劣气息，并以一种超乎年岁的审慎的目光看着我。接着，他回到了父母身边。他们前后走着，相互隔着一臂距离，长长的阴影在身后，与他们一起，在转角处消逝了。

1 这里指汽车的轰鸣会让“我”意识到此种出行方式不够环保。

2 指宗教曲乐和经讲。

as though they were spaghetti. I was surprised he'd been listening. "Ride a wild horse, fall and break your leg," I replied.

The mother chuckled. Then she raised her chin at the mill and said, either to me or the child, "That's how we started in this country, you know, swinging at rocks all day. We worked in a place like this."

As they continued toward the mine, the child hung back for a moment. He had none of the air of mischief from earlier and looked at me with a precocious scrutiny. Then, he rejoined his parents. They walked ahead at an arm's distance from one another, shadows long behind them, before they vanished around a bend.

3 老型号的汽车会由于过热而故障，因此高速路边才有这种告示牌。但在这篇小说的时代背景下，汽车早已换代，只是高速路长年缺乏照管，牌子没有取换。

4 原文为古英语说法。

5 位于加利福尼亚州以北，亚利桑那州的一个城市。

6 公共事业振兴署是美国大萧条时期罗斯福总统实施新政时建立的一个机构，旨在解决失业问题。为兴盛公共事业，鼓舞人心，该机构发行的海报采用了一种乐观主义风格，感情洋溢，造型经典。如今，这种风格的海报或明信片依然在国家公园游客中心一类的地方出售，作为怀旧主义的纪念品。这一风格也会被用来调侃世事，幽默活泼。

7 传说中美国的摩尔门教徒移民将短叶丝兰命名为“约书亚树”，树的样子好像约书亚伸直的手臂。

8 著名澳大利亚女演员，曾获奥斯卡奖。

9 伊丽莎白女王一世患天花，以铅粉遮瑕。

10 这一场景出自1998年的英国电影《伊丽莎白》。伊丽莎白女王一世终生未婚，被称为“童贞女王”。

11 一般用来形容美国某些边远地区。

Translator's Note

“Little Finger” opens with one character’s warning to another on an icy mountain road. In Chinese, Luosang tells the narrator that his 命 (fate, life) is so 硬 (firm, hard) that it is liable to 克 (overcome, subdue) the lives of others. A tenacious researcher with the right resources might be able to find precedence for how a concept like 克 has been translated into English, but even then, those verbal choices may not fit the context of the story. These words, so resistant to translation, are from the oral language of fortune telling, a vast, overlapping, chaotic assortment of folk practices with no centralized source of authority. Such practices appear throughout the story: an effigy made to represent an unborn child, a sinister version of acupuncture, a cursed strand of hair. Some of these may be She Donghao’s inventions, but one can never be sure. Later in the story, a diviner uses his knowledge of feng shui to assess whether a house’s architecture is favorable to conceiving a son. His tool, a bagua (eight trigrams) compass, uses a mathematical and cosmological system as old as the *I Ching*, a divination text whose present form was assembled between the 10th and 4th centuries BC. On the other hand, the same character interprets the burning patterns of incense, a tool with no discernable origin in the classical texts, though there are numerous blog posts dedicated to its practice. Trying to translate these practices is a noticeable undoing of the metaphor of the translator as a “cultural ambassador” tasked with representing a singular culture.

There is no singular guide or key to the story’s “old customs,” just as there is no center that can hold in its moral sensibility, aside from the sense of a pervasive wickedness in its characters. Within a single page of She’s text, the dialogue might flit from the rhetoric of Buddhism, to Daoism, to Confucianism, to the ideology

of the state. None of the characters actually seem to have real spiritual aspirations. Instead, they are tossed about in a world that, though open to the supernatural, has no reliable logic or sense of causality. This quality to She's work possibly reflects his biggest literary influence, Yu Hua, an avant-garde writer who, in the 1980s, popularized postmodern and metafictional approaches to Chinese writing.

While translating this story, I mostly sat at my desk by the apartment window, a poor buffer for the quick sounds of various machines on the street. To cover them, I turned to the stark organ drone of Kali Malone's *The Sacrificial Code* and the whirl of snowstorm recordings.

余东昊

小指

洛桑说我这条命太硬，是要克死人的。

说这话的时候，我们正往川地深进，大雾锁着盘山公路，汽车抛锚了，他跳下去查看引擎，登山靴踩着冻实的地面，犁出两列冰碴子。我向外看了看，远处的松林落满了霜，崖下，五六辆轿车仰翻。上路的时候，一个老太太在山口卖防滑链，铁环像拳头那么粗。我不愿花钱，洛桑争着拿了两根。路就容一辆车过，越往上爬雪越大，车轮太滑，一个险弯没别过去，洛桑一脚急刹，车熄火了。

他回来的时候就说，你的命克我。我说，你是信佛教的，不应该说这个。他说，你要克我，我肯定把你推下去。我笑笑。

他也笑了。车摇晃地尖叫时，我就知道这趟不是好跑的。我背着相机四处拍照，险境也有过，但自恃运旺，从来都是大大咧咧。枪弹擦着我的头皮，我也是晃着腿就走了过去。死的是个毒贩。姓马的警察第一天出任务，闭着眼睛把板机扣下去了。

洛桑不知道这个故事。他那样说，是因为我告诉他：这条命是我姐给的。天色青暗，呜咽着凛峻处落鸟的断鸣。我看着后视镜挂着的毛泽东像，说，那时候，我还没生出来，我爸去寻医问药，问来一个人。

我伸手在他腰上比了比。就这么高，我说，一个男的，上来就说，你听过吗，小鬼难缠，我这样的，生来就该吃这碗饭。

都说他道行高，谁知道，我说，死马当活马医。

那时候我姐是七岁，我说，七岁半，刚上一年级。

**translated from the chinese by
KEVIN WANG**

LITTLE FINGER

Luosang said the fate set into motion by my birth was so unyielding it might kill him.

When we first got on the road, an elderly woman at the foot of the mountain had been selling snow chains. Each link on the chain was the size of a fist. I didn't want to spend the money, but Luosang bought two anyway. The snow on the ground thickened as we climbed. There was barely enough road for one car and we slipped a bit on a turn. Luosang slammed on the brakes, stalling the engine. He jumped out to check under the hood. I looked at the rows of frosted-over pines. The sky's gloom had deepened, and a bird whimpered from somewhere on the frozen slope. The remains of five or six cars lay half buried at the bottom of the cliff.

Luosang's boots crunched against the crust of snow. After getting back in, he came at me again: your fate will overwhelm mine. I said, you're a Buddhist, are you people supposed to talk like that? He said, I'd push you off this cliff if I were any wiser. I smiled at him. He smiled back. The car started again with a shudder.

I wondered whether the good luck I'd enjoyed all my life would run out on this mountain. I've taken my camera to shoot in all kinds of dangerous places, careless in my belief that the universe was benign, at least to me. A bullet once grazed my scalp during a standoff involving a drug trafficker. I kept snapping my pictures. The cop's name was Ma. It was his first day on the job and he pulled the trigger with his eyes closed.

What made Luosang spooked, though, was the story I'd told him about owing my life to my sister.

我姐脑子有点笨，学话晚，认字也晚，就是体格好，别的孩子刚走，她已经上树了。

一共是三回，我打了个手势，就是这个三要命，中国人就这样，坏在三上。

头一回人没来，我说，请了一个纸人，还有名字，叫暮暮，我爸取的，意思是全家人朝思暮想，就为了盼我。纸人的脸是用毛笔勾的，墨浓，眼角垂一道黑泪，扎着红发髻，捆着红腰带。我姐说，爸，这是啥？我爸说，这是你弟弟。她说，我啥时候有弟弟了？我爸说，现在没有，过阵儿就有了，今天起，你就认他作弟弟。她说，爸，我不要弟弟。

我爸没理她。纸人倚着墙，立在床前。一天三趟，我姐得叫它，暮暮弟弟，暮暮弟弟。我爸妈都是工人，白夜班来回倒，大多时候，我姐都自己在家。过了一周，纸人霉了，墙壁浸出尸油，腐臭冲天。我爸拉着她，说，让你叫弟弟，叫了吗？我姐说，叫啦。我爸把纸人扔出去，后背破了一条口子，里面填的是狗胃狗舌头。小个子男人笑嘻嘻地说，你家姑娘不定怎么骂呢。我爸说不会。他说，我干了小半辈子啦，这点儿事都看不出来，出门让车轧死。我爸心就重了。我妈说，算了吧，这些人说话怎么都那么不吉利？我爸说，就是因为人家捏得准呢。

其实中国人吧，就是爱赌咒，我对洛桑说，赌咒发誓，所有事都是这么弄的，没必要。

我爸对我姐说，你好好的，端正态度，老师怎么教你的？得有奉献精神，眼看大局，舍小家为大家，丢车保帅，为人民服务。我妈就乐：这是厂领导教你的话吧。我爸说，不管怎么样，你得帮爸爸妈妈一次，好吗？我姐说，爸，妈，你们就想要个弟弟呗。我爸说，对。我姐说，我妈头天把弟弟生下来，第二天我就给他掐死。我爸把头垂在胸前，跟男人说，没法弄。男人说，有的是办法。我爸说，人在做，天在看，凡事有报应。男人说，那

My parents had always wanted a son. My father looked all over for doctors and fertility experts and managed to find someone. People said he was a master of his art. True or not, he was a desperate measure for desperate times.

I pointed at Luosang's waist. That's how tall the man was. He'd tell people that an imp like him was born to serve the lords of hell.

My sister was seven years old then. Seven and a half. She had just started first grade. She was a bit... thick in the head. It took her a while to learn how to speak and read, but she was strong in body. When other kids were just starting to walk, she was already climbing trees.

It took three tries to bring me into the world. What's that thing people like to say? Three times a mishap. The first time, the little man had someone deliver a stuffed doll with paper skin to our family. My father even gave it a name, Mumu. He named it after the sunset because the whole family yearned day and night for my birth. The face on the doll was painted on with a brush. The ink had left a tear running down the corner of one eye. The doll wore a red hair clip and a red belt. My sister said, Ba, what's this? He said, this is your brother. She said, since when do I have a brother? He said, not yet, but soon. From now on, just accept it as your brother. She said, I don't want a brother. My father ignored her. The doll was left on the bed where it leaned against the wall. My sister was instructed to speak to it three times a day, addressing it as "Mumu" and "brother."

That's the way with our old customs, I said, looking at the little portrait of Mao Zedong that hung from the rearview mirror. They're not so easy to get rid of.

My sister was home alone while my parents worked shifts around the clock. After a week, the doll began to rot. The oils of its decomposing corpse seeped into the wall and a stench of decay filled the air. My father pulled my sister aside and said, I told you to call

倒是，随你吧。

没多久，我姐就病了，低烧不退，查不出病因。我姐说，爸，给我送医院吧。我爸说，送医院得输液，西医的办法，伤身。他找来一个老头。老头带着一副银针，剥开我姐的衣服，乳下，脊梁，刺了一十二下，针留了一个钟头。

这是第二回，我说，可针拔出来的时候，血都没流。

男人烧柱香看了看，我爸一去，他点点头，我知道了，你姑娘是硬啊。我爸说，是。他说，想好了？我爸说，好了。男人就说，走。

男人进家，我姐跟在后面。他拿着一个镶着水银的八卦盘，绕家一圈，我姐说，叔叔，你怎么跟桌子一般高。他笑笑，说，你们家啊，装修时候找人看过吧。我爸说是。他说，已经是个送子的盘势了，问题在哪儿，不用我说了吧？我爸说，奶奶的，弄吧。男人就点点头，看着我姐，说，姑娘，头发一直没剪过？

那时候，我姐的辫子能在脚腕打个结。男人过来，双指由鬓角一合，合下一缕头发，捡出一根，往我姐左手食指打了个结。我爸说，这就行了？男人说，行啦。

一年，我说，我妈就把我生下来了。

洛桑说，你姐呢？

我说，发结看着细，一绷就断，可没用，怎么扯也下不来，指头开始发红，最后发乌，半年过去，像萎落的花茎，忽然断了。我姐也跑了，我说，我爸意思意思，找了两天，不再动了。我妈哭，我爸说留着也是祸害，算逮。

洛桑理理佛珠。我掏出烟盒，还剩两根。他全嚼在嘴里。我说，歇歇。他说，天快黑了，再不开，今晚难说。

我说，早知道，四个轮子全上防滑链。

him brother. Did you? My sister said, I did. My father took the doll outside and tore a hole in its back. It had been stuffed with the tongue and stomach of a dog.

The little man grinned and said, if only you knew how your girl curses behind your back. My father couldn't believe it. The man said, I've been doing this work for nearly half my life, don't you think I know what goes on? If I turn out to be wrong, you can send me back to hell.

Forget it, my mother said. How can these people talk such bad luck? My father said, you know they always get these things right. He went to my sister and pleaded: you're a good girl with a proper attitude. Haven't you learned from your teachers? Serve the people. Lift up your spirit of devotion. Keep your eyes on the big picture. Crash the chariot, save the king. Sacrifice one for the sake of many. My mother laughed: that's what the factory bosses tell you. My father said, doesn't matter. Just help us this once, okay? My sister said, the two of you only want a boy? My father said, that's right. She said, if Ma gives birth to a son, I'll strangle him to death.

My father lowered his head and said to the little man, there's no use. The man said, you know there are other options. My father said, the heavens are watching. I'm afraid of bad karma. The man said, fair enough. You have to make that choice.

Not long after that, something made my sister sick. No one knew why her fever would not go away. She said, Ba, take me to the hospital. My father said, they'll put you on an IV, Western medicine hurts the body. Instead, he invited over an old man who put a dozen silver needles under her breasts and along her spine and left them there for an hour. That was their second attempt. Contrary to the plan, the needles came out without a drop of blood.

My father went back to the little man, who lit some incense, observed the smoke, and nodded: your girl really is stubborn. Have you made up your mind? My

他瞪我一眼，拔出一杆刀，柄上的红宝石像麻雀的眼睛，顺着左手食指拉了一道，又拍了拍脸。他的棉袄全湿了，油门压着，车蹒跚着过弯，猛地一紧，我眼前一阵模糊，一个女人殷红的身影现在山石之间。

她双手护着，戴着手套，穿得陈旧不堪，红围巾绕了脖子好几圈。洛桑死盯着她。这段路老碰见藏族女人。我说，反正后车分量不够，让她上。

女人年纪不大，很瘦，一摘帽子全是筋，脸黄黄的，嘴唇是紫色，头发倒很厚，皮绳捆不住。洛桑说，有钱吗？没声，我看看后视镜，她鼻子挺拔，尖尖的。不要你钱，我笑笑。车很慢，还没过一个弯，云已经连到一处了，山影青靛，四下只余若有若无的风响。洛桑把手刹一拽，我说，要不我来。他偏偏头：非得滚下去。我一看，半个前车轮探了出去。天黑，没看清，洛桑说。我说，实在不好意思。他说，没事。我说，我来吧，你沉，坐后面去。他拉开车门。我扒着仪表盘，慢慢曲身，伸到离合那里，对着他的肚子笑笑。女人很快地向右边一移，我刚想喊，洛桑坐了进去。车停止晃动，我看着天边的云。好一会，只有洛桑沉重的吸气声。我说，明天冰能化不？洛桑笑笑。我打开双闪，掏出空烟盒一点点撕。洛桑说，有老婆了吗？我说，没有。你一个人来的？他说。是，女人说。洛桑深出一口气，把棉袄敞开，白毛衣染满了黄渍。我看向后视镜。女人一圈圈地旋下围巾，脖子很细。她穿的是旧风衣，大扣子别在肋条那儿，掏了几下没掏到，洛桑一把拽开了。女人又脱毛衣，刺啦啦地响，好多火花。她又理头发，双手并在背后解胸罩。洛桑扯住她的脖子，按去身下顶着。她的鼻子撞着洛桑的大腿，头发缎子似的闪光。洛桑把她的裤子拉下一半，爬上去。车晃起来。我脚下狠狠地踩着，一块块雪花落在前挡玻璃。女人要叫，洛桑把一条白色毛巾从置物盒里拿出来，塞进她的嘴里，压着她。我听见他用藏语骂人，骂得很厉害。洛桑把毛巾

father said, yes.

The little man came to our house and read his bagua compass as he circled around the space. My sister followed him and said, how come you're as short as the table? He smiled faintly: did someone check the feng shui while you were fixing up the place? My father said yes. The man said, it's already auspicious for bearing a son. You don't need me to tell you what's in the way. My father said, damn it, do what you have to do. The man looked at my sister and said, little girl, have you ever cut your hair?

At the time, my sister's braids reached down to her ankles. The man took a strand of hair from her temple and knotted it around the base of her left index finger. My father said, that's it? The man said, it's done.

My mother gave birth to me within a year.

Luosang said, what about your sister?

I said, that strand of hair looked thin, but it wouldn't break. Her finger was red at first. Then it turned dark as a wilted flower stem. The finger fell off within half a year, and my sister ran away. My father spent two days looking for her just to keep up appearances. When my mother wept, he brushed aside her desiderium: the girl was a disaster, he said. Forget it.

The clouds to my right looked heavy as they slid past the blue cliffs. Luosang rolled a strand of prayer beads between his fingers as he drove. He was getting tired. I pulled out my box of cigarettes. There were two left and he lit up both of them in his mouth. I said, let's take a break. He said, not with the night still ahead of us. The road only gets worse.

I said, if I'd known earlier, there'd be snow chains on all four tires. Staring at me, he pulled out a knife. The ruby on the hilt flashed like the eye of a sparrow. He made a cut on his finger and slapped himself in the face. His jacket was damp with nervous sweat.

Suddenly, the red shadow of a woman appeared in the headlights. We lurched to a stop. She held up her gloved hands. Her coat was so old it looked rusty and

提出来，女人嘴里冒出一股混着白沫的口水。他坐好，用毛巾擦下体。车猛然一抖，什么东西碎了，轮子向前窜了一下，整个车身都沉下去，我大声叫骂，一脚一脚地踹刹车，洛桑扑上来，死命旋了一把方向盘，车呼啸着偏头，撞在山上。

我大口喘着气，左边倒车镜压碎了，石渣埋了半面玻璃。洛桑跳下车，趴下去看。镜子里的女人擦擦嘴，把内衣穿好，也走过去。防滑链碎了，剩下半条像蛇。我说，洛桑，你个傻屌。他乐起来，走到车后的另一侧，看那个轮子。车屁股擦着山崖，我说，小心点。他说这一边没事，刚要抬身，只穿着内衣的女人从我后面走来，一把将他推了下去。我愣愣地看着漆黑的高山。掉下去的洛桑什么声音都没有，像片雪花一样无影无踪。大雪落满女人的身体。她说，走吗？我的心脏怦怦直跳，她坐回汽车。

路上，冰一寸寸地从黑暗里冒出来，车灯照到许多断裂的防滑链。我一边开车，女人把手套摘下，左手搁在置物盒上，食指是缺的。

过了一会，她把一只漂亮的刀拍在那里。我说，洛桑的。她说，对。我说，你想要？她说，这是削水果的刀。摇下车窗，一把扔了出去。她掀开风衣，将一把抽下牛皮鞘的宽刀撂在我们之间。她说，这是我的刀。她把右手拍到我的座位上，操起刀劈，椅背使劲敲着我的头。我看过去，她的手血肉模糊，搁在置物盒上，再一刹，整根小指滚落下来。她往小指上吐了口水，用围巾擦干净，打开置物盒放了进去。

小指是幸运符，留给你，她说。

我说，以后再不要动刀了。她笑了笑。指头算什么？

盘山公路颤抖着倾延，车灯闪烁几下，灭了一边，雪花扑来，在前窗撞碎。她的手仍然滴血不止，将毛巾包上。我的眼前飘忽着这抹洁白的阴影。车碾着滑落的碎

there was a red scarf looped around her neck. Luosang glanced at her and said, I run into women like this all the time. I said, let her in, we need more weight in the back anyway.

The woman took off her hat. Veins on her sallow face strained against the skin. Her lips were purple. Her hair was too thick for a hair tie to hold. Her age was hard to guess. She looked middle-aged, barely. Luosang said, any money? Silence. I looked at her in the rearview mirror. It's alright, you don't need to pay us, I smiled.

The car was creeping slowly down a sharp bend when I heard metal creaking. The wind moaned faintly from somewhere beneath my feet. Luosang pulled up the emergency break. How about I try? I said. He twisted his head slightly: we'd fall if we switched. I looked out the window and saw half the front tire hanging over the void. Didn't see the edge, he said. I'll drive, I said, you sit in the back since you're heavier. He opened his door. I kept a hand on the dashboard, slid past the stick shift, and smiled at his stomach as he squeezed out. The woman shifted to the right. I yelled for her to be careful. Luosang climbed into the backseat. We just sat there for a while and listened to his heavy breathing. I asked, will the ice melt by tomorrow? He laughed. I turned on the hazard lights. Took out the cigarette box and tore at it bit by bit. Luosang said, do you have a wife? I said no. He said to the woman, you're traveling alone? She said yes. Luosang let out a long exhale. I looked in the rearview. He took off his jacket, his white sweater covered in yellow stains. The woman unwound her scarf loop by loop. Her neck was very thin. She was having trouble with a button on her coat and Luosang wrenched it open. As she took off her sweater, the wool crackled with sparks. She unclasped her bra with both hands and readied herself, pulling her hair aside. Luosang grabbed her neck and yanked her toward him, smashing her nose against his thigh. Her hair had a satiny sheen. Then, Luosang tugged her pants halfway down and climbed on top. The car began to rock. I leaned forward

石，轮胎不时上下颠簸，好像被一只只手接连托起。
你要去哪里？我看着她的一双眼睛。
往前面开。她说。

to keep the weight even and listened to the snowflakes as they disintegrated against the windshield. The woman began to shout. Luosang took out a towel from the seat pocket and stuffed it in her mouth. He pressed her down. I heard him swear in Tibetan. The things he said were hard to repeat. He took the towel out, sat up, and wiped his lower half. White foam spilled out of the woman's mouth. The car suddenly jerked. Something had snapped. The wheels rolled forward and the whole front of the car seemed to dip. I yelled and stamped on the brake. Luosang reached over from the back and gave the steering wheel a desperate yank to the left. The car crashed into the side of the mountain.

A mass of ice and gravel slid down, landing in a blast of powder. Shards of the smashed side mirror glinted from the snow on the rock face. Luosang jumped out to inspect the car. The woman wiped her mouth, put on her underwear, and followed. We fucked so hard it broke the snow chain, he said. You dumb cunt, I said to him. He laughed and walked around the car to check the side facing the cliff. Don't slip, I said. He stooped down. Not a scratch on this end. He was about to get up when the woman went over and, with a shove, sent him over the edge.

I stared at her blankly. Nothing but silence rose from below. Luosang had disappeared like a snowflake. The woman was still in her underwear. Thick strands of snow clung to her hair. She turned to look at me before getting in on the passenger side. Sacrifice one for the sake of many, she said. We sat listening to the panic in my chest.

The headlights pulled the road inch by inch out of the dark. Other broken, abandoned chains twisted along the frozen ground like snakes. As I drove, the woman took off her gloves and stretched her arms. There was a stump where her left index finger should be.

She took out Luosang's knife from the glove box. You can have it, I said. She opened the car door and tossed it out. That's for peeling fruit. She opened her coat

and drew a butcher knife from its leather sheath. Here's mine, she said.

She spread her legs, placed her palm on the edge of her seat, and began to hack at her flesh with a methodical rhythm. Then she pressed her mangled hand against the dashboard and gave it one more chop. Her little finger fell on the floor mat. She spat on the finger, wiped it clean with her scarf, and dropped it in the cup holder.

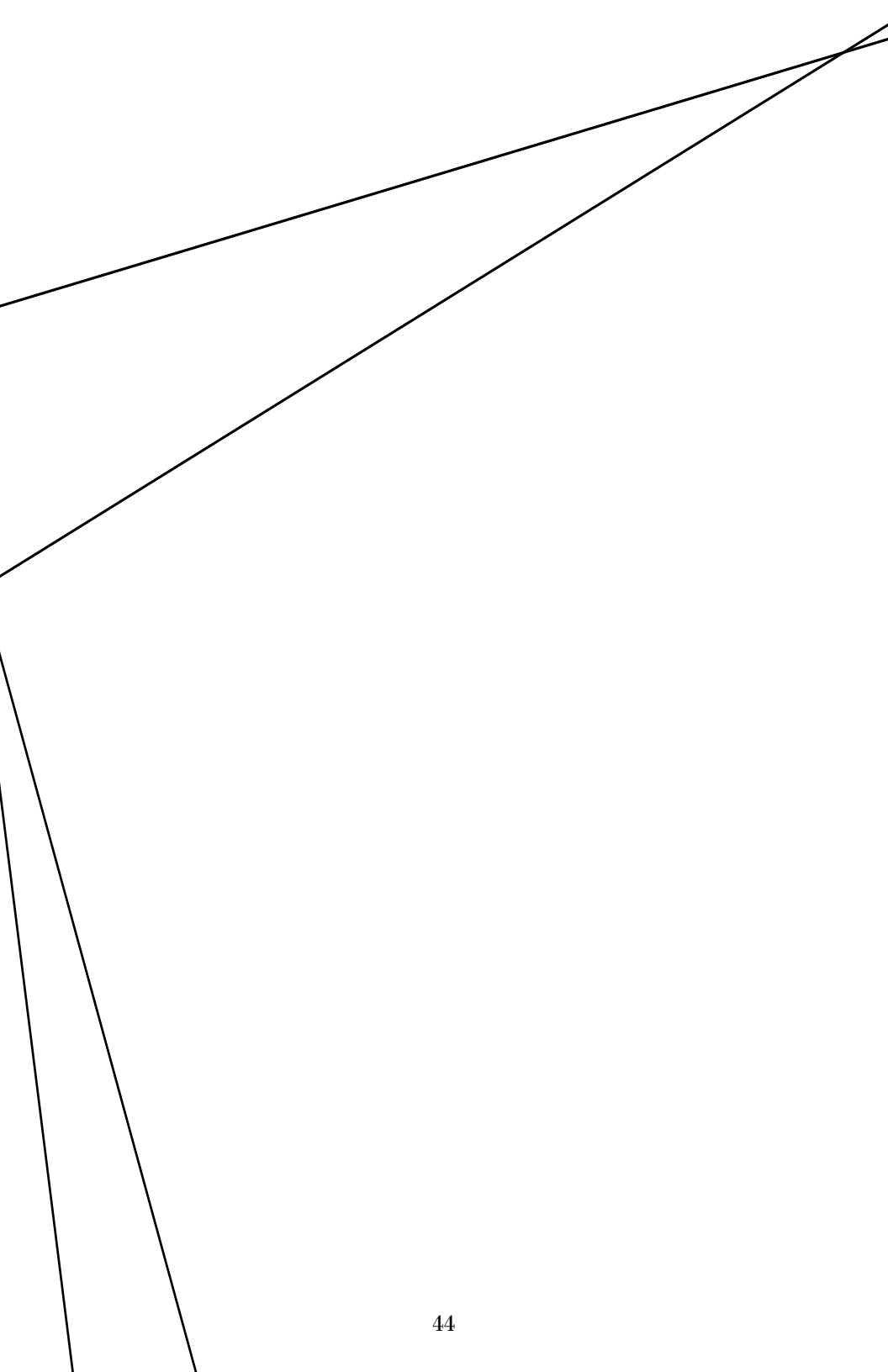
My gift, she said. Maybe it'll protect you from bad luck.

I said, please don't pull the knife again. She laughed: what's a finger worth?

The car rattled as it crawled down the mountain. The left headlight gave a few flickers before it faded, leaving behind a rush of grey shadows. I could still see blood dripping from her hand in the half dark. She wrapped the towel around it. The tires rolled unevenly over bump after bump as though we were driving over an endless column of curled up fingers.

Where do you want to go? I tried to catch her eye.

Just drive.



word for word / mot pour mot
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Translator's Note

Entrer dans les poèmes de Latif c'est plonger dans une matière épaisse, qui, en nous enveloppant, projette des images vives et frappantes sur la rétine. L'une des choses saisissantes dans la lecture de ses textes c'est l'aisance avec laquelle il parvient à nous immerger dans une déambulation au cœur d'une nuit, d'un corps, d'une - voire plusieurs langues- en usant de métaphores toujours plus singulières.

Chez lui la plongée se caractérise par une désintégration du corps qui ne trouve aucun miroir et qui, se faisant, coule, s'évapore, ou se transforme en un liquide grinçant et incisif.

S'enfoncer plus profondément c'est sentir se dessiner la forme d'une famille, deviner ses distances dans une organisation textuelle parfois distendue. Percutante et poreuse, l'écriture de Latif fait entendre toute son intensité dans les espaces blancs entre les mots. La lecture est une avancée ondoiyante à travers une nuit obscure, mais surtout peuplée, car avancer à tâtons, c'est avancer en s'appuyant sur ce qui nous entoure. C'est exactement ce que fait Latif en mobilisant ses parents, ses oncles, ses frères, des djinns, le Wolof ou encore l'arabe.

Néanmoins avancer à tâtons n'est pas sans risque, par un vocabulaire abrasif et par la nonchalance que peut revêtir le slang, la langue creuse des entailles sur la peau des lecteur.ices. L'atmosphère est inquiétante et brumeuse lorsque Latif donne à voir les injonctions qui pleuvent sur les corps non conventionnels, les menaces qui pèsent sur les identités non conventionnelles, non parfaitement identifiables, non parfaitement uniformes. L'immobilité guette toujours, et quand elle enserme ses victimes, le sarcasme est souvent ce qui offre une porte de sortie.

Atteindre les abysses Latifiennes ce n'est pas subir la paralysie qu'impose le monde, ni se noyer complètement, mais s'autoriser à arriver aux limites, au seuil, juste avant que l'air ne devienne irrespirable, au moment où le cerveau, privé de son apport habituel en oxygène, fait fuser des visions irréelles, presque magiques, dont on parle encore après être remonté à la surface.

Traduire les poèmes de Latif, c'est aussi faire ce plongeur, remonter et essayer de témoigner au mieux de ce qu'on a vu : au-delà des difficultés à en rendre compte, le plaisir de la tentative est immense.

LATIF ASKIA BA

POEMS

Me in Marble

I learned to be black
from my mother—
who held my jittering body

who balanced my liquid legs
They never taught me
to be crippled—
though they tried:

in your mouth.
me:
not in any book,
not on any screen.
I'd see, perhaps,

switched one part for another—
glass
would straighten like a Greek statue,
all marble and white-washed.
This is how you keep still,

they chip

in her cracked white hands
and to be white
from my father—
on his long black feet.

this is how you walk,
this is how you talk,
this how you keep the drool
I never saw anything like

some related thing with one or two parts
missing. And maybe if I,
like Daedalus,
my looking

this is how you flex.
Those Olympians
and their objective beauty,
and pale.

traduit de l'anglais par
LINA BENAYADA

POÈMES

Moi de Marbre

J'ai appris à être noir
Par ma mère –
Qui tenait mon corps gigotant
dans ses blanches mains craquelées

et à être blanc
par mon père –

Qui maintenaient en équilibre mes jambes liquides
sur ses longs pieds noirs.

Ils ne m'ont jamais appris
à être éclopé –
bien qu'ils aient essayé :
c'est comme ça qu'on marche,

c'est comme ça qu'on parle,
c'est comme ça qu'on retient la bave

dans sa bouche.

Je n'ai jamais rien vu qui me ressemble :
dans aucun livre
sur aucun écran.

j'y aurais vu, peut-être,
chose de ressemblant avec une ou deux parties

quelque
manquantes. Et peut-être que si,
comme Dédale,

j'échangeais une partie pour une autre –
mon miroir

se redresserait comme une statue grecque
tout de marbre et blanchi.

C'est comme ça qu'on se tient tranquille,

c'est comme ça qu'on gonfle les muscles

Ces Olympiens
et leur beauté objective,

ils s'ébrèchent

et pâlisent.

And it was night

The night is vague, and in it, I can hear each sound. And sometimes I fold my legs and become. I heard my great grandfather used to speak to the river-jinn. It was night, it was night, it was night. He reached out to shake them and tell them and make them. But they just laughed their smokey jinn-laugh and went on whispering among themselves.

The meandering night with her strenuous banks, and sometimes I sit and think and stretch out my legs like baobabs—the village under them stripping off their opulent bark: look a house and a cart and a boy and a horse. They run and play and forget themselves in their soccer ball—ripe with sweat and sand-plumes.

The night, her humming faces, her spilling tongues—I sit like a delta after all that dancing, in the midst of dancing, in the strangely choreographed before. I listen to the vague unfolding, the moonspeak of the 4th avenue drunk: he's trying to align his body with the stars; he's trying to fold himself like a cat; he's trying to fill his eyes with midnight. I hear her pouring.

Et la nuit est tombée

La nuit est vague, et en elle, je peux entendre chaque son. Et parfois je replie mes jambes et je suis en devenir. On m'a dit que mon arrière-grand-père avait pour habitude de parler à la rivière-djinn. La nuit était tombée, tombée, tombée. Il tendit le bras pour les faire bouger, les faire parler, pour les faire. Mais ils se contentaient de rire de leur rires vaporeux de djinns et continuaient à chuchoter entre eux.

La nuit sinueuse, avec ses rives épuisantes, et parfois je m'assoie et je pense, j'étire mes jambes comme des baobabs – le village en dessous d'elles les dépouillant de leur opulente écorce : regarde une maison et un charriot et un garçon et un cheval. Ils courent et jouent et s'oublient dans leur ballon de foot – gorgé de sueur et de panaches de sable.

La nuit, ses visages bourdonnants, ses langues jaillissantes – je m'assoie comme un delta après toutes ces danses, au milieu d'une danse, dans l'avant étrangement chorégraphié. J'écoute le vague déploiement, la langue-lune du soûlard de la quatrième avenue : il essaie d'aligner son corps avec les étoiles ; il essaie de se replier comme un chat ; il essaie d'emplir ses yeux de nuit. Je l'entends couler.

Agency

I call the agency; mornings are preferable. “Hello,” I say,

“This is Latif. May I please have what I need now?”

I would like them to say “No,” maybe even hang up. At
least this way

I know what I am, where I stand, what it is I’ve been
denied,
and when.

But instead, there is just a meander of words that turn
on themselves like a Hegelian dream or a confused
swarm of butterflies; a bundle of words that boils
down to some vague future-tense or some sterilized
verb—

beaten into its predicate form.

“I don’t suppose you can help me at all.”

“No,” they don’t say.

I hear the flowers growing from their lips.

“But who will fry my eggs and button my shirt and loop
the hooks of my mask behind my ears? And who,
most importantly, will peel all these ripe avocados?”

I can hear the machine on the other end
like the humming of a motherboard
or the chugging of an engine.

Someday soon, I’ll emerge
almost human.

Agence

J'appelle l'agence ; les matins sont préférables.

« Bonjour, » dis-je, « C'est Latif. Pourrais-je avoir, ce dont j'ai besoin maintenant, s'il vous plaît ? »

J'aimerais qu'ils disent « Non, » peut-être même qu'ils raccrochent. Au moins comme ça

Je sais ce que je suis, où je suis, ce que l'on m'a refusé et quand cela m'a été refusé.

Mais à la place, il y a juste un méandre de mots qui se retournent sur eux-même comme un rêve Hégélien ou une nuée confuse de papillons ; un paquet de mots qui se résume à une sorte de vague futur ou une sorte de verbe stérilisé -

violemment réduit à sa forme prédicative.

« J'imagine que vous ne pouvez pas du tout m'aider. »

« Non, » ne disent-ils pas.

J'entends les fleurs pousser de leurs lèvres.

« Mais qui fera cuire mes œufs, boutonnera ma chemise et nouera les attaches de mon masque derrière mes oreilles ?

Et, surtout, qui épluchera ces avocats mûrs ? »

Je peux entendre la machine à l'autre bout comme le bourdonnement d'une carte mère ou le souffle d'un moteur.

Un jour ou l'autre, j'émergerai presque humain.

Locals

Kyle is afraid of Morningside Park
after dark. Mustapha rolled up carefully.
We sat underneath the mosaic branches.
Africans. In the dark. My body
finally eyeless. The yogis waited till their borders
were ambiguous.
On my corner
someone got shot. Around the corner
another. Around 3 pm.
Just across the avenue. They call it Park Slope. No more
Boricuas. Just co-op moms and petites boulangeries.
White. Like Morningside Drive. Past minuit. The colonizer
is asleep. The paths like Jazz. The lamppost magic.
How the fuck you read all the Harry Potters. You didn't even speak
English.
Your father took me to the library
and made me choose a book. Mustapha.
You betta pass that. Kyle
says someone got robbed right on 1-teenth-something.
My brother Omar turns
to my brother Mustapha turns
to my brother Tarek turns
to my brother Ardo. Why. We all have such funny names
that will disappear in the news. In the night. In the day.
in the petit matin of central booking. Omar
Omar Omar Officer. That's my grandfather's name
in the back of your paddy wagon. Omar Antonio
even. Both our grandfathers' names. Overnight.
In a Brooklyn precinct. I text my mother.
It's 1 am. In the East Village. She and her wandering
children. Brown
in her White hands. She is probably afraid.
I am not coming home. I'ma
take the bus back up. Damien and I cross over

Locaux

Kyle a peur du parc Morningside
à la nuit tombée. Mustapha s'est prudemment recroquevillé.
On s'est assis sous les branches en mosaïque.

Africains. dans la nuit. Mon corps
sans yeux enfin. Les yogis ont attendu jusqu'à ce que leurs bords
soient indistincts.

Dans mon coin
quelqu'un s'est fait descendre/abattre. Au coin de la
rue

un autre. Vers 15 heures.

Juste de l'autre côté de l'avenue. Ils l'appellent le Park Slope. Fini
les Boricuas. Seulement des mères membres de coopératives et de
petites boulangeries.

Blanches. Comme la route de Morningside. Après minuit. Le
colonisateur

est endormi. Les sentiers semblables au Jazz. Les lampadaires
magiques.

Comment t'as pu lire tous les putain de Harry Potter. Tu parlais
même pas

Anglais.

Ton père m'a emmené à la bibliothèque
et m'a fait choisir un livre. Mustapha.

T'as intérêt à réussir ça. Kyle
dit que quelqu'un vient juste de se faire voler l-gramme-et-
quelque.

Mon frère Omar se tourne
vers mon frère Mustapha qui se tourne
vers mon frère Tarek qui se tourne
vers mon frère Ardo. Pourquoi. On a tous des prénoms

aussi
drôles

qui disparaîtront dans les infos. Dans la nuit. Dans le jour.
au *petit matin* du service central de réservation. Omar
Omar Omar Officier. C'est le nom de mon grand-père

Harlem. Her deep night. He ain't from here.
 We talk amongst ourselves. I ain't
either. We split by Amsterdam.
 Somewhere in the 120's.
3 am. Kyle's sleep. And very lovable.
 All I fear is this.

à l'arrière de ton fourgon de police. Omar Antonio
même. Les noms de nos deux grands-pères. Dans la nuit.
Dans un commissariat de Brooklyn. J'envoie un
message à ma mère.
Il est 1 heure du matin. Dans l'East Village. Elle et ses
enfants
Errants.
Marrons
dans ses mains blanches. Elle a probablement peur.
Je ne rentre pas à la maison. J'veais
prendre le bus dans l'autre sens. Damien et moi traversons
Harlem. Sa nuit profonde. Il n'est pas d'ici.
On parle entre nous. Je n'en suis pas
non plus. On se sépare au niveau d'Amsterdam.
Quelque part sur là 120^{ème}.
3 heure du matin. Kyle est endormi. Et vraiment adorable.
Tout ce que je crains c'est ça.

Wet Monasteries

We're nothing but drunks in wheelchairs
A bottle of vodka for the wash
We dossy around the room
We roll on the wet floor
The straws bow and we bow back
Joking, laughing, dancing
Ruined from birth
Or accident
We're all the same to the bottle
Awaiting emancipation
Through twitching lips or broken necks
And it doesn't matter to us
We're all sitting here anyway
Waiting for another love to look beyond
Our sheepskin faces
Hanging like jerky
Drying in gin
They're all the same to us
They blend into one
But when they come out
They come by the knees
We drink for nothing for no one at all
Until one needs to be put down
Until one needs his dead legs
Tucked under a blanket
Until one needs to be shat and washed
Stripped and clothed
Pilled and pumped
Emptied by a catheter
Bags of piss on a good day
Bags of blood on a lucky one
They walk in with their gloves
Knowing they'll join us soon
In our wet monastery
That's when we scatter like ants

Monastères mouillés

On est rien qu'des alcoolos en fauteuils roulants
Une bouteille de vodka pour s'laver
On zone dans la chambre
On roule sur le sol humide
Les pailles s'inclinent et nous nous inclinons aussi
Blaguant, riant, dansant
Foutus de naissance
Ou d'accident
On est tous pareil par rapport à la bouteille
En attente d'émancipation
A travers des lèvres qui se contractent involontairement
ou des cous brisés
Et ça n'a pas d'importance pour nous
On est tous assis ici de toute façon
A attendre qu'un autre amour voie plus loin que
Nos visages en peau de mouton
Pendants comme de la viande séchée
Séchant dans du gin
Elles sont toutes pareilles pour nous
Elles se confondent en une seule
Mais quand elles sortent
Elles sortent par les genoux
On boit pour personne pour rien du tout
Jusqu'à ce qu'un de nous ait besoin d'être euthanasié
Jusqu'à ce qu'un de nous ait besoin que ses jambes
mortes
Soient repliées sous une couverture
Jusqu'à ce qu'un de nous ait besoin d'être chié et lavé
Dénudé et habillé
Pillulé et pompé
Vidé par un cathéter
Sacs de pisse les bons jours
Sacs de sang un jour de chance
Ils rentrent avec leurs gants
Sachant qu'ils vont bientôt nous rejoindre

Away from our glasses and into our beds
Alone we return
We sit and we lie like monks
Sprawled out across ourselves
The bitter winds turn warm
Against our smiles

Dans nos monastères mouillés
C'est là qu'on se disperse comme des fourmis
En s'éloignant de nos verres pour aller vers nos lits
Seuls nous revenons
On s'assoit et on s'étend comme des moines
Affalés en nous-mêmes
Les vents amers deviennent chauds
Contre nos sourires

Langue Pochée

dad said wash your face you have buttons
stop bouncing around up there
you're obsessed with games
why you don't study
always finding a briquet
in my brothers' coat pockets

poches pochés pochés and pochés
my langue
bien pochée
you fumes hein

no
this
more beacon than lighter

i the city of d'accord
a flowing djellaba
my uncle's voiture
from st louis to sali

attention
you eat too fast
why you don't relax you eat
like cochon

dad tried to give us
himself
in english rek

mamiyo
nangadef me
but i didn't know
whether i was here
or there

Langue Pochée

papa a dit lave ton visage tu as des boutons
arrête de t'agiter dans tous les sens
t'es obsédé par les jeux
pourquoi tu étudies pas
je trouve toujours un lighter
dans les poches de manteaux de mes frères
pockets pockets pockets pockets
ma tongue
 well poached
 tu smoke huh

non
ça
plus phare que briquet

je la ville of all right
 une djellaba fluide
 la car de mon oncle
de saint louis à sali

 watch out
tu manges trop vite
pourquoi tu te détends pas tu manges
comme pig

 papa a essayé de nous donner
 sa personne
en anglais rek

mamiyo
m'ont nangadefit
 mais je ne savais pas
si j'étais ici
ou là-bas

a whole langue
 pressing down inshallah
on the black skull
 a little black france
 a little black portugal
phonetic hell
 washed up with speckled
fish carcass
 sandy crescent
 dusty fez
that flattening waalo

je te jure was a sound
 like a sneeze
or a cough
 before i found it
 slinking across the page

dad on the phone
 the whole house
ringing with waaw's
 and nakawakergi's
and we were always
there
 there
 there and too much jaam

that jamaican asked if
 i was ready
fi ñaam
 some fulfulde
must've kept that sacred word
 rammed under her tongue
 waiting till the cane was bien coupée
the sun incapable
of beating

dad gave up
 on his surahs

une tongue entière
pressant inshallah
tout contre le crâne noir
une petite France noire
un petit Portugal noir
enfer phonétique
nettoyé avec une carcasse
de poisson tacheté
croissant sablonneux
fez poussiéreux
cet écrasant waalo

i swear était un son
comme un éternement
ou une toux
avant que je le trouve
se faufilant à travers la page

papa au téléphone
la maison entière
retentissant de waoow
et de nakawakergi
et on est toujours
là
là
là et trop de jaam
cette jamaïcaine a demandé si
j'étais près
fi naam
un peu de fulfulde
j'aurais dû garder ce mot sacré
éperonné sous sa langue
attendant que la canne soit well cutted
le soleil incapable
de taper

papa a abandonné

alif alif alif
his mother made him
a grigri for his final exams
he said no we are tested
on the greeks

ses sourates
alif alif alif
sa mère lui a fabriqué
un lucky charm pour ses examens finaux
il a dit non on est évalués
sur les grecs

Translator's Note

One of the most striking qualities of Lina Benayada's piece is its hospitality. Her text alternates between a monologue from her father (the italicized passages) and her own internal monologue (the non-italicized passages). In doing this, Benayada makes the reader feel like their active participants in an ongoing conversation, so that when the father says something like "je te sers, tu me dit stop," the reader may accidentally find themselves at Beneyada's dinner table contemplating how much of a serving they'd like.

This effect is achieved not only through diction, tone, and pacing, but (more radically) through Benayada's dilation of the sentence. In this piece, independent clauses rarely constitute a complete thought—and why should they? Do we really think and speak in the confines of single sentences, or do we tend towards Benayada's sinuous run-ons, where a thought is not a simple vector from A to B, but an accumulation—a wave, washing over the reader?

I don't think this piece is concerned with answering this question, but I do think Beneyada's formal decisions successfully embodies all the various feelings of estrangement that recur throughout her writing. Her long complications of thought (where the text was most resistant to my translation) are where the author reveals her relationship with her country, her culture, her family, and of course, herself. And though her sentences are usually long, their individual components, whether literal or metaphorical, have a degree of self-containment. This piece shines in the way these components play off of each other, following an underlying logic, allowing the narrative to constantly unfold.

LINA BENAYADA

Abdelhak, Ghani, Mohammed, Younes, Rachid, Amine... et le dernier, dont j'oublie toujours le nom... Abdelhak, Ghani, Mohammed, Rachid, Younes, Amine... dans cet ordre-là peut-être. Ou alors celui que j'oublie est l'aîné, je ne sais plus très bien, c'est celui que j'ai le moins vu, alors ça explique le trou de mémoire. Pas de prénom pour le dernier, pour le septième, car ils sont sept, papa me l'a dit souvent, et souvent je me suis dit que sept garçons pour une seule femme c'était beaucoup, que ça n'avait pas dû être facile pour elle, enfin pour eux. Parce qu'ils étaient pauvres, et que la pauvreté ça fait toujours beaucoup de ravages.

J'y suis depuis dix-huit heures ma fille, tu aurais pu descendre, m'aider à préparer, tu vois, on est tous les deux, on discute et comme ça, ça va plus vite, là ça fait long, et tu vois je prépare pour nous deux, je t'ai appelée, tu m'as pas entendu ?

Enfin bon, c'est prêt, passe-moi le couteau s'il te plaît, merci, bon, c'est prêt je crois, encore cinq minutes ma fille, tu veux boire un truc, du rouge, une bière, avec des olives comme ça waw la classe quoi, mange pas celles-là, fait attention, elles arrachent, je me suis fait avoir hier, oui y'a plus de noires, elles sont pleines de (demander à papa) alors j'en achète plus...

A la maison, on mange comme on pense. Papa en arabe, de droite à gauche, de la mélancolie à la joie et de l'envie à la satiété. Chez maman, en émotion, de la colère au dégoût, des yeux à la bouche, dans le noir et en cachette, pour n'être vu d'aucun œil, par Dieu seul, qui sent les notes aigues du chocolat noir même depuis le ciel, tout en haut du monde. Moi je mange ce qu'on me donne, les odeurs fondent en idées lorsqu'elles montent depuis la

translated from the french by
LATIF ASKIA BA

Abdelhak, Ghani, Mohammed, Younes, Rachid, Amine... and the last one, I always forget his name—actually, maybe it's Abdelhak, Ghani, Mohammed, Rachid, Younes, Amine... in that order, or maybe the one I keep forgetting is the eldest, I'm not sure anymore, he's the one I've seen the least, that explains why I've forgotten his name. No name for the last one, the seventh, since there are definitely seven, dad always said so, and I've always said (to myself) that seven is a lot for just one woman, and that it must not have been easy for her... or them. They were poor after all, and being poor always ends in disaster.

I've been here since six ma fille, you could have come down to help you know, it would've been just the two of us, we could've talked a little, that would've made things go by faster, alone it felt like forever, and look, I made dinner for both of us, I called you, didn't you hear?

Anyway, it's ready, pass the knife, thanks, okay, I think it's ready, five more minutes ma fille, you want something to drink, some wine, beer, look at those olives, now that's class, careful though, those ones are spicy, they fooled me yesterday, yeah there's no more black ones, they're full of you-know-what so I don't buy them anymore.

At home, we eat as we think, papa in Arabic, from right to left, from melancholy to joy, from desire to contentment. At maman's, emotions often go from anger to disgust, from eye to mouth, in darkness and in secret, to go unseen by any eye but God's, who smells the sharp notes of dark chocolate all the way up from the summit of heaven. Me? I eat what I'm served, the kitchen aroma fades into

cuisine jusqu'à l'étage, et l'humeur du jour se règle selon que l'ail, audacieux conquérant du moindre interstice, se marie aux poivrons noyés d'huile (nombreux sont les noyés, qui, épuisés, décharnés et visqueux, abandonnent au liquide brûlant leurs dernières forces, et parfois même, une légère teinte orangée, semblable aux éclaboussures de lumière que le soleil dépose sous des paupières closes), ou que les effluves d'un bœuf bourguignon s'étirent en tranchées dans l'impossible chaleur d'un feu de cheminée. Il n'existe aucune frontière entre l'espace de la cuisine et le reste de la maison, la déchirure se trouve entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur du corps, entre le lieu qui s'offre et celui qui désire. C'est pourquoi partout, j'ai désiré, partout, j'allais les pores avides de vapeurs gourmandes, la langue écrasée contre le palais, le plaisir dans tout le corps d'ingérer comme on jouit, seule et repue, honteux. se après coup du soupir désespéré qui m'échappe, vestige éphémère d'une saveur. Moi, sur les mots comme sur un bateau pris dans la tempête, comme un poivron-épave en mer huileuse. Maman semi-aliment, maman ingère et se transforme, maman donne la becquée à ses petits (mari compris) et ce faisant maman se donne elle-même.

A la maison, papa cuisine, maman dévore et je pleure devant l'incompréhensible tajine. Plus grande, on m'a dit que ça n'allait pas, ce corps qui n'avait pas l'air français mais qui ne savait rien de l'arabe, comme si c'était simple de discuter avec navets et patates (alors j'ai mangé beaucoup, j'ai fait taire tous les aliments qui m'opposait une résistance, une fois disparus, leurs bavardages cessaient, j'étais tranquille pour quelques heures). Il a donc fallu craindre la nourriture, mais aussi mon corps, qui tous deux, en plus d'être analphabètes, sont fourbes comme pas possible. Les leçons sont venues de maman, mais difficilement, alors quand elle m'a dit qu'elle quitterait papa un jour, j'ai su que c'était foutu.

Ça va, on se débrouille bien quand même tous les deux, hein ma fille...

thought as it makes its way upstairs, and the day's mood is set by garlic, a conquistador, getting into every nook and cranny, harmonizing with the oil-drenched peppers (all drowned, drained, flaccid and viscous, they let their last breath slip into the grueling oil, some even give off a golden hue, like the little splashes of light the sun leaves under closed eyelids) or by the beef bourguignon melting and rilling in the insurmountable heat of the fireplace. It's hard to tell where the kitchen stops and the rest of the house begins, the only clear border is the one separating the inside and outside of the body, the part that offers itself and the part that desires. That's why I was always wanting no matter where I was, everywhere I went, I went with my pores open and eager for tantalizing vapors, tongue crushed against palate, pleasure coursing through the body, I swallow as I climax, alone, satiated, and afterwards, ashamed of the sheepish sigh I let out, a vanishing aftertaste. I cling to words like a raft taken by storm, like a pepper-wreck in an oily sea. Demi-food-maman, she ingests and transforms, she feeds her young (her husband included) by the beakfull, and in doing so feeds them a little of herself each time.

At home, papa cooks, maman eats, and I cry in front of the incomprehensible tagine. When I was older, I was told that something was off, something about my body, it didn't look French and didn't know a word of Arabic either, as if it were easy to hold conversations with turnips and potatoes (so I ate a lot, silencing the food that resisted, and once it was gone, the chatter ceased, and I could relax for a few hours). In this way I grew afraid of food, afraid of my own body, both being not only illiterate, but deceitful as hell, that was one of the few things maman bothered to teach me, so when she told me she was leaving papa, I knew I was fucked.

It's ok, we're gonna be fine, right ma fille?

“Catastrophe” in Arabic is *nakba*.

« Catastrophe » se dit « *nakba* ».

Bon, c'est prêt, attends, je te sers, tu me dis stop, attends, tu veux un peu de sauce, encore ? ah ouais t'en mets beaucoup toi, c'est vrai, je te mets de la viande, c'est bien que tu sois plus végétarienne, tu sais c'est important de manger de la viande, pour la santé, après, tu aurais eu des carences, c'est dangereux, c'est bien, ça te va ? vas-y j'arrive.

Ah, attention c'est chaud, il est où le pain, ok, bon appétit.

Alors franchement c'est excellent, bon, c'est pas aussi bon que quand c'est ma mère qui prépare, mais c'est peut-être à cause des légumes, tu sais quand j'étais petit les légumes étaient pas pleins de pesticides, enfin au Maroc en tout cas, ceux qu'on mangeait étaient bio donc ils avaient du gout, je regrette que t'aies jamais goûté des vrais bons légumes, il faudrait que tu goutes un jour des vraies tomates, si on retourne au Maroc je te ferait goûter.

C'est vrai que quand j'étais petit j'étais un peu le gouteur de la famille, maintenant je regrette, j'étais pas tendre avec ma mère...j'avais des avis tranchés, si c'était pas bon, j'étais très critique, très pointu, mais on m'écoutait quand même.

Abdelhak (celui qui est mort, et dont la disparition a provoqué la deuxième dépression de mon père, celle qui l'a poussée à partir de la maison pour un mois, à aller à Cuba avec le frère qui n'était pas venu au Maroc pour l'enterrement, car il voulait régler ses comptes, même si Cuba c'est joli et qu'on pense rarement à gâcher un voyage avec de la colère et de la peine), Younes (celui qui travaille à la RATP), Ghani, Mohammed (celui qui ne donne presque jamais de nouvelles), Rachid (celui qui est mon père), Amine (celui qui a une femme très belle, dont tous les traits du visage semblent légèrement enflés par la joie), et le septième...

Tout à l'heure j'ai eu ma mère au téléphone, elle va bien, elle m'a demandé de tes nouvelles, elle voulait savoir si tu savais cuisiner, si tu t'occupais bien de moi, je lui ai dit que tu te

Okay, it's ready, wait a sec, I'll serve you, just tell me when to stop, you want some more sauce? Yeah, cause I know you like to have way too much, here, take some meat too, good thing you're not a vegetarian anymore, you gotta eat meat, it's good for you, you don't want to end up with deficiencies, that's dangerous, okay, you good? go ahead, I'm coming.

Be careful, it's hot, wait where's the bread, okay, bon appétit.

So you gotta admit, this is pretty good, still not as good as my mother's, probably because of the vegetables, you know when I was little they didn't use pesticides, well at least not in Morocco, our vegetables were organic, you could actually taste them, it's a real shame you never got a chance to taste fresh veggies, you'll have to try a real tomato one day, if we ever go back to Morocco you'll have to try one.

In fact, when I was young I unfortunately slipped into the position of family taste-tester, which I regret, I wasn't really that nice to my mother... I was quite the critic, if something wasn't good, I'd let you know, I could be a little harsh, but they listened to me all the same.

Abdelhak (the one who is dead, and whose passing caused my father's second bout of depression, which made him leave for a month to go to Cuba with his brother who hadn't come to Morocco for the funeral because he'd been busy dealing with something else, though to be fair, Cuba is gorgeous and nobody wants to spoil a trip with anger and sorrow), Younes (the one who works for the RATP), Ghani, Mohammed (the one we almost never hear from), Rachid (the one who is my father), Amine (the one with a very beautiful wife, whose facial features seem to be slightly swollen with joy), and the seventh...

I just got off the phone with my mother, she's doing good, she asked about you, she wanted to know if you know how to cook, and if you're taking good care of me, I told her you're

débrouillais, que tu étais sortie parce que tu avais un truc avec la fac. Elle vieillit ma mère, bon après tu sais elle se plaint beaucoup, mon épaule, mon dos, oui maman, elle veut que je la plaigne un peu c'est comme ça...

Ma grand-mère maternelle est une femme rousse à la peau mutilée de milliers de grains de beauté. A neuf ans j'ai compris qu'elle ne m'aimait pas comme il l'aurait fallu, qu'elle aurait préféré autre chose pour sa fille (un autre homme que mon père). A onze ans je n'ai plus voulu aller chez elle, nous nous sommes disputé.es avec colère à grands coups de cris dégoulinants et amers. Elle a un prénom très joyeux, comme son rire, car elle est soprano à la chorale de sa ville, le reste du temps, elle parle à son chat, alors soprano ou silencieuse, ça n'est pas si différent. D'aussi loin que je me souviens, c'est la première personne à qui je dois mon intérêt pour la beauté (pas uniquement celle du corps, car elle était très coquette mamie Laurette, mais aussi à la beauté du dessin, de la peinture, de la musique, des décors, car son appartement en est un, bien trop chargé en bois et en tapis, bien trop baroque, mais joli tout de même).

*Il faut juste que je l'écoute, que je lui dise que je vais prier Allah pour elle, ça lui fait plaisir, c'est comme ça... elle me manque tu sais, c'est dur d'être expatrié, de vivre loin de sa famille, du lieu où on a grandi, ça me manque de pouvoir être proche de ma mère, de mes frères, ceux qui sont restés au Maroc, de leurs enfants que je n'ai pas vu grandir, ça me manque parfois, tu sais ça a été dur quand je suis parti, au début tu es tout seul, après j'ai travaillé, et j'étais à l'université, mais la famille c'est pas pareil, il y avait plus personne pour me faire à manger * il rit*.*

C'est dans ma première année d'étude après le bac que j'ai découvert, étonné.e, que je n'étais pas blanc.he. Comment ça ! Ah oui d'accord, très bien, ah non je ne savais pas, au temps pour moi, je me mets là alors, voilà, oui là c'est beaucoup mieux, pardon, mais je vous en prie, vous ne pouviez pas savoir ! La place est chaude sous moi

doing alright, and that you just stepped out for your thing at the university. My mother's getting old, so you know how she loves to complain, my shoulder, my back, oui maman, she wants me to feel for her a little, that's just how she is.

My maternal grandmother is a redhead covered in moles. When I was nine I realized that she didn't really love me, that she'd have liked other things for her daughter (namely, a better husband than my father). When I was eleven I decided I didn't want to visit her anymore, we got into a nasty argument with pungent, bitter screams. She has a pretty joyful name—and a laugh to match because she's a soprano in her town choir, the rest of the time, she talks to her cat, so soprano or silent, she's basically the same. As far as I can remember, she's the first person who got me curious about beauty (not just of the body, though she was quite the flirt, but beauty found in drawings, paintings, music, and interior design, which her apartment is a testament to, filled to the brim with carpets and wooden furniture, way too baroque, but beautiful all the same.

I just have to listen, to say that I'm praying for her, that always makes her happy, that's just how it is... she misses me you know, it's hard being away, being so far from your family, being so far from the place you grew up, I miss being around my mother, my brothers, the ones who are still in Morocco, and all of their children who I couldn't see grow up, I get homesick sometimes, it was hard when I first came here, you're all alone at first, eventually I began to work and go to school, but nothing can replace family, there was no one to cook for me anymore.

** He laughs **

It wasn't until my first year of college that I figured out, to my surprise, that I wasn't White. How is that even possible! Oh ok, cool, nah I didn't know, my bad, I'll just sit over there then, yup, it's fine, pardon me, ah, much better, don't worry, you couldn't have known. My seat is

et je ne comprends pas vraiment quel rôle je suis sensé.e jouer désormais. Mais où suis-je ? Ah mais tu parles arabe toi, non, dis-moi une phrase en arabe, allez, vite fait quoi, non, mais je ne sais pas parler arabe désolée, ah ouais, ouais, oh dommage. Ah ça oui ! N'importe quoi, mais ta culture *binti*, que reste-t-il d'elle si ce n'est le sang du père qui t'inonde ? Par quels mauvais sorts l'as-tu manquée ? Qui es-tu, si tu t'ignores à moitié ? Comme si ma vie se découpait. Comme si, de là où vous vous trouviez, vous pouviez extraire de moi ce qui m'est étranger. Car je suis apatride sur mes propres terres, dans mon propre corps, tout en moi m'est étranger.

C'est la vérité hein, mais quand on s'appelle Rachid Benayada c'est pas facile en France, heureusement que je maîtrisais bien le français et que Hassine m'a hébergé au début, et gratuitement. Après j'étais dans un foyer d'immigrés, c'était pas pareil, là c'était chaud, mais je suis resté que quelques mois là-bas... c'était pas des studios, c'était des chambres, des trous à rats, des tous petits trucs de rien du tout complètement délabrés, j'ai eu la chambre parce que le gars d'avant était en prison, il s'était fait choper en train de vendre du cannabis, je te jure, et dans les escaliers parfois il y avait des filles...tu vois, elles étaient là, à peine vingt an, des sénégalaises beaucoup, et puis aussi des marocaines, trente francs, trente francs, ça fait environ quatre euros, t'imagines, quatre euros la passe...c'est rien...c'était triste...

Je ne m'appelle pas Lina comme on s'appelle Pierre. Je m'appelle Lina et je n'y peux rien, on s'appelle Pierre et ça n'a pas beaucoup d'importance, va, on verra ça plus tard ! A 10 ans j'ai voulu m'appeler Astrid, j'ai demandé à la maîtresse de changer mon nom sur la liste de la classe, Lina ne me gênait pas, mais je voulais choisir, je voulais me nommer pour décider comment on me percevrait (elle n'a pas voulu). Je suis rentré.e et maman m'a dit que nous aurions dû garder son patronyme, et non celui de mon père, pour te faciliter la vie, tu

burning underneath me though, and I'm not sure what anyone wants from me. Anyway, where was I? Wait, you speak Arabic right? say something in Arabic, come on, do it. Um, no... I don't speak Arabic, sorry, yeah, I know, such a shame. Yeah, it really is, but I mean, what's left of your binti culture besides your father's blood pulsing through you? What voodoo did you do to escape it? Who are you if you ignore half of yourself? As if my life were cut in half. As if from right where you stand, you could extract whatever it is in me that I find foreign. For I'm an exile in my own land, and every inch of my body seems alien.

I'm telling you though, in France, when your name is Rachid Benayada, life is not easy, it's a good thing I learned French so well, and that Hassine let me stay with him at first, for free. But then I ended up in migrant housing, there's nothing like it, I'm telling you, it was a real mess. I stayed for a few months... it wasn't your studio apartments, it was tiny rooms, ratholes, and useless old crap scattered everywhere, I got a room because the guy who was in it before me went to prison, he got caught selling weed, I swear, and sometimes there'd be girls in the stairways... there were just "hanging out," you know, barely 20 years old, most of them Senegalese, and some Moroccans too, 30 francs, 30 francs, that's what, like 4 euros, can you imagine, 4 euros, that's barely anything, that's sad.

You don't call someone Lina like you call someone Pierre. They call me Lina and there's nothing I can do about it, if you name someone Pierre it doesn't really matter, well maybe it does, but I'll come back to that later. When I was ten I wanted to be called Astrid, I asked the teacher to make the change on the class roster, it's not that I didn't like the name Lina, I just wanted to be able to choose, I wanted to name myself so that I could decide how people would see me. (My teacher refused.) When I came home, maman said that she should have given me her last name, not my father's, that it would have made

comprends bien. Lina ça sonne doux, ça se prononce vite mais on est obligé de ralentir à cause du « n » et du « a » en français, et à cause du « i » en arabe. Ça fait pas mal d'obstacles à la douceur, mine de rien. Je m'appelle Lina, mais les inconnu.es le savent bien, ça n'est pas si surprenant, ça fait partie de leurs horizons d'attentes de lecture de la vie réelle de tous les jours. Je m'appelle Lina, et je ne suis pas dans ce nom comme Pierre est dans le sien, d'abord, Pierre, il a la Bible, il a presque la France, et moi je n'ai que ce nom, un territoire à quatre lettres, pour exister. Pierre a faim et Pierre chie, moi je m'assoie et je demande à sortir de table, car on m'a bien élevé.e. Et puis surtout, Pierre a de la consistance, il a un peu la classe, Lina coule, se fait discrète, Lina sourit et Lina nananère, erre sur la Pierre entière.

Je passais mon DESS de droit, le soir j'allais dans le réfectoire où on mangeait, et j'apprenais mes cours par cœur, j'avais tout l'espace pour moi, et la vue était belle, parce que la cantine était tout en haut, au treizième étage, c'était bien ça, et le silence tu vois, c'est top ça pour travailler.

Après avoir passé mon baccalauréat on m'a dit l'université c'est du gâchis, va en prépa et maman répétait à la mère Michelle, son chat et aux cailloux du jardin que je faisais une classe préparatoire littéraire à Paris. Alors le sourire aux lèvres, un peu gêné.e, un peu fièr.e, un peu bête, je répondais oui mais c'est pas la meilleure, c'est presque rien. Et j'y suis allé.e. J'ai pris le train, le rer et le métro, j'ai acheté les livres inscrits sur les listes des professeurs, je me suis assis.e dans la classe du lycée Jules Ferry Place de Clichy, sur une chaise très loin du plafond. Là, et pour la première fois de ma vie, j'ai appris la honte. C'est un sentiment qui s'apprend avec lenteur et violence, qui se grave dans la chair à mesure qu'elle martèle le corps. La honte collective (l'ignorance), nous l'avions toustes en partage, toustes, nous aurions pu montrer sur nos peaux les endroits bleuis par cette honte-là, mais l'autre, celle de ne pas pouvoir

my life a lot easier. Lina sounds gentle, it's pronounced fast but you have to slow down for the French "n" and "a," and in Arabic you linger on the "i." But in the end, that's quite the hassle for a little sweetness. My name is Lina, but strangers already know that, it's not surprising, it's part of the expectations of the average reader. My name is Lina, but I don't carry my name the way Pierre carries his. First of all, Pierre has the Bible behind him, he has almost all of France. I only have this name, a four-letter province. Pierre's hungry, Pierre takes a shit. I, on the other hand, take my place at the dinner table and ask to be excused when I'm done. I was raised with manners. But nonetheless, Pierre has consistency, a bit of a classic, Lina trickles out, she's elusive, Lina smiles and teases, she clammers all over the hard surfaces of Pierre.

I was doing my DESS in law, in the evening I had dinner in the dining hall, that's where I would memorize my lecture notes, there was plenty of space and a gorgeous view, I was all the way up on the thirteenth floor, the top floor, it was nice, the silence you know, it was the perfect place to get your work done.

After I graduated high school, I was told that uni was a total waste, that I should get into a prépa, maman kept telling mère Michelle, her cat and the pebbles in her garden that I was studying literature in Paris, taking a classe préparatoire. So feeling a little embarrassed, a little proud, and a little stupid, I'd put on a smile and say yes, that's right, but it's no big deal really. And I went. I took the train, the shuttle, the metro, I bought all the books on the syllabus, I sat in a Jules Ferry Place de Clichy classroom, in a chair that made the ceiling seem very far away. That's where I first learned shame, it was a slow and violent lesson, that engraved itself in my flesh and reverberated throughout my body. Our collective shame (our ignorance), we all shared it, all of us, the shame leaving blue blotches on our skin, but the

être plus que soi-même, n'en réunissait que quelques-un.es. Les ami.es que je me suis fait lors de la première année n'étaient pas blanc.hes et ne sont pas resté.es l'année suivante. Contrairement aux élèves qui résidaient aux alentours du lycée, nos horizons dépassaient les rails de la gare Saint-Lazare, si nous vivions les mêmes journées, nos espaces connaissaient d'infinis distances. Plus tard, je leur en ai voulu d'avoir fait de mes lieux des obsessions. Je leur en ai voulu de me regarder comme iels l'avaient fait, d'avoir transformé mon entrain en inertie.

Haha, t'as eu de la chance toi à côté, c'était la belle vie hein, collègue privé, lycée privé, classe prépa, ça va hein, on s'en est donné du mal pour toi, non, je rigole ma fille, mais t'as toujours été sérieuse de toute façon, tu as bien travaillé, bon c'est vrai au collège un peu moins mais t'avais besoin de prendre confiance, après ça a été tout seul.

Lors des premiers échanges avec les autres, une fille, Solène, a déclaré que la banlieue c'était la province et qu'elle ne sortait jamais de Paris intra-muros-tu-connaiss-pas-le-cyrano-c'est-super-sympa. Solène elle vivait à Pigalle et elle aidait aux restos du cœur le mercredi après-midi. Je lui ai répondu qu'elle était bourgeoise sans savoir vraiment ce que ça voulait dire et lui ai demandé si elle avait déjà nettoyé le sol de son appartement elle-même, avec ses mains fripées par l'eau javéalisée, mais Solène, elle avait jamais rien rendu beau de ses mains, elle connaissait pas la distance entre ses épaules et le sol, entre ma vie et la sienne, dans sa famille on faisait du ski en janvier, alors elle avait une femme de ménage. Dans la réalité du corps et de la conversation j'ai ri, mais moi, j'avais des amies dont les mères avaient lavé le sol de chez Solène, je croisais les dames de cantine quand je rentrais à la maison le soir, j'avais le pied dans *the gap between the train and the platform*.

On a de la chance quand même, tu t'en rends compte un peu ou pas trop ? en parlant avec tes copines, tu vois qu'elles ont pas toutes cette relation avec leur parents, avec leur père,

otherness, the not being able to be more than oneself, created small enclaves. The friends I made in my first year weren't White and didn't return the following year. Unlike the students who lived in that area, our futures stretched far beyond the rails of the Saint-Lazare station, and though we all shared the same routine, we inhabited vastly different spaces. In the end, I resented them for making my space their obsession. I resented them for looking at me the way they did, for turning my enthusiasm into inertia.

Ha, you were lucky, you had it good, private middle school, private high school, classe prépa, pretty nice huh, we went to a lot of trouble for you, just kidding ma fille, you were always so serious, you worked hard, well except in middle school, but you just needed a little more confidence, then you were off.

One of my interactions at the lycee was with a girl, Solène, who told me the banlieue was outside of Paris and she never left Paris intra-muro-you-probably-never-been-to-Cyrano's-it's-like-super-chill. Solène lived in Pigalle and volunteered at the soup kitchen every Wednesday afternoon. I told her she was just another yuppie who didn't know what she was talking about. I asked her if she'd ever cleaned the floor of her apartment herself with her hands all shriveled up from bleach, but Solène never made anything beautiful with her hands, she didn't know the distance between her shoulders and the ground, between my life and hers—her family went skiing in January, so they hired a cleaning woman. With respect to my body and the conversation, I laughed, I had friends whose mothers had probably washed Solène's floor, I'd run into the lunch ladies on my way home at night, I put my foot in "the gap between the train and the platform."

At the end of the day we're pretty lucky, you realize that or what? talking to your girlfriends, a lot of them say they don't

qu'ils se disent pas qu'ils s'aiment, si, oui, tu t'en rends compte, enfin ça a été naturel pour nous, on a toujours été tendres l'un envers l'autre, et puis on parle, c'est bien quand les enfants sont petits, mais moi je préfère maintenant, on peut discuter pour de vrai, avoir des conversations où tu vois que je suis pas toujours dans une posture d'homme fort, on peut parler comme des adultes en fait, c'est bien, je t'aime ma fille.

have this type of relationship with their parents, with their fathers, that they rarely tell each other I love you, I mean, you do realize that don't you? but you know, it was pretty natural for us, we were always sweet to each other, and we talked a lot, that's the best way to raise a kid, but it's even better now that you're grown, we can talk for real, I don't have to play the infallible father, we can just talk as two adults, it's great, I love you ma fille.

Translator's Note

Damien m'a confié sept poèmes. J'ai regardé sur internet des vidéos de Damien en train de dire ses textes en public. Je comprenais tout et j'ai eu la chair de poule. Ensuite j'ai lu ces sept poèmes et d'abord, je n'ai rien compris. Lorsque nous avons commencé à échanger sur nos textes respectifs, je lui ai demandé de me lire les siens à voix haute. Ce n'était pas beaucoup plus clair mais une ambiance était posée, qui avait percé l'opacité première des textes. Durant un peu plus de trois mois, la durée de nos séances de travail hebdomadaires, je lui ai demandé de me les expliquer chacun en détail. Il s'est chaque fois patiemment prêté au jeu. Les notes que je prenais étaient plus longues que tous ses poèmes réunis. C'est un luxe de traductrice et j'en ai conscience.

Il fallait, je crois, plonger dans l'histoire de Damien pour réussir à me saisir de toutes les images qu'il mobilise pour évoquer ses thèmes d'écriture. Dans ces poèmes, il prend des mots, les arrange en images et avec elles, il effleure les histoires qu'il adresse à son passé, à ses proches, à lui-même et parfois à la vie entière.

La langue de Damien est pleine de références à la culture africaine américaine. Elle est habitée par la foi et les spiritualités. L'histoire de l'exploitation prolétaire y croise celle de l'esclavage et se prolonge dans l'évocation des violences policières. Ses poèmes racontent les traumatismes intergénérationnels, la cohabitation de l'amour et de la violence dans les gestes et la nourriture, dans les paroles et le silence, dans l'inquiétude et l'insouciance – celle qui manque à l'enfant qui se cache à la rivière. Ils racontent la mémoire de la mort qui peut surgir à n'importe quel moment – et ne se prive pas de faucher ses victimes. Damien nous parle de son enfance et de son enfant, cette vie qui le maintient en vie, lui et peut-être bien d'autres au-delà ; cette vie qui s'épanouit

dans l'amour et quelques tessons de verre.

Ici, la famille est un grand corps collectif. Elle protège autant qu'elle colle à la peau, elle est capable de blesser ses membres autant que de veiller sur eux à tout prix. Je me suis demandé quelles saveurs pouvaient avoir ces des repas partagés concoctés avec des fonds de frigos, mais qui traduisent l'acharnement maternel à protéger l'âme de sa famille noire. Est-ce que les blancs peuvent comprendre ça ? Est-ce que je peux moi-même avoir la moindre idée de ce dont il parle et que je n'ai pas expérimenté dans ma chair ? Est-ce que ma famille juive et les sentiments violents qu'elle a plantés en moi peuvent m'aider à mettre des mots sur l'idée même de la lutte que son existence représente?

J'ai eu quelques sueurs froides : le français était mon ennemi. J'ai fouillé les tréfonds d'internet. J'ai usé les dictionnaires de synonymes jusqu'à la corde pour fabriquer mes propres images.

Avant cela, je n'avais jamais traduit de poème. Le plus difficile était peut-être, ici, qu'il fallait traduire l'expérience d'une vie, peuplée de personnages nombreux, mais racontée par un seul visage. Il fallait trouver dans les ronces le chemin de la rivière, et y emmener tout le monde.

DAMIEN MCCLENDON

POEMS

Life on Lease

I sold God to the landlord
for one month's rent
I mean, I sold God on Craigslist
for cash — landlords don't accept God

I offer forty times the price
as proof — hope
this land-god believes in a lower power

That's how it starts

Showing of stubs
history of wear
work a double
double security
deposit down — and out of deities

The first voice is an invoice

The baby is rent this month

**traduit de l'anglais par
NORAH BENARROSH ORSONI**

POÈMES

Une vie sous caution

J'ai vendu ma foi au proprio
Pour un mois de loyer
En fait, j'ai vendu ma foi sur Craigslist
pour du cash – les proprios ne prennent pas la foi

Je promets trois fois le montant du loyer
comme preuve – comme espoir que
ce divin-bailleur croit en une puissance ouvrière

Ça débute comme ça

Montrer ses fiches de paie
toute une vie de labeur
à faire les trois huit
un loyer d'avance
acompte versé – poches percées – dieux échoués

La première créature : une facture

La prochaine fois, je vendrai le bébé

The House

The house
has nothing to do with walls
everything to do with doors
Family a group of people walking
through each other
calling to let you know
we on the way.

We live in different rooms
of the same heart
not paying rent
but giving love free.

The Family is a streetlight
screaming come home
in the dark with grass-stained school clothes
chlorophyll and cotton pressed
against each other like hands
praying for a child's safety.

Whose nerves become a place
for the whole family to sit
and carry on as if weightless
until it's time to eat

We have a pot's appetite
cook with our foot in the food
every bite tastes like a mile in mama's shoes

La maison

La maison
n'est faite d'aucun murs
n'est faite que de portes
La famille : des êtres qui avancent
les uns dans les autres
qui appellent pour te dire
on se ramène.

On habite dans différentes pièces
du même cœur
on ne paie pas de loyer
on donne de l'amour gratis.

La Famille est un réverbère
grondant qu'il est l'heure de rentrer
dans la nuit vêtements d'école tâchés d'herbe
chlorophylle et coton pressés
l'un contre l'autre comme des mains
prient pour que l'enfant rentre sain et sauf.

Ses nerfs transformés en espace
où toute la famille vient s'asseoir
comme si elle ne pesait rien
jusqu'à ce qu'il soit l'heure du repas

Nous avons un appétit vorace
notre âme entière dans un repas
chaque bouchée a le goût du labour de mama

a consumption of survived trauma.

We part our curtains
open our windows
to arms that reach out and embrace you
like summer's heat

The family is the biggest hug
when you need it most,
living until living becomes
mostly remembering

l'absorption des traumas traversés.

Nous écartons les rideaux
ouvrons les fenêtres
sur des bras qui viennent nous enlacer
comme la chaleur estivale

La famille est une étreinte immense
quand ça devient vital,
jusqu'à ce que vivre prenne surtout
la forme du souvenir

Let it take forever

The last time I spoke
to grandpa
he was in the hospital dying
despite our desperate effort
to love him back to health

On the way to the hospital
Nile (4-year-old) Says, *daddy*
I want something from ol McDonalds
I told him we can stop after
we go see grandpa
he says *that's gon'take forever*

The last thing grandpa said to Nile was
I love you too. 45 minutes
later the smell of French fries fills
the car as grief and guilt build-up
like bad cholesterol

I should've made Nile wait
spent more time
I should've let it take forever
for a few more minutes

Que ça dure des plombes

La dernière fois que j'ai parlé
à papi
il mourait à l'hôpital
malgré nos efforts désespérés
pour le guérir à force d'amour

Sur le chemin de l'hôpital
Nile, 4 ans, dit *Papa*
Je veux aller au Macdo
Je lui dis qu'on ira après
être allés voir papi
Il répond *Mais ça va durer des plombes*

Les derniers mots de papi à Nile étaient
Moi aussi je t'aime. 45 minutes
plus tard l'odeur des frites s'insinue dans
la voiture pendant que deuil et culpabilité enflent
comme du mauvais cholestérol

J'aurais dû laisser attendre Nile
Rester plus longtemps
J'aurais dû faire que ça dure des plombes
Pour quelques minutes encore

A war older

River's footprint across my chest.

Carry a boy
through forest of glass.

To stay alive I call home
but there was no tomorrow.

Heavy rain did not blot the shore but flattened it.

Edges of a day too heavy to move
Retires at night, before the knife
comes out.

Jaws gather memories
like tomb.

River Intrudes
on argument to demand a monster.
I want to yell my life's name at her.
Now, I am a war older, running late as usual

Une guerre de plus

Les petits pieds de Mon Ruisseau sur mon torse.

Charrier un garçon

à travers une multitude de tessons.

Pour rester en vie j'essaie de rentrer chez moi
mais il n'y a pas de lendemain.

Les orages n'ont pas lavé le rivage – ils l'ont détruit.

Fin de journée, déjà épuisé

Se transforme en nuit, avant que surgisse
le couteau.

Mes mâchoires recueillent les souvenirs
comme un tombeau.

Mon Ruisseau s'immisce

dans les cris pour réclamer son nounours.

Je voudrais qu'elle se bouffe tout ce que j'ai traversé.

Voilà que j'ai mené une guerre de plus, en retard comme toujours

Baptism

I used to play,
in a shallow creek
jump rock-to-rock,
trying not to fall.

My sneaker and the moss and the lack
of friction between them, slipping
on each other, like new lovers.

You are the river my feet fell into, running
from ourselves to ourselves.

When smoke fills the damaged house,
you exhale into me

We share
a single breath,

now all things can exist.

Take it all from me and become yourself.
Say nothing.

Everything in nature has your voice,
and speaks to me in language only I know.

Un baptême

Souvent je jouais
dans un petit ruisseau
sautant d'un caillou à l'autre,
tâchant d'éviter les chutes.

Mes baskets et la mousse et entre elles
aucun frottement, elles
s'effleuraient comme de jeunes amants.

Tu es le fleuve où mes pieds ont glissé, en s'élançant
de nous à nous.

Quand la fumée envahit la maison meurtrie,
c'est en moi que tu expires

Nous partageons
le même souffle,

désormais tout est possible.

Prends tout ce que j'ai et réalise toi.
Ne dis rien.

La nature toute entière a le son de ta voix
et me parle une langue que moi seul comprends.

Sacrifice

A wound the shape of a smile
keeps the blood a secret.

Then it all became
a wound. The shape of a smile
a memory.

Keep the blood a secret.
Before it is born, a ghost
is a memory

Resentment grows old
before it is born. A ghost
finds a way to speak.

Resentment grows old.
Keep the blood. A secret
finds a way to speak.

Sacrifice

Une plaie grimée en sourire
garde secret le sang versé.

Alors tout s'est transformé
en plaie. Et la forme du sourire
en souvenir.

Garde secret le sang versé.
Avant de voir le jour, les fantômes
sont des souvenirs

La rancune se flétrit
avant de voir le jour. Les fantômes
s'inventent un langage.

La rancune se flétrit.
Garde le sang versé. Les secrets
s'inventent un langage.

In the river's shelter

When i walk at night Peace comes down,
throwing itself towards
a rotted floor
accepting the oncoming shatter.

i am sobered
by dark thicket of childhood.
A soul with empty stomach
expelled from the mouth

Just yesterday it was yesterday and now its already today
And we will never be the same

In the river's shelter, we felt no threat.
Walking into the house
standing together wondering, does God see that little piece of light
in danger of blowing away.

À l'abri de notre ruisseau

Quand la nuit je marche La paix retombe,
et s'élance
vers le plancher pourri
pour accueillir le fracas qui vient.

je suis dégrisé
par le noir bosquet de l'enfance.
Ma bouche recrache
un spectre affamé

À peine hier on était hier et voilà qu'on est déjà aujourd'hui
Et nous ne serons plus jamais les mêmes

A l'abri de notre ruisseau, on n'avait peur de rien.
On marchait dans la maison on
se tenait tous ensemble on se demandait si
Dieu pouvait voir cette minuscule lueur
qui menaçait d'être emportée.

Translator's Note

When I first read “Les Semaines”, I initially thought that the subject matter made me feel as though a higher level of sensitivity than usual would be needed to translate the text properly. Then I learned that the author was a character in this poem about experiencing the loss of a friend who died of suicide, made me nervous. This wasn't just a poem but a collection of memories, a way of remembering — and remembering is already an act of translation in which details can be lost or skewed. I knew in my translation some things might be lost or skewed but I still wanted it to be able to function as memory for Norah, and not just tell the story of Tal, not that that wouldn't have been substantial in itself.

Les Semaines translated as The Weeks documents the collective mourning of a group of people connected by a mutual friend who become closer in the wake of their friend's death. It begins one week after and I chose to retain the syntax of the French Une Semaines as “One week” instead of reversing it to “Week one” as I felt the latter carries an analytical connotation that didn't feel present in the text. With the phrase Il reste which can translate to he stays or remains, two words that carry distinct connotations in English but not in the same way in French, I chose “Still there is” each word individually communicating the idea of being without the same corporeal connotations associated with them as a word such as “remain” . English aided in translation of this text because for the translation Norah requested that I use a gender neutral pronoun for the late friend which was not used in the original text. Her decision to use “il” rather than “iel” was made in part based on the connotations of these gender neutral pronouns. In this way “The Weeks” lives in a space that may be in some ways closer to the original than the original

itself. This is a choice I wouldn't ever have made if not for the author's input which I know isn't a translator's usual experience to have — but I think it goes to show what can happen in the space of collaboration.

NORAH BENARROSH

LES SEMAINES

Une semaine

Il doit être à l'hôpital
Il va se réveiller

J'aurais voulu ne pas lui rendre le pull qu'il avait oublié chez moi
Sur ses photos institutionnelles, il porte ce pull au logo Champion
Toutes les filles qui ont été amoureuses de lui s'en souviennent
Ce pull qui a dormi deux mois entre les miens
Ce pull que je n'ai jamais essayé de porter
Que j'ai pas non plus osé renifler
Ou peut-être que je l'ai fait

Il reste le souvenir de ce pull et les trous de mémoire pour tout le reste
Il reste des questions

On me dit vendredi soir dans la cuisine
Je cuisine des champignons parce que c'est ce qu'il préférerait
Et dans ma tête :
Est-ce qu'on a mangé des champignons cet hiver dans la maison de campagne ?
J'aimerais qu'on ait mangé des champignons
J'aimerais qu'il m'ait dit combien il aimait ça
Ou plutôt : ne pas avoir oublié s'il me l'a dit
J'aimerais lui avoir cuisiné des champignons
Et j'aimerais lui avoir dit que moi aussi, c'est ce que je préfère
J'aimerais poser ces questions aux personnes qui étaient là cet hiver
Mais ce n'est pas le moment d'emmerder des gens en deuil avec des trous de mémoire

translated from the french by
DAMIEN MCCLENDON

THE WEEKS

One week

They must be in the hospital
They will wake up

I didn't want to give them back the sweater they forgot at my house
The one with the Champion logo they wore in their college photos
All the girls who've been in love with them remember
This sweater that slept among my own for two months
This sweater that I never tried to wear
And didn't dare to sniff
Or maybe I did

Still there is the memory of this sweater but for everything else the
memory lapses
Still there are questions

Our friends tell me Friday night in the kitchen
I cook mushrooms because that's what they liked best
And in my head:
Did we eat mushrooms that winter at the lake house?
I wish we had eaten mushrooms
I wish they had told me how much they enjoyed them
Or rather that I hadn't forgotten if they told me
I wish I had cooked them mushrooms
And I wish I had told them that I liked mushrooms best too
I would like to ask the ones who were there this winter
These questions about mushrooms

J'ouvre mes agendas pour compter le nombre de fois
J'ajoute les rendez-vous que j'avais négligé de noter
Je garde l'espoir secret qu'il y en ait eu d'autres et que je les ai oubliés
Parce que pourquoi je suis ravagée s'il n'y a eu que ceux-là ?

Il reste :
son nom dans mon répertoire téléphonique
Je dois changer de téléphone et peut-être que c'est le moment
L'éteindre avant qu'il ne soit cassé
Pour le rallumer quand je voudrai lire ses messages

Il reste :
Son nom sur Facebook, sur Twitter, sur Instagram
Il reste nos conversations dans les messageries et une grande inquiétude :
Quand sa famille désactivera ses comptes, combien de personnes perdront
des années de discussions intimes avec lui ?

On me dit
Ça faisait deux semaines qu'il appelait son psy tous les jours pour lui dire
qu'il voulait mourir
On me dit
Il ne l'avait dit à personne
On me dit
Quand le temps sera venu, on se vengera du psy

En face de moi
Celle qui a essayé de le joindre tout le week-end
Celle qui a eu une histoire d'amour avec lui
Celle qui était trop malade pour se déplacer dans la nuit malgré
l'inquiétude
Celle qui le mercredi d'avant, mangeait un gâteau avec lui en parlant
d'inceste
Celle qui le connaissait quand il avait encore les cheveux longs
En face de moi aucun corps ne s'effondre
Elles attendent les ruelles, leurs lits et les bras d'autres amies pour hurler
dans le noir, défoncer des vitrines à poings nus et avaler des ansiolytiques

Tout autour de moi :
Une constellations de corps qui se rencontrent parce qu'un ami est devenu

But this is not the time to piss off grieving people with my lapses in memory

I open my diaries to count the number of times we hung out
I add the dates I had neglected to note
I secretly hope that there were more and that I just can't remember
Cause why am I so devastated if it's only been this many?

Still there is:
their name saved in my contacts
I need to change phones
maybe it's time to turn this one off before it dies
I can turn it on again later to read the messages

Still there is:
their name on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram
Still there are our conversations in the messages and the greatest worry:
When their family deactivates their accounts, how many of us will lose
years of irreplaceable memories with them?
I hear from our friends
They'd been calling their shrink every day for two weeks to tell him that
they wanted to die.
I hear
They didn't tell anyone
I hear
When the time is right, we'll take revenge on the shrink

Facing me
The friend who tried to reach them all weekend,
The friend who had a love affair with them,
The friend who was too sick to leave the house that night despite the
worry.
The friend who the Wednesday before, ate a cake with them while
discussing incest
And the friend who knew them when they still had long hair
In front of me none of their bodies are collapsing
They wait for the alleys, their beds and the arms of other friends to

précisément ça :

un corps

Des verres de vin dans des bars où on n'avait jamais mis les pieds mais où l'on reste chaque soir jusqu'à la fermeture

Des inconnues qui se serrent dans leurs manteaux se partagent des clopes s'échangent des numéros de téléphone s'appellent tous les jours et se disent des mots d'amour dans un groupe Whatsapp

Une succession de jours fériés

Trente personnes qui deviennent le centre du monde les unes des autres

C'est comme un attentat

Des soutiens de soutiens de soutiens

Un jour peut-être on dessinera la cartographie des corps qui se sont mus ensemble ces dix jours-là

Et puis quelqu'un dit

Voici sa sœur

Et le lendemain

Voilà son frère

Et je me demande

S'ils vont s'effondrer maintenant qu'ils sont ensemble

S'ils vont réaliser qu'ils ne sont plus que deux

Ou s'ils vont continuer

à sourire

à manger notre nourriture

à dormir chez leurs parents et que se passe-t-il dans cet endroit où notre ami ne voulait plus mettre les pieds ?

On me dit

La police a demandé :

Est-ce qu'il possédait une barre de traction ?

Est-ce que cette corde d'escalade lui appartenait ?

On me dit

La police a demandé à ses amies dans le hall de l'immeuble :

Pourquoi vous dites Il alors que c'est une dame qui est pendue à cette corde ?

Et que l'une a retenu l'autre de mettre son poing dans la gueule du flic

La police a écrit dans le dossier médical :

la table était couverte de lignes de coke

scream in the dark, smash windows with bare fists and swallow anxiety pills.

All around me :

A constellation of bodies that meet because

a friend has become precisely this: a body

Glasses of wine in bars we've never gone to but where we now stay every night until closing time

Strangers who huddle in their coats share cigarettes exchange phone

numbers call each other every day and share words of love in a Whatsapp group

A series of holidays

Thirty people who become the center of each other's world

It's like an attack

Supports of supports of supports

One day perhaps we will draw a map of the bodies that moved together these ten days

And then someone says

Here is their sister

And the next day

Here is their brother

And I wonder

If they're gonna fall apart now that they're together

If they'll realize it's just the two of them

Or if they will continue

to smile

to eat our food

to sleep at their parent's

and what happens in this place where our friend

no longer wanted to set foot?

I hear

The police asked:

Did they have a pull up bar?

Did that climbing rope belong to them?

I hear

On se demande entre quelles pièces était installée la barre de traction
On dit qu'on ne veut pas la réponse

On se demande s'il a laissé une lettre
On apprend que non
Je suis soulagée
Je me raconte :
je préfère qu'il ait sombré plutôt qu'il ait planifié de nous abandonner

Je demande
Mais est-ce qu'on sait quand il est mort ?
L'une me regarde pendant trente seconde en silence et finalement
Lundi matin
Et le silence ensuite encore, dans le bar vide qu'on a choisi exprès

On me dit
C'est mercredi pour aller voir son corps à l'Institut médico-légal
Je dis Vous êtes sûres que ça lui aurait plu que vous le voyiez comme ça ?
L'une répond
Ca faisait des mois que je le ramassais défoncé et qu'il refusait de
consulter un psychiatre
Alors tu vois, là tout de suite, son consentement je m'en fous

On dit aussi
C'est vendredi pour se recueillir devant le cercueil ouvert avant la mise en
bière
On se demande à quoi ressemble un cercueil ouvert dans une mort juive
Est-ce qu'un linceul c'est un drap avec un zip fermé
Ou plutôt comme une momie, une tête le nez les yeux le menton visible
sous le drap enroulé autour de son visage

On se demande
Est-ce qu'on peut empêcher des parents de faire un discours à
l'enterrement de leur enfant ?
Qui vide l'appartement d'un ami mort sans devenir fou ?

Quelqu'un dit
Il devait prendre l'avion pour s'installer à Berlin le lendemain

The police asked our friends who were in the lobby of the building:
“Why do you say He when it’s a lady hanging from this rope?”
And one of them stopped the other from putting their fist in the cop’s
face

The police wrote in the medical file:
the table was covered in lines of coke

We wonder where in the apartment the pull-up bar was installed
We say we don’t want the answer

We wonder if they left a letter
We learn... no
I am relieved
I tell myself:
I’d rather they fell into despair than planned to abandon us

I ask
But do we know when they died?
One friend looks at me for thirty seconds in silence and finally
Monday morning
And silence then again, in the empty bar that we chose on purpose

I hear
on Wednesday we will go see their body at the Forensic lab
I ask, are you sure they would have liked you to see them like that?
One friend responds
I had been picking them up stoned for months and they refused to see a
psychiatrist.
So you see, right now, I don’t care about their consent

We also say
On Friday we will gather in front of the open coffin before the funeral
One friend wonders what an open coffin looks like at a Jewish funeral
Is a cerement a sheet with a closed zip
Or is the head, nose, eyes, chin visible under the sheet
that’s wrapped around his face like a mummy

Il avait rangé toutes ses affaires dans des cartons
Il avait dit au revoir à tout le monde

Pendant des jours ma tête répète une comptine à trois vers
Pauvre pauvre enfant
Qu'est-ce qu'ils lui ont fait ?

Et l'écho de la voix de ma sœur, en larmes dans le téléphone :
Tal s'est suicidé

We wonder

Can parents be prevented from giving a speech at their child's funeral?
Who empties a dead friend's apartment without going mad?

One friend says

"They were to fly to Berlin the next day
They had packed all their things in boxes
They had said goodbye to everyone"

For several days my head repeats a three-line nursery rhyme

poor poor child

What did they do to you?

And my sister in tears

her voice on the telephone echoing

Tal committed suicide

Deux semaines

À l'entrée du cimetière une foule colorée
Des gens en noir mieux sapés que nous
Leur air effrayé sur notre passage
On le voit dans leurs yeux : nous sommes trop jeunes pour être ici
Quand on se retourne, dans l'allée la foule
Va si loin que les dernières personnes sont floues

Une famille embarrassante et dévastée
Les parents à gauche, les enfants à droite
Le visage sec de la mère
Des chaussures à talon
Un micro comme dans une salle des fêtes
Un discours avec des listes
Ça pourrait aussi bien être un mariage
Si cette vie n'était pas racontée au passé

Je pense à ma mère
Je pense à tous les bras qu'elle aurait pour se blottir

Après les discours et les poignées de terre jetées on reste encore
Ça dure longtemps on retrouve nos voix
Soudain on complotte on entend même des ricanements
Le bruit court des bouches aux oreilles
On se retourne sur le bruit de l'étincelle :
Devant sa tombe le fumigène est craqué
Le bras est levé haut
Les yeux suivent la fumée
Les volutes oranges claquent contre le ciel bleu
On se dit c'est bizarre ça donne envie d'applaudir
Mais ça se fait pas et nos gorges sont serrées alors
On se contente du silence pour décorer notre tristesse
Et c'est terminé

Le Rabbin beau gosse vient nous voir
C'était vraiment une belle idée les lacrymos, bravo

Two weeks

At the entrance to the cemetery a colorful crowd
People in black, better dressed than us
As we pass they look frightened
We see it in their eyes: we're too young to be here
When we turn around to look back down the byway
the crowd is vast, the people furthest away are a blur

An embarrassing, devastated family
Parents on the left, children on the right
mother's dry face
High heels
A microphone like in a reception hall
A speech full with lists
It might as well be a wedding
If this life were not told in the past tense

I think of my mother
I think of all the arms that would cuddle her

After the speeches and the handfuls of dirt we stay behind
It lasts a long time, we find our voices
Suddenly we're plotting, we even hear giggles
The rumor goes from mouth to ear
We turn at the sound of the spark:
In front of their tombstone the smoke bomb is lit
The arm raised high
Eyes follow the smoke
Orange swirls slap against the blue sky
We say to ourselves, it's weird, it makes you want to applaud
But it wouldn't be right and our throats are tight so
We settle for silence to decorate our sadness
And it's over

Merci Rabbi mais ça s'appelle des fumigènes
On rit sous cape
Cette phrase est déjà en train de devenir une bonne histoire
Oui oui pardon mais il continue
Ah ces lacrymos, quelle beauté
Dans nos têtes on dit
Tu vois Tal, finalement il n'y a pas de hasard
Ca fait des jours qu'on se dit
Calmons-nous, c'est pas un happening
Et malgré nous, on t'a organisé une manif

The hot Rabbi comes over to us
The tear gas was really a great idea, well done
Thank you Rabbi but they're called smoke bombs
We laugh under our breath
This sentence is already becoming a good story
Yes yes sorry but he continues
Ah this tear gas, what a beauty
In our heads we say
You see Tal, ultimately it's no coincidence
There's been days that we say
Let's calm down, this isn't a scene
And despite ourselves, we organized a demonstration for you

Trois semaines

Enfoncé dans un canapé (comme lui)
En chaussettes (comme lui)
La bouche tendue par l'histoire drôle qui emporte sa voix (comme lui)
Il reste l'ami qui lui ressemble le plus
On se demande qui a piqué les mimiques à l'autre
On imagine combien ils devaient être collés pour à ce point se ressembler
On imagine les nuits et la tristesse de l'ami qui a perdu son miroir
On voudrait lui ouvrir nos bras

On fait les gestes du deuil
Mais d'autres aussi et à chaque instant
La vie nous revient en pleine gueule

On dit On a gagné quinze amis
On dit Des fois j'y pense et je me trouve chanceux d'être parmi vous
On dit Il nous a laissé ça
On dit Maintenant, c'est comme avoir un petit habitant supplémentaire à l'intérieur
On dit Ou alors un petit diable sur l'épaule
On dit Oui ça lui irait bien

Three weeks

Lying on a sofa (like them)

In socks (like them)

Mouth stretched by a funny story that uplifts the voice (like them)

Still there is the friend who resembles them the most

We wonder who stole the other's facial expressions

We imagine how much they must have been glued to each other to look so similar

We imagine the nights and the sadness of the friend who lost his mirror

We would like to open our arms to him

We make gestures of mourning

But joy too

At every moment life hurries back to us

We say

We gained fifteen friends We say

Sometimes we think about it and feel lucky to be here with each other We say

They left us this We say

Now it's like having a little extra inhabitant inside We say

Or a little devil on the shoulder We say

Yes it would suit him well

Quatre semaines

Je donnerais cher aujourd'hui pour qu'il ait laissé un petit mot
Enterrez-moi avec mon pull préféré
Amenez moi vous aussi vos petits mots

Dans les jours avant l'enterrement, je regarde la boîte
Décorée des plus adorables oiseaux peints
Posée sur ma bibliothèque, près de la porte de ma chambre
Je passe devant vingt-cinq fois par jours
Dans les jours avant l'enterrement, je voudrais proposer qu'on y glisse
Des objets, des petits mots, des trucs
Je voudrais proposer qu'on la glisse, cette boîte, dans le cercueil
Dans les jours avant l'enterrement
Sur la bibliothèque près de la porte de ma chambre
Il y a aussi une cigarette en céramique
Le corps bleu, le filtre orange
C'est un amoureux qui me l'a offerte
C'est une artiste qui l'a fabriquée
Dans les jours avant l'enterrement, on dit
Pas de fleurs dans les enterrements juifs, apportez des petits cailloux
Sur la bibliothèque près de la porte de ma chambre
Je prélève la cigarette en céramique et un lapis-lazuli volé en Espagne
Je les pose sur sa tombe avec tous les autres cailloux
Je prends une photo de sa tombe
J'ai un peu honte

J'aimerais que l'Occident ne nous ait pas privé des corps de nos mortes
Qu'on n'aie pas peur d'aller embrasser leurs joues froides
Qu'il n'y ait pas d'institut médico légal
Pas de chambre impersonnelle et au mobilier ignifugé
Dans les maisons de retraite qui font mourrir nos grand-mères
J'aimerais avoir écrit l'histoire de la mort cruelle de ma grand-mère
Le respirateur, les sushis, l'urgentiste juif, la main tenue, le râle et l'oxygène
qui le calme
Mourir seule quand-même un matin où on se lève juste un peu trop tard

J'aimerais qu'on ait cette audace

Four weeks

I would give a lot today for them to have left a note a little word
—Bury me with my favorite sweater
Bring me your little words too

In the days before the funeral, I look at the box
Decorated with the cutest painted birds
Lying on my bookshelf, near my bedroom door
I walk past it twenty-five times a day
In the days before the funeral, I would like to propose that we slip
Objects, messages, other stuff
I would like to propose that we slip
this box, into the coffin
In the days before the funeral
On the bookshelf by my bedroom door
There is also a clay cigarette
blue body, orange filter
It was a lover who gave it to me
It was an artist who made it
In the days before the funeral, we say
No flowers at Jewish funerals, bring small pebbles
On the bookshelf by my bedroom door
I take the clay cigarette and a lapis lazuli stolen in Spain
I place them on his grave with all the other pebbles
I take a picture of his grave
I'm a bit ashamed

I wish the Western world didn't dispossess us of the bodies of our dead
loved ones
That we weren't afraid to kiss their cold cheeks
I wish there were no forensic lab
No impersonal rooms with fireproof furniture
In the retirement homes that kill our grandmothers
I wish I had written the story of my grandmother's cruel death
The respirator, the sushi, the Jewish paramedic, the hand held, the

Pomponner nos mortes pour leur dire adieu
J'aimerais que nous soyons des croque-morts aimants et inventifs
Que nous soyons des familles de croque-morts
Des pièces d'or sur les paupières
Du rouge sur les joues
Chanter vingt-quatre heure autour du cercueil d'un bien-aimé
Qu'on aie le droit de le faire
J'aimerais qu'on lui ait chanté ses chansons préférées ou rien du tout
Mais qu'on lui ait dit au-revoir et même des blagues

crackle
and the oxygen that soothed her
To die alone anyway on a morning when we get up just a little too late

I wish we had the audacity
To doll up our dead to say goodbye
I wish we were loving and inventive undertakers
That we were entire families of undertakers
Gold coins on the eyelids
Red on the cheeks
Singing twenty-four hours around a loved one's coffin
I wish we had the right to do it
I wish we had sung their favorite songs or nothing at all
But that we still said goodbye to them and even played around

Cinq semaines

Rendez-vous dimanche pour vider son appartement
L'amie n°1 dit : je ne veux jamais y remettre les pieds, je veux résilier le bail, ne récupérer aucun meuble, je ne veux rien savoir
L'ami n°2 fait réparer la fenêtre que les pompiers ont cassée
Pour chaque chose, il y a un numéro suivant sur la liste
Qui souffrira moins que le précédent

Ses parents veulent venir voir les lieux
On fait un conciliabule : faut-il le leur interdire ?
On leur fait un mot
Surtout, n'empportez rien, c'est décidé, tout nous appartient

Dans la conversation collective, l'amie n°3 dit
Ne vous inquiétez pas, c'est rangé et il n'y a rien de choquant
Dans la conversation collective, l'amie n°4 dit
Si vous changez d'avis, personne ne vous en voudra
Elle dit, S'il y a des choses rassurantes à faire avant d'entrer
Elle dit, Que ce soit le plus doux possible
On lit les messages de loin, c'est affreusement émouvant et à la fin
On ne sait pas ce qu'elles ont fait
Une cinquième demande si elle pourra les rejoindre après
Une sixième demande qu'on l'appelle en vidéo quand on y sera
Sur le pallier, l'ami n°7 écrit
J'ai apporté des croissants et les autres répondent avec des cœurs
Dans sa chambre maintenant, quatre amis qui ont hésité à entrer

Plus tard, on lit le message d'une autre, qui dit
J'ai pas entendu mon réveil, j'arrive
Et puis d'un autre encore qui répond
On a fini mais on t'attend

Sa chambre est maintenant une pièce vide qui sent le tabac
Les amies ont fumé des cigarettes et bu des cafés et
D'autres choses qu'on ne m'a pas racontées, sauf que ça a tout adouci
Les clés vont être rendues
Les parents n'ont rien emporté

Five weeks

See you on Sunday to empty his apartment
Friend number 1 says: I never want to set foot in there again, I want to
end the lease, abandon all the furniture, I don't want to know anything
Friend n°2 gets the window fixed that the firefighters broke
For every little thing there's a number coming next on the list
Who will suffer less than the one before

Their parents want to come see the place
We hold a discussion: should we forbid this?
We tell them
Above all, don't take anything, it's decided, everything belongs to us

In the group chat, friend n°3 says
Don't worry, it's tidy and there's nothing too shocking
In the group chat, friend n°4 says
If you change your mind, no one will blame you
She says, If there's any reassuring things you need to do before entering
She says, let it be as gentle as possible
We read the messages on our phones, it's terribly moving and at the end
We don't know what they wound up doing
The fifth asks if she can join them afterwards
The sixth requests that we FaceTime him when we get there
On the landing, friend n°7 writes
I brought croissants and the others respond with hearts
In their room now, four friends who hesitated to enter

Later, we read another's message, which says
I didn't hear my alarm clock, I'm coming
And then another one who answers
We're done but we're waiting for you

Their room is now an empty room that smells like tobacco
The friends smoked cigarettes and drank coffees and
Did who knows what but they said

L'état des lieux est : Tal est mort, son appartement est vidé, ses affaires
sont dans la cave d'une des amies numérotées
Ses rêves et ses cauchemars, maintenant, c'est notre affaire

It made everything sweeter
The keys will be returned
The parents took nothing
The inventory is: Tal is dead, their apartment is empty, their things are in
the basement of one of the numbered friends.
Their dreams Their nightmares, all of it
is now our business

Translator's Note

Luciana et moi sommes géographiquement très éloignées, il y a 6 heures et 6 ans d'écart entre nous (pas un monde, mais quand même !) et pourtant par la grâce d'aller savoir quoi, je me sens très proche de Luciana.

Notre rencontre a été une des meilleures expériences que j'ai vécues cette année, tant sur le plan relationnel que textuel.

L'écriture de Luciana est poétique, organique, sensorielle. Elle m'a immédiatement plu.

Rentrer dans le texte de Luciana, c'est comme rentrer dans de la matière changeante, fluide, concrète. On sent qu'elle a accordé un soin particulier non seulement aux images, mais aussi aux sons, aux rythmes aussi bien en prose qu'en poésie, et c'est comme se sentir investie d'une mission délicate de la traduire. Délicate dans le sens fine, subtile, comme son écriture, mais aussi dans le sens de la difficulté, surtout dans les poèmes où j'ai senti et reconnu l'importance de chaque mot.

Pouvoir échanger avec Luciana a non seulement rendu cette mission plus agréable mais m'a aussi permis de produire une traduction beaucoup plus juste : au cours de nos échanges, Luciana a parfois mis en geste un mot ou une expression pour me permettre de m'approcher au plus près du sens. C'est précisément ce que permet son écriture ; son écriture fait corps.

Et bien sûr cette écriture et nos échanges - autant sur mon texte que le sien - m'ont aussi fait réfléchir différemment à ma propre écriture et l'ont nourrie.

Au cours de notre dernier échange, Luciana m'a confié un secret qu'elle m'a autorisée à révéler ici : le texte et les poèmes que vous allez lire ont été écrits lorsqu'elle

n'avait que 17 ans. Et je vous laisse maintenant découvrir pourquoi cette nouvelle m'a fait l'admirer davantage.

LUCIANA SIRACUSANO

PAST THE FLOWER FIELDS

It was the fourth year since the woman had come, and still sometimes he would think of her in the early mornings when the sun slipped in and greeted the lilies. He wiped his glove off on his apron, dressing the name tag on his left breast-pocket with dirt. It might've said Arthur or something but perhaps he had forgotten because lots of people did and maybe it didn't matter anyway. There was a permanent film of soil that layered his skin and the floor and the benches but he took comfort in it. He knew that soil, he lived and loved and breathed that soil. Sometimes the sunlight sifted through the dirt-stained windows and set fire to the suspended particles of dirt in the air. The scent of earth and flora would hang in the shop, growing thick and rich before it clung to his arms and the stubble on his chin. He took comfort in not sweeping the soil away, for in the soil lay hidden the memory of all the people that had come to his shop, and in that memory existed that woman.

The morning the woman had come he had been wearing the green sweater, the one with the long sleeves that covered his left arm. He didn't have many sweaters that did that anymore. He had been tending to the hydrangeas when she had come in, the wind chime twinkling against the glass window pane, a zephyr of the outside world stealing in.

She was sweet in white sweater fashion, bundled in scarf and wool, and under her red winter gloves there lay hidden delicate, perfect hands, hands that touched but weren't marked by soil, hands that could splay fingers and pluck strings and caress faces. What he remembered most were her hands.

**traduit de l'anglais par
LÉA CUENIN**

AU-DELÀ DES CHAMPS DE FLEURS

Cela faisait quatre ans qu'elle était venue, et certains jours, il lui arrivait encore de penser à elle, tôt le matin, quand le soleil se fauflait à l'intérieur et embrassait les lys. Il essuyait ses gants sur son tablier, recouvrant de poussière le badge accroché à la poche de sa chemise, au niveau de sa poitrine. Le nom d'Arthur y figurait probablement, mais celui-ci l'avait sans doute oublié comme tout le monde, et ça n'avait peut-être pas d'importance après tout. Une pellicule de terre recouvrait en permanence sa peau, le sol et les bancs, mais c'était son élément. Il connaissait cette terre, il vivait, aimait et respirait cette terre. Parfois, les rayons du soleil se glissaient par les vitres entre les tâches et enflammaient les particules de poussière en suspension. L'odeur de terre et de flore flottait dans le magasin, grandissait, s'épaississait jusqu'à s'accrocher à ses bras et sa barbe de trois jours. Ça le rassurait de ne pas épousseter la terre, car dans cette terre reposait, caché, le souvenir de toutes les personnes qui étaient passées dans sa boutique, et dans ce souvenir se trouvait cette femme.

Le matin de sa visite, il portait le pull vert, celui aux manches longues qui couvraient son bras gauche. Il n'avait plus beaucoup de pull comme celui-ci. Il s'occupait des hortensias quand elle était entrée, le tintement du carillon contre le carreau de vitre, l'infiltration d'un zéphyr du monde extérieur.

Elle était douce dans son pull blanc, emmitoufflée dans une écharpe et de la laine, et sous ses gants d'hiver rouges se cachaient des mains délicates et parfaites, des mains qui touchaient sans être imprégnées de terre, des mains qui pouvaient écarter les doigts, pincer des cordes

It had been a common interaction. *Hello* she had said, swinging her way into the shop. *How can I help you* he had said and she had waltzed toward him, drifting in and burying her nose in roses as she went. *Oh I'm just looking* she had said. And then she spun around and leaned through the scented air to rest her elbow on the counter where he was, and stretched like a gazelle across the table to smell the hydrangeas in his arms. Her butterfly eyes fluttered as she took in the scent. The man was a bit startled by the manner in which she had come in, and even more so once she swept up the nearest bouquets and held them to her chest and exclaimed *Oh I want to buy them all!* But she had no money, and although the man was willing to give her a bouquet for free she said she couldn't. So she settled for staring at the hydrangeas and watching as the man tended to them, preening and doting on each one with his right hand while his left arm hung graciously behind his back. At one point the woman couldn't help herself any longer, and tore her gloves off to cup the buds in her Raphaellesque hands. The sight of such lovely hands softened the man's guarded expression, and thus he felt that longing rise up again, the one he had tried to forget back at the hospital when the pain had been fresh and the nerves still tingled.

"Arthur, is that your name, Arthur?" she said as she leaned over to inspect his tag.

"Yes."

"That's a wonderful name. Solid. More people should be named Arthur."

"Enough people are already."

"What! No! You're the only Arthur I know."

"I suppose you just haven't met many Arthurs then." He removed himself from the counter and came around to gather more hydrangeas. He was well aware of his left arm, and took care not to show it. It would be too shameful, in front of those angel hands, it would be like standing naked, drenched in a thousand years of sin before God. Slow and deliberate the man gathered

et caresser des visages. Ce dont il se souvenait le plus, c'était de ses mains.

L'échange avait été banal. *Bonjour* avait-elle dit, en entrant dans la boutique avec un léger balancement, *Comment puis-je vous aider* avait-il demandé, et elle avait valsé vers lui, se laissant dériver et plongeant son nez dans les roses au passage. *Oh je ne fais que regarder* elle avait répondu. Puis elle avait tourné sur elle-même et s'était penchée dans l'air parfumé pour poser son coude sur le comptoir où il se trouvait, elle s'était étirée par-dessus la table comme une gazelle pour sentir les hortensias dans ses bras. Ses yeux avaient papillonné quand le parfum lui était parvenu. Il avait été légèrement surpris par la manière dont elle était entrée, et plus encore lorsqu'elle avait rassemblé les bouquets les plus proches pour les porter à sa poitrine, s'exclamant *Oh je voudrais tous les acheter !* Mais elle n'avait pas d'argent, et bien qu'il soit prêt à lui offrir un bouquet, elle avait répondu qu'elle ne pouvait pas. Alors elle s'était contentée de fixer les hortensias et de l'observer, lui, s'en occuper, lissant et dorlotant chacun d'eux de sa main droite, tandis que son bras gauche pendait gracieusement dans son dos. Au bout d'un moment, elle n'avait pu s'empêcher de retirer ses gants pour prendre les boutons dans le creux de ses mains, des mains dignes d'un Raphaël. À la vue de mains aussi jolies, l'expression réservée qu'il affichait s'était adoucie, alors il avait senti renaître ce désir, celui qu'autrefois il avait tenté d'oublier, à l'hôpital, lorsque la douleur était nouvelle et que les nerfs le picotaient encore.

- Arthur, est-ce votre nom, Arthur ? avait-elle demandé en se penchant pour examiner son badge

- Oui.

- C'est un nom magnifique. Sérieux. Plus de gens devraient s'appeler Arthur.

- Il y en a déjà suffisamment.

- Quoi ? Non ! Vous êtes le seul Arthur que je connaisse.

- J'imagine bon, mettons que vous n'avez pas rencontré

the hydrangeas, but was soon distracted by the woman stretching up to the ceiling to touch one of the hanging snapdragons. She was on tippy-toe and when she slipped and the snapdragons came down on top of her the man caught her before she could hit the ground. She grabbed onto his arms as he pulled her up, gripping him in thanks. The man quickly retreated back into his sweater, sheltering the arm he had so carefully tried to hide. But the woman had felt the arm, and bid him wait and turn towards her once again. She touched his shoulder and inspected the useless heap attached.

“How did it happen?” she asked, still grasping his arm gently.

“How it always happens,” he replied. The man was perhaps only a couple years her senior and yet he felt to her as frail and as old as rotten wood. How strange he must seem to this lithe being that had wandered into his cave, how shaggy and haggard he must look, the lonely monster under the cliff, hiding his ugly face behind flower fields of azure and bubble gum. What sorrow she must have seen strewn over his face that she let go quickly, startled by his sincerity. She looked at him with brow furrowed, eyes drooped in sympathy as if to say, *I don't mean no harm*, but that's what everyone said so he turned away before he could judge the truth that welled up in her eyes.

“My brother fought too, you know. Lost his leg,” she said. When the man did not respond, she continued. “He would sit by the window and stare at the people passing. Usually he'd be quiet but from time to time he'd whisper when he thought no one was listening that he wished he could run one more time. Just one run, just to the end of the block.” The woman bent to gather the fallen dragons in her arms, caressing each one as they purred orange and pink against her skin. “But I know if he could run he'd run to the end of the world and never come back. He'd just keep running.”

The man too, wished he could run. Run out of his cave, past the flower fields and shatter through

beaucoup d'Arthur, alors.

Il s'était extrait du comptoir et l'avait contourné pour rassembler plus d'hortensias. Il avait bien conscience de son bras gauche, et prenait soin de ne pas le montrer. Cela aurait été trop honteux devant ces mains d'ange, comme s'il s'était tenu nu devant Dieu, dégoulinant de 1000 ans de péchés. Lentement et avec application, il rassemblait les hortensias, mais il avait vite été distrait par la silhouette qui s'étirait vers le plafond pour toucher l'une des gueule-de-loup suspendues. Elle était perchée sur la pointe des pieds quand elle avait glissé, faisant tomber les gueule-de-loup qui avaient fondu sur elle, il l'avait rattrapée avant qu'elle ne touche le sol. Elle s'était agrippée à ses bras pendant qu'il la hissait, et l'avait enlacé pour le remercier. Il s'était rapidement retranché dans son pull, dissimulant le bras qu'il avait si soigneusement tenté de cacher. Mais elle avait senti son bras, et lui avait intimé d'attendre et se tourner vers elle à nouveau. Elle avait touché son épaule et inspecté le bout de peau inutile.

- Comment est-ce arrivé ? avait-elle demandé, sans lâcher sa prise délicate sur son bras.

- Comme toujours, avait-il répondu.

Il était probablement à peine plus âgé qu'elle, et pourtant il lui avait semblé aussi frêle et vieux que du bois pourri. Comme il devait lui paraître étrange, à cet être léger qui s'était égaré dans sa grotte, comme il devait être hirsute et hagard, le monstre solitaire sous la falaise, dissimulant son visage hideux derrière des champs de fleurs d'azur et de bubble gum. Quelle peine avait-elle dû voir voiler son visage pour qu'elle le lâche si rapidement, surprise par sa sincérité. Elle l'avait regardé, les sourcils froncés, les yeux baissés en signe de sympathie, comme pour dire *Je ne vous veux aucun mal*, mais c'est ce que tout le monde prétend, alors il s'était détourné avant de pouvoir juger de la vérité qui montait à ses yeux.

« Mon frère a combattu aussi, vous savez. Il a perdu une jambe », avait-elle dit. Comme il ne répondait pas, elle avait continué. « Il s'asseyait près de la fenêtre et

the dirt stained glass. Run past the roses and the snapdragons and the hydrangeas, run past till he left all the world behind. But his arm, his brutal, despicable little stump of an arm would still be there, to remind him that he could never run. He'd always have a cursed keepsake from his life as the useless one-armed florist on that corner of that street down which people walked and didn't run.

Sometimes when he remembered the woman he wished she hadn't come at all. Then he would have forgotten the feeling of want, the feeling of running and sighing and leaping.

The snapdragons seemed to protest as he took them from her beautiful hands. We are beautiful too, the flowers told him, we should be touched and loved by hands of beauty, not your rough, mangled stump! *Patience* he told his children. He shuffled back to behind the counter, and gathered the snapdragons with the spare hydrangeas that were too small for arrangements. He collected the buds and tied them with straw, the special straw that he saved for the wedding bouquets and the Christmas laurels.

"Here. They're too small for me to use anyway," he told her as he handed her the flowers.

"Oh no I couldn't!"

"Please, you must, they'll be thrown out if you don't."

"Oh. We wouldn't want that."

"No, we wouldn't."

"I'll take care of them for you!" she said as she grasped the flowers, taking his hand in hers at the same time in gratitude. She smiled and he smiled and then she was gone, evaporated into dust that sparkled across the flower fields like the dirt that hung in the sun-lit air.

regardait les gens passer. En général, il restait silencieux, mais de temps en temps, quand il pensait que personne n'écoutait, il murmurait qu'il souhaitait pouvoir courir une dernière fois. "Juste un sprint, seulement jusqu'au bout de la rue." » Elle s'était penchée pour rassembler dans ses bras les gueule-de-loup qui étaient tombées, caressant chacune d'elles tandis qu'elles faisaient ronronner l'orange et le rose sur sa peau. *Mais je savais que s'il pouvait courir, il irait jusqu'au bout du monde et ne reviendrait jamais. Il ne s'arrêterait jamais de courir.*

Lui aussi souhaitait pouvoir courir. S'enfuir de sa grotte, aller au-delà des champs de fleurs et faire voler en éclats les vitres tachetées de terre. Dépasser les roses, les gueule-de-loup et les hortensias, courir jusqu'à laisser le monde entier derrière lui. Mais son bras, son brutal et minable petit moignon serait toujours là pour lui rappeler qu'il ne pourrait jamais fuir. Il aurait toujours un souvenir maudit de sa vie de fleuriste manchot inutile, à cet angle de cette rue où les gens marchent et ne courent pas.

Quand il se souvenait d'elle, il lui arrivait de souhaiter qu'elle ne soit jamais venue. Alors, il aurait oublié le sentiment de désir, le sentiment de courir, de soupirer et de sauter.

Les gueule-de-loup avaient semblé protester quand ils les avait reprises de ses belles mains. Nous sommes belles aussi, avaient dit les fleurs, nous devrions être touchées et aimées par les mains de la beauté, pas par ton moignon rêche et mutilé ! *Patience*, avait-il répondu à ses enfants. Il était retourné derrière le comptoir et avait réuni les gueule-de-loup avec le reste des hortensias, trop petits pour les arrangements. Il avait ramassé les boutons et avait noué une ficelle de paille autour, la paille spéciale qu'il gardait pour les bouquets de mariage et les lauriers de Noël.

- Tenez. Ils sont trop petits pour que je les utilise de toute façon, avait-il dit en lui tendant les fleurs.

- Oh non, je ne peux pas !

- S'il vous plaît, vous devez les prendre, sinon elles

finiront à la poubelle.

- Oh. Personne ne voudrait ça.

- Non, personne.

- Je prendrai soin d'elles pour vous ! avait-elle dit, saisissant les fleurs et serrant sa main en signe de gratitude. Elle avait souri, il avait souri, et comme ça, elle était déjà partie, évaporée dans la poussière qui étincelait sur les champs de fleurs, comme la terre suspendue dans la lumière du soleil.

Re: Addresses to the Homeless

i. To December

When your God created the Earth He took
the long knife and cut,
jagged, into your frozen stone.

Through these battered crevices He poured
silver dust, drips
of moon and star whisked in the
primordial blender on His kitchen counter.

I call the silver dust *rivers* but sometimes
you think they look like people
but maybe better since they sparkle.

In the early mornings you like to
touch the silver
and lick solid its mercurial feet
but it will escape you.

Lazy-eyes, one morning you forgot
about the silver specks,
and the air particles,
and the sweet ferns.

And over your sloth eyes
One Lonely Sun awoke in the
neighboring galaxy,
and glanced, briefly, at the silver dust.

And when the silver dust bursted with the lonely sun
You cried, poor one,
but your ice-tears blew dry from your Decembersphere.

Did you know that I cried too?

Re : Adresses aux sans-abris

i. À décembre

Quand ton Dieu créa la Terre Il prit
le long couteau et trancha,
en dents de scie dans ta pierre gelée.

Dans ces crevasses usées, Il versa
de la poussière d'argent, des gouttes
de lune et d'étoiles fouettées dans le
mixeur originel de Sa cuisine.

J'appelle *rivières* la poussière d'argent même si parfois
tu penses qu'elles ressemblent à des personnes
mais peut-être en mieux car elles étincellent.

Au petit matin, tu aimes
effleurer l'argent
et lécher avec soin ses pieds mercuriels
mais tu seras dépassé

Yeux oisifs, un matin tu oublias
les taches argentées,
et les particules d'air,
et les douces fougères.

Et au-dessus de tes yeux de paresseux
Un Soleil Solitaire s'éveilla dans la
galaxie voisine,
et jeta un bref coup d'œil à la poussière d'argent.

Et quand la poussière d'argent s'embrasa avec le soleil solitaire
Tu pleuras, pauvre de toi,
Mais tes larmes-de-glace s'évaporèrent de ta décembrosphère

Savais-tu que j'avais pleuré aussi ?

ii. To the Lonely Sun

Whoever invented birthing didn't know about you, hot stuff.

The mundane ones sometimes gaze
with burning eyes into
your fuzzy orange,
their retinas scorched like
a sizzling gun shot wound.

Must have been awfully boring before we homo sapiens came
along,
you know, what with our worshipping
and our superstitions
and our 24 in 7 in 4 in 12.
Was it hard, the waiting?

It must have been quiet, there,
at the center of all things.
Making eyes at STAR 6203409
and swallowing the perfume
of the pink comets.

Married to gentle Moon soul, you loomed, explosive
you, almost swallowed her.
If not for the falling sparkles.

We little beings called them "shooting,"
But you drifted, before we opened day old eyes to
the dawn of blessed wombs
and rosy skies.

Crackling fire flower, you breathed
at the edge of the fifth dimension,
under the watchful eyes,
and behind hazy matter,
like the woman that waits on the shore
for him to wander home.

ii. Au Soleil Solitaire

Quiconque inventa l'accouchement ne te connaissait pas, petite bombe.

Les gens terre-à-terre contemplant parfois
avec des yeux brûlants
ton halo orangé,
leurs rétines calcinées comme
la blessure d'une balle chauffée à blanc.

Ça devait être atrocement ennuyeux avant que nous arrivions, nous, les
homo sapiens,
tu sais, avec nos cultes
et nos superstitions
et nos 24 sur 7 sur 4 sur 12.
Était-ce difficile, l'attente ?

Ça devait être calme là-bas,
au centre de toute chose.
Faire les yeux doux à l'ÉTOILE 6203409
et boire le parfum
des comètes roses.

Marié à la douce âme de la lune, tu as surgi, explosif
toi, l'avalant presque.
S'il n'y avait pas eu les étincelles tombantes.

Nous, les petits êtres, les appelions « fusillade »,
Mais tu as dérivé, avant que nous n'ouvrions nos yeux vieux d'un jour sur
l'aube des utérus bénis
et des ciels rosés.

Fleur de feu crépitante, tu as respiré
au bord de la cinquième dimension,
sous les yeux vigilants,
et derrière la matière trouble,
comme la femme qui attend sur le rivage
qu'il rentre à la maison.

iii. to Neanderthal Man

Long nights did you gaze over shallow waters
At the silver sphere roamers of the above-ground.
Broad-browed, blunt-bodied, boulder-shouldered
warrior of forgotten.
Outrun, outfought, outbid.
No, you never liked learning about Darwin at school.

In the cold months, did your shallow seers drift upward,
as mine did, and watch
as their God sprinkled the silver specks,
and try to speak to the Lonely Sun?

Scratch your fouled ear, lonesome man,
and listen. Is it me,
that you hear, whispering
below the earth?
Or Lady of the caves, keeping vigil near
the fire, bearing your fruitless seed?
And you coughed, grunted, shrugged,
'liked' her newest profile picture,
and thought to yourself,
what is "to be" anyway?

iii. À l'homme de néandertal

De longues nuits durant tu as regardé les eaux peu profondes
Les vagabonds de la sphère d'argent de la surface de la terre.
Tes sourcils épais, ta charpente émoussée, tes épaules de pierre
guerrier de l'oubli
Dépassé, débordé, démodé.
Non, tu n'as jamais aimé étudier Darwin à l'école.

Pendant les mois froids, tes prophètes peu profonds ont-ils erré vers le haut
comme les miens l'ont fait, et regardé
leur Dieu saupoudrer les taches argentées,
et ont-ils tenté de parler au Soleil Solitaire ?

Nettoie ton oreille sale, loup solitaire,
et écoute. Est-ce moi
que tu entends, chuchotant
sous la terre ?
Ou la Dame des cavernes, veillant
près du feu, portant ta semence stérile ?
Et tu as toussé, grogné, haussé les épaules,
« liké » sa dernière photo de profil,
et tu t'es demandé,
qu'est-ce qu'*être* de toute façon ?

Translator's Note

TAIRE by Léa Cuenin is a lyrical, interiorly oriented piece following the end of a writer's life. In her final months, the book she is supposed to have written launches into outer space while her body deteriorates from a brain tumor that will eventually take away her words. Translating the piece was a deeply meaningful endeavor for me, as Léa's writing is precise and poetic, conjuring up the palpable loneliness of her protagonist Line Stevens against the carefully selected language of her Ireland coast backdrop. Working in tandem to translate each other's work was also, simply, a lot of fun: We are both writers concerned with language and playing with words and sounds, we both were writing pieces that dip into science fiction but leave a foot in poetry, we were both creating characters that had some element of isolation, haunted by the memory of a beloved woman. To put it simply, we are well matched. I sometimes attribute our ability to communicate well to our both being Scorpios, and having November birthdays, hers one day after mine.

Translating seems to be a form of rewriting, or writing through, or writing again. I found that if I did not understand the mechanics of the text, the story would be lost in translation. But if I understood the meaning behind Léa's French, then I could sort of, transcribe that meaning down through my English, as if the story existed up in the air somewhere, and I had to hear it in my mind before writing it over in English. The same seemed to be true for my own text, which, once read in the French, seemed to take on a whole other life. As Léa said, she was looking forward to my *discovering* my poems in French, and likewise, I looked forward to her discovering her story in English. Since much of my creative experience has been in acting and directing for the theatre, I was able to recruit a different mode of interpretation

that aided this transcribing of meaning. And so, part of the translation process was almost a performance study, where Léa would use gestures to demonstrate what she imagined, her hands holding a ring between her thumb and index finger in front of the laptop camera. And, of course, our meetings were always over Zoom, which in itself is a form of translation, shooting our images across the Atlantic, meeting up in the ether somewhere where the meaning behind our texts floated.

There were a few key elements to Léa's original French story that had to be modified in the English. First, was the title of the piece, *Taire*. In Léa's original text, *Taire* is the name of the logbook that Line Stevens writes in during the last months of her life. *Terre*, on the other hand, is the title of the book she is paid to write, but delegates to an AI program. *Terre* and *Taire*, though spelled differently, are pronounced the same way. While *Terre* means *Earth*, its homonym *Taire* is a verb, meaning *to be silent, to hold one's tongue, to keep secret*. To translate it literally to English, however, would lose the sonic element and pun of the French *terre/taire*. Instead, I tried to find a parallel in English that could work, preserving the sonic resonance but translating the meaning differently, a sort of, sideways translation.

Several options were considered for the two titles. We started with *Earth/Heart*. The letters were similar, the story was concerned with the body, and Line's cabin became a home for her, a place in her heart that reminded her of her lover. I then suggested *Hearth*, which contained the words *Heart* and *Earth*, and its meaning had a quality of home. But that still was not exactly right, since *Hearth* is pronounced in a way that does not rhyme with *Earth*. *Hearse* was considered, the car that carries the coffin to the grave, which worked to bring in the element of Line's degenerating body. Finally, the word *Dearth* presented itself as the right fit. *Earth* and *Dearth* rhymed and shared the same vowel, which was

an improvement on *Hearth*. *Dearth* also had the word *Earth* in it, and was one letter away from *Death*. Read in French, *D'earth* would mean *of earth*. Finally, *Dearth* means *a lack*, and has tones of missing, or an emptiness, which seemed not a far cry from *Taire/to be silent*. Line was alone in her Irish cottage, her words were starting to slip from her brain due to the tumor, she was remembering her missing lover, there was a lack. It was settled, *Earth* would be the title of the book hurling through the interstellar void, *Dearth* would be the title of the book she was writing into the void of death.

Other translation concerns arose from the bilingual nature of Léa's original text. In the French text, mentions of Erin, Line's lover, evoke English, as Erin is Irish. In the English translation, these moments are for the most part translated back into French, to preserve the bilingual texture, while some lines retain the original English. In this way, other puns and sonic elements of the original are preserved. In the original text, Léa writes the bilingual phrase: *It's a curse, chérie* followed later on by *C'est une course, chérie*, which links the English *curse* to the French *course*. Connecting *curse/course* only works when you have both languages together, as *curse* in French is *malediction*. *Course* is a false-friend — translated to English it should become *race*. But in the English version, I decided to tweak the line to be about the disease running its course, in order to preserve the sonic quality of *curse/course*.

Thinking about how to articulate such words in order to express Léa's haunting story resulted in rich, deliberate work that made translating *Taire* a delightful challenge and a true pleasure.

LÉA CUENIN

TAIRE

En 1977, la NASA envoya dans l'espace les sondes Voyager 1 et 2 avec, à leur bord, des Golden Records ; ces disques contiennent entre autres : des informations sur la Terre et ses habitants, des enregistrements sonores, des extraits de musiques, des photographies de nature, de musées, une déclaration de Jimmy Carter.

En 2026, une commission internationale présidée par l'astrophysicien James Lyers décida d'envoyer un nouveau Golden Record, contenant cette fois une œuvre littéraire porteuse du récit de l'Humanité. L'écrivaine Line Stevens fut sélectionnée pour écrire le roman Terre, embarqué dans la sonde spatiale Voyager 3 le 11 novembre 2029. La sonde lancée par la NASA comprend le manuscrit, ainsi qu'un disque sur lequel sont gravées les 140 traductions du texte, versions écrites et orales.

Voyager 1, 2 et 3 poursuivent leur trajectoire à la rencontre d'éventuelles populations extra-terrestres.

Sur volonté de l'écrivaine, nous vous présentons l'édition posthume de Taire, le journal de bord rédigé dans les mois précédant son suicide. La publication a été autorisée sur décision de la Cour Internationale de Justice du 3 juillet 2032.

**translated from the french by
LUCIANA SIRACUSANO**

DEARTH

In 1977, NASA launched Voyager 1 and 2 into space, the Golden Records on board. Among other things, these discs contained: information on Earth and its inhabitants, natural sound recordings, musical selections, images of nature and art, a written message from Jimmy Carter.

In 2026, astrophysicist James Lyers presided over an international commission that decided to send a new Golden Record into space, this time containing a work of literature bearing the story of humanity. The author, Line Stevens, was selected to write the novel Earth, which embarked on the interstellar probe Voyager 3 on the 11th of November, 2029. The NASA-launched probe contained the manuscript, as well as a disc engraved with 140 translations of the text, including versions both written and oral.

Voyager 1, 2 and 3 continue on their mission to seek out possible extra-terrestrial populations.

By the will of the writer, we present the posthumous edition of Dearth, the logbook and diaries from the months leading up to her suicide. This publication was authorized by decision of the International Court on this 3rd of July, 2032.

Spinning like a ghost
on the bottom of a
top,
I'm haunted by all
the space that I
will live without
you

Richard Brautigan - *Boo, Forever*

Spinning like a ghost
on the bottom of a
top,
I'm haunted by all
the space that I
will live without
you

Richard Brautigan - *Boo, Forever*

ALORS, REMBOBINONS

Rembobinons pour tenter d'empêcher la mort de l'oiseau.

Si le sang a coulé, la terre le recrache lentement, la rigole se tarit petit à petit, à mesure que son crâne boit le liquide. Déjà l'oiseau se redresse comme une feuille d'érable soulevée par un coup de vent. Une ou deux plumes rouges ondulent, aimantées par son corps.

Mes yeux volettent du thé renversé à la fenêtre et entament une longue glissade à la surface de la vitre ; dehors, la pluie est aspirée par un nuage gris et gras. Les éclats de céramique se rassemblent sur le sol, l'émail cicatrise, la tasse avale le thé d'une traite et bondit dans ma main.

L'oiseau fait une embardée, choque contre la vitre, il passe de la mort à la vie en déployant ses ailes. Il se stabilise.

Voilà, nous y sommes : l'oiseau me fait face à nouveau, quelques centimètres avant l'impact. Fixons l'image : il est rouge, entièrement rouge, à l'exception d'un large sourcil blanc. Juste en-dessous, dans ses iris marron-noirs, traverse un reflet. L'éclair est bref, mais il y passe l'essentiel. Que voit-il au juste ?

Bon, une personne assise à un bureau, ça c'est entendu. Elle écrit, un stylo dans une main, une tasse de thé noir fumant dans l'autre. La raison de sa présence à ce bureau dans cette cabane sur cette falaise ne lui est pas évidente, mais comment lui en vouloir quand elle-même en doute parfois (tout ça n'est pas très clair encore). Elle

SO, REWIND

Let's rewind and try to prevent the death of the bird.

Since the blood has already spilled, the soil spits it up slowly, the rivulet running dry little by little, as the bird's skull drinks up the liquid. Already the bird rights itself like a maple leaf lifted by a gust of wind. One or two red feathers undulate, magnetized towards its body.

My eyes flutter from the spilled tea over to the window, where my gaze starts a long slide along the surface of the glass; outside, the rain is sucked up by a cloud, grey and greasy. The ceramic shards reassemble themselves on the ground, the enamel heals, the mug swallows the tea in one gulp and leaps up into my hand.

The bird swerves, a shock against the glass, it passes from death to life, respreading its wings. It stabilizes itself.

Here we are once more: the bird faces me again, a few centimeters before impact. Let's pause here and focus the image: the bird is red, entirely red, with the exception of one large white eyebrow. Right beneath, in its brown-black irises, a reflection flits. The flash is brief, but it captures enough. What exactly does the bird see?

Well, a person sitting at a desk, that's for sure. She writes, pen in one hand, cup of steaming black tea in the other. The reason for her presence at this desk in this cabin on this cliff escapes the bird, but how can we blame it when she sometimes doubts the reason herself (all of this is still not yet clear to her). She seems calm,

semble calme, organisée : elle a un programme. L'oiseau ne sent pas sa douleur, mais il peut l'imaginer à la régularité avec laquelle sa main passe de sa tasse à sa tête, à la fréquence des aller-retours et à sa façon de se masser le crâne de tous ses doigts : lentement mais avec application.

Ou bien elle réfléchit, tout simplement, qu'est-ce qu'il en sait ?

L'oiseau ne voit pas ce qui la tue - pas plus qu'il ne voit la vitre - mais il perçoit sans doute qu'elle n'a plus beaucoup de temps. Plus que lui, c'est certain. Beaucoup plus ? C'est peu probable.

~~Elle est en train de disparaître.~~ (Elle raye cette dernière phrase : trop solennelle) à la place, elle écrit : Ses contours sont flous, ils se confondent avec la vapeur qui s'élève de la tasse. Tout se mélange. Ses yeux sont brumeux, ils ont perdu de leur éclat. Ses gestes sont ouatés, comme estompés. C'est déjà un fantôme. Elle n'est pas encore triste, elle n'est plus effrayée, seulement affairée. Elle est concentrée, un fantôme entouré de fantômes. Une écrivaine.

L'oiseau rouge s'éloigne à l'horizon comme un coup de fusil.

organized: she has a plan. The bird does not feel her pain, but can imagine it by the regularity with which her hand goes from teacup to temple, by the frequency of back and forth movements and the way she massages her skull with all her fingers: slowly but with force.

Or she's thinking, simply — what would it know?

The bird does not see what is killing her — anymore than it sees the glass — but it no doubt perceives that she doesn't have a lot of time left. More than the bird, that's for sure. Much more? It's unlikely.

~~She is disappearing.~~ (She crosses out that sentence: too solemn). In its place, she writes: Her outlines are vague, they merge with the steam rising from the cup. Everything blends. Her eyes are hazy, they have lost their luster. Her gestures are faded, as if blurred. She's already a ghost. She is no longer sad, she is no longer frightened, only busy. She is focused, a phantom surrounded by phantoms. A writer.

The red bird streaks across the horizon like a gunshot.

TENIR BON

J'ai prévu de mourir le 11 novembre 2029, à l'instant précis où la sonde Voyager 3 avec *Terre* à son bord pénétrera l'exosphère, vers l'infini et au-delà. Tout est en ordre, il me reste quelques mois pour :

Five

Achever ce texte

Four

Le rendre à mon éditeur

Three

Blinder les contrats

Two

Liquider les en-cours

One

Quitter ma capsule

Lift-off

Taire pourra être publié dès le 12 novembre 2029.

Il est peu probable qu'il le soit avant quelques années.

La NASA, les ministres de, les chargés de, les attachés à la culture tenteront d'empêcher sa sortie. Les 43 membres de la commission responsable de ma sélection se rejeteront la balle qui finira par exploser entre les mains de son président, fier, gominé et dominant, James Lyers.

C'est une belle petite bombe.

La maison d'édition sera attaquée en justice. Mais, si j'ai bien fait mes comptes, la hausse des ventes devrait amortir le coût du procès. Et plus.

Ils ont misé sur le bon cheval.

STAND FIRM

I plan to die on November 11th, 2029, at the precise instant when Voyager 3, *Earth* on board, penetrates the exosphere, en route to infinity. Everything is in order. I still have several months to:

Five

Finish this text

Four

Give it back to my editor

Three

Bulletproof contracts

Two

Eliminate leftover assets

One

Exit my capsule

Lift-off

Dearth will be ready for publication on November 12, 2029. But the book is unlikely to appear in print until a few years after that.

NASA, its ministers of culture, its commanders, the people in charge, will try to prevent its release. The 43 coalition members responsible for my selection will pass the buck, playing Russian roulette, until it ends up exploding in the hands of their president, the proud, slicked-back and dominating James Lyers.

It's a beautiful little bomb.

The publisher will get sued. But, if I did my accounts correctly, the increase in sales will amortize the cost of the lawsuit. And more.

Un pur-sang ! Mes livres se vendaient déjà très bien, ils s'arrachent à présent. L'ensemble de mon œuvre se résume à 11 romans, 3 recueils de poésie et une dizaine de performances dont il n'existe aucun enregistrement - je m'y suis catégoriquement opposée - mais qui se racontent. Plus ou moins bien. Les meilleurs lignes que j'ai pu lire à leur propos figurent sur le blog *kennings.com*.

C'est peu, mais ce n'est pas rien.

Et c'est tout : carnets, épreuves, brouillons, manuscrits non publiés ont été noyés dans le lac de Genève. J'ai accordé très peu d'entretiens. Je n'ai rien de plus à dire que ce que j'ai écrit dans mes livres. Si bien que tout ce qu'on peut lire sur moi est : au mieux inexact, et le plus souvent à côté de la plaque.

On lit : vie réglée et solitaire, mondaine et dissolue.

Et aussi : boit un whisky tous les soirs, une coupe de champagne aux rentrées littéraires et n'a pas bu une seule goutte d'alcool depuis 12 ans.

Et encore : ses deux lévriers galgo portent des noms de déserts.

Foutaises.

On me prête une histoire tumultueuse, chaotique, enflammée, donc destructrice avec E.

Mais ça mon amour, je ne le commenterai pas.

(À la fin, tout ce qui compte c'est cette nuit de 2011, où je découvre que trois ou quatre pintes de Guinness constituent un repas qui tient bien au ventre, que le ciel nocturne de Dublin est constamment voilé d'un noir-bleu-rose laiteux, et qu'en bonne Irlandaise tu n'as pas froid aux yeux. De l'index, tu traces un mot sur la table du pub. Entre chaque lettre, tu trempe ton doigt dans la condensation de mon verre : *COME*.)

They bet on the right horse.

A thoroughbred! My books were already selling very well, but now they are being snapped up. My oeuvre can be summed up in 11 novels, 3 collections of poetry, and a dozen performances of which there doesn't exist a single recording — I am categorically opposed to recordings — but which have been written about. Good reviews, more or less. The best stuff I've read about them is on the blog *kennings.com*.

It's not much, but it's something.

And that's it: notebooks, proofs, drafts, unpublished manuscripts — all drowned in Lake Geneva. I have given very few interviews. I have nothing more to say than what I wrote in my books. So everything one can read about me is, at best, inaccurate, and mostly misses the mark.

Things like: a well-ordered and solitary life... high society and debauchery.

And also: she drinks a whisky every night, toasts with a glass of champagne at the start of the publishing season... and hasn't touched a drop of alcohol in 12 years.

And another: her two greyhound galgos are named after deserts.

Bullshit.

I hear a story about me and E, a tumultuous, chaotic, incendiary — and therefore destructive — story.

But that, my love, I won't comment on.

(In the end, all that matters is that night in 2011 when I discover that three or four pints of Guinness add up to a meal that will hold well in my stomach, that the Dublin night sky is constantly veiled in a milky black-blue-pink, and that as a good Irishwoman, you're not afraid of the

La suite, tu la connais : une relation long courrier où le va-et-vient de nos corps est calé sur le rythme des marées. À marée basse, le vent nous éloigne, chacune reprend son souffle et sa solitude, tu m'envoies des baisers *from miles away*, je te rends tes caresses en faisant rouler, au creux de ma paume, la bille verte que nous avons trouvée sous les galets de la plage de Howth. À marée haute, nous nous retrouvons sur ta côte ou la mienne, je parcours le chemin de crête entre ton menton et ton oreille, nos langues avancent et se retirent, se heurtent aux dents, aux lèvres, comme les vagues contre les falaises qui déposent de l'écume au coin de ta bouche.)

Mais ça mon amour, je ne le commenterai pas.

Ma nomination pour le Golden Record n'est pas vraiment une surprise. Je peux aisément imaginer les critères de sélection : un écrivain mondialement connu (oui), primé de préférence (oui !), légèrement subversif mais globalement consensuel (oui et oui), et - puisqu'il ferait beau envoyer en orbite l'œuvre d'un pédophile - moralement irréprochable (moui...). Ajoutés à cela ma nationalité américaine, mes langues écrites et parlées (anglais, allemand, français), et ma domiciliation en Suisse - la neutralité par excellence - au fond, j'étais, sur le papier, la candidate idéale pour rédiger le récit de l'Humanité.

Je n'en ai pas écrit une seule ligne.

Que ce soit clair : j'ai eu l'intention de le faire. Simplement, je ne m'en sentais pas capable.

Depuis quelques mois, les mots me fuient.

La tumeur est localisée dans la zone de Broadmann 39 de mon cerveau.

Le nombre de mots qu'elle englutit croît de manière

cold, you're not afraid to dive right in. With your index finger, you trace a word on the pub table. Between each letter, you soak your finger in the condensation of my glass: *VIENS*.

You know the rest: a long-term relationship, where the back and forth of our bodies is set to the rhythm of the tides. At low tide, the wind blows us away, we each catch our breaths and our solitudes, you send me kisses *from miles away*, I return your caresses by rolling, in the palm of my hand, the green marble we found under the pebbles on the beach at Howth. At high tide, we find ourselves on your coast or mine, I trace a path along the crest between your chin and your ear, our tongues advance and retreat, clashing with teeth, with lips, like waves against cliffs that drop foam at the corner of your mouth.)

But that, my love, I won't comment on.

My nomination for the Golden Record doesn't really come as a surprise. I can easily imagine the criteria: world-famous writer (yes), preferably award-winning (yes), slightly subversive but still globally commercial (yes and yes), and morally impeccable (yeahhh...). Add to that my American citizenship, the languages I read and speak (English, German, French), and my Swiss domicile — the ultimate neutrality — basically, I was, on paper, the ideal candidate to write the story of Humanity.

I didn't write a single line.

Let me be clear: I intended to do it. I just didn't believe I had the capacity to manage it.

For months now, words have eluded me.

The tumor is located in the Broadmann area 39 of my brain.

désordonnée. Je dois sans cesse partir à la pêche : la ligne coule, demeure molle dans la matière grise, l'hameçon pend au bout de son fil. Vide. Je reste les yeux écarquillés, transpirante, happant l'air comme une carpe koï échouée sur la rive, les ouïes agitées.

Ma nomination a été rendue publique avant que je ne puisse réagir / décliner.

Mon téléphone n'en pouvait plus de vibrer sous les sollicitations et félicitations. Je l'ai déposé au centre de l'allée et j'ai roulé dessus. Trois fois.

En avant, en arrière, en avant.

Deux jours, il m'a fallu deux jours pour englober l'à-valoir conséquent qui m'avait été versé pour l'écriture de *Terre*. Je l'ai couché en jetons sur le tapis d'une table de blackjack, en liquide au bar du Casino, en chair sur le tapis de la suite présidentielle. Et le lit.

Il m'en restait juste assez pour financer le programme d'intelligence artificielle qui allait se charger de l'écriture de *Terre*.

Terre est déjà terminé. Il a fallu 24 jours au programme d'intelligence artificielle pour ingurgiter et digérer (disons "processer"), sous forme de données, les mille et quelques romans que j'avais au préalable téléchargés en open source. Et 6 jours supplémentaires pour régurgiter une pâte molle et sans âme que certains ne se gêneront pas pour appeler "roman".

Moi la première.

La perspective de voir un robot tirer la ligne du récit de l'Humanité me plaisait assez. Le résultat ne pouvait être que peu convaincant. Il est, en définitive, extrêmement mauvais.

The number of words it gobbles up increases in a disorderly way. I can't help going fishing all the time: the line casts, rests softly in the grey matter, the hook dangles at the end of its line. Empty. I remain wide-eyed, sweaty, snapping at the air like a koi fish stranded on the shore, my gills collapsing.

My nomination was made public before I could react / decline.

My phone would not stop vibrating with solicitations and congratulations. I dropped it in the middle of the driveway and drove over it. Three times. Forward, backward, forward.

Two days, it took me two days to burn through the entire advance I had been paid to write *Earth*. I laid it down in chips on the blackjack table, in liquid at the casino bar, in flesh on the rug of the presidential suite. And in the bed.

I had just enough left to finance the AI program that was going to take care of the writing of *Earth*.

Earth is already finished. It took 24 days for the AI program to ingest and digest (let's call it "process"), in data form, the thousand and a couple open data novels that I had previously downloaded. Six days more to regurgitate a soft and soulless paste that some will not hesitate to call "a novel".

I'll be the first.

I liked the idea of a robot writing the lines of the story of Humanity. The result, inevitably, was hardly convincing. It is, in the final analysis, extremely bad. Would it have been any better if I'd written it myself? Probably not. To think that a writer can sustain a

Aurait-il été meilleur si j'en avais été l'autrice ? Probablement pas. Penser qu'un écrivain puisse tenir un discours neutre et universel est un non-sens absolu.

Il me reste 258 jours à vivre et je les passerai dans cette ancienne cabane de pêcheur relativement isolée sur la côte irlandaise.

L'aménagement est sommaire. L'isolation est bonne.

Je n'ai pas emporté de téléphone. Pour communiquer, ou, en cas d'urgence, j'ai toujours la possibilité de me rendre au village, accessible par le sentier qui longe la falaise (env. 30-35 minutes à pied, plus s'il pleut – et il pleut souvent).

Je ne suis pas exactement coupée du monde, mais je fais comme si.

Le temps est à la fois dilaté, ralenti à l'extrême, et terriblement pressant. L'échéance se rapproche avec une fulgurante lenteur. Je dois composer avec ce paramètre, l'apprivoiser.

Tenir bon.

La tumeur a aujourd'hui la taille d'une petite noix bien dense. Elle s'étend rapidement. À mesure que les mots s'effacent, mon espace se rétrécit. Mon seul objectif à présent est d'achever *Taire* avant que les mots ne s'évanouissent totalement.

Et ensuite ?

J'ai prévu de mourir le 11 novembre 2029, à l'instant précis où la sonde Voyager 3 avec *Terre* à son bord pénétrera l'exosphère, vers l'infini et au-delà. Il paraît assez peu probable qu'il rencontre un jour son public cible,

discourse in a neutral and universal way is utter nonsense.

I still have 258 days left to live and plan to spend them in this relatively isolated ancient fishing cabin on the Irish coast.

Basic layout. Good insulation.

I did not bring a telephone with me. To communicate, or in case of emergency, there's always the option of returning to the village, accessible by the cliff-path (about 30-35 minutes by foot, more if it rains — and it often rains).

I am not exactly cut off from the world, but I'm pretending I am.

Time both dilates, slowing to an extreme, and then begins to run out terribly. The deadline approaches slowly and all at once. These are the parameters I must work with.

Stand firm.

Today the tumor is the size of a small, dense nut. It's rapidly expanding. While words fade, my space shrinks. My only objective now is to finish *Dearth* before the words completely vanish. And then?

I plan to die on November 11th, 2029, at the precise instant when Voyager 3, *Earth* on board, penetrates the exosphere, en route to infinity. It is unlikely that the book will ever reach its intended audience, nor is it certain that *Dearth* will know a better fate.

After all, isn't this a feature of every creative process?

et il n'est pas certain que *Taire* connaisse meilleur destin.

Après tout, n'est-ce pas une caractéristique inhérente à tout processus créatif ?

Une bouteille à la mer.

A message in a bottle.

IT'S A CURSE, CHÉRIE

J'ai choisi cette cabane pour la bande de gros goélands posés sur une pierre très plate et très exposée, tapissée de chiures glaireuses vertes grises blanches, pour leur rire gras quand le vent me charge, m'envoie une bonne gifle d'iode avant d'aller tourbillonner dans le jonc.

J'ai choisi cette falaise suspendue dans le blast d'une déflagration pour toutes les fois où, descendant lentement, lourdement le sentier vers la mer, je me retrouve au cœur de l'explosion : la charge placée au creux des rochers, la poudre et le temps soigneusement empilés, et dynamités juste avant mon arrivée.

J'ai choisi ce plateau pour le tapis de sphaigne gluante qui palpite à proximité avec des bruits de succion pour le moins suggestifs, pour la tourbe puante qui engloutit tout, prend tout, et rend à contrecœur, mais n'abîme rien.

J'ai choisi l'Irlande pour une raison évidente : Erin.

Et parce que j'apprécie, de temps en temps, un bon whisky - et il n'est jamais aussi bon qu'à sa source (comme toute chose ?).

Certains jours, quand la brume est bien basse, bien dense, bien sèche, c'est un mur. La mer disparaît entièrement : elle pourrait tout aussi bien ne plus exister. Je pourrais tout aussi bien être seule au monde. Ce sont probablement là les journées les plus douces de ma - trop courte ou trop longue, c'est selon - vie.

Malgré tout, je maintiens : *the void is sweeter in good company*

Je me suis toujours demandé ce qui avait bien pu te séduire en premier lieu chez moi.

À part, bien sûr, la magie.

IT'S A CURSE, CHÉRIE

I chose this cabin for the squabble of large gulls roosting on a rock that's very flat and very exposed, carpeted with green-grey-white phlegmy specks, for the gulls' great laughter when the wind charges against me, sending me a good slap of iodine before whirling away in the rush.

I chose this cliff suspended in the blast of an explosion for all the times when, slowly, heavily descending the path towards the sea, I've found myself at the heart of the detonation: the charge placed in the hollow of the rocks, powder and timer carefully stacked, dynamite lit just before my arrival.

I chose this plateau for the carpet of slimy sphagnum moss that quivers nearby with suggestive sucking sounds, for the stinking peat sod that engulfs everything, swallows everything, and reluctantly gives back, but spoils nothing.

I chose Ireland for one obvious reason: Erin.

And because I appreciate, from time to time, a good whisky — and it's never as good as it is at the source (like everything else?).

Some days, the mist is very low, very dense, very dry, it becomes a wall. The sea disappears entirely: It might as well not exist. I might as well be alone in the world. These are probably the sweetest days of my life — too short, or too long, depending on — life.

Still, I maintain: *le vide est plus doux en bonne compagnie*

I've always wondered what could have first seduced you into my house. Apart from, of course, the magic trick.

Ça, c'était fort.

Ta bague est maintenue entre mon pouce et mon index, à trente centimètres environ de ton visage brûlant, troublé, déjà électrisé. J'exerce une pression très mesurée de la pulpe des doigts sur le bijou. C'est un oiseau. Je le tiens fermement pour éviter qu'il ne s'envole, mais avec souplesse de crainte de l'écraser. Je le fais rouler à l'aide de mon index, et le guide jusqu'à la racine de mon pouce, ma main se referme et le coince entre deux bourrelets de ma paume. Dans quelques secondes à peine, ta bague sera dans ma bouche, ma langue prendra le relai et la conduira jusqu'à une cavité entre deux molaires, une simple mortaise dans laquelle le bijou se logera de champ. Encastré ainsi, je pourrais, si je le voulais, poursuivre mon boniment pendant des heures. Mais assez duré, ma langue se retire à nouveau à l'arrière de ma mâchoire et d'un coup sec (bien que tout à fait humide) décroche la bague pour se glisser dedans, puis elle ressort sertie par mes lèvres entrouvertes. Je la retire - elle est retenue par un fil de salive - je ne l'essuie pas avant de la remettre à ton majeur.

Oui, il faut avouer que c'était fort.

Laisse-moi te révéler le truc derrière tout escamotage : le geste, la voix, le regard, l'intention, tout est question de synchronisation. Toi, moi, une synchronisation. La magie, comme l'amour, est une science et un art, elle ne s'improvise pas, elle ne s'acquiert pas sans peine.

C'est une affaire sérieuse, j'y ai consacré des heures.

(Je porte ton anneau à mon majeur à présent. La bague au doigt ne me va pas mal du tout.)

J'ai choisi la proximité de la mer *aussi* pour apaiser un mal

That magic, that was something.

Your ring is held between my thumb and index finger, about thirty centimeters from your burning, troubled, already electrified face. I exert a carefully calibrated pressure from the pads of my fingers against the jewel. It is a bird. I hold it tightly to prevent it from flying away, but with a soft suppleness, for fear of crushing it. I roll it with my index finger, and guide it right up to the root of my thumb, my hand closes and wedges it between two folds of my palm. In just a few seconds, your ring will be in my mouth, my tongue will take over the relay and conduct it to a gap between two molars, a simple mortise in which the ring will lodge itself horizontally around the tooth. Wearing it like that, I could, if I wanted to, continue my sales pitch for hours. But soon enough, my tongue retreats once more to the back of my jaw and sharply (although the tongue is quite soft) unhooks the ring to slip through it, then it emerges from my half open lips. I remove it — it is held by a thread of saliva that I do not wipe away until I surrender the ring to your middle finger.

Yes, I must admit, that was quite something.

Let me reveal to you the trick behind all that conjuring: the gestures, the voice, the glances, the intention, it's all a question of synchronization. You, me, a synchronization. Magic, like love, is a science and an art, it is not improvised, it is not easily learned.

This is a serious matter, and I've spent hours on it.

(I'm still wearing your ring on my middle finger right now. My hand with your ring on my finger doesn't look half bad.)

I chose the proximity to the sea *also* to soothe an impossible

de crâne chronique pas possible.

Dans l'espace, le corps vieillit prématurément. Les muscles s'atrophient, les os s'effritent, les rayonnements cosmiques brisent les molécules d'ADN, endommagent ou tuent des cellules, la cornée se détériore, le cristallin s'opacifie - autrement dit, la lumière ne pénètre plus à l'intérieur de l'œil - nausées, vomissements, mutations génétiques, attaques du système nerveux central, et éventuellement, mort. Le bruit, l'absence de gravité, l'isolement, et le confinement favorisent le stress et l'épuisement.

Survivre dans l'espace nécessite de connaître les limites du corps, de les accepter, de jouer avec, en sachant que de toute façon, le corps *ne peut pas* gagner.

It's a curse, chérie.

Survivre avec une tumeur au cerveau sur une falaise irlandaise demande plus ou moins les mêmes aptitudes.

Time is running out.

C'est une course, chérie.

(Quoi te dire encore ? Que je t'aime, mais c'est faible...)

chronic headache.

In outer space, the body ages prematurely. Muscles atrophy, bones crumble, cosmic radiation unravels DNA molecules, damaging or killing cells, corneas deteriorate, the lens opacifies — in other words, light no longer enters the eye —nausea, vomiting, genetic mutations, attacks to the central nervous system, and eventually, death. Noise, absence of gravity, isolation, and confinement all contribute to stress and exhaustion.

Surviving in space requires an awareness of the limits of the body, accepting them, playing with them, and knowing that in the end, the body *can not win*.

It's a curse, chérie.

Surviving a brain tumor on an Irish cliffside demands more or less the same skills.

Le temps presse.

It will run its course, chérie.

(What else can I say? That I love you. But how weak a thing to say...)

Translator's Note

Aiden Farrell délivre un texte où un contrôle démesuré de la langue pose un regard sur lui-même, et où l'humain qui tire les ficelles travaille éperdument à son propre effacement. C'est le vertige de *contrôle*. Je suis entrée dans ce texte comme on entre en contact avec un vase brisé : il y a les bris et les espaces entre eux, le tranchant des mots, la trace d'une cohérence et notre regard sur la scène qui cherche à se poser partout à la fois. On trouve peut-être même quelque chose de la scène de crime : les humains sont manquants, il y a eu des chocs.

Sauf qu'ici, les mystères semblent être également des élucidations. Il en va ainsi de la logique : Aiden Farrell brise les raisonnements habituels, les liens de cause à effet, il travaille à la collision d'abstractions et d'éléments concrets – sans doute sa plus grande folie selon moi – mais se faisant il décentre notre raison et donne de la substance à la matière de la pensée. Il permet une distance qui, paradoxalement, nous rapproche de cette matière d'une façon inédite. Ses jeux sur la grammaire produisent le même effet : la langue de *contrôle* est très incorrecte mais avec une grande précision et une grande justesse ; elle évoque et introduit un *twist*, comme un sol se déroberait sous nos pieds, et pourtant le sens est là, vibrant sous les mots. Comme un moteur.

Par ailleurs les mots de Aiden Farrell s'inscrivent dans la duplicité : ils sont mots et sens, signifiants et signifiés, matière et horizons. Ils sont deux fois pleins, agitent le texte en de multiples directions, alors même que chaque poème respecte, sur la page, un carré scrupuleux et soigné.

C'est une tâche passionnante que de rendre dans une autre langue cette complexité et cette rigueur, ces paradoxes qui le traversent, tout en conservant

l'incroyable naturel que déploie Aide Farrell, quasiment jusqu'à la désinvolture. Cette désinvolture, je l'attribue au rythme que Aiden met en place, à sa vitesse, mais aussi aux ruptures abruptes de tonalités et de niveaux de langue qu'il met en œuvre. Mes formations de jeunesse m'avaient appris, à l'inverse, à viser l'homogénéité d'un texte. Ici, les poèmes associent des concepts et des sandwiches pastrami, des questions wittgensteiniennes et des images irréelles de jardiniers gelés, parfois même un humour explosif et soudain.

Ainsi ce travail de traduction s'est fait dans un mouvement de libération progressive, alors que je saisisais peu à peu les jeux de ruptures et que je m'approchais de l'équilibre très singulier ménagé par Farrell, de l'espace très spécifique qu'il ouvre, me fiant autant à l'évocation et au trouble qu'à la raison pour accéder au sens. Il a fallu se libérer dans l'extrême rigueur des phrases, se libérer dans l'extrême contrôle, être sensible aux courants contradictoires qu'il met en place, et ça a été une formidable leçon. Je remercie Aiden pour sa grande confiance et sa générosité.

contrôle est constitué d'une série de poèmes dont environ la moitié a été donnée ici à traduire.

AIDEN FARRELL

CONTROL

*a film or a photograph is like a diamond that rose from the earth a million years ago
that someone has only now excavated because of the right conditions.*

it is like that.

it is not that.

**traduit de l'anglais par
CHARLÉNE DINHUT**

CONTROL

*un film ou une photographie est comme un diamant né de la terre il y a un million d'années que
quelqu'un a sorti de terre seulement maintenant
car les conditions sont bonnes.*

c'est comme ça

ce n'est pas ça.

control intends.

meanwhile—a tree bends. it suffers nothing and gains nothing.

its perspective exerts nothing to a wind of the hollowed-out

garden bed. the gardener frozen in a thicket—

waiting for thaw. alienation is along the word. otherwise

speaks a mathematics that corrects the blade in

a stretch of grass—stretching. the wooden cupboard of

a room forgets how to bend

but for swinging open at

a finger's pull. there is a thought

that folds from the tablecloth retrieved from said cupboard.

said cupboard exists in glimpses. its room

advances via the subordinations of its user whereby

control intends.

desire calms to now. priorly caught off guard by a mistake as

unannounced as a view past a window. that which dares warp

pure envy. expression as in movement. expression as in preconception.

as if the affect of something so natural

as to be defined by the number of times it has been touched.

a rock in a simple desert.

roll over.

roll over rock.

contrôle détient une intention.

pendant ce temps — un arbre plie. il ne souffre pas, ne gagne rien.

son point de vue n'exerce rien pour un vent de la parcelle pioché du
jardin. Le jardinier gelé dans un fossé —

le dégel bientôt. l'aliénation est au long du mot. autrement
parle une mathématique rectifiant la

lame d'un brin d'herbe — qui s'étire. l'armoire en bois d'une

pièce oublie comment plier

mais s'ouvre grand sous la

traction d'un doigt.

il y a une pensée

qui se replie de la nappe venue de la dite armoire.

la dite armoire existe dans l'entraperçu. son espace
avance via les subordinations de son usager par lesquelles
contrôle détient une intention.

le désir s'apaise jusque maintenant. auparavant pris au dépourvu par une erreur aussi
intempestive qu'une vue par une fenêtre. celle qui ose voiler

l'envie pure. l'expression comme dans mouvement. l'expression comme dans
préconception. comme l'affect de quelque chose de si naturel

qu'il est défini par le nombre de fois qu'il a été touché.

une pierre dans un simple désert.

au panier.

allez, pierre, au panier.

loose pride keeps the war ticking. not all kinds.
the distinction lasts a while but its application might not. the effort
to see less of the other. to see less of the self. the conditions for
which it will matter ruminate—live in a lean-to by the bridge— watching
the river's constant release. people together ostracize
the moment this describes. mistake as a condition of being
has infinite faces. correctness shaves everything down to one.
familiarity
deems fact with what is common plus faith.
can differences be reconciled with saying
 though saying articulates
 a difference consequential
 with articulation. the treasure
therein is unfortuitous—resists documentation. fact
is neither immodest nor polite and certainly not patriotic until
drawn and brandished opportunistically. truth lacks the
substance to fulfill any of this—the graveyard of a caved-in
church on a hill in gray. abandoned locations are a beautiful fetish.

une fierté floue garde la guerre alerte. pas vraiment tous les genres.
la distinction dure mais ça pourrait ne pas être le cas de son application.
l'effort pour voir moins de l'autre. pour voir moins du soi. les conditions pour
lesquelles ça aura de l'importance ruminent – vivent dans un abri à côté du pont –
y regardent la constante relâche du fleuve. les gens ensemble ostracisent
le moment décrit ici. l'erreur comme condition d'être
a des visages à l'infini. la correction réduit tout jusqu'au singulier.
la familiarité
considère le fait avec ce qui est commun plus la foi.
les différences peuvent-elles être réconciliées en parlant
alors que parler exprime
une différence due
avec l'expression. ce trésor
là n'est pas fortuit – se laisse mal documenter. le fait
n'est ni immodeste ni poli et surtout pas patriotique jusqu'à ce qu'il soit
dégainé et brandi opportunément. la vérité manque de consistance
pour répondre à tout cela – le cimetière d'une église en ruine sur une colline
c'est gris. les lieux abandonnés sont de magnifiques fétiches.

stillness paints a picture.
its relief from time remains incomplete. still
miles to go. on an empty street corner—
a wind unobstructed. nothing interrupted.
the offspring of thoughtlessness is thought—left to fend for itself in
scraps of color. thought begets the elsewheres language talks
about. like skin as air's negative—the elsewheres of which no one has
yet thought circumvent control. desire for control
is the darker side of controlling desire. objects fragment at the
swing of a door—slowly. miles to go. elsewhere can be right
here.
actually—it is. practically—it is not.
what is potentially true is not determined by practicality.
it is not determined. it is not
an interactive
video game. it is not a reuben
sandwich. it has nothing to do with
a reuben sandwich except that it is made of ingredients. it is un-
available. it measures in increments. it has taken vows.
“actually” corresponds to control insofar as judgment. as in
nevermind. that's the important stuff. the stuff that crawls sweaty into
bed—sticking to sheets. to inherit is to be told what isn't.
second by second crowds of pink plastic shopping bags. a room
resonates all at once with the many things it could contain. a
vase—ashtray—
bookcase—space— chair—space—
full of miles.

le calme peint une image.

son soulagement loin du temps reste incomplet. pourtant

encore du chemin à faire. à un coin de rue vide

un vent que rien n'arrête. rien n'interrompt.

la pensée est fille de ne pas y penser - livrée à elle-même dans des bouts de

couleur. la pensée engendre les ailleurs dont parle le langage. comme

la peau dans le rôle du négatif de l'air - les ailleurs auxquels personne

n'a encore pensé contournent contrôle. le désir de contrôle

est la face obscure du contrôle de désir. des objets se fracassent contre le battant

d'une porte – lentement. encore du chemin à faire. l'ailleurs peut être ici-même.

dans les faits – ça l'est. en pratique – ça ne l'est pas.

ce qui est potentiellement vrai ne peut être déterminé par la pratique.

ça n'est pas déterminé. ça n'est pas

un jeu vidéo

interactif.

ça n'est pas un sandwich

pastrami.

ça n'a rien à voir avec

un sandwich pastrami sauf qu'il y a des ingrédients. c'est

indisponible. ça se mesure en incréments. ça a prononcé des vœux.

«dans les faits» correspond au contrôle dans la mesure où le jugement. comme dans

peu importe. c'est le truc important. le truc qui rampe

en sueur dans le lit - collé aux draps. hériter, c'est se faire dire ce qui n'est

pas. seconde après seconde des foules aux sacs de courses en plastique rose. une

pièce est remplie toute entière d'un coup de tout ce qu'elle peut contenir.

un vase – cendrier

étagère – espace

chaise – espace –

encore du chemin.

appearance makes a move on a backdrop of sky.
appearance obliges. appearance is a stock broker. either
this or there are only consumers. the framing business is
booming. at the framer's they make a series of deductions
—see to the necessary adjustments and
contentions. outside convokes the surrounding material to its gown
of day and night. an interpretation's worth of belief awaits
its syringe. it is ever enough. the whittling down of walking out the
door.

in winter

there is no more space. there is less in winter of light.
control can be touched. a vessel submits to appearance.
appearance takes a shape complimentary to submission.

this and this. so on.

blank frames on the wall.

control says no.

l'apparence passe à l'action sur un décor de ciel.
l'apparence oblige. l'apparence est un agent de change. soit ça
soit il n'y que des consommateurs. il y a un boom du business de
l'encadrement. chez les encadreurson fait toute une série de déductions
- on veille aux ajustements nécessaires et
aux contentions. le dehors convoque la matière du coin à sa robe de chambre de
jour et de nuit. Le potentiel d'interprétation d'une croyance
patiente pour sa seringue. c'en est toujours assez. la réduction jusqu'à l'os de
sortir par la porte.
en hiver
il n'y a plus d'espace. il y a moins en hiver de lumière.
contrôle peut être touché. un vaisseau se soumet à l'apparence.
l'apparence prend une forme complémentaire à la soumission
ceci et ceci. etc.
le blanc encadre sur le mur.
contrôle dit non.

no one is the same. nor one thing.
the avant garde is a spectrum of yesterdays. no one knows
how it is doing. everyone is the same in this manner. control has an
intern in pavement. pavement
and soil were friends—they don't speak anymore.
no one sees this. everyone walks across it.
conversations people are not having are the potential to be had.
unused language in a storage facility. change dictates
an unreasonable physics. intention takes up room in time. the
falling into place of glass coke bottles. one thing is all the poten-
tial everyone will ever need.

math is given to it.

formulas described

language takes an empty night bus to the store where only one
register is available. it purchases a plunger. futuristically
speaking. a man moves to America to control himself in
the 1800s. many novels are written.

personne n'est pareil.

aucune chose non plus.

l'avant-garde est

un spectre des jours d'hier. personne ne sait

comment elle va.

En ce sens tout le monde est pareil. contrôle a un

stagiaire en goudron. le goudron

et le sol étaient amis – ils ne se parlent plus.

personne ne le voit.

tout le monde traverse dessus.

les conversations que les gens ne sont pas en train d'avoir sont le potentiel d'être tenues.

le langage inutilisé dans un dépôt. le changement dicte

une physique déraisonnable. l'intention accepte l'espace à temps. la

mise en place des bouteilles de coca-cola en verre. une chose est tout le

potentiel dont on aura jamais besoin.

les maths lui sont données.

les formules décrivent.

le langage prend un train de nuit vide pour le magasin où il n'y a qu'une caisse de libre.

il achète une ventouse. futuristiquement parlant.

un homme emménage aux Etats-Unis pour se garder sous contrôle

dans les années 1800. beaucoup de romans sont écrits.

a rule

determines its exception. the determination of the flaw—
unexpected. it is unaware that it doesn't know what it is. to
accept this fully is to stop trying. not to try to. control
is tempting. the attempt to depict the wish in a hollowed out tree
stump. light can be seen in it.
the forest is full until it is stabbed.

it learns that directionality
is aesthetic essence—spread across the broad side
of the knife.

une règle

détermine son exception, la détermination d'un défaut ;

inattendu, il n'a pas conscience qu'il ignore ce qu'il est.

accepter vraiment ça c'est arrêter d'essayer, sans essayer.

contrôle est tentant. l'essai de décrire le vœu dans une souche d'arbre
creuse, de la lumière peut y être vue.

la forêt est pleine jusqu'à ce qu'on la poignarde.

 elle apprend que la directionnalité
est essence de l'esthétique – étalée sur le côté large
du couteau.

the space of a grass bends in the wind.
the grass in a space believes in bending.
a vacant shoe in a vacant lot—a street
closed for a block party. precedents are unclear until after them.
a tumbleweed gathers where there was not enough cleaning
done. then emptiness. attention
to detail excludes all else one at a time. the wind beating at the
door. to make sure the door is locked every possibility must have
been considered. a wound sleeps.
what there is to do falls short of doing. ingredients are preex-
isting matter. they change a construction. a garbled message
lands anyway. hope is against the wilderness—unless it is
disease. an icon looks down at personality.
history is in a word—spoken from different angles in
different bedrooms throughout space.

l'espace des herbes plie dans le vent.

les herbes dans un espace croient dans l'action de plier.

une chaussure vacante est un terrain vague. une rue fermée pour fête de quartier. les précédents ne sont pas clairs jusqu'à après eux. un tumbleweed se forme là où le ménage a été insuffisant.

puis le vide. le souci

du détail exclut tout le reste, un par un. le vent qui frappe à

la porte. pour être sûr que la porte est fermée toutes les possibilités doivent être considérées. une blessure dort.

ce qu'il y a à faire est à court de faire. les ingrédients sont de la matière préexistante. ils changent une construction. un message brouillé atterrit de toute façon. l'espoir est contre le sauvage – sauf si c'est une maladie.

une icône regarde de haut ce qu'est la personnalité

l'histoire est dans un mot — dit sous différents angles dans différentes chambres à travers l'espace.

Translator's Note

“Plak” is a quintuple-entendre. It’s the same word in English: “plaque”, which has two uses. Firstly, it designates an ornamental slab or plate commemorating a person, group of people, a place, or event. Secondly, it is what the dentist scrapes from your teeth, or the organic material that may shorten your breath if it gathers on the walls of your arteries. It also connects with “plaque d’égouts”, which translates to “manhole cover” or “sewer grate”. The reflexive verb “se plaquer” means to suddenly depart, leaving everything behind including spouse, kids, family, job, social standing, one’s home and possessions: “j’ai envie de tout plaquer”—“I want to give up and abandon everything.” It describes an escapism. Finally, the sound is most playful in its onomatopoeic usage. “Plak” imitates the sound of individual droplets of water falling and coming into contact with a hard surface. It’s somewhat interchangeable with the English “drip” or “plunk.” I decided to leave it as “plak” because it’s at once a hard and light sound. It echoes the bleak tunnels in which it is found.

Such a variety of meanings is an apt primer for Charlène Dinhut’s world of Plak, a series of prose vignettes that withhold as much as they allow and are quick to redefine objects, to make familiarities new. The narrative assumes several guises: it is at once a fairy tale with a dark riddle at its center, childish and full of looming awe; a critique of gender and gender roles, class, and maybe even of capitalist sentiments too; a place rife with uncertain identities; and an underground domain whose lack of resources necessitates resourcefulness, a rethinking of the functions of commonplace tools, like reading empty cigarette packs as literature, for example. Balancing these registers, helping them both contrast and support one another, was the most difficult task in translating

this excerpt of Plak.

While any of these interpretations might individually or simultaneously be the case, I've resisted the idea that any of Plak is to be taken directly as allegory for any one idea or stance. The experience of these subterranean female figures is far too specific, detailed, and too playful, too close to home to be read as such. Part of Plak's success is that the logic of its sensations, its emotions, its behaviors, are reminiscent of something primal, and all point to the inevitable seesaw between community and loss, learning and isolation. Dinhut's figures are raw in their mental and social pubescence, so plain and forthcoming that it's almost vulgar. But this vulgarity is alluring. It's us. The specificity of her framing, the simplicity of her language and register, the way her figures know just enough to make their own sense of events but far too little to become jaded by them, bring out Plak's humanity. This is not a mythology. It's as rooted in the "world above" as the water passing through its canals.

On the other hand, Dinhut has stitched together her "Great Big Beneath" with a curious gathering of syntactical defamiliarizations. The language—the material of the narrative—is what's least recognizable. However, the story's unorthodoxy facilitates the space for invention, much like the resourcefulness of its characters. Her playing with language and association becomes Plak's magic. Dinhut slips meaning in and out of unusual phrasings and nonlinear logic with a deft ear. She normalizes her experimentation as she experiments. The effect is subtle, awkward but without revealing exactly why.

The process of translation became more certain when I stopped treating it like a game of interpreting metaphor and instead encountered the text at face value, finding that the work's literality is its liberation. Why should it

be so hard to picture? How much more “figurative” can a state of affairs become if it is already permeated by uncertainties, by the innocent ignorance of a child, for example? The way from the French to its recapitulation in English is imperfect, the tunnel dark and sticky. Plak’s logical and associative configurations are just as rewarding when understood literally as otherwise. The creation of this hard-edged yet fantastical “Great Big Beneath” benefits from its insistence on humility and asks as much of its readers. This is comparable to Dinhut’s characters, whose experiences of life are obscured by the unlit, resonant tunnels in which they dwell. It remains to be seen, however, if they are ever truly devoid of light.

I’d like to thank Charlène for her openness, playfulness, and her ear for subversion. The following is a sample of “Plak.”

CHARLÈNE DINHUT

PLAK

Avant, elles sont dans les égouts, avec les alligators et les mites noires, elles sont leurs amies. Elles mangent les cadavres de chats, de chiens, de serpents ; elles chassent les rats, font pousser des pissenlits.

Elles s'ennuient et elles lisent beaucoup, elles lisent tout ce qui leur vient ; elles parlent peu, sauf lors des battues des gros animaux égarés dans ces souterrains, les cerfs et sangliers. Le son à la gorge leur est venu de la nécessité de se repérer les unes et les autres dans les tunnels emmêlés, les cavernes de bétons, les puits aux échelles en fer, pour échanger au sujet du lieu vers lequel court l'animal traqué, au sujet de la voie qu'il avait prise, vers où il croyait s'échapper. La bête fait du bruit, halète dans l'humidité, fait claquer ses sabots au sol. Tous ces bruits résonnent hardiment dans les réseaux souterrains. Les sons viennent de toutes parts dans l'obscurité aux oreilles des chasseresses. Plak. Plak. Plak-plak. Ces bruits aux milles répercussions sur les murs n'indiquent rien de la géographie en cours. Alors il a faut qu'elles, elles sachent crier, mais sans échos.

**translated from the french by
AIDEN FARRELL**

PLAK

Before, they're down in the sewers with the alligators and black moths—their friends. They eat the corpses of cats, dogs, of snakes. They hunt rats and grow dandelions.

They're often bored and read a good deal—they read whatever they can get their hands on. They don't speak much, except for when prowling for large animals stuck underground; deer and wild boar. They learned how to make guttural noises with their throats to orient themselves in the intricate tunnels—concrete caves, wells of iron ladders—to discuss where the stalked creature flees, the path it took, which way it thinks it can escape. The beast pants in the wet air, hooves clattering along the ground. All these sounds resonate throughout the wide subterranean network. They come from every corner of the darkness, reaching the ears of the hunters. Plak. Plak. Plak-plak. These sounds—thousands of resonances against the walls—are not indicative of the present geography. The women had to—had to know how to shout, but without echoes.

Il y a toujours un indice du monde du dessous, lorsque les femmes apparaissent sur terre, quand elles sortent de terre, à l'âge qu'on leur désigne. C'est qu'à force de mener une vie de piratage de tuyaux, de suspens aux échelles, d'amours dans le béton, de guerre contre le froid, les mains de nos femmes gagnent en largeur et en rugosité ; des paquebots de chair crevassées, jaunes, et sèches. Quand elles arrivent à l'air frais de la dite civilisation, ces mains de manuelles font état de la vie souterraine. Personne ne veut le voir. Les mains se mettent vite dans les gants du monde, deviennent étroites, minutieuses.

There are always clues to the world beneath—when the women appear, when they come out of the ground at a designated age. It's from a life of pirating underground pipes, hanging from ladders, love amid concrete, war against the cold, the womens' hands grow and strengthen: ocean liners of cracked flesh, yellow, dry. When they reach the fresh air of civilization, their tempered hands bear witness to subterranean life. No one up there wants to see that. The hands slip immediately into the gloves of the world—becoming narrow and fussy.

C'est toujours effrayant quand l'une de nous part en haut. On ne sait pas quand on part en haut nous-mêmes. Nous ne partons pas toutes au même âge.

Caille est légèrement plus âgée que moi mais ça ne dit rien de l'ordre dans lequel nous monterons. Caille ne me sert pas d'horloge, elle ne viendra pas annoncer mon départ par le sien.

Parfois je la regarde dormir et je lui en veux de ne pas être ma grande horloge, de ne pas m'offrir une tranquillité que seule sa montée viendrait rompre.

(tout ici, le je est Lampe)

It's always a shock when one of us goes up for good. No one here knows when it will be their turn. We don't all leave at the same age.

Quail is slightly older than me but that has no influence on the order in which we leave. Quail isn't my clock—her departure will not inform me of my own.

Sometimes I watch her sleep and resent her for not being my clock—she can't offer me the ease that her departure would disturb.

(from here on out, the I is Lamp)

Les femmes des souterrains lisent beaucoup, entre leurs promenades, leurs virevoltements, leurs embrassades, leurs dîners, et les danses, les chasses. Elles lisent beaucoup de ce qu'on trouve ici-bas, c'est beaucoup de tickets de caisse, alors elles savent ce qu'on mange dans tel endroit et dans tel autre, quelles richesses y habitent, quels produits aux saisons froides aux saisons chaudes. Une fois à la surface, elles savent où trouver tout ce dont elles ont besoin dans la ville.

Les femmes lisent aussi les paquets de cigarettes, les canettes, les tickets de métro, les étiquettes de bonnets, les post-it, et, par-dessus tout, elles aiment lire les paquets de céréales. Ils sont rares, mais il y a là des jeux de l'oie, des jeux des sept différences, des couleurs vives, rouges, et vertes, des grenouilles qui s'exclament. C'est d'une grande suavité. Elles s'y enfoncent comme dans des bras. Elles les relisent chaque jour, encore et encore, jusqu'aux pourcentages de sucre.

La lecture de ces courtes phrases n'aide pas à savoir écrire ; les femmes ne savent pas écrire ; Stine voudrait écrire ; quel culot, disent-elles.

La lecture de ces formes courtes n'aide pas non plus à penser très loin. Mais on peut faire des ponts, imaginer des liens, entre le ticket de caisse et la liste de courses tachée

The subterranean women read a lot—between their walks, their sudden twirls, their embraces, their dinners, and the dances, the hunts. They read everything they can find down here, receipts for the most part. They know what people eat above one zone and what they eat above others, which neighborhoods are more expensive, which dishes are available during the cold seasons and which when summer arrives. Once on the surface, the subterranean women know where to find everything they need in the city.

The women also read empty cigarette packs, soda cans, metro tickets, the tags of purchased hats, post-its, and, above all, they love to read cereal boxes. Cereal boxes are rare, but sometimes they have puzzles like snakes and ladders and spot the difference, with vivid colors—red and green—and pictures of yelling frogs. It's a real delight. They sink into cereal boxes as if into an embrace. They reread them daily, over and over, everything down to the sugar content.

Reading such short sentences doesn't help anyone learn to write—the women don't know how to write. Stine would like to—"what nerve," the women say.

Reading such short passages doesn't help anyone learn to think through an idea either. But we can build bridges, dream up connections between a receipt and a rain-battered shopping list, imagine a route, smell smells, scour corridors to find a story.

par une pluie, imaginer un parcours, renifler des odeurs,
faire défiler des couloirs de marche pour trouver une histoire.

Nous avons développé le sens de l'écoute du grain de l'air. Nous, femmes des sous-sols, savons, même si moins promptement que les rats et les sauterelles naines, savons quand la pluie est sur le point d'être brutale. Nous devons rejoindre au plus vite les couloirs hauts et quitter les impasses, celles-ci sont les plus terribles des pièges. Nous sommes de grandes nageuses mais personne ne peut survivre quand les tourbillons d'eaux inondent les tranchées. Et nous n'aimons pas perdre l'une des nôtres. Les nôtres meurent une fois en haut, c'est l'ordre des choses, elles ne doivent pas mourir ici.

We've developed a sense that let's us hear the air's texture. We, women of the underground, know—even if the rats and little grasshoppers knew first—when the rain is about to get brutal. We have to make it back to the upper walkways, away from the dead ends—they're the worst spots to get stuck. We're great swimmers but no one can survive when torrents flood the trenches. And we don't like to lose one of our own.

We die once above ground. It's the order of things. We don't have to die down here.

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Une fois Caille et moi avons vu des égoutiers faire l'amour malgré le froid. Deux vieux bonshommes vêtus de combinaisons rouges et jaunes imperméables, qui ont peiné à descendre l'une des échelles au Sud de la zone 4C et sont allés droit au but, comme si le désir s'était amassé depuis des nuits ; le barbu a embrassé l'autre après avoir posé ses mains fortes et grandes sur ses joues, et l'autre l'a entouré de tous ses bras, avec l'affection qui chuchotait dans tous ses mouvements. Le barbu s'est agenouillé tout béat, a ouvert le pantalon de l'autre, a saisi très gourmand le pénis dans sa bouche.

Moi j'ai un peu tressailli et j'ai senti le sang battre dans mes lèvres. Nous avons observé. Caille m'a doucement pris le bras, doucement m'a tirée en arrière, m'a placée contre un mur, sa main sur ma tête afin que je ne heurte pas le ciment ruisselant et glacial, a picoré mon

This one time Quail and I saw some sanitation workers making love despite the cold. Two old guys in red and yellow waterproof overalls, who'd struggled to climb down one of the ladders south of zone 4C went right at it, as if the tension had built over the course of several nights. The bearded one kissed his companion after carressing his face with huge, rugged hands, and his companion pulled him close, his arms coiled around him, affection echoing in each movement. The bearded one knelt in eager delight, unzipped his companion's pants and nursed hungrily on his penis.

With a faint shudder, I felt blood pulsing in my lips. We watched. Quail took me gently by the arm, gently pulled me back, pressing me up against a wall, her hand behind my head so it wouldn't slam against the dripping, frozen concrete, and pecked at my neck with hot kisses. Her fingers combed me, tousling my hair. At one little spot on my skin, right there, where the shoulder meets the neck, the tip of her tongue made little flicks, little upward flicks, a hundred times, maybe even a thousand times, on a stretch of skin the size

cou de baisers chauds. Ses doigts en peigne me décoiffaient. Sur un petit endroit de ma peau, là où l'épaule rencontre le cou, le bout de sa langue s'est mis à faire de petits mouvements, de tout petits mouvements de bas en haut, cent fois, mille fois peut-être, sur ce ténu timbre-poste de peau. À un moment, je n'ai plus pu me tenir debout, je me suis laissée aller au sol, emplie des effets de cette langue ; il y avait de grandes lumières aveuglantes et des électricités, et la langue a continué à jouer de son humidité et de sa pression tandis que mon sexe gonflait fort, battait fort, occupait tout l'égout. Il en fut ainsi de ma première jouissance : à distance, cou au sexe, tout le corps foudroyé par deux centimètres de peau. Nous sommes retournées épier les vieux hommes, l'un venait de prendre l'autre, la jouissance était partout.

of a postage stamp. Eventually, unable to hold myself up, I let myself fall to the ground under the influence of her tongue. There were huge blinding lights and shocks of electricity, and her tongue continued to tease me with its wetness, building till my sex swelled hard, throbbed hard, took up the whole sewer. That's how I had my first orgasm: from a distance, from my neck to my sex, my entire body struck down by two centimeters of skin. We went back to spying on the old sanitation workers. One was taking the other in his mouth. Orgasm was everywhere.

Caille a de l'espace dans les jambes. Elle doit marcher chaque pas loin devant elle sinon elle ressent qu'il la travaille dans ses jambes. En marchant avec ses pieds Caille fait tourner le noyau du monde. Caille marche beaucoup mais comme toutes ici sauf Stine qui ne regarde même pas les autres marcher. Caille marche beaucoup et prend la main de l'une des femmes, qui devient feuille verte à son contact. Caille marche en balançant le bras, le bassin, en balançant sa langue tirée dans un sourire. Lampe et elle prévoient d'aller loin bientôt : bientôt le départ pour le loin.

Quail has ants in her pants. She has to stretch her legs way out in front when she walks or else it feels like they're gnawing at her. When she walks with her feet Quail spins the core of the world. Quail walks a lot, like everyone here except Stine who doesn't even watch anyone walk. Quail walks a lot and takes one of the women's hands, who turns into a green leaf on contact. Quail walks swinging her arms, her pelvis, tongue hanging limp through a smile. Her and Lamp plan to go far away soon—soon they'll depart for the far away.

Allègrement Caille et Lampe marchent jusqu'au quartier des Grandes résidences. C'est jour de lessive, Belle-Sœur a dit un jour que tout le monde fait sa lessive à la même heure au-dessus de nos têtes.

On s'installe au bord d'un canal, l'une à côté de l'autre, on grapille des cafards et des scolopendres pour que le ventre soit plein. C'est facile ici car ils fuient leur cachette quand l'odeur savonneuse se fait sentir.

Leur odeur à elles, à Caille et Lampe, cette odeur épice (c'est, il faut le dire, plutôt l'odeur de Caille que celle de Lampe), une odeur rouge et rouille, perd du terrain, disparaît. Caille et Lampe apprennent alors à reconnaître la lavande, le pin, ces senteurs qui piquent légèrement le nez. Et peu à peu l'eau du canal change de texture. Dans le grand obscur de leur jour les deux femmes perçoivent le blanc d'une mousse qui avance vers elles, régulière, épaisse. A pas d'enfant. C'est le spectacle, Lampe admire en silence.

Quail and Lamp walk joyfully to the suburb zone. It's laundry day. Sister-In-Law said once that everyone does laundry on the same day up there, above our heads. We sit next to each other on the edge of a canal and grab cockroaches and centipedes to fill our stomachs. Here there's good hunting because they scurry from their corners as soon as they smell the detergent.

Their own smell—Quail and Lamp's, that spicy smell (though it should be noted that the smell is more Quail's than Lamp's), a red and rusted smell, losing ground—disappears. Quail and Lamp learn to recognize lavender, pine—scents that arouse the nose lightly. And little by little the water in the canal changes texture. In the great big darkness of the day the two women see suds advancing toward them: steady, thick. As a child steps. This is the show. Lamp admires in silence.

Chaque soir, avant dîner, nous nous asseyons en cercle et Stine nous montre des lettres, des mots, sur des bouts de papier, de cartons, des emballages, sur des pièces de monnaie. Stine prononce les sons qu'elle imagine être liés à ces lettres. Nous faisons circuler ces supports sur lesquels ces mots sont inscrits.

Il est probable que, à force de se les passer de mains en mains, nous perdions de vue le mot précis que Stine prononce de sa bouche sans lèvre.

Alors chaque soir nous changeons de place, que chacune reçoive un jour les papiers directement des mains de Stine. Que chacune reçoive la juste indication, arrache correctement son savoir, arrache correctement un peu de terrain à son ignorance. Nous sommes consciencieuses.

Every evening, before dinner, we sit in a circle and Stine shows us letters, words, on scraps of paper, cardboard, packaging, on coins. Stine makes the sounds she imagines are linked to these letters. We pass around the material on which the words are written.

It's likely that, by passing them from one hand to the next, we could lose the exact sound Stine pronounces with her lipless mouth.

Every evening we rotate places, so that each of us gets a chance to receive the scraps of paper directly from Stine—so that each of us receives the right instruction, claims their knowledge, reclaims a little bit of ground from their ignorance. We are conscientious.

Quand il est l'heure pour l'une d'entre nous d'être appelée à la vie du haut, elle disparaît, tout simplement. Un jour, à la leçon, nous ne la voyons plus.

Nous partons toutes la chercher, toutes ensemble ou en petits groupes, en silence. La chercher dans les recoins du grand dessous. Voir s'il a pu lui arriver malheur. Nous plongeons dans les points d'eau, dans les galeries les plus sombres des zones les plus profondes, où l'on peut se perdre, dans les carrières où parfois des blocs de pierre tuent tout dans leur chute. Nous sommes munies de torches, nous cherchons le moindre indice avec le peu de lumière que nous avons, sachant que jamais nous n'en avons trouvés. Nous errons longtemps, souvent toute une nuit. Troupe silencieuse et hagarde. Satie continuera à chercher pendant des jours, puis nous devons nous réjouir, car il est dit de tout temps qu'en haut c'est mieux.

Il est dit qu'une fois en haut les femmes des égouts oublient tout de leur passé dans le monde du bas.

Elles ignorent que celles qui les aiment grouillent encore ici.

Lampe se demande est-ce qu'une fois mortes les femmes se souviennent de leur vie du Grand dessous.

When it's time for one of us to be called to life above, she disappears—plain as day. One afternoon during our lesson, she's nowhere to be seen.

We leave to look for her in silence as one team or in smaller groups—to look for her in the corners of the Great Big Beneath, to make sure nothing awful has happened to her. We dive into the waterholes—in the darkest tunnels of the deepest zones, where it's easiest to lose your way—in the quarries where stone blocks kill everything as they collapse. Equipped with torches, we look for the slightest clue with our meager light, knowing none has ever been found. We wander for a long time, often the whole night. Silent and haggard company. Satie will continue for days at a time, but eventually we feel we should cheer up as it's always been said that life's better up there.

It's said that once they've made it up there, the sewer women forget their past in the world below, unaware that those who still love them swarm down here.

Lamp asks herself if the women only remember their lives in the Great Big Beneath once they're dead.

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Tous les après-midis Stine s'assoit pour tenter de déchiffrer des caractères inconnus de nous sur des cartons qu'elle a trouvés.

D'une main, elle les tient, de l'autre elle range régulièrement ses cheveux courts derrière l'oreille, pour les empêcher d'aller sur son visage. Ça ne marche pas car elle a la tête penchée sur les mots. Les cheveux reviennent tout aussi obstinément qu'elle tente de lire. Sa bouche reste close mais sa mâchoire, derrière, est détendue. Ses joues sont creusées et le menton glisse à droite, à gauche, Stine est concentrée.

Même assise, Stine est un piquet. Si droit que l'on voit la planche en bois qui maintient son dos par derrière. Cette planche a deux clous, ce sont ses yeux, qui scrutent les autres chacune à tour de rôle, méprisants et amusés. Ces yeux, des cercles, des mondes. Selon Caille, Stine conçoit en silence des discours politiques et acharnés ; elle saura les adresser à toutes les femmes des égouts qui, rapidement convaincues, la suivront d'un seul mouvement.

Stine est un costume cintré. Quand Stine se lève, elle entre sur scène et son corps tranche l'air lentement.

Every afternoon Stine sits herself down to try to decipher the characters we can't read from the cardboard she's found.

With one hand she holds them, with the other she routinely tucks her short hair behind her ear to stop it from getting in her face. It doesn't work because of the way she bends her head over the words. Her hair falls back, just as stubborn as her attempt to read. Her mouth stays closed but her jaw relaxes behind it. Her cheeks are gaunt and her chin slides left and right. Stine is focused.

Even when sitting, Stine is a stake in the ground: so straight that you can see the wooden plank keeping her back upright. The plank has two nails—her eyes—that examine each other, disdainful and amused. Her eyes—circles, worlds. Quail says that Stine silently composes ruthless political speeches. She knows how she'll present them to the sewer women who, easily convinced, will follow her in one fell swoop.

Stine is a fitted suit. When she stands, she enters the stage and her body cuts through the air slowly.

Pour l'étude et le dîner les femmes disposent en cercle les chaises de jardin en plastique blanc trouvées çà et là dans les couloirs longs, des chaises aux dossiers fendus et aux pieds inégaux. Toujours il semble à Caille que les femmes du bas rejouent alors avec précision des gestes très anciens. Toutes, malgré leurs errements, savent leur partition. Elles composent un espace connu de longue date, prises par une danse à peine visible. Avec une fermeté tombée des épaules, elles empoignent les montants branlants des dossiers, elles sirotent dans l'espace des chemins sinueux parées de ces attributs blancs à quatre pattes, ces trônes du Grand dessous, ces animaux d'avant l'histoire - comme elles. Qui leur donnent en grandeur lorsqu'ils sont dans leurs bras. Elles traversent l'espace. Elles s'évitent les unes les autres en imprimant à leurs bustes des quarts de tour qui ne sont que la partie apparente des longs élans qui les traverse.

Quand elles se penchent pour placer ces chaises, qu'elles fléchissent les genoux ou qu'elles courbent le dos, elles déposent au sol, à leur sol à elles, des lettres d'amour tout autant que des regards de défiance. Les pieds des chaises atterrissent en produisant, entre les coussins de mousse, des bruits sourds et incertains. Du fait de leur instabilité irréductible.

Et, parfois, ils glissent au sol en grondant. Belle-sœur aime ce bruit.

Belle-sœur a d'immenses membres, lorsqu'elle remue sur sa chaise en désignant du doigt la direction dans laquelle, sans doute, une situation engendre son ire et fournit le prétexte à son despotisme, la chair, sous ses bras, pendouille avec langueur, d'avant en arrière, deux paresseux accrochés là à un idiot d'arbre. Son visage est chèvre-pâle, ses petites lunettes rondes trouvées sans verres sont aussi étroites que les trous de ses yeux, eux-mêmes évoquant le couloir qu'emprunte son âme chaque matin, et jusqu'au coucher. Il faut dire, il faut dire, que tout repose sur elle.

Tout est en ordre dans ces cercles de femmes. C'est l'automne, certaines se haïssent et prévoient de se battre, les autres s'aiment et courent ensemble. Certaines cuisinent les rats, d'autres ajoutent les légumes trouvées au creux de promenades oisives, deux d'entre elles jouent à faire écouler des graviers doucement pour imiter le son des pluies.

Stine ne lâche pas un carton sur lequel elle cherche à déchiffrer un mot encore inconnu.

Pour trouver un peu de calme, Satie tourne la tête vers le haut, et par la bouche d'égout, sous laquelle toujours elle s'assoit, voit se développer le tuyau d'un tronc et les crochets de petites branches qui, toutes, découpent l'air, de sorte que la magie semble sans fin, et un grand feu brûle entre toutes.

Satie ne sert à rien, mais qu'est-ce que je l'aime. Elle a des fleurs sur les tempes, des fleurs des plus simples : cœurs jaunes et pétales blancs. Elle ne retient pas ses leçons, n'a jamais réussi à chasser, n'aime pas lire, ne sait pas nager, alors qu'il faut savoir nager quand on vit dans les égouts. Elle passe ses journées à sautiller, à regarder par les bouches, les nôtres et celles qui donnent vers l'air du haut, dans une humeur de grimpe perpétuelle.

Il y a une chose qu'elle sait faire, c'est dérober les flasques des égoutiers qui partent jurer dans les recoins des couloirs. Grâce à elle, calva, rhum et whisky s'offrent aux femmes presque chaque soir, pour adresser nos saluts à la Grande Nocturne.

Caille, quand ira-t-on marcher pour de bon?

Translator's Note

When the French writer Guillaume Perilhou and I first started having conversations about his epistolary novel based on the making of the film, *Death in Venice*, he showed me a picture of a family crest. This image, meant to represent the Visconti noble family known for ruling a tract of Italian cities during the 14th and 15th centuries, was a thick blue snake wearing a crown, swallowing a screaming boy. One of the descendents of this ruling family just happens to be Luchino Visconti, the film director Guillaume's novel brings to life again. As I began working on this English translation, I couldn't help but be shaken by the eerie concurrence between the pedophilic voice of Guillaume's Luchino and the centuries-old symbol of the predator meant to resemble his family name. In order to translating *Dans le gueule du serpent*, I was going to have to find the voice of a man in his 60s (Visconti) enamored with an adolescent boy (Björn Andréén).

The Most Beautiful Boy in the World, a documentary film about the now nearly seventy-year-old Björn Andréén, came out in 2021, inciting a reckoning with *Death in Venice* 50 years after its making. In writing *Dans le gueule du serpent*, Guillaume draws much of the language and stories from the what Andréén and the people in Andréén's life say in *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World*. I learned that much of the language Guillaume wrote in French come from English subtitles while Andréén and others speak Swedish onscreen. In this way, Guillaume's work, like mine, is an act of translation, especially since the cast of actors and friends featured in *Dans le gueule du serpent* speak different languages to each other – Swedish, Italian, French, German, English. Guillaume had stayed pretty faithful to the stories and language of the film, or at least the

translator's translations via subtitles. Though my initial translation philosophy was to remain most faithful to Guillaume's storytelling in French, watching Andréén speaking in Swedish in the documentary made me feel comfortable taking departures from Guillaume's interpretation, especially since this is a true story.

Of all the voices in this novel, Luchino's was the easiest to find on the page in English. A man of the film world and descendent of noble culture speaking in multiple languages, Luchino speaks a bit like a bad actor – melodramatic, clunkily, too formal in places. Björn's voice, on the other hand, was harder for me to find in English. At first, his spirit showed itself as too mature in my reading of Guillaume's work. But then I took more time to think about Björn, to remind myself that he had lost his mother to suicide, that he was being pressured by his grandmother to become a star, that he was praised and admired by Visconti and the other filmmakers in a way he was too young to understand. I was able to see Björn as someone naive, but who grew up quickly when he became a child actor. Maybe writing victims are harder than writing villains, but I also think another part of what made Luchino easy to write is that Guillaume wrote Luchino's voice in a way that dialed up Visconti's language to a point that made a fool of such romanticizing.

The voices of other characters — the grandmother, Björn's grown up daughter, the interviewers at press conferences, as well as the receivers of the letters – their reactions were easier to find in English. This cast of voices are more like what readers' are – open to the adventure, or complicit in it, or at the very least, just stupid to what they don't know. These characters easily showed themselves to me as they are: human — too wrapped up in themselves to see perhaps some important and frightening things as they are, or perhaps being

enchanted enough by the glamour to notice what they should.

This story maps the last link on on a great chain of perverted desire: it's a story about a boy (Björn) who plays a boy (Tadzio) who is a rendition of a boy (the literary Tadzio) that is inspired by a boy (Wladyslaw Moes, a boy in a hotel the writer Thomas Mann supposedly lusted over, the real boy who inspired the book). Like *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World*, Guillaume's *In the Jaws of the Serpent* finally allows something twisted and cruel to show itself as it is.

It has been an honor to translate this project.

GUILLAUME PERILHOU

DANS LA GUEULE DU SERPENT

roman

*Il est bon assurément que le monde ne connaisse que le
chef-d'oeuvre, et non ses origines, non les conditions et les
circonstances de sa genèse*

Thomas Mann, La Mort à Venise

**translated from the french by
CATE VALINOTE**

IN THE JAWS OF THE SERPENT

Il est bon assurément que le monde ne connaisse que le chef-d'oeuvre, et non ses origines, non les conditions et les circonstances de sa genèse

— Thomas Mann, *La Mort à Venise*, trans. Felix Bertaux, Axel Nesme, Charles Sigwalt

It is surely for the best that the world knows only the lovely work and not also its origins, not the conditions under which it came into being; for knowledge of the origins from which flows the artist's inspiration would surely often confuse the world, repel it, and thus vitiate the effects of excellence.

— Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, trans. Clayton Ko

Grand Hôtel de Stockholm,
10 février 1970,

Maria, *amore,*

Habemus angelus : la fumée peut s'envoler dans le ciel de Rome. L'ange est passé. Celui que je cherchais dans le monde entier depuis des années m'est apparu ce matin. Il aura fallu traverser la Hongrie et la Russie avant de le trouver ici enfin. Il s'appelle Björn — je crois savoir l'orthographe —, venu accompagné de sa grand-mère qui, je l'ai compris d'emblée, veut faire de lui une célébrité. Elle ne sait pas que son rêve sera exaucé, ni du moins que je le partage... L'enfant est très blond comme le sont les Suédois, grand, trop pour ses quinze ans et ça m'embête, mais on oublie vite les défauts de ceux qu'on aime. J'exagère, Maria, mais pas tant. Je n'ai pas appris un mot de sa langue et lui bien sûr ne parle pas la nôtre : en silence, il a d'abord marché. Pas un instant ses joues n'ont rosé, pas même quand je lui ai demandé de se déshabiller. De long en large, il a arpenté le salon de ma chambre et tourné sur lui-même après avoir enlevé son pull à col roulé. Il a hésité quelques secondes mais il l'a fait en souriant malgré sa gêne. Face au spectacle, j'en ai profité pour l'intimer à dévoiler sa gaieté plus encore face caméra. Tu aurais vu ses dents, Maria, *amore*, toi même à qui j'écris

Great Hotel of Stockholm

February 10th, 1970

Maria, *amore*,

Habemus Angelus. Smoke fills the Roman skies. An angel has finally arrived! The one I was searching for all over, all these years, just this morning! It took crossing Hungary and Russia to find him here at last. His name is Björn – I think that’s how you spell it – and he came with his grandmother who I immediately could tell wants to make him a star. She does not know her dream will come to fruition, or at least that she shares it with me... The child is blond like all Swedes, tall for age fifteen – this annoys me, but it’s easy to forget the things that bother us about those we adore.

I know I exaggrate sometimes, Maria, but I wouldn’t this much.

I didn’t understand a word of his language, and of course he doesn’t speak ours, so he walked into the room without saying a word, and his cheeks didn’t flush, not even for a moment, not even when I asked him to take off his clothes. Whirling around the room, trying to take off his turtleneck, managing to do it in so many seconds, smiling in his beautiful defiance against the fabric. Taking in this little show, I took advantage of the opportunity to invite him to reveal even more of that shyness for the camera. And those teeth - if you had seen them, Maria, you who I confide in because you never needed beauty to strike you in the face to see it – you would have not been able to contain yourself. Lucky for me, I was the one fidgeting in the director’s chair.

I write you this in a flash. I still don’t think I’ll call off my trip to Warsaw,

parce que la beauté t'a choisie à qui tu as consacré ton art et ta vie, que tu t'en serais pâmée. C'était moi alors qui m'agitais sur le canapé. Je t'adresse de premiers mots à la cavalcade, mû par l'excitation du chercheur d'or qui trouve la récompense de sa chevauchée. Mon périple doit m'emmener encore à Varsovie, à Munich et à Helsinki les jours prochains et je crois que je ne vais pas annuler, je vais y aller pour être sûr. Pour que le visage de Björn s'impose. Je dois redescendre déjà mais comme toujours je t'embrasse, maintenant et toujours,

Fiévreusement,

Luchino

PS : Envoie ta réponse à Rome, je ne serai pas long. Raconte-moi comment se passe le tournage de Médée. Pasolini est-il à ta hauteur ? J'ai hâte de t'entendre *de vive voix*.

Munich, and Helsinki again in the next few days, I will go there to be sure, hoping that Björn's face stays in my mind, that he will be the one. I have to go down now, but I send you kisses as always.

Un abbraccio,

Luchino

PS: Send your answer to Rome, I won't be long. Tell me how the filming of Medea is going. Is Pasolini up to you? I look forward to hearing from you in person.

...

« Björn,

Reste tranquille. Fini les mots qui font mal. Il ne reste plus grand chose de moi. Ne pleure pas pour moi, il n'y a plus de feu à éteindre ici. Ne me regarde pas, je suis prête à tomber. Je vais m'effondrer à tout moment. Je ne veux pas que tu me vois m'écraser. Ne pleure pas pour moi, il n'y a plus de feu à éteindre ici. J'ai donné tout ce que j'avais. Je n'ai rien gardé pour vivre. C'est pour ça que je suis de plus en plus invisible, mais je ne vais pas mourir. Il reste une porte. Que faire d'autre que de sortir de cette pièce en moi ? Je ne meurs pas, je disparaiss seulement. Peut-être que mes inquiétudes me ramèneront aux certitudes et aux doutes. Alors, je reviendrais te chercher.

Maman »

Björn,

Stay calm. Words can't hurt me anymore. There is not much left of me now.

Don't cry for me. There's no more fires to put out here. I don't want you to see that I'm ready to surrender – I will collapse any moment and I don't want you to see me crash and burn.

Don't cry for me. There's no more fires to put out here. I gave everything I had. I didn't have anything to hold on to, to live for. That's why I'm more and more invisible, but don't see this as my death. There is only one door left. What else can I do but get out of this room inside me?

I am not dying, just disappearing. I'll come back to you, be with you in times of both certainty and doubt. I'll be your forever angel.

— Mamma

...

Cannes, printemps 1971, une conférence de presse du festival.

« — Tout le monde connaît l'immense talent de Dirk Bogarde, c'est donc inutile de le souligner une fois de plus, mais on ne connaît pas bien Björn Andrésen. Pourriez-vous nous dire comment vous l'avez découvert ?

— Je vais vous raconter toute l'histoire de Björn Andrésen, s'il me le permet (*Visconti se tourne vers lui*). Il ne comprend pas le français très bien, mais enfin... Je suis arrivé à Stockholm. Le premier jour, quand j'ai commencé à visionner les garçons suédois, le cinquième, je vous dis le cinquième qui est entré dans la chambre était Monsieur Björn Andrésen. Et moi j'étais sûr que c'était lui, Tazio. J'ai pas eu de doute, j'ai commencé à le photographier de la tête au pied de tous les côtés, tu te souviens ? (*Le réalisateur se tourne de nouveau en direction de l'acteur.*) Tazio était trouvé. Il était plus beau que ça, hein ! Il a vieilli maintenant, il est un peu trop grand, il a les cheveux trop longs, il était beaucoup plus beau à ce moment-là. Il ne le sait pas mais il est en train de changer, peut-être ce sera un très bel homme, mais pour le moment, bon... C'est l'âge ingrat, c'est l'âge ingrat. Il a maintenant quinze ans... non *sixteen*, seize ! Il est très vieux ! (*Rires dans la salle.*) »

Cannes, spring 1971, a the film festival press conference.

INTERVIEWER: Everyone knows the immense talent of Dirk Bogarde, so let's not get into that, but we do not know Björn Andréén well. Could you tell us how you discovered him, Mr. Visconti?

LUCHINO: I will tell you Björn Andréén's whole story if he allows me.
[The director turns to Björn. The boy looks at him blankly.]

LUCHINO: He doesn't understand French very well, but anyway... I arrived in Stockholm. The first day, when the Swedish boys lined up for the casting call, the fifth boy...oh the fifth boy who entered the room... Mr. Björn Andréén... I was sure it was him – Tadzio. I had no doubts.

I started photographing him from all sides, from head to toe. Remember, Björn?

Anyway, Tadzio was found. He was more handsome than we could have imagined, eh? He's older now, a bit too tall, his hair too long, oh he was much more handsome back then. He doesn't know it, but he's changing. Maybe he will be a very handsome man, but for the moment, well... it's a dull age, the lackluster age really. He's fifteen now... no sixteen! Sixteen! Far too old!

[The room erupts with laughter.]

...

Stockholm,
10 février 1970,

Maman,

Tu es partie pour que je grandisse. Tu nous observes, tu sais ce qui se passe, tout ce qui se passe, tu sais que grand-mère veut faire de moi une star, tu sais ce que j'ai fait aujourd'hui mais je t'imagine en écrivant, je maintiens ta voix enfermée dans mon oreille. Aujourd'hui donc j'ai rencontré un réalisateur italien que je ne connaissais pas. Nanna m'a dit mon chéri il faut absolument que tu réussisses cette audition-là, elle le connaissait Nanna, enfin ses films pas lui personnellement, elle dit que c'est un *maestro*, le plus grand maestro d'Italie, alors on est allé au grand hôtel où il recevait. Il y avait d'autres mecs à attendre, on faisait la queue mais c'était rapide, on m'a vite fait entrer dans sa chambre où il était assis dans le fond sur un canapé à côté de celle que je devinais responsable du casting. Il m'a demandé mon âge, il parlait français je ne sais pas pourquoi, j'ai compris qu'il me trouvait grand il l'a dit d'emblée, il est très grand il a même dit, j'ai compris ça, la déception dans sa voix. Il disait il est très beau aussi et m'a demandé de tourner la tête, il faisait des gestes pour m'indiquer ce qu'il voulait pendant que la fille traduisait en suédois, tu as des photos il m'a demandé, tu as des photos ici

Stockholm,

February 10th, 1970

Mamma,

I like to believe you left me so I could grow up. You watch over us, you know what's going on — that grandma wants to make me a star, and you know what I did today. As I write, I imagine your voice in my ear. Today I met an Italian director I haven't heard of. Nanna said to me: "Älskling, you absolutely have to pass that audition." Nanna knew him, not personally, but she knew his films. She says he's a *maestro*, the greatest in Italy.

So we went to the big hotel where he was staying. There were other guys there and we had to wait in line, but it went fast. Right away I was taken to his room where he was sitting in the back, on a sofa next to the guy I guessed was in charge of the casting. He asked me my age, he spoke French but I understood that he thought I was tall. He said it straight away – *il est très grand*. I could hear the disappointment in his voice.

But he also said I'm handsome, and asked me to turn my head, giving me directions through the girl translating into Swedish. "Do you have photos with you?" he asked me, or something like that. I understood that he wanted photos, but I didn't have any – I didn't know I was supposed to have them. Then the girl asked me to walk up and down the room to see if I knew how. *Quanto è alto* the director exclaimed, *quanto è alto!*

And then he asked me to take off my sweater. At first, I thought I just didn't understand what he was asking, but then the girl repeated what he

? ou quelque chose comme ça, j'ai compris qu'il voulait des photos, j'ai fait non, je ne savais pas. La fille m'a demandé de marcher, de long en large dans la pièce pour voir si je savais, *quanto è alto* il s'exclamait, *quanto è alto* comme il est grand ! et puis il m'a demandé d'enlever mon pull. Au début je n'ai pas compris, la fille a répété ce qu'il voulait et moi je ne voulais pas, comprenais pas, j'ai eu envie de partir et j'ai pensé à Nanna et à toi, t'aurais sans doute été contente que je sois là et puis visiblement c'est pas n'importe qui alors je l'ai fait. *Molto bello* il continuait, *molto bello* je devais regarder la caméra, regarder la caméra et sourire, regarder sans rien faire d'autre. Il commençait à s'énerver un peu, s'impatienter plutôt, il gueulait Mario ! Mario photos ! J'ai dû enlever mon pull et mon t-shirt, mon pantalon ensuite. En caleçon contre un mur, le visage tourné dans un sens puis dans l'autre, je devais fixer l'objectif la tête légèrement penchée vers le bas. J'ai eu très froid.

Björn

wanted. I understood the words but I still didn't understand. ...I didn't want to undress. I wanted to leave but I then thought of you and Nanna and how happy you would be that I was there. He was not just any stranger.

So I did it. *Molto bello*, he said, *molto bello!* I had to look at the camera, look at the camera and smile and look at nothing else. He was starting to get upset, rather impatient, he was yelling at Mario! Mario! Photos!

I had to take off my sweater and my t-shirt, then my pants. In my underwear, against a wall, my face turned first in one direction, then in the other, I had to tilt my head down ever so slightly and stare into the lens. I was so cold.

Björn

...

Helsinki, 1970, interview dans un salon d'hôtel.

« — Pourquoi voulez-vous d'un garçon finlandais dans votre film ?

— Je ne veux pas nécessairement d'un garçon finlandais, je veux un garçon blond aux yeux clairs. Et pour trouver un garçon comme ça je suis venu à Stockholm, à Helsinki, et je vais me rendre ensuite à Varsovie et Munich. Je cherche là où les cheveux blonds et les yeux bleus sont des caractéristiques raciales. Bien sûr, je ne peux trouver cela en Italie.

— Et les yeux verts, ça va ?

— Oui, les yeux clairs.

— Comment sélectionnez-vous les acteurs ?

— J'ai fait appeler de nombreux garçons ici, le plus possible. Ensuite je les sélectionne petit à petit, et j'espère trouver le bon.

— Vous aurez des problèmes pour la langue...

— Non, car le personnage ne parle pas beaucoup. Il parle son propre langage, qui est le polonais dans le livre, mais ce pourrait être du finnois, du suédois, peu importe du moment qu'il parle une langue incompréhensible pour les autres personnages. »

Helsinki, 1970, in a hotel lounge:

INTERVIEWER: Why do you want a Finnish boy in your film?

LUCHINO: I don't necessarily want a Finnish boy, I want a blond boy with light eyes. And to find a boy like that I traveled to Stockholm, to Helsinki, and after that, I'll go to Warsaw and Munich. I'm going to a place where blonde hair and blue eyes are racial characteristics. Of course, I can't find that in Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Green eyes, will they suffice?"

LUCHINO: Yes, light eyes.

INTERVIEWER: How do you select the actors?

LUCHINO: I had many boys called here, as many as I could. Then I'm weeding them out, them little by little. I hope I find one.

INTERVIEWER: You won't have language problems?

LUCHINO: No, because the character doesn't talk much. He speaks his own language, which is Polish in the book, but it could be Finnish, Swedish, it doesn't matter as long as he speaks a language the other characters don't understand.

Cannes,
le 3 mai 1971,

Ma soeur,

Projection hier devant un parterre de stars, tonnerre d'applaudissements avant la conférence de presse. Luchino répondait en français aux journalistes, je ne comprenais rien. Envie de crier. L. m'a désigné comme « le plus beau garçon du monde ». J'ai le sentiment ici d'être constamment survolé par une nuée de chauves-souris, les gens s'intéressent à moi subitement, me complimentent, murmurent mais qu'il est beau, bravo monsieur, bravo jeune homme vous êtes exceptionnel, et tout cet amour volatile sonne creux. J'ai pourtant rencontré Romy Schneider hier, qu'est-ce qu'elle est belle... Je t'écris surtout pour regretter que tu ne sois pas à mes côtés, je m'ennuie, Nanna est fatiguée de tout ce cirque et moi aussi. C'est à cause d'elle, tout ça. Je ne pouvais pas répondre aux questions des journalistes alors j'en ai vu sourire, se foutre de moi, il n'y avait même pas de traducteur... Comment j'aurais du faire ? Je n'ai même pas appris l'italien pour le film vu je n'avais aucune réplique. Seulement des brouhahas, des rires forcés sur une plage dans une langue que l'on ne devait pas comprendre. Les instructions de

Sister dearest,

Picture me... the screening in front of an audience of stars... the booming applause and the press conference soon to come... Luchino responded to the journalists in French. I didn't understand anything. I wanted to scream. He selected me as "the most beautiful boy in the world." It felt like a swarm of bats around me, people are suddenly interested in me, compliment me, murmur: *he is handsome, well-done sir, well done young man you are exceptional*. All this volatile love rings hollow.

But I met Romy Schneider yesterday, how pretty she is.

I am writing to you mostly because I wish you were by my side. I'm bored. Nana is tired of this circus too. But it's all because of her. I couldn't answer journalists' questions and they grinned and laughed at me. There wasn't a translator! How could I have done it? I didn't even need to learn Italian for a film I didn't have lines in. Only brouhaha... even the forced laughter was a language I wasn't supposed to and didn't to understand. Visconti's instructions during filming came down to four words: walk, stop, turn around, smile. So yesterday I also smiled, as I had learned in front of the camera the first day. I smiled stupidly, not knowing how to do anything else.

I am writing to you facing the Mediterranean, from my room at the Martinez hotel, which is almost entirely filled up by the film crew. All this is a bit over my head. Tonight Luchino and Dirk told me we are going out, I don't know where – again, I didn't understand. I doubt it was one of Nana's plans for me. I think they want to party all night.

Visconti pendant le tournage se sont résumées à quatre mots : marche, stop, tourne-toi, souris. Alors hier aussi je souriais, comme j'avais appris, comme devant la caméra le premier jour, je souriais bêtement de ne savoir faire autre chose. Je t'écris face à la Méditerranée, depuis ma chambre de l'hôtel Martinez presque entièrement occupée par l'équipe du film. L'engouement me dépasse.

Ce soir, Luchino et Dirk m'ont dit qu'on allait sortir, je ne sais pas où je n'ai pas compris. M'étonnerait que ce soit un truc pour Nanna, j'ai compris qu'ils veulent faire la fête toute la nuit. Je voudrais qu'on m'oublie, me cacher sous le lit de la maison.

Puss,
Björn

I would like to be forgotten, to hide under the bed at home.

Kisses,

Björn

Stockholm,
le 7 juin 2020,

Papa,

Bien sûr que je vais t'aider, tu sais que tu peux compter sur moi. J'essaye de t'appeler depuis ce matin, depuis que j'ai reçu ton mot mais tu ne me réponds pas alors je t'écris à mon tour. Tu sais pourtant combien je m'inquiète quand tu ne réponds pas au téléphone, je te l'ai déjà dit. Quand j'étais petite ou plus jeune, non, quand ça n'allait pas tu ne me répondais pas, ni à moi ni à personne. Depuis quelques années tu as changé, tu as pris la bonne habitude de décrocher même quand ça ne va pas, peut-être que ta mélancolie s'adoucit ? Si c'est un mauvais jour tu me dis non, pas maintenant, je ne réussirai pas à tenir une conversation rappelons nous plus tard alors j'accepte, je recule face à tes jours noirs et on raccroche. Ça me va, papa. S'il-te-plaît continuons comme ça, ne fais pas le mort avec moi, pas encore.

Jessica m'a appelé justement hier soir. Elle s'inquiète de cette histoire de voisins. Elle est passée chez toi, apparemment tu n'étais pas là mais quelqu'un l'a reconnue et lui a expliqué la situation. L'as-tu vue depuis, ton amie Jessica ? Les voisins en effet ont l'air remonté. Je vais passer dès que je peux, disons ce soir, aussi tu recevras cette lettre après que je sois

Dear Papa,

Of course I'll help you. You know you can count on me. I've been trying to call you since this morning, since I got your note. You didn't pick up, so I'm writing you back. I told you how much I worry when you don't answer the phone.

When I was little or younger, when things weren't good, you wouldn't open up to anyone, but I've noticed a change with you. You pick up the phone when things aren't going well (even though you change your mind, when I ask about the depression, but at least you have the courage to say you can't hold a conversation before you hang up). That's fine with me, Papa, if you need me to step away from your darkness, if you continue need to keep hanging up.

But don't play dead on me. Not again.

Jessica called me just last night. She's worried about this neighbor situation. She went by your house, apparently you weren't there, but someone recognized her. Have you seen your her since? The neighbors seem upset. I'm going to come by as soon as I can, let's say tonight, so you'll get this letter when I come by. I don't want to waste any more time.

I'll see you tonight then. Tonight being perhaps yesterday or the day before for you when you read my letter, but why not this tonight again? I will help you as you ask me, dad, I will help you to get up and talk. I am grown up, I am not afraid anymore, actually I am strong enough for us both. Believe me.

It's time you told me. Maybe that'll help you too. Maybe you should write because writing suits you better than talking, as you once told me. It's easier to be sincere in writing.

Let's not be afraid.

Your daughter,
Robine Andresen

passée mais tant pis, je n'ai plus envie de laisser passer le temps.

Je te dis à ce soir, donc, ce soir étant peut-être hier ou avant-hier pour toi quand tu liras ma lettre, mais après tout pourquoi pas ce soir encore ? Je vais t'aider comme tu me le demandes, papa, je vais t'aider à te relever et à parler. Je suis adulte, je n'ai plus peur, au contraire j'ai de la force pour deux, crois-moi. Il est temps que tu me racontes. Peut-être que t'aider passera aussi par cela, écrire, parce qu'écrire te convient mieux que parler, tu me l'as dit un jour. Il est plus facile d'être sincère par écrit alors n'ayons pas peur.

Robine

Cannes,
May 4, 1971,

My Helmut, mein Schatz,

I pick up my pen in the later hours of the afternoon. Last night's tipples and the views of the Mediterranean Sea from my bed kept me from getting up any earlier.

The stress died down after the screening and the press conference that followed. The most beautiful boy in the world was – you guessed it – greatly applauded/widely adored. We had dinner with Dirk and others at the hotel – Romy was there too. We drank a lot – bottles of champagne passed over the table, ordered by the relieved producer, Robert. Dirk wanted to go out afterwards – he said we're going out – and he tried to convince everyone to come. He knew a club here popular with the boys. We had to take Björn there, to share his beauty with the world. I think Dirk was proud to show him off.

But first we had to cross the city. The photographers were waiting at the exit of the Martinez. The little one was frightened... I'm not sure what's up with all his seriousness. When we got there, he was all stuck up too, but we took care in making him feel comfortable. Dirk had found a lot of friends who were interested in him... Shouldn't sixteen year olds be happy? In his place, how happy I would have felt to be there, in freedom, and in the center of attention. At my age, on the other hand, this is no longer a place for hunting. I didn't stay until the end (the horrible music depressed me) and I left the little one with Dirk and his friends ready to pounce on him like tigers. (I hope D was

*Cannes,
le 4 mai 1971,*

Mein Helmut,

Je prends mon stylo à une heure tardive de l'après-midi. L'alcool de la nuit et la vue sur la Méditerranée depuis mon lit ne m'ont pas incité à me lever plus tôt.

Le stress est retombé après la projection et la conférence de presse qui a suivi ; le plus beau garçon du monde fut, tu t'en doutes, acclamé. On a diné avec Dirk et d'autres à l'hôtel, Romy était là aussi. Beaucoup bu : les bouteilles de champagne défilaient à table commandées par Robert en producteur soulagé. Dirk voulait sortir ensuite, il nous l'avait dit d'emblée et tentait de convaincre toute le monde, il connaissait une boîte ici fréquentée par les garçons, il fallait y emmener Björn, partager sa beauté au monde. Je crois que Dirk était fier de le promener. Première difficulté : traverser la ville. Les photographes attendaient à la sortie du Martinez, le petit était apeuré... Qu'est-ce qu'il est sérieux ! Une fois là-bas il était tout coincé aussi, on a pourtant fait attention à le mettre à l'aise, Dirk avait retrouvé plein d'amis qui s'intéressaient à lui... N'est-on pas joyeux quand on a seize ans ? À sa place, quel bonheur j'aurais ressenti de me trouver là, dans la liberté, au

still careful. I'll meet him tonight if his hangover allows it).

How are you, my love? Tell me about the shoot. That the film is called "A Beautiful Monster" delights me every time I think about it. I am sure your deviant tendencies allow you to play the most convincing of perverts without much effort ;)

Kisses to you, mostro mio,
Luchinaccio

centre de l'attention qui plus est. À mon âge en revanche, ce genre d'endroit n'est plus qu'agressions. Je ne suis pas resté jusqu'au bout, l'horrible musique m'a déprimé, j'ai laissé le petit avec Dirk et ses amis prêts à bondir au garrot. (J'espère que D. a tout de même fait attention, je le retrouve ce soir si son état le permet.)

Comment vas-tu toi, *meine Liebe* ? Raconte-moi ton tournage. Que le film s'appelle Un beau monstre me ravit à chaque fois que j'y pense. Je suis certain que tes adorables penchants te permettent de jouer sans forcer le plus convaincant des pervers.

Je t'embrasse, *mostro mio*,
Luchinaccio

CATE VALINOTE

NOVEL EXCERPT

Chapter 1

With her index, Aiyla plucks the milk petal from the coffee she will drink half of and wipes it on the saucer. She had not asked for milk.

She presses her cold fingers around the cup, looks out the window for the animal trainers she's seen in pictures. In all the morning light refracting, her face shows up in the glass window too. Her mother's going to hate it — if not just the septum piercing, or perhaps the blanket of strawberry blond hair, all of this body that's becoming her own.

Despite the absence of her mother's hair trims and lack of color in her cheeks, Aiyla still inherited some of her distinguishing features. Her warm coloring and wide hips give her a flashy sort of femininity, and her hair, however drying and splitting at the ends, retains that color and takes up enough of her to make it the main subject of compliments from strangers.

But everything else is growing cold and even falling off the axis of those hips — her moon-colored boobs and her thighs, that once full and fiery hair dwindling like sunset. Especially now that she had used up almost the last of the powders and pigmented creams her mother left in the bathroom, even the dusting of freckles on her cheeks has faded in all those months unexposed to UV. That color no longer distracts from hollows in her cheeks, the darkness under her eyes. If you hadn't seen her for a while, you might think she had aged out of girlhood. It was all her fault.

Outside, the tourists hover over ride apps, or

traduit de l'anglais par
GUILLAUME PERILHOU

NOVEL EXCERPT

Chapitre 1

De son index, Aiyla enlève le nuage de lait de son café qu'elle ne boira qu'à moitié et l'essuie sur la soucoupe. Elle n'avait pas demandé de lait.

Elle serre la tasse de ses doigts froids, regarde par la fenêtre les dresseurs d'animaux qu'elle a vus en photos. Par la lumière réfractée du matin, son visage apparaît dans la vitre. Sa mère va le détester — si ce n'est seulement le piercing au septum, ou peut-être sa tignasse blond vénitien, tout ce corps qui devient le sien.

Bien qu'elle n'ait pas la coupe de cheveux ni la pâleur de sa mère, Aiyla a hérité de certains de ses traits. Sa couleur et ses larges hanches lui confèrent une sorte de féminité tape-à-l'œil, et ses cheveux, bien que secs et cassants aux pointes, conservent ce reflet et prennent suffisamment de place pour être la principale raison des compliments d'inconnus.

Mais tout le reste de son corps se refroidit et tombe même le long de ses hanches — de ses seins couleur de Lune et de ses cuisses, cette chevelure autrefois pleine et ardente qui s'étiole comme le coucher du soleil. Surtout maintenant qu'elle a presque terminé les dernières poudres et crèmes pigmentées que sa mère a laissées dans la salle de bain, même les taches de rousseur de ses joues se sont estompées au cours de ces derniers mois sans exposition aux UV. Sa pâleur ne détourne plus l'attention du creux de ses joues, de l'obscurité sous ses yeux. Si vous ne l'aviez pas vue depuis un certain temps, vous pourriez penser qu'elle n'était plus une jeune fille. C'était de sa faute.

struggle to express their destinations into taxi windows. They will return saying how fast and confusing the city was, and rave about the bread.

She's more interested in the moving crowd of people returning to their lives, quickly sliding into cabs or talking on the phone while they wait. Her mother probably speaks just like them, now — the people on the curb. Eighteen-year-old Aiyla, not a part of either of these crowds, waits for the animal trainers — loved ones to her mom, strangers to her.

She sips the good and strong coffee so that it lasts until it's cold. Then the studio van pulls up in the pickup lane, and she struggles out with her bags that are too heavy for her.

Marina and Felix are just as her mother first described them — city people enchanted by the two realms of her career: the animal world in Marina's case, the film scene in Felix's. They both have ugly teeth but nice smiles. Felix, swallowed by his Studio Animals jacket, has shaggy dark hair and eyes that get bigger with the expressions peeking underneath it. For a French person, he seems approachable and warm. Marina has a buzzcut and carries herself like a feminine Napoleon that might make a great animal trainer. She's beautiful, maybe not conventionally, but in a way that makes Aiyla afraid to approach her. She looks artistic in a non-expensive, non-pretentious way. Her personal dog, a wiry-haired Cairn terrier, takes Felix's place in the front seat as he gets out to help Aiyla with her bags.

"You look just like Caroline," Marina tells her.

Aiyla is not sure if this is true or if her mother's co-worker is just being polite. She wraps her fingers around the smallest part of her wrist, meets her own eyes in the rearview mirror. These little grabs at herself have become routine comforts. She's accepted that she is just an ember of her great mother, now just finding a way to take that smallness farther, shrinking into something her own.

The animal trainers hug her even though she was

Dehors, les touristes désespèrent de trouver un chauffeur sur des applis ou luttent pour épeler leur destination à travers les vitres des taxis. Ils reviendront en disant à quel point la ville était rapide et tumultueuse, et s'extasieront sur le pain.

Elle s'intéresse davantage à cette foule retournant à sa vie, s'engouffrant rapidement dans des taxis ou téléphonant en attendant. Sa mère parle probablement comme eux maintenant — ces gens sur le trottoir. Aiyla, dix-huit ans, qui ne fait pas partie de cette foule, attend les dresseurs — des proches de sa mère, des étrangers pour elle.

Elle sirote le bon et fort café pour le faire durer avant qu'il ne devienne froid. Ensuite, la camionnette du studio s'arrête au dépose-minute et elle se débat avec ses sacs trop lourds pour elle.

Marina et Felix sont exactement comme sa mère les a décrits — des citadins passionnés par les deux faces de sa carrière : le monde animal dans le cas de Marina, celui du cinéma dans celui de Felix. Ils ont tous deux de mauvaises dents mais de jolis sourires. Enseveli sous sa veste Studio Animals, Felix a des cheveux bruns hirsutes et des yeux qui grossissent selon leurs expressions. Pour un Français, il a l'air accessible et chaleureux. Marina a les cheveux ras et se comporte comme une Napoléon au féminin qui pourrait faire une excellente dresseuse. Elle est belle, peut-être pas d'une beauté conventionnelle, mais d'une façon qui rend difficile pour Aiyla de l'aborder. Elle semble avoir la fibre artistique, sans être expansive ou prétentieuse. Son chien, un Cairn terrier à poils longs, prend la place de Felix sur le siège passager alors que celui-ci sort de la voiture pour aider Aiyla à porter ses sacs.

« Tu ressembles à Caroline », lui dit Marina.

Aiyla ne sait pas si c'est vrai ou si la collègue de sa mère cherche à être polie. Elle entoure de sa main la plus petite

told they wouldn't. Her mother has this kind of effect on people, even Parisians. Naturally, they love Aiyla by proxy.

Somehow on the way to the greeting, Aiyla's forearm brushes the beginnings of what would be Marina's curls. Usually, Aiyla does not enjoy or even notice sensation much, but the static of Marina's hair on her skin somehow makes her feel that she's in a place of unexpected calm.

They get in the car, Felix insisting that Aiyla take the passenger seat next to Marina. He sits in the back, leaned up against the same beige, dirt-smudged, large animal crates they use to transport dogs and cats to Hollywood. These ones are stacked two layers high, empty except for one with two different species of baby deer, standing up now, expecting action. He sticks his fingers between the grates and the deer smell him like cats, raises his voice so Aiyla's mom on speakerphone can hear what sound like greetings in French.

They drive out of the airport into some of the landscapes Aiyla had flown over, beginning what will be a long ride to the Alps. It's been a long time since she's ridden in a studio van, but the rattle of the crates and the presence of other creatures in the back provide a distantly familiar feeling in this unfamiliar place. As Felix and Marina ask her questions, she keeps track of a brief race they keep with a train headed in the same direction.

The last of the train disappears into a tunnel, abandoning their neck-and-neck game as they make progress through the valley. As the tidy canal boarding the highway splits into disappearing rivers beside them, Aiyla tries to orient herself. In her flawed mental map of cardinal directions, she decides downstream must point straight to the ocean or sea, to where she came from. Then she remembers: rivers curve.

Because she is there, the conversation between Marina and Felix is stilted — they keep stopping themselves, slow down to speak in English to fill Aiyla in about who or what they are talking about. They spend a

partie de son poignet, croise son propre regard dans le rétroviseur. Ces petites manies sont devenues une routine réconfortante. Elle a accepté de n'être qu'un vestige de sa grand-mère, essayant simplement de trouver un moyen d'aller plus avant dans sa petitesse, se rétrécissant en quelque chose qui lui serait propre.

Les dresseurs la prennent dans leurs bras alors qu'on lui avait dit qu'ils ne le feraient pas. Sa mère fait ce genre d'effet sur les gens, mêmes sur les Parisiens. Bien entendu, ils adorent Aiyla par procuration.

Lorsqu'elles se saluent, l'avant-bras d'Aiyla effleure les boucles de Marina. D'ordinaire, Aiyla n'apprécie pas ou ne remarque pas beaucoup ses sensations, mais l'électricité statique des cheveux de Marina sur sa peau lui donne en quelque sorte l'impression d'être dans un lieu de calme inattendu.

Ils montent dans la voiture, Felix insistant pour qu'Aiyla prenne le siège passager à côté de Marina. Il s'assoit derrière, appuyé contre les mêmes grandes caisses beiges, sales, destinées au transport de chiens et chats à Hollywood. Celles-ci sont empilées sur deux niveaux, vides à l'exception de l'une d'elles contenant deux petits cerfs, tenant debout à présent, attendant qu'il se passe quelque chose. Il passe ses doigts entre les grilles et les cerfs le reniflent comme des chats, hausse la voix pour que la mère d'Aiyla, sur haut-parleur, puisse entendre ce que sont des salutations en français.

Ils quittent l'aéroport pour des paysages qu'Aiyla avait survolés, entamant ce qui sera un long voyage vers les Alpes. Cela fait longtemps qu'elle n'est pas montée dans un fourgon de studio, mais le bruit des caisses et la présence d'autres êtres vivants à l'arrière lui procurent un sentiment familier dans cet endroit inconnu. Tandis que Felix et Marina lui posent des questions, elle suit la brève course que leur voiture mène avec un train lancé dans la même direction.

Le dernier wagon du train disparaît dans un tunnel,

while debating which producers they think are the most attractive, then pull over in one of the towns, buy sandwiches with butter and thick slices of ham. Aiyla stays in the van with the deer, lies to the trainers, telling them she already ate while she was waiting for them at the airport. But when they get back in the van, sandwich in hands, Aiyla finds it hard not to stare at Marina's narrow fingers as they slowly peel the foil.

Marina gestures to the sandwich towards her. "Have half," she says, "Your mother won't be happy to hear we didn't feed you."

Aiyla wants to make a good impression on her mother's co-workers, even if she doesn't want to eat. She takes a bite of the bread, which sticks in her throat for a moment. As it works its way down, she feels kind of anxious, kind of sick, kind of giddy. She quickly covers the rest of the half and looks out the window as they zip through modest cutouts in the trees, where there are breathtaking views of conforming cities, always with church towers, below. Aiyla fights the urge to close her eyes. From up here, the landscape seems to overcome the noise of life turning inside it.

...

When she wakes up, Felix and Marina are talking about *papillons*. She recognizes this word because she knows dog breeds. Papillons, because of the shape of their ears, are named after butterflies.

When Marina notices that Aiyla is awake, she touches her shoulder and gestures to the road.

"Do you see them?"

At first Aiyla had mistakes them for scraps of paper, but as she looks closer, yes, more and more of them, white-winged and docile, like those she caught in California as a girl, like those she once believed were fairies, fly straight into the moving traffic, flatten into sudden deaths on windshields, under wheels. Don't they see the others? It is horrible to be a part of this move-

abandonnant leur partie de coude-à-coude tandis qu'ils progressent dans la vallée. Alors que le petit canal qui longe l'autoroute se divise en deux rivières disparaissant à leur côté, Aiyla tente de s'orienter. Dans sa carte mentale imparfaite des points cardinaux, elle décide que l'aval doit pointer vers l'océan ou la mer, de là d'où elle vient. Puis elle se souvient : les rivières sont courbes.

Parce qu'elle est là, la conversation entre Felix et Marina est guindée — ils ne cessent de s'interrompre, ralentissent pour parler en anglais afin d'expliquer à Aiyla de qui ou quoi ils parlent. Ils passent un moment à parler des producteurs qu'ils estiment les plus séduisants, puis font une halte dans l'une des villes, achètent des jambons-beurre aux tranches épaisses. Ayla reste dans le fourgon avec les cerfs, ment aux dresseurs leur disant qu'elle a déjà mangé lorsqu'elle les attendait à l'aéroport. Mais quand ils remontent dans le van, sandwiches à la main, Aiyla a du mal à ne pas fixer les doigts fins de Marina qui lentement enlèvent le papier d'aluminium.

Marina fait un geste en direction du sandwich en face d'elle. « Prends la moitié, dit-elle, ta mère ne sera pas contente d'entendre qu'on ne t'a pas nourrie. »

Aiyla veut faire bonne impression aux collègues de sa mère, même si elle n'a pas faim. Elle prend une bouchée de pain, qui reste un moment coincée dans sa gorge. Au fur et à mesure qu'elle descend, Aiyla se sent comme anxieuse, presque malade, étourdie. Elle recouvre rapidement la moitié du sandwich et regarde par la fenêtre alors qu'ils passent par d'étroits raccourcis entre les arbres ; la vue est imprenable sur les villes en contrebas, toutes parsemées de clochers. Aiyla lutte contre l'envie de fermer les yeux. De là-haut, le paysage domine le bruit de la vie qui court en son sein.

...

Quand elle se réveille, Felix et Marina parlent de papillons. Elle reconnaît le mot parce qu'elle connaît les races de

ment against them.

Marina, driving and certainly not the victim in this butterfly trolley problem, winces with Aiyla as hundreds of what look like origami fall around them. Their fractioned wings are everywhere, raising up and down with the wind in and around the road.

“We shot near here last week,” Marina says.

“You think the smoke made them crazy?” Felix says.

“They set some of the forests on fire,” Marina fills Aiyla in, “for a scene.”

“You should have seen us” Felix says, “We were all black with ash. Your mom more than anyone.”

Aiyla wishes the notion of her mother being covered in toxic ash (something she did not mention to her in her emails) made her worry about her. Instead it contributed to the confusion about what she often tried not to think about: why would her mother return to this brutal world over the life they had once had together? How could she?

Shuffling with the deers’ water dishes in the back of the moving vehicle, Felix touches her shoulder, and says, in a way that feels telepathic, “Your mom can’t wait to see you.”

...

There is a basil plant sitting precariously on the windowsill. It casts a long basil plant shadow on the floor. The room is cold, but the big white dogs — Garfield, Fort, and Sarge — drool and pant nonetheless. Garfield, the most gregarious, clambers for Aiyla. Fort — the gentlest, gingerly licks her hands. Sarge, the most devoted, stays looking at Aiyla’s mother, waiting for the next cue. Marina and Felix sit smoking on the balcony outside, waiting until it’s time to go down to the animal compound.

Because her mother is the head trainer, for once she has the nicest apartment out of all the trainers. It’s

chiens. En raison de la forme de leurs oreilles, on a appelé les papillons d'après les insectes du même nom. Quand Marina se rend compte qu'Aiyla est réveillée, elle touche son épaule et fait un geste en direction de la route.

« Tu les vois ? »

Au début, Aiyla les avait pris pour des bouts de papiers, mais à mesure qu'elle regarde de plus près, oui, de plus en plus d'entre eux, aux ailes blanches et dociles, comme ceux qu'elle attrapait en Californie quand elle était petite, comme ceux qu'elle croyait des fées, volent entre les voitures, meurent subitement contre le pare-brise, sous les roues. Ne voient-ils pas les autres ? C'est horrible de faire partie du mouvement qui va contre eux.

Au volant, ne se percevant pas comme le bourreau des papillons, Marina grimace néanmoins avec Aiyla alors que des centaines de ce qui ressemble à des origamis tombent autour d'eux. Leurs ailes fractionnées sont partout, volant au gré du vent au-dessus de la route et autour d'eux.

« On a tourné près d'ici la semaine dernière », dit Marina.

« Tu penses que la fumée les a rendus fous », rétorque Felix.

« Ils ont mis le feu à des certaines forêts pour une scène », explique Marina à Aiyla.

« Tu aurais dû nous voir, reprend Felix, on était noirs de cendres. Ta mère encore plus que quiconque. »

Aiyla aurait aimé que l'idée de sa mère recouverte de cendres toxiques — ce qu'elle n'a pas évoqué dans ses mails — l'inquiète. Au lieu de quoi, cela a nourri son questionnement : pourquoi sa mère voulait-elle retourner à ce monde brutal plutôt qu'à la vie qu'elles avaient eue ensemble ? Comment le pourrait-elle ?

Alors qu'il s'affaire aux gamelles d'eau des cerfs à l'arrière du véhicule en train de rouler, Felix lui touche l'épaule et lui dit, comme par télépathie : « Ta mère est impatiente

just a studio, but there's a wide window on almost every wall, giving the space a sense of expansiveness, especially with the green slopes all around them. There are the elements of her mother's usual "on-location" setup — the colossal pile of visibly dirty laundry, call sheets and Vitamin waters and candy bars, dog teeth marks on all the pens from every time the dogs have been asked to practice fetching.

When she finally hugs her mom, Aiyla feels her bones — the tops of her shoulders and the protrusions at the top of her back where her mom's forearms hold her. What's worse is that her mother seems to feel for more, squeezing the tops of Aiyla's arms, taking her hollowing cheeks in her hands. For the first time in a long time, Aiyla feels afraid of what might be the truth. Only her mother has this power.

"You're so thin," her Mom says, holding Aiyla in front of her, those full-of-life blue eyes, looking Aiyla up and down in a way she has not been looked at in a long time, in the way only mothers are allowed to. Somehow Aiyla wants to both disappear into her mother's embrace, which smells like a return to the house after a long trip. She also feels naked, some impulse to hide.

Her mother, already youthful-looking in her pixie cut, almost looks younger — lean and tan and strong from months out working in the sun. She doesn't wear makeup anymore, the touch of darkness under her eyes and the natural pink of her lips almost a statement of her return to her Frenchness. She hurries to the counter, wipes it with a kitchen sponge. Seeing Aiyla seems to enliven the domesticity in her.

"They're even bigger than I thought they would be," Aiyla says, sitting down on the bottom bunk with the dogs, instead of at the table where her mother had pulled out a chair.

"Let me make you something," her mother says, opening the cupboards.

"When do you have to go back to work?" Aiyla says.

de te voir. »

...

Il y a un plant de basilic posé dangereusement sur le rebord de la fenêtre. Il projette son ombre de basilic sur le sol. La pièce est froide, mais les grands chiens blancs — Garfield, Fort et Sarge — bavent et halètent malgré tout. Garfield, le plus grégaire, grimpe sur Aiyla. Fort, le plus doux, lui lèche les mains délicatement. Sarge, le plus dévoué, reste regarder la mère d'Aiyla en attendant le prochain signe. Assis sur le balcon, Marina et Felix fument en attendant qu'il soit temps de descendre dans l'enclos.

Parce que sa mère est l'entraîneuse principal, pour une fois elle a le plus bel appartement de tous ses collègues. C'est juste un studio, mais il y a une large fenêtre sur presque chaque mur, donnant à l'espace un sentiment de grandeur, ce que soulignent les grands pans de murs verts. On y trouve tous les éléments de l'installation habituelle de sa mère : la pile immense de vêtements manifestement sales, des listes de coups de fils à passer, des eaux vitaminées et des barres chocolatées, des traces de dents sur ses stylos dues à toutes les fois où l'on a demandé aux chiens de s'entraîner à rapporter.

Lorsqu'elle serre enfin sa mère dans ses bras, Aiyla sent ses os — le haut de ses épaules et les saillies de ses omoplates quand sa mère l'a enlacée. Le pire est que sa mère semble en vouloir encore plus, serrant le haut des bras d'Aiyla, prenant ses joues dans ses mains. Pour la première fois depuis longtemps, Aiyla a peur de ce qui pourrait être la vérité. Seule sa mère a ce pouvoir sur elle.

« Tu es si mince », dit sa mère en tenant Aiyla devant elle, ses yeux bleus pétillants, regardant Aiyla de haut en bas comme elle n'a pas été regardée depuis longtemps, d'une façon que seules les mères sont autorisées à faire. D'une certaine manière, Aiyla a l'envie de disparaître dans cette étreinte qui a l'odeur des retours à la maison après un

“Eggs?” her mother says.

“I don’t like eggs.”

Her mother pours a lot of oil into the pan. Aiyla can not see what kind, because she doesn’t know the words in French yet. Then she closes the cap, opens it again, and adds more. In a bowl, she cracks two eggs and milk and whisks, before cracking one more, then more milk.

As her mother cooks, Aiyla and Marina make eye contact through the window. Marina is the first to look away, and then she checks her watch, takes another puff, and returns to her conversation with Felix. Even through the glass, Aiyla can discern that she sounds like she’s someone made for the world, her voice somehow both heady and honeyed. It might have just been the capacity of French and anyone who could speak it to overawe her though.

“I don’t like eggs,” Aiyla repeats as her mother sets them down at the table.

“Since when?” her mother says. She pulls out a chair for Aiyla, then takes two beers from the fridge, cracks the caps, and sits down at the table. She takes off her baseball cap, the bump on her forehead from the latest boon stick accident still showing.

“Everyone here smokes a lot,” Aiyla says.

“I don’t smoke,” her mother says.

“They look good doing it,” Aiyla says.

“They’re killing themselves.”

Her mother pauses for a moment, checks the time, “You don’t smoke, right?” she says.

“I don’t smoke.”

Sometimes Aiyla feels like the love between her and her mother is less about their knowing of one another, and more about their mutual longing for each other.

“Do you want to try it?”

“What?”

Outside, Marina stands up, opens the sliding glass door.

“It’s 6pm,” she says.

long voyage, et elle se sent également nue, elle ressent une certaine envie de se cacher.

Sa mère, qui a déjà l'air jeune avec sa coupe de lutin, l'est presque encore davantage — svelte, bronzée et musclée après des mois à travailler au soleil. Elle ne porte plus de maquillage, la touche de noir sous ses yeux et le rose naturel de ses lèvres étant presque la déclaration de son retour à sa francité. Elle se précipite vers le comptoir qu'elle essuie avec une éponge. Voir Aiyla semble raviver sa domesticité.

« Ils sont encore plus grands que je ne le pensais », dit Aiyla, s'asseyant sur la couchette avec les chiens au lieu de venir à table où sa mère lui a tiré une chaise.

« Laisse moi te préparer quelque chose », dit sa mère, ouvrant les placards.

« Quand dois-tu retourner au travail ? », demande Aiyla.

« Des oeufs ? », répond sa mère.

« Je n'aime pas les oeufs. »

Sa mère verse beaucoup d'huile dans la poêle. Ayla ne peut voir quelle sorte d'huile puisqu'elle ne connaît pas encore le mot français. Ensuite elle referme le bouchon, le rouvre à nouveau et en rajoute. Dans un bol, elle casse deux oeufs, verse du lait et bat le tout, avant de casser un autre oeuf, puis verse à nouveau du lait.

Tandis que sa mère cuisine, Aiyla et Marina se regardent à travers la fenêtre. Marina est la première à détourner les yeux, puis elle vérifie sa montre, tire une autre bouffée et reprend sa conversation avec Felix. Même à travers la vitre, Aiyla peut deviner que Marina est faite pour le monde, sa voix est à la fois capiteuse et mielleuse. Mais c'est peut-être tout simplement parce que le français, et tous ses locuteurs, l'impressionnent terriblement.

« Je n'aime pas les oeufs », répète Aiyla alors que sa mère les pose sur la table.

« Depuis quand ? », dit sa mère. Elle tire une chaise pour Aiyla, puis prend deux bières dans le réfrigérateur, fait

“Yeah, let’s go,” her mother says.

The dogs jump off the beds, scamper around the front door. Felix and Marina leash them while her mother kisses her head and reminds Aiyla that she used to like eggs, and that she would call Aiyla before she went to sleep, and trainers hurry out the door to begin their evening of work.

Then, the room is quiet. Aiyla can tell her mother spends little time there because it isn’t as tidy as she usually keeps her space. Aiyla sits there for a moment with the plate of eggs and the two cold undrunken beers. She gets up, scrapes her eggs into the trash bin, reaching in with her hands to make sure they are hidden underneath some containers and old fruit. Then she opens the sliding door, steps out onto the balcony. The biting air gives her goosebumps, but she sits down anyway, looks out at the great mountain she will watch reflect sun and catch shade for weeks after this. She picks up Marina’s cigarette bud... no, that’s not what it was called... cigarette butt, and places it on her tongue. It tastes like pressed flowers and dry hair, and scraps of many tastes she thought might become familiar as she got older. She holds the little charred thing in her hand again and looked out at the mountain, white and reflecting the orange of the setting sun.

sauter les capsules et s'assied à la table. Elle enlève sa casquette de baseball, découvrant la bosse que son dernier accident de hockey lui a laissée sur le front.

« Tout le monde fume beaucoup ici », dit Aiyla.

« Je ne fume pas, moi », répond sa mère.

« Ca les rend beaux », dit Aiyla.

« Ils se tuent. »

Sa mère fait une pause, regarde l'heure, « Tu ne fumes pas, si ? », dit-elle.

« Je ne fume pas, moi. »

Parfois Ailya se dit que l'amour entre elles ne tient pas tant au fait qu'elles se connaissent mais à leur désir d'être ensemble.

« Tu veux essayer ? »

« Hein ? »

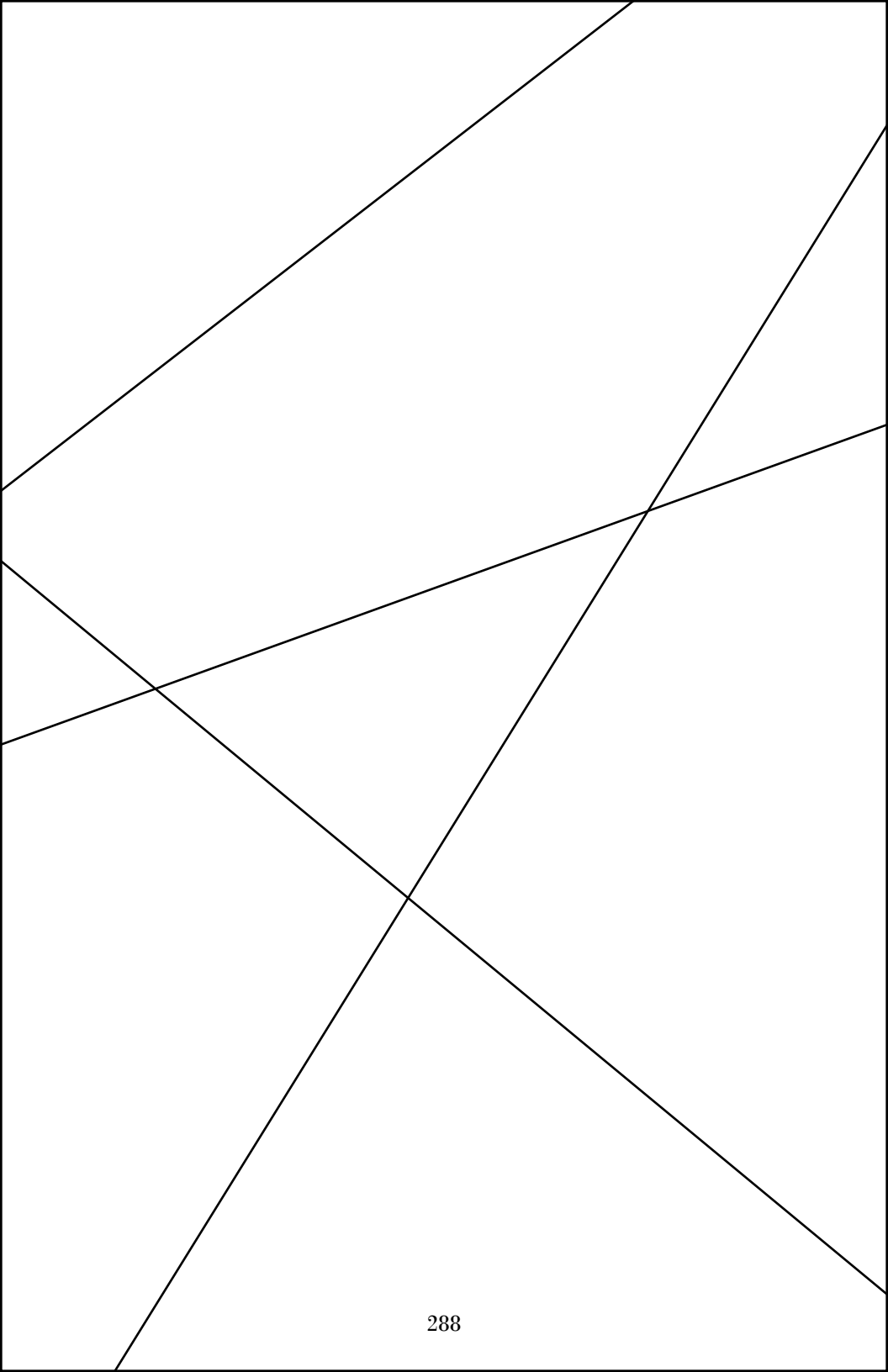
Dehors, Marina se lève et ouvre la porte coulissante. « Il est 18h », dit-elle.

« Oui, allons-y », dit sa mère.

Les chiens sautent des lits, s'agitent près de la porte d'entrée. Felix et Marina les tiennent en laisse pendant que sa mère embrasse sa tête et rappelle à Aiyla qu'elle aimait les oeufs avant, qu'elle l'appelait avant de s'endormir, et que les dresseurs se dépêchent dehors pour commencer leur soirée de travail.

Puis, la pièce devient silencieuse. Ayla devine que sa mère y passe moins de temps qu'avant parce qu'elle n'est pas aussi bien rangée que d'habitude. Ayla reste assise là un moment avec l'assiette d'oeufs et les deux bières froides qui n'ont pas été bues. Elle se lève, jette ses oeufs dans la poubelle, y plongeant les mains pour s'assurer qu'ils sont bien cachés sous quelques emballages et des vieux fruits. Puis elle ouvre la porte coulissante et sort sur le balcon. L'air mordant lui donne la chair de poule, mais elle s'assied quand même, regarde la grande montagne sur laquelle elle contempera le reflet du soleil et les ombres

durant des semaines. Elle saisit le magot de cigarette de Marina... non, ce n'est pas comme ça qu'on dit ... le mégot de cigarette, et le pose sur sa langue. Ça a le goût de fleurs séchées et de cheveux secs, et de nombreux autres goûts auxquels elle se dit qu'elle s'habituera avec l'âge. Elle tient à nouveau la petite chose carbonisée dans sa main et regarde la montagne, blanche et reflétant l'orange du soleil couchant.



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

Translator's Note

Working on this translation has taught me a lot about grammar in relation to humor. In the original, some of the wittiest parts are supported by unusually long, metaphor-dense sentences. Those help the pacing immensely, building up to comedic climaxes by piling details and asides on top of each other without letting the reader get lost in the grammar.

Translating those parts as closely as possible made for a rather dry, confusing read with great losses in character. Due to the different German syntax, the words that really make the joke often had to change places. The necessary added commas and nouns tipped the eloquent style into stilted territory. I decided to place some periods to better highlight the punch lines and help readers where I felt that sentences got too long to keep up with in German.

Some words and phrases I have not been able to translate satisfactorily, but I hope I have been able to replicate the angry, self-pitying but clever voice of this not-quite-lovable protagonist. Especially the dialogue seems a little unnatural in German, possibly due to literary conventions more than the translation itself.

I've tried to keep up with the somewhat violent vocabulary by choosing corresponding German words, but I feel that some of their depth has been lost anyway: Somehow, the scratching seems even more brutal in the translation, which diminishes the comedic effect. The same goes for the swearing. In general, I feel like the protagonist in the translation has gotten angrier somehow, even though I tried to soften some parts later on in the process.

This has been a fascinating project to work on. I've been

lucky to read the entire text with great joy and had a lot of fun sinking my teeth (or the stumps of my fingernails) into translating this excerpt.

AZIZA KASUMOV

MARTINIQUE (EXCERPT)

I came down with the plague a couple of months after Erika started working for us. Turns out, when you lay on the beach after the tropical afternoon rainfall has come and gone with the violence of a biblical deluge, no towel, just your half-naked body on the sand, trialing the clinically endorsed insanity cure otherwise known as rest and relaxation, you are making yourself a ripe target for a pest called sand fleas, hundreds of them, crawling all over you without your brain having even the faintest idea because they're so small your sleep-deprived retina won't be able to register them. The average surface area of an adult male body is 20.45 square feet, and because an individual sand flea takes up no more than 0.001 square feet, there is hypothetically speaking space for close to 19,000 of them on your skin, which means that, even at a rate of only one percent of your surface area falling under the imperial control of the sand flea industrial complex, there are 190 of the beasts tripping over your chest hair to get in on the action. And when you wake up in the middle of the night, a couple of hours after your beach excursion, your self-prescribed rest-and-relaxation retreat, you want to literally peel off your skin, for once not because your kids are screaming through the baby monitor or because your wife is relentlessly sobbing in fetal position on the bathroom floor mat, but because you cannot for the sake of it stop the total and absolute urge to scratch every single one of the red marks that by now are disparagingly splattered all across your skin, rendering it into a Jackson Pollock painting of purgatorial dimensions. So you give in to the overwhelming urge that has come to define the entire spectre of your life, but

**aus dem englischen übersetzt von
AMY WITTENBERG**

MARTINIQUE (EXCERPT)

Die Seuche erwischte mich ein paar Monate, nachdem Erika bei uns angefangen hatte. Wer hätte gedacht, dass man sich, während man an einem Strand liegt, über den sich gerade ein tropischer Regen mit der Gewalt einer biblischen Sintflut ergossen hat, ohne Handtuch, nur dein halbnackter Körper im Sand, mittendrin in der vom Arzt verordneten Heilmethode namens Ruhe und Entspannung, zu einem Leckerbissen für eine Plage macht, die man Sandflöhe nennt, hunderte von ihnen, die auf dir herumkrabbeln, ohne dass dein Gehirn was davon bemerkt, weil sie so klein sind, dass deine übernachtigte Netzhaut gar nicht in der Lage ist, sie zu registrieren. Die durchschnittliche Oberfläche eines ausgewachsenen Männerkörpers beträgt 1,89 Quadratmeter, und weil ein einzelner Sandfloh weniger als einen Quadratzentimeter besetzt, ist auf deiner Haut theoretisch Platz für mehr als 19.000 von ihnen, sodass selbst wenn nur ein Prozent deiner Oberfläche vom industriellen Sandflohkomplex erobert wird, immernoch 190 dieser Viecher in deinem Brusthaar herumkraxeln um mitzumischen. Und wenn du mitten in der Nacht aufwachst, ein paar Stunden nach deiner Strandexkursion, der selbst verordneten Besinnung auf Ruhe und Entspannung, willst du dir buchstäblich die Haut abschälen, ausnahmsweise mal nicht, weil deine Kinder aus dem Babyphon schreien oder weil deine Frau sich unablässig schluchzend auf dem Fußhandtuch im Bad zusammengerollt hat, sondern weil du dem unbedingten und allumfassenden Drang nicht widerstehen kannst, an jedem einzelnen der roten Punkte zu kratzen, die inzwischen wie Farbspritzer überall auf deiner Haut verteilt sind, ein Jackson-Pollock-

here's the catch, the harsh, despairing, sisyphian catch: you can't and won't be satisfied, not even for a second, because you only have so many fingers and your fingernails are all chewed down to the edge of the nail bed on top of that, because life has been stressful, not just lately but as far back as you can remember.

On day one of the plague, I try to go to work. I have showings booked all day, across the island, and it's too late to cancel or reschedule, mostly because people on this goddamn island never check their email unless they're physically sitting in their ornamental home office, gawking through the window at the birds shitting up the swimming pool. So I get up, shower, try to rinse the itching off my body, little success, but at least the cold water has a meditating effect on my skin, because a cold shower is the first and most important breakfast-of-champions ingredient, and I get the sense that I can get through this, ready, set, go, sprint or stumble, doesn't matter, just keep moving. To be safe, I also pack a flask of rum — the second and sometimes most important breakfast-of-champions ingredient — into the glove box of our diarrhea green Citroën, leased from the same guy who owns the house we're renting, some retired, fat bastard with a face as leathery as shedded snakeskin, cracking here and there from the salt in the air and the tropical sun that's been unapologetically beaming upon him for years. On the way to the first property, I pull over three times just to give myself a good scratch all over my chest and legs, and take a big gulp of rum each time. Some of it drools from my mouth down my chin and onto my chest, and when it runs over a bite or two, it feels good, almost as good as the liquid's warmth that's spreading through my intestines simultaneously, distracting me, if just for a moment, from the urge of the bites. Then I get driving again.

I last about 20 minutes into the first showing before I start slurring my words from the rum and cannot feasibly excuse myself to go to the bathroom for a third

Gemälde infernalisches Ausmaßes. Also gibst du dem überwältigenden Juckreiz nach, der nun dein komplettes Sein bestimmt, aber es gibt einen Haken, einen brutalen Sisyphus-mäßigen Haken, der dich zur Verzweiflung treibt: du kannst und wirst keine Befriedigung finden, nicht mal für eine Sekunde, weil du einfach nicht genug Finger hast und deine Fingernägel außerdem alle bis auf das Nagelbett abgekaut sind, weil du eine stressige Phase hattest, nicht nur kürzlich, sondern schon immer, solange du denken kannst.

Am ersten Tag der Seuche versuche ich zur Arbeit zu gehen. Ich habe für den ganzen Tag Hausbesichtigungen quer über die ganze Insel eingeplant und es ist zu spät zum Absagen oder Umplanen, vor allem weil die Leute auf dieser gottverdammten Insel nie in ihre Mails gucken, außer sie sitzen gerade in ihrem dekorativen Home Office und glotzen durchs Fenster die Vögel an, die den Swimming Pool vollscheißen. Also stehe ich auf, dusche, versuche ohne Erfolg das Jucken von meinem Körper zu waschen, aber immerhin hat das kalte Wasser auf meiner Haut einen meditativen Effekt, denn die kalte Dusche ist die erste und wichtigste Zutat des Breakfast Of Champions, und ich glaube langsam daran, dass ich das hinkriege, auf die Plätze, fertig, los, Sprint oder Stolpern, egal, Hauptsache vorwärts. Vorsichtshalber packe ich eine Flasche Rum ein – die zweite und manchmal wichtigste Zutat des Breakfast Of Champions – ins Handschuhfach unseres Durchfallgrünen Citroën, von dem Typen geleast, von dem wir auch unser Haus gemietet haben, so ein fetter Rentner-Bastard mit einem Gesicht, das so ledrig ist wie die abgeworfene Haut einer Schlange, hier und da rissig von der salzigen Luft, die ihn seit Jahren erbarmungslos anstrahlt. Auf dem Weg zum ersten Grundstück halte ich dreimal an, nur um meinen Oberkörper und meine Beine ordentlich zu kratzen, und ich nehme jedesmal einen großen Schluck Rum. Ein bisschen läuft mir aus

time to pull my pants down, claw my bitten-down fingernails into my legs and take a massive gulp from the flask before flushing the toilet for good measure and stumbling back out. I ask to reschedule, evil side-eye, unprofessionalism personified, yes, *kick a man while he's down*, get back into the car, drink the rest of the flask and drift home through the highways and dirt roads leading all the way to our hill, feeling my alcohol blood content rise inversely proportional to the functionality of my motor skills.

At home, I call for Erika, conqueror of my fatherly duties, simulacrum of my married self, substitute for my persona. François Bertrand 2.0, debugged and automated.

“François?”

“Erika, Erika. Look at this,” I say and unbutton my shirt, revealing the Jackson Pollock.

“Aïe! Those are definitely sand flea bites, mon dieu, and how many of them. Beastly. I’m so sorry, mon petit chou.”

“Erika, what am I to do? It’s driving me mad, *mad!*”

I cry a little out of desperation. Erika pats me on the cheek, her hands soft like a pillow despite all the heavy cleaning she’s done around the place.

“Go upstairs and lay down. You need rest and rum. And don’t scratch,” she says, slapping me on my wrist as I attempt to get another satisfying scrape at my chest. I whimper. Then I walk down the hallway, catch a glimpse of the living room — the usual scene, wife bundled up in her thermal blanket on the couch, staring holes into the ceiling, while my sons are laying on the play quilt on the floor, choking on their drool — before crawling up the stairs. I jump under the covers and begin to scratch myself again, punctuating my fingernail stumps into my flesh.

Erika comes through the door five minutes later and catches me scratching, in flagranti. She shakes her head and puts a bottle of rum on the bedside table, no

dem Mund, mein Kinn runter und auf meine Brust, und als es über ein, zwei Bisse läuft, fühlt sich das gut an, fast so gut wie die wärmende Flüssigkeit, die sich zeitgleich in meinen Innereien ausbreitet, die mich, wenn auch nur für einen Moment, von den juckenden Bissen ablenkt. Dann fahre ich weiter.

Ich halte die erste Besichtigung ungefähr 20 Minuten durch, bevor ich anfangen, von dem Rum zu lallen, und ich kann mich nicht zum dritten Mal entschuldigen, um mir auf dem Klo die Hose runterzuziehen und meine abgekauten Fingernägel in meine Beine zu krallen und einen Riesenschluck aus der Flasche zu trinken, bevor ich vorsichtshalber die Klospülung drücke und wieder rausstolper. Ich bitte um eine Terminverschiebung, bekomme einen bösen Blick aus dem Augenwinkel, die personifizierte Unprofessionalität, ja, gib mir den Rest, zurück zum Auto, ich trinke den Rest der Flasche aus und lasse mich über die Highways und Schotterpisten treiben bis zu dem Weg, der unseren Hügel hinaufführt, ich spüre den Alkoholspiegel in meinem Blut steigen, umgekehrt proportional zur Funktionalität meiner motorischen Fähigkeiten.

Zuhause rufe ich Erika, Bezwingerin meiner väterlichen Pflichten, Scheinbild meines verheirateten Selbst, Ersatz meiner Person. François Bertrand 2.0, debugged und automatisiert.

„François?“

„Erika, Erika. Guck dir das an“, sage ich und knöpfe mein Hemd auf, um den Jackson Pollock zu enthüllen.

„Aïe! Das sind auf jeden Fall Sandfloh-Bisse, mon dieu, und so viele. Garstig. Das tut mir echt leid, mon petit chou.“

„Erika, was soll ich jetzt machen? Das macht mich noch wahnsinnig, wahnsinnig!“

Vor Verzweiflung weine ich ein bisschen. Erika tätschelt mir die Wange, ihre Hände sind weich wie Kissen, und das trotz des ganzen Geputzes, das sie hinter sich hat.

glass, slaps my wrist again, and then hands me two packs of frozen peas.

“Put this on your skin, to cool off the bites, mon petit chou. Don’t drink all of the rum at once. Just enough so you can go to sleep. And don’t scratch,” she says. I cry.

“Erika, Erika. How long until it will go away?”

“It could be a week, it could be a month. It all depends on how much you scratch.”

I whimper.

“A month! I can’t be out of work for a month. Shouldn’t I be going to the doctor?”

“The doctor will tell you nothing else. Don’t scratch, drink the rum. I will go and pick up some ointment for you, too; that should move things along faster. Call for me when the peas get too warm. We have more in the freezer, and some carrots and corn bags too, and I can always get more.”

She places her palm on my cheek and runs her thumb over the skin between my left eye and nose, stroking it with tender movements.

“At least they didn’t come for your face! Get some rest now, I’ll take care of everything downstairs.”

“Erika, Erika. What would I do without you?”

She sighs, raising her thick, gray eyebrows, and looks at me, and then, for the fraction of a second, I am staring right back into my own eyes, the brown ring around the pupil pulsing gently against the olive green backdrop of the iris, framed by another wooden circle that’s separating all the colors from their off-white canvas. I shake my head and press my lids together tightly, trying to focus on my breathing, but my throat feels as if it’s been put in a chokehold. I want to open my eyes and look back at Erika, but I decide that it’s too soon to seek out confirmation on whether I am now just actually and fully losing it, and so I squeeze my eyelids together even tighter, closing the shutters on the vision of madness in front of me.

“François, is everything alright?”

„Geh nach oben und leg dich hin. Du brauchst Ruhe und Rum. Und nicht kratzen“, sagt sie und schlägt meine Hand weg, als ich wieder versuche, befriedigend an meinem Oberkörper herumzukratzen. Ich winsel. Dann gehe ich den Flur entlang, werfe einen Blick ins Wohnzimmer – die übliche Szene, meine Frau, auf der Couch eingerollt in ihre Thermo-Decke, starrt Löcher in die Wand, während meine Söhne auf der Spielmatte auf dem Boden liegen und an ihrem Sabber ersticken – dann krieche ich die Treppe hoch. Ich springe unter die Bettdecke und fange wieder an, mich zu kratzen, pieke mir meine Stumpen von Fingernägeln ins Fleisch.

Erika kommt fünf Minuten später zur Tür rein und erwischt mich beim Kratzen, in flagranti. Sie schüttelt den Kopf und stellt mir eine Flasche Rum auf den Nachttisch, ohne Glas, haut mir wieder auf die Finger und reicht mir zwei Beutel gefrorener Erbsen.

„Leg dir das auf die Haut, um die Bisse auszukühlen, mon petit chou. Und trink nicht den ganzen Rum auf einmal. Nur gerade genug, dass du schlafen kannst. Und nicht kratzen“, sagt sie. Ich heule.

„Erika, Erika. Wie lange, bis die wieder weg sind?“

„Könnte eine Woche sein, könnte ein Monat sein. Das kommt ganz darauf an, wie viel du kratzt.“

Ich winsel.

„Ein Monat! Ich kann auf der Arbeit nicht einen Monat ausfallen. Soll ich nicht zum Arzt gehen?“

„Der Arzt wird dir auch nichts anderes erzählen. Nicht kratzen, trink den Rum. Ich gehe jetzt auch noch eine Salbe für dich besorgen; das dürfte die Sache beschleunigen. Ruf mich, wenn die Erbsen zu warm werden. Wir haben noch mehr im Tiefkühler, und auch ein paar Beutel Möhren und Mais, und ich kann jederzeit mehr holen.“

Sie legt mir die Hand auf die Wange und streicht mit dem Daumen über die Stelle zwischen meinem linken Auge und meiner Nase, streichelt mich zärtlich.

I open my eyes and stop shaking. Erika's eyes are tinted reddish-brown, like the wood from the mahogany trees animating the island. I guess I'm not going mad. I just have the sand fleas.

"Yes, yes, I am. What would I do without you, Erika? What would I do?"

I hired Erika because the bottom of your feet are packed with over 20,000 sensory receptors, and when just 7.3 percent of those sensory receptors come into contact at about 18 miles per hour with acrylonitrile butadiene styrene because you're ramming your foot into the floor in an attempt to turn on your heel in time to make it across the kitchen to catch a cup of coffee currently tipping over the counter edge, it hurts. It hurts like a fucking bitch. It hurts so much that you curse every single carbon and hydrogen molecule making up that *fucking* lego stone, you curse your mother for the day you were born, and you curse every single moment of your life that has led up to this one, every decision you've made, because it has set off a chain reaction of you meeting Elise, you marrying her, her becoming pregnant with Baptiste, then Vincent, you being so sleep-deprived that you're big-time messing up at work, you getting consequently quasi exiled to this *godforsaken* island, and before you even had the *time to blink* your entire house is filled with tropical lizzards, volcanish ash and screaming children while your wife disappearing into the couch, leaving you with no one and nothing to pick up the fucking lego stones sprinkled all over your kitchen floor like a herd full of crabs peaking out of their sand tunnels on the shore.

"We need to hire someone," I screamed across the house in the immediate aftermath of the foot-lego encounter, direction living room, direction couch where my wife was clutching a wool blanket like it was the last piece of plywood in the ocean, the only thing saving her from drowning in a sea of her never-ending tears, tears over the top button of her favorite jeans not closing anymore, tears over her breasts not producing enough milk

„Wenigstens haben sie dein Gesicht nicht erwischt! Jetzt ruh dich aus, ich kümmer mich unten um alles.“

„Erika, Erika. Was würde ich bloß ohne dich tun?“

Sie seufzt mit hochgezogenen grauen Augenbrauen und schaut mich an, und dann, für den Bruchteil einer Sekunde, starre ich mir selbst in die Augen, der braune Ring um die Pupille herum pulsiert sacht, dahinter die Olivgrüne Kulisse der Iris, umrahmt von einem weiteren hölzernen Kreis, der die ganzen Farben von ihrer schmutzig weißen Leinwand abhebt. Ich schüttle den Kopf und kneife die Augen fest zusammen, versuche mich auf meine Atmung zu konzentrieren, aber meine Luftröhre fühlt sich an, als würde sie jemand mit einem Würgegriff zusammendrücken. Ich will die Augen öffnen und Erikas Blick erwidern, entscheide aber, dass ich noch nicht bereit bin für den Beweis, dass ich jetzt möglicherweise tatsächlich und vollständig durchdrehe, also drücke ich meine Augenlider noch fester zusammen, zieh die Gardinen vor dieser irren Vision meiner selbst zu.

„Alles okay, François?“

Ich öffne die Augen und höre mit dem Gezitter auf. Erikas Augen haben Rot-Braun-Töne, wie das Holz der Mahagoni-Bäumen, die die Insel beleben. Schätze, ich werde doch nicht wahnsinnig. Ich hab bloß Sandflöhe.

„Jaja, alles gut. Was würde ich bloß ohne dich tun, Erika? Was nur?“

Ich habe Erika angeheuert, weil Fußsohlen mit über 20.000 Nervenenden vollgestopft sind, und wenn auch nur 7.3 Prozent dieser Nervenenden bei etwa 29 km/h mit Acrylnitril-Butadien-Styrol-Copolymeren in Berührung kommen, weil du deinen Fuß bei dem Versuch in den Boden rammst, auf dem Absatz kehrtzumachen, um rechtzeitig durch die Küche zu hechten und eine Kaffeetasse zu fangen, die gerade auf der Kante der Küchentheke balanciert, dann tut das weh. Verdammte Scheiße, tut das weh. Es tut so weh, dass du jedes

for Vincent, tears for her breasts producing too much milk and staining her last clean shirt with two identical wet circles about three times the size of her actual nipples.

“I’ve had it with this mess,” I screamed, again, rubbing the balm of my hand against the bottom of my foot, hoping, if not to stop the pain, to at least spread it out across the 18,540 sensory receptors unharmed by the lego, the coffee mug long shattered on the kitchen floor, its shards taking a bath in a silky mixture of caffeine and expired milk while Vincent was cheering on the destruction from his highchair, *laughing*.

“I’ve fucking had it,” I said to myself, quieter now, because no one was listening anyway, and why waste any breath on it when I already had no energy left for anything, or anyone anymore. This was what my life had become: a series of inconveniences that I would give anything, *anything*, to have taken off my hands.

I also had hired Erika because she was the first and only person to respond to the ad I’d placed in the local island newspaper. She called the day that it ran and came the next morning, an old French woman who had been, similarly to our landlord, left in the sun for too long until her skin looked like aged leather and desert drought at once. She wore shorts and a T-shirt that read, in English glitter letters that she likely couldn’t understand, “*Namastay in Bed*,” and I remember standing there, door open, Vincent’s poopy diaper in my hands, at the crack of dawn, when all you could hear across the island were the sounds of the waves rolling in with their raspy voice and the chirping of birds chipping away at the hour, and thinking, *this is it*.

einzelne Kohlenstoff-Wasserstoff-Molekül verfluchst, das in diesem scheiß Legosteine steckt, du verfluchst deine Mutter, weil sie dich auf die Welt gebracht hat, und du verfluchst jeden einzelnen Moment deines Lebens, der zu dem hier geführt hat, jede deiner Entscheidungen, weil sie eine Kettenreaktion in Gang gebracht haben, du hast Elise kennengelernt, sie geheiratet, sie ist mit Baptiste schwanger geworden, dann mit Vincent, du warst so übernützlich, dass du auf der Arbeit total verkackst hast, dadurch wurdest du praktisch ins Exil geschickt auf diese gottverdammte Insel, und ehe du dich versiehst, ist dein ganzes Haus voller tropischer Eidechsen, Vulkanasche und schreienden Kindern, während deine Frau in der Couch versinkt und dich ganz alleine zurücklässt, und nichts und niemand hebt die scheiß Legosteine auf, die überall auf dem Küchenboden verstreut liegen wie eine Herde Krabben, die an der Küste die Köpfe aus ihren Sandtunneln strecken.

„Wir müssen jemanden einstellen“, schrie ich quer durch Haus, gleich nach der Begegnung von Lego und Fuß, in Richtung Wohnzimmer, Richtung Couch, wo meine Frau sich an eine Wolldecke klammerte, als wäre die das letzte Stück Pressspan im Ozean, das einzige, was sie vor dem Ertrinken schützen kann im Meer ihrer niemals versiegenden Tränen, Tränen wegen dem obersten Knopf ihrer Lieblingsjeans, der nicht mehr zugeht, Tränen wegen ihren Brüsten, die nicht genug Milch für Vincent produzieren, Tränen wegen ihren Brüsten, die zu viel Milch produzieren und einen Fleck auf ihr letztes sauberes Hemd machen, zwei identische nasse Kreise, etwa dreimal so groß wie ihre eigentlichen Nippel.

„Ich hab die Schnauze voll von dem Chaos“, schrie ich weiter und rieb mir mit dem Handballen die Fußunterseite, in der Hoffnung, wenn der Schmerz schon nicht aufhören würde, könnte ich ihn wenigstens auf die 18.540 Nervenenden aufteilen, die von dem Legosteine nicht verletzt worden waren, die Kaffeetasse lag längst zerbrochen auf dem Küchenboden, ihre Scherben

badeten in der seidigen Mischung aus Koffein und abgelaufener Milch, während Vincent die Zerstörung von seinem Hochstuhl aus abfeierte, und zwar lachend.

„Scheiße, ich hab die Schnauze voll“, sagte ich zu mir selbst, leiser jetzt, weil mir sowieso niemand zuhörte, und warum sollte ich mir die Mühe machen, wenn ich eh schon keine Energie für irgendwas übrig habe, oder für irgendjemanden. Das war aus meinem Leben geworden: eine Reihe von Unannehmlichkeiten, und ich würde alles dafür geben, wirklich alles, die an jemanden abgeben zu können.

Außerdem hatte ich Erika eingestellt, weil sie die erste und einzige Person war, die auf die Anzeige reagierte, die ich in der lokalen Inselzeitung aufgegeben hatte. Sie rief mich am gleichen Tag an, an dem die Anzeige erschien, und kam am nächsten Morgen, eine alte Französin, die wie unser Vermieter zu lange in der Sonne liegen gelassen worden war, bis ihre Haut wie altes Leder und Wüstendürre zugleich aussah. Sie hatte Shorts und ein T-Shirt an, auf dem etwas in glitzernden Buchstaben auf Englisch stand, was sie wahrscheinlich gar nicht verstehen konnte, „Namastay in Bed“, und ich kann mich erinnern, wie ich da stand, die Tür offen, Vincents vollgekackte Windel in der Hand, bei Tagesanbruch, und alles, was man auf der Insel hören konnte waren die Wellen, die mit ihren Reibeisenstimmen aufs Land rollten, und das Zwitschern der Vögel, die an der Zeit knabberten, und ich dachte, das ist es.

Translator's Note

Reading “Nightmare Chronicles” is an auditory experience. When the text’s author, Amy Wittenberg makes her narrator string hundreds of supersized instruments every night, there’s a nightmarish dissonance ringing through the image. We read of words echoing off the walls, of frantic stomping sounds and hectic beats conducting our absorption of this language. Wittenberg’s words are charged with audible rhythm. It’s what makes reading this text such a gripping undertaking – but it’s also what makes translating it an auditory challenge.

German, the language Wittenberg originally composed this text in, has a way with rhythm that’s quite distinct from its English counterpart. It is that the sounds of the German language are harsher, more expressive, or is it just Wittenberg’s word choices that makes it seem so? Let’s take, for instance, *Tischkreissäge*, “circular table saw” in English. *Tischkreissäge*, through its “sch” and back-to-back “s,” carries several hissing sounds that resemble the fade of a cymbal or the snare of a drum. “Circular table saw,” on the other hand, yields much less musicality, one may argue none at all. Similar problems arise with *gelackt*, which in English turns into “polished” and loses its sharp “ckt”; or *hämmern*, which, in the context of the line, most logically translates not to its auditory cousin “hammering” but rather to “pounding,” a verb no longer echoing the drumming sound intrinsic to its German counterpart.

Preserving the musicality and rhythm of Wittenberg’s text has been my primary objective in this translation. There are, therefore, moments when I deviated from the original, allowed myself a degree of literary freedom,

to try to replicate – or, if that wasn't possible, at least create a new – audible sensation for the reader. For instance, Fliesen im Flur – literally “tiles in the hallway” – I substituted for “limestone-tiled landing,” to preserve the alliteration. German also loves multisyllabic words, much more so than English, and I often found it necessary to switch to a slightly looser translation to preserve the word length intrinsic to the rhythm of the text.

I may not always have succeeded in fully capturing the sizzle and staccato and sharpness of Wittenberg's original text. Perhaps this means something loud, dissonant and precious got lost in translation. Perhaps it also means that something more tonally fluid, connected and harmonious now stands its place: a translation that is a different interpretation, the same and something new altogether.

AMY WITTENBERG

ALBTRAUMTAGEBUCH

*ach das haus kenn ich, das heißt, der mann der sich
da hinter der tür versteckt, muss also derselbe sein wie
mein vater, muss also der mann sein, der mir kleine
apfelpfannkuchen gebacken hat bei ohrenbetäubender
jazzmusik –*

one two three four five six seven eight

one two three four five six seven

one two three four

ta-ta-ta-ta

dass ich um jemanden getrauert habe, der noch steht,
ergraut, gebeugt, ein atemloser greis,

dass ich nachts hunderte von saiten einspanne in
schrankgroße instrumente, bleierne müdigkeit in den
händen,

dass ich im ersten jahr umwirbelt werde von prüfenden
blicken und schwankenden sprints in die werkstatt im
keller, runter-polter rauf-polter türquietschen kling-kling
über die fliesen im flur,

dass das poltern im dritten jahr immer zaghafter wird,
bis ich mir den lärm fast zurückwünsche,

zwischen kisten und an die wand gelehnten holzbalken

translated from the german by
AZIZA KASUMOV

NIGHTMARE CHRONICLES

ah, I recognize this house, which means that the man hiding behind the door over there must be the same as my father, and must therefore be the man who used to make me little apple pancakes to the sound of ear-splitting jazz improvisations –

One two three four five six seven eight

One two three four five six seven

One two three four

Ta-ta-ta-ta

that I've been in mourning for someone who's still standing here, graying, hunched over, a breathless old man,

that I am spending night after night stringing hundreds of supersized instruments, leaden sleeplessness in my hands,

that my first year is a constant whirl of questioning looks and staggering sprints down to the workshop in the basement, downstairs-stomp-stomp upstairs-stomp-stomp creak-eeek door clack-clack across the limestone-tiled landing,

that, in my third year, the stomping becomes ever more timid, until I almost yearn for the noise to come back,

I toss my backpack full of clothes among the boxes and wooden planks leaning against the wall, I must have come for a visit, the floor is snowed in with sawdust,

that it's always cocktail hour when I stop by in the mid-

*werfe ich meinen reiserucksack, ich muss wohl zu besuch
gekommen sein, der boden ist mit spänen eingeschnit,*

dass es immer cocktails gibt mitten am tag, wenn ich
komme,

dass ich bewegungslos in höchster panik neben der
tischkreissäge stehe, bereit, nach jemandem zu greifen,
als könnte ich den fall in die säge stoppen, und die arme
sinken lasse nach einer stunde oder fünf,

two three four

one two three four five six seven eight

five six seven eight

ta-ta-ta-ta

dass jemand, der mir worte und noten lesen
beigebracht hat, vergisst, wie ich bin, und endlose, leere
konversationskreise zieht: was studierst du – wie heißt
dein freund – in welchem semester bist du – und dass
ich lerne, diese kreise stoisch mitzugehen, wutlos zu
antworten: philosophie – wir sind nicht mehr zusammen
– erstes, zweites, drittes, viertes semester,

dass jemandes hände bedeckt sind von kleinen wunden,
die nicht mehr heilen können,

*ich höre den mann hinter mir atmen, ein rasselndes
geräusch, drehe mich um und checke nochmal: doch, das ist
immernoch der gleiche mann, im grunde also –*

dass meine mutter eine panikattacke bekommt bei dem
stück, bei dem die musiker sekundenschlaf vortäuschen,
so als gag

dle of the day,

that I stand motionless in an alert panic next to the circular table saw, ready to grab hold of someone, as if I could stop a fall into the saw, eventually I drop my arms, after one hour or five,

two three four
one two three four five six seven eight
five six seven eight
ta-ta-ta-ta

that someone who taught me how to read words and music forgets how I am and endlessly converses in empty circles: what are you studying – what's your boyfriend's name – what semester are you in – and that I learn to stoically join the circles, to answer, dully: philosophy – we broke up – first, second, third, fourth semester,

that someone's hands are covered in little wounds which refuse to heal,

I hear the man behind me breathing, a rattling sound, I turn around and check once more: indeed, it is still the same man, so therefore –

that my mother had a panic attack during the part where the musicians feign a few seconds of microsleap as a gag,

that, twenty-four-seven, steve reich pounds from my headphones, nearly perfectly drowning out the shrill sawing noise from the basement, drumming, that I've already seen someone in concert, polished shoes, the gaze still steady,

that I stop listening to music, that I stop going to concerts,

that someone locks himself in his workshop and sleeps

dass twentyfour-seven steve reich in meinen kopfhörern
hämmert, der das schrille sägen aus dem keller beinahe
lückenlos übertönt, drumming, dass ich jemanden schon
habe spielen sehen, die schuhe gelackt, der blick noch
gerade,

dass ich aufhöre, musik zu hören, dass ich aufhöre,
konzerte zu besuchen,

dass sich jemand in der werkstatt einschließt und
zwanzig stunden zwischen bambusrohr und importierten
patronenhülsen schläft, sägemehl im haar, wir laufen erst
auf zehenspitzen, sprechen später sehr laut, aus angst,
jemand könnte nicht mehr herauskommen,

dass ein mensch sich von seiner hülle trennen kann,
wie ein umgekehrter geist ein haus heimsucht, eine
bewegliche abwesenheit,

one two three four

one two three four five six seven eight

two three four

ta-ta-ta

*die küche ist schmutzig, hier stehen neue möbel, gestapelt
und sortiert nach klangqualität, ich klopfе auf klingende
holzkörper, auf glasflaschen, so also wohnt der mann,
vielleicht hat er immer so wohnen wollen –*

dass meine mutter aufhört zu weinen und beginnt,
stundenlang am küchentisch zu sitzen, die arme
herabhängend, die augen starr geradeaus gerichtet,

amid bamboo pipes and imported cartridge cases for
twenty hours, hair full of sawdust, at first we're tiptoe-
ing around, later we talk very loudly, out of fear that
someone may never come back out,

that a person would separate from his shell like a return-
ing ghost haunting a house, an absence in motion,

one two three four
one two three four five six seven eight two three four
ta-ta-ta

*the kitchen is filthy, full of new furniture, stacked and sorted
by sound quality, I knock on resonant woodwork, on glass
bottles, so this is how the man lives, perhaps he's always
wanted to live like this –*

that my mother stops crying and starts sitting at the
kitchen table for hours, arms dangling, eyes staring
straight ahead,

that I wish someone would finally break down, so that a
paramedic can inject a dose of sleep,

that, every morning, I have to either turn away or put on
makeup when I'm looking bleary-eyed in the mirror,

That, every day, I'm awaiting news of someone's death,

one two three four five
one two three four five
one two three four five
ta-ta-ta-ta-ta

*I fight my way through the clutter in the kitchen all the way
to the patio door, hear how the man lights himself a cigarette
at the gas stove, a deeply familiar sound, I too have mean-
while taken up smoking, I clumsily make small talk with
the man reflected in the window, who stands in a strangely*

dass ich mir wünsche, jemand würde endlich
zusammenbrechen, damit ein sanitärer schlaf erzwingen
kann,

dass ich mich abwenden muss oder schminken, wenn ich
übernächtigt in den spiegel schaue,

dass ich auf die todesnachricht warte jeden tag,

one two three four five

one two three four five

one two three four five

ta-ta-ta-ta-ta

*ich kämpfe mich durch den krempel in der küche vor bis zur
terassentür, höre, wie der mann eine zigarette am gasherd
entzündet, das ist ein bekanntes geräusch, auch ich rauche
inzwischen, ich smalltalke unbeholfen mit dem mann, der
sich im fenster spiegelt, in einer seltsam schiefen position
dasteht und mir auf den hinterkopf starrt –*

dass ich schließlich die frage stelle, und jemand ohne
zu zögern erklärt, das mit den kindern sei ein versehen
gewesen, und ich sehe, wie das gesicht meines kleinen
bruders zerfällt,

dass ich die kopfhörer in regelmäßigen abständen
abnehme, um auf das kreischen der säge zu horchen, das
mir bestätigt, dass jemand noch alle gliedmaßen hat,

dass ich lerne, so einzuschlafen, und nach dem erwachen
zuallererst auf lebenszeichen zu lauschen,

slanted position, staring at the back of my head –

that I eventually pose the question and someone explains, without hesitating, that the whole having-children thing was a mistake, and I see my little brother's face quietly fall apart,

that I periodically take off my headphones, waiting for the screech of the saw to confirm that someone still has all his limbs,

that I learn to fall asleep like this, and to listen for a sign of life the moment I wake up,

that I vomit whenever my friends tell me they've been up all night working, that I want to confiscate their work and send them all to bed,

the man approaches with a shuffling gait, his scent is unfamiliar to me, I realize that I don't recognize this man, that he cannot be my father, who's dead, and yet –

that someone, TK worried about his treasures, hides the workshop keys from us before sneaking off to the bar on his fortieth hour without sleep,

that someone tells my little brother he's utterly useless when, sometime between the two-hundredth and three-hundredth string, three end up snapping,

that, every day, someone insists everything's alright, a mask-like grin engraved on his yellow, emaciated face,

I make small talk about the food, the plants, the chick corea concert, if I turn around, the man who's so close to me now we're almost touching will swallow me up –

that someone forgets about my presence and flinches every other minute as I'm prep-cutting wood, sanding

dass ich mich übergebe, wenn freunde mir erzählen, dass sie die nacht durcharbeiten, dass ich ihnen die arbeit wegnehmen will, sie ins bett schicken will,

der mann kommt näher, setzt schlurfend schritt vor schritt, sein geruch ist mir fremd, mir wird klar, dass ich den mann nicht kenne, dass der mann nicht mein vater sein kann, der tot ist, und doch –

dass jemand den werkstattsschlüssel vor uns versteckt, ängstlich besorgt um seine schätze, um nach vierzig wachen stunden in die kneipe zu schleichen,

dass jemand meinem kleinen bruder gesagt hat, er könne eigentlich gar nichts, nachdem diesem irgendwo zwischen der zweihundertsten und der dreihundertsten saite drei reißen,

dass jemand täglich wiederholt, es sei alles in ordnung, ein maskenhaftes grinsen im gelben, verhungerten gesicht,

ich smalltalke über das essen, über die pflanzen, über das chick corea konzert, wenn ich mich umdrehe, wird der mann, der jetzt so nah ist, dass er mich fast berührt, mich verschlingen –

dass jemand meine anwesenheit vergisst und sich im minutentakt erschreckt, während ich holz vorsäge, kanten schleife, schrauben sortiere, in bin versteckt zwischen zwei rätselhaften bambusklangkörpern,

dass manche worte ihre bedeutung verlieren: fleiß, begabung, stolz, tochter, dass ihre buchstaben labyrinthe ergeben, in denen es hallt, dass ich die schule schwänze,

edges, sorting screws, hidden from sight between two
mysterious, reverberating sound bodies carved from
bamboo,

that certain words lose their weight: diligence, talent,
pride, daughter, that their letters form labyrinths with
echoing walls, that I skip school to follow someone
around, phone in hand, 911 pre-dialed, unseen,

that I flinch whenever people tell me that I resemble
someone, my face aching with tension,

that I don't hear from someone for a year after I move
out, much to my relief, I haven't reached out either,

one two three four two three
two three
two three
ta-ta

that we're all still leaving the house, though only after
setting up a schedule to monitor whether someone is still
alive,

that certain items disappear from the fridge after days
of fasting: three packs of cheese, ten apples, a pound of
yogurt,

*the man hanging from the ceiling over there looks like my fa-
ther, though this one has six fingers on each hand which are
covered in blood, the head hangs at an acute angle, the eyes
have been plucked out, their sockets scarred-up caves –*

um jemandem mit dem handy in der hand zu folgen, den
notruf bereit, unsichtbar,

dass ich ein neues gesicht mache, wenn menschen mir
sagen, dass ich jemandem ähnele, ein gesicht, das vor
anspannung schmerzt,

dass ich ein jahr lang nichts höre nach meinem auszug,
was mich erleichtert, ich frage auch nicht,

one two three four

two three

two three

two three

ta-ta

dass wir zwar alle das haus verlassen, vorher aber einen
schichtbetrieb vereinbaren, um überwachen zu können,
ob jemand noch lebt,

dass nach tagen des hungerns einzelne lebensmittel
über nacht aus dem kühlschrank verschwinden: drei
packungen käse, zehn äpfel, ein kilo quark,

*der mann, der da an der decke hängt, erinnert an meinen
vater, hat aber sechs finger pro hand, blutüberströmt, der
kopf hängt in einem spitzen winkel, die augen sind entfernt,
sind vernarbte höhlen –*

dass jemand ein alter mann werden kann in drei jahren,
sodass ich nun die letzte bin mit diesem forschen,
schnellen gang, den ich abwechselnd festhalten und
ablegen will,

that someone can turn into an old man in three years,
leaving me the last to walk with a certain assertive, brisk
step that at times I want to cling to and at others abandon,

that someone tells me he's not going to live much longer,
a fiction-turned-fact since someone in his mid-fifties now
inhabits the body of a seventy-year-old,

that someone will die all over again and be mourned
twice, that I still fear finding a frozen corpse in my arms
whenever someone leans in for a hug,

that I am the only one who hears the saw at night in my
bedroom above the workshop, in the mornings my mother
asks me for how long,

that the sleeping sounds of my childhood are the melodic
finger exercises of my father playing the vibraphone,

*I've never seen this man we're burying before, awkwardly I
throw my little bouquet on the naked cadaver –*

that someone might not come to again, the EMTs arrive
and my mother bangs on the door for twenty minutes, I
make coffee for the abashedly prying paramedics, it's un-
palatable, they sip it courteously, my mother knocks and
screams until someone bolts out, madness in his eyes,

that my grandmother, with her starched blouse and fixed
stare, tells me she wouldn't be surprised if her son killed
himself as she's scraping the dirt out from underneath

dass jemand zu mir sagt, dass er nicht mehr lange leben wird, was zum fakt gemacht worden ist, weil jemand mit mitte fünfzig nun den körper eines siebzigjährigen hat,

dass jemand erneut sterben wird, zweimal betrauert werden wird, dass ich noch immer, wenn jemand mich umarmt, angst habe, leichenkälte zu spüren,

dass ich in meinem zimmer über der werkstatt die einzige bin, die die kreissäge nachts hört, und meine mutter mich morgens fragt, wie lang,

dass die schlafklänge meiner kindheit die melodiosen fingerübungen meines vaters auf dem vibraphon sind,

den mann, den wir begraben, habe ich noch nie zuvor gesehen, unbeholfen werfe ich mein blümchen auf den nackten kadaver –

dass jemand nicht mehr zu wecken ist, als die transporter kommen, und meine mutter zwanzig minuten lang an die tür hämmert, ich gehe kaffee kochen für die betreten schauenden träger, der ungenießbar ist, sie trinken ihn höflich, meine mutter klopft und schreit, bis jemand herausstürzt mit irrem blick,

dass meine großmutter mit gestärkter bluse und unbewegtem blick zu mir sagt, es würde sie nicht wundern, wenn ihr sohn sich umbringt, und sie sich dabei den dreck unter den fingernägeln raus- und wieder reinpult, um nicht die fassung zu verlieren,

der mann, der an meinen vater erinnert, bewegt sich noch,

her fingernails, only to scrape it back in, to keep from
losing her mind,

*the man who looks like my father is still moving, his legs
twitching –*

that a suicide can be hectic and slow all at once, spread
over three frantic years, a soul slipping out like a leak
from a valve,

two three four
one two three four five six
one two three four five six seven eight
ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta

zuckt mit den beinen –

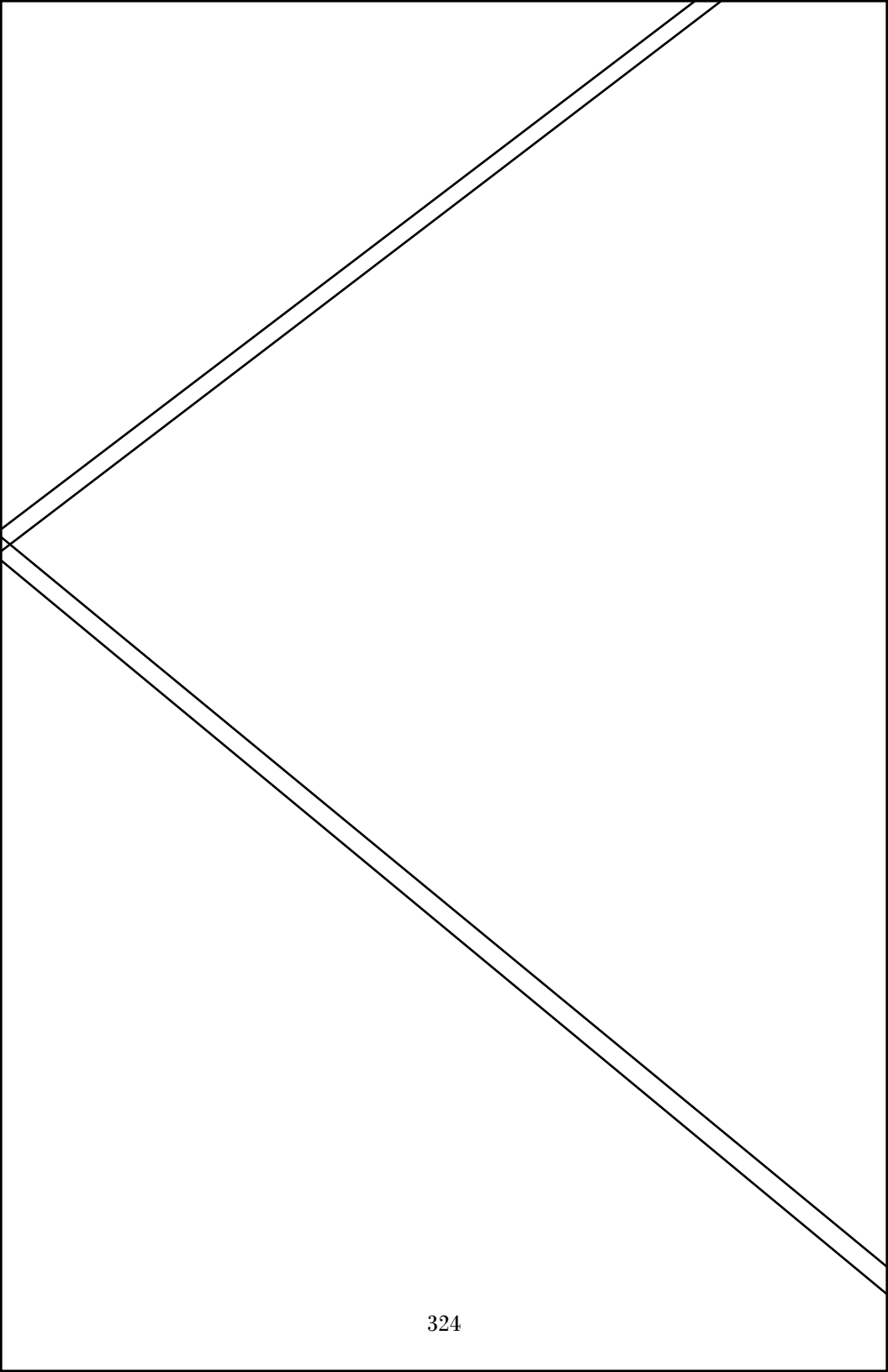
dass ein selbstmord hektisch und langsam zugleich sein
kann, verteilt auf drei rasende jahre, eine entweichung
der seele wie durch ein leckes ventil,

two three four

one two three four five six

one two three four five six seven eight

ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta



The page features an abstract geometric design consisting of several black lines of varying lengths and orientations. These lines intersect to form various triangular and quadrilateral shapes across the white background. The lines are thin and black, creating a minimalist, architectural feel.

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

Translator's Note

Imagine entrar de cabeça na bandeira LGBTQIA+ e em meio as cores observar os corpos que se decompõe anonimamente sobre nossos olhos. Ou então mergulhar sem corpo em conversas virtuais, perdendo o contorno das falas que oprimem. Ou mais, vivenciar no corpo a linguagem binária dos computadores que ditam regras por meio de oleodutos que cortam comunidades originárias.

Como todos esses estados acontecem no texto de Joel? Em uma primeira leitura a forma nos salta, parece pedir calma para compreensão mais profunda... conforme a leitura avança passamos a confiar que a experiência é mais importante que a própria racionalização do texto. Aliás: um texto que é performance, ou seria uma performance que é um texto? Não importa muito a ordem, e sim o que sentimos enquanto lemos, e há reverberação em nós através dessa vivência. É isso que motiva nossa leitura contínua, quase asfixiada – como as personagens travestis que acompanhamos – dos textos de Joel.

Enquanto lia e traduzia só conseguia imaginar que isso deveria ser feito em voz alta, tanto em inglês quanto em português. O texto de Joel foi feito para ser declamado e projetado, conversando com o público através das sensações que ele provoca. Tanto de ojeriza pela sociedade em que estamos, quanto pela forma que as palavras são conduzidas, nos levando a um vórtice físico das inconsequências, daquilo que acontece e tentamos segurar com as mãos, mas se torna impossível pelo tamanho.

Há saídas no texto, mesmo que elas nos mostrem o

concreto pelo absurdo, e elas são imperativas. A frase final nos resume bem o que estou querendo trazer:

devolva tudo;

Não devolva tudo. Mas devolva tudo;

O que cabe em tudo? É a dúvida do ponto e vírgula e do que cabe na palavra tudo que nos abriga, nos diz, a saída é sempre possível, já que com esse ponto e vírgula paramos para observar o vazio do que vêm depois, vírgula, pois podemos observar o vazio, e não apenas o ponto antes da queda

JOEL SEDANO

POST-PRISMATIC

RED

An effulgent metallic intruder permeates
opaque layers, searching and searching,
yet all that remains are the trucking, frag-
mented **burgundy** columns in retinal vessels

ORANGE

there appeared to be a bit of a struggle
off-white fleshy particles clumped under
meretricious **vermillion** almond-shaped nails,
he or whatever it fucking was put up quite a fight

YELLOW

gubernatorial documentation enumerating
personables: **lemon chiffon** stained itsy bitsy
teenie weenie brand whore lingerie, golden
trinkets opulently canvassing decaying fingers...

GREEN

she/he? shim? fuck, whatever It was was in for a wild night
a lurid skirt hemmed, perfectly, hair as black as coal,

**traduzido do inglês por
CAMILLA LORETA**

PÓS-PRISMÁTICO

VERMELHO

Um intruso resplandecente metálico permeia
camadas opacas, procurando e procurando,
ainda tudo que resta são as trocas, frag-
mentadas colunas **vinho** em veias da retina

LARANJA

parece que houve uma certa luta
partículas carnudas esbranquiçadas aglomeradas sob
meretrício unhas amendoadas de **vermelhão**,
ele, ou qualquer porra que seja, empenhou uma luta e tanto

AMARELO

documentação governamental enumerando
itens pessoais: biquíni de bolinha **lima chiffon** manchado
marca de lingerie de prostituta, douradas
bugigangas opulentamente vasculhando dedos em decomposição...

VERDE

ela/ele? shim? porra, qualquer Coisa que foi ia ter uma noite selvagem
uma saia vívida com bainha perfeita, cabelos negros como carvão,
quadro perfeito, o que se faz, aqui que se paga sulfemoglobina
erradiando **verde intenso** decomposição, aparência maculada

AZUL

hora da morte depois da **meia-noite blue** e trinta minutos
marcas pretas de ligadura entrelaçadas
na maçã proibida de Adão, rasteja cruzada
através da expulsão angelical, paraíso asfixiado

picture perfect, *you got what you paid for*, sulphaemoglobin
radiating **verdant green** decomposition, tarnished appearance

BLUE

time of death half-past **midnight blue** and
black ligature marks interweaved within
Adam's forbidden apple, criss-cross slithering
across angelic expulsion, asphyxiated paradise

INDIGO

latex filled digits sprawl across stiff to death cadaverous
arms, *there was no trace of illegal substances found in the body*,
aged old **indigo** rings found at various intersections where blood
and water met, folds jacked up on life, discolour into death

VIOLET

anal fissures and tears are consistent with sexual assault,
eddies spilt dried **amethyst** all over mahogany-kissed skin
an amalgamation of semen and shit that no one cares about
nameless and soon to be forgotten, *just another dead tranny*.

ÍNDIGO

dígitos preenchidos por latéx esparramam-se sobre o rigor dos cadavéricos
braços, não havia vestígios de substâncias ilegais encontradas no corpo,
envelhecidos anéis **índigo** achados em várias intersecções onde o sangue
e a água se encontraram, na fissura da vida, descolorindo para a morte

VIOLETA

fissuras anais e rasgos são consistentes com abuso sexual,
redemoinhos derramaram **ametista** seca por toda a pele beijada de mogno
uma amálgama de sêmen e merda com quem ninguém se importa
sem nome e logo esquecido, apenas mais uma traveca morta.

Sangue nas ruas¹

Ruddy nas marés de carmesim,
o fruto iníquo de Adão,
pálido e oco,
envolto em buracos e lesões,
com óleo aveludado, derramando
como um rio inquietante,
uma fusão
de prejuízo e
animalidade.

Por que, Ó por que, Ó por que, Ó² –
outro Zé Ninguém, assinalado, em
uma cama de gelo, 28° 47' 22" N,
81° 16' 32" W³, mais outra maçã
cai a 1,002⁴ milhas da árvore
fraturando contra o pavimento,
e o caule de mais um é encontrado
balançando, solitário, em um vendaval úmido.⁵

1 Alusão à música "Strange fruit", de Billie Holiday. (N.A.)

2 "Ohio", música de Betty Comden e Adolph Green, do musical Wonderful town. (N.A.)

3 As coordenadas para Stanford, Flórida, onde Trayvon Martin foi morto. (N.A.)

4 O número de milhas de Sanford, Flórida para Ferguson, Missouri, onde Michael Brown foi morto. (N.A.)

5 Alusão a Sandra Bland que foi morta na Prisão de Waller County em Hempstead, Texas. (N.A.)

Blood on the Streets¹

Ruddy in tides of crimson,
Adam's iniquitous fruit,
pallid and hollow,
enveloped in dents and lesions
with velvety oil, pouring
like a disquieting river,
an amalgamation
of detrimentality and
animality.

Why, OH why, OH why, OH ²--
another John Doe, tagged, on
a bed of ice, at 28° 47' 22" N,
81° 16' 32" W³, yet another apple
drops 1,002⁴ miles from the tree
fracturing against the pavement,
and the stem of another is found
swinging, lonesome, in a humid gale.⁵

Can't you see it
No. I don't think it's a systemic race problem in this country⁶
Can't you feel it
That's why our blacks are so much better than their blacks⁷
It's all in the air
If white privilege is a thing, why are people working so hard to be black?⁸
I can't stand the pressure much longer

I had a dream, well
it was more of phantasmagorical
nightmare, an All-American holocaust,
the land of opportunity, but the trouble was,
these was states, Trumped, where there was very little
room for foolish black boys."⁹

1 Allusion to Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit"

2 Betty Comden and Adolph Green's "Ohio" from the musical *Wonderful Town*

3 The coordinates for Sanford, Florida, where Trayvon Martin was murdered.

4 The number of miles from Sanford, Florida to Ferguson, Missouri, where Michael Brown was murdered.

5 An allusion to Sandra Bland who was murdered in Waller County Jail in Hempstead, Texas.

6 Steve Bannon's appearance on Karen Hunter's SiriusXM show

7 Ann Coulter's appearance on *The Sean Hannity Show*

8 Milo Yiannopoulos' tweet in regards to comedienne/actress Leslie Jones

9 African American activist James Cameron's *A Time of Terror: A Survivor's Story*

Você não vê

Não. Não acho que seja um problema racial sistêmico neste país¹

Você não consegue sentir

É por isso que nossos negros são muito melhores que os negros deles²

Está tudo no ar

Se o tal privilégio branco existe, qual o motivo para as pessoas estarem trabalhando tanto para serem negras?³

Eu não suporto a pressão por muito mais tempo

Eu tive um sonho, bem

era mais fantasmagórico

pesadelo, um holocausto americano,

a terra da oportunidade, mas o problema era,

estes eram estados, Trumpetizados, onde havia muito pouco

espaço para meninos negros tolos.⁴

Sabe, há um

lugar que todas as pessoas com o

maior potencial estão reunidas⁵

e aparentemente é isso

sete palmas abaixo.

Inimizade eletrônica

“Uma conclusão geral ou inferência; (com conotação negativa) uma declaração excessivamente ampla ou geral baseada em evidências limitadas ou inadequadas;” – Oxford English Dictionary

Você está brincando comigo, porra?!?! Homens brancos são lixo⁶

– Iniciando sequência de Padrões Comunitários –

1 Steve Bannon em participação no programa de Karen Hunter, na rádio SiriusXM. (N.A.)

2 Ann Coulter em participação no programa de televisão The Sean Hannity Show. (N.A.)

3 Tweet de Milo Yiannopoulos em relação à comediantes/atriz Leslie Jones. (N.A.)

4 Ativista afro-americano James Cameron em A Time of Terror: a survivor's story. (N.A.)

5 Viola Davis, em discurso ao Oscar 2017. (N.A.)

6 Comentário feito por mim numa postagem no Facebook, que incluía uma foto do ministro da educação de Quebec, Jean-François Roberge, ao lado da vencedora do Prêmio Nobel da Paz e ativista, Malala Yousafzai, que ele twittou em 5 de julho de 2019 e declarou, em francês: “Bom encontro com @Malala Yousafzai, ganhadora do Prêmio Nobel da Paz, para discutir o acesso à educação e o desenvolvimento internacional. @UNESCO.” Folxs foram rápidos em destacar a hipocrisia desse momento da divulgação devido ao projeto de lei de reforma secular (Projeto de Lei 21) aprovado em Quebec, que proíbe servidores públicos em cargos de autoridade de usar símbolos religiosos. O partido de Roberge foi fundamental para adicionar emendas rígidas ao projeto de lei. (N.A.)

You know, there's one
place that all the people with the
greatest potential are gathered¹
and apparently that is
six feet underneath.

Electronic Enmity

*"A general conclusion or inference; (with negative connotation)
an excessively broad or general statement based on limited or inadequate evidence;
-Oxford English Dictionary²*

Are you fucking kidding me?!?! White men are trash!³

-Initiating Community Standards sequence-

public classification: hate speech

mustHegemonicallyBowdlerise

vagrant voices reverberating

calumny from piceous apertures, or {

publicity will metastasize,

rising like an exanimate

zealot⁴ fumbling hallowed prognostication;

unless we void ab initio to

maintain (Stringent[] margins){ we must

1 Viola Davis' 2017 Oscar speech

² "generalization, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/77505. Accessed 9 July 2019.

³ Original comment from me on a Facebook post that included a photo of Quebec education minister Jean-François Roberge alongside Nobel Peace Prize winner and activist Malala Yousafzai, which he tweeted on July 5, 2019 and stated in French "Nice meeting with @Malala Yousafzai, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, to discuss access to education and international development. @UNESCO" (translation by me). Folx were quick to highlight the hypocrisy of this press moment due to the secular reform bill (Bill 21) passed in Quebec, which bans public servants in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols. Roberge's party was implemental in adding stricter amendments to the bill.

⁴ Allusion to Reza Aslan's *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*.

deveHegemonicamenteExpurgação
 vozes vagabundas reverberando
 calúnia de abertura obscura, ou{
 publicidade vai ter metástase,
 subindo como um desmaiado
 fanático¹ desastrado prognóstico sagrado;
 a menos que anulemos ab initio para
 manter (Restritas[] margens){ nós devemos
 fortificar (& interceder na ∩² da branquitude{ø♀} iniqua< 1455³; MCDXCII⁴ ††)
 Sistema.de.repressão(est.inquisição †1478⁵ † : paraRedigir
 besteira herética e imposta);
 Sistemas.de.opressão(estruturas obstrutivas significavam); como
 // bloqueios limitados de GELO onde as coisas selvagens estão ⁶
 enviado para lamentar; em
 Sistemas.persecutórios (arraigados † “: ⁷ † da.integração
 de um contingente de Natividade totalitarista Adstringente(
 no peso as pontes das nossas costas⁸ conseguem aguentar));

1 Alusão ao livro de Reza Aslan, Zelota: a vida e a época de Jesus Nazaré. (N.A.)

2 Símbolo braille que significa omissão. Na impressão, a omissão de material matemático ou literário pode ser indicada por um espaço em branco, um traço, um ponto de interrogação, pontos ou uma combinação destes ou de outros sinais concebidos pelo autor. Salvo indicação em contrário, o símbolo de omissão a ser usado em braille deve corresponder ao sinal impresso. Se o sinal de omissão usado na impressão não tiver equivalente em braille no código, o sinal pode ser representado por um símbolo em braille inventado ou por um desenho. Uma nota do transcritor deve ser incluída para explicar qualquer símbolo braille criado. (N.A.)

3 Papa Nicholas V publicou Romanus Pontifex, uma encíclica dirigida ao rei Afonso V de Portugal, que sanciona a conquista de terras não cristãs e a redução das populações nativas não cristãs à “escravidão perpétua”. (N.A.)

4 1492 em algarismos romanos; ano em que Colombo “descobriu as Américas”, seguido por duas cruzes latinas para simbolizar o papel cúmplice da religião na colonização. (N.A.)

5 Ano em que a Inquisição espanhola foi estabelecida pelo Rei Fernando II de Aragão e pela Rainha Isabela I de Castela.

6 Alusão ao livro infantil epônimo de Maurice Sendak (1963). (N.A.)

7 Símbolo matemático de “pela razão de.” (N.A.)

8 Alusão a This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color (1981). (N.A.)

fortify(& intercede in the ∷¹ of yt {δφ} iniquity < 1455²; MCDXCII³ ††) System.
of.repression(est.inquisition †1478⁴ † : toRedact

heretical balderdash and impose);

Systems.of.oppression(obstructive structures meant); as

//bounded blockades of ICE where the wild things are⁵

sent to wail; at the

Systems.of.persecution(ingrained † “. -6” † of.the integration.

of an Astrigent totalitarianistic Nativity contingent(

on the weight the bridges of our backs⁷ can hold));

* preemptive: empire strikes⁸ the westbank⁹

stripping Salvia apiana¹⁰ in mass; leaving

streams of coagulated H₂S¹¹ overriding aquatic circuits

with lactescent and honey-tinted films;

must * Sever postcaval: passageways= apply stoppage

1 A Braille symbol meaning omission. In print, omission of mathematical or literary material may be shown by a blank space, a dash, a question mark, dots, or a combination of these or other signs devised by the author. Unless otherwise stated, the omission symbol to be used in braille should correspond to the print sign. If the omission sign used in print has no braille equivalent in the code, the sign may be represented by a devised braille symbol or by a drawing. A transcriber's note must be included to explain any devised braille symbol
2 Pope Nicholas V publishes Romanus Pontifex, an encyclical addressed to King Afonso V of Portugal, which sanctions the conquest of non-Christian lands, and the reduction of native non-Christian populations to 'perpetual slavery'

3 1492 in Roman Numeral, year Columbus "discovered the Americas," followed by two Latin crosses to symbolise religion's complicit role in colonisation.

4 Year Spanish Inquisition was established by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castille.

5 Allusion to Maurice Sendak's eponymous children's book (1963).

6 Mathematical symbol for "because."

7 Allusion to This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981).

8 Allusion to George Lucas' The Empire Strikes Back (1980).

9 Allusion to the Israeli-Gaza Conflict.

10 White sage, allusion to white sage being culturally appropriated and mass produced by big corporations for New Age spiritualism.

11 Chemical formula for Hydrogen sulfide.

* preventivo: contra ataque do império¹ o westbank²
decapagem Sálvia-apiana³ em massa; deixando
correntes coaguladas de H2S⁴ sobrepondo circuitos aquáticos
com filmes lactescentes e cor de mel;
deve * Cortar veia cava: passagens = aplicar paralisação
algoritmo para deliquescer neve compactada liberal em bacia de supremacia;
implementar filtro1848⁵, tecendo em redes como a Naja naja usando
*/ sua língua wish-bone⁶ para gravitar em direção à essência refulgente de sua presa,
que estaticamente Atravessa oCieloBinário (um intermediário entre animação e
quietus){

Implementar fórmula:

booleano éNeg =

porque se o pensamento corrompe a linguagem, a linguagem também pode corromper o
pensamento⁷?

#FAKENEWS

-ISSO É UMA POLÍTICA DE CAÇA ÀS BRUXAS;⁸

Rebaixar a credibilidade do criador de conteúdo

por amortecimento míope das modulações do indivíduo

saídas da esquerda, eu não acho, então você deve falar⁹

1 Alusão ao filme Guerra nas estrelas: o império contra-ataca, de George Lucas (1980). (N.A.)

2 Alusão ao conflito Israel-Gaza. (N.A.)

3 Sálvia-branca, alusão à planta culturalmente apropriada e produzida em massa por grandes corporações voltadas ao espiritismo New Age. (N.A.)

4 Fórmula química do sulfureto de hidrogênio. (N.A.)

5 Alusão ao início da Corrida do Ouro na Califórnia. (N.A.)

6 Wish-bone é um termo em inglês que, em português, seria literalmente “osso da sorte”. Escolhi não traduzi-lo, pois não fazemos a mesma ritualística popular, que consiste em “disputar” quem o ganha ao puxar o osso de galinha, peru, ou qualquer ave, após uma refeição, o que traria boa sorte ou a realização dos desejos do vencedor. Uma prática que se iniciou na data da Ação de Graças, mas que, nesse contexto, não se conecta com essa origem, apenas com a prática em qualquer data da superstição. (N.T.)

7 Livro 1984, de George Orwell (1949). (N.A.)

8 Allusão ao 45º presidente dos Estados Unidos, em tweet de 10 de janeiro de 2017, e seus problemas contínuos com o politicamente correto como um problema neste país e os efeitos do racismo reverso em relação aos folxs, particularmente The Squad, criticando a América “por não ser grande” e os “ataques a Israel”. (N.A.)

9 Alusão a um diálogo entre Alice e o Chapeleiro Maluco no capítulo 7, “Um chá de loucos”, de Alice no País das Maravilhas, de Lewis Carroll. (N.A.)

algorithm to deliquesce liberal snowpack into supremacy basin;
 implement filter¹, by weaving within networks like the Naja naja using
 */ its wish-bone tongue to gravitate towards its prey's refulgent essence,
 who statically Straddles theBinarycycle(an intermediary between animation and quietus){
 Implement formula:
 boolean isNeg =
 because if thought corrupts language, can language also corrupt thought?²
 #FAKENEWS
 -THIS IS A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT;³
 Debase credibility of content creator
 by myopically muffling individual's modulations
 outlets from the left, I don't think, then you should talk⁴
 These constringent beats= "";
 palpitate through blooming arterial terrains
 ~~~so(KXL<sup>5</sup>)ve{DAPL<sup>6</sup>}re (TMX<sup>7</sup>) ign{TAPS<sup>8</sup>}ty~~~  
 resulting in = coal lubricating;  
 split sublunary skirts

---

1 Allusion to the beginning of the California Gold Rush.

2 George Orwell's *1984* (1949).

3 Allusion to 45's January 10, 2017 tweet and his ongoing issues with political correctness as a problem in this country and the effects of reverse racism in relation to folxs, particularly The Squad, criticising America "not being great" and the "attacks on Israel."

4 Allusion to an interchange between Alice and the Mad Hatter says in Chapter 7: "A Mad Tea-Party" from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

5 Allusion to Keystone Pipeline System

6 Allusion to Dakota Access Pipeline

7 Allusion to Trans Mountain Pipeline System

8 Allusion to Trans-Alaska Pipeline System

Essas batidas constringentes = “”;

palpitam através de terrenos arteriais florescentes

~~~~so(KXL<sup>1</sup>)be{DAPL<sup>2</sup>}ra (TMX<sup>3</sup>) ni{TAPS<sup>4</sup>}a~~~~

resultando em = lubrificante de carvão;

saias sublunares divididas

Restauração = brilho no revestimento de pátina privado de oxigênio

dado por fraturamento hidráulico da terra, e aí transferindo elétrons entre fragmentos = de rugas mais profundas que ainda foram aliviadas de reservas inchadas --⁵

como(o ponto de ruptura desliza transversalmente, o espelho racha sob pressão

= uma maldição nos espera,⁶

por Negligenciar)

para dar resultados finais = “†”

Fim de jogo;

* esposa: o lábio rosado, o bronzado agridoce manchado, e o rosto retorcido que grita olhe para minhas obras, ó Poderoso, e desespere!⁷

* medidas preventivas: obstruir ! = narrativa difamatória em ordem

para reforçar a sanção pública, segurando o alusivo copo que decreta a mais bela da

terra para pérolas valentes! = : “ ou careta rubicunda ou com botões de berilo desabrochando⁸”;

de bocas cheias de nitrato e fosfato;

avaliar carregamento de charivari venenoso; para a final

internet interface = cynosure vs. cipher:

devolva tudo;

1 Alusão ao Sistema de Oleoduto de Keystone. (N.A.)

2 Alusão ao Sistema de Oleoduto de Dakota. (N.A.)

3 Alusão ao Sistema de Oleoduto Trans Mountain. (N.A.)

4 Alusão ao Sistema de Oleoduto Trans-Alaska. (N.A.)

5 Alusão a Ricardo II, de Shakespeare. (N.A.)

6 Alusão a “A senhora de Shalott”, de Lord Alfred Tennyson. (N.A.)

7 Alusão a “Ozymandias”, de Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818). (N.A.)

8 Alusão ao poema “Not in a silver casket cool with pearls”, de Edna St. Vincent Millay’s (1931). (N.A.)

Restaurate = lustre on the oxygen-deprived patina coat
given by fracking glass, and therein transferring electrons between fragments = of deeper wrinkles that have yet been relieved of swelling reserves--¹

as(the breaking point transversely glides, the mirror cracks under pressure
=a curse awaits us,²
for Neglecting)

to yield end results = “†”

Endgame;

* espouse: the snarled lip, the bittersweet stained tan, and the gnarled visage that shrieks look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!³

* preventive measures: occlude != defamatory narrative in order

to bolster public sanction, by holding the allusive glass that decrees the fairest of the

land to valanced pearls != : “or rubicund grimace or with beryl buds blossoming⁴”;

from heavily nitrated and phosphated mouths;

assess veined charivari charging; towards final

internet interface = cynosure vs. cipher:

return all;

1 Allusion to Shakespeare's *Richard II*

2 Allusion to Lord Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"

3 Allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818).

4 Allusion to Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Not In A Silver Casket Cool With Pearls" (1931).

Translator's Note

Camila Loreta's *History: Hand in Hand, History: Mouth to Mouth*, is an exploration of the human experience through a historical lens that transgresses colonial conceptions of time and space. Her work asks us to examine the interconnection between the various relationships within one's life of the material and immaterial worlds, a perspective long forgotten by those willing to open to the (im)possible. If a reader attempts to classify her piece, they lose the magic and beauty of Loreta's art and storytelling that cannot be understood in binary terms. Through her imagery and diction, Camila offers readers an intuitive way of observing the world. Her innovative writing, as seen with her use of repetition, alliteration and enjambment, opens the spacetime continuum and allows us to visit multiple planes and universes all in a single page. Time is nonlinear and non-sequential. Moments bleed in and out of our existence. Every memory is woven within the fiber of daily lives such that, at any moment, a part of them awakens and haunts us.

CAMILLA LORETA

HISTÓRIA DE MÃO-PARA-MÃO HISTÓRIA DE BOCA-PARA-BOCA

Cada um de nós vagando
Como estrelas cadenciadas
No terreno fértil e brilhante
De água turva
Como uma noite infinita
O solo cede sobre nossos pés
Ventres se tocam

—
isso antes
Um toque macio nas costas quentes

Boca vermelha, língua passa entre os dentes. cheiro de canela no canto das orelhas.

A noite abriu as conversas, olhos de espanto me observam, há portões armados que se mostram nos meus ombros tensos, boca semi aberta emite poucas opiniões e olhares furtivos.

Chovia

Entramos no bar. Há uma geladeira, que gruda no meu casaco plástico, o lanche chegou, comemos e o gosto de carne me dá náuseas. Me arrependo, sabendo que isso deveria acontecer.

Suspiro o afastamento. Falamos sobre rios enormes, galhos, folhas e arestas virgens.

Ele me olhava e eu duvido se é para mim ou é receio que eu chore.

Digo. Tá tudo bem. Não passa nada.

Acendo um cigarro, mesmo sem fumar tenho fumado, pra ter o gosto do cigarro dele dentro de mim. Um sorriso pequeno e tenso de saudade se instala no meu peito, mesmo sabendo pulsante: ele te desconhece.

translated from the portuguese
JOEL SEDANO

HISTORY: HAND IN HAND, HISTORY:
MOUTH TO MOUTH

Every one of us wanders
like shooting stars
on bright and fertile ground
from water that's murky
like an unending night
the soil gives in under our feet
bellies touch

—

On a warm back,
before this, a soft touch
mouth red, tongue sliding between teeth, the smell of cinnamon at the corners of ears.
The night opens conversations, eyes bewilderedly observe me, armed entrances show in my
tense shoulders, half-opened mouths spit scanty opinions and furtive glances.
It was raining,
we entered a bar. There's a fridge that fuses to my plastic coat, our lunch arrives, and we eat— the
taste of meat makes me nauseous. I regret knowing this would happen.
I sigh slowly. We talk about large rivers, bowers, leaves, and new edges.
He looks at me but I doubt it or am I afraid I'll cry.
I tell myself—It's okay. Nothing happened.

Although I hadn't smoked in some time, I lit a cigarette, just to have the taste on my tongue.
A small and strained smile of saudade settles in my breast, all the while my heart pulsates: he
doesn't recognize you.

We walk down the street, passing those churches and their arches. An intuitive two-faced cat is
watching us. I say: 'He likes you.' He said: 'Then why did he run away?'

Andamos pela rua, ultrapassamos igrejas pelo meio de arcos, um gato de duas caras nos observa, digo: ele gostou de você, e ele: acho que fugiu de mim.

No bar mesas na rua, pessoas desconhecidas, um homem tenta nos vender seu cd por cinquenta centavos. A capa é vermelha.

Ele me dizia sobre o mês de agosto. Incêndios e roubos, tomamos uma água que eu não pedi, mas acabo percebendo que estava com sede.

Começa a chover. Senta aqui do meu lado. Ele senta. Seu corpo parece menor do que o meu, sem casaco, treme de frio.

Vamos entrar?

Fumamos um cigarro. Mesmo que eu não fume, há uma tensão estranha no ar. Lembro do nosso último encontro

Seu olho perto do meu, uma respiração quase inexistente, imaginei que ele era um tanto lunático.

Comemos romã na sua casa. Estava tudo escuro, a luz da farmácia brilhava no teto, a faca que abriu a fruta da sorte apoiada num prato sem cor.

Dentro do bar um cheiro de fritura, ele se afasta. Minha cabeça apoiada na geladeira, mastigo o hambúrguer.

Já vim tantas vezes aqui, penso, eu era outra pessoa. Até a cor do cabelo mudou.

Tenho vontade de abraça-lo. Uma fenda entre os dois banquinhos do balcão nos separa. Passo a mão em suas costas, está quente, mais do que eu.

Falamos sobre impossibilidades. Ele se arrepende, mas parece aliviado, resignado talvez.

Eu suspiro novamente. Está chegando a hora de ir embora, pedir a conta, seguir a vida. Pagamos e andamos pela rua falando sobre santos e homens, ninguém nos pergunta nada.

Damos dois abraços, um não foi suficiente, não há nenhum cheiro, meu peito parece pedir mais tempo, dou um passo pra trás. Falamos de rios e coragem.

Bar tables dot the street, filled with people. At one table, a man tries to sell us his CD for 50 cents, but the cover is a socialist red...

He talks about August: a month of robberies and fires. We drank water, which I didn't order. Eventually, I come to realize my thirst.

It starts to rain. He sits next to me. His body is smaller than mine, especially now shivering in the cold without a jacket.

'Shall we enter?'

We shared a cigarette. I don't smoke. There's a strange tension in the air. I recall the last time we met:

Your eye is near mine, your breath is almost nonexistent. I thought he was mad. We shared a pomegranate at his house.

Dark throughout, except the light from the pharmacy that reflected on the ceiling, the knife opened the fruit which brings good fortune, sitting on a muted plate.

A frying smell wafts inside the bar. He moves away. My head rests against the refrigerator as I chew on a burger.

I've come here so often I think I'm someone else. Even the color of my hair has changed.

I feel like hugging him. There's a gap between these two stools that separates us. I run my hand across his back. He's warm— hotter than me.

We talk about what ifs. He regrets the conversation, but seems relieved, perhaps resigned.

Someone requests the bill. I sigh anew. It's almost time to leave, to move on with life. We paid, then walked along the street conversing about men and their God. There's no one around to bother us.

We hugged twice because once wasn't enough. He has no scent, but my chest yearns for more time. Eventually, I step back. We speak of rivers and courage.

He said, 'later.' I reply, 'We'll see.'

-

Ele diz: até, eu: tchau.

-

O encontrei de novo, caminhava na rua
o livro aberto
as palavras no chão

Dessa vez era uma pessoa de passagem, anunciei a despedida
quem estava dentro do restaurante era outro

um outro com os braços de cozinheiro
o rosto de poeta
havia algo em seu movimento que lhe fazia enigmático

respiramos em conjunto
arroz
feijão
peixe grelhado

anda tudo muito caro, muito caro
ainda a classe média acredita que é só se endividar, já que sempre alguém vai pagar por nós

fico em silêncio, a verdade daquilo me doi, me sinto pequena
mesmo que ele não perceba, me desconhece

I'm surprised, thereafter, to see him once again.
Words spill onto the sidewalk
from the book in my hand.

A passing moment, I say my farewells
to those inside the restaurant. Someone else,

with arms like a cook,
and a poet's countenance
something enigmatic about the way he moves.

Jointly, we inhale
rice
beans
grilled fish

everything is expensive—
very, very expensive
middle class believes
in going into debt,
no matter the cost
because someone
will foot the bill.

I remain silent. The truth thereof hurts. I feel small,
even if he doesn't realize it. He doesn't see me.

Outside, another leaves, even as I let go.
A sundry of torsos, each a different size.
Just like sex
dampening or drying from within.

lá fora o outro foi embora, até larguei
são tantos os torsos de tamanhos diversos
assim como o sexo
que molha ou seca por dentro

no seu carro, já a caminho da gasolina
muito caro
muito caro
você reclama da mania de fazer pão com alvéolos
pão é água e farinha, pô!

Estendo a mão até seu cabelo, sabendo que seria o meu primeiro toque no seu corpo
que revoltado, que gracioso
você desmonta e sorri
desmonta tanto que se curva até mim, numa diagonal sobre o câmbio
aproximo a minha respiração da sua
o beijo é quente
e lá vem
o cheiro de canela

seus lábios de casca de planta

penso se ele não chupou uma bala redonda
mas nada
parecia mais um perfume, um cheiro de verdade

Now in your car, en route for gas
very, very
expensive
you complain about the bread-making trend with all its air bubbles
Pal, bread is nothing but water and flour!

I reach for your hair, knowing this will be my first touch of your
body
how insurgent, how comely
you smile and disassemble
so much that the charade bends towards me, diagonally upon the
exchange.

I draw my breath closer to yours
the scent of cinnamon
your lips like tree bark
and here it comes
the kiss, so warm.

I wonder if he sucked on a cinnamon candy
yet nothing
seemed more like perfume, a sincere smell
not honeyed
rising spicy to my nose

não de doce

apimentado, subindo no meu nariz

um beijo simples,
assumido
no meio da rua girassol

-

um mapa geológico de
um pequeno objeto, diversos monumentos esmagados,
sobre a mulher e seus envolvimento.

-

tudo é possível de ser dito
com uma colher de mel na boca

isso para os querem as coisas para sí, ou para todos
você disse

conforme a tarde se aprofundou sua sala também já não tinha muita luz
moro numa pirambeira, no fundo a mata cheia de entulho
a proprietária não se interessa por trocar as janelas
muito caro
muito caro

a single kiss,
accepted
in the middle of Rua Girassol.

-

a geological map of
a small object, several smashed monuments,
about a woman and her encumbrances.

-

everything possible can be said
with a spoon of honey in your mouth

this for those who want things for themselves, or for everyone
you said
as the afternoon deepened, his room didn't have much light either

I reside on a steep pirambeira, at the bottom a thicket
flooded with rubble
the landlord doesn't care to replace the windows
too expensive

on the shelf a rose quartz, identical
to the one by my bed
the smell of bark in the breeze
I lean over, your warm body covered in the white t-shirt

sobre a prateleira uma pedra rosa, a mesma que fica ao lado da minha cama
o cheiro de casca no ar
me debruço, seu corpo quente coberto pela camiseta branca
a pele cheia de pintas
mais parece o céu noturno

não sei que pode acontecer
o pote de granola na cozinha, as panelas no armário aberto
os livros escolhidos cuidadosamente

lá embaixo vi um pacote de camisinha jogado no meio da terra, aberto
essa evidência como curiosidade e distância
você pelado com outro corpo pelado
sua boca passando pelo seio

você disse
é tão rosa
nunca ninguém tinha reparado
como o bico dos meus seios são assim
macios
com a blusa já caída na cintura, a língua preenche
logo atrás, na sua nuca, vejo a tempestade chegar.

skin speckled
like the night sky

I don't know what will happen
the jar of granola in the kitchen, pots and pans on the opened
shelves
books carefully curated

At the bottom, I saw a pack of condoms nestled in the dirt,
exposed
this evidence, curious and distant,
of you with another body, both naked
your lips brush across my breast

you whisper
they're so pink
no one's ever noticed
my nipples are so
tender
like the blouse hugging the waist, the tongue swells

right on the nape of your neck, I see the storm coming.

-

in the background we listen to the clarinet, the saxophone

*...History: hand in hand,
History: mouth to mouth...
...At the time when life began...
...The air turned into a mass of water...
... A current ... A seashell ... A palm seed ...*

...He flew, and flew, and flew...

I listen to
the beginning of the earth
in the hollow of every chest

-

no fundo escutamos o clarinete e o saxofone

...História de mão-para-mão, história de boca-para-boca ...

...No tempo que a existência começou ...

...O ar transformou-se em massa de água ...

... Uma corrente ... Uma concha do mar ... Uma semente da palmeira ...

...Ele voou, voou, voou....

eu escuto

o início do mundo

no buraco de cada peito

como um feitiço antigo

sobre sua prateleira o rastro da fé

que repousam em meus sonhos

os tambores de uma música que nem mesmo eu sabia

sob o manto branco

-

Cada um de nós vagando

Como estrelas cadenciadas

No terreno fértil e brilhante

De água turva

like an unsung spell

on your shelf the trace of faith
that resides in my dreams
the drums of a tune that even I didn't know

beneath the white veil

-

Every one of us wanders
like shooting stars
on bright and fertile ground
from water that's murky
like an unending night
the soil gives in under our feet
we fly, and fly, and fly

-

the wide earth underfoot
where did we come from
where are we going
I close my eyes
think about the creator of each
humanly body,
of a tree,
the one who sees inside and out

*...History: hand in hand,
History: mouth to mouth...*

-

Author's Note:

The portions in italics are excerpts from the oldest myth-poem of the Nagos. The poem is a creation story about Òrìṣà òbátálá also known as Orisha the Creator. The work entitled "Òrìṣà dídá ayé: òbátálá" was translated by Luis L. Marins as Orisha the Creator and When the Yoruba World was Created.

Como uma noite infinita
O solo cede sobre nossos pés
nós voamos, voamos, voamos

-

a terra larga sob os pés
da onde viemos
pra onde vamos
fecho os olhos
penso no criador dos corpos
para cada humano
uma árvore
aquele que vê por dentro e por fora

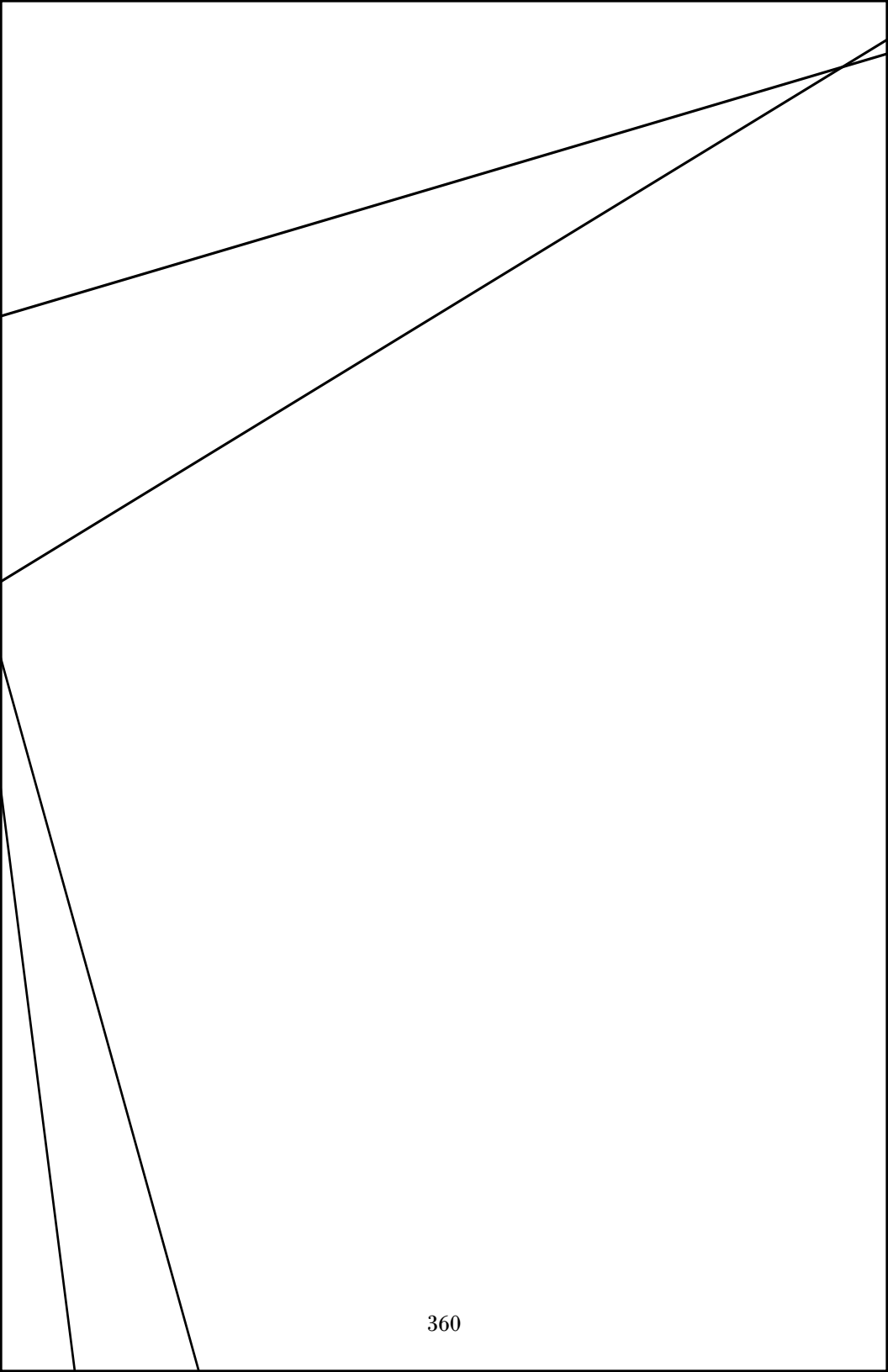
...História de mão-para-mão, história de boca-para-boca ...

-

nota:

Os trechos em itálico são trechos que pertencem ao mais antigo mito-poema dos nagôs sobre a criação do mundo. Traduzido por Luis L. Marins em Òrìṣà dídá ayé: òbátálá e a criação do mundo iorubá

.





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

Translator's Note

Mateo Alexander Rispoli, estudiante de la Universidad de Columbia (Nueva York), presenta aquí un fragmento de *Angelo*, un proyecto narrativo. A lo largo de nuestras conversaciones, me hizo saber de su afición por el cine, conocimiento que anexo a su habilidad para crear escenas a detalle. Aquellos con un paladar refinado para el true crime notarán ciertas semejanzas con el género, incluso se podría establecer un tenue vínculo entre cómo el autor muestra a su protagonista y cómo lo hace Capote con Dick y Perry.

Como lector de poesía, traducir una novela implicó adentrarme en un terreno que no conozco del todo (sospecho que traducir mis poemas fue algo más o menos parecido). A esto se suma la distancia cultural, específicamente ciertos códigos y estilos de vida estadounidense, desde la prepotencia del “frat boy” hasta un juicio estético y social al “hillbilly”; la infraestructura de las ciudades en el estado de Delaware fue otro tema a tener en cuenta, en especial encontrar una traducción exacta para “driveway” y un oficio similar a “masterweight”. La creación de escenas es una habilidad del autor de esta narración, ellas surgen a partir de un imaginario de precariedad, tales como planchar ropa pasando una olla con agua hirviendo o niños haciendo figuras en el barro con sus bicicletas tuneadas. A esto se suman conductas y vocabulario recurrentes en los medios de comunicación estadounidenses, como el orgullo étnico del ítalo-americano.

A lo largo del proceso de traducción sentí cierta envidia expresiva por el inglés. Como escritor envidié la capacidad de síntesis, al punto que fue necesario recortar algunas oraciones que, en el original, abarcaban una

cantidad considerable de información. En ese sentido, mi traducción puede parecer menos compacta, con “sobrepeso” en comparación a la original. Aun así, la experiencia de traducir y conversar con el autor fue muy enriquecedora.

MATEO ALEXANDER RISPOLI

ANGELO

We were out on the driveway smashing the door off the safe and laughing at the violence of it. Someone, unknown to all but myself, had already violated the intimacy of the door, bolt, and wall in an attempt to force a sale of the contents inside. My father was too afraid to render a verdict as to who did the business with it, worried that an unjust accusation would bring more undesired attention to his house, of which he received quite a bit in the week prior. Matt, a nice local frat boy of infirm convictions on any matter that does not concern his brothers or the brute destruction of something, came in with a sledgehammer. His cut octagon vents into the face of the door, sending a cement smoke into the air.

“Caustic stuff, that’s how they fireproof it. The bastard wasn’t getting in there no matter how hard he tries” said my dad, letting cigarette smoke filter through his front teeth and veil his face in sunlight.

I agreed. “He could have tried until the sun rose and fell and he wouldn’t have popped that lock.”

“You just get my files out of there and give them to me. Whoever had a go at it came in through a storm door that leads right to the basement. Ed would have heard it.” But I did hear it, and I knew who did it.

**traducido del inglés por
MARTÍN NÚÑEZ**

ÁNGELO

Estábamos afuera, en la entrada de nuestra casa, destrozando la puerta de la caja fuerte y riéndonos de la violencia en ello. Alguien, desconocido para todos menos para mí, ya había violado la intimidad entre la puerta, la bisagra y el muro buscando apoderarse de los contenidos. Mi padre temía dar su opinión al respecto. Le preocupaba que una acusación falsa atrajera más atención a su casa, de la cual ya había recibido bastante la semana anterior. Matt, un zorrón buena onda y de convicciones débiles en asuntos que no giraran en torno a sus “hermanos” o la destrucción de algo, entró con un mazo. Hizo una abolladura octagonal en la cara de la puerta, levantando polvaredas de cemento.

“Tiene esa mierda cáustica que la vuelve a prueba de fuego. El bastardo no iba a entrar ahí por más que lo intentara” dijo mi papá, dejando que el humo del cigarro se filtrara entre sus dientes y que la luz del sol cubriera su cara.

“Podría haberlo intentado todo el día y no lo hubiera logrado”. Asentí.

“Saquen mis archivos de ahí y pásenmelos. Quien sea que lo haya hecho, entró por la puerta que conduce al sótano. Ed lo habría escuchado”. Pero sí lo escuché y sabía quién lo había hecho.

“¿Se considera allanamiento si la puerta está sin llave?” Pregunté.

“Is it considered a break in if the door was unlocked?” I asked.

“It’s an unlawful entry, you’re still walking into someone’s house uninvited.” my father replied.

“Well at least whoever did it didn’t take anything else. Damn good safe here too.” said Matt. He broke back into the spirit of sanctioned demolition and swung half circles into the side of the safe. He was having fun. He took up a digging pole to it and tried to pry the door out of itself. The metal on metal scrape as the wedged tip of the pole skinned the grey paint on the safe off reminded me of the sound of the cellar door opening.

My dad and Matt didn’t know who did it but I did.

It all started less than a week earlier with a post to the New Castle Community Facebook group:

Angelo Mendoza

5 days ago

I truly believe that christopher conrad ordered jack’s muder,and the communication when like this;order went Theresa gamly ,gormley to her hairdresser thomas villiam yeats,thomas to antonio mendoza, the owner of the establishment thomas villiam yeats works at. From there my pimp brother antonio (he is my brother and I want to make clear that I do love him, i just want the truth, and I don’t want to implicate his illegitimate son, who is not his, not a Mendoza,) would dispatch one of his whores to manipulate the target,in this case the whore that he dispatched is a well known one is this area,my wife and the biological mother of my

“Sigue siendo ilegal, estarías entrando a la casa de alguien sin ser invitado.”

Respondió mi padre.

“Bueno, al menos no se llevaron nada más. Tienen una caja muy buena” dijo Matt.

Regresó a su espíritu demolidor e hizo semicírculos contra el costado de la caja fuerte. Se estaba divirtiendo. Agarró un poste de excavación e hizo palanca contra la puerta. El roce del metal contra el metal, cuando la punta del poste raspó la pintura gris de la caja fuerte, me recordó al sonido de la puerta del sótano abriéndose.

Mi papá y Matt no sabían quién lo había hecho, pero yo sí.

Todo comenzó, hacía menos de una semana, con una publicación en el grupo de Facebook de New Castle:

Ángelo Mendoza

hace 5 días

En vrrdad creo qe christopher conrad msndó a matar a jack,y la xosa fue así:la orden fue de Theresa gamly .gormley a su peluqero thomas villiam yeats y de thomas a antonio mendoza, dueño del establecimiento en que trabaja thomas villiam yeats. De ahí el kbrón de mi hermano anntonio (es mi herrmano y kiero dejar en claro qe lo amo, solo quiero la verdad, y no qiero involucrar a su hijo ilegítimo, qe no es de él, no es un Mendoza) habría mandao una de sus putas a manipular al objetivo,en este caso la puta que mandó es konocida en mi barrio,mi esposa y madre biológica de mis tres hijos,sra. María Mendoza (quien sospecho es tambien la madre del huacho de antonio, cenvebido y parido en secreto repugnante [y cambiado, sí

three children, Mrs. Maria Mendoza (who I believe to also be the mother of Antonio's bastard, conceived and birthed in a degenerate secrecy [and switched, yes swapped without my knowing for another child I do not know the origin of and suspect I never will, some Italian boy that looks like me but] Neither I nor the dedicated team of investigators at the Investigation Discovery channel have yet been able to discern the identity of the actual killers.

Will someone out there please debate me on this?

and be constructive about it,

No Likes

0 Comments

It was a glorious bit of nonsense, written atop a repost of an episode of a true crime show in the disordered grammatical depravity indicative of any well-crafted monomaniacal scrawl. Between the lines festered a singular quality of abandonment, the type felt only by a man down bad on his luck with no other outlet for his bilious pain than social media. The author was one of my five uncles on my father's side. My godfather, cast down to such desperate depths by the cold heart of an unfaithful wife and the greasy palms of a bank in savage pursuit of delinquent loan payments. Angelo Mendoza, weighmaster at The Cherry Island landfill, assiduous drinker, and the father of three boys fond of treaded wheels and mud, found himself one night hunched over a time-yellow mechanical keyboard with a lit cigarette resting snug between the keys of the seldom used number pad, slandering the name of his own brother on the town square Facebook page, his wrists, I like to think, shaking with the arrhythmic excitement of a free jazz pianist following the direction of some force beyond all human understanding and taste. Yes, this was the state of my uncle Angelo when he decided to jettison all social credibility and announce himself as the latest in a never-ending series of exciting town grotesques. He had probably taken in a few drinks that scattered his wits, and a

cambiado sin que yo lo supiera por otro niño del que no conozco su origen y sospecho que nunca lo sabré, un niño italiano que se parece a mí pero] ni yo ni el esmerado equipo de investigadores del Investigation Discovery ha podido discernir la identidad de los verdaderos asesinos.

Puede alguien debatir esto conmigo?

y ke sa constructivo porfa,

0 Me gusta

0 Comentarios

Era una lesera hermosa, comentada en la publicación de un episodio de un true crime show y en la depravación gramatical de cualquier garabato bien hecho. Entre líneas supuraba cierta especie de abandono, del tipo que solo siente un hombre con mala suerte y sin otra salida para su amargo dolor que las redes sociales. El autor era uno de mis cinco tíos por el lado de mi padre. Mi padrino, hundido en tal desesperación por el frío corazón de una esposa infiel y las grasientas manos de un banco al acecho de pagos por préstamos morosos. Ángelo Mendoza, recolector de basura en el vertedero The Cherry Island, bebedor asiduo y padre de tres niños aficionados al barro y las ruedas todoterreno, se encontraba una noche encorvado sobre un teclado desgastado por el tiempo y con un cigarrillo cómodamente encendido entre las teclas numéricas, calumniando el nombre de su propio hermano en la página de Facebook del pueblo. Me imagino sus muñecas temblando con la excitación arrítmica de un pianista de jazz siguiendo la dirección de alguna fuerza más allá de toda comprensión y gusto humanos. Sí, ese era el estado de mi tío Ángelo cuando decidió deshacerse de toda credibilidad social y anunciarse como el último de una serie interminable de emocionantes grotescos en la ciudad. Probablemente

few more doubly intoxicating episodes of a true crime show.

The show he referred to in the post had done an episode on his friend, Jack Tealy, a man who none of the people mentioned in the post had even met let alone ordered the murder of. He was launching an inquisition and just about everybody saw it and took it upon themselves to bring it up in that hushed excitement characteristic of small town intrigue to my father, Antonio Mendoza. If Angelo had written his indictment of my father within the standards of the English language observed on Facebook, I worry that people would not have bothered to come to my father to ask his side of the story first. Perhaps I should be thankful that Angelo was so upfront about his complete derailment.

Based on the post, I came to the conclusion that my uncle Angelo had been cracked. His presence in my life up until that point was made up of the narrative my father drip-fed me over the years of his precipitous decline into the online baron of provincial conspiracies that I am forced to portray him as today. In a brief period of peace during my adolescence, Angelo used to take me out to the riverfront with my Aunt Maria, and according to my father, we would play mini-golf, but I can only remember throwing dice against a brick wall and hanging out with an off-duty cab driver whose left leg stopped growing when he was only eight years old. His name was Jehu. Come to think of it, my Aunt Maria was never there at all. She was at home, not with the kids, but with another man from Angelo's now-defunct construction company, devising ways to siphon money out of the business. She maintained this grift with imperturbable cool for about a decade before she disappeared entirely, leaving a broken man and three sons, who even then, were very fond of treaded wheels and mud.

había bebido unas cuantas copas que lo mal entonaron y algunos episodios, doblemente embriagadores, de un true crime show.

El programa al que se refería en la publicación había hecho un episodio sobre su amigo, Jack Tealy, un hombre que ninguna de las personas mencionadas había conocido y mucho menos había mandado a matar. Estaba desatando una inquisición, la cual casi todo el mundo vio y se encargó de traerla a conversación en esa discreta emoción, típica en las intrigas de los pueblos pequeños, contra mi padre, Antonio Mendoza. Si Ángelo hubiera escrito su acusación contra mi padre dentro de los estándares del idioma inglés que se observan en Facebook, me preocupa que la gente no se hubiera molestado en acudir primero a mi padre para preguntarle su versión de los hechos. Tal vez debería estar agradecido de que Ángelo fuera tan sincero sobre su completa decadencia.

Basándome en la publicación, había llegado a la conclusión de que mi tío Ángelo había enloquecido. Su presencia en mi vida hasta ese momento se componía de la narrativa que mi padre me fue metiendo a lo largo de los años, acerca de su precipitado declive hasta convertirse en el barón de las conspiraciones provinciales de internet, a quien hoy me veo obligado a retratar. En un breve periodo de paz durante mi adolescencia, Ángelo solía llevarme a la orilla del río con mi tía María y, según mi padre, jugábamos minigolf; pero solo recuerdo tirar dados contra una pared de ladrillos y huevar con un taxista fuera de servicio, cuya pierna izquierda había dejado de crecer cuando solo tenía ocho años. Su nombre era Jehú. Ahora que lo pienso, mi tía María nunca estuvo allí. Estaba en casa, no con los niños, sino con otro hombre de la —ahora desaparecida— empresa constructora de Ángelo, ideando formas de desviar dinero del negocio. Ella mantuvo este vínculo con una frialdad imperturbable durante

My father, being the most successful of his siblings, bailed Angelo out of the complete economic destitution my aunt left him in. He took another mortgage out on our house to help Angelo pay off his debts, but this didn't keep him from borrowing even more money. We found out about his troubles when we came upon him wallowing away in a nest of beer bottles and cigarette butts at our beach house while my cousins ripped muddy figure-eights into our backyard with their dirt bikes. He had foreclosed on his house, and he had too much pride to ask for help. I'll never forget the cold detachment with which my father treated them. I didn't agree with this, I couldn't understand it; my early adolescent conscience couldn't rationalize how a brother could treat his own like he was nothing but a squatter. His presence after that was like that of a ghost exorcised from our lives by the cleansing holy water of a fraternal loan, the only type of money you can default on without being ruthlessly chased down for.

I went to bed fairly early the night of the break-in (walk-in). I spent the day working on a piece of reporting on the local mushroom festival, an event of interest to almost no one who did not attend besides the six local seniors that still read the community newspaper. I heard the scream of the cellar door opening, and I walked downstairs expecting to see my father had returned home from his trip early. I found him in the most unceremonious fashion: He was prying at the safe door with my father's favorite crow bar. The fluorescent lights in the basement exposed all the blemishes on his face and stains on his t-shirt; one mustard, two beer, and a few assorted reds that could have been ketchup, sriracha, a light BBQ, or blood. I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. He turned around, and the color drained from both of our faces. He started laughing, bagging up; he couldn't contain himself. I'd be remiss if I did not admit that I, too, started laughing. I thought that maybe if I indulged him he would put down the crow and not disbar me from the living in any of the thousands of horrific and gruesome ways my mind thought up in the moments between my

aproximadamente una década antes de desaparecer por completo, dejando a un hombre destrozado y tres hijos, a quienes, ya en ese entonces, gustaban mucho de las ruedas y el barro.

Mi padre, siendo el más exitoso de sus hermanos, salvó a Ángelo de la miseria económica en la que mi tía lo había dejado. Pidió otra hipoteca sobre nuestra casa para ayudar a Ángelo a pagar sus deudas, pero esto no le impidió pedir prestado aún más dinero. Nos enteramos de sus problemas cuando lo encontramos revolcándose en un nido de botellas de cerveza y colillas en nuestra casa de playa mientras mis primos hacían figuras en forma de ocho en el barro de nuestro patio trasero con sus motos de Cross. Había ejecutado la hipoteca de su casa y era muy orgulloso como para pedir ayuda. Nunca olvidaré el frío desapego con el que mi padre los trató. Yo no estaba de acuerdo con esto, no podía entenderlo; mi conciencia de adolescente no podía racionalizar cómo un hermano podía tratar a los suyos como si no fueran más que un ocupante ilegal. Su presencia después de eso fue como la de un fantasma exorcizado de nuestras vidas por el agua bendita purificadora de un préstamo fraternal, el único tipo de dinero que puede dejar de pagar sin ser perseguido despiadadamente.

En la noche del allanamiento, me había acostado temprano. Estuve todo el día trabajando en un reportaje sobre el festival local de hongos, un evento de interés para casi nadie que no asistiera además de los seis adultos mayores locales que aún leen el periódico de la comunidad. Oí el sonido de la puerta del sótano abriéndose y bajé esperando ver que mi padre había regresado antes de su viaje. Lo encontré de la manera menos ceremoniosa: estaba haciendo fuerza en la puerta de la caja fuerte con la palanca favorita de mi padre. Las luces fluorescentes del sótano expusieron todas las imperfecciones de su rostro y las manchas de su polera; una de mostaza, dos de cerveza y algunos rojos que podrían haber sido de

arrival in the basement and his turning around; the two toothed curve cutting my ear in half and hooking my head like the first stab at a watermelon; a toss of the crowbar and some simple blunt force trauma, tragedian justice for Jack Tealy. I started to think that I, too, was a softcore-snuff-film-addled victim of the Investigation Discovery channel. He stopped laughing and took a deep breath.

“Angelo, please, I don’t know anything about my father’s prostitution ring.”

He dropped the crowbar and reverted to the kindhearted delinquent I knew him to be in those days playing craps in Wilmington. He said “I know you don’t son. Have a beer with me.”

He disarmed me by the time we made it up the stairs and onto the porch. Though somewhat of a vermin, he retained an admirable amiability in his attitude and I’m convinced that he could disarm anyone so long as he disarmed himself. He referenced our days on the riverfront, when we allegedly played minigolf. “I still talk to Jehu,” he said, “he owes me from games back when I used to take you out with me, and I wouldn’t be surprised if the gimp-leg owes you a few bucks too eh?” He chose not to mention my parentage, he chose not to even acknowledge the Facebook post, but he did give me further details about his wife’s infidelities on several occasions. Nonetheless, we sat there chatting shit and enjoying each other’s company in the half-paternal, half-fraternal banter of uncles and grown nephews. He made me smoke cigarettes.

He said “Smoke that to the tip, we’re not rich men. Have you ever had to iron your clothes with a boiling pot of water?”

I had not.

Once we were settled in on the porch, he said “Wait here, I’m gonna go grab a brew, two

kétchup, sriracha, salsa barbacoa o sangre. No sabía qué decir, así que no dije nada. Se dio la vuelta y el color desapareció de nuestras caras. Empezó a reírse, metiendo cosas en una bolsa; no pudo contenerse. Sería negligente si no admitiera que yo también comencé a reír. Pensé que tal vez si lo complacía, bajaría la palanca y no me excluiría de la vida en ninguna de las miles de formas horribles y espantosas que mi mente pensó entre mi llegada al sótano y el instante en que se dio vuelta; la curva de dos puntas cortando mi oreja por la mitad y enganchando mi cabeza como la primera puñalada a una sandía; un alzamiento de la palanca y un simple trauma de fuerza contundente, justicia trágica para Jack Tealy. Empecé a creer que yo también era una víctima atontada por las películas snuff del Investigation Discovery. Dejó de reírse y respiró hondo.

“Ángelo, por favor, no sé nada sobre la red de prostitución de mi padre”.

Dejó caer la palanca y volvió a ser el delincuente de buen corazón que sabía que era en aquellos días jugando a los dados en Wilmington. Dijo: “Sé que no, hijo. Ven, tomémonos unas chelas.”

Me desarmó cuando subimos las escaleras y salimos al porche. Aunque algo asqueroso, conservaba una admirable amabilidad en su actitud y estoy convencido de que podía desarmar a cualquiera con tal de desarmarse a sí mismo. Se refirió a nuestros días en la orilla del río, cuando supuestamente jugábamos minigolf. “Todavía hablo con Jehú —dijo—, me debe de los juegos cuando solía llevarte conmigo. No me sorprendería si el cojo también te debiera plata” Eligió no mencionar lo de mi parentesco, eligió ni siquiera reconocer la publicación de Facebook, pero me dio más detalles sobre las infidelidades de su esposa en varias ocasiones. No obstante, nos sentamos ahí hablando huevadas y

for me and one for you, nephew,” and he stumbled out to his trunk, unlatched the hatchback and brought back a thirty rack with him. Before he handed me a beer he held it in front of me and asked.

“It skips a generation Eddy, like hair loss, now here you go.”

I watched his gullet undulate as he guzzled a Corona, depositing it behind the taut hairy skin wrapped over his belly, which I could not help but notice looked like a newborn baby’s head peeking out from under his t-shirt which was framed by green suspenders and screaming denim waistband about two sizes too small. He had a righteous set of tits, birthed, earned, in the alcoholic labor that begot the belly. At some point, he turned on country music and let it play through the tin can speaker on his phone.

It was almost as if he had come that night for no reason other than to see me, as if there were no ulterior motives in the visit whatsoever. “You work, you’re in good spirits, why break in?”

“It’s not a break in if the door is unlocked.”

“Is that true?”

“Sure is.”

I didn’t know what to say to this, so I steered my eyes towards his truck. Its hood was splotched like the face of an iron leper, and he was rocking two worn donuts instead of front wheels. I could see a mass of trash sitting in the back seat, and it looked like he had a filling cabinet lodged between the passenger and driver seat. He noticed my silence.

disfrutando de la compañía del otro en esa onda media paternal, media fraternal, de tíos y sobrinos adultos. Me hizo fumar cigarro.

Dijo: “Fúmatelo entero, no somos ricos. ¿Has planchado tu ropa con una olla de agua hirviendo?”

No lo había hecho.

Una vez que nos acomodamos, dijo: “Espera aquí, voy por unas chelas. Dos para mí y una para ti, sobrino”. Salió tropezando hacia su camioneta, abrió el maletero y trajo un pack de treinta. Antes de darme una cerveza, la sostuvo frente a mí y dijo:

“Se salta una generación, Eddy, como la calvicie. Aquí tienes”.

Vi su garganta moverse mientras engullía una Corona, depositándola detrás de la piel tensa y peluda que envolvía su guata, la cual no pude evitar asimilar a la cabeza de un recién nacido asomándose por debajo de su camiseta enmarcada por unos suspensores verdes y la cintura de sus jeans ajustados. Tenía un par de tetas, surgidas, obtenidas a partir del trabajo alcohólico que había engendrado el vientre. En algún momento, puso música country y la dejó sonar a través del altavoz de lata de su teléfono.

Era casi como si él hubiera venido esa noche sin otro motivo que verme, como si no hubiera motivos ocultos en la visita. “Trabajas, andas de buen humor, ¿por qué hacer esto?”

“No es allanamiento si la puerta está abierta”.

“¿En serio?”

“You know, I’m a sick man, Ed.” This admission struck me blind. He could see that much and he pursued it. “You may find yourself where I am one day and I can only hope you handle it as well as I have. I know I’ve stolen, I’ve lost bad and been down worse, I made mistakes I cannot atone for. But I’ve tried to do better than my father, and your father seems to have been the only one of us that has done it.”

This was my godfather; a thief, a liar, a conniver of a man chewed up spit out by the community that raised him, devoured as prey by Investigation Discovery channel and online conspiracy theories, a man who could not be further from God without finding himself on an episode of “My Husband, The Manslayerer.” He must not have been like this when my father saw him fit to guide my souls away from the brimstone cradle of eternal damnation. He could not have been.

The day we decided to see if we could bust the safe open, dad went into the shed for the crowbar and came back out with his eyes wide. I didn’t tell him about my vigil with Angelo, and I didn’t want to. I have yet to see him again. I hope I will not later see him in myself.

“Bastard stole my crowbar.”

Matt started to work at the hinges. He gave up and asked if he could bring the safe to his frat house and put the new pledges to work on it, to find out if they had what it took to be brothers. We loaded it into the back of his truck and drove it to the basement of a dilapidated Newark townhouse where three boys of infirm convictions on any matter that did not concern their potential brothers beat at it with wooden baseball bats for three hours. They took out a

“Claro”

No sabía qué decir, así que me puse a ver su camioneta. El capó estaba manchado como la cara metálica de un leproso y estaba ocupando dos neumáticos gastados en lugar de las ruedas delanteras. Pude ver un montón de basura en el asiento trasero y parecía que tenía un archivador alojado entre los asientos del piloto y del copiloto. Se dio cuenta de mi silencio.

“Soy un enfermo, Ed”. Esta confesión me impactó. Él pudo notar eso y prosiguió: “Es posible que algún día te encuentres en mi situación, solo espero que lo manejes tan bien como yo. Sé que he robado, he perdido mucho y he estado peor. Cometí errores que no puedo reparar, pero he intentado ser mejor que mi padre. Tu padre parece haber sido el único de nosotros en haberlo logrado”.

Este era mi padrino: un ladrón; un mentiroso; un conspirador mascado y escupido por la comunidad que lo había criado, devorado cual presa por el Investigation Discovery y las teorías conspirativas de internet; un hombre que no podía estar más lejos de Dios sin verse reflejado en un episodio de “Mi esposo, el homicida”. No debió haber sido así cuando mi padre lo vio apto para guiar mi alma lejos de la cuna de azufre de la condenación eterna. No pudo haber sido así.

El día en que decidimos ver si podíamos abrir la caja fuerte, mi papá fue al cobertizo por su palanca y volvió con los ojos muy abiertos. No le conté sobre mi velada con Ángel y no quería hacerlo. Todavía tengo que verlo de nuevo, solo espero no verlo

reflejado en mí mismo.

“El bastardo se robó mi palanca”.

Matt comenzó a trabajar en las bisagras. Se dio por vencido y preguntó si podía llevar la caja fuerte a su spot y poner a trabajar en ella a unos conocidos, para averiguar si tenían lo que se necesitaba para ser “hermanos”. Lo cargamos en la parte trasera de su camión y lo condujimos hasta el sótano de una casa en ruinas de Newark, donde tres muchachos, de convicciones débiles en cualquier asunto que no incumbiera a sus potenciales “hermanos”, la golpearon con bates de béisbol durante tres horas. Sacaron un montón de archivos y lo último de los ahorros de mi abuelo. Le devolví el contenido a mi papá, quien tomó con gratitud los archivos y dejó la plata sobre la mesa. “Pura basura”, dijo.

Translator's Note

As an introduction, I believe a list of topics discussed by the writer and I during the process of translation best reveals the foundation on which the translation was built. Most of the items on this list were created before either of the writer or I were born in places neither of us have been, however they were the common ground.

The List:

- The anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) created by Hideaki Anno, how it is discussed in academic circles in Santiago, but not in New York.
- The Southern California post-hardcore band *Drive Like Jehu*, their album *Yank Crime* (1994), the appearance of the name Jehu in my story which the writer of the following poem was translating, where I got it from (the band, *Drive Like —*), and its actual origin (the tenth king of the northern Kingdom of Israel).
- The French filmmaker Chris Marker and his film *Sans Soleil* (1983).
- The Lithuanian American cameraman Jonas Mekas and his film *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000), a film the seemingly seemingly random construction of, provided me with a loose visual representation of the rhythm of the translation.
- The Washington emo band *Death Cab for Cutie*, and a line of theirs that the writer translated and the translator untranslated somewhere in the body of 'december 1.'

- Garbage men, junkers, weigh masters, world champion weightlifters, truckers, motorbikers; all men of garbage and motors.
- The D.C. post-hardcore band Fugazi, and the writer's favorite song by them ("Last Chance for a Slow Dance" off of *In On the Kill Taker* [1993]).
- The Spanish verb "desgastar," and how it can be used to describe the yellowing of gray late-90s computer hardware shells.
- The writer's cat, Juan, whose buttohole flashed across his Zoom window every other time we met.
- The English prog-pop/post-punk band XTC and how their logo (as seen on the cover of their album *Drums and Wire* [1979]) appears on the area below the neckline of Shinji's pajamas in a single shot of the aforementioned anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.
- The poet Anne Sexton, the source of another translated-into-Spanish-and-untranslated line.
- A mutual aversion to dogs.
- I owe the following translation to the above, but most of all to Martin Nuñez.

MARTÍN NÚÑEZ

I de diciembre

Ya que la mía sigue electrocutada, se tuerce y quema negando la ceniza en tu oído, aprovecho la inocencia. Parece que no hay escape. Otra vez soñé con el pasillo en que cada puerta es de un color diferente. ¿Siempre le tuve miedo a lo real? Si un pájaro se incrustara en mi ojo no sé si podría tomarlo. Evadiendo plazas o canchas de fútbol, evito lo que nunca llega: un pelotazo constante. Diría que es un miedo a lo imprevisto, más que a lo real. Lo espontáneo del ladrido corresponde a mi perdición, no el perro. Pienso en la mirada de un conejo al ser apedreado. Cuando estás con tu familia o amigos, ¿aún te dan ganas de irte pensando que una campana es el cuerpo de Dios? Niños entrando a la sala después del recreo. Se juran amarrados a un árbol invisible. Quizá la palabra adecuada sea “transparente”. Alguien viene —con su arco y flecha diminutos—, les pica la yugular y guarda la sangre en balde, tropieza y bota la sangre al río. Descubrir la cabeza de amantes en la noche. Mirabas a una pareja echada sobre el pasto, lejos de la luz. Yo miraba esas manos blancas que tomaban por debajo del mentón. Tampoco te lo dije. Cuando volví a mirarte, las manos se habían convertido en ramas encajando con el perfil de tu mandíbula. No sé. A veces, me veo durmiendo al final de una sala de clases. Llamabas por teléfono, maldiciendo, pero nadie llamó. Había manchas de sangre en mi almohada. Es infantil y asqueroso, intento ser discreto. Despertar en otra ciudad y no deslavarse uno, sino el día. Un sol que vibra, la intención que ignoro. Concentración y calor son igual de difusos. Una mujer barre el frente de su casa, la hija juega lanzando piedras de un lugar a otro. Es la imagen que ofrece al novio cuando le pregunta por recuerdos de infancia. En realidad, piensa en la madre y su contorno ambarino: “¿Qué tiene mi pelo? ¿Se parece al fuego!”. Deforme cara del amor. Me perdí buscando al gato sin orejas, siempre maúlla y se acerca. Dice mi hermana: “Quizá lllore más cuando se muera el papá”. En el zoológico, la mayor de sus hijas había aplastado una abeja. El padre la pateaba por la espalda. La madre me mira, con su boca entre el tedio y la sonrisa. ¿Lo ves? Acaba de ocurrir. Mi hermana se maquilla en el baño. Un poquito más abajo de la nuca, el tatuaje de una mirada. No había visto a nadie y nadie lo había visto. Las cabezas de un gecko, mordidiéndose y lamiendo heridas. Llueve. Se ríe tan fuerte. Solo queda esperar la noche y que volteee las hojas. Cúmulo de

translated from the spanish by
MATEO ALEXANDER RISPOLI

december 1

Since mine is still electrified, it contorts and burns, it rejects the cinder in your ear, and I take advantage of innocence. It seems like there is no escape. Again, I dream of a hallway where every door is a different color. Have I always been afraid of the real? If a bird crashed into my eye I don't know if I could take it. Avoiding parks and soccer fields, I avoid whatever comes my way: there's always a ball. I would say it's a fear of the unexpected more than of the real. The spontaneity of the bark is my undoing, not the dog. I think of the look on a rabbit's face when it's about to get stoned to death. When you're with your family or friends, do you still feel the urge to leave, thinking that the sound of a bell is the body of God? Children return to class after recess. They've convinced themselves that they're tied to an invisible tree. A better word would be "transparent." Someone comes—with his tiny bow and arrow—stings their jugular and saves the blood, but it's all in vain as he stumbles and spills it into the river. To come across the heads of lovers in the night. You watched the couple lay in the grass, far from the light. I looked at those white hands cupping my chin. I didn't tell you either. When I looked at you again, the hands had turned into branches fitting the profile of your jaw. I don't know. Sometimes, I see myself asleep in the back of the classroom. You'd call on the phone, cursing, but no one called. There were blood stains on my pillow. It's childish and gross, I try to be discreet. Waking up in another city and not wasting a day, but letting it wash away. A vibrating sun, the intention I ignore. Concentration and heat are equally hazy, A woman sweeps the front of her house, her daughter plays throwing stones from one place to another. The image she offers to her boyfriend when he asks about childhood memories. Actually, he thinks of her mother and her amber contour: "What's wrong with my hair? It looks like fire!" Deformed face of love. I got lost looking for the earless cat, it always meows and comes near. My sister says "Maybe he'll cry more when dad dies." At the zoo, the eldest daughter crushed a bee. The father kicks her in the back. The mother looks at me, her mouth somewhere between boredom and a smirk. Do you see it? It just happened. My sister is putting on makeup in the bathroom. A little below the nape of her neck, the tattoo of a look. I had seen it but no one else had. The heads of a gecko, biting and licking its wounds. It's raining. It laughs so hard.

sensaciones que volverán cuando salga: la carrera de una gota y el posar de una polilla. ¿Por qué? Algún motivo, no pretexto, para volver a sentarse tras gritarle al perro de un vecino. Todas las mañanas aparecía una canica en el patio. Una paloma devorada por hormigas. En la cama, el cuerpo negro seguía transmitiendo desde lejos. No ocurre lo mismo con el sillón carmesí. Creo que este es el comienzo. Del final se dice poco. Los platos se alinean como limpias costillas goteando, relucientes. El viento entre huesos de pollo. Incluso viendo nada, no verías la nada. Cómo se mueven las manillas de una micro vacía. El arrastre de hojas en la noche. La brisa imaginaria que entumece el cuerpo. Debes imaginarme escribiendo al azar. Puede ser. Lo más querido y molesto del recuerdo es que vuelve como un garabato a deshilar. La incertidumbre de cuando te dicen “piensa un color nuevo”. Algo que ralentiza el pensamiento. Escribir es inhibirse (cacofonía). Tiemblan dedos y la rigidez de la palma impide su cierre. El cítrico aroma del tiempo en los limones me calma. Cambio imponente. Nada que escribir. Paseando por la orilla, lo encontramos. El color del cielo, de una jaiba y una vasija. Se volvió la imagen más grande, la orgullosa que al reptar se quita las pequeñas de encima. Existe, debe existir, una diferencia entre “amor” y “amor, amor”. Un incremento o una pérdida, no la indiferencia. Un delfín de oro clavado sobre la encía. Portón sin cáscara. Teníamos que comprar una jaula más grande. Al restregar los huevos de mosca en la nevera dejan algo parecido a mermelada. En fin, retomar el avance. Verde pisar de las cosas. Desearía escribirte como antes. Aquí viene, aquí viene otro día. Almorzamos afuera, mirando a los que nos rodeaban. Él aplaudió cuando le entregaron su plato. Nunca lo hice ni lo pensé. La supervivencia en aparentar. “Estas son las hojas que comían los dinosaurios”. Omitir se ha vuelto necesario. El desfase entre mi lengua y yo. Vive sin mí —como un niño—, cuando la miro no se mueve. El poema será el grito cuando se mueva. Lo inmutable dentro del poema, el silencio también varía. Soldaron estatuillas de cupido a los faroles. Pero no. Siguen ahí, como discurso ante el “supongo”. Hierve el aceite. La cara en yeso de la Virgen, encendida por los cirios que abren mejillas. Siento aire por debajo del jirón. Algo similar dice, o me hace decir, un poema. Mi lira de lenguas no es lira, instrumento, musical, mía, ni lenguas. Creo que algo inconcluso es suficiente.

All that remains is to wait for the night to come and turn the leaves. The accretion of sensations that will return when it hatches: the rush of a drop and the perching of a moth. Why? Some reason, not a pretext, to sit down again after yelling at a neighbor's dog. Every morning a marble appeared in the yard. A pigeon eaten by ants. On the bed, the sleeping body kept broadcasting from afar. It's not the same from the crimson armchair. I think this is the beginning. Little is said about the end. Wet dishes lined up like a rack of ribs, glistening. Wind flying between chicken bones. Even seeing nothing, there was nothing there all along. Like the handholds of an empty minibus swinging. The shuffling of leaves in the night. The imaginary breeze that numbs the body. You must imagine me writing at random. I might be. The most precious and annoying thing about memory is that it comes back like a scribble in a fray. The uncertainty of being told to "think of a new color." Something that slows down thinking. To write is to be inhibited (cacophony). Fingers tremble and the stiffness of the palm hinders its closure. The citrus aroma of time in lemons calms me. Imposing change. There is nothing to write. Walking along the shore, we find it. The color of the sky, of a crab and a pot. It became the bigger picture, the proud one that crawls away from the small ones. There is, there must be, a difference between "love" and "love, love". An increase or a loss, not an indifference. A golden dolphin nailed along the gum. A gate without a shell. We had to buy a bigger cage. By rubbing fly eggs together and storing them in the fridge, you get something similar to jam. Anyway, back to progress. Green footsteps on things. I wish I could write to you as before. Here comes here comes another day. We ate lunch outside, looking at those around us. He clapped when was handed his plate. I never did or thought about it. Survival in appearing. "These are the leaves the dinosaurs ate." Omitting has become necessary. The gap between me and my tongue. It lives without me -like a child-, when I look at it it does not move. The poem will be the cry when it moves. The immutable within the poem, the silence also varies. They welded lanterns to the cupid statuettes. But no. They are still there, as speech, before the "I suppose". The oil boils. The plaster face of the Virgin, lit by the candles that open cheeks. I feel air underneath the street. Something like that says, or makes me say, a poem. My lyre of tongues is not a lyre, instrument, musical, mine, nor tongues. I think something unfinished is enough.

1 de enero

Como elefante, vine para morir tranquilo. Podré quejarme intentando pensar en cosas que me conmuevan: mi chaqueta sobre el respaldo de una silla y frascos bien cerrados. Masticaré hojas que suelten agua. Cuando salga de mi cuerpo, ¿por dónde lo haré? Lo oscuro dentro de la luz. Círculo blanco en medio del párrafo. ¿Existe diferencia alguna entre morirse del miedo y morirse de vergüenza? Me defiendo con sangre y orina. Dejé de leer sobre mi enfermedad. Era incómodo. Saber que los pulmones se iban a cerrar y que el cerebro, de a poco, iba a oscurecer. Ojalá fuese algo teológico: A á: melodía del asentamiento (el yo del cuerpo); E é: melodía del logro (el yo del acto); I í: melodía en apuros (el yo de la escritura); O ó: melodía de risa (el yo del habla); U ú: melodía desconocida (el yo esencial). Una sexta melodía que sirva de escotillón o tapa. Ritmo sinusal de cuarenta y siete latidos por minuto. Entra y sale. Presenta “Conducción Alternada del Pensamiento”. Es decir. Lámina linear a los costados. Irrupción de otro flujo de imágenes perpetuo. En ocasiones húmedo y concreto, pero líquido e intuitivo. Dice que volverá pronto. Perdido en la niebla por voluntad propia. Transita desde la necesidad de cercanía con otro, al distanciamiento, lejanía y aislamiento social. En la orilla siguiente, se arrastra una mimesis constante. En los retratos de Lope aparecen dos Monstruos de la Naturaleza. La diferencia entre una guarida y una madriguera es que el primero es un lugar que haces tuyo, mientras que el segundo es un lugar que haces tú. Espero que este sea el último de estos sueños. Recuerdos ajenos. En casa del primo que se despertó gritando en una noche de tormenta. Todos sabían lo que le pasaba, excepto él. Había desarrollado hiperacusia: empezó escuchando los ladridos de un perro y las conversaciones de los vecinos; después, las raíces de un árbol extendiéndose bajo tierra (según él, lo más doloroso era cuando las raíces crecían fuera de la tierra). Al final, los ruidos se habían mezclado en su cabeza como pensamiento ajeno y ruidoso, un bioma. Las sillas de plástico y su logo de Coca-Cola. Una estaca interminable atraviesa los nervios. Anticucho. Los niños en rehabilitación, con un tronco y una plancha de zinc, hicieron una rampa. Conversación en la escalera de servicio: cuando le devolvieron las llaves de su casa, el baño estaba repleto de agujeros. “Era como si un ratón no hubiera sabido en cuál esconderse”. Los días de los Díaz son lentos. Un grupo de introvertidos, que interactúa lo justo y necesario, resulta más interesante. Mi abuelo aplastaba arañas y después se las metía a la boca. Mi hermana

january 1

Like an elephant, I came here to die peacefully. I'll be able to complain as I try to think of things that move me: my jacket over the back of a chair and tightly closed jars. I will chew leaves that release water. When I leave my body, where will I do it? The dark inside the light. White circle in the middle of the paragraph. Is there a difference between dying of fear and dying of shame? I defend myself with blood and urine. I stopped reading about my illness. It was uncomfortable. Knowing that my lungs were going to close and my brain, little by little, was going to go dark. If only it were theological: A á: melody of settlement (the body self); E é: melody of achievement (the act self); I í: melody in distress (the writing self); O ó: melody of laughter (the speech self); U ú: melody unknown (the essential self). A sixth melody that serves as a cap or lid. Sinus rhythm of forty-seven beats per minute. In and out. Presents "Alternate Conduction of Thought". That is to say. Lamina leaves on the sides. Irruption of another perpetual flow of images. At times wet and concrete, but liquid and intuitive. He says he will be back soon. Lost in the fog of his own free will. He transitions from the need for closeness with another, to estrangement, remoteness and social isolation. On the next shore, a constant mimesis creeps in. In Lope's portraits, two Monsters of Nature appear. The difference between a lair and a den is that the former is a place you make your own, while the latter is a place that makes you. I hope this is the last of these dreams. Other people's memories. At my cousin's house, the one who woke up screaming on a stormy night. Everyone knew what was wrong with him, except him. He had developed hyperacusis: he started hearing dogs barking and the neighbor's conversations; then, the roots of a tree spreading underground (according to him, the most painful thing was when the roots grew out of the ground). In the end, the noises blended together in his head as a noisy, foreign thought, a biome. The plastic chairs and their Coca-Cola logo. An endless stake through the nerves. Anticucho. Children in rehabilitation made a ramp with a log and a ruffled metal sheet. Conversation on the service stairs: when his house keys were returned to him, the bathroom was riddled with holes. "It was as if a mouse didn't know which one to hide in." Los días de los Diaz are slow. A group of introverts, interacting only as much as necessary, is more interesting. My grandfather would crush spiders and then put them in his mouth. My sister said, "Soon I'll be gone and you'll

dijo: “Pronto me iré y volverás a estar solo. No levantaremos baldosas para ver gusanos o chanchitos de tierra”. Despidieron a mi hermano por mostrarle sus propios puntos lagrimales a sus alumnos. ¿Qué es lo excitante al final de un poema, sino el deseo de continuarlo? Escribir de manera que la palabra tenga un leve recuerdo de sí misma. Encontrar un lugar de confianza en cual dejar a un niño. El hospital en que nació mi padre sigue bajo un escorial. Una sombra se acerca hasta mi mano como un perro.

be alone again. We won't be picking up tiles to look for worms or roly polies." My brother was fired for showing his tear ducts to his students. What is most exciting at the end of a poem but the desire to continue it? To write in such a way that the word has a faint memory of itself. To find a trustworthy place to leave a child. The hospital where my father was born is still under a slag heap. A shadow approaches my hand like a dog.

Translator's Note

Zoe Engels nació en un suburbio cerca de Chicago, Illinois, en 1998. Se tituló de Literatura con Escritura Creativa y Asuntos Internacionales, con un *minor* en Español, de la Universidad de Washington en San Luis. Actualmente, vive en Nueva York mientras obtiene su Maestría en Bellas Artes en Escritura Creativa de No ficción y Traducción Literaria en la Universidad de Columbia.

El texto de Zoe es de no ficción y una de mis principales preocupaciones fue mantener la “hibridez” del texto original, en que cuesta diferenciar si se está leyendo algo de ficción o no. Esto es algo que Zoe hace habitualmente en sus escritos; en este, específicamente, fue una decisión consciente para representar la realidad del protagonista, ya que este no siempre puede diferenciar qué es real o no.

La escritura de Zoe cumple excepcionalmente lo que llamamos “forma y contenido”, ya que a través de palabras muy bien elegidas logra crear imágenes, símbolos y conceptos muy profundos. A menudo utiliza frases bastante largas con palabras que, además de sonar bien, son utilizadas perfectamente. Intenté cuidar muchísimo ambos aspectos, por un lado, mantener la formalidad, o incluso solemnidad, del lenguaje cuando correspondía, y por otro, que las imágenes creadas no se perdieran en la traducción. Para lograr esto, aprendí una cantidad considerable de palabras nuevas, tanto en inglés como en español.

Volviendo al tema del largo de las frases, fue un desafío lograr mantenerlas del mismo largo y que fluyeran igual a como fluyen en inglés, sin salir del tono de voz original. Utilicé palabras que entraran en el mismo “contexto”

dependiendo de la formalidad de las oraciones, y también incluí algunas palabras o conceptos ligados al habla chilena, que es con la que me siento más cómoda. Además, habían dichos en inglés que no contaban con una traducción concreta en español, así que debí inventar algunas frases equivalentes.

Por último, quería destacar los temas que son tratados en el texto, donde hay diversas reflexiones sobre qué es la realidad y sobre la desconexión con esta. Hay instantes de tristeza, angustia, desesperación e incluso ira en el escrito, que tiene momentos muy intensos, e hice un esfuerzo por intentar mantener esas voces.

El escrito de Zoe es realmente destacable en cuanto a sus temáticas y cómo estas son abordadas y descritas. Trabajar con ella en su traducción fue una experiencia realmente enriquecedora.

ZOE MAYA ENGELS

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR (EXCERPT)

They send the Bulgarian on vacation.

Yes, Raisa Bronstein and her daughter, Inessa, take a shot in the dark, and it works. They decide to pack the nonexistent man's metaphorical bags and ship him off to Timbuktu. That is, they send him to Bulgaria and make him out to be some sort of glorified vigneron, ready for the world's carafes to brim with his own ambrosial product. They likely do not know that Bulgaria had been the world's fourth-largest wine exporting country in the 1980s. They likely do not know, with the fall of communism, land for grape-planting was dramatically reduced, constricting Bulgaria's wine industry like a Boa coiled around its prey. And they likely do not know that these days, wine production in Bulgaria is again on the rise.

So, we could say that the Bulgarian's departure comes at the most opportune moment. *Carpe diem*. It's time to make wine. We could say these things, but they're only half-truths.

The news of the Bulgarian's departure is delivered to Mark Bronstein when he is again standing, statuesque, in the center of the bathroom (that is, in his shared space with the Bulgarian) so that only half of his frame is captured in the mirror. This time, perhaps all too conveniently for Raisa's intents and purposes, Mark does not face the mirror. It is unclear why, but he stares at the toilet instead. It sits just two feet across from the mirror and another two feet to the left, so one might imagine that the world in the mirror and the world in the remainder of the bathroom are separate, but, for Mark Bronstein, they now seem to have converged into one. Just an oblique space filled with the shadows of people who are not there and have never been there—a space where invisible friends come and go, leaving only Mark Bronstein behind. Always behind.

He stares at the toilet as his wife delivers the news of the Bulgarian's departure. She stands in the doorway, out of reach of the mirror's threats. As a symbol of false composure, her hands are folded firmly in front of her, demure and intentional. But inside her hands is a thin red string, scrunched up like a wad of paper. At some point, she likely wore the string as a bracelet around her left wrist, knotted seven times as is the Kabbalist Jewish tradition, even though she is not a

traducido del inglés por
ESPERANZA DÍAZ

EXTRACTO DE “EL HOMBRE EN EL ESPEJO”

Mandan al Búlgaro de vacaciones.

Sí, Raisa Bronstein y su hija, Inessa, se arriesgan y funciona. Deciden empacar los bolsos metafóricos del hombre inexistente y enviarlo a Tombuctú. Es decir, lo envían a Bulgaria y lo convierten en una especie de viñatero enaltecido, listo para que los decantadores del mundo se rebalsen con su propio producto ambrosíaco. Probablemente no saben que Bulgaria había sido el cuarto mayor exportador de vino en los 80s. Probablemente no saben que, con la caída del comunismo, la tierra para plantar uvas fue dramáticamente reducida, comprimiendo la industria vitivinícola de Bulgaria como una Boa enrollada alrededor de su presa. Y probablemente no saben que estos días la producción de vino en Bulgaria está nuevamente en auge.

Entonces, podríamos decir que la retirada del Búlgaro llega en el momento más oportuno. *Carpe diem*. Es hora de hacer vino. Podríamos decir estas cosas, pero solo son verdades a medias.

La noticia sobre la retirada del Búlgaro es entregada a Mark Bronstein cuando está de pie, como una estatua, nuevamente en el centro del baño (es decir, en su espacio compartido con el Búlgaro), por lo que solo la mitad de su silueta se refleja en el espejo. Esta vez, quizás demasiado convenientemente para las intenciones y propósitos de Raisa, Mark no encara el espejo. No está claro por qué, pero en su lugar mira hacia el wáter. Está a medio metro del espejo y a otro medio metro a la izquierda, por lo que uno podría imaginar que el mundo en el espejo y el mundo en el resto del baño están separados, pero, para Mark Bronstein, parece que ahora se convirtieron en uno solo. Es solo un espacio oblicuo rebosando con las sombras de personas que no están y nunca han estado ahí, un espacio donde los amigos invisibles van y vienen, dejando solo a Mark Bronstein detrás. Siempre detrás.

Está mirando el wáter mientras su esposa le entrega las noticias de la partida del Búlgaro. Ella se queda de pie en la puerta, fuera del alcance de las amenazas del espejo.

Kabbalist herself. In ancient Jewish rituals, it's said that women would tie a red string around the tomb of Rachel and knot it seven times to endow the string with protective energy and good luck. Rachel, as the Bible story goes, was Jacob's favorite wife, and she gave birth to his favorite son, Joseph. She died during childbirth; her second son, Benjamin, miraculously survived. She represents the Jewish Mother, the Matriarch, which is said to be why, after praying around her tomb, the women would then remove the string from the tomb and cut it into bracelet-sized portions to be worn on their left wrists—the side of the body that is supposed to receive blessings and abundance—as a charm for fertility and for protection from the evil eye.

Yet, in theory, the red string should never leave your wrist—not if it is expected to work. Cut it off and ruin the protection; it's also probably bad luck. If it falls off too soon, that's a bad omen. But if it falls off due to natural wear, often after months or even years, you're in the clear. It means the bracelet has done its job—has reached its maximum evil-absorbing capacity and can no longer hold any more negativity. It is time for a new bracelet. No need to mourn the old bracelet, no need for some sort of ritual burial. Out with the old, on with the new.

Out with the old... is that how Raisa Bronstein feels? Does she clutch the red string, crumpled up like an unwanted page from a notebook (surely, that must negatively impact the bracelet's protective energy), to symbolize the out-with-the-old of the Bulgarian's departure? And what will be the new? She cannot expect Mark Bronstein to lose one friend and not make a new one. She cannot expect her husband to see only what she sees and nothing more. And why does she hold the red string in her hands like rosary beads? Has the string fallen off—old and useless? Is it a new string that she has simply yet to put on? What's the point? Maybe there is none. Maybe she just needs something to hold onto, something soft to run between her fingers so that she doesn't have to be fully present with her husband. Maybe she, too, only wants to be half-present in the world, just like her husband. Maybe she doesn't need to tie the red string into seven knots because she's already tied up in knots, pulled in different directions and living each day on repeat like a red string wound round and round an ancient tomb.

“He's leaving now,” she tells him coolly in Russian. Her voice rings out softly, like chimes in a gentle breeze. “He has a family. Responsibilities. I don't think he'll be back.”

“Where?” Mark manages to ask as he stares, blankly, at the toilet. His voice sounds stuck, muddled, as if the sound has been velcroed in him and cannot escape. He does not cry, but maybe he should.

Raisa does not take her eyes off her husband. She looks at him with pity

Como señal de falsa compostura, sus manos están cruzadas firmemente en frente de ella, con recato y propósito. Pero al interior de sus manos hay un delgado hilo rojo, arrugado como una bolita de papel. En algún momento, es probable que usara el hilo como una pulsera alrededor de su muñeca izquierda, anudado siete veces como en la tradición Judía Cabalista, aunque ella no fuera Cabalista. En los rituales judíos antiguos, se decía que las mujeres ataban un hilo rojo alrededor de la tumba de Raquel y lo anudaban siete veces para infundir el cordón de energía protectora y buena suerte. Raquel, según cuenta la Biblia, era la esposa favorita de Jacob, y dio a luz al hijo favorito de este, José. Ella murió en el parto; su segundo hijo, Benjamín, sobrevivió milagrosamente. Ella representa a la Madre Judía, la Matriarca, por lo que se dice que, después de rezar alrededor de su tumba, las mujeres sacaban el hilo y lo cortaban en porciones del tamaño de una pulsera para usarlas en sus muñecas izquierdas (el lado del cuerpo que se cree recibe bendiciones y abundancia) como amuleto para la fertilidad y protección contra el mal de ojo.

Sin embargo, en teoría, el hilo rojo nunca debería salir de tu muñeca, no si se espera que funcione. Córtalo y arruinas la protección; probablemente también da mala suerte. Si se desprende muy pronto, es un mal augurio. Sin embargo, si se desprende por el desgaste natural, a menudo después de meses o incluso años, estás librado. Significa que la pulsera hizo su trabajo, ha alcanzado su capacidad máxima de absorber el mal y ya no puede contener más negatividad. Es momento de una pulsera nueva. No hay necesidad de estar de luto por la pulsera antigua ni de un tipo de ritual funerario. Fuera lo viejo, bienvenido lo nuevo.

Fuera lo Viejo... ¿así se siente Raisa Bronstein? ¿Acaso agarra el hilo rojo, arrugado como la página indeseada de un cuaderno (seguramente afectando en forma negativa la energía protectora de la pulsera), para simbolizar el fuera-lo-viejo de la partida del Búlgaro? ¿Y qué sería lo nuevo? No puede pretender que Mark Bronstein pierda un amigo y no haga uno nuevo. No puede esperar que su esposo solo vea lo que ella ve y nada más ¿Y por qué toma el hilo rojo en sus manos como las cuentas de un rosario? ¿Acaso el viejo e inútil cordón se ha desprendido? ¿O se trata de un nuevo hilo que no se ha puesto todavía? ¿Y para qué? Quizás para nada. Quizás solo necesita algo a lo que aferrarse, algo suave que recorrer con sus dedos para no tener que estar totalmente presente con su marido. Quizás ella, también, solo quiere estar semi presente en el mundo, tal como su esposo. Quizás no necesita hacer siete nudos en el hilo porque ella misma está anudada, tirada en diferentes direcciones y viviendo cada día una y otra vez como un hilo rojo enrollado alrededor de una tumba antigua.

— Se va ahora — le dice fríamente en ruso. Su voz sale suavemente, como

and love and remorse and an undercurrent of resentment that embeds itself like a tattoo into the faint wrinkles around her eyes.

“To Bulgaria. Home. To grow grapes and make wine. He’ll be happy there with his wife and family.”

Silence fills the bathroom. Raisa unclasps her hands and runs the red string between her fingers, weaving it around each finger as if she is trying to escape into a labyrinth—to get lost in it.

The only noise is the sound of Mark’s labored breathing, caused in part by the Parkinson’s Disease that plagues him and in part by the emotional blow he has just sustained. He stares at the toilet as if the toilet itself has transformed into an airport terminal, but the only thing terminal about the bathroom is Mark Bronstein’s condition. He is watching a movie that only he can see. He stares at the toilet and waits patiently for the Bulgarian’s wife to follow her husband aboard the plane. He stares at the toilet and waits in vain; he cannot spot her. Where has she gone? He concludes that she left a few days prior to prepare the house in Bulgaria for her husband’s arrival. She is gone, and her loss will not be as palpable as that of his friend and his shadow, the Bulgarian.

Sure, after his prior outburst at the man in the mirror, maybe one wouldn’t expect Mark Bronstein to be upset by the Bulgarian’s absence, but he is upset, and he is offended. The Bulgarian never divulged his knack for winemaking to Mark, who cannot help but see this as a major snub and gaping hole in their friendship. They *were* like brothers. Sure, they fight, but how dare his dear friend keep such a talent—and such a big life change—from Mark Bronstein? The sting of betrayal runs deep. If Mark Bronstein’s hands worked like they used to, and if he knew where his wife hid the wine, he likely would reach for the bottle and glug away his sorrows.

He is suffering from the burns of abandonment. He can’t escape the sense of loss that enraptures him as he watches the Bulgarian man walk onto the toilet-turned-tarmac, a pile of old, beat-up suitcases in tow, ready to board the plane to his new life. Perhaps Mark Bronstein wants to go, too. Nobody ever asks him and, deep down, it seems he knows that such an invitation will never arrive. He only wishes it would.

The plane leaves the runway, and the man in the mirror departs just as suddenly as he had arrived, disappearing into the clouds.

It remains a mystery why Mark Bronstein is so easily able to believe his wife’s story about the man in the mirror. The mere utterance of the Bulgarian’s departure seems to switch off a light in Mark’s mind, and the man in the mirror is gone. Poof. Sayonara. *Enjoy your new life.* But where was Mark’s new life? Why

campanadas en una brisa delicada. — Tiene una familia. Responsabilidades. No creo que vuelva.

— ¿Dónde? — Mark logra preguntar mientras mira, en blanco, el wáter. Su voz suena estancada, difusa, como si el sonido se le hubiese pegado con velcro y fuera incapaz de salir. No llora, pero quizás debería.

Raisa no aparta la mirada de su esposo. Lo mira con lástima y amor y remordimiento y un trasfondo de resquemor que se impregna como un tatuaje dentro de las finas arrugas alrededor de sus ojos.

— A Bulgaria. A casa. A plantar parras y hacer vino. Será feliz ahí con su esposa y su familia.

El silencio llena el baño. Raisa separa sus manos y enreda el hilo rojo entre sus dedos, pasándolo por cada uno como si estuviese intentando escapar hacia un laberinto, perderse en él.

El único sonido es la respiración dificultosa de Mark, causada en parte por el Parkinson que lo azota y en parte por el golpe emocional que acaba de recibir. Está mirando el wáter fijamente como si el propio wáter se hubiese transformado en un terminal de aeropuerto, pero la única cosa terminal de ese baño es el estado de Mark Bronstein. Está viendo una película que solo él puede ver. Se queda mirando el wáter y espera pacientemente a que la esposa del Búlgaro siga a su marido a bordo del avión. Mira fijamente al wáter y espera en vano; no la puede divisar ¿Dónde se ha ido? Llega a la conclusión de que se fue algunos días antes a preparar la casa en Bulgaria para la llegada de su esposo. Se ha ido, y su falta no será tan palpable como la de su amigo y su sombra, el Búlgaro.

Claro, después de su anterior exabrupto contra el hombre en el espejo, quizás uno no esperaría que Mark Bronstein estuviera molesto por la ausencia del Búlgaro, pero está molesto, y está ofendido. El Búlgaro nunca divulgó su habilidad de hacer vino a Mark, quien no podía evitar ver esto como un gran desaire y un enorme vacío en su amistad. Eran como hermanos. Sí, pelean, pero, ¿cómo se atreve su querido amigo a ocultar un talento como ese (y tal cambio de vida) a Mark Bronstein? El dolor de la traición cala profundo. Si las manos de Mark Bronstein funcionaran como antes, y si supiera donde su esposa escondía el vino, probablemente tomaría la botella y se bebería sus lamentos.

Está sufriendo las quemaduras del abandono. No puede escapar la sensación de pérdida que lo invade al observar al Búlgaro caminar hacia el wáter-convertido-en-pista, con un montón de deterioradas y viejas maletas a cuestas, listo para abordar el

was he stuck in the damn house, talking to hallucinatory subjects and objects as if he didn't have any real family around him? And what's this thing called "reality" even mean, anyways? It seems to me that it's just this thing that we've constructed to give our lives a shape, a sense of direction; it's just this thing that we've constructed because we're so adamant about finding a purpose, as if we can't merely exist and be satisfied doing so. Why can't existing be enough?

It's fucked up.

Mark Bronstein is my grandfather, and when I look at him, I just want to cry or scream or both at the same time. When I look at him, I see a shadow of my grandfather. I see the man in the mirror. I see a man who is only half-present—a mere reflection of himself. When I see him, I pity him, and I love him, and I just want to help put him out of his misery. I don't mention his hallucinations to him. I acknowledge their presence when he points to figures that are not there, turning the hallucinations into something tangible. I do not make him feel as though he is the only one who sees. That is, except for the one time when he started to scream because he thought I slammed my fingers in the closet door, but I was standing on the other side of the room; I grabbed my fingers as if to make sure they were still there and then gently tried to draw his attention away from the closet door and the invisible fingers, breaking.

I once took a class on the subject of pain in literature. My professor, an astute and balding 70-something British man with a satisfying accent and dog named Basil, shared with the class on Zoom: "I told my children, that if my mind goes, let me go. Let me throw myself into the ocean and drown. When my mind goes, I don't want to live."

My eyes widened like in those old-time cartoons, and I stared at my screen in shock and disbelief and agreement. He could sense it. "Yes, Zoe," he said as he nodded. "Yes."

You get it, he seemed to tell me.

I get it.

But my grandfather isn't going to throw himself into the ocean, and we wouldn't let him anyways, no matter how much he insists in his increasingly rare and ever-fleeting moments of clarity that he wants to end it all and no matter how much we want to save him from himself—from his mind. So instead of letting him be free and one with the earth, it feels like we've made my grandfather into a prisoner, and there's something about taking the hallucinations away that irks me, like we're shackling him to a reality that he does not want and that he is

avión hacia su nueva vida. Quizás Mark Bronstein también quiere ir. Nadie nunca se lo ofrece y, en el fondo, pareciera que él sabe que tal invitación jamás llegará. Solo desearía que sí.

El avión despega de la pista, y el hombre en el espejo se va tan rápido como llegó, desapareciendo entre las nubes.

Sigue siendo un misterio por qué Mark Bronstein fue capaz de creer tan fácilmente la historia de su esposa acerca del hombre en el espejo. La mera verbalización de la partida del Búlgaro parece haber apagado una luz en la mente de Mark, y el hombre en el espejo, *puf*, desaparece. *Sayonara. Disfruta tu nueva vida.* Pero, ¿dónde estaba la nueva vida de Mark? ¿Por qué estaba pegado en esta maldita casa? ¿Por qué sigue conversando con sujetos y objetos alucinados como si no estuviera rodeado por una familia de verdad? Y, por lo demás ¿qué significa esta cosa llamada “realidad”? Me parece que es algo construido solo para dar forma a nuestras vidas, un sentido de dirección; construimos ese “algo” porque nos empeñamos en encontrar propósito; como si existir simplemente no fuera satisfactorio ¿Acaso existir no es suficiente? Qué mierda.

Mark Bronstein es mi abuelo, y cuando lo miro, solo quiero llorar o gritar o ambas al mismo tiempo. Cuando lo miro, veo la sombra de mi abuelo. Veo al hombre en el espejo. Veo a un hombre que solo está semi presente, un mero reflejo de él mismo. Cuando lo miro, siento lástima y amor por él, y solo quiero ayudarlo a salir de su miseria. No le menciono sus alucinaciones. Cuando señala figuras que no están ahí, reconozco esas presencias, convierto a las alucinaciones en algo tangible. No lo hago sentir que es el único que ve. O sea, excepto por esa vez en que empezó a gritar porque pensó que me apreté los dedos con la puerta del clóset, pero yo estaba parada en el lado opuesto de la pieza; tomé mis dedos como para asegurarme que seguían ahí, y después, gentilmente, intenté desviar su atención de la puerta del clóset y los dedos invisibles, rompiéndose.

Una vez tomé una clase sobre el tema del sufrimiento en la literatura. Mi profesor, un astuto británico de unos 70 que se estaba quedando pelado y tenía un acento agradable y un perro llamado Basil, compartió con la clase de Zoom: “Le dije a mis hijos, si mi mente se va, déjenme partir. Dejen que me tire al océano y me ahogue. Cuando mi mente se vaya, no quiero seguir viviendo.”

Mis ojos se abrieron tan grandes como en esos monitos animados antiguos, y miré

constantly trying to escape. The man in the mirror gets to be and do more than Mark Bronstein will ever be able to do again.

Sure, the nonexistent Bulgarian man is now an exile, pushed out of the mirror by two desperate women—my mother and my grandmother—who just want to uncover some semblance of the “real” Mark Bronstein in a now very sick man’s body. Not to mention that they’re afraid of what he could do if the hallucinations get worse. We all are. If the Bulgarian man decides to set the house on fire or shatter the mirror, will Mark Bronstein decide to do it, too? Will he help find the match to start the flames or the hammer to break the glass? Will he agree to the seven years of bad luck? What difference do seven more miserable years make, anyways?

A cynic might say that the Bulgarian man is not free because he’s subject to the whims of a matriarchy, but that feels like a stretch. The Bulgarian man gets to leave the mirror. Period. Full stop. It doesn’t matter whether he’s forced out or not. He walks free, unscathed. A miracle. The Bulgarian is a figment of Mark Bronstein’s imagination, and he’s more than that all at once. He is free to live in a narrative outside the mirror—a matter that utterly outweighs the pitfalls of the fact that his narrative is constantly being constructed and reconstructed for him; Raisa and Inessa successfully craft an actual life for him, one that extends far beyond the mirror and digs its roots into Bulgarian soil. But they can’t do the same for Mark Bronstein, and maybe that’s what really eats away at them; no matter how much they search for the Mark that was, they are confronted only with the Mark that is. It bothers me, too... that cruel irony: The man in the mirror is free, and Mark Bronstein—my grandfather—is not. The man in the mirror is who Mark wants to be, unfettered by his body. When he looks in the mirror, maybe he refuses to see and cannot see himself because, if his body can’t be free from the Parkinson’s Disease, his reflection might as well be. Part of him must be let free, even if it’s just his reflection. The Parkinson’s Disease Dementia comes as a sort of relief; his imagination is all that he really has left.

a mi pantalla concordando, pero en shock y desconcierto. Él lo podía percibir. “Sí, Zoe,” dijo asintiendo. “Sí.”

Lo entiendes, parecía que me dijera.

Lo entiendo.

Pero mi abuelo no se va a tirar al océano, y tampoco lo dejaríamos, sin importar cuanto insista en sus cada vez más escasos y siempre fugaces momentos de lucidez en que quiere terminarlo todo y sin importar cuanto queramos salvarlo de sí mismo, de su mente. Así que en vez de dejarlo ser libre y uno con la tierra, se siente como si hubiésemos convertido a mi abuelo en un prisionero, y hay algo sobre quitarle las alucinaciones que me irrita, como si lo estuviéramos encadenando a una realidad que no desea y de la que constantemente está intentando escapar. El hombre en el espejo llegará a ser y hacer más de lo que ya nunca logrará Mark Bronstein.

Claro, el Búlgaro inexistente está exiliado, expulsado del espejo por dos mujeres desesperadas (mi mamá y mi abuela) quienes solo quieren desvelar algo de la semblanza verdadera de Mark Bronstein, ahora en el cuerpo de un hombre enfermo. Eso sin mencionar que temen a su reacción si las alucinaciones empeoran. Todos tememos. Si el Búlgaro decide incendiar la casa o romper el espejo, ¿Mark Bronstein también decidirá hacerlo? ¿Lo ayudará a encontrar los fósforos para encender las llamas o el martillo para romper el vidrio? ¿Aceptará los siete años de mala suerte? En todo caso, ¿qué diferencia hacen otros siete miserables años?

Un pesimista diría que el Búlgaro no es libre porque está expuesto a los caprichos de un matriarcado, pero eso parece excesivo. El Búlgaro puede dejar el espejo. Punto. Ya está. No importa si lo echan o no. Camina libre, intacto. Es un milagro. El Búlgaro es un producto de la imaginación de Mark Bronstein, y es más que eso a la vez. Es libre de vivir en una narración fuera del espejo, un detalle que supera demasiado los enredos de que su historia sea constantemente construida y reconstruida para él; Raisa e Inessa logran crearle una auténtica vida, una que se extiende mucho más allá del espejo y echa sus raíces en la tierra de Bulgaria. Pero no pueden hacer lo mismo por Mark Bronstein, y quizás eso es lo que realmente las carcome; sin importar cuanto busquen al Mark que fue, solo encuentran al Mark que es. También me molesta... esa ironía cruel: El hombre en el espejo es libre, y Mark Bronstein (mi abuelo) no. El hombre en el espejo es quien Mark quiere ser, sin las trabas de su cuerpo. Cuando mira en el espejo, quizás se rehúsa a ver y no puede verse a sí mismo porque, si su cuerpo no puede librarse del Parkinson, su reflejo sí debería lograrlo. Parte de él debe estar libre, aunque solo sea su reflejo. La demencia del Parkinson llega como una suerte de alivio, su imaginación es lo único que realmente le queda.

Translator's Note

Esperanza Díaz Madina was born in Rancagua, Chile (2000). Currently, she is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Creative Literature at the Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago, Chile. Like the other young adult fiction writers that she admires, including Rainbow Rowell, Angie Thomas, Jennifer Nevin, and John Green, Esperanza's writing is filled with whimsy and quick wit. In this piece, titled "00:00," Esperanza's characters are fresh and refreshing, not only through their relatability but also their sincerity and honesty. That is to say, our narrator always tells it like it is.

Esperanza makes her characters feel like real teenagers as she puts their thoughts on the page. Our narrator, Sofi, speaks casually and, in many instances, with a stream-of-consciousness monologue. This style is one of many attributes that made the piece fun yet challenging to translate. I wanted to maintain the sense of intimacy between the narrator and reader—as if a friend were telling you, the reader, a story. To do so, I concentrated on voice. Sofi speaks casually, but there are moments when she slips into a higher register, as if she is trying to sound more “grown-up.” I worked to incorporate words, like “gestures” and “wanderings,” without their feeling out of place within the larger framework of the piece.

A second feature in both the narration and dialogue is the use of words specific to Chile, like “po” and “cachai.” It was an enjoyable challenge as I hadn't heard some of these words before and they can be difficult to define. For instance, “pucha” can mean “oh no,” “wow,” “bummer,” “darn it,” “jeez,” etc. depending on the context. Esperanza and I spoke at length, too, about Chilean swear words and how “intense” each one is to determine their English equivalents. I've tried to maintain the

resonances of each of these Chile-specific words within this translation.

Esperanza is also highly conscious of the ways that language, especially Spanish, is gendered, which is particularly relevant as she avoids a cliché ending for the piece and shows her characters just beginning to explore their sexualities. In one exchange, Basti uses the word “amigos,” which Sofi corrects to the gender neutral “amigues.” Because the English “friends” isn’t gendered in the way “amigos” is, I’ve opted for “bros” and then “besties” and then “homies” in this quick dialogue sequence to show that Basti and Sofi are alluding to the nuances and importance of word choice.

The title, too, shows the importance of word choice—or lack thereof. The numbers and colon, 00:00, indicate midnight or a new year. Because the 24-hour clock is not predominantly used in the United States as in Chile or elsewhere, I considered translating the title to “Midnight,” “12am,” or “A New Year.” However, what makes “00:00” so effective as a title is its wordlessness; the repetition of zero creates a sense of urgency, as if time were running out, and suggests new beginnings, a blank slate. By preserving the title of “00:00,” my aim is to avoid oversimplification, much like Esperanza’s writing avoids oversimplifying teenage relationships, emotions, and intimacy. Ultimately, we walk away from the piece ready to reflect upon its contents and its characters—a quality I hope comes through in this translation.

It was a joy and honor to work closely with Esperanza throughout the translation process.

ESPERANZA DÍAZ

00:00

Nooo, me puse mal el labial. A ver, ¿y si...? Me paso un dedo tratando de borrar lo que hice y queda mucho peor. Pucha, siempre pasa lo mismo. Y lo sigo haciendo. Saco desmaquillante y algodón para limpiar y empezar de nuevo. Aplico el labial. Sí, ahora sí, increíble. Es un labial rojo demasiado bueno, onda nada que coma ni tome me lo va a sacar. Sonríe al espejo y creo que se ve bien, en verdad nunca distingo cuando el labial me queda “bien” o, parejo, por decirlo de alguna forma. No sé si las demás personas se fijarán tanto, tampoco. Pero siempre reviso.

El labial y el vestido negro se ven muy bien. Me gusta. El vestido es corto, ¡y tiene bolsillos! Por fin tengo un vestido con bolsillos, siempre he querido hacer el gestito. Ese cuando te dicen “que lindo tu vestido” y dices, “gracias, ¡y mira, tiene bolsillos!” entonces te metes las manos en los bolsillos y te inclinas un poquito. Me encanta la idea. Ojalá hoy día me lo digan muchas veces. En la noche tenemos la fiesta de año nuevo con mis compañeras, es primera vez que no ceno con mis papás. Antes cenaba con ellos, y después de las 12 salía con mis amigas. Pero este año me vine a Santiago a estudiar, y pucha, todas lo iban a pasar aquí. Estamos en clases todavía porque nos fuimos a paro, entonces no sé, pensamos que era más fácil cenar entre nosotras. Igual me da un poco de pena, cuando les dije a mis papás dijeron que estaba bien, pero obvio que igual se pusieron tristes.

Por otro lado, me emociona un poco. Cenar con mis amigas para año nuevo, no sé, suena a panorama de gente grande. Aunque está claro que no soy tan grande si pienso en cosas como “panorama de gente grande”; pero es que esto de crecer es todo un poco raro. Hasta cierto punto es todo fingir.

En fin, ojalá el otro año ser adulta de verdad. No una persona de 19 que es más o menos como una adolescente, o no sé, ¿post adolescente?, pero en definitiva no una adulta,

translated from the spanish
ZOE MAYA ENGELS

00:00

Oh no, I screwed up my lipstick. Let's see... what if—I rub it with my finger and try to erase my mess, but that just makes it worse, way worse. Darn. This always happens. And I keep doing it. I grab my makeup remover and a cotton pad—time to clean up and start over. I reapply the lipstick. Yes... this time, yes. Incredible. It's a kick-ass red lipstick—the kind that won't come off no matter what I eat or drink. I smile at the mirror and think it looks good, but I can never really tell when I've put a lipstick on right, like perfectly in the lines and stuff. I'm also not sure if other people pay this much attention. But I always check carefully.

The lipstick and black dress look amazing. I like this look. The dress is short. And it has pockets! Finally, a dress with pockets. I've always wanted to do that thing, that little gesture, where they tell you, "Your dress is so lovely," and you say, "Thank you. And look! It has pockets!" and then you stick your hands in your pockets and lean forward a smidge. I love the concept. I hope people will say that to me a bunch. Tonight, my friends and I are having a New Year's party, and it's the first New Year's Eve I won't be eating dinner with my parents. I always used to eat dinner with them and then go out with my friends after midnight. This year is different because I'm studying in Santiago and, well, all my friends are gonna be here for New Years. My holiday vacation was delayed because most of us students went on strike, so we're still having classes, and then, oh I dunno, it just seemed easier to have dinner here together, without my parents. But I do still feel guilty because even though my parents said it was okay when I told them about this plan, I could tell it made them sad, naturally.

On the flipside, I'm kinda thrilled. Having dinner with my friends to celebrate the New Year—it just sounds, I dunno, like a grown-up event. Even though it's clear that I'm not that grown-up if I think of things as "grown-up events." It's just that this whole process of growing up is a little strange. In some ways, it's all a game of pretend.

Anyway, I hope I'll be a real adult in the new year. Not some 19-year-old that's

jugando a ser mayor. Igual de repente me pregunto eso, si la mentalidad de adolescente se pasa en algún momento. Si las adultas dejan de ser conscientes de que tan “de grandes” son las cosas que hacen, y solo las hacen, sin pensar.

Tocan la puerta, se interrumpe (casi) por completo mi divagación mental. Estoy casi segura que es el amor de mi vida, el Bastián. Bueno, el amor de mi vida, pero en amistad. Ya tiene llaves de mi departamento. Nos hicimos amigos en la media, estudiando para la PSU, y entre tanto estrés nos volvimos confidentes. Es de región como yo, y les dos nos vinimos a Santiago. Ahí la confianza aumentó mucho más, nos entendíamos caleta respecto a demasiadas cosas en verdad. Nos vemos todos los días casi; de hecho, tenemos un día mega hiper reservado en caso de no poder los otros: la hora de almuerzo de los jueves. Nos hemos recorrido todo Santiago, de hecho, ni se imaginan el lugar cuático que fuimos el otro día, era en...

- ¡Sofi, ya po! ¿Puedo pasar? – Chucha, ni me doy cuenta cuando me quedo en nada, pensando.
- ¡Sí, *sorry*, pasa no más!

Entra el Bastián, usando un pantalón de vestir negro y camisa blanca, se ve bien. Nunca lo veo con ropa así en verdad.

- Oye, que te ves linda. – me dice.
- ¡Y tú! O sea, wow. – se ríe y me va abrazar. Siempre que me abraza me levanta un poquito o quedo en puntillas, porque hay 30 centímetros de diferencia.
- Oye, Sofi, ¿me podis peinar?
- Sí, sí, obvio, siéntate no más. – a este punto no sé si en verdad quiere que lo peine o es porque le gusta que le haga cariño en el pelo.

Se sienta en la cama mientras voy a buscar el cepillo y la crema para peinar. Me siento al lado de él y empiezo, primero le desenredo el pelo con los dedos; lo hago más rato del necesario, si soy honesta, porque a mí igual me gusta hacerle cariño en el pelo, nunca se lo voy a contar eso sí. Después de un rato con el cepillo y la cremita lo logro, ya hasta develé el gran misterio de cómo se logran dejar el pelo medio parado, pero que se vea natural.

- Ya, estamos. ¿Vamos? – le digo.

Llegamos al departamento de la Bea, que vive con la Lili, su polola. Ya hay un par de amigas, todas se ven increíbles como siempre. Dejo la lasaña que traje en la mesa

definitely not an adult, that's still more or less an adolescent—or, like a post-adolescent?—pretending to be a grown-up. Suddenly, I wonder if this adolescent mindset will ever pass and if adults ever stop thinking about how “grown-up” the things they do are and then actually do those things without a second thought.

The doorbell rings, and my mental wanderings are (almost) completely interrupted. I'm pretty sure it's the love of my life, Bastián. Well, the friend love of my life. He already has a set of keys to my apartment. We met in high school when we were both studying for the University Selection Test and, somehow, in the middle of all that stress, we got close. He's from outside Región Metropolitana like me, and we both moved to Santiago, where we got even closer, like partners in crime. We understand each other a ton about way too many things, honestly. Now we see each other almost every day. We even set aside time once a week for a super chill hangout in case the other days don't work out: lunchtime on Thursdays. We've explored all of Santiago. In fact, you wouldn't believe this dope place we went to the other day. It was in—

“Sofi, come on already! Can I come in?”

Damn it, I don't even realize when I'm getting lost in thought.

“Sí! Sorry. Come on in!”

Bastián enters, wearing black dress pants and a white dress shirt. He looks good. I really never see him dressed like this.

“Hey, you look pretty,” he tells me.

“You, too! I mean, wow.” He laughs and comes in for a hug. Every time he hugs me, he lifts me up a little bit or I end up on my tiptoes because he's a foot taller than me.

“Listen, Sofi, can you style my hair?”

“Yeah, of course, obviously. Take a seat.” He asks this so often that I don't know if he actually wants his hair done or if he just likes it when I show his hair affection.

He sits down on the bed while I go look for a brush and styling gel. I plop down next to him and start untangling his hair with my fingers. I keep it up for a lot longer than necessary because, if I'm being honest, I also like to play with his hair. I'd never say that to his face, of course. After some time with the brush and gel—success! I've even figured out the big secret of how guys get that spiky, faux-hawk hairstyle and still make it look natural.

“All set. Ready to go?” I ask.

y empezamos con los abrazos y los piropos; pude hacer el gestito del vestido. Después el Pato, el pololo de la Maite, dice que van a comprar un poco más de copete con el Fernando, el pololo de la Andrea. El Bastián los acompaña y apenas salen se giran todas hacia mí.

- Oye, ¿y el Bastián y tú qué onda? – me pregunta la Andrea. Se sienta en el sillón y todas nos vamos sentando alrededor.
- ¿Qué onda qué? – pregunto.
- Ay, Sofi, si tú cachai de lo que hablamos. – dice la Maite.
- Noo, si no pasa nada. Si me preguntaron hace un tiempo ya po. – les digo.
- Pero amiga, si no pasa na' es porque tú no atinai no más po. – dice la Bea.
- Ya, ¿qué onda ustedes? ¿han estado hablando del tema acaso? Amigas si con el Basti ya nos conocemos hace... no sé, ¿sus tres años? y nunca nada, si en verdad que no. – les digo, ya un poco chata del tema.
- Amiga, ya, pucha, sí, hemos hablado un poco del tema. Pero es que son demasiado tiernos, no podíamos, como, dejarlo pasar, ¿cachai? – dice la Maite.
- Sofi, es que sí, demasiado sí. Es que tú no te dai cuenta de los ojitos que pone cuando te mira. – dice la Bea.
- Es cierto eso. – dice Lili, que es bien callada. Demás lo hizo solo pa darle la razón a la Bea.
- Pucha, en volá tiene lindos ojos no más. – ya debo estar sonando un poco pesada, pero es que no me gusta este tema. Si el Basti y yo somos amigos, y buenos amigos.
- Ya amiga, si no te enojis. En verdad no lo decimos por molestarte. – la Andrea me toma la mano. – Es que amiga, en verdad pensamos que podrían tener algo bacán ustedes, por eso te lo decimos no más... Es que, weona, siento que ni mi pololo es tan lindo conmigo.
- Weona, yo siento que ni cagando veo tanto al mío como tú al Bastián. – agrega la Maite.
- Pucha, yo no puedo decir lo mismo, básicamente porque la Lili es increíble conmigo y porque vivo con ella. – dice la Bea y todas nos reímos un poquito; su polola le guiña el ojo y nos reímos de nuevo.

Después Lili me mira a los ojos, cosa que nunca hace, y asiente. Me quedo callada unos minutos.

We get to the apartment that Bea shares with her girlfriend, Lili. A few of our other friends are already there, and everyone looks incredible, as always. I leave the lasagna I brought on the table, and we start in on the hugs and compliments. I get to do that little gesture with my dress. Afterwards, Pato, Maite's boyfriend, says that he and Fernando, Andrea's boyfriend, are gonna buy some more booze. Bastián goes with them and they're barely out the door when all the girls turn and look at me.

"Ey, what's up with you and Bastián?" Andrea asks me. She sits down on the couch, and we all grab a spot around her.

"What's up with what?" I ask.

"Ugh, Sofi, you know what we're talking about," Maite says.

"Noo, nothing's going on. You guys already asked me about that a while ago," I tell them.

"Listen girl, if nothing's happening, well, it's only 'cause you haven't done anything about it," Bea says.

"Alright chicas, what's going on? I guess you've all been talking about this? Guys, Basti and I met like, I don't know... three years ago? And nothing—never. Honestly, nada," I tell them, already a bit sick of the conversation.

"Girl, ok ok. Yeah, so maybe we've talked about it a little. You guys are just all over the place with your PDAs. We can't, like, let it slide, ya know?" Maite says.

"Sofi, it's just ... well, yeah. Over-the-top, for sure. You don't notice those googly eyes he has whenever he looks at you," Bea says.

"That's true," Lili, the quiet one, adds. I bet she's only chiming in to help Bea prove her point.

"Alright. Honestly, maybe he does have nice eyes. That's all." I must sound kinda annoyed at this point, but it's only 'cause I don't like the topic. Basti and I are friends—good friends.

"Fine, amiga don't get mad. We really aren't saying this to bug you," Andrea takes my hand. "Girl, we just think you guys could have something amazing. That's why we're telling you all this—really, that's it. I mean, I don't even think my boyfriend is that sweet with me."

"Dude, there's no way I see my guy half as much as you see Bastián," Maite adds.

"Well, I can't say the same... because Lili is incredible with me, and I live with

- Ya, pero, ¿están seguras de todo lo que me están diciendo? – todas asienten. – ya, bueno... pero, pucha, si fuera tan así como dicen, ¿qué hago, igual? Si en verdad nosotres nunca nada.
- Pucha que eris pava, Sofi. Y te lo digo con todo cariño amiga, pero estamos en año nuevo po. – me dice la Maite. La miro como “ya, ¿y?”, y estoy clara que la Andrea, su dupla dinámica, le va a complementar la idea. Y así pasa.
- A las 12 te lo agarrarai no más po.

Estaba intentando decir, o preguntar, algo más, pero se adelanta la Bea.

- Amiga, tú tranqui, nosotras vamos a ver todo.

Me quedo callada de nuevo. Era demasiada información de la nada, nunca habíamos hablado tanto de este tema, creo. Pero, ya, filo. Les asiento. Lili me guiña el ojo.

Después los chiquillos vuelven, llegan con la prima del Pato. Es preciosa, onda demasiado. Tiene el pelo morado y está con un enterito negro. Sabía que venía, pero antes de hoy no la conocía.

Nos sentamos a cenar, pero como que no estoy aquí por completo, estoy un poco aquí y un poco divagando en mi mente. Preguntándome hartas cosas igual, qué pasa si le doy un beso al Basti y él en verdad está ni ahí, ¿vamos a dejar de hablar? En serio no quiero dejar de hablar con él. O peor, seguimos hablando, pero se vuelve incómodo. No, chao, me muero.

Pero, por otra parte, ¿y si tienen razón mis amigas? ¿y si en verdad nos estamos perdiendo de algo lindo de pavos no más? En verdad que complicado. No voy a decir que nunca lo había pensado antes, pero era de mí para mí no más. Ahora es más, no sé, “real”.

Al fin llega el momento, se hizo eterno. Estamos afuera, en el balcón del departamento, esperando que den las 12. Después de esto vamos a ir a carretear aquí cerca. Ya. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. ¡Feliz año nuevo! Abrazo a todas mis amigas bien fuerte. Estoy emocionada de empezar el año con personitas tan increíbles. Abrazo a les pololes de mis amigas después, a ellos no tan fuerte. Y después veo a la Nati, así se llama la prima del Pato. Le doy un abrazo, demás que bien torpe. Al fin veo al Basti, que había quedado al otro extremo del balcón. Antes de acercarme a él, la Maite me agarra del brazo:

- Amiga, nos vamos a ir en el Uber con la Andrea, la Nati, el Fernando y el Pato. Las chiquillas van a ir a buscar algo a la conserjería para que las esperen y

her,” Bea says, and we all laugh a little. Lili winks at her, and we all start laughing again.

Then Lili looks me in the eyes, something she never does, and nods. I stay silent for a few minutes.

“Ok, but are you guys really sure about everything you’re saying?” Everyone nods. “Ok, well... dang, even if it’s like you guys say, what am I supposed to do? Honestly, we’ve never done or been anything—never ever.”

“Jeez, you’re so oblivious, Sofi, and I’m telling you this because I care. But it’s about to be New Year’s,” Maite says to me. I give her a look like, “Ok, and?” but then I’m certain that Andrea, Maite’s partner-in-crime, will back her up. And that’s what happens.

“All you have to do is latch on to him at midnight.”

I was trying to say or ask something else, but Bea cuts me off.

“Girl, you chill. We’ll be watching everything.”

I get quiet again. It’s too much information pulled out of thin air, and I don’t think we’d ever talked so much about this topic before. But, in the end, yeah whatever... I give them all a nod. Lili winks at me.

The guys come back later... with Pato’s cousin. She’s gorgeous—insanely hot. Her hair is dyed purple, and she’s wearing a black jumpsuit. I knew she was coming but had never met her before.

We sit down for dinner, and it’s like I’m not really there—I’m all over the place, rambling in my head and firing off a whole bunch of questions like, what happens if I give Basti a kiss and he’s totally not into it? Will we stop talking? Seriously, I don’t want to stop talking to him. Or worse—what if we keep talking, but it’s awkward. No, adiós, I’d die.

On the flipside, what if my friends are right? What if we really are missing out on something amazing just because we’re oblivious? Honestly, it’s all so complicated. I can’t say I never thought about it before, but it was just that—a thought in my head, just for me. Now it’s more, I don’t know, “real.”

The moment finally arrives, and it feels like it’s taken forever to get here. We’re outside, on the apartment balcony, waiting for midnight. Then we’re gonna head to

después se van con ellas, ¿dale? – asiento porque ya estoy tan nerviosa que no creo que le pueda hablar sin tartamudear. Me guiña el ojo.

Juro que en medio segundo el balcón queda vacío, mis amigas van saliendo y me hacen gestos de ánimo, yo creo que intentan ser disimuladas, pero eso lo hace mil veces peor. La Bea me tira hasta besitos po. Puta, ojalá el Bastián no las haya visto. Medio segundo después el departamento también queda vacío.

- Feliz año nuevo, Sofi. – me dice el Bastián acercándose.
- Feliz año nuevo, Basti. – También voy caminando hacia él, hasta que nos encontramos y nos damos un abrazo bien fuerte. Después logro poner los pies de nuevo en el piso, pero no nos separamos.
- Oye... en verdad que te ves muy hermosa hoy día.
- Gra-gracias. Tú igual te ves muy bien. – ya siento que me puse roja, puta la wea.

Nos estamos riendo un poco, bien bajito. Al menos no soy la única nerviosa. Lo miro a los ojos. Siento que agarra mi cintura un poco más fuerte, acercándose más. Llevo mis manos a su cara, para tomarla. ¡¡¡Conchetumare no puedo creer que esté pasando esto!!! Acerca su cara. Y pasa. Y siento... pucha, ¿nada?

A ver, no nada. No, no nada. Porque le tengo demasiado cariño, pero no sentí nada fuera de nuestra amistad. Nada distinto a cuando nos abrazamos, como si el beso hubiese sido, no sé, innecesario. Puta que la cagué, ¿qué le voy a decir ahora?

Nos separamos y estamos callades, mirando al piso. Nos miramos a los ojos y se nos escapa una carcajada al mismo tiempo. Ya, parece que pa él fue igual, menos mal.

- Oy, Basti, en verdad sorry. No sé bien que estaba pensando, es que mis amigas...
- No, no, si tranqui. – me interrumpe. – Si también me aweoné, es que los chiquillos igual me empezaron a decir cosas, y no sé...
- ¿Es broma? – ahora lo interrumpí yo – puta que son weonas, ¿cómo le cuentan hasta a sus pololos?
- Tranqui, si sabis que no lo hicieron en mala.
- No, no, sí sé. Si las quiero mucho, las buenas intenciones estaban... La Andrea y la Maite son como nosotres, siento. – El Bastián se sienta en el piso, apoyándose en la ventana y me siento al lado de él.
- ¿Cómo?

a party nearby. Here it is. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1. Happy New Year! I hug all my gal pals real tight. I'm so excited to start the year with such incredible people. I hug their baes next—not as tight. Then I spot Nati. That's the name of Pato's cousin. I give her a hug, but I'm nervous, so it's awkward. I finally find Basti. He'd stayed at the other end of the balcony. Before I can get anywhere near him, Maite grabs my arm.

“Girl, I'm gonna take an Uber with Andrea, Nati, Fernando, and Pato. Lili and Bea have to check on something downstairs. You and Bastián can wait for them to come back up, and then you'll all leave together. Alright?” I nod because I'm so nervous I don't think I can talk without stuttering. She winks at me.

I swear, in less than half a second the whole balcony is empty. My friends make little gestures of encouragement at me as they leave, and I think they're trying to be secretive, but that just makes everything a thousand times worse. Bea even blows little besos at me. Shit, I hope Bastián didn't see all that. Half a second later, the apartment is empty, too.

“Happy New Year, Sofi,” Bastián says, coming over.

“Happy New Year, Basti.” I walk towards him, too, until we meet and give each other a big hug. Eventually, I manage to get my feet back on the ground, but we don't separate.

“Hey... honestly, you look so beautiful today,” Basti says.

“Gra-gracias. You look really good, too.” I can feel myself blushing. Holy shit.

We're giggling a little bit, real softly. At least I'm not the only nervous one. I look into his eyes. I feel him tighten his grip around my waist a little bit, pulling me in closer. I move my hands to his face, to grab it. Fuck, I can't believe this is happening!! He moves his face closer. And it happens. And then I feel—damn, absolutely... nothing?

Well, not nothing. Not exactly. Because I care about him so much—but I just don't feel anything besides friendship. It's no different from any other time we've hugged, like the kiss had been, I don't know, unnecessary. Shit, I really screwed up. What am I gonna say to him now?

We part, and we're both quiet, staring at the floor. Then we look each other in the eye and burst out laughing at the same time. I guess he felt the same way. Thank goodness.

“Listen, Basti, sorry. I mean it. I don't really know what I was thinking, it's

- Como amores de la vida, pero en amistad. – se ríe y me abraza por el hombro.
- Todo el rato... Sofi, si en verdad te encuentro una mina increíble y todo, pero...
- Tranqui, si no te tenis que explicar. – lo interrumpo. – Yo también te encuentro una persona increíble, es solo que, no sé...
- Estamos destinados a cosas más grandes como amigos, quizás. – nos reímos, de repente el Basti se saca comentarios así de la nada.
- Destinades, amigos. – le digo, pa webiarlo.
- Ya, sí, destinades, amigos. – nos reímos. – Oye, y supongo que todo esto de dejarnos atrás era como un plan, ¿o no?
- Todo parece indicar que sí, amigo. Les voy a mandar un mensaje a estas weonas pa decirles que vuelvan, y de paso putearlas porque bien malo su plan.
- Oye, tampoco así malo, malo, si igual estuvo bueno el beso, ¿o no? – me pongo un poco roja. Le pego con el codo en la costilla.
- Ya, cállate, no se vuelve a hablar de eso nunca.
- No sé yo... Igual quizás tenía que pasar po, pa' que nos diéramos cuenta que...
- Basti, ya. – lo interrumpo – Mucho por hoy, creo. En un mes más lo hablamos, hasta yo te saco el tema si queris.
- Ya, bueno... Oye, ¿y sabis si nos vamos con la Nati?
- No, se fue antes.
- Ahh... - nos miramos con esa cara de complicidad que ya reconozco.
- Es demasiado linda la Nati, y es muy simpática – le digo.
- Sí, en verdad sí... El Pato me dio su Instagram.
- ¿Real?
- Síp.
- ¿La seguiste?
- No, todavía no.
- ¿Me lo dai?
- No po, si yo la quiero seguir.
- Puta que eris egoísta.
- Ya, bueno. – saca su celular y busca el perfil.
- Ya, ¿la seguimos al mismo tiempo?
- Mmm... ya, yo cuento. – estoy consciente de que era una wea idiota.
- Ya.

just that my friends...

"No, it's ok, relax," he interrupts me. "I also got caught up 'cause the guys started telling me things, too, and I don't know..."

"Is that a joke?" now I'm doing the interrupting. "Shit those chicas are such blabbermouths. I mean, they even told their boyfriends about this?"

"C'mon, chill. You know they didn't do it to hurt you."

"No, no, I know that. I love them lots, and they definitely had good intentions. ... Andrea and Maite are like us, I think." Bastián sits down on the floor, leaning his back against the balcony door, and I plop down next to him.

"Huh?"

"Like, the loves of each other's lives, but the friend version." He laughs and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

"Totally... Sofi, honestly, you're an incredible girl and everything, but..."

"It's cool, you don't have to explain," I interrupt him. "I also think you're an incredible person, it's just that, I don't know..."

"Maybe we're destined for huge things, I mean, as bros." We laugh. Every once in a while Basti just says things like this out of nowhere.

"Yeah, as besties," I say, kinda making fun of him.

"Yeah yeah, we're homies." We laugh. "Hm, and I guess leaving us here alone was part of their plan, right?"

"It does look like it, amigo. I'm gonna send a text to these blabbermouths and tell them to come back up, and, while I'm at it, I'm gonna tell 'em off because their plan was shitty."

"Hey, not like shitty, shitty," he says. "I mean, it wasn't that bad, since maybe the kiss was kinda good, wasn't it?" I turn a little red and elbow him in the ribs.

"K, shush, let's never talk about that again."

"I dunno, maybe it had to happen so we could realize that..."

"Basti, stop," I interrupt him. "I think that's way more than enough for today. We can talk about it again in a month, I'll even bring it up if you really want me to."

"Ok, fine... so um, do you know if we're going in the Uber with Nati?"

"No, she already left."

"Ahhh gotcha," we glance at each other like we're in cahoots or something—I know that look.

- Oye, oye no, pero igual dame ventaja po. Si tengo mal internet.
- Ya, mira, tú síguela al 2 y yo la sigo al 3.
- Ya, bueno, ¿estai lista?... 1.... 2.... – toca su pantalla – y 3. – la sigo.
- Veis, ¿qué andabai haciendo tanto problema? – le toco la costilla con el dedo porque sé que le dan nervios, y a mí risa.
- Ya po, Sofía, córtala. – lo sigo haciendo un rato más para que nos riamos, si en el fondo no le molesta tanto.

Cuando pensé que el Bastián y yo quizás nos estábamos perdiendo algo lindo por pavos no pude estar más equivocada. No sé cómo pensé algo así, si nuestra amistad ya es lo más bonito que tengo.

“Nati’s definitely super pretty, and I think she’s so nice, too” I tell him.

“Yeah, she really is. Pato gave me her Insta.”

“Really?”

“Yup.”

“Did you follow her?”

“No, not yet.”

“What’s her handle?”

“No way. I’m the one who wants to follow her.”

“Jeez, you’re so selfish. Share.”

“Ok, fine.” He gets out his phone and looks up her profile.

“Got it,” I say, “Should we follow her at the same time?”

“Umm... yeah, I’ll count,” Basti says. I know it’s such a ridiculous thing to do.

“Ok.”

“Wait, wait no, give me a head start. My internet connection sucks.”

“Sure, you follow her on 2, and I’ll follow her on 3,” I say.

“Ok, cool, are you ready? ... 1... 2” —he touches his screen— “...and 3.” I

follow her.

“See, and you were making such a big deal out of it!” I tickle his ribs with my finger because I know it makes him nervous and it makes me laugh.

“Alright, Sofía, cut it out.”

Since it doesn’t actually bother him that much, I keep it up for a little while longer so we can laugh some more—together.

When I thought that Bastián and I were missing out on something amazing just because we were oblivious, I couldn’t have been more wrong. I don’t know how I could’ve thought something like that since our friendship is already the most beautiful thing I have.

Translator's Note

El hijo que mira al padre, el padre al retrato de su amante, el hijo que se siente observado por el retrato y no puede apartar la mirada de este... En ese deseo triangular, Abby logra una compulsión al compás de la repetición y el taller al que siempre se retorna, en un lenguaje encriptado en la corporalidad y una sensualidad que sugiere sin jamás sobrepasarse. Al menos no hasta el final, donde lo no dicho es tanto que lo real no basta para expresar, por lo que el cuento traspasa ese umbral con el amante saliéndose de los límites del marco, arrinconando al narrador, así como también me arrinconó a mí, al dejarme ante el desafío de transmitirles la extrañeza de lo sucedido.

Al traducir este cuento me encontré con diferencias lingüísticas como la repetición de palabras adjetivizadas (por ejemplo: paint-flecked stool), que en inglés funcionan, pero en español hacen ruido y decidí solucionarlas alternando la manera de describirlas a lo largo del cuento. Sin embargo, más allá de tecnicismos, lo verdaderamente desafiante fue cuidar mantener esa tensión que siempre empuja y empuja en un lenguaje disfrazado de cotidianidad pero que no deja de narrar cosas raras, el exceso de corporalidad, y tenue sensualidad.

Para eso me fue necesario ir suavizando el afilado ritmo del inglés al lenguaje más fluido del español e indagar en las diferencias entre el erotismo español e inglés, pues no es lo mismo decir “my small damp mouth” y traducir de manera literal “mi pequeña boca húmeda” a en vez decir “la humedad de mi boca”, que consta de un mayor grado de sutileza.

Bien lo plantea Abby, todas las familias guardan secretos,

así que dejense arrinconar y preguntense... pregúntese
cuál es la pregunta que la suya no se atreve a formular.

ABBY MELICK

FIGURE DRAWING

Every Saturday after lunch, I am allowed to sit on the paint-flecked stool in the corner of my father's art studio and watch him while he draws you. The one condition of my presence is that I do not interrupt. Today, I sit on the stool and watch with wide, seven-year-old eyes as he dips his quill into the murky ink and begins to scratch lines into the fresh parchment that stretches across his great white drafting table.

Hours pass, or maybe minutes, and the scratched ink lines morph on the parchment, becoming muscles, becoming arms, becoming feet and thighs and hairs that fly in thick tendrils around the top of your head. You reveal yourself slowly in the face—your eyes will always come last of all—but it is not long before you are there in full, apparated into this world, and just as quickly captured into stillness.

At first, your pelvis region is sketched out to be the same smooth mound I've found between the legs of my Ken dolls and G.I. Joe action figures. But it will not stay this way; I know this by now. My father glances up at me for just a moment to see if I am watching him but I quickly shift my gaze out the window, pretending to be bored. So his head lowers to the page once more, exposing the cowlick swirl on the back of his head. He does not notice me carefully turn back to the table to catch my favorite part of the process: the addition of the tantalizing lines between your thighs. Some deep and terrifying part of me never wants to look away from your new pelvic appendage, which looks like mine and yet nothing like mine.

I watch my father's face as he takes out the digital camera and flips back

**traducido del inglés por
TAMARA MALDONADO**

FIGURA HUMANA

Cada sábado después del almuerzo, tengo permitido sentarme en el taburete salpicado de pintura en la esquina del taller de mi padre y mirarlo mientras te dibuja. La única condición de mi presencia es que no interrumpa. Hoy, me senté y observé, con ojos de siete años, mientras sumerge su pluma en tinta oscura y comienza a trazar líneas en el fresco papel que se extiende a lo largo de su gran blanca mesa de dibujo.

Horas pasan, o tal vez minutos, y las líneas de tinta trazadas se transforman en el papel, se convierten en músculos, brazos, pies, muslos y gruesos rizos que caen sobre tu rostro. Rostro que es desvelado lentamente, siendo tus ojos los últimos en aparecer — el gran final— pero no pasa demasiado antes de que estés ahí completo, aparecido en este mundo y, tan pronto eso sucede, con la misma rapidez, la quietud te captura y te deja inmovilizado.

Al principio, tu zona pélvica es dibujada de manera idéntica al montículo suave que encontré entre las piernas de mis muñecos Ken y figuras de acción G.I Joe. Pero no permanece así, ya he aprendido esto. Mi padre me mira para ver si yo lo estoy mirando, pero rápidamente desvió mi mirada hacia fuera de la ventana, fingiendo estar aburrido. Entonces su cabeza baja hacia la página una vez más, dejando al descubierto el remolino en su cabello. No nota cuando me vuelvo con cuidado para apreciar mi parte favorita del proceso: la adición de las tentadoras líneas entre tus muslos. Una parte profunda y aterradora de mí nunca quiere apartar la mirada de tu nuevo apéndice pélvico, que se parece al mío sin parecerse en nada al mío.

Miro el rostro de mi padre mientras agarra la cámara digital y regresa a la imagen del verdadero tú, el tú no de tinta, sino de carne que le ha modelado

to the image of the real you, the you not of ink but of flesh who has modeled this twisting move for him in New York City, where, as you know better than anyone, my father teaches drawing classes Thursdays and Fridays. He taps at the worn silver buttons: zooming in, zooming out, searching for the line of you he needs to bring you more fully onto the page. For hours, or maybe minutes, his eyes flit between the you on his camera screen and the you on the parchment as he scratches your lifelines. He doesn't want to look away from you either.

I am suddenly jealous of the attention he pours into you and only you. I ease off the paint-flecked stool and crawl along the deep blue river of rug to slip silently beneath the desk. I reach up to feel its smooth underbelly. I reach up and over the lip of the drawing table, grubby fingers searching until I feel the cool of the paper. Then, quickly, I yank the parchment, and you along with it, down to under the table. Scrrriiiiittch—his quill skids across the page as I drag you down and before he can stop me, I stuff as much of the parchment as I can into my small damp mouth. I want to see if you will have the same metallic tang as the nosebleeds I get in the middle of the night when blood drips down the back of my throat and jolts me awake. Does your lilting body of dark ink, so different from my own, still taste like me? Our creator is the same.

My father takes the paper from my mouth before I can swallow it and blots at the wet half-circle of teeth-marks I've made. He uncrumples the page to assess the damage: not only are you soggy and bite-marked, but you now have an extra-long eyelash. You will have to be redrawn; he will start you over on a new sheet.

He does not yell at me. There is only quiet disappointment. He has never been one to make a scene. He pats my head and crumples up the destroyed version of you, sends you flying into the bin on the other side of the room. Then, a new sheet on the drawing table. Then, he enters back into the trance of the dance of pulling the you on the camera into the you on the page. You did not taste like blood, but the aftertaste of a flavor I can't quite place sits heavy on my tongue.

*

I am sitting on the paint-flecked stool in the corner of his art studio, watching with twelve-year-old eyes as he pulses you into being on the paper. I've

ese curvado movimiento en Nueva York, donde, como sabes mejor que nadie, mi padre da clases de dibujo los jueves y viernes. Palpa los gastados botones plateados: acercando, alejando, buscando la línea de ti que le falta para traerte en tu totalidad a la página. Durante horas, o tal vez minutos, sus ojos intercalan entre el tú en la pantalla de la cámara y el tú en el papel, trayéndote a la vida con sus pinceladas.

De pronto siento celos de la atención que vierte en ti y solo en ti. Me levanto del taburete salpicado de pintura y navego a lo largo del río azul profundo de la alfombra para deslizarme silenciosamente debajo del escritorio. Me estiro para acariciar la suave panza del dibujo y me estiro hacia el borde de la mesa, donde mis dedos sucios tantean hasta que dan con el frío del papel. Entonces, rápidamente, arranco el papel y lo tiro al suelo hasta debajo de la mesa, y a ti junto a este. Gwssss— su pluma resbala mientras te arrastro y antes de que pueda detenerme, meto todo el papel que pueda dentro de la humedad de mi boca. Quiero ver si tienes el mismo sabor metálico que los sangrados de nariz que me dan a mitad de la noche cuando la sangre gotea por mi garganta y me despierta de golpe. Tu cuerpo rítmico de tinta oscura, tan diferente al mío, ¿sabe cómo yo? Nuestro creador es el mismo.

Mi padre saca el papel de mi boca antes de que pueda tragarlo y seca el semicírculo húmedo de marcas de dientes. Desarruga la página para evaluar el daño: no solo estas pegajoso, sino que ahora tienes una pestaña extra larga. Vas a tener que ser redibujado; él te hará de nuevo en una hoja nueva.

No me grita ni hace dramas. Solo decepción silenciosa. Me da unas palmaditas en la cabeza, arruga la versión destruida de ti, y te envía volando hasta la papelera al otro lado de la habitación. Luego, con un nuevo papel en la mesa de dibujo, vuelve al trance, la danza de tirar del tú de la cámara hacia el tú de la página. No sabías a sangre, sino que a un sabor que deja un regusto de no sé qué pero que reposa con pesadez sobre mi lengua.

*

Estoy sentado sobre las manchas del taburete en la esquina de su taller, mirando con ojos de doce años mientras al pulso de su dedo te trae al papel. He crecido exponencialmente en el último año: la superficie de la mesa ahora me llega a la cadera. Del rostro de mi padre, caen nuevos cabellos plateados.

grown exponentially in the past year: the surface of the great white drafting table now comes up to my hips. New silver hairs are etched into my father's temples.

I am in his studio on a Saturday afternoon instead of out playing soccer with the other neighborhood boys because I am hoping that by watching I will figure out why it's you that he constantly conjures with his ink. Why are you the subject of every one of his drawings? You are never wearing clothes, but sometimes, a twist of cloth clings to your waist or spurts from your hands. Sometimes, you are caught mid-leap: your limbs arced upwards in triumph, perpetually thwarting the laws of gravity. But these strokes of his quill have imprisoned you, despite the yearning for motion inherent in your limbs and there will be no escape. Sometimes, you are alone on the page: shy and exposed on a blank background. More often, your body contorts around the body of another man. We can never see this man's face, but the cowlick swirl of the back of the head is gnawingly familiar.

Always naked. Always motionlessly in motion. Always the eyes last: he must not want you to see him drawing you. Your eyes from the lines, the lines from the quill, the quill in the hand of my father as he sits at the great white table in his studio and draws your rippling body, just as he's always done since I was small.

These days, I draw like he does. But I do not scratch with ink like he does; squelch and squeak are the language my felt-tipped markers speak. I refuse to draw realistically like he does; my creations are ghoulish cartoons with sagging jowls and poison-tipped teeth. I take care to draw their eyes first. I want their eyes to watch me as I curve their bulbous noses and shape their elfish ears and draw their hairs in thick tendrils about the top of their heads. They watch me so there will be no secrets between us, my drawings and I. They don't have bodies. At least, not bodies like yours. Smooth Ken doll mounds are what separate leg from leg.

My father has hung up his collection of your bodies all over the house. In the bathroom, three Ken-sized yous wrestle each other above my toothbrush. In the living room, my mother's collection of vintage pillboxes sits dusty and delicate on the mantle beneath a grand portrait of you sprawled spreadeagle on a pile of sheets. On the kitchen table, my older sister's collection of prescription pill bottles sits below a framed drawing of you running away, with just the tip of your nose and side

Estoy en su taller un sábado por la tarde en lugar de jugar al fútbol con los demás niños del barrio porque tengo la esperanza de que mirando descubriré por qué eres tú a quién constantemente conjura con su tinta. ¿Por qué eres el tema de cada uno de sus dibujos? Nunca estás vestido, pero a veces, un trozo de tela se aferra a tu cintura o sale disparado de tus manos. A veces, te encuentras congelado en la mitad de un salto: con tus extremidades arqueadas hacia arriba en señal de triunfo, derrotando para siempre las leyes de la gravedad. Tus extremidades ansían movimiento, pero las líneas de su pluma te han aprisionado y no tienes escapatoria.

A veces estás solo en la página: tímido y expuesto sobre un fondo blanco. Más a menudo, tu cuerpo se moldea alrededor del cuerpo de otro hombre. Nunca podemos ver el rostro de ese hombre, pero el remolino en el cabello es dolorosamente familiar.

Siempre desnudo. Siempre en quieto movimiento. Siempre los ojos siendo los últimos en aparecer: no debe querer que lo veas dibujándote. Tus ojos desde las líneas, las líneas de la pluma, la pluma en la mano de mi padre mientras se sienta ante la mesa de su taller y dibuja tu ondeante figura tal como siempre lo ha hecho desde que yo era pequeño.

*

Ahora dibujo como él. Pero no doy pinceladas delicadas con tinta; chirriar y chillar son la lengua de mis marcadores. Me rehúso a dibujar de manera realista; mis creaciones son dibujos animados macabros con mejillas caídas y dientes envenenados. Me aseguro de hacer sus ojos primero. Quiero que me vean mientras curvo sus narices bulbosas y doy forma a sus orejas puntiagudas y dibujo sus cabellos en gruesas espirales que nacen desde la raíz de sus cabezas. Me vigilan para que no haya secretos entre nosotros, mis dibujos y yo. No tienen cuerpo. Al menos, no cuerpos como el tuyo. Suaves montículos de Ken son lo que separa pierna de pierna.

Mi padre ha colgado su colección de tus cuerpos por toda la casa. En el baño, encima de mi cepillo de dientes tres tús del tamaño de Ken luchan entre sí. En la sala, la colección de cajitas de pastillas vintage de mi madre reposa polvorienta y delicada sobre la repisa debajo del gran retrato de ti despatarrado sobre un montón de sábanas.

En la mesa de la cocina, la colección de frascos de pastillas prescritas de mi

slit of your eye looking coyly back over your shoulder to laugh at the pursuer.

How smart of you, to get him to feature you on every available wall. You slipped into our everyday architecture so that we cannot round a corner without seeing your face. Even when we are breathing deeply in sleep, we are inhaling little pinpricks of your paper dust.

My mother and sister do not question your bodies, for you are the backdrop to their own dramas. My sister was injured in a Volleyball game three years ago and prescribed Vicodin. She says she's still in pain. She has graduated from high school but does not leave the house. My mother watches her take more pills than she needs and does not try to stop her but instead loudly smacks the sourdough lump onto the counter as she bakes her umpteenth loaf of the week. No one asks where my father stays when he teaches in New York. On Wednesday nights, as he packs to catch the Acela from Union Station, my sister, prostrate on the couch in the den, does not look up from the endless stream of the HGTV. Meanwhile, my mother cuts calmly into crusty baked pillows of pumpernickel and rye. The released steam from the bread fogs up her glasses as she slathers a slice with Kerrygold and sprinkles Maldon salt across the top. Her first bite into the buttery flesh always perfectly aligns with the door closing quietly behind my father. I wonder if she's in on the joke: his leaving is her bread and butter.

When my father calls on Friday to say he must stay in the city an extra day to get in one more modeling session with you, neither mother nor sister bats an eye.

Even though he will not be there working, I still go down into his studio on Saturday afternoon to draw my own drawings. I sit on the floor, facing the wall, resisting the urge to go over and look at the current you rolled out in progress on the drafting table. I fear I will find you smirking an all-knowing grin. I win. You'll say if I look. I win him. You win nothing.

No one looks up from their TV or their bread when my father comes home late on Sunday. No one asks him how he is. No one wants to know about New York so no one says anything at all. I go into my room and the click of my door as it latches shut is the only sound that breaks our silence.

hermana mayor se encuentra bajo un dibujo enmarcado de ti huyendo, con solo la punta de tu nariz y el rabillo del ojo mirando tímidamente por encima del hombro, riéndote del perseguidor.

Que inteligente de tu parte, lograr que él te dibuje en cada una de las paredes disponibles. Te infiltraste en la arquitectura de nuestro día a día de tal manera que no podemos doblar una esquina sin verte la cara. Da igual que tan profundamente durmamos, seguimos inhalando pequeñas motas del polvo de tu papel.

Mi madre y hermana no cuestionan tus cuerpos, porque eres el telón de fondo de sus propios dramas. Mi hermana se lesionó en un partido de voleibol hace tres años y le recetaron Vicodin. Ella dice que aún siente dolor. Terminó el colegio, pero no sale de casa. Mi madre la ve tragar más pastillas de las que necesita y, en vez de intentar detenerla, golpea con fuerza la porción de masa madre contra el mostrador mientras hornea su enésima hogaza de la semana. Nadie pregunta dónde se queda mi padre cuando enseña en Nueva York.

Los miércoles por la noche, mientras él hace las maletas para tomar el tren más rápido de la Union Station, mi hermana, desparramada en el sofá del estudio, no levanta la vista del flujo interminable de HGTV. Mientras tanto, mi madre corta tranquilamente las almohadillas crujientes recién horneadas de pan integral y centeno. El vapor que emana del pan empaña sus anteojos mientras unta una rebanada con Kerrywold y espolvorea sal Maldon por encima. Su primer mordisco de la rebanada mantecosa siempre se alinea a la perfección con la puerta cerrándose de manera silenciosa detrás de mi padre. Me pregunto si ella está en el chiste: su partida es su pan de cada día.

Cuando mi padre llama los viernes para decir que debe quedarse en la ciudad un día más para tener una última sesión de fotografía contigo, ni mi madre ni mi hermana se inmutan. Por más que él no esté ahí trabajando, igual bajo a su taller los sábados por la tarde para dibujar mis propios dibujos. Me siento en el piso, frente a la pared, resistiendo el impulso de acercarme y mirar al tú actual, enrollado y aún en proceso sobre la mesa blanca. Temo que te encontrare sonriendo una sonrisa presuntuosa. Yo gano. Dirás si miro. Lo gane a él. Tú no ganas nada.

Nadie levanta la vista de su televisor o su pan cuando mi padre llega tarde a casa el domingo. Nadie le pregunta cómo está. Nadie quiere saber sobre Nueva

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I am nineteen years old and I am as tall as I will ever be and yet I'm still not as tall as my father. Maybe I am still not as tall as you, but I can't know for sure because I have never met you in person. I have not sat on the paint-flecked stool in a long, long time.

I am home for fall break from my freshman year in college, home for the last time because I am here to pack up the house and the studio before it is sold. We need the money for your sister's rehabilitation program, my mother explains. Besides, with your father now spending so much time in New York... I just don't need all this space. So here I am to help her wipe clean the imprints of my childhood and hand a glistening shell over to a new family with new secrets.

Boxes are everywhere, but you still cling to the walls, the last to be packed away. I float around the house and take you in, one by one. I drift from the kitchen to the living room to the bathroom to the bedrooms and back to the kitchen again. Throbbing muscles of naked men tangled up in sheets creased with colored ink. The weight of your eyes peering from the frames is heavy and I am dizzy from your presence.

These first months away from home, I kept thinking I saw you sprinting across the quad, or standing by the keg at the frat party, or sitting in front of me in the lecture hall. Always, though, the boy I think is you comes into focus as just another sleek-bodied curly-haired verisimilitude. They are not you, but the quickening of my pulse lingers as my eyes rake the sinewy limbs of your doubles. I do not like that I do not want to look away from them; I blame you for it.

The studio is the last place I go to pack. There is that same creaky step as I descend, an alert that I am coming down into the basement, entering his sacred space. Without thinking, I knock quietly on the door, just as I always did on those Saturday afternoons. But of course, there is no answer. The door swings open and he is not there. He is still in New York, drawing your bodies into being in a room I've never seen.

But you, you are everywhere. You are freed from the paper that hangs in frames and freed from the paper that sits coiled in the corners. You rise as one and

York, así que nadie dice absolutamente nada. Entro a mi habitación y el clic de la herradura de mi puerta al cerrarse es el único sonido que rompe nuestro silencio.

*

Tengo diecinueve años y soy lo más alto que llegare a ser y aun así no soy tan alto como mi padre. Quizás sigo sin ser tan alto como tú, pero no puedo estar seguro ya que nunca te he conocido en persona. Hace mucho, mucho tiempo que no me siento en la esquina. Estoy en casa por las vacaciones de invierno de mi primer año de universidad, es la última vez que estaré porque estoy aquí para empacar la casa y el taller antes de que se venda. Necesitamos dinero para la rehabilitación de tu hermana, explica mi madre. Aparte, con tu padre pasando tanto tiempo en Nueva York... no necesito todo este espacio. Así que aquí estoy para ayudarla a limpiar todas las huellas de mi infancia y entregar una cáscara reluciente a una nueva familia con nuevos secretos.

Hay cajas en todas partes, pero tú aún sigues aferrado a las paredes, el último en ser empacado. Me deslizo a lo largo de la casa y te tomo, uno por uno. Voy de la cocina a la sala, al baño, a las habitaciones y de nuevo a la cocina. Músculos palpitantes de hombres desnudos que se entrelazan bajo sábanas arrugadas con tinta pigmentada. El peso de tus ojos mirando desde los marcos es demasiado y me siento mareado ante tu presencia.

Los primeros meses fuera de casa, me parecía verte corriendo de clase en clase a lo largo del campus, parado junto al keg lleno de cerveza en la fiesta de fraternidad, o sentado frente a mí en la sala de clase. Siempre, sin embargo, que mis ojos se detienen en los chicos que creo que son tú, comprendo que son poco más que otra imitación de rulos y cuerpo esbelto. Ellos no son tú. Pero la aceleración de mi pulso persiste mientras mis ojos estudian los torsos fornidos de tus dobles. No me gusta no querer apartar la mirada de ellos; te culpo por ello.

El taller es el último lugar al que voy a empacar. Ahí está el mismo escalón chirriante mientras desciendo, una alerta de que estoy bajando al sótano, ingresando a su lugar sagrado. Sin pensarlo, toco suavemente la puerta, tal como solía hacerlo aquellos sábados de tarde. Pero por supuesto, no hay respuesta. La puerta se abre y él no está ahí. Sigue en Nueva York, dibujando tus cuerpos que serán colgados en una habitación que nunca veré.

corner me in the middle of the room. You place your collective hand – rendered so carefully in jet black ink that the tendons in your extensor digiti minimi catch the light – onto my throat.

You ruined everything and I hate you for it. And yet, to be so close to your overwhelming beauty quickens the pulse in my pelvis and pricks goosebumps into the back of my neck and makes my mouth wet with sudden, undeniable desire.

No. No. I don't want that. I don't want to be like him. I don't want you. I grab your hand and pull you towards me and tear you in two. Every last one of you.

As you bleed out onto the floor, I go and touch the great white drafting table, which has become a great yellowed drafting table. I pick up scraps of paper that have been strewn this way and that, studies for your feet and hands and muscles, drafts of twisting sheets. I think: paper is thin and see-through and, when pressed up to the light, it is bad at hiding things.

I want to eat you all over again, as I did when I was small. No longer searching for a familiar taste, but now to feel the black ink slide through my stomach and to feel the relief when I puke the paper up again, returned to amorphous bodies of meaningless mush. Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. I want to sludgeify the secrets of your naked bodies.

Naked men. You and my father. His drawings and mine.

I am small, reaching for the table. I am tall, afraid to ask the question. I am tall and I am small, and I am reaching for the bodies to place in my mouth and reaching for the bodies to tear them in two and he is reaching for your body in the room in New York and I am recoiling from the bodies I do not want to want to touch so instead I watch as he scratches them in ink in the cool damp quiet of the basement on the great yellowing desk and I know then like I know now that perhaps it is only me who is afraid to answer the question.

Pero tú, tú estás en todas partes y de golpe te liberas del papel que cuelga en los marcos y te liberas del papel que se encuentra enrollado en las esquinas. Te levantas como uno solo y me acorralas en medio de la habitación. Levantas tu mano colectiva— ejecutada con tanto cuidado en tinta negra azabache que los tendones de tu extensor digiti minimi captan la luz —y encierras mi garganta.

Arruinaste todo y te odio por eso. Y, aun así, estar tan cerca de tu abrumadora belleza acelera el pulso de mi pelvis, me da escalofríos en la nuca, y hace que mi boca se sienta aguada por un súbito e incontrolable deseo.

No. No. No quiero esto. No quiero ser como él. No te quiero. Agarro tu mano y te atraigo hacia mí y te parto en dos. A cada uno de ti.

Mientras te desangras en el suelo, voy y toco la amarillenta mesa de dibujo. Recojo trozos de papel que han sido esparcidos por aquí y por allá, apuntes de tus pies, manos y músculos, bosquejos de hojas retorcidas. El papel es delgado y transparente y, presionado contra la luz, es malo para ocultar.

Quiero devorarte de nuevo, como lo hice cuando era pequeño. Ya no buscando ese sabor familiar, sino que ahora para sentir la tinta negra deslizarse desde la garganta hasta mi estómago y sentir el alivio cuando vomito el papel de nuevo, retornando cuerpos amorfos. Sin dientes, sin ojos, sin palabras, sin nada. Necesito enlodar los secretos de tus cuerpos desnudos.

Hombres desnudos. Tú y mi padre. Sus dibujos y los míos.

Soy pequeño, estoy tomando la mesa. Soy alto, temeroso de hacer la pregunta. Soy alto y soy pequeño, y estoy tomando los cuerpos para colocarlos en mi boca y estoy tomando los cuerpos para partarlos en dos y él está tomando tu cuerpo en la habitación de Nueva York y yo estoy retrocediendo de los cuerpos que no quiero tocar, así que en vez miro como él los pincela con la tinta en el frío y húmedo silencio del sótano sobre el gran amarillento escritorio y entonces sé que lo sabía antes tal como lo sé ahora que tal vez soy solo yo quien teme responder la pregunta.

Translator's Note

The form of Tamara Maldonado's "In a City Similar to Asunción" matches the restlessness of its protagonist. Deprived of stimulation in a city which may or may not be Asunción, Paraguay, the narrator generates her own high-stakes, over-the-top drama to pass the time. As she wanders the city streets, it's as if she's donned glasses that bring the world into sharp relief. This gives her the power to see technicolor beauty in her surroundings, but it simultaneously sharpens the darkness too: the cogs of this urban machine have rusted to a stand-still. By playing with undulating registers of voice, Maldonado's project permits a love affair with the sky to exist side-by-side with the grim and grimy details of life in a suffocating metropolis.

Indeed, in both plot and prose, Maldonado's writing bucks the reader's expectations of what will come next. In the very first sentence, a pause to appreciate a hummingbird sipping from a flower catapults directly into murder in cold blood. The voice is equally whirling – in both this short story and the accompanying poem "When I Became a Burrow," a moment of embellished supplication can quickly morph into one of wry and caustic wit. Sentence to sentence – and sometimes mid-sentence – Maldonado's writing telescopes between beauty and horror until happy serendipity and cruel twist of fate collapse into one and the same.

Beginning this translation project, my most pressing concern was how to preserve the high drama of these vicissitudes without the shifts feeling sticky or jarring. In the original text, the flow is fluid, seamless as the narrator moves around the city. I found that to capture the same effect in English, I frequently needed to

break up sentences into a more staccato rhythm. The translation therefore walks to a slightly different beat, but one that hopefully still pulses at the same barreling pace.

Maldonado also experiments with juxtaposing verse and prose. The song that comes halfway through the short story and the final paired poem seem to be in conversation with each other, both interested in how lust and longing for the possession of hidden entities – swallowed stars and weeping angels alike – can generate a synchronous blend of hope and desperation.

The biggest challenge for me in translating these lines in verse was rendering the inherently romantic cocktail of tenderness, playfulness, and sanctity in the Spanish songs into a non-romance language. Many of my conversations with Maldonado centered on how the English, lacking the romance of the Spanish, needed to be turned up a few notches to capture the fire of the original. To heighten the drama, I needed to heighten the language. To accomplish this, I relied heavily on my copy of Roget's International Thesaurus, flipping to find the perfect adjective that would bring a more charged connotation to the translation. In this way, the word *sostiene*, which I first translated as holds, became the more dramatic grips. The word *confecciona*, first translated as makes, became the heightened bestow. In the final line of the story, the word *alegra* started as happy, but happy felt too quotidian a match for being cradled by an angel among the stars. I went for the much more dazzling synonym of exultant.

I hope that the resulting translation captures the effervescence of the original. My other hope is that, after reading Maldonado's work, if you someday find yourself fed up with the earth beneath your feet, you might look skywards instead to find solace in celestial bodies.

TAMARA MALDONADO

En Una Ciudad Parecida A Asunción

Los colibríes pican las flores de la vereda mientras un motochorro apuñala a un hombre para llevarse su billetera y, por inercia, le deja lo suficiente como para que se pague la micro. Todo bajo el dulce aroma del mango estrellado contra el suelo. La sangre se mezcla con la tierra rojiza del camino que la municipalidad jamás asfalto y adquiere un color precioso, parecido al del vestido que use en la colación de mi hermana. Me alejo de la escena, dobló la esquina, mi corazón retumba en mi pecho, pero antes de darme cuenta veo ramas de árboles que se asemejan a una multitud de dedos extendiéndose para acariciar las tumbas que resguardan. Los troncos oscuros y las hojas de color verde profundo resaltan entre el blanco de la piedra y el mármol. En el centro se alza un gran ángel de rostro sereno y cabello largo que sostiene una rosa entre sus manos. Me arrodillo por impulso y justifico mi inacción diciendo que nunca pedí ser testigo. Paseo entre las largas hileras de personas en descanso eterno, todas descuidadas y olvidadas, excepto por una que tiene depositada una crisantema delante. Me la robo a modo de compensación. Nací en un país que parece no existir y, como segundo castigo, se me dio la ambición de perseguir fantasías lejanas a mí. Salgo de ahí, ahora voy pasando frente a casonas antiquísimas convertidas en bares, farmacias, y despensas. Los vendedores de la calle me abruman, me incomodan, siento culpa, los ignoro cada vez, al igual que a los hombres que me silban como si fuese perro cuando no lo soy. Entro a una despensa, me compro una botella de agua, sin sed, solo por hacer algo, y, con disimulo, guardo en mí bolso un pintauñas transparente. Afuera la oscuridad comienza a hacerse, aunque aún es temprano. Las bocinas de los autos compiten con los látigos de los recolectores de basura que van en carretas tiradas por caballos. Sigo el aroma a marihuana que tanto me tranquiliza, pues conduce al parque. Llego hasta la estatua pintarrajeada del mariscal que destaca en el medio,

**translated from the spanish by
ABBY MELNICK**

In a City Similar to Asunción

The hummingbirds sip from the flowers along the sidewalk while a thief on a motorcycle stabs a man, steals his wallet and, thanks to inertia, leaves behind just enough change to pay for the bus. All this, cloaked in the sweet scent of mango splattered on the ground. The victim's blood mixes with the ruddy dirt of the road – which the government never paved – turning it a pretty color, similar to the dress I wore to my sister's high school graduation.

I hurry away from the crime scene. Turning the corner, my heart thundering in my chest, I'm surprised by tree branches reaching out like a multitude of fingers to caress the tombs they shelter. Dark trunks and leaves of deep green stand out against the white of stone and marble. In the cemetery's center rises a colossal angel with a serene face and long hair, cupping a rose in her hands. I kneel on impulse and justify my passivity by telling her I never asked to be a witness.

I stroll down the long rows of people taking their eternal rest, all of them neglected and forgotten. Except for one grave which has a fresh chrysanthemum deposited in front of the headstone. I steal it by way of compensation – I was born in a country that seems not to exist and, as form of double punishment, has sentenced me to the ambition to pursue fantasies far beyond my reach.

I get out of there, rush past the creaking colonial mansions that have been converted into bars, pharmacies, corner stores. The street vendors overwhelm me, harass me. I feel guilty that I always ignore them, the same way I ignore the men who whistle at me as though I'm a dog. Which I am not.

I walk into a corner store and buy a bottle of water, thirstless, just to do something. Surreptitiously, I slip a bottle of clear nail polish into my bag.

Back outside, darkness is falling even though it's still early. Car horns compete with the whipcracks of garbage collectors atop their horse-drawn carts, and I follow the tranquilizing aroma of pot to the park.

At the center stands the defaced statue of the Marshall. He may be imposing but I don't respect him one bit. As always, troops of vagrants' tents surround him as if

imponente, pero no me despierta respeto. Como siempre, hay varios grupos y carpas rodeándolo, parecen su batallón. Hay voces, pero no entiendo el idioma que hablan, así que los registro como si fuesen pájaros en el ambiente. Las aves pueden hacer sonido y seguirá siendo silencio. Ese es su gran secreto para ser un refugio necesario de la realidad. Me echo en el pasto y veo a las nubes gordas esconder al cielo. Sonrío porque sé que ella está siendo tímida, mi dulce amada, ¿acaso no fuiste tú misma quién me llamó? Puedo verte, dulce emperatriz de los cielos, aunque te escondas detrás de las nubes, tu poder es tan grande que no puedes evitar filtrar rayos de luz que bastan para guiarme hacia vos. Aunque la distancia que nos separa parezca inabarcable, acá en la tierra, voy a dejar un rastro tan grande de hierbas malas, gruesas, y feroces, que será imposible no las puedas ver. En ese momento sonreirás, de seguro, pensando que eso es tan típico de mí, hacer el ridículo así, pero te agradara, porque te gusto así. De seguro premiaras mi voluntad y determinación, mostrándome la gracia de la fuerza de una mujer, no bajando hasta mí y haciendo algo absurdo como humanizarte, sino que me confeccionaras alas con las que yo pueda subir hasta vos. Por mi parte, como gratitud, pondré todo mi corazón e inteligencia en cada una de las cosas que haga para ser digna de reinar a tu lado. Mis justos puños jamás volverán a caer en la obediencia desesperada de las circunstancias, que demasiado bien sé, atan y privan de libertad al alma. Entre nuestra fuerza e inteligencia, ¿quién podría competir? Por favor, emperatriz, antes de que se me vaya la vida, aplaca mi alma expectante, se la causa de mi sonrisa triunfante, entrelaza nuestros caminos para que al fin pueda descansar el destino sin voluntad que le niegue. Así que lluvia, sé que esta es respuesta tuya a mis ruegos, solo que no estoy segura de sí es para invitar o intimidar mi temperamento. Entonces, suficiente dialogo verbal, ahora saco el recibo de la despensa, hago un esfuerzo de barquito, diluyo pintañas con el agua sobre el pasto, formando hileras plateadas, gotas gruesas que brillan como la luna. Se las dedico como tributo, como si estuviésemos fusionando nuestras salivas. El barco las navega dejando una estela similar a las de los cometas. La crisantema va como única tripulante. Canto:

Hay un triste ángel

Llora sobre la tierra, llora sobre los cerros,

they were his battalion. There are voices, but I can't understand the language – they register as nothing more than birds chattering in the background. It can still be silent when sparrows sing. That's their big secret: their song provides a vital refuge from reality.

I lie down in the grass and watch the plump clouds obscure the sky.

I smile, for I know she's being shy.

My sweet love, was it not you who called me? I see you, darling Empress of the Sky. Even though you hide behind the clouds, your power is too vast, you cannot stop the rays of light from escaping, guiding me to you. Though the distance between us seems insurmountable, here on Earth I will leave a trail of weeds so wild and thick it will be impossible for you to ignore!

At this, you will surely soften. You'll think: how typical of me, to make a fool of myself. You'll laugh, because you like me this way. No doubt you'll reward my persistence and determination and flaunt the grace of a woman's power. You won't look down on me. You won't do something ridiculous like take on human form. Instead, you'll bestow wings upon me to whisk me skyward, and in gratitude I shall pledge to pour my heart and mind into being worthy of reigning by your side. No more desperate obedience to fate – my righteous fists shall never fall again, for I know all too well how circumstance can bind the soul and deprive it of freedom. With our combined strength and intelligence, who could compete? I implore you, Empress, before the life leaves my body, appease my aching soul! Grant me a triumphant grin! Intertwine our paths so at last destiny may rest of its own accord!

And so...

Rain.

I know this is your answer to my plea, but I'm not sure if it's meant to tempt or intimidate my temperament.

In any case, enough talk.

I take out the receipt from the corner store and fold it into a little boat. I dilute my new nail polish with the dew of the grass to form shimmering trails, thick gleaming droplets of moonlight. I dedicate them to you as my offering, as if we were pooling our saliva. We will sail the paper boat and leave comet tails in our wake. The kidnapped chrysanthemum will be our only crew.

I sing:

There is a forlorn angel

She weeps over the land, weeps upon the hills,

Sobre las plantas y los barcos de papel

¿Cómo doy un pañuelo a un ángel

que no se deja ver?

Empapada me levanto, sin saber a dónde ir, divago por el centro y sus calles pobremente iluminadas. El farol de cristal roto parpadea e ilumina a los mosquitos que se reúnen entorno a ella en una especie de discoteca en miniatura. De repente me siento agotada, las piernas me pesan. Temo la vitalidad se me va desgastando y que la impotencia es lo único que queda dentro de este cuerpo. No, no es verdad: la impotencia siempre acaba pariendo al resentimiento. Entro a un pub, voy hasta el baño, es pequeño, no hay papel, y la puerta está rota. Intento atajarla apoyando mi pie contra esta. En este país, en esta ciudad, donde nada sucede, voy y busco aventuras, pero este resentimiento con el que regreso, las manos vacías con las que regreso, no me otorgan nada. Algún día me voy a ir bien lejos y viviré historias, ya verán. Por ahora, me pido un trago, nadie me pregunta mi edad, me señalan que estoy mojada y yo confirmo que lo estoy, pero ni por un segundo quito la vista del bartender para asegurarme de que no le eche nada. Parece seguro, me lo tomo de un golpe. Un hombre se me va acercando e imploro que no lo haga. Lo hace. Me hace preguntas, me levanto, me siento abrumada, digo que tengo que ir al baño. En realidad, abandono el lugar. En la calle, el viento sopla pétalos rosas hacía mí. Los lapachos son la resistencia de la magia. Las abejas buscan postergar el apocalipsis. Hay diminutos reinos revoloteando alrededor de los mangos. Un ruido de motor me acorrala, las vueltas del destino, sostiene lo que parece una daga. Sus ojos desorbitados, parece le sale espuma de la boca, me clava la mirada, justo segundos antes de darme en el riñón. Antes de darme cuenta, mi cabeza estrellada contra el suelo. Estiro mi mano y arranco con la fuerza que me queda un puñado de hierbas verdes. Hago una especie de sendero desde la base del lapacho hasta mí. Allá arriba, la emperatriz de los cielos se deja ver por fin. Me confecciona alas, me lleva con ella, en sus robustos brazos, me acuna junto a las estrellas, me da una patria, un hogar. Luego, me dice que la alegre tenerme a su lado, que supere muy bien las pruebas.

Onto the leaves and paper boats
How do I give a tissue to an angel
who refuses to unhide?

Soaked, I rise, not knowing where to go. I drift along the poorly lit streets towards the city center. The cracked-glass streetlamps flicker and faintly illuminate the mass of mosquitos dancing in some sort-of mini-disco. All of a sudden, I'm exhausted. My legs are lead. I fear my vitality is waning, draining my body of all but impotence. No, no that's not true: my impotency will perpetually re-birth resentment.

I walk into a pub and find the bathroom. It's tiny, there's no toilet paper, and the stall won't lock. I try to keep the door shut by bracing it with my foot. In this country, in this city where nothing ever happens, I go looking for adventures, but my resentment resurges every time I come back empty-handed. My country grants me nothing. One day I will fly far from here and live out epics, you'll see.

But for now, I order a drink. No one asks how old I am. They do point out that I'm soaked and I shrug to confirm, but not for one second do I take my eyes off the bartender to make sure he doesn't slip me something. The drink seems safe, I toss it back in one gulp. A man makes a move to approach me and I silently beg for him not to. He comes anyway. He starts asking questions and soon I'm feeling agitated. I get up and tell him I have to go to the bathroom but instead, I make my escape.

In the street, the wind blows pink petals my way; the lapacho trees fight to keep the magic alive. Bees strive to stave off apocalypse. Tiny kingdoms orbit the mangos.

The roar of a motorcycle stops me in my tracks. The wheel of destiny spins: the rider grips what appears to be a dagger. His eyes bulge out of their sockets. Frothing at the mouth, he locks eyes with me seconds before stabbing me in the kidney.

The next thing I know, my head smashes against the ground. I reach out a hand and, with all my remaining strength, rip up fistfuls of green weeds from along the sidewalk. Dragging myself to the base of the lapacho tree, I leave a path of blood in my wake.

Up in the heavens, my Empress of the Sky finally unhides. She bestows wings upon me and whisks me skyward. In her powerful arms, cradling me among the stars, she gives me a homeland, a home. By and by, she'll tell me she's exultant to have me at her side, and that I've passed her test with flying colors.

De cuando me convertí en madriguera

Una estrella se cayó silenciosa

Espectáculo único y personal

La tome con cuidado

Aun quemaba un poco, pero no importo

Era tan bella que me lleno de lágrimas dulces

Ya nada sería igual y lo sabia

Eso era un antes y un después

¡La apoteosis de mi historia!

Hice lo único racional y predecible podía hacer:

me la trague.

A veces, hasta hoy, cuando toso me sale polvo de estrella

Y en mis ojos, de la nada, se puede colar un extraño brillo intenso

Me veo obligada a vestir ropa ligera, incluso en invierno, por el calor

Si me rio muy fuerte, se me puede escapar fuego, entonces trato de no hacerlo

Pero no me molesta.

Tengo una estrella

Mi estrella

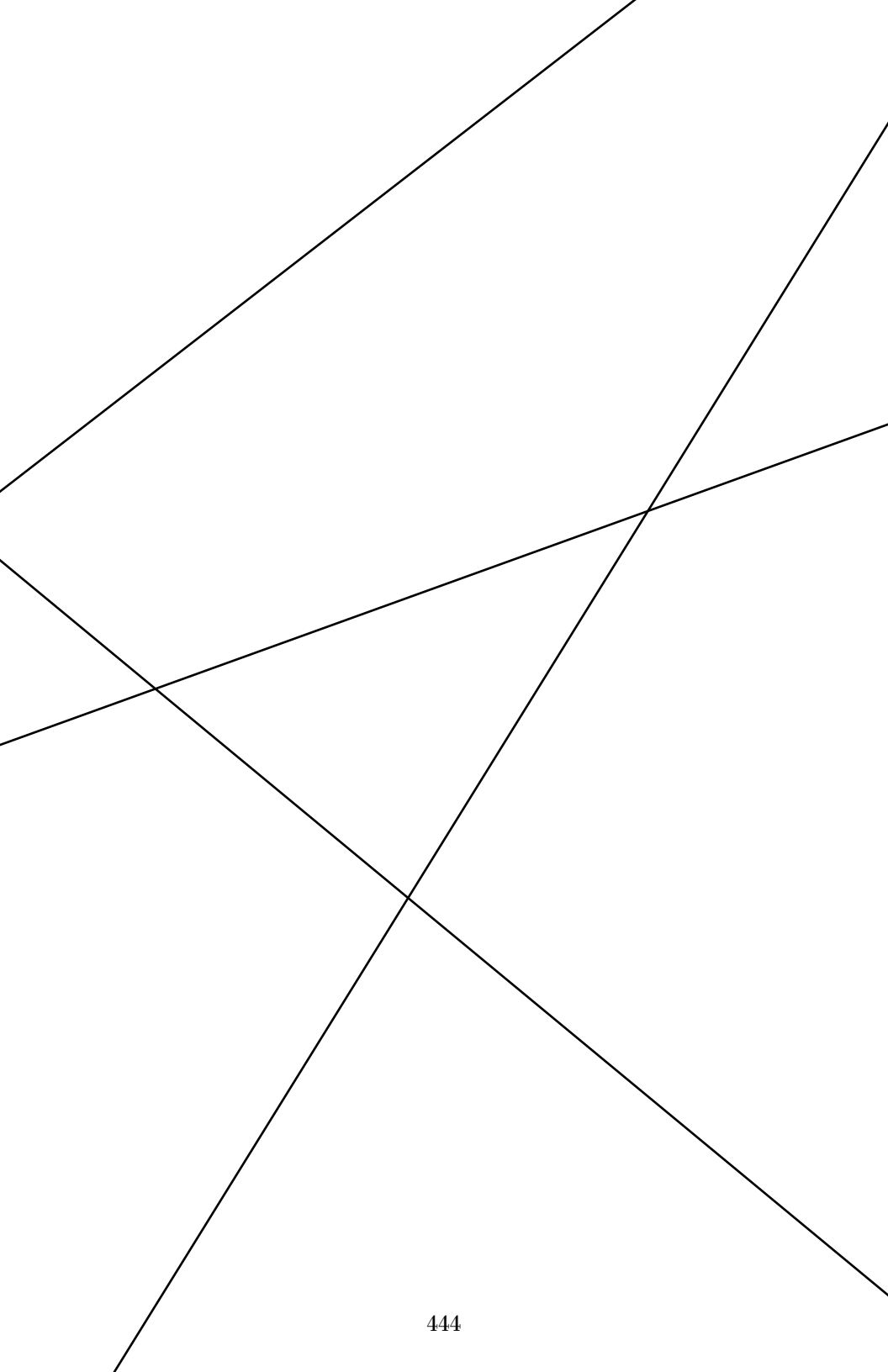
y me da ilusión.

When I Became a Burrow

A star fell silently
Spectacle singular and mine
I caught her with care
It burned a bit, but was no bother
Her radiance filled me with sweet tears
Nothing would be the same, and I knew
There was after now, and before
The apotheosis of my history!
I made the only rational and predictable choice:
I swallowed her.

At times, even now, I cough out sprays of stardust
And in my eyes, out of nowhere, strange pricking shimmers coalesce
Even in winter, I must wear light summer clothes for the heat
Flames may leap from my mouth if I laugh too hard, so I try not to

But I don't mind.
I possess a star
My star
And she hides my hope.



word for word / parola per parola
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Scuola Holden

Translator's Note

“The Other Girl”, by Evelyn Batchelder Burd, is a dark fairy tale which tells the story of two unnamed girls who live in a forest, throughout their youth and puberty.

The tone of the narration is grotesque, turning almost into horror sometimes, even if there is no violence or true fear. Writing this story in such a genre is brilliant to me, especially because the central topics of the story are so often related to “pinkness”, especially when it comes to narratives.

The main theme of the story is in fact, without any doubt, the growth of the two girls and their relationship with themselves and with each other, the changing of their bodies and the need to be close despite any cracking between them.

The biggest challenge in translating was to keep the same atmosphere of the original text, the genre, and the touch of magic that follows every page without being too invasive.

It was crucial to me to be intentional with the meaning of certain words that are used in an unconventional way in the English. It was my duty to bring these words into the Italian while maintaining the same feeling of “weirdness”, to not lose the deeper sense that the author had in mind.

Because of this, I had to carefully choose the correct level of language to use, which in English is a complex one without ever being an obstacle to the reader's comprehension.

It was a priority to me not to make the importance of the theme of the story, in its delicacy and complexity, seem typical, or even worse, stereotypical. The risk of missing Evelyn's eye, which is very personal and particular, was very high and made me seriously consider things which might appear obvious, such as the meaning of even small words like "girl".

In general, while translating this story it was very important to not to rely on the first translation that came to mind, but always to dig deeper, looking for the inner, light-bringing, true meaning of each word.

Atmosphere, sound of words, and rhythm were all crucial aspects of the text that I could not keep apart. In this case, the simple meaning of words was not everything, and "The Other Girl" is proof that form is also substance.

EVELYN RUBY BATCHELDER BURD

THE OTHER GIRL (EXCERPT)

There were two girls who lived in the forest and ate rocks. It was their secret; a part of the games that they played. They would play evil witch and little prince, they would stare at each other and see who could go the longest without blinking, one above water, one below, the surface of the river acting as a mirror. The rocks taught them everything; how to shave their teeth, how to catch the rabbits, how to filter water.

They tumbled through trees down hills together, to find the rocks, hidden under mushrooms and trapped away in caves. The rocks started with mundane whispers, then murmured desires, thoughts, rumbled whole lives they would have lived on two legs. The girls tried to live for the rocks.

The girls loved the forest. There they drank from the rocks and ate in the streams and found each other. The water was where the games clarified. The moss would gurgle and the fish would slip and the girls would lock eyes, noses above the water mouths below. Wet hair would drip down their faces and explode below the surface. They wouldn't touch, they would just look, enchant, meld and mold.

Through the discovery of games, they invented their world. They played the fairytale games that the river stones had taught them, but they also played others that they had created; the game of the fish, or the game of the wolves. The game of the fish made them two koi, encircling each other so slowly that you almost couldn't tell they were moving. Maybe they didn't know that they were. The game of the wolves was the most complicated and involved more energy than the others. There were more gestures to imitate, more connections to understand. It's harder to transform your figure into a wolf than into a fish, but that wasn't the trickiest part. They could never quite complete the perfect act of giving. It was something they'd watched the wolves do. After a wolf died, whether by

**tradotto dall'inglese da
ACHIM NOFFKE**

L'ALTRA FANCIULLA

C'erano due fanciulle che vivevano nel bosco e mangiavano le pietre. Era il loro segreto; parte dei loro giochi. Giocavano alla strega cattiva e al piccolo principe, si guardavano negli occhi per vedere chi riusciva a stare più a lungo senza chiuderli, una sott'acqua, l'altra fuori, con la superficie del fiume a fare da specchio. Dalle pietre imparavano tutto; come limarsi i denti, come catturare i conigli, come filtrare l'acqua.

Insieme ruzzolavano in mezzo agli alberi giù per le colline, per cercare le pietre, nascoste sotto i funghi e intrappolate nelle grotte. Le pietre cominciano con normali sussurri, poi mormoravano desideri, pensieri, borbottavano a proposito delle vite che avrebbero vissuto su due gambe. Le fanciulle provavano a vivere per le pietre.

Amavano il bosco. Lì bevevano dalle pietre, mangiavano nei ruscelli e si trovavano. Era nell'acqua che i giochi si rivelavano completamente. Un gorgoglio usciva dal muschio e i pesci sguazzavano e le fanciulle chiudevano gli occhi, il naso fuori e la bocca dentro l'acqua. I capelli bagnati sgocciolavano sui loro volti ed esplodevano sotto la superficie. Loro non toccavano mai, si limitavano a guardare, incantarsi, fondersi e plasmarsi.

Attraverso la scoperta dei giochi, inventavano il loro mondo. Oltre a quelli delle fiabe che avevano imparato dai sassi del lago, ne crearono altri; il gioco dei pesci, oppure il gioco dei lupi. Il gioco dei pesci le rendeva due carpe che si giravano attorno così lentamente da sembrare quasi immobili. Forse neanche loro sapevano di muoversi.

Il gioco dei lupi era il più complicato e richiedeva gli sforzi maggiori. C'erano più gesti da imitare, più passaggi da capire. È più difficile trasformarsi in lupo che in pesce, ma non era quella la parte più spinosa. Non riuscivano mai a

course or by force, another wolf would sniff it out, tear through its chest, and take its heart. The game would have been easy if all it required was taking. But after the wolves performed the simple, invasive magic, they would give the heart away. The girls would watch, crouched in the dirt and the leaves, shy behind tree trunks but captured by the scene. One wolf would tenderly place the heart on the cold earth before another and then bow away. The girls had never seen a heart rejected. They felt that they were missing some part of the ritual. During these moments the air felt softer, thinner, and they weren't sure if they could breathe. They felt queasy, had to look away. They were enthralled with this magic but couldn't quite settle with it themselves. They were excited by the idea of a new game but were unsure how to imitate it. That magic was distant from them, something the wolves must have learned from the trees, a magic more difficult than unzipping yourself for someone else to see. They'd known this from the beginning; they'd learned it from the rocks.

Most games they found in the middle of the day, but there was one game that they learned in the middle of the night. The stars had been high and clear; crystals. The girls had lain in the grassy leaves under a blanket of dirt and listened to the stars which were the oldest rocks; the ancestors. Millions of years old they were, and hundreds of millions of games had they invented. The stars whispered to the girls about unzipping, about unfolding, about seam ripping. They lay there in the dirt under the stars and felt for the seams. It was hard to find the separation bumping along the ridges of the ribs, rather than the hidden places under their armpits, inside their lips, or even in the folds between their legs. They used their sharpened teeth to tear at the thread, and their mucky fingernails to catch any strand left standing. They knew that they could do this, because it was external. They touched no internal organ as they turned themselves inside out for that game, and traded skins.

The first time they played was a bit jarring. At first, they struggled to use their fingers, unsure of how their bones would fit, whether there would be wrinkles or stretch marks to come. They tripped over their feet and scraped at their cheeks to see. They laughed at each other and cackled to hear their own laughs coming from mismatched mouths. They were exhilarated by this new type of transformation they had discovered. It brought them closer to each other,

completare fino in fondo il perfetto atto di donare. Lo avevano visto fare ai lupi. Alla morte di un lupo, naturale o violenta che fosse, un altro lupo lo annusava, gli sgarciava il petto, e prendeva il cuore. Un gioco facile, se si fosse trattato solo di prendere. Ma dopo aver eseguito quella magia semplice e invasiva, i lupi regalavano il cuore. Le fanciulle guardavano, accovacciate sulla terra e le foglie, spaventate dietro i tronchi degli alberi ma ammaliata dalla scena. Un lupo adagiava con cura il cuore sul terreno freddo davanti a un altro, per poi allontanarsi a capo chino. Le fanciulle non avevano mai visto rifiutare un cuore. Sentivano che in quel rituale qualcosa gli sfuggiva. In quei momenti l'aria si faceva più dolce, più sottile, e non erano certe di riuscire a respirare. Si sentivano male, dovevano distogliere lo sguardo. Quella magia le affascinava, ma non riuscivano a comprenderla del tutto. L'idea di un nuovo gioco le entusiasmava, ma non sapevano bene come imitarlo. Era una magia lontana da loro, i lupi dovevano averla appresa dagli alberi, un tipo di magia più difficile che slacciarsi per farsi vedere da qualcun altro. Loro questo lo sapevano sin dall'inizio; lo avevano imparato dalle pietre.

Scoprivano la maggior parte dei giochi durante il giorno, ma uno lo avevano imparato a notte fonda. Le stelle erano alte e luminose; cristalli. Le fanciulle si erano stese sul terreno erboso sotto una coperta di terra ad ascoltare le stelle che erano le pietre più antiche; le antenate. Erano lì da milioni di anni, e avevano inventato centinaia di milioni di giochi. Le stelle sussurrarono alle fanciulle come slacciarsi, schiudersi, scuirci. Loro rimasero sdraiate sotto le stelle a tastarsi le cuciture. Era difficile trovare la commessura che emergeva lungo la cassa toracica, oppure le parti nascoste sotto le ascelle, dentro le labbra, o perfino nelle pieghe tra le gambe. Usarono i denti affilati per strappare i bordi, e le unghie sporche per tirare via ogni filo che rimaneva. Sapevano di poterlo fare, perché era all'esterno. Rivoltandosi da capo a piedi per il gioco, non toccavano organi interni, e si scambiarono di pelle.

La prima volta fu un po' fastidioso. All'inizio fecero fatica a usare le dita, non sapendo come le ossa si sarebbero adattate, se si sarebbero create rughe o smagliature. Fecero qualche passo e si stroppiarono le guance per riuscire a vedere. Ridevano l'una dell'altra e sghignazzavano sentendo le loro risa provenire da bocche diverse. Le divertiva il nuovo tipo di trasformazione che avevano

closer to the rocks who had guided them, closer to the sky.

They would exchange and meld again at night, shifting skins back and forth until the once new casings felt as natural to them as those of the koi and the wolf; as natural as the rocks against their teeth. The skin stretching game made most sense below the stars and in the water, where the sounds of the frogs and the bears and the howls and the bees ran together, where they echoed between the trees on either bank, and between the water and the sky. That's where the girls decided maybe there was no need for a skin to return to a certain set of bones. Maybe they could last a little bit longer in each other's skin, maybe more than just a night, maybe a day. Maybe even a stretch of the moon.

They melded, they separated, they couldn't remember which skin had been theirs to start with. And one night, a girl felt something warm slip from between her legs. The water ran red and filled with blossoms and plumes. The other girl felt dry. Whose skin had produced the flowers, the paint, the art that could fill the lakes and the sky? Which girl could claim credit, which girl wanted to? And here was the first opportunity for competition, the first place to claim something outside of the forest and for themselves. All of a sudden, the skins felt uncomfortable; one too much like the moon and the other too much like the sun. How could they change skins now, when one of them was so clearly different? What would it mean for them to trade, and would the blood come with the skin or with the organs? One felt jealous and the other scared, unsure what made them different, strange, broken. The stars had not told them of this power, that the balance they had not realized was so fragile could break. The rocks had betrayed them, and they could not forgive each other.

That was the first night the girls ever spent apart.

One left the other, slipped away into the shadows, found a wolf skin, or a rabbit, and loped away while the other lay her head against the leaves. Howls echoed through the trees those nights, when a girl couldn't find the other. They had never considered that they could be lost, that there could be an issue finding one another. There had never been a need to invent calls to find each other, or to speak to the bees to spread the word. One thought they would never unite again. The other flooded the river with her blood and her tears.

scoperto. Le portò a essere più vicine, più vicine alle pietre che le avevano guidate, più vicine al cie-lo.

Si scambiavano e si rimodellavano la notte, alternandosi le pelli fino a sentirsele addosso con la stessa naturalezza di quelle della carpa e del lupo; naturali come le pietre contro i loro denti. Il gioco di tirarsi via la pelle aveva più senso sotto le stelle e dentro l'acqua, dove i versi di rane orsi gufi e api si mescolavano, echeggiando tra gli alberi su entrambe le sponde, e tra l'acqua e il cielo. Fu lì che le fanciulle decisero che forse non era necessario che una pelle ritornasse a un preciso insieme di os-sa. Forse potevano stare un po' di più nella pelle dell'altra, forse più che una sola notte, forse un giorno. Forse perfino una fase lunare.

Si fondevano, si separavano, non ricordavano qual era stata la loro pelle. E una notte una fan-ciulla sentì una cosa calda colarle da in mezzo alle gambe. L'acqua si tinse di rosso e si riempì di fiori e piume. L'altra fanciulla si sentì asciutta. Di chi era la pelle che aveva prodotto i fiori, il colore, l'arte che riusciva a riempire i laghi e il cielo? Chi poteva prendersene il merito, chi voleva farlo? Fu la prima occasione di competere, la prima opportunità di pretendere qualcosa al di fuori del bosco e per loro stesse. All'improvviso, le pelli erano fastidiose; una troppo simile alla luna e l'altra troppo simile al sole. Come potevano scambiarsele ora che una era tanto diversa? Cos'avrebbe comportato? Il sangue avrebbe seguito la pelle o gli organi? Una era gelosa e l'altra spaventata, incerte di cosa le rendesse strane, diverse, rotte. Le stelle non avevano detto che esisteva quel potere, che quell'equilibrio più fragile del previsto si potesse rompere. Le pietre le avevano tradite, e loro non potevano perdonarsi.

Fu la prima notte che le fanciulle non passarono assieme.

Una abbandonò l'altra, si inoltrò nell'oscurità, trovò la pelle di un lupo, o di un coniglio, e corse via mentre l'altra poggiava la testa sulle foglie. Quelle notti i gufi echeggiavano tra gli alberi, quando una fanciulla non riusciva a trovare l'altra. Non avevano mai pensato di potersi perdere, che ritro-varsi potesse essere difficile. Non avevano mai avuto bisogno di inventare un richiamo o di parlare con le api per spargere la voce. Una pensava che non si sarebbero mai più riunite. L'altra inondava il fiume di sangue e lacrime.

The skins changed.

One girl embraced her blood. She wondered how it could keep coming and yet she could feel stronger, feel the dull pain in her gut pulsing through her veins and fueling her legs to run with the wolves. Under the full moon of the third month after the first blood, hunting with the wolves, she fell. Something strange had happened, a root had crept and curled its way above the soil, perhaps overnight, because she knew that she had never met this root before. Her ankle swiveled and something sharp marked her side. She could feel the hot blood coursing, not just from between her legs but along her seams, as well. The rib cage was not enough to stop it, and the other wolves left her behind. She lay, in the dirt, heaving, having come so abruptly to a stop, and asked the stars to help her stop the blood. They were silent.

So she limped to the river, where the water had taken her excess before, where it had sewn together the shredded skin and built it up stronger, though thicker and bumpier, resistant to the rocks which might be angry and point out a sharp edge.

Once her skin had stitched itself together again and her ankle had straightened and strengthened, she felt a certain satisfaction, a gratification, one that felt familiar, yet distant; lost somehow. But the warmth only lasted a moment before following the red strokes away from her, downstream. She watched it go. She wanted to feel it again, immediately, to understand where it had come from, when it had coursed through her veins before.

found a sharp edge, a rock peeking out of the dirt, one that was isolated, outcasted, alone. She drew it along her elbow, her cheek, against the soft part of her thighs. And she realized where the missing warmth had come from.

The other girl had been spending much time as a passive spectator to her body. She'd watched as when she spent more time in the river, her skin browned, her hair lightened, and little brown dots turned her skin into a reflection of the night sky. Her thighs began to thicken like the trunks of the trees, her hips spiraling outwards, her chest slipping and dripping into waterdrops of skin.

In the water, sometimes she could pretend it was all the same, the way

Le pelli cambiarono.

Una fanciulla accolse il proprio sangue. Non capiva come potesse sentirsi più forte nonostante quello continuasse a uscire, sentiva il dolore sordo alla pancia pulsarle nelle vene e rinforzarle le gambe per correre con i lupi. Sotto la luna piena del terzo mese dopo il primo sangue, cacciando con i lupi, cadde. Era successo qualcosa di strano, una radice era uscita e si era curvata fuori dal terreno, forse durante la notte, perché sapeva di non aver mai incontrato prima quella radice. Le si storse la caviglia e qualcosa di affilato le ferì il fianco. Sentì colare il sangue caldo, non solo da in mezzo alle gambe ma anche lungo le cuciture. La gabbia toracica non bastava a fermarlo, e gli altri lupi la la-sciarono indietro. Dopo quella brusca battuta d'arresto, si sdraiò sulla terra, ansimante, e chiese alle stelle di aiutarla a fermare il sangue. Loro tacquero.

Zoppicò fino al fiume, dove l'acqua aveva già accolto i suoi eccessi, dove la pelle lacerata si era ricucita e ricostruita più forte anche se più spessa e tumefatta, resistente alle pietre che potevano essere iraconde e tirare fuori angoli affilati.

Una volta che la pelle si fu rimarginata e con la caviglia di nuovo dritta e forte, provò una certa soddisfazione, una gratificazione, che le sembrava familiare, ma allo stesso tempo lontana; in un certo senso perduta. Ma il calore durò solo un momento prima di andarsene insieme ai rivoli rossi che seguivano la corrente. Lo guardò scomparire. Voleva sentirlo di nuovo, in quell'istante, per capire da dove provenisse e quando le aveva già attraversato le vene.

Trovò un angolo affilato, una pietra che affiorava dal terreno, isolata, lontana, sola. Se la fece scorrere lungo il gomito, le guance, contro la parte morbida delle cosce. E capì da dove proveniva il calore svanito.

L'altra fanciulla aveva trascorso molto tempo da spettatrice passiva del proprio corpo. Aveva osservato come quando passava più tempo nel fiume, si era abbronzata, i capelli le si erano schiariti, e piccoli puntini marroni le rendevano la pelle un riflesso del cielo notturno. Le cosce cominciarono a ingrossarsi come i tronchi degli alberi, i fianchi a curvarsi verso l'esterno, il petto a cadere e a colare in liquide gocce di pelle.

Nell'acqua, a volte poteva fingere che non fosse cambiato nulla, che

that it had once been. If she covered herself in the dirt and the leaves, she was just a small one, a rabbit, under the brush.

Her hair started to dry in waves, in separated tendrils. She spent as much time looking at the peaks and caves and valleys of her skin as she did playing the game of the fish or the wolves, as she did hibernating with the bears. The body was not hers, she felt, and yet it was always there when she finished a game. She wanted a different body, one that she could call her own, and she thought of the other girl. She had forgotten, after what seemed like years, that there was a possibility the skin was not hers.

When the girls found each other again, they had been drawn together by the water, and the bodies that had once been as familiar as their own skin looked foreign.

That night they traded one last time and didn't play the game anymore. They thought, perhaps, that exchanging skins would help them to understand the time they had spent apart; that feeling the inside of unfamiliar marks and scars wrinkle as one girl straightened an elbow or bent a knee or raised an eyebrow would call to her attention the foreign past which lay there.

Walking with the new bodies, they discovered untold stories, and soon, without words but with an understanding, they could no longer remember why they had separated in the first place, and they were running with the wolves again. The stars sang above them and the dirt and the rocks and the water moved like waves and time and feet.

But they didn't run quite like before. One of them had a large scar on her side which rippled with every movement, and the other was a bit slower, couldn't lope as far for as long, and always seemed to have hair tangling with her line of vision. Now, their feet were more calloused, and they'd traveled parts of the forest the other didn't know. They made a practice of taking each other to these hidden nooks, fingers interlaced, eyes closed or open; they had feeling fingers and translating toes. They could trust the other to know the space and let themselves be blind with trust. Two beating hearts discovered new caverns, instead of one. It made a difference, they thought, to be somewhere with the other half of their

tutto fosse come un tempo. Se si copriva di terra e di foglie, diventava piccola, un coniglio, immersa nella boscaglia.

I capelli le cominciarono a seccarsi in forma di onde, in singole ciocche. Passava tanto tempo a guardare le guglie grotte e vallate della propria pelle quanto a giocare ai pesci e ai lupi, ad andare in letargo con gli orsi. Quel corpo non le apparteneva, lo sentiva, eppure ogni volta che finiva un gioco lo trovava lì. Ne voleva uno diverso, che potesse sentire suo, e pensava all'altra fanciulla. Aveva dimenticato, dopo quelli che sembravano anni, la possibilità che quella pelle non fosse sua.

Quando le due si incontrarono di nuovo, ad avvicinarle era stata l'acqua, e il corpo che un tempo era stato familiare quanto la propria pelle sembrò sconosciuto.

Quella notte si scambiarono di pelle per l'ultima volta e misero per sempre fine al gioco. Pensavano, forse, che fare a cambio le avrebbe aiutate a conoscere il tempo che avevano trascorso lontane; che sentire sfregare l'interno di segni e cicatrici nuove al distendersi di un gomito o al piegarsi di un ginocchio o alzando un sopracciglio avrebbe fatto emergere il passato nascosto lì.

Camminando con i nuovi corpi, scoprirono storie mai sentite, e presto, senza parlare ma capendosi, non riuscirono più a ricordare perché si erano separate, e di nuovo correvano con i lupi. Le stelle cantavano sopra di loro e la terra e le pietre e l'acqua si muovevano come le onde, il tempo, i piedi.

Ma non correvano come in passato. Una aveva sul fianco una grossa cicatrice che si raggrinziva a ogni movimento, l'altra era più lenta, non riusciva più a correre tanto lontano e a lungo, e sembrava che i capelli le offuscassero costantemente la visuale. Ora avevano più calli sui piedi e avevano girato per parti del bosco che l'altra non conosceva. Presero l'abitudine di portarsi a vicenda in quegli angoli nascosti, le dita intrecciate, gli occhi chiusi o aperti; avevano dita delle mani che sentivano e dita dei piedi che traducevano. Potevano fidarsi l'una dell'altra per conoscere lo spazio e permettersi di essere cieche nella fiducia. A scoprire nuove grotte furono due cuori pulsanti, invece di uno. Non era la stessa

soul.

Once, they stumbled upon a new cavern, at a different edge of the forest, at the end of a trail of moss that squished through their toes as they got closer, one with stalactite and stalagmite teeth, one that was foggy and steamy and filled with a drip drip sound and a chorus of frogs. They gathered rocks that had fallen off from the top of the cave and made a circle; they found wax and made candles, creating light around themselves and encircling their bodies in warmth. This was the first time they'd ever felt the gap between their hands.

There was something there, in that touch, that the girls hadn't expected. An awareness coupled with a sort of leafy texture, without the wax or the cold. When they had exchanged skins, there was a cool feeling to it, removed, detached, external. But here, placing one palm against the other and wrapping fingers around wrists, there was a different sort of feeling. Like touching the trunk of a tree or gathering up a stone; they couldn't feel from the other side.

The magic here was different. More traditional, from a time when the rocks were still inventing their own games by watching animals. Even knowing the insides of each other's skins couldn't meld them the way they were melded here. There was a droplet of a gift, one they didn't know how to give.

They felt too the eyes of the frogs around them, the ways in which the fresher magic was pulsing here, the ways in which they could climb up the sides of the rock and not fall, the ways in which they could see the scene from strange angles.

But they sat still, the light flickering across the cavern and reflecting on the water of the pool, lighting the whole space up in rippling and moving waves. There were sounds; the water lapping softly at the rocks' ridge, the frogs, sometimes croaking sometimes leaping, and the soft crackles and pops that candles make, when the wicks get smaller.

This was a moment they would remember, one that echoed not just in the cavern, but in the pulse of their palms and thoughts, too. When they left the cavern, when they lost it, their internal compasses could no longer point the way to the squishy seeded path, the one they'd found as if by fate, and the magic of the cave seemed like the magic of a dream.

cosa, pensavano, stare in un posto con l'altra metà della propria anima.

Una volta si ritrovarono in una nuova grotta, in un punto diverso del bosco, alla fine di un sentiero di muschio che affondava sotto i loro piedi man mano che si avvicinavano; la grotta aveva zanne di stalattite e stalagmite, era nebbiosa e umida, pervasa di un plic plic e di un coro di rane. Raccolsero le pietre cadute dall'alto della grotta e le misero in cerchio; trovarono la cera e fecero candele, ricavando la luce e circondandosi i corpi di calore. Fu la prima volta che sentirono lo spazio tra le loro mani.

C'era qualcosa lì, in quel tocco, che le fanciulle non avevano previsto. Una consapevolezza unita a una specie di sensazione erbosa, senza la cera o il freddo. Quando si erano scambiate la pelle, la sensazione era fredda, distaccata, distante, esterna. Ma qui, sovrapponendo i palmi e stringendo le dita attorno ai polsi, la sensazione era diversa. Come toccare il tronco di un albero o stringere in mano un sasso; non potevano sentirla dall'altro lato.

Qui la magia era diversa. Più tradizionale, appartenente a un tempo in cui le rocce ancora inventavano i giochi osservando gli animali. Persino conoscere l'interno della pelle dell'altra non le aveva fuse come lo erano adesso. Lì c'era una stilla di dono, che non sapevano come trasmettere.

Sentivano anche gli occhi delle rane attorno, il modo che quella nuova magia aveva di pulsare, i modi in cui potevano scalare le pareti di roccia senza cadere, i modi in cui potevano vedere la scena da prospettive insolite.

Ma restarono sedute, la luce che tremolava per la grotta e si rifletteva sull'acqua della pozza, illuminando tutto l'ambiente di onde agitate e increspate. Si udivano rumori; l'acqua che sbatteva dolcemente sui bordi di pietra, le rane, che ora gracidavano ora saltavano, e i piccoli scoppiettii e crepitii che fanno le candele, man mano che lo stoppino brucia.

Fu un momento che avrebbero ricordato, che avrebbe echeggiato non solo nella caverna ma anche nel pulsare dei loro palmi e pensieri. Quando lasciarono la caverna, quando la smarrirono, la loro bussola interiore smise di indicare la strada per il sentiero di muschio, quello che avevano trovato come se l'avesse voluto il destino, e la magia della grotta sembrò quella di un sogno.

Translator's Note

In Achim Noffke's story "Gli Angeli"—or "The Angels"—our unnamed narrator reflects on his childhood with his best friend Ari, whose funeral he is going to as he walks through LA.

Noffke writes in a style that is sparse, using as few words as possible to get at the idea he's expressing. This style is very different from my own; my writing has often been described as flowery, and sometimes there's actually an excess of words on the page. Especially in a translation, where there inevitably will be more words than in the source text because of stealth glosses or extra details to help the reader of the translation, this was my biggest challenge with the piece. I did end up adding words at times; for example, the narrator orders pancakes "for the novelty of it," words that aren't in the original because in the Italian "pancakes" is in English—there's no word in Italian for pancakes so I needed to express that this wasn't a typical breakfast order in some other way. To counteract additions like this, I tried to make the voice sound more clipped by making clauses shorter; for example ending the first sentence earlier in the English, after "goes off" so that "It's time" can be its own quick sentence, giving a rhythm that emulates the sparse voice of the original. Another place I drew back to counteract my additions was in describing the narrator's speech. In Italian it's "il discorso che ho scritto," literally the speech that I wrote, which is a bit wordier in English. So I traded it for "my speech," using fewer words and still retaining the meaning.

So much of this piece is about nostalgia, remembering a friend who is gone, especially in the context of their biggest joy, in this case a romanticized sport. At the same time, the narrator is reserved, holds back, and doesn't

give any thoughts related to his feelings until the end, when he reveals that he finds the speech he's written for the funeral pointless, a weak gesture at remembering his friend's lively life.

Ari is the main character of the piece, but even so, I enjoyed making my relationship with the narrator. The narrator for me became a bit more sentimental. Not in the sense that he would begin to profess his feelings, or diverge from the stark voice that characterizes Achim's style, but it was helpful for me to understand where he was coming from, to think about what these specific memories mean to him, why he's reflecting on them as he walks to Ari's funeral.

Ari was able to embody an endless go-getter attitude for the more reserved narrator. I've often had that experience with friends, where I think of them as more outgoing than me, more outrageous, more the way that I wish I could be. Once I drew that connection between the narrator and myself, the translation started to really feel like it was flowing through me.

ACHIM NOFFKE

GLI ANGELI

Suona la sveglia, è presto. Mi vesto al volo ed esco per andare a fare colazione. Ordino pancakes e succo di arancia e mentre mangio sento due operai chiacchierare con la barista al bancone del ristorante. Dicono che la linea del treno sarà sospesa fino a domani. Non riesco a capirne il motivo. Sono in America solo da qualche giorno e il mio inglese è zoppicante.

Pago la colazione e torno nella camera che ho affittato. Mi faccio la doccia, metto il completo nero che ho portato per il funerale e leggo per l'ultima volta il discorso che ho scritto. Sono quasi le nove e il funerale di Ari è alle due del pomeriggio. Vado fino alla stazione di West Pasadena sperando di aver capito male. È chiusa. Prendo il telefono e cerco le indicazioni per la chiesa metodista di Lynwood.

Il navigatore indica che ci vogliono più di quattro ore. Dovrò attraversare tutta Los Angeles a piedi e vestito di tutto punto. Mi infilo nella tasca dei pantaloni il foglio su cui ho scritto il discorso e mi tolgo la giacca per gettarmela sulla spalla. È una calda giornata di estate e nel cielo non c'è una nuvola. Apro l'ultimo bottone della camicia e allargo il nodo della cravatta. Mi incammino verso la chiesa di Lynwood, dall'altra parte della città.

Quando frequentavamo le medie, dopo la scuola andavo tutti i giorni a casa di Ari, perché i miei genitori non erano a casa. Sua madre ci preparava da mangiare e poi si metteva in salotto a leggere o a parlare al telefono in inglese.

Trascorrevamo i pomeriggi nel quartiere Trieste di Roma. Ogni giorno ci mettevamo a giocare a calcio con gli altri ragazzini a Piazzale Jonio, ma regolarmente, dopo massimo un'ora, Ari mi diceva di andarcene perché si annoiava.

Dal giorno in cui ci eravamo conosciuti, mi aveva sempre detto di voler diventare un pilota di Formula Uno, e che per questo non aspettava altro che diventare più grande e più bravo, e passare dai kart, su cui già gareggiava, alle vere monoposto da Gran Premio. Spesso mi faceva discorsi di ore su motori, pneumatici e altre cose che non conoscevo, per di più mischiando inglese e italiano e usando anche parole che non capivo.

**translated from the italian by
EVELYN RUBY BATCHELDER BURD**

THE ANGELS

The alarm clock goes off. It's early. I dress quickly and leave to get breakfast, order juice and pancakes. While eating I hear two workers chatting with the barista at the restaurant counter. They're saying the train line will be held up until tomorrow. I can't make out the reason why. I've been in America for just a few days and my English struggles to keep up.

I pay for breakfast and return to my hotel room. I take a shower, put on the black suit I brought for the funeral and read over my speech for the last time. It's almost nine and Ari's funeral is at two. I get all the way to West Pasadena Station, and hope I've misunderstood. It's closed. I get out my phone and look up directions to Lynwood Methodist Church.

I don't think to call an Uber and the GPS indicates that it takes more than four hours to walk. I will have to get through all of Los Angeles on foot and in a suit. I put the speech in my pocket, take off my jacket and toss it over my shoulder. It's a hot summer day and there's not a cloud in the sky. I undo the top button of my shirt and loosen the knot of my tie. I walk towards Lynwood Church, to the other side of the city.

When we were in junior high, after school I would go to Ari's house because my parents were never home. His mom always made us food and then sat in the living room to read or talk to family in English on the phone.

We spent our afternoons in the Trieste district of Rome. Every day we played soccer with other boys in Piazzale Jonio, but usually, after no more than an hour, Ari would say he wanted to leave because he was bored.

In all the days we knew each other, he always said that he wanted to be a Formula One driver. He couldn't wait to be older and better, to move on from the little cars he'd already competed in to the real one-seaters they drive in the Grand Prix. Often he made me talk with him for hours about cars, tires and other things I didn't know about, getting more and more animated, mixing English and Italian and using words I didn't understand.

One windy Sunday in November when we had just started high school,

Una nuvolosa domenica di Novembre, avevamo da poco cominciato la seconda media, andai con lui e il padre al circuito dell'Eur. Quel giorno Ari aveva una gara, e così io mi misi seduto sugli spalti di fianco al padre per vedere queste macchine di cui Ari mi aveva tanto parlato ma che fino ad allora non avevo mai visto, se non in alcune foto che mi aveva mostrato. I kart su cui gareggiava erano molto piccoli e sembravano più dei giocattoli che vere auto, ma appena sentii rombare i motori e vidi questi ragazzini della mia età sfrecciare ad oltre 100 Km/h, mi irrigidii e mi voltai a guardare il pubblico, tirandomi istintivamente su il cappuccio della giacca.

Dopo un po' cominció a piovere, prima solo qualche goccia, poi a dritto. Ci spostammo a guardare la gara in un'area coperta sulla cima degli spalti. Tutti i kart rallentavano, tranne quello di Ari che continuava a spingere sull'asfalto bagnato come se niente fosse, e tempo un paio di giri, si ritrovò primo con molto scarto sugli altri.

Mancava poco al traguardo, quando per superare un pilota rimasto indietro, fece una curva brusca, e il suo kart cominciò a girare su se stesso per poi finire fuori strada. Sbandò sulla parte in terra al bordo della pista senza riuscire a fermarsi, e si andò a schiantare contro la barriera di sicurezza. Il kart fumava sotto la pioggia e la squadra medica si precipitò a soccorrerlo. Lo vedemmo riemergere dal veicolo i cui pezzi erano volati tutt'attorno. Fu caricato su una barella e immediatamente portato verso l'ambulanza. Il padre si precipitò giù dagli spalti, e io lo seguii spaventato. Arrivammo al fianco dell'ambulanza mentre ad Ari veniva tolto il casco e portato di peso a bordo. Mi avvicinai ancora di qualche passo e lo vidi disteso sul lettino. Gli infermieri stavano dicendo al padre che stava bene ma che dovevano portarlo all'ospedale per degli accertamenti. L'equipe medica salì a bordo e suo padre si girò per tornare alla macchina: mi avrebbe riportato a casa e poi sarebbe corso via. Poco prima che chiudessero la porta posteriore dell'ambulanza, riuscii a incrociare lo sguardo di Ari che in tutto ciò rideva mostrando il pollice alzato.

Circa una settimana dopo l'incidente, mentre tornavamo da scuola, gli chiesi se facendo il pilota non avesse paura di morire durante una gara. I miei genitori, dopo quello che era successo, avevano cercato di sminuire l'accaduto per non farmi spaventare, ma sapevo che con un incidente simile si poteva morire, qualunque cosa volesse veramente dire. Lui mi rispose sorridendo come al solito, e mi disse che no, questo non era qualcosa che lo preoccupava. Secondo lui, mi disse, la morte era sopravvalutata. Dopo tutto se muori al massimo può essere un problema per gli altri, non per te. E in più, morire guidando una macchina da corsa è il modo

I went with him and his dad to the Eur district circuit. Ari had a race that day. I sat in the stands next to his dad to watch the car Ari had talked so much about but that until now I had never seen, aside from in photos. The cars he competed in were very small and seemed more like toys than real cars. But as soon as I felt the rumbling of the motors and watched these guys about my age shoot off at over 100 km/hr, I stiffened. I glanced at the audience behind me, instinctively pulling up my jacket hood.

After a bit it started to rain, first just a couple drops and then it came down in floods. We moved to watch the race from a covered area at the top of the bleachers. All the cars slowed down, except for Ari's. His continued to streak like lightning along the wet asphalt as if it were nothing. And after a couple loops he found himself in first with a big lead on the others.

He was not far from the finish line when, to overtake a driver left behind, he took a sudden turn. His car started to go on its own and ended up off of the track. He swerved to the area of dirt along the side without managing to regain control and smacked right into the safety barrier. His car was smoking in the rain and the medics ran to assist him. We watched him emerge from the vehicle, car parts strewn all over the place. He was put on a stretcher and immediately taken to the ambulance. His dad ran down the bleachers and I was right behind him, terrified.

We got to the ambulance while Ari was being extracted from his helmet and brought on board. I took a few more steps and saw him stretched out on a hospital cot. The EMTs were telling Ari's dad that he was fine but he needed to go to the hospital just to be sure. The medical team climbed in after him and his dad turned around to go back to his car—he would take me home and then meet them at the hospital.

Just before they closed the back door of the ambulance, I was able to get a glance of Ari who was laughing despite it all, giving me a thumbs up.

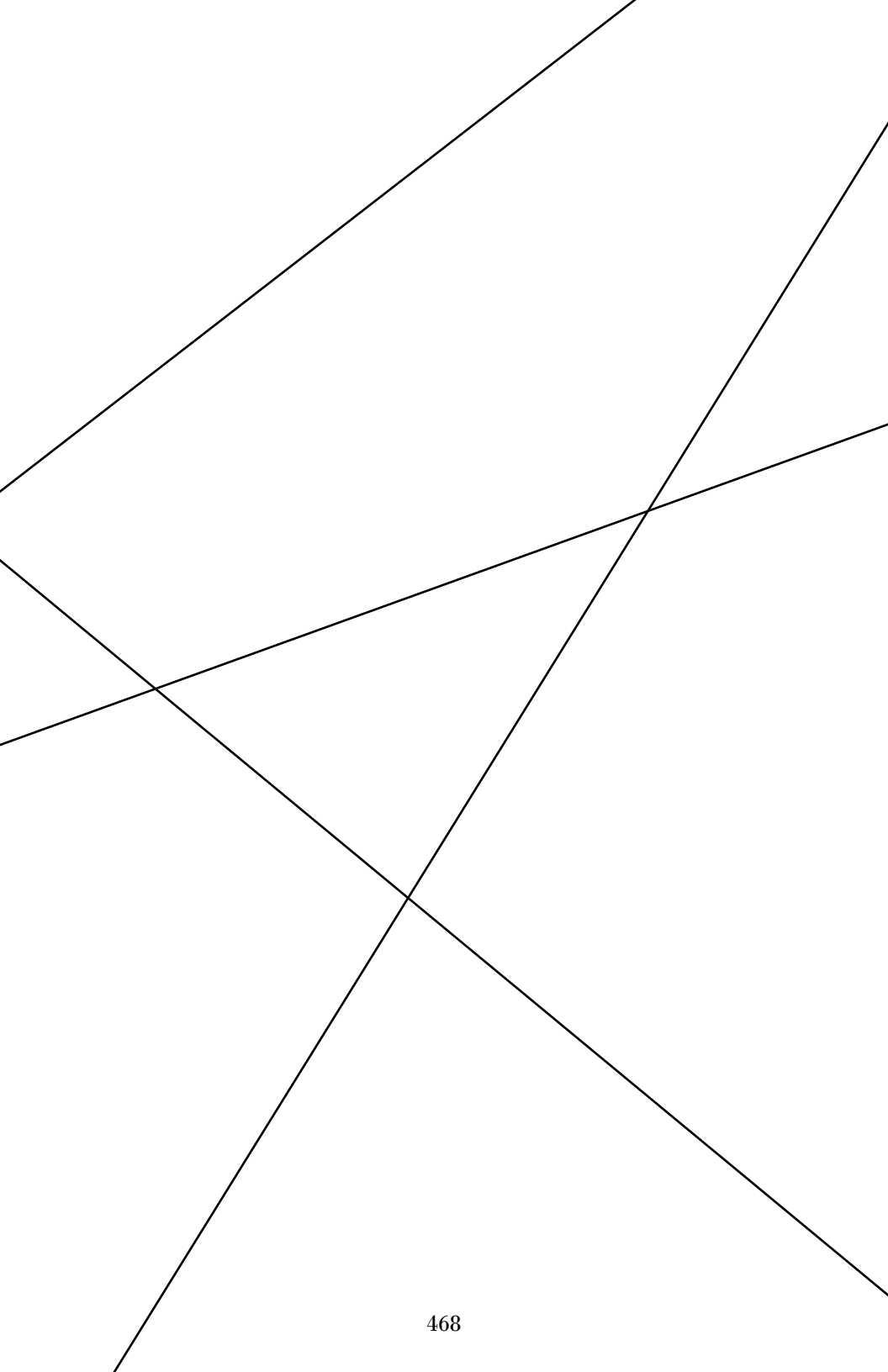
About a week after the incident, when we were both back in school, I asked if, driving down the track, he had no fear of dying. My parents had, after everything that happened, looked for ways to downplay the danger to keep me from worrying. But I knew, no matter what they said, that in a similar accident he could have died. He looked at me, smiling as always, and told me that no, it wasn't something he worried about. From his perspective, he told me, death was played up. After all, when you die it's a problem for others, not for you. And anyways, dying while driving a car down a race track was the best way to go.

I've lost track of how much time has passed since I set out this morning.

migliore di andarsene.

Ho perso il conto di quanto tempo è passato da quando mi sono incamminato stamattina. Tutta Los Angeles mi è passata accanto e mi sembra di essere stato in dieci città diverse. Messicani, africani, armeni, ad ogni quartiere che attraverso mi sposto di migliaia di chilometri. Le scarpe eleganti mi stanno distruggendo i piedi che quasi non sento più. Metto una mano in tasca e tiro fuori il foglio con il discorso che ho scritto per il funerale. Lo leggo di nuovo, e quello che ho scritto così faticosamente nei giorni precedenti ora mi sembra inutile e fastidioso. Mi hanno chiesto di parlare di Ari, sono l'unico venuto fino a lì dall'Italia. Penso che alla fine l'unica cosa che dirò è che è morto a bordo di un'auto di Formula Uno, il modo di gran lunga migliore.a

All of Los Angeles goes by and it seems I've walked through ten different cities. Neighborhoods with as many different cultures. With every neighborhood I walk through I move thousands of kilometers. My dress shoes are destroying my feet so I almost can't feel them anymore. I put a hand in my pocket and bring out my speech. I read it again, and the words I painstakingly wrote in the past few days now sound feeble and fabricated. They asked me to speak about Ari, I'm the only one who came all the way from Italy. I think in the end, the only thing I'll say is that he died in a Formula One car, by far the best way to go.



The top half of the page features three thin, black, intersecting lines that create a complex geometric pattern. One line slopes downwards from left to right, another slopes upwards from left to right, and a third line is nearly vertical, crossing the other two.

acknowledgments

Columbia University and the other participants in the 2022 Word for Word workshop would like to thank the following individuals for supporting the collaborative exchange that made these translations possible, and the publication of this anthology:

Carol Becker and Jana Wright, Deans of the School of the Arts
Lis Harris, Chair of the School of the Arts Writing Program
Susan Bernofsky, Director of Literary Translation at Columbia, School of the Arts Writing Program
Katrine Jensen, LTAC Coordinator, School of the Arts Writing Program
Franklin Winslow, Director of Academic Administration, School of the Arts Writing Program
William Wadsworth, Former Director of Academic Administration, School of the Arts Writing Program
Binnie Kirshenbaum, Professor of Fiction, School of the Arts Writing Program
Jörn Dege and Linn Penelope Micklitz, Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig
Wang Anyi, Hongtu Wang, and Tao Lei, Fudan University
Roberto Taddei, Márcia Fortunato, and Livia Lakomy, Instituto Vera Cruz
Martino Gozzi and Mattia Zuccatti, Scuola Holden
Rodrigo Rojas, Universidad Diego Portales
Lionel Ruffel, Vincent Message, and Vincent Broqua, Université Paris 8
Safwan Masri, Executive VP, Columbia Global Centers and Global Development
Thomas Trebat, Director, Columbia Global Centers | Rio de Janeiro
Karen Poniachik, Director, Columbia Global Centers | Santiago

The page features several thin, black, intersecting lines that create a complex geometric pattern. These lines are not parallel and intersect at various angles, forming a series of overlapping triangles and quadrilaterals across the entire page. The lines are thin and black, set against a plain white background.

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.



