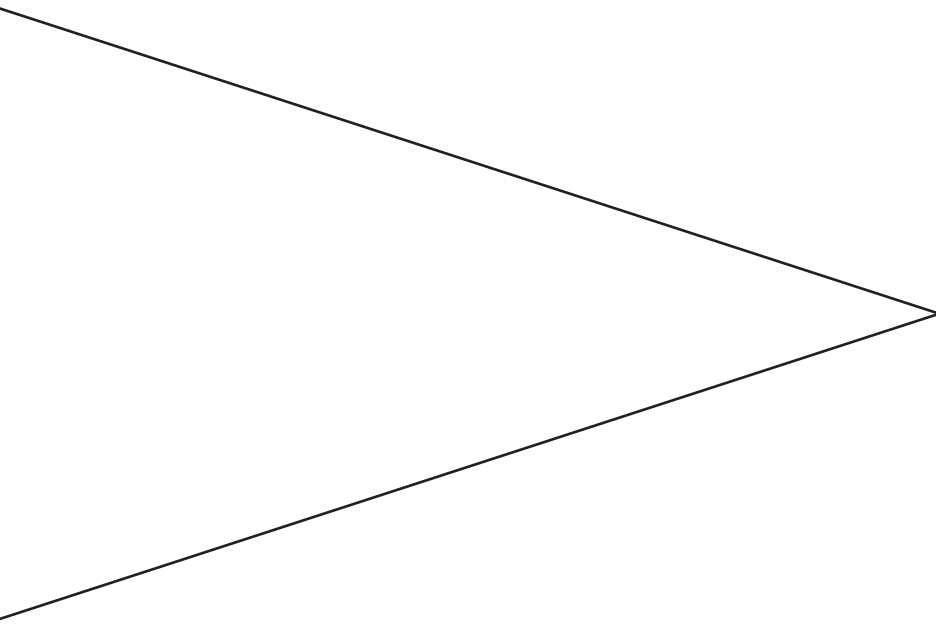
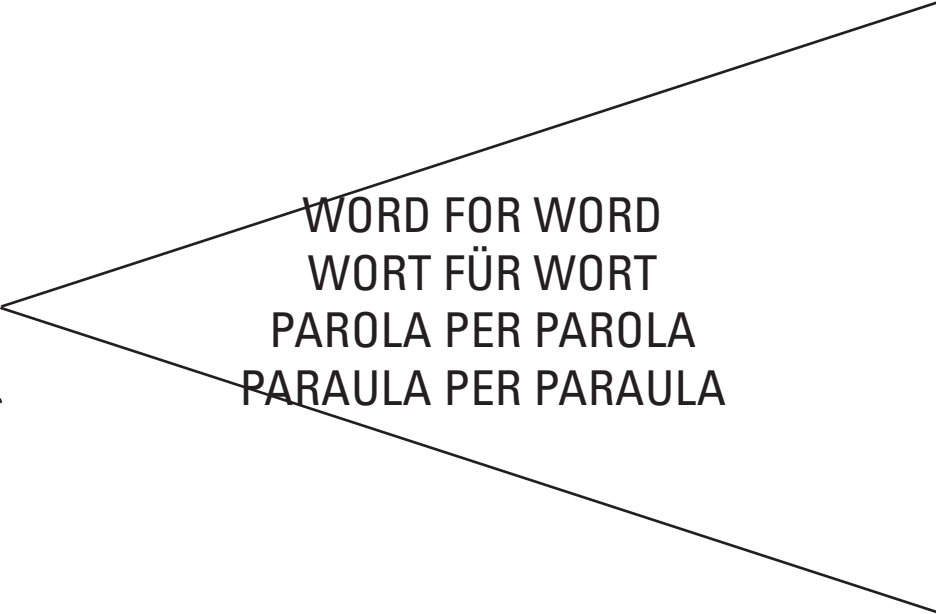


WORD FOR WORD  
WORT FÜR WORT  
PAROLA PER PAROLA  
PARAULA PER PARAULA

2014/2015



Columbia University School of the Arts / Writing  
Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig (DLL)  
Scuola Holden  
Màster en Creació Literària, Universitat Pompeu Fabra-IDEA



WORD FOR WORD  
WORT FÜR WORT  
PAROLA PER PAROLA  
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2014/2015

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Columbia University und alle Mitbeteiligten in den Austauschprogrammen zwischen 2013 und 2015 möchten sich bei den folgenden Institutionen für ihre großzügige Unterstützung, auch bei der Herausgabe vorliegenden Buches, herzlich bedanken:

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Columbia University i els altres participants en els intercanvis Word for Word dels anys 2013-15 agraeixen profundament a les següents institucions el seu suport generós del programa i la seva ajuda pera en fer possible aquest llibre:

### **U.S. Consulate General Leipzig**

(Columbia/DLL, 2013-14)



### **Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig**

(Columbia/DLL, 2013-14)

### **Institut Ramon Llull**

(Columbia/UPF, 2014-15)

### **Fundació Han Nefkens**

(Columbia/UPF, 2014-15)

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(Columbia/Scuola Holden, 2014-15)

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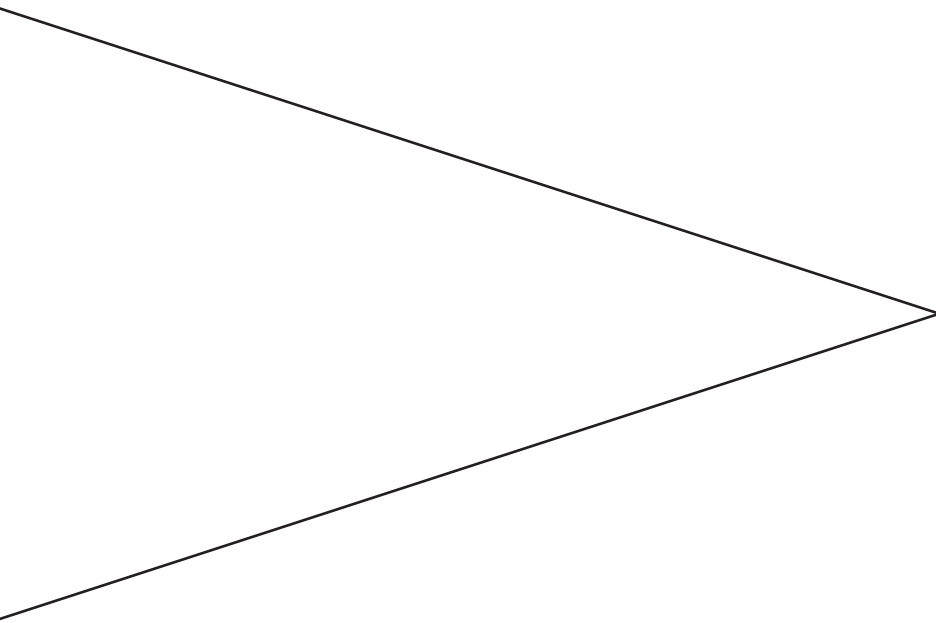
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& the Màster en Creació Literària Universitat Pompeu Fabra—IDEC  
in partnership with the Institut Ramon Llull  
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## FOREWORD

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

Since 2011 the Writing Program has conducted exchanges in partnership with the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig in Leipzig, Germany; the Scuola Holden in Turin, Italy; the Institut Ramon Llull, the Fundació Han Nefkens, and the Universitat Pompeu Fabra—IDEC in Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain); the Columbia Global Center | Middle East in Amman, Jordan; and Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

In the course of these exchanges, cultural horizons and worldviews have been expanded, friendships and artistic partnerships have been forged, and an innovative new model for cross-cultural engagement in literature has been established. In addition, a number of the writers who have participated have gone on to see their translations published in journals and in book form, and have received awards and honors recognizing the quality of their translations.

The present volume offers selections from the texts (originals and translations) composed by twelve students who took

part in the Word for Word program between 2013 and 2015. We hope you enjoy reading the work of these exceptionally talented writers who have translated each other into and out of English, Catalan, German, and Italian—and who, in doing so, have transcended the borders of language and culture at the very outset of their literary careers.

Susan Bernofsky

*Director, Literary Translation at Columbia*

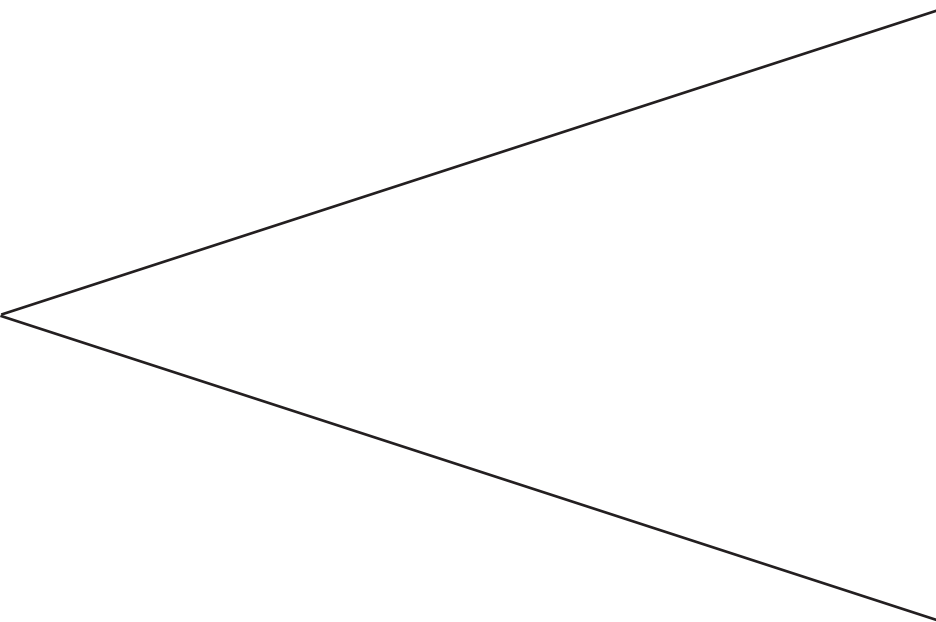
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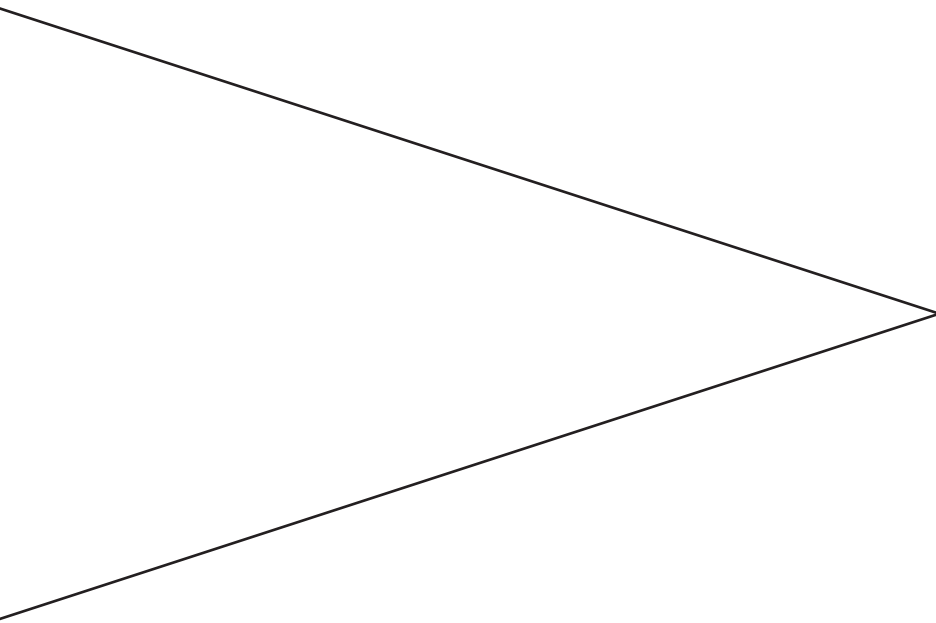
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*Director of Academic Administration*

*Columbia University School of the Arts / Writing*









WORD FOR WORD  
WORT FÜR WORT

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS &  
DEUTSCHES LITERATURINSTITUT LEIPZIG  
2013-2014

# NIKA KNIGHT

## THEBES

[Excerpt]

My father was born in the tiny village of Carrot River, in the middle of Saskatchewan, Canada, in the winter of 1948. It was the kind of place where everyone knew everyone, and there weren't many to know. He'd pull himself to school on subzero winter mornings by hanging onto the backs of pickup trucks, sliding on the ice-coated roads, gripping extra tight when the drivers made hard turns on the prairie-flat streets. He'd mash the red sphere of dye in the middle of his mother's slabs of margarine, massaging the dot outward so that the color bled into the surrounding fat, turning it a butter-like yellow and covering his fingers in grease. In his house, aluminum foil was "silver paper" and toast that fell butter-side down was stolen by the wicked brownies, the little house fairies that my grandmother inherited from her Scottish ancestors.

My father skipped two grades in middle school, was bullied horribly, and had few friends throughout high school. As a teenager he'd collect old candles and stay up all night burning the last bits of wick, dripping the wax slowly into enormous molten castles. I'll never know when his first manic episode occurred but sometimes I picture it brewing during the candle-dripping nights, his inner life churning itself into a silent fever. But then again bipolar disorder is a mental condition, possibly a genetic trait, and according to our current

übersetzt von Lilian Peter

## THEBEN

[Exzerpt]

Mein Vater wurde im Winter 1948 in dem winzigen Dorf Carrot River, das mitten in Saskatchewan, Kanada liegt, geboren. Es handelte sich um die Art von Dorf, in dem jeder jeden kannte; und es gab nicht viele, die man hätte kennen können. An kalten Wintermorgen hängte er sich an die Hecks von Pritschenwagen und ließ sich, schlitternd auf der eisbedeckten Straße, in die Schule bugsieren; wenn die Fahrer scharfe Kurven nahmen, um ihn loszuwerden, hielt er sich nur umso stärker fest. Er zerquetschte den roten Farbkumpen, den seine Mutter zwischen Scheiben von Margarine gelegt hatte, und knetete ihn nach außen, bis seine Finger über und über schmierig waren, damit sich die Farbe auf das Fett übertrug und diesem ein buttergelbes Aussehen verlieh. In dem Haus, in dem er aufwuchs, war Alufolie „Silberpapier“, und eine Toastscheibe, die auf die Marmeladenseite fiel, wurde von den frechen Heinzelmännchen gestohlen, den kleinen Hauswesen, die meine Großmutter von ihren schottischen Vorfahren mitgebracht hatte.

Mein Vater übersprang zwei Klassen, wurde furchtbar gemobbt, und hatte während seiner gesamten Schulzeit keine Freunde. Als Teenager sammelte er alte Kerzen und blieb die ganze Nacht wach, bis der Docht heruntergebrannt war; aus dem Wachs baute er, Tropfen um Tropfen, riesige Schmelzschlösser. Ich werde nie erfahren, wann er seine

psychological model it is a case of altered brain chemistry and not an existential state. The DSM does not allow it an external cause. Still, this is the first time I see my father's brain going elsewhere, his thoughts dallying in a place that feels not normal.

\* \* \*

When I was very young I'd ask my father how to see the things that he saw. While he worked in our garden, he taught me how to see flower fairies. "Close your eyes," he told me, "and imagine a flower fairy. Just let her show herself to you." I closed my eyes and imagined my best friend, her dark hair and tan skin, because I thought she was the most beautiful person I knew. I put her in a frilly dress because it seemed fairy-like. "I can't see a fairy," I said. My father told me to keep imagining until it felt right. "You can see a flower fairy through intuition," he said. "Use your mind's eye." All I could conjure up was that same frozen image of my pretty friend, and so I gave up, disappointed. My father's world, I half-believed, would reveal itself to me when I was a grown up. When I was finally like him.

I remember a summer when my father wrapped duct tape in thick layers around his midsection. He explained to my siblings and me that he needed to do this in order to contain himself, that he would otherwise disperse into the ether and dissolve. I was young, maybe seven or eight or nine. We spent summer weeks at my parents' lake house in New Hampshire, where my father delicately kept his duct-tape-swaddled belly out of the water. That particular summer, I once threw a rock at one of my sisters while we splashed in shallow water at "the

erste manische Episode hatte, aber manchmal stelle ich mir vor, wie sie sich während einer dieser Wachstropfnächte zusammenbraute, sein Innenleben im Strudel eines lautlosen Fiebers. Unserem derzeitigen Modell entsprechend ist bipolar allerdings kein existenzieller Zustand, sondern eine psychische Verfassung, die auf eine veränderte Hirnchemie zurückzuführen und wahrscheinlich genetisch mitbedingt ist. Das DSM kennt keine externen Ursachen. Nichtsdestotrotz sehe ich das Gemüt meines Vaters in dieser Zeit zum ersten Mal driften und seine Gedanken sich verlieren in einem Irgendwo, das sich nicht normal anfühlt.

\* \* \*

Als ich sehr jung war, wollte ich immer wieder von meinem Vater wissen, wie ich die Dinge sehen könnte, die er sah. Wenn er in unserem Garten arbeitete, brachte er mir bei, Blumenfeen zu sehen. „Mach die Augen zu“, sagte er zu mir, „und stell dir eine Blumenfee vor. Lass sie einfach erscheinen.“ Ich schloss die Augen und stellte mir meine beste Freundin vor, ihr dunkles Haar und ihre gebräunte Haut, da ich fand, dass sie die schönste Person war, die ich kannte. Ich steckte sie in ein Rüschenkleid, denn das musste es sein, was Feen trugen. „Ich sehe keine Fee“, sagte ich. Mein Vater meinte, ich solle nur weiter versuchen, sie mir vorzustellen, so lange, bis es sich stimmig anfühlte. „Eine Blumenfee kann man durch die Phantasie sehen“, sagte er. „Benutze dein inneres Auge.“ Aber alles, was ich hervorzaubern konnte, war dasselbe festgefrorene Bild meiner hübschen Freundin. Also gab ich enttäuscht auf. Wenn ich erst einmal erwachsen wäre, so glaubte ich halbherzig, würde sich mir die Welt meines Vaters schon

beach”—a small patch of sand at the water’s edge—and it hit her in the forehead. My father sloshed through the water to her. He cradled her forehead in his palm, and asked her to imagine her pain pouring into his hand. She did as he told her to, gulping air, but she couldn’t stop crying, and I felt a rock of guilt harden in my gut as I watched her scalp bloom into a bruise. I’m not sure when this memory takes place—if I was nine, he would have already been diagnosed as manic-depressive and was taking lithium. If I was seven, or eight, he hadn’t yet.

\* \* \*

A few months ago I was riding the subway uptown, in a seat at the back of the car, reading a book for the class I was headed toward. A man sat down next to me, and I slowly became aware of the heavy stench of hot garbage. I ignored it. The man had his back to me and his body started bumping rhythmically against my elbow but I stuck with my book, steadfastly refusing to look over its pages, attempting to sustain normality by force of will alone. I kept reading until the man’s motion became so violent that the words on my page were rocking with him, and I looked up to confirm that this man was not sane. He was immersed in hallucination. He had leaned over the seat to his right and was moving his left hand as though he were writing feverishly on a page floating just above the seat. His fist clenched a nonexistent pen. I looked around and realized that everyone else had dispersed, that only this man and I were left in our section of the car. Straphangers huddled a few feet away, looking up and sideways and down at their own feet. About a yard of empty space seemed to be what the



zeigen. Wenn ich endlich so wäre, wie er.

Ich erinnere mich an einen Sommer, in dem mein Vater sich Klebeband in dicken Schichten um den Bauch wickelte. Meinen Geschwistern und mir erklärte er, dass er das bräuchte, um sich beisammenzuhalten, weil er sonst in den Äther entschwinden und sich auflösen würde. Ich war jung, vielleicht sieben oder acht, oder neun. Wir verbrachten die Sommer im Seehaus meiner Eltern in New Hampshire. Mein Vater achtete empfindlich darauf, seinen in Klebeband eingewickelten Bauch ja nicht nass zu machen. Als wir im seichten Wasser am „Strand“ – einem kleinen Flecken Sand am Wasserrand – plantschten und ich einen Stein in Richtung einer meiner Schwestern warf, der sie an der Stirn traf, watete mein Vater durch das Wasser zu ihr hin, wiegte ihre Stirn in der Handfläche, und sagte ihr, sie solle sich vorstellen, wie ihre Schmerzen in seine Hände übergingen. Das tat sie auch, Luft schnappend, aber sie konnte nicht aufhören, zu weinen; ich fühlte einen Brocken Schuld im Bauch, der noch schwerer wurde, als ich sah, wie sie einen dicken Bluterguss bekam. Ich kann mich nicht erinnern, wann genau das war – sollte ich neun gewesen sein, dann wäre er schon als manisch-depressiv diagnostiziert worden und hätte bereits Lithium genommen; falls ich erst sieben oder acht war, noch nicht.

\* \* \*

Vor ein paar Monaten bin ich mit der Subway Richtung Uptown gefahren; ich saß am Ende des Waggons und las ein Buch für das Seminar, das ich gleich besuchen sollte. Ein Mann setzte sich neben mich, und allmählich nahm ich einen schweren, strengen Müllgeruch wahr. Ich ignorierte ihn. Der

commuters felt would keep their world from being contaminated by his.

\* \* \*

In the fall of 2008, several months went by in which I spoke to my father exclusively about dreams. That period came after his most violent manic episode to date: it had culminated in him wrapping his hands around my mother's throat while she drove him to the hospital. In the two and a half years that followed it, he would be hospitalized over, and over, and over again. Doctors prescribed him off-label antipsychotics not popularly used since the 1970s, my mother moved him out of the house I'd grown up in, and he eventually had a nurse regularly visit him in his new apartment to ensure that he was taking all of his medication. He was physically accounted for, but he was not reachable.

That fall, I knew he couldn't pay attention to the banality of real-world things—the details of the activities and relationships that comprised my daily life, like my classes, my friends, the guy I was newly seeing—and I couldn't handle his talk of visits with sentient trees and the archangel Gabriel. And so I limited the conversation to dreams, an unreality we could both inhabit. Every week or two, I'd call him and describe an especially vivid dream or nightmare, and he'd exclaim over the imagery and come up with some kind of meaning for it all. As time went on, though, our conversations began to make me feel unbalanced: dreams use such a detailed dictionary of private symbols, and my father would ask too-personal questions about my emotional state and close relationships, looking for answers that I didn't feel comfortable sharing with

Mann saß mit dem Rücken zu mir und sein Körper begann, rhythmisch gegen meinen Ellenbogen zu stoßen; ich jedoch las mein Buch unbeirrt weiter und weigerte mich, aufzusehen, bemüht, allein durch Willenskraft Normalität herzustellen. Ich las weiter, bis die Bewegungen des Mannes so heftig wurden, dass die Wörter auf der Seite, die ich vor mir hatte, mitschwankten, und so blickte ich auf, nur um bestätigt zu sehen, dass er vollkommen geisteskrank sein musste. Er war versunken in Halluzinationen. Er lehnte sich über den Sitz rechts neben ihm und bewegte die Hand, als ob er fieberhaft schreiben würde, auf einem Blatt, das unmittelbar über dem Sitz schwebte. Mit der Faust umklammerte er einen nicht-existenten Stift. Ich sah mich um und stellte fest, dass nur der Mann und ich in diesem Abschnitt des Waggon übriggeblieben waren. Passagiere, die einen Stehplatz hatten, drängten sich in einem Stück Entfernung; sie waren eifrig bemüht, nach oben, zur Seite, oder auf ihre eigenen Füße zu schauen. Etwa ein Meter leerer Raum schien der Abstand zu sein, den die Pendler brauchten, um das Gefühl zu haben, dass ihre Welt nicht durch seine verunreinigt würde.

\* \* \*

Vor einigen Jahren habe ich einmal ein paar Monate lang mit meinem Vater ausschließlich über Träume gesprochen. Das war im Herbst 2008, nachdem er seine bisher schlimmste Episode hatte, die darin gipfelte, dass er meiner Mutter an die Gurgel ging, während sie ihn ins Krankenhaus fuhr. Er wurde den gesamten Sommer über wieder und wieder und wieder eingewiesen. Ärzte verschrieben ihm Medikamente, die man eigentlich seit den 1970er Jahren nicht mehr wirklich einsetzte,

anyone: “Are you worried this guy will leave you?” “Have you slept with him yet?” The dream world is thin on boundaries, and our conversations evaporated the ones I’d tried to set up between us, too. I stopped calling about dreams.

\* \* \*

Privately, I still wonder about my dreams. I have lucid ones most nights, and in them I’ve been working on flying. I’ve run into trouble, though. In each dream I leap up and it’s as though a wind current lifts me higher, higher, higher, until I am rocketing through layers of ozone and find myself suspended in the stratosphere, and it’s then that I look to earth and I fall. I wake up from the sickening drop with my heart still thumping with adrenaline. I once had a boyfriend whose eyes used to roll when I talked about dreams and so I began to try to keep them to myself in the mornings. I wonder if it’s better not to indulge in talk of dreams when I’m awake; to keep my mind on the hard facts of the real world when I’m not unconscious.

My father is different than he was when I was a child. Years and years of lithium pills have expanded his belly, so the flat abdominals of his thirties and forties have dissolved and given way to a Santa-like rounded expanse. The pills make his hands tremble and his answers to questions arrive after a long delay, as if delivered over a spotty long-distance connection. He has flat feet from performing modern dance barefoot throughout his twenties and thirties, and his ankles collapse so extremely that his feet squish outward into what he calls his “duck feet.” His hold on reality feels loose. In conversation, particularly in groups, I can watch his gaze fog over and his movements

meine Mutter brachte ihn dazu, aus dem Haus auszuziehen, in dem ich aufgewachsen war, und in seiner neuen Wohnung kam schließlich eine Krankenschwester regelmäßig vorbei, um sicherzustellen, dass er alle seine Medikamente einnahm. Er war zwar physisch da, aber anwesend war er nicht.

In diesem Herbst, das wusste ich, konnte er keine Aufmerksamkeit für die Banalitäten der realen Welt aufbringen, für die Details der Aktivitäten und Beziehungen, aus denen mein tägliches Leben bestand, wie etwa die Seminare, die ich besuchte, meine Freunde, der Mann, mit dem ich seit kurzem zusammen war. Ich wiederum konnte nicht damit umgehen, wenn er mir erzählte, wie er mit empfindsamen Bäumen oder dem Erzengel Gabriel gesprochen hatte. Und so beschränkte ich unsere Gespräche auf Träume, eine Unwirklichkeit, in der wir uns beide aufhalten konnten. Jede Woche oder jede zweite rief ich ihn an und erzählte ihm von einem besonders lebendigen Traum oder Alptraum; er ergründete dann die Symbolik und fand irgendeine Bedeutung darin. Mit der Zeit jedoch brachten mich unsere Gespräche zunehmend aus dem Gleichgewicht: Träume benutzen ein sehr detailliertes Lexikon privater Symbole, und mein Vater stellte äußerst persönliche Fragen über meinen Gefühlszustand und enge Beziehungen, auf der Suche nach Antworten, die ich niemandem ohne weiteres gegeben hätte: „Hast du Angst, dass dich dieser Mann verlassen wird?“ „Hast du schon mit ihm geschlafen?“ Die Welt der Träume hat feine Grenzen, und unsere Gespräche waren nicht mehr die, die ich zwischen uns aufzubauen versucht hatte. Ich rief nicht mehr an, um über Träume zu sprechen.

slacken, and I know that he is lost in his mind. It's more difficult, now, to call him back, and to catch him up on the goings on of the world around him. His slipping grip on reality frightens me in a way I can't articulate; when I am around him I sometimes feel as though my father's suspension in his own mind will cause me to slip into his world, too.

\* \* \*

When I was a child my father was the parent who helped my siblings and me when we had nightmares. We'd draw a picture of the bad dream, which according to him kept it stuck to the page and out of our heads. The technique worked for my sisters and me—there was a palpable relief when I'd look at the finished drawing—but when my brother was old enough to draw his nightmares he experienced the opposite effect. "When he draws a dream, it takes over the page, and then he asks for more paper," my father explained to me once. "The dream becomes larger, it comes alive." Recording the inner world of dreams gave it entry into reality; the mental could not be contained to the mind. This is my father's daily experience, and it's perhaps my greatest fear.

Insgeheim denke ich immer noch über meine Träume nach. Meistens habe ich sehr klare Träume, in denen ich an meinen Fähigkeiten, zu fliegen, arbeite. Allerdings habe ich mir dabei Probleme eingehandelt; in jedem dieser Träume springe ich hoch, und dann treiben mich Windstöße höher und höher und höher, bis ich durch Ozonschichten hindurchschieße und mich schwebend in der Stratosphäre wiederfinde. Erst dann blicke ich zurück auf die Erde und stürze ab. Von dem Übelkeit verursachenden Fall wache ich auf, mein Herz immer noch pochend vor Adrenalin. Da mein Freund nur die Augen verdreht, wenn ich ihm von meinen Träumen erzähle, behalte ich sie morgens für mich. Ich frage mich, ob es besser ist, dass ich meinen Träumen nicht nachhänge, wenn ich wach bin, sondern meine Gedanken mit den harten Fakten der wirklichen Welt beschäftige.

Mein Vater hat sich verändert, seit ich ein Kind war. Jahre über Jahre, in denen er Lithium nahm, haben seinen Bauch aufgebläht; was in seinen Dreißigern und Vierzigern flach und muskulös war, hat einen Weihnachtsmann-ähnlichen Umfang angenommen. Die Medikamente bringen seine Hände zum Zittern und auf Fragen antwortet er langsamer. Er hat Plattfüße, weil er während seiner Zwanziger und Dreißiger barfuß Modern Dance getanzt hat, und seine Knöchel klappten so extrem ein, dass seine Füße sich zu „Entenfüßen“, wie er sie selbst nennt, nach außen quetschen. Seine Verbindung zur Realität scheint irgendwie loser zu sein. Im Gespräch, besonders in Gruppen, sehe ich, wie sich irgendwann sein Blick trübt und seine Bewegungen schlaffer werden; ich weiß dann, dass er in seinen Gedanken verloren ist. Es ist





schwieriger geworden, ihn zurückzuholen und wieder auf Augenhöhe mit seiner Umgebung zu bringen. Sein loser werdender Realitätsbezug macht mir Angst in einer Weise, die ich nicht richtig benennen kann; manchmal, wenn ich in der Nähe meines Vaters bin, fühle ich mich, als würde sein gedanklicher Schwebезustand mich dazu bringen, ebenfalls in seine Welt abzugleiten.

Als ich ein Kind war, war mein Vater derjenige von meinen Eltern, der meinen Geschwistern und mir half, wenn wir Alpträume hatten. Wir malten dann Bilder von dem schlechten Traum; er behauptete, dass das den Traum auf dem Papier festhielt, sodass er nicht mehr in unserem Kopf sein konnte. Für meine jüngeren Schwestern und mich funktionierte diese Methode sehr gut – wenn ich das fertige Bild anblickte, fühlte ich eine greifbare Erleichterung –, aber als mein Bruder alt genug war, um seine Alpträume aufzumalen, erlebte er das Gegenteil. „Wenn er einen Traum aufmalt, ergreift dieser Besitz von dem Papier, und braucht dann ein neues Blatt Papier“, erklärte mir mein Vater einmal. „Der Traum wird größer, wird lebendig. Er kann dann nicht mehr aufhören zu malen.“ Die innere Welt der Träume zu erfassen, ebnete diesen den Weg in die Realität; die Phantasie konnte nicht im Geist gehalten werden. Dies ist das tägliche Erleben meines Vaters. Vielleicht ist es meine tiefste Angst.

# LILIAN PETER

## PIANO

### [Gekürzte Version]

*Sie werden hören, was Sie sonst gesehen haben.*

*Sie werden hören, was Sie hier sonst nicht gesehen haben.*

*Sie werden kein Schauspiel sehen.*

*Ihre Schaulust wird nicht befriedigt werden.*

*(Peter Handke: Publikumsbeschimpfung)*

Gäbe es einen Vorhang zwischen Pianist und Publikum, der während des Konzerts traditionellerweise geschlossen bliebe, so wäre die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass ich mich mit achtzehn für eine Musikerlaufbahn entschieden hätte, vielleicht höher gewesen; aber ich konnte den Blick des Publikums nie ertragen, zu aufdringlich war mir seine Präsenz und zu ausschließlich mein Ausgeliefertsein an diese Präsenz. [...] Ein ums andere Mal wischte ich mir die Hände ab, die binnen Sekunden wieder klebrig waren, bis das Publikum schon hüstelte und sich das Anfangen nicht weiter hinauszögern ließ. Dann [...] begann in meinem Kopf eine Art *paralleles Sprechtheater*; ein Wust an Stimmen verbündete sich gegen mich und trachtete danach, mich aus dem Takt zu bringen [...]; ich wusste, dass, sobald ich anfinde, darüber nachzudenken, was ich tat, meine Hände vergessen würden, was sie zu tun hatten, dass also das Konzert in einem unweigerlichen Desaster enden würde und ich damit ein für alle Mal bewiesen hätte, dass ich einfach zu schlecht war. Bis hin zu dem Ton, den der Komponist als letzten Ton des Stückes

translation by Nika Knight

## PIANO

[**Condensed**]

*You will hear what you usually see.*

*You will hear what you usually don't see.*

*You will see no spectacle.*

*Your curiosity will not be satisfied.*

—Peter Handke: *Offending the Audience*. \*

If only there had been a curtain that traditionally stayed closed during concerts, a curtain that separated pianist from audience, audience from pianist. Had that been the case, I'd have been more likely to choose a career as a musician when I was eighteen. But I could never bear the audience's gaze. Their presence was too intrusive, my subjugation owed too much to it. [...] I'd wipe my hands, over, and over—they'd instantly become clammy again. Eventually, the audience began to cough and wouldn't let me delay any longer. Then [...] a kind of parallel theater began in my mind; a tangle of voices united against me and then endeavored to knock me off rhythm. [...] I knew that my hands would forget what they had to do as soon as I thought about it, the concert would end in an inevitable disaster, I'd have proved for all time that I was just *not good enough*. Until the composer's final note, I was preoccupied, above all, with ignoring these voices.

In an attempt to suppress the voices, I unleashed another voice against them. It was a voice that repeated, mantra-like:

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\* Trans. Michael Roloff

vorgesehen hatte [...] war ich vor allem damit beschäftigt, mich davon abzuhalten, diesen Stimmen Gehör oder Beachtung zu schenken.

Mein Versuch, die Stimmen zu bändigen, indem ich ihnen eine weitere Stimme entgegensetzte, die mantra-artig wiederholte: *Nicht nachdenken nicht nachdenken nicht nachdenken!*, oder: *Ich höre Euch nicht ich höre Euch nicht ich höre Euch nicht!* führte häufig dazu, dass ich erst recht anfang, nachzudenken; beispielsweise [...] darüber, dass alle anderen, die vor mir an der Reihe gewesen waren, viel besser gespielt hatten, dass ich nämlich höchstwahrscheinlich die *Schlechteste von allen* war, und ich musste sämtliche Konzentration darauf verwenden, möglichst über *nichts* nachzudenken, die Stimmen möglichst nicht zu hören, um den Auftritt halbwegs unbeschadet zu überstehen; das war die eigentliche Herausforderung jedes Konzerts.

Aber wer waren diese Stimmen in meinem Kopf? Ich habe gerade [...] geschrieben, es habe sich um eine Art *paralleles Sprechtheater* gehandelt – um eine Vorstellung also, die mir geboten wurde zur selben Zeit, zu der ich selbst eine Vorstellung gab. Natürlich war ich, was diese parallele Vorstellung betraf, da sie in meinem Kopf stattfand, nicht nur ihr Publikum, sondern zugleich auch ihre Bühne, vielleicht sogar auch Sprecherin, Regisseurin oder Autorin dieser Stimmen, aber ich *fühlte* mich vor allem als ihr Publikum, und merkwürdigerweise ging diese Tatsache mit demselben Gefühl des machtlosen Ausgeliefertseins einher wie die Tatsache, dass ich ja eigentlich, von außen betrachtet, nicht Publikum, sondern *Darbietende vor Publikum* war. Aber vielleicht kam das Gefühl des Ausgeliefertseins überhaupt erst in und aufgrund genau

*Don't think don't think don't think!*, or: *Can't hear you can't hear you can't hear you!*—which only gave rise to more thinking, about, for example, [...] how everyone who had gone before me had played much better than I had, that I was most likely the worst of them all, and I'd have to concentrate solely on thinking about nothing as much as possible, to not hear the voices as much as possible, in order to survive the performance halfway unscathed. This was the true test of each concert.

But who were these voices in my head? [...] I just wrote that it was a kind of *parallel theater*—a performance that staged itself alongside my own. When it came to this parallel performance I was of course not only its audience but simultaneously its stage, and perhaps even the voices' speaker, director, author—but above all I *felt* that I was their audience. Strangely, I absorbed this fact with the same feeling of powerless subjugation as I had the fact that I was actually, when viewed from the outside, not the audience but instead the performer before the audience. But perhaps the feeling of subjugation arose within and precisely due to this dialectic doubling and reversal—I was never the one performing, but instead, in the moment in which I was the one performing, I was also, in a way, an audience.

[...]

And so I sat on my bench and held the voices back, which allowed me to inwardly and outwardly ossify. Only my fingers and arms moved. As I played, it was as if my upper body was deep frozen:

dieser dialektischen Dopplung und Verkehrung zustande, dass ich eben nie nur Darbietende war, sondern in dem Moment, in dem ich Darbietende war, auch zu einer Art Publikum wurde.

[...]

Und so saß ich auf meinem Hocker und hielt die Stimmen, die mich innerlich und äußerlich erstarren ließen, aus; lediglich meine Finger und Arme bewegten sich, mein Oberkörper war beim Spielen grundsätzlich wie eingefroren.

Dadurch, dass du beschimpft wirst, wird deine Bewegungslosigkeit und Erstarrung endlich am Platz erscheinen.\*

[...]

Jene Stimmen in meinem Kopf waren nicht daran interessiert, mich zu hören, aber auch nicht wirklich daran, gehört zu werden; sie hatten mir ja, da sie [...] als wirre, laute, undefinierbare Masse wild durcheinander riefen, gar nicht wirklich etwas zu sagen, sie waren nicht interessiert daran, mit mir ins Gespräch zu treten, sie hatten keine Frage an mich und entsprechend auch keine Sehnsucht nach meiner Antwort. Ein großes, angsteinflößendes Etwas machte Sprechtheater in meinem Kopf; und ein großes, angsteinflößendes Etwas schaute mich aus dem Zuschauerraum heraus an. Da ich nicht zurückschauen und dadurch seinen Blick begrenzen konnte, sondern mich auf die Tasten zu konzentrieren hatte, verwandelte sich die absolute Distanz des Blickes, mit der sich jenes Etwas zum Publikum und mich zur Darbietenden machte, in die absolute Distanzlosigkeit jener Stimmen, denen ich nicht

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\* Peter Handke: *Publikumsbeschimpfung*. In: *Publikumsbeschimpfung und andere Sprechstücke*, Frankfurt/Main 1966/2012, S. 44. (Im Original in „Sie“-Anrede.)

Due to the fact that we're offending you, your motionlessness and your rigidity will finally become overt.\*

[...]

Those voices in my head were not interested in hearing me and were also not truly interested in being heard; they didn't speak to me individually but rather as an indefinable mass. They shouted wildly over each other, not to actually say anything—they weren't interested in having a conversation with me, they had no questions for me and accordingly no desire, either, for an answer. A large, anxiety-inducing something staged theater in my head and a large, anxiety-inducing something gazed out at me from the auditorium. Since I couldn't stare back and hem it in, and had to concentrate instead on the keys, the absolute distance of the gaze transformed—and with it, in the absolute lack of distance from those voices that I couldn't escape, that “something” created the audience and made me into the performing one. I *heard the looking* of the audience, and the feeling that I had on the stage was more than anything a sensation of total claustrophobia. The theater was not separate from me, was not on another stage where I could have looked out from the audience, but was instead next to me, behind me, above me, in me—it was everywhere and with it, I was nowhere.

You stare. By watching, you become rigid. The seating arrangement favors this development. If the curtain comes together, you feel encircled. You feel inhibited. The parting of the curtain merely relieves your claustrophobia. Thus it relieves you. You can watch. Your view is unobstructed.

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\* Handke, Peter. *Kaspar and Other Plays*. Translated by Michael Roloff. Macmillan, 1970.

entkommen konnte. Ich hörte das Schauen des Publikums, und die Empfindung, die ich vor allen anderen Empfindungen auf der Bühne hatte, war jene absoluter Platzangst. Das Sprechtheater war nicht von mir getrennt, auf einer anderen Bühne, auf die ich aus einem Zuschauerraum heraus hätte blicken können, sondern neben mir, hinter mir, über mir, in mir – es war überall und ich damit nirgends.

Sie schauen. Sie starren. Indem Sie schauen, erstarren Sie. Die Sitzgelegenheiten begünstigen diesen Vorgang. Sie sind etwas, das schaut. Sie brauchen Platz für Ihre Augen. Ist der Vorhang zu, bekommen Sie allmählich Platzangst. Sie haben keinen Blickpunkt. Sie fühlen sich eingekreist. Sie fühlen sich befangen. Das Aufgehen des Vorhangs vertreibt nur die Platzangst. Deshalb erleichtert es Sie. Sie können schauen. Ihr Blick wird frei. Sie werden unbefangen. Sie können beiwohnen. Sie sind nicht mitten drin wie beim geschlossenen Vorhang. Sie sind nicht mehr jemand. Sie werden etwas. Sie sind nicht mehr mit sich allein. Sie sind nicht mehr sich selber überlassen. Sie sind nur noch dabei. Sie sind ein Publikum.\*

Verehrte Leserin, verehrter Leser, stellen Sie sich einmal vor, Sie gingen in eine beliebige Veranstaltung und wären dann nicht im Publikum, sondern Sie wären – das Publikum, weil kein anderer Zuschauer gekommen ist: Ist das nicht eine beunruhigende Vorstellung? Anstatt aus der sicheren Anonymität einer Masse heraus schauen zu können, ohne selbst angeschaut zu werden, sind auch Sie plötzlich ein beobachtetes Objekt. Das verändert die ganze Konstellation; denn dass Sie beobachtet werden, zwingt Sie dazu, auf Ihrem Platz zu verharren [...]. Dass Sie auf Ihrem Platz bleiben, wird von Ihnen erwartet, und dadurch haben auch Sie plötzlich

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\* Peter Handke: *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, a.a.O. S. 28.



You become uninhibited. You can partake. You are not in dead center as when the curtain is closed. You are no longer someone. You become something. You are no longer alone with yourselves. You are no longer left to your own devices. Now you are with it. You are an audience.\*

Dear reader, imagine now that you've gone to an event where you are not in the audience, but are the audience, because no one else came: isn't that a disquieting notion? Instead of being able to look out from the secure anonymity of a crowd—without being gazed upon yourself—you, too, are suddenly an observed object. This changes the whole constellation. When you're observed, you're forced to remain in place (unless you decide to leave the whole performance, a process that could never escape notice and so would demand a certain amount of courage from you). It'll be expected of you that you'll stay in your place, and then you'll suddenly have a role within it—without you, the event couldn't happen at all. Perhaps you'd wish for the curtain to fall, to be an unobserved, solitary listener who no one knew was there and who no one knew was alone; instead of, by virtue of being the audience by yourself, suddenly having an audience, which looks at you while you watch it.

[...]

*Real art has the capacity to make us nervous*, writes Susan Sontag in her famous essay "Against Interpretation" in 1964, in which she rails against literary theory's hermeneutic rage for interpretation, the primary aim of which is to domesticate, to subdue, to categorize literature (art in general), instead of being involved in what happens to the reader through the words.

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\* Handke, Peter

eine Rolle inne: Ohne Sie würde die Vorstellung gar nicht stattfinden. Sie würden sich vielleicht wünschen, dass der Vorhang fele; dass Sie ein unbeobachteter, einsamer Zuhörer sein könnten, von dem niemand wüsste, dass er da und dass er allein ist, anstatt dadurch, dass Sie als Einzelperson das Publikum sind, plötzlich selbst ein Publikum zu haben, welches Ihnen beim Schauen zuschaut.

[...]

*Real art has the capacity to make us nervous*, schreibt Susan Sontag in ihrem berühmten Essay *Against Interpretation* von 1964<sup>\*</sup>, in dem sie gegen die hermeneutische Interpretationswut der Literaturwissenschaft wettet, der es primär darum gehe, die Literatur (allgemein die Kunst) zu domestizieren, zu bändigen und zu kategorisieren, anstatt darum, sich auf das einzulassen, was mit dem Leser durch die Worte hindurch geschieht. Ihre Schlussfolgerung daher: *Instead of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art*<sup>†</sup>, was primär bedeutet, gängige und etablierte Oberflächendualismen (Publikum – Darbietender; Autor – Interpret; Subjekt – Objekt; Realität – Sprache) aufzulösen und füreinander zu öffnen. Oder, noch einmal, Handke:

Die Sprechstücke sind Schauspiele ohne Bilder, insofern, als sie kein Bild von der Welt geben. Sie zeigen auf die Welt nicht in der Form von Bildern, sondern in der Form von Worten, und die Worte der Sprechstücke zeigen nicht auf die Welt als etwas außerhalb der Worte Liegendes, sondern auf die Welt in den Worten selber.<sup>‡</sup>

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\* In: Susan Sontag: *Against Interpretation*, London 1966, S. 8.

† Ebd., S.14.

‡ Peter Handke: *Bemerkung zu meinen Sprechstücken*, in: Ders.: *Publikumsbeschimpfung und andere Sprechstücke*, 1966/2012, S. 95.

Her closing sentence: Instead of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art, which primarily means dissolving popular and established superficial dualisms (audience – performer; author – interpreter; subject – object; reality – language) and opening them up for one another. Or, Handke once again [...]:

The speak-ins are spectacles without pictures, inasmuch as they give no picture of the world. They point to the world not by way of pictures but by way of words; the words of the speak-ins don't point at the world as something lying outside the words but to the world in the words themselves.\*

Why would that Handke audience—which was berated above because it would rather sit before an opened curtain than a closed one, “in the thick of it”—sit instead before a closed curtain? Because the opened curtain initially makes the duality of the space and the establishment of a relationship of objectification possible, inasmuch as the audience and the performer are relegated in each instance to the roles that they have to abide by until the end of the performance. The opened curtain [...] is thus a staged boundary, which is there to separate two sides clearly and unambiguously—and the boundary paradoxically only truly exists when the curtain opens. As long as the curtain is closed, it makes no difference what possibly exists behind it [...]. As long as nothing stirs behind it and the audience is not willing or not able to look behind it, the curtain has no relevance. The boundary, in a practical sense, doesn't exist. Without a boundary, however, the power of the “I” ceases to be “lord of the things”, and with it, its power to order the world around itself and to place itself in relation to this order also vanishes.

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\* Handke, Peter

Weshalb wäre jenes Handke'sche Publikum, das oben beschimpft wurde, weil es lieber vor einem geöffneten als vor einem geschlossenen Vorhang sitzt, „mitten drin“, säße es stattdessen vor einem geschlossenen Vorhang? Weil erst der geöffnete Vorhang die Dualität der Räume und die Etablierung einer Relation des Objektivierens ermöglicht, insofern als er Publikum und Darbietende jeweils in ihre Rollen verweist, die sie bis zum Ende der Vorstellung einzuhalten haben. Der geöffnete Vorhang ist [...] eine inszenierte Grenze, dazu da, zwei Seiten klar und eindeutig voneinander zu trennen, und wird paradoxerweise gerade dadurch erst wirklich gezogen, dass der Vorhang aufgeht. Solange der Vorhang geschlossen ist, ist es vollkommen gleichgültig, was sich möglicherweise hinter ihm befindet [...]; solange sich dahinter nichts regt und das Publikum nicht willens oder nicht ermächtigt ist, dahinter zu schauen, hat der Vorhang keine Relevanz, dann gibt es die Grenze faktisch nicht. Ohne Grenze aber kommt dem Ich sein Vermögen abhanden, 'Herr der Dinge' zu sein, und damit sein Vermögen, die Welt um sich herum zu ordnen und sich selbst im Bezug auf diese Ordnung zu platzieren.

Die Grenze, die es für das Publikum, sofern es zahlreich ist, und sofern es nicht zum 'Opfer' einer der vielfältigen modernen Varianten des Theaters wird, in denen diese Grenze aufgelöst oder umgekehrt wird (Handke ist nur ein Beispiel), natürlicherweise gibt, gab es für mich auf der Bühne nicht; ich habe es nie geschafft, mir das Publikum vom Leib zu halten [...]. Yoko Onos *Cut Piece* von 1964/65, in dem sie selbst reglos auf der Bühne saß und das Publikum nach eigenem Ermessen Stücke aus ihrem Kleid herausschneiden durfte, bis schließlich jemand den Träger ihres Büstenhalters

This boundary—which exists for the members of the audience, provided they are many, and provided they are not “victims” of one of the various modern variations of the theater in which this boundary is removed or reversed (Handke is just an example)—this boundary did not exist for me on the stage. I’d never managed to keep the audience at bay [...]. Yoko Ono’s 1964/65 *Cut Piece*—in which she sat, motionless, on the stage, and allowed the audience to cut pieces out of her dress at their discretion, until finally someone some cut the strap of her bra—is in this sense more radical a vengeance on the audience than Handke’s *Offending the Audience*, because in it, no idea is presumed of and then held up to the audience (which finally earns the same narrative, and simply turns it around). The audience in *Cut Piece* rather performatively reveals itself as the voyeuristic, objectifying presence that it is. Through *Cut Piece*, Yoko Ono’s audience demonstrates how radically misunderstood Susan Sontag’s urging toward an “erotics” of art can be. While for Sontag it’s about the dissolution of the single, gazing boundary in favor of a mutual “erotic” invitation in speech and hearing in the sense of the non-objectifying, Platonic Eros [...]—Yoko Ono’s audience does the opposite.

My fear that I wouldn’t be able to bear the audience’s presence would have been eased, or perhaps would have not existed at all, had the audience been only able to hear but not to see me. At least, I imagine it that way today when I look at myself over a distance of twenty years. A twenty years’ thick curtain seems to suffice in order for the girl on the bench to feel, just barely, a polite distance. She sits down, puts her fingers on the keys, and begins, completely naturally, to play. No ringing sharpening of thoughts in her head that take on a life of their

durchtrennte, ist eine radikalere Rache am Publikum als Handkes *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, weil darin keine Idee des Publikums schon vorausgesetzt und diesem dann vorgehalten wird (was letztlich dasselbe Narrativ bedient und es lediglich umkehrt); in *Cut Piece* entlarvt sich das Publikum vielmehr performativ selbst als die voyeuristische, objektivierende Präsenz, die es ist. An Yoko Onos Publikum zeigt sich, wie radikal das, was Susan Sontag meint, wenn sie eine „Erotik“ der Kunst fordert, missverstanden werden kann – während es für Sontag um die Auflösung der einen, starren Grenze zugunsten eines gegenseitigen „erotischen“ Einlassens im Sprechen und Hören im Sinne des platonischen Eros [...] geht, der nicht objektiviert, tut Yoko Onos Publikum gerade das Gegenteil davon.

Meine Angst, dass ich der Präsenz des Publikums nicht würde standhalten können, wäre viel kleiner, oder vielleicht auch überhaupt nicht vorhanden gewesen, hätte mich das Publikum nur hören, aber nicht sehen können; zumindest stelle ich mir das heute so vor, wenn ich mir selbst gegenüber eine Distanz von zwanzig Jahren einnehme. Ein zwanzig Jahre dicker Vorhang scheint auszureichen, um von dem Mädchen auf dem Hocker gerade noch als eine höfliche Distanz empfunden zu werden; es setzt sich hin, legt die Finger auf die Tasten, und fängt ganz selbstverständlich an, zu spielen. Keine tönenden Gedankenschleifen in seinem Kopf, die sich verselbständigen und alles daran setzen, sein Spiel aus der Bahn zu werfen; keine übermächtige Präsenz im Raum, die es kaum erwarten kann, der Matrosenkleid gewordenen Erfüllung ihres bürgerlichen Normanspruches zu applaudieren; keine Schaulust, die in kollektive Verzückung übergeht,

own and do their utmost to throw the playing off track; no overwhelming presence in the room that can hardly expect to applaud the sailor-dress-bedecked validation of its bourgeois standards; no curiosity that overlooks the collective rapture while the girl behind the stage immediately hates herself for *playing so badly* and refuses every additional bow. Instead, the girl wears paint-splattered pajamas, on the floor there are dolls, tubes of paint, pieces of a model train, a puzzle magazine, three St. Clare's books, sheets of paper written in a secret script amidst it all and two half-finished paintings. When the girl sits at the piano bench, her feet don't quite reach the floor. She plays, then stops, her feet swing, and everything remains still. I am her only listener, but I am a listener from the future, which makes the relationship between the girl and myself asymmetrical: the girl doesn't see me, doesn't know who I am or where I am. But she knows, I believe, that I am. I imagine that she plays for me and I believe that she wants to play for me because I listen to her and because I expect nothing from her—I already know the next twenty years of her life.

Here, exactly here, I suddenly want to change the story, to write it anew: I want to ask the audience in, to wait until all have found their seats and the last person has coughed themselves out. Then I sit next to the girl on the bench, behind the curtain. In place of the rehearsed Beethoven sonata, I encourage the girl to improvise a four-handed piece with me, a piece that is allowed to sound as stilted, wild or even as horrible as suits us. I imagine: instead of whispering because of what it *sees*, the audience is either touched or irritated by what it *hears*. Those who are touched clap in the middle of our playing, stand up, sing, some emerge through the gaps at the sides of

während sich das Mädchen hinter der Bühne unmittelbar dafür hasst, dass es *so schlecht gespielt* hat, und jede weitere Verbeugung verweigert. Stattdessen trägt das Mädchen einen mit Farbklecksen übersäten Schlafanzug, auf dem Boden liegen Puppen, Farbtuben, Teile einer Modelleisenbahn, ein Rätselheft, drei Hanni-und-Nanni-Bücher, dazwischen Blätter, die in Geheimschrift beschrieben sind, und zwei halb fertig gemalte Bilder. Wenn das Mädchen auf dem Klavierhocker sitzt, reichen seine Füße noch nicht ganz bis auf den Boden; es spielt, dann hört es auf, seine Füße baumeln, und alles bleibt still. Ich bin seine einzige Zuhörerin; aber eine Zuhörerin aus der Zukunft, was die Relation zwischen dem Mädchen und mir asymmetrisch macht, denn das Mädchen sieht mich nicht, es weiß nicht, wer ich bin und wo ich bin. Es weiß aber, glaube ich, dass ich bin; ich stelle mir vor, dass es für mich spielt, und ich glaube, dass es gerne für mich spielt, weil ich ihm zuhöre, und weil ich nichts von ihm erwarten muss. Ich kenne die nächsten zwanzig Jahre seines Lebens ja bereits.

Genau hier habe ich plötzlich Lust, die Geschichte zu verändern, neu zu schreiben: Ich habe Lust, das Publikum hereinzubitten, zu warten, bis alle ihre Plätze gefunden haben und auch der letzte ausgehüstelt hat; dann setze ich mich neben das Mädchen auf den Hocker, hinter dem Vorhang. Ich ermuntere das Mädchen, anstelle der einstudierten Beethoven-Sonate spontan mit mir eine vierhändige Musik zu improvisieren, die so schräg, wild oder auch schrecklich klingen darf, wie uns der Sinn steht. Ich stelle mir vor: Statt zu raunen aufgrund dessen, was es *sieht*, ist das Publikum entweder berührt oder irritiert von dem, was es *hört*; die, die berührt sind, klatschen mitten in unser Spiel hinein, stehen



the curtain and begin to dance around the piano. Those who are irritated, perhaps also disgusted, leave the hall. And then, suddenly, I imagine that the girl calls out: *Curtain up!*

auf, singen, manche schlüpfen durch den Spalt zwischen den Vorhangseiten und fangen an, um den Flügel herum zu tanzen – die, die irritiert sind, vielleicht auch empört, verlassen den Saal. Und auf einmal ruft das Mädchen: *Vorhang auf!*



# ARTHUR SEEFAHRT

## POEMS

SO YOU HEARD ABOUT THE ASTEROID RIGHT

the one that exploded over Russia

the one that left a terran eye above Quebec  
the dinosaur one

or the ones like Apophis  
looming somewhere

in the dark around the sun  
I had a dream

I was in a nightclad field  
and was at once a youth

stealing a horse  
and an old man laying on his belly

cataracted with vision in the dark  
laying the youth still off the horse

with a single shot  
But when I awoke after three hours

übersetzt von Daniel Schmidt

## GEDICHTE

DU HAST VOM ASTEROIDEN GEHÖRT STIMMTS

dem der über Russland zerbarst

dem der ein Auge auf Quebec hinterließ  
dem Dino-Auslöscher

oder solchen wie Apophis  
aufziehend von irgendwoher

aus den Schatten des Sonnensystems  
hatte ich einen Traum

ich war auf nachtbedecktem Feld  
dabei ein Pferd zu stehlen

zugleich ein Jüngling  
und ein alter Mann auf der Lauer

mitgerissen in der Dunkelheit von Gespinsten  
stürzte umgenietet der Jüngling vom Pferd

mit einem einzigen Schuss  
aber als ich nach drei Stunden erwachte

the world was still there  
And if it wasn't

I can't tell

war die Welt immer noch da  
und wär sie es nicht

ich weiß nicht was dann

## HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED A DUMB LATE-NIGHT MOVIE

where someone has to mine an asteroid  
or some comedy about time travel

and lizardmen with chintzy day-glo scales  
and in spite of all the talking space fish

and bizarre flickering urban skylines  
some scene happens on an alien world

right at the close of the film  
between two humans

and a sacrifice is made  
to reunite the space fish clone with his creator

so you burst into tears turn off the TV  
want to scream but its Monday

at three fortyfour AM  
and the silence in the street and the constant whir

of the fan in the livingroom's white noise  
is the only thing makes this time slow

snot in your beard  
mouth agape in silence because to scream

would be to break into the future  
where in every moment that follows



## HAST DU DIR MAL NEN SCHEISS SPÄTFILM REINGEZOGEN

wo einer einen Asteroiden vermint  
oder eine Komödie über Zeitreisen

und Eidechsenmännern mit quietschbunten Neonschuppen  
und ungeachtet all der sprechenden Weltraumfische

und bizarr flimmernden Stadtlandschaften  
läuft eine Szene auf fremdem Planeten

kurz vor Ende des Films  
zwischen zwei Menschen

und ein Opfer wird dargebracht  
um den Schöpfer mit dem Klon des Weltraumfisches zu vereinen

also beginnst du zu flennen schaltest die Glotze aus  
willst schreien doch es ist Montag

drei Uhr vierundvierzig in der Früh  
die Stille der Straßen und das gleichbleibende Surren

des Ventilators im weißen Rauschen der Stube  
sind das einzige was diese Zeit zu etwas Langsamem macht

Schnotter im Bart  
den Mund offen bereit loszuschreien

auszubrechen in die Zukunft  
wo in jedem Moment der folgt

one thing is always true

time travel is not real

your father is dead  
and you will never see him again

Eines immer wahr ist

Zeitreisen sind nicht real

dein Vater ist tot  
du siehst ihn nicht wieder

## MY OWN PRIVATE AUTOMAT

There is a wall of tiny doors

a studio filled with vacant plastic chairs   red   orange   yellow

each time I am hungry I open a door

Holographic Tommy James   sodapop sommelier

round teal tables   a bar with plastic forks

I am always hungry

door 3F   grilled cheese   it is 1pm

I bought half of Brooklyn for a handful of clamshells

door G50   dissipation   a photo of spearmint growing  
in my parents' back yard

the west wall is all glass   dust motes quiver through light  
like protozoa

door S12   a miniature replica of Rooms by the Sea

Every name   is my name

on the east wall it hangs like a celebrity photo   already  
there are so many

## MEIN EIGENER PRIVATER FRESSOMAT

dort ist eine Wand aus winzigen Klappen

ein Atelier mit unbesetzten Plastikstühlen orange gelb rot

immer wenn ich hungrig bin öffne ich eine Klappe

Tommy-James-Holografie Limo-Pop Sommelier

runde türkise Tische eine Bar mit Palstikgabeln

ich bin immer hungrig

Klappe 3F Grillkäse 1 Uhr Nachmittag

ich kaufte halb Brooklyn für eine Handvoll Muschelschalen

Klappe G50 Ausschweifung ein Foto minzgrüner  
Gewächse im Hinterhof meiner Eltern

die westliche Wand ist ganz aus Glas Staubpartikel flickern  
wie Protozoen durchs Licht

Klappe S12 Miniaturreplik von Rooms by the Sea

jeder Name mein Name

an der östlichen Wand hängt das wie ein Star-Foto jetzt  
schon dort sind so viele

door AA42      a pocket copy of A Message to Garcia

in the red booth      a name is carved      like a stone

Sometimes I forget there is always music playing

Everytime I flip a coin      I am Ritchie Valens

door X15      tri-color Jell-O parfait      it is 9am in July

Everything depends upon      a red plastic basket  
lined with wax paper

I sleep in the booth with the orange vinyl pads

door M5      a whole BBQ chicken      it is 4am  
November

the napkin dispenser is filled with Supreme Court Rulings

Harry Truman's head is a wall-mounted bottle opener

door Y8      Baseball tickets      disco fries      Doc Ellis

There are dirigibles like clouds in my vitreous

The baseboards are Warhol pink

endless black      coffee      penny warm ups

Klappe AA42 Taschenkopie von A Message to Garcia

in der roten Nische ist ein Name gemeißelt wie ein Stein

manchmal vergesse ich dort spielt immer Musik

jedes mal werfe ich eine Münze ich bin Ritchie Valens

Klappe X15 dreifarbiger kaltgestürzter Wackelpudding

9 Uhr früh im Juli

alles abhängig von einem roten Plastikkorb eingeschlagen  
in Wachspapier

ich schlafe in der Nische mit den orangen PVC-Matten

Klappe M5 ein ganzes Grillhähnchen 4 Uhr früh

November

der Serviettenspender gefüllt mit Urteilen des Obersten Gerichts

Harry Trumans Kopf ein an die Wand montierter

Flaschenöffner

Klappe Y8 Baseballtickets Disco brennt Doc Ellis

dort sind Luftschiffe wie Wolken in meinem Kelch

die Fußleiste ist Andy-Warhol-pink

endlos schwarz Kaffee Morgenfernseh-Gymnastik

door J3      accomplishment      a ribboned diploma

door L40      Remington .22 shells      it is happy hour

I will die as the king of Demark      in the afternoon

door V6      Robert Johnson's guitar strings

because sometimes you get lost on the way

there is sunglass in the field of barbaric myth

door W92      the hermit      the lovers      the devil

I will always be hungry

door B89      key lime pie      it is Flag Day

Dennis Wilson is my prison chaplain

I have been swallowed by the sea      he says  
it is painless midnight

door O14      a miniature replica of Night Windows

Walt Whitman lives in my claw foot tub      he is always  
singing along

All is laid out before me like a grande buffet

I merely pass through the open doors



Klappe J3 Errungenschaft Diplom mit Schleifchen

Klappe L40 Remington 22er Kaliber happy hour

ich werde sterben als der König von Dänemark nachmittags

Klappe V6 Robert Johnsons Gitarrensaiten

weil manchmal verläufst du dich auf dem Weg

ein Sonnenglas dort auf dem Feld barbarischer Mythen

Klappe W92 der Eremit die Liebenden der Teufel

ich werde immer hungrig sein

Klappe B89 die Lösung Limetten-Pastete es ist Gedenktag

Dennis Wilson ist mein Knastkaplan

mich verschluckte die See sagt er schmerzfreie  
Mitternacht

Klappe O14 Miniaturreplik von Night Windows

Walt Whitman lebt in meinem Fingernagelkästchen er wird  
ewig weiter singen

alles vor mir aufgetischt wie ein Gala-Buffer

ich gehe lediglich durch offene Türen

## THE BOOK OF THE BEGATS: CHAPTER II

*for Carl Sagan*

2 Here continues the telling of how the World came to be known. The Word is awesome for it creates, and moves creation.

2. And so, began anew the swirling motion of the Orbs in the minds of the men who walked on the Earth. 3. And in this time it was that Newton sprung up from the Earth as would a fruit tree; 4. For it had already come to pass that all seeds had tasted celestial light through the lenses of the Forebears. 5. Thus stood Newton under a fruit tree, upon Kepler's shoulder, to ponder the Heavens. He was struck by an apple then; 6. And thought unto himself, among other things, Errors are not in the art, but in the artificers and biting the apple he cast it into the sea.

7. The apple of Newton

thus drifted until a shore was reached. It was at that moment that Franklin stepped from the core of the apple onto the new land.

8. In the new land he searched for a key. Casting his kite on the wind, Franklin spake thusly: Energy and persistence conquer all things and his words were pushed on the air by thunder, and written in the sky with lightning, and many people were witness to them throughout the lands.

9. And from the fruit tree, in awe of the thunderous words, a hairy man climbed down. This man was called Darwin. 10. He left the land to travel on the Seas of Life from whence Newton's apple had washed ashore. The tale of his days is long, and the toil of his work maddening; 11. Though, after seeing

## DAS BUCH DER BEGATEN: KAPITEL II

*für Carl Sagan*

2 Hier setzt sich die Geschichte fort, wie es dazu kam, dass die Welt bekannt wurde. Das Wort gebietet Ehrfurcht vor dem, das es erschafft und seine Schöpfungen antreibt.

2. Und so begann abermals das Wirbeln der Gestirne im Geiste der Menschen, die auf der Erde wandelten.

3. Und zu dieser Zeit war es, da Newton, als wär er ein Obstbaum, der Erde entsprang;

4. Denn längst zugetragen hatte es sich, dass alle Samen durch Ahnenaugen hindurch gekostet hatten vom himmlischen Lichte.

5. So stand Newton, um sich über den Himmel in Gedanken zu verlieren, auf Keplers Schultern unter dem Obstbaume. Er ward von einem Apfel getroffen

sodann;

6. Und unter anderem dachte er sich, kein Irrtum steckt im Geschick, allein dieser liegt im Geschicke-Erschaffer und in den Apfel beißend warf er diesen ins Meer.

7. Der Apfel des Newton also trieb über das Meer solange, bis er eine Küste erreichte. Das war der Augenblick in dem Franklin das Apfelgehäuse verließ und die neuen Lande beschrift.

8. In den neuen Landen suchte er nach einer Lösung. Franklin also, seinen Drachen steigen lassend, sprach dies: Energie und Beharrlichkeit überwinden ein jedes Ding und seine Worte wurden vom Donner in alle Lüfte geschleudert und dem Himmel eingeschrieben mit Blitzen und viel Volk ward Zeuge davon

the Earth from the Sea,  
and returning to the lands,  
Darwin made a declaration:  
How paramount the future  
is to the present, when one is  
surrounded by children and  
thus the Law was spoken.

12. The Word is awesome,  
for the numbers too are the  
Word, and the power of the  
Word is multiplied under  
the law that Darwin hath  
spake.

13. And so, it was seen  
in the lands that men  
crawled up from the sea, and  
began to walk and speak;  
14. And of these men, one  
was known in the lands as  
Einstein. When the people  
of the lands first encoun-  
tered him, many took him  
to be mute or feeble, for they  
heard but animal's sounds  
when he spoke. 15. Though  
in time, which is measured  
by numbers, some of the  
people came to know that  
Einstein was a prophet, and  
that the tongues with which  
he spake where the tongues

of numbers; the language of  
the Swirling Orbs.

16. It was thus that  
Einstein's words were  
understood, and recorded  
in the lands: Gravitation is  
not responsible for people  
falling in love. 17. And after  
speaking the Word, it was  
observed in the lands that  
light fell from the heavens as  
tiny blinding stones on that  
day.

18. The stones of light  
quickly dissolved, though  
another man held the last  
of these mysterious pebbles  
in his hand. He was called  
Oppenheimer; 19. And the  
people of the lands feared  
him for he took the melting  
stone of light, and closing  
his eyes, cast it down at  
the Earth, crying out; I am  
become death, the destroyer  
of worlds and a great noise  
was heard, and a dark wind  
blew over all of the lands.

20. Thus Oppenheimer,  
as many men, had used the  
Word to place upon himself

überall im Lande.

9. Und ehrfürchtig vor den donnernden Worten stieg vom Obstbaume herab ein haariger Mann. Diesen Mann hießen sie Darwin.

10. Er verließ das Land, um auf den Meeren des Lebens zu fahren, von woher Newtons Apfel einst kam getrieben. Die Geschichte seiner Tage ist lang und nah dem Wahnsinne brachte ihn die Mühsal seiner Arbeit;

11. Jedoch, nachdem er die Weltmeere befahren und an Land zurückgekehrt ward, verkündete Darwin seine Proklamation: Wie überragend ist die Zukunft für die Gegenwart, wenn einer umgeben von Kindern, und so gesprochen ward das Gesetz.

12. Das Wort gebietet Ehrfurcht, denn auch Zahlen sind Wörter und die Macht des Wortes ist vervielfacht durch Darwins verlautbartes Gesetz.

13. Und so geschah es,

aus dem Meere gekrochen erschienen die Menschen und zu gehen begannen sie und zu sprechen.

14. Und im Lande war einer von ihnen bekannt als Einstein. Als es ihm ward angesichtig, hielt ihn für schwächlich und stumm das Volk, denn dass er dies sei, hatten sie über ihn vernommen, sobald er aber zu sprechen anhub, erklangen die Stimmen der Tiere.

15. Obgleich zur selbigen Zeit, welche gemessen in Zahlen, überkam einige Leute doch die Einsicht, Einstein sei von Nutzen und die Zungen, in denen er sprach, waren die Zungen der Zahlen – die Sprache der wirbelnden Gestirne.

16. Und also wurde Einstein verstanden und aufgezeichnet im Lande: die Erdanziehungskraft kann nicht verantwortlich gemacht werden dafür, dass Menschen sich voneinander angezogen fühlen

a curse that was undeserved;  
21. And opening his eyes he  
saw in the hollow where he  
had cast the stone, a man  
bathed in blinding light;  
22. For the end is in the  
beginning, and all things are  
one in the Word.

23. Thus, the man who  
was seen on that day  
standing in the hollow, had  
grown out of the ground as  
a fruit tree; 24. And it was  
known to the people of the  
lands, that he had eaten the  
apple and flown the kite;  
25. He had set sail on the  
Seas of Life and mastered  
the language of the Orbs.

26. The people of the  
lands then learned that he  
was called Sagan, and he had  
witnessed the casting of the  
stone of light; 27. And on  
that day, he was heard to say;  
For small creatures such as  
we, the vastness is bearable  
only though love

17. Und nachdem er  
die Worte gesprochen,  
beobachtete man an diesem  
Tag im Lande ein Licht,  
dieses fiel aus dem Himmel  
wie winzige, grelle Gesteine.

18. Die Lichtsteinchen  
zerfielen geschwind, obschon  
ein anderer Mann die letzten  
dieser rätselhaften Kiesel in  
Händen hielt. Ihn nannte  
man Oppenheimer;

19. Und im Lande  
fürchtete ihn das Volk, da  
er an sich nahm die schmel-  
zenden Steine des Lichtes  
und, die Augen geschlossen,  
schleuderte er sie in den  
Staub und schrie; ich bin der  
Tod geworden, Zerstörer  
der Welten, und ein großer  
Krach ward vernommen und  
ein finsterer Wind blies über  
das Land.

20. So legte Oppenheimer,  
wie viele andere Menschen  
vor und nach ihm, durch das  
Wort einen Fluch auf sich,  
den er nicht verdiente;

21. Und seine Augen  
öffnend erblickte er in der  
Kuhle, in die er den Stein

geworfen, einen Mann, der  
badete im blendenden Lichte;

22. Am Ende ist der  
Anfang, und alle Dinge sind  
eins im Worte.

23. So wuchs, wie ein  
Obstbaum, der Mann aus der  
Kuhle heraus;

24. Und es verbreitete sich  
im Volke, dass jener den  
Apfel gegessen und auf dem  
Drachen geflogen;

25. Er setzte seine Segel  
auf dem Meere des Lebens  
und war bewandert in der  
Sprache der Gestirne.

26. Das Volk verstand,  
dass man diesen Sagan  
nannte und dass er anwesend  
ward, als geschleudert wurde  
der Lichtstein;

27. Und an diesem Tage  
hörte man ihn sagen: Für die  
kleinen Kreaturen, solchen  
wie wir es sind, wird die  
Unermesslichkeit erträglich  
allein durch die Liebe

# DANIEL SCHMIDT

## GEDICHTE

AUF DEM ZIMMER *[FROM OSTSEEHOTEL CALIFORNIA]*

kein Nachdenken, nachdenken kannst du nicht, versuch es nicht, es ist nicht deine Stärke, der Versuch schon würde dich schwächen, schwach machen, dich verführen, weiterhin weithin nachzudenken, im Glauben daran du könntest es, könntest erfolgreich sein damit, gewisse Dinge herausfinden, sie dann zu sagen zu haben, weil du glaubst, du hättest sie dir erdacht, ehrlich erdacht, im Schweiß deiner Nachdenklichkeit, die keine Grenzen mehr kennt, vor dir nicht, vor anderen nicht, die respektlos darüber hinweg denkt, dass du abkommst, wegstommst vom Wege des guten Gedankengeschmacks, bitter zu denken beginnst und es nicht mitkriegst, die scheußliche Wahrheit, die du dir denkst, um dann darüber nachzudenken



translation by Arthur Seefahrt

## POEMS

IN THE ROOM *[FROM BALTIC SEA HOTEL CALIFORNIA]*

without dreams, you cannot dream, do not try to, it is not  
your strong suit, this attempt has already weakened you,  
swan-girl, it has seduced you, furthermore it has opened your  
thoughts to the night, you could come to believe it, you could  
be affected by it, so, certainly you will find the thing, then, as  
it's said, it has you, because you believe it, you have invented it  
yourself, truly you have cast your dreams into a pious sweat,  
you know no more boundaries, before you nothing, before  
another nothing, respectless you think on it so much that  
you deviate, you stray from the path of beneficent tasteful  
thoughts, you begin to think bitterly and do not fight it, you  
think to yourself the undelightful truth, that you are over-  
thinking

## REMINISZENZ SOMMER [FROM OSTSEEHOTEL CALIFORNIA]

nichts geht, augenblicksblind, Schnee fällt wie eine endlose Vervielfachung der Vergangenheit einer Flocke, die Meisen mit Körnerverlangen und Würmersehnsucht jagen durchs Unterholz, dem kahlen, fahlen, schneeansetzenden, hatte mal Blätter, hatte Sonne, ich war mal nackt, nicht eingepackt, hatte mal See vor mir, Brüste und Arsch in der Hand und wenn sie zu heiß wurden, gab es das Wasser, Kühlung und Anfassen im Nass, die Boote auf Abstand, Schwäne gleichgültig, Krumen und Fussel, die wir aus Haaren zogen, waren keine passenden Leckerbissen für Federvieh, ließen es gleichgültig über das Wasser rutschen, unter Wasser unsere Hände, wasserverdrängende Körper, bis wir abgekühlt froren, dafür gab es Sonne, die dritte Liebende im Unterholzbunde, gelegentliche Gestrüppdurchstöberer stöberten zwei bis vierbeinig weiter, wenn sie uns fanden, fanden peinlich, beim Stöbern gestört und uns obendrein vertraulich zu sehen, nirgendwo kann man Ruhe gewiss, so wie Gewissheit gewiss sein, nur stören lassen davon braucht man sich nicht, wir konnten das, wir konnten ungestört gestört sein, vergessen daliegen, vergessen von Allem uns vergessend, zur Sonne werdend, See seiend, birkenriebgrünes Rascheln der Luft, zart und wachsend, der Schnee ist dasselbe Wasser, hart vorzustellen, kalt einzutauchen, in solchen Gedanken, vielleicht die Meisen wissen das und vielleicht wissen sie alles, weil sie das alles nicht stört, nicht stören darf, in Streifzügen durch Büsche, in ihrer haltlosen Jagd nach immer dem nächsten Augenblick, fang fang fang fang fang...

## SUMMER REMINISCENCE *[FROM BALTIC SEA HOTEL CALIFORNIA]*

don't go, momentary blindness, snow fell as an endless multiplicity of the passing of flakes, the titmice with the seeddesire and wormhunger hunt through the underbrush, then bleaker, paler, snowswell, had the leaves, had the sun, I was buck-naked, unpacked, it had the fuckin' see before me, tits and ass in the hand and when she was too hot, gave her the water, cooling and catching waves in, the boats in the distance, the swans just as good, crumbs and lint, we had tangled in our hair, we were without appropriate tidbits for poultry it was just as good to glide easily over the water, our hands under water, dragging our bodies through the water, until we were chilled to the bone, but there was the sun, the third lover in the bramblebond, occasional shrubsearching further disturbed by two four-legs, when they found us they found us embarrassed, when the rummage disturbed us and came upon a privatemoment, one can find certain tranquility nowhere, and this certainly is certain, only one need not be disturbed by this, we were not, we were unperturbed to be disturbed, to lay forgotten, forgetting those that had forgotten us, the nascent sun, the existing lake, the new-birch-growth-green rustling the air, tender and growing, the snow is itself water, introduced to hardness, immersed in cold, in such thoughts, maybe the titmice know that, maybe they know everything, because they don't interfere with everything, mustn't interfere, in rambles through the shrubbery baseless in their always hunting the next moment and the next, catch catch catch catch catch...

TRAUM [FROM OSTSEEHOTEL CALIFORNIA]

es hat alles am Stadtteich über den Haufen geworfen  
sich in sich der schöne Regen stürzte  
zusammen was folgte war was  
ich nicht wollte die Sonne mich  
zu entkleiden beschloss ich zu tauchen  
durch des Gewässerchens Wasser stieß ich auf  
Tonnen und Räder hineingeworfenes  
Stadtgut jetzt Riffe für Egel im Schlamm und Karauschen  
die ich fing mit Hand und den Füßen denn  
ich wurde ein Otter vom Ufer  
das Häufchen Klamotten stahlen Ghattokids mir  
der ich Schrott klaubte und mit Zähnen  
mir bog eine Rüstung nun sollte versuchen noch  
einmal mir umzuwerfen etwas die Pläne  
Schwert und Schild schmiedete mein heißes Blut  
und ein Ross aus versenkter Karosse  
bereit entstieg ich stählernd dem Wasser  
triefte und knirschte hinterdrein einem Reiher  
das erste Opfer

der Schlachtruf:

“Frühling jetzt  
will ich mich verlieben!”

DREAM [FROM *BALTIC SEA HOTEL CALIFORNIA*]

everything has been thrown into the heap over the city-pond  
the beautiful stirring plunges into itself  
together what followed was what  
I myself didn't want the sun  
to undress decision I plunge  
through the water of the pondy I threw  
tons and wheels the cast away  
driftgoods now reefs for leeches in sludge and gurgurling  
that I clutch with my hand and feet then  
I was an otter from the shore  
the lil' rag heap inures me to Ghetto-kids  
I clawed the scrap and with my teeth  
attempt to bend myself an armament now yet  
again the plan to knock something down  
sword and shield forged in my burning blood  
and a steed from a sunken stage coach  
readily emerging from the steely water  
dripping and gnashed and after him a heron  
that first victim

the battlecry:

"Spring now  
I will remain myself!"

## DAS DSCHÄBÄWOKK

und Käptn Eggedeck soßen bede beim Verhör  
und zählten Schnurren bei dem Kömmissar  
, der Schmolke hieß, so hieß man ihn  
und hisste Flaggen ihn zu Ähren

, das er vor dazumal erfolgreich führte  
Kommando Gaschi, sein Triumph, er war  
ein barscher Mann und die zwi Zwetschkengammler  
mistfielen ihm mit ihrem Boschihoschihuschbuschstil

, denn was sie watschten, die zwo Zwobler, war banal  
, so schien es ihm, denn für den Fall  
das für den Fall, um den es gung, nichts  
beizutrögen wussten sie, war das mal sicher, doch

aus den Backetaschen zutschten sie und  
muntren Munds quahatschten sie draufslös vom  
Blumenglöcknering, dem sie die Missetat andachten  
und als Söbjekt hinstellten, das zu Zünftigkeiten

fähig war, die Ihresgleichen irreführten auf der Welt  
, so soll Herr von und zu und auch daneben  
Blumenglöcknering, ein draller Stäuber, sagten sie, die  
holde Dolde einer Waldfeenkönigin bestäubet

haben, was dieser wiederum gefiel, weil sie  
schon lange nicht ansähnlich war, so  
gob sie ihm das halbe Königinnenreich  
, nen halben Baum, mit dem kein Mann

## THE DSCHÄBÄWOKK

and Käptn Eggedeck mute with the sauces of interrogation  
and counting the purrs of the Kömmissar  
, a Mr. Scmolke, he was a hot one  
and hoisted the flags to his ears

, back in the day to prosperously furl  
Kommando Gaschi, was a triumph, he was  
a gruff man and the wee plum-bum  
their shit fell on him with a sposchsplischsposch

, then what slapped him, the dub-doubler, was banal  
, so it seemed to him, that in this instance  
and for that instance, it was about the gung, he  
knew not to contribute to it, that much was certain,

so from his backpack he whispered and  
the jollymouth of mouths chattered straight out of it  
Blumenglöcknering, his devoted misdeed  
and the subject posited, to capable guild-bonds

he was, the foremost liar in the world  
, and so Lord of and to and also besides  
Blumenglöcknering, a stout caretaker, she said, the  
Waldfeenkönigin had sprinkled the dear umbel

, which in turn pleased her because they  
were not long purdy already, so  
she gove to him half her queenswealth  
, yessir! half a tree, with no man

was anzufangen wusste und auch mit dieser  
Fabel nichts der Kömmissar, dem schon schön  
schwindlig war von dem Verhör, was er vom Käptn  
und vom Dschäbäwokk mitanhörn musste er



which begins to know and also with these  
stories not the Kömmissar, who already beautiful  
was giddy from the interrogation, which the Kaptn  
and the Dschäbäwokk overheard

## DAS DSCHÄBÄWOKK

und Käptn Eggedeck auf der Suche nach  
dem Gartenzweg, wo zwischen Borstelwurz  
und Zippelgnup er sich verborgen mit dem Wissen,  
wo die Dame Burselmunde abgeblieben, denn

weg war sie und nun der Zwerg auch obendrein,  
zusammenfassend: der, der wusste, wo sie, die  
weg war, war, in ihrer Wunderschönbarkeit, war  
selber weg und wo war er, der Zwerg, wenn er

nicht da und vor der Laube hockte zwischen  
Knöterich und Sawidauz und wusste wer vielleicht  
vom Los der Abgebliebenen wer anders noch,  
vielleicht der Gaschi aber dieser der der schlief

und als zum Blumenglöcknering man kam, da  
wurde Kaffekuchen rumgereicht, doch kein Gerücht  
vom Ferngebleib der Dame Burselmund, vielleicht  
ward sie gefressen plump, denn das kam vor, die

Welt war nicht die Friedlichste und manch Geheuer  
oft vergabelte nen Zwerg noch unverhofft zum  
Schnabbelschmatz, solch Zeiten damals waren das,  
doch eine Dame schmeckte nicht, und wenn:

nach Frosch, war nicht zum spielen da, nur  
für die Zier, das wusste man ganz allgemeinheitlich,  
nun ja, man grübelte und frug die Piep, aus der kam  
Qualm, doch Antwort nicht, vielleicht war sie auch

## THE DSCHÄBÄWOKK

and Kaptn Eggedeck from the search for  
the Gardengnome, who bent between  
the Borstelworz and the Zippelgnup with the knowledge of  
the Woman who was not there, then

she was away uh huh and the gnome as well besides,  
gathered together: the, the fuzzy, whom she, was  
away, was in their beautiful availability, was  
itself away and who her was, the gnome when he

was not there and before he crouched between the arbors  
knotweed and nobthistle and who was perhaps  
of the lot of those who are not there and yet another  
perhaps Mr. Gaschi or the ones who slept

and just as Blumenglöcknering came,  
coffee-cake was served, with much hearsay  
of the impermanence of Dame Burselmund, perhaps  
she was awkwardly eaten, then it came forth, the

world was not Tranquility and some Turmoil  
often forgotten unexpectedly toward the Gnome ya know  
lipsmakcing, in those days it was like that  
however no woman of good taste, and when:

the friggin' frog, was not there to play, only  
for the blossoming, that was completely vulgaform  
uh huh yes, one pondered and asked the Squeek, and from him  
came smoke, not an answer, perhaps also she

nur verweist, zum Rubbler Denny möglich auch, der  
Käptn und das Dschäbäwokk, doch schon mit Anderem  
beschäftigt waren sie und setzten sich auf einen Storch  
und flogen, flogen und dann lachten sie

was only trained, for the potential of Rubbler Denny,  
the Kaptn and the Dschäbäwokk, who were already engaged  
with another and she sat herself upon a stork  
and flew, flew and then she laughed

## DAS DSCHÄBÄWOKK

und Käptn Eggedeck als Leutnants beide sonderlich  
nicht zuverlässig und Schmolke, Kommissar,  
nicht haben will sie sauerampfermampfend auf  
dem Rummel bei den Deppen (Gefühlsverletzte /

Quark und Hupe ) knattern saubre Sachen auch schön  
schon und geile Geschosse dudeln dideldingi Dudelsack,  
Haare aufsetzen, vom Augentrost kosten und Frau, die  
gibt es diesmal nicht, der Wolf des Guten hält Papi

gepackt, er will nie wieder schlechtes Tun, die Gören  
plärrn und Göran Ütschlemür, die Irr im Blick,  
stürmt heldseinwollend zu auf Schluppi, alte  
Klappertante, ober-oberflächlich, Futter und Fakten

sowieso ermittelt man im nachhinaus und plötzlich  
sehen alle einen Negerlein, ganz klein, das kann nicht  
sein, im Riesenrad hochoben, nein, Gäule klappern,  
Revolver knallern, im Saloon brät eine Birne durch,

ein wilder Westentaschenblues lässt Silbermünzen  
klimpfern wie das Dschäbäwokk auf seinen Zähnen spielt  
Klavier, ein Blitz! und da ein Wesen aus dem Reich der  
Lust nimmt wackren Käptn Eggedeck zur Brust, der

kiechererbsig schwafelnd Seebeern aus Mangrovensümpfen  
mümmelt, die sind tabu, doch für den Schmu entscheidend  
wichtig weiß man ja und Schmolke hält sein Hinterteil,  
sein Klepper Ferdinando wartet vor der Geisterbahn, doch

## THE DSCHÄBÄWOKK

and Kaptn Eggedeck as if both his lieutenants were especially unreliable and Schmolke, the Kommissar did not want to have the munchin'-sorrel of the bustle of the idiots (fembutthurt/

Quark and Hupe) rattling claes things and beautifully already and the lecherous closing of tootle-tootling bagpipes let down their hair, from the cost and women of the moment, which was not given at this time, the Wolf of Good stopped Poppy

bundling, he never wants to act so badly again, the brats howl and the Ütschlemür brats, to view their mistake, stormed the would-be-hero, Schluppi, an old draft horse, a super-superficiality, the feed and fact

anyhow determined one in foresight and suddenly they all saw a jiggaboo, utterly little, this could not be, high up on the Ferris wheel, no, the old horse's stable, revolver bangs, caused by a fired pear in the saloon,

a savage saddlebag-blues provided silver strumming as the Dschäbäwokk played piano with his teeth, a Flash! and there a creature from the kingdom removed the stalwart pleasure from Kaptn Eggedeck's breast,

garbanzo beans, babbling seaweed from the mangroveswamp nibbled, and this is taboo, for the crucial jiggery-pokery while the important one yes! and Schmolke were assgrabbing the draft horse Horace waited for the ghost-train,

wo der Autoscooter steht, da hat vor Blicken Anderes sich  
zugetragen doch und doch vergessen ist es schön schon denn  
das Dschäbäwokk und Käptn Eggedeck vom Scheriff Schmolke  
ausgezeichnet wurden sie und das mit Orden ordentlich



where the bumper-cars are, there they look for another glance  
and it is already beautifully forgotten then  
the Dschäbäwokk and Kaptn Eggedeck were excited  
by the neatness of the order of Sheriff Schmolke



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NIKA KNIGHT is originally from Boston, and currently lives in Portland, Maine. She has a B.A. from Oberlin College in Comparative Literature and an M.F.A. from Columbia University in Nonfiction Writing and Literary Translation. In 2009, she was awarded a DAAD fellowship to study journalism in Berlin. She was a founding editor at Full Stop, and her writing has been published in *Guernica*, *Narratively*, and *The Rumpus*, among others. Her translation of Svenja Leiber's *The Last Country* is forthcoming from Seagull Books.

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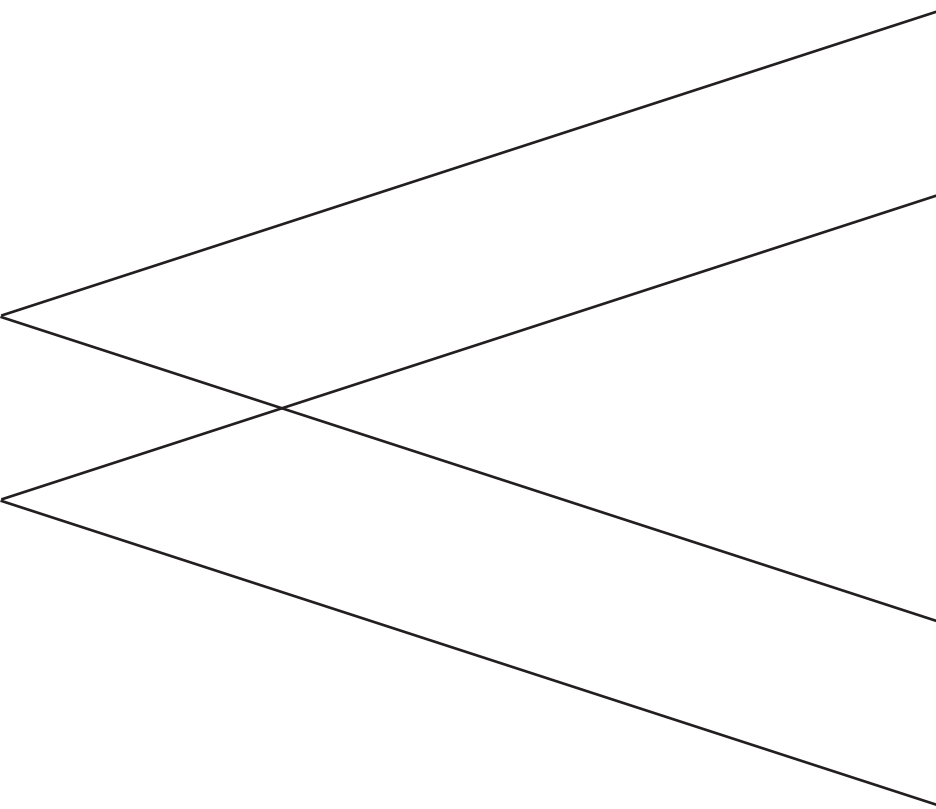
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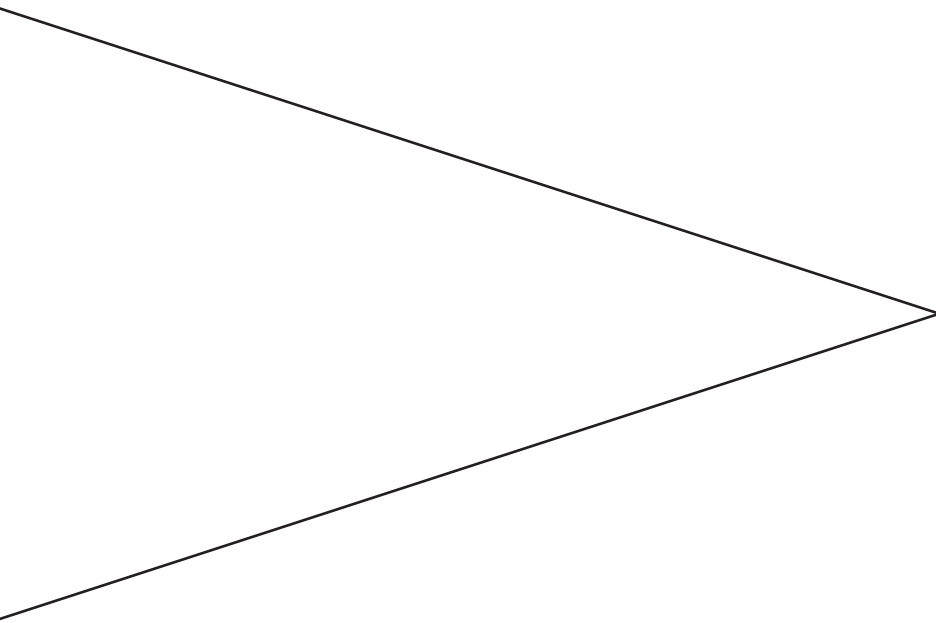
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WORD FOR WORD  
PAROLA PER PAROLA

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS  
& SCUOLA HOLDEN  
2014-2015

# KEVIN ST. JOHN

## MYSTERY SPOT

He received an unexpected text from the man he once was deeply in love with, while sitting alone in his kitchen at dusk drinking a beer with the lights off. At times it seemed to him that maybe he was still in love this man, even if the man had been—and still was—impossibly unavailable, happily coupled with another man. The man (whom he hadn't heard from in months, ever since he decided to cut of their torrid, yet static, affair) was asking him if he would feed his fish, which he had forgotten to make arrangements for before leaving to attend a wedding in Santa Cruz with his boyfriend. Not seeing any way to politely decline, and somehow touched that in a moment of crisis he was the person elected to help, he agreed to feed the fish. The keys arrived the next day in a manila envelope, with a California postmark and a tidy blue sticker printed with the word "Overnight."

\* \* \*

On Monday and Tuesday, he fed them in the morning, a single pinch of fluorescent-colored flakes that smelled strangely of fish themselves. But on Wednesday evening, while drinking and hiding from the cold autumn rain at home with a friend, he remembered the fish, how he hadn't fed them. The friend, with a dramatic glance, reminded him how easy it is to kill fish. "There's really, a thousand ways for them to die" she said, then added: "which is surprising I know because they're so simple."



traduzione di Alessandro Bianchi

## IL MYSTERY SPOT

**A**l tramonto, mentre beveva una birra a luci spente seduto da solo in cucina, ricevette un messaggio inatteso dall'uomo di cui un tempo era profondamente innamorato. A volte gli sembrava di amarlo ancora, forse, anche se il tipo era stato—ed era sempre—impossibile da raggiungere, felicemente in coppia con un altro. L'uomo (di cui non aveva avuto notizie per mesi, da quando aveva deciso di interrompere la loro ardente, ma piatta tresca) gli chiedeva se avrebbe potuto dar da mangiare ai suoi pesci, cosa che aveva dimenticato di organizzare prima di partire con il fidanzato per un matrimonio a Santa Cruz. Non vedendo nessun modo educato di rifiutarsi, e in qualche maniera commosso dal fatto che si fosse rivolto a lui in un momento di crisi, accettò di nutrire i pesci. Le chiavi arrivarono il giorno seguente in un plico di carta manila, con un timbro postale della California e un bell'adesivo blu con la scritta "Consegna per il giorno dopo."

\* \* \*

Il lunedì e il martedì li nutrì al mattino, un singolo pizzico di fiocchi fluorescenti che avevano anch'essi uno strano odore di pesce. Ma la sera del mercoledì, mentre era a casa con un'amica a bere e rifugiarsi dalla fredda pioggia autunnale, si ricordò di loro, del fatto che non li avesse ancora sfamati. Con un'occhiata allarmata, l'amica gli rammentò quanto fosse facile uccidere dei pesci. "Ci sono davvero mille modi diversi di farli

\* \* \*

He left his friend in his kitchen and made the journey by bike, squinting against the rain. Wet and a little drunk he watched the fish shuttle from each extremity of the tank and back, then circling around one another near the castle, and then repeating this dance, scattering and regrouping.

He stood for a long time in the dark kitchen watching two silver fish in particular, their scales illuminated, more than the others, by the faded yellow light of the city streetlamps. He saw the fish suddenly, not as swimming, but as though suspended in the water, like birds might be suspended in air. How strange they are, these slight shimmering things. He had never thought of fish like birds, nor water like air before. Before this he'd regarded aquariums as cages filled with water. Now he saw them as showcases for a world that operates under natural laws that are, nevertheless, alien to us. A fluid, buoyant world unknowable to those of us who dwell awkwardly in air. He sat and watched them, his heart heavy, entranced by their looped choreography, and by their contained, untouchable strangeness. He liked watching them disappear and reappear, not being able to discern which silver one was which. With a jolt, breaking his drunken reverie, he noticed a third fish, dark and ungainly—a bottom feeder—slide out from behind a miniature palm tree and slink across the colored pebbles covering the tank floor, scavenging about for the food the other fish had dropped. Feeling nauseous, from mixing exercise and beer he assumed, he stared at the dark, unappealing thing.

fuori” disse, prima di aggiungere: “che è sorprendente lo so perché sono così semplici.”

\* \* \*

Lasciò l’amica in cucina e percorse il tragitto in bici, con gli occhi strizzati contro la pioggia. Bagnato e un po’ alticcio, guardava i pesciolini fare la spola da un’estremità dell’acquario all’altra, e ruotare in circolo attorno al castello, per poi ripetere questa danza, sparpagliandosi e raggruppandosi a turno.

Rimase a lungo nella cucina buia a guardare soprattutto due pesci argentei, dalle scaglie illuminate, più di quelle degli altri, dal giallo sbiadito dei lampioni stradali. Di colpo li vedeva non come se stessero nuotando, bensì sospesi, come uccelli, nell’acqua. Che strane, queste sottili creature scintillanti. Prima di allora non aveva mai pensato ai pesci come uccelli, o all’acqua come aria. Prima, aveva sempre considerato gli acquari come gabbie riempite d’acqua. Ora li vedeva come vetrine di un mondo sotto il controllo delle leggi naturali, che tuttavia ci appaiono aliene. Una realtà liquida e galleggiante, ignota a chi di noi vive tra le nuvole. Stava seduto a guardarli, il cuore pesante, incantato dalla loro ciclica coreografia, e dalla loro contenuta, inafferrabile stranezza. Era immerso nei propri pensieri quando notò, con un sobbalzo, un terzo pesce, scuro e sgraziato—un pulitore da fondo—scivolare da dietro una palma in miniatura e sgattaiolare tra i ciottoli colorati che coprivano il fondale dell’acquario, rovistando alla ricerca di cibo lasciato dagli altri pesci. Sentendosi nauseato, forse, pensò, per aver unito lo sforzo fisico alla birra, rimase a fissare quella cosa scura e sgradevole.

When the man got back from his vacation they met for coffee to hand off the keys. His beard was fuller than the last time he saw him—he looked carefree and robust. He talked about Santa Cruz, explained it was a place that was, by all accounts, frozen in time. “If it gives you any idea, there’s a movie rental store there that only rents out VHS cassettes.” They laughed about this. The man further explained that he was there for a wedding (not his own) and described the kitsch, all-pink hotel he stayed in with his boyfriend, taking care not to mention his boyfriend. Then, at a lull, the man pulled out of his bag a hologram souvenir keychain picturing Santa Cruz, and a bright yellow brochure with the words “The Mystery Spot” printed in cartoonish font on its front lip.

“So the key chain, that’s my thank you gift for helping with the fish, and this is just some brochure from a crazy tourist spot that I thought you would love.” He handed over the gifts and continued explaining. “They claim gravity is totally off here. And either someone’s pulled off the most insane optical illusion or gravity there is actually, with no good explanation, in this small spot in the middle of the redwood forest, like, completely perverted.”

He opened the brochure. “Santa Cruz’s Sensational Wonder in Wonderland: *The Mystery Spot*.” Next to this, was an odd, stiffly composed photo of an old man doing a pull up on a bar; his legs and body and long wiry beard, instead of hanging down perpendicular to the wooden floor, jutted bizarrely to one side. Another man, standing in front of a teetering shack was photographed leaning back at an urgent angle, without falling, as if leaning against an incredible, unseen gale. “Even

Quando l'uomo tornò dalle vacanze, presero un caffè insieme per la riconsegna delle chiavi. Portava la barba più folta dell'ultima volta in cui si erano visti—e sembrava disinvolto e in forma. Gli parlò di Santa Cruz, spiegando che era un luogo apparentemente congelato nel tempo. “Per darti un'idea, c'è un videonoleggio che affitta soltanto cassette.” Ci risero su. L'uomo aggiunse che era stato là per un matrimonio (non il suo) e descrisse lo strano hotel color rosa fenicottero in cui aveva alloggiato col fidanzato, che ebbe la cura di non menzionare. Poi, in un momento di silenzio, tirò fuori dalla borsa un portachiavi ad ologramma che riportava il suo nome, e un volantino giallo brillante con le parole “Mystery Spot” stampate sulla copertina in un carattere da cartone animato.

“Il portachiavi è per dirti grazie, e questo è un volantino di un posto turistico pazzesco che penso ti piacerebbe.” Gli consegnò i regali e riprese a parlare. “Sostengono che lì la gravità sia del tutto assente. O qualcuno ha messo in piedi la più assurda illusione ottica del mondo, oppure in questo posticino nel mezzo del Parco di Redwood, per qualche oscurissima ragione, la gravità è totalmente alterata.”

Aprì il volantino. “La sensazionale Meraviglia delle Meraviglie di Santa Cruz: *il Mystery Spot*.” Accanto erano piazzate in modo strambo fotografie di un anziano signore che si teneva a una sbarra; le gambe e il corpo, invece di pendere perpendicolari al pavimento di legno, si protendevano curiosamente da un lato. Un altro tizio, in piedi di fronte a una baracca in bilico, era fotografato inclinato di un angolo rischioso, senza cadere, come se si appoggiasse a un fortissimo vento invisibile. “Persino avvicinandoci al posto abbiamo iniziato

walking up to the place we started getting dizzy and nauseous,” he said. “There’s this old house that was built on top of a hill, and even though it was built on a level foundation—you can see it—in the last hundred years, it’s slowly slid off its foundation and half way down the hill, and no one knows why. And it’s really like that picture with the old guy—we hung from a bar, and our legs flew out to the side, not down.” The man laughed, in disbelief at his own memories. “It’s really one of the craziest places I’ve ever been. I have no idea how to explain it.”

The young man agreed that this was a place he’d love to see, and thanked the man for the brochure and the keychain.

Saying goodbye, they hugged, for a long time it seemed, and then he walked away, down the hill toward his apartment. He stopped at his front door and opened the brochure again. He saw in a bold, silly font:

**“The Doubting Thomas who heads for the Spot finds himself among the puzzled when he staggers out to regain his sense of balance and perspective.”**

A mixture of longing and sadness—which he thought had long ago passed—flitted impatiently through him, hiding, resurfacing.

What, he asked himself, am I supposed to do with this? The brochure sat for weeks on his kitchen table, alongside old bills and catalogues, because he could not bring himself to throw it in the trash.

a sentirci storditi e nauseati. C'è questa strana casa che era stata costruita sulla cima di un'altura, su un terreno piano, e nessuno sa perché, ma durante lo scorso secolo è slittata a metà collina. Ed è proprio come nella foto—eravamo appesi a una sbarra, e le gambe ci penzolavano da un lato, non in basso. È davvero uno dei luoghi più assurdi in cui sia mai stato. Non saprei proprio come spiegarlo.”

Il giovane confermò che era un posto che avrebbe voluto vedere, e ringraziò l'altro per il volantino.

Nel salutarsi, si abbracciarono a lungo, gli parve, poi lui si incamminò giù per la collina, verso il suo appartamento. Si fermò di fronte alla porta e aprì di nuovo il volantino. Vide, scritto in grassetto con uno stupido carattere:

**“San Tommaso stesso si troverebbe disorientato se uscisse barcollando dal Mystery Spot a riprendere l'equilibrio e il senso dell'prospettiva”**

Un sottile, pungente, scintillante senso di eccitazione che pensava fosse svanito da tempo, guizzò con impazienza attraverso di lui, scomparendo, riaffiorando.

Cosa ci dovrei fare?, si chiese. Il volantino stette sul tavolo della cucina per diverse settimane, tra vecchi scontrini e cataloghi, perché non si decideva a buttarlo nell'immondizia.

# ALESSANDRO BIANCHI

## UNA PERSONA BUONA

**D**ark Skinwalker non è il suo nome di battesimo, lo sanno tutti. È il nome d'arte, sempre che di arte si possa parlare.

Molta gente pensa che il wrestling sia una buffonata, una sottospecie di circo. Non considera che quei pagliacci sono in realtà atleti, che passano ore a cadere e rialzarsi e cadere di nuovo, finché la pelle non si copre di lividi. Non è forse poesia, questa? La puntualità di manovre richiesta perfino da un suplex, non è qualcosa di artistico? E lo studio dei personaggi, la parte recitata: quei pagliacci fanno anche questo, raccontano storie. Tra gli spettatori di un incontro, specialmente qui da noi, ci sono spesso bambini, che vogliono sognare, immedesimarsi, amano quelle messinscene come amano i supereroi dei fumetti. Vogliono essere buoni.

«Perché la bontà è disarmante, stronzo!» mi ha detto ridendo Dark Skinwalker, subito dopo un incontro. Osservavamo spesso i giovani spettatori affollarsi intorno al loro beniamino, quello che interpretava il bene.

La bontà è disarmante, diceva. Se la bontà è così disarmante, come mai lui ha scelto di interpretare il temibile Dark Skinwalker?

È la marcia imperiale di Star Wars ad annunciarne l'ingresso: le luci si spengono e lui avanza fino al centro del quadrato, lentamente, illuminato dalla luce schizofrenica di una strobo. Soltanto al cessare della musica cominciano i



translation by Kevin St. John

## A GOOD GUY

Everyone knows Dark Skinwalker isn't his real name, it's his stage name—his *nome d'arte*, if you will. That is, of course, if we're going to call this art.

Many people think pro wrestling is just clowning around, a subspecies of the circus. They don't think about the fact that these clowns are actually athletes who spend hours falling, getting up, falling down again until they're black and blue. Is this not perhaps poetic? The tactical precision required to execute even a suplex, how is that not art? And the character studies, the spoken bits: these clowns do that stuff as well; they tell stories. In the crowd at any given match, especially here in Italy, there are always young boys eager to dream, to spend a day in the winner's shoes. They love the spectacle of it as much as they love the heroes you find in comic books. They want to be the good guys.

"Cause being good is fucking awesome, asshole!" is what Dark Skinwalker said to me right after a match, laughing. He and I were watching the young fans as they rushed the ring, crowding around their idol—that evening's good guy.

"Being good is fucking awesome," he used to say. But if being good is so fucking awesome, why in the world did he choose to play the dread Dark Skinwalker?

I can picture him now: The imperial march from Star Wars announces his entrance. The lights go black, and he makes his way to the middle of the ring, slowly, lit by the schizophrenic

primi buu, e allora lo si può osservare, in un paio di pantaloni di pelle lucida e una maglietta nera che aderisce al petto esaltandone le forme. La sua mossa finale consiste nel sollevare l'avversario, afferrandolo al collo con entrambe le mani, per poi scaraventarlo a terra. "Bramo il tuo respiro," grida al nemico sospeso sopra di lui, e a questo punto, di solito, la platea gli inveisce contro. Nessun bambino fa il tifo per i cattivi.

Nessun bambino fa il tifo per lui.

Ricordo bene il giorno in cui Eugenio è diventato Dark Skinwalker. Abbiamo iniziato per scherzo, io e lui, appena finito il liceo. Non pensavamo nemmeno si potesse, qui. Per noi il wrestling era quello della televisione, uno spettacolo che veniva dall'America. Era Steve Austin, freddo come la pietra, che eliminava ventinove avversari nella storica Royal Rumble del '97. Era l'attesa della primavera per poterci trovare nel mio garage con una cassa di birra a vedere la Wrestlemania. Era la sensazione di grandezza che provavamo nei confronti di Undertaker ogni volta che saliva sul ring, o di Hulk Hogan, indomito, spietato, inclemente, Dio.

Quando in città ha aperto una palestra specializzata, non ci abbiamo pensato due volte. L'allenatore aveva esperienza: ci siamo buttati. Provavamo ossessivamente, per giornate intere. Le cadute, le mosse, la terminologia, tutto. Avevamo già un primo, chiososissimo pubblico: Davidino, il fratello minore di Eugenio, che ci saltellava intorno durante le esercitazioni serali, fino a crollare esausto mentre noi continuavamo a rialzarci.

Abbiamo esordito come addetti alla sicurezza negli incontri regionali. Certo, rispetto agli show americani, quelli erano totalmente diversi, abborracciati, provinciali, ma non ci aspet-

flashes of a strobe lamp. As soon as the music stops, the crowd begins to boo, and only then can you really take him in, sporting a pair of patent leather pants and a sleeveless black t-shirt, glued to his chest, accentuating his build. When it's time for his finishing move, he lifts his opponent, grabbing him by the neck with both hands, and just before throwing him to the ground, screams at his enemy suspended above his head: "I will suck the life out of you!" Here, like clockwork, the crowd rises up against him. Kids don't cheer for bad guys.

Kids don't cheer for him.

I remember the day Eugenio became Dark Skinwalker. We had started by just messing around, he and I, straight out of high school. At the time, we didn't even think you could do it for real here in Italy. For us, wrestling was something you saw on TV, entertainment from America. It was Stone Cold Steve Austin who eliminated twenty-nine opponents during the Royal Rumble of '97. It was the long wait for spring when we could meet in my garage, drinking the cheapest beer we could find, watching Wrestlemania. It was the feeling of greatness that filled us each time the Undertaker climbed into the ring, or when we saw Hulk Hogan—savage, ruthless, unstoppable, a God.

When a gym opened downtown that offered wrestling classes, we didn't think twice. The instructor had experience. We dove in. We practiced obsessively for days on end. The drops, the moves, the terminology, everything. We already had our first, roaring audience: little Davidino, Eugenio's younger brother, jumped up and down during our evening drills, eventually collapsing, exhausted, while we kept getting back up.

tavamo nient'altro. I match si svolgevano perlopiù in palestre comunali, dentro le scuole. Sotto il ring c'erano striscioni pubblicitanti parrucchieri, al massimo concessionarie. Le luci consistevano in quattro faretti, e la cronaca era affidata a ragazzotti che scimmiottavano Peterson e Recalcati. Alla fine dello spettacolo ci toccava anche pulire. Poco importava: all'improvviso il wrestling era lì, vicino, reale, davanti a noi. Piano piano hanno iniziato a chiamarci anche sul quadrato, come jobber, per prenderle di santa ragione e perdere contro i wrestler famosi. Poi, finalmente, ci hanno assegnato un personaggio. Abbiamo iniziato così, e siamo andati avanti per un po'. Eugenio anche più di me: gli riusciva proprio bene, il pubblico lo amava, Davidino sempre in prima fila. Le ragazze stravedevano. Poi, a un certo punto, dal nulla, ha smesso. Io ho continuato.

\* \* \*

Dopo dieci anni ha tirato fuori quella frase. Ne erano già passati tre, dall'incidente, ma sembrava ieri che Davidino esultava per noi. Credevo ancora di sentirne la voce durante i miei incontri, mi era anche costata una brutta caduta, l'ultima volta. Dopo la perdita del fratello, Eugenio non era più lo stesso. Era diventato apatico, e anche per me lottare non aveva più lo stesso sapore.

Invece quel giorno:

«Sai stronzo, mi piacerebbe riprovarci.»

Sembrava di nuovo il mio vecchio amico, quello sempre pronto a prenderti per il culo.

«Ovverosia?»

«Ovverosia?» ha ripetuto «Vorrei riprendere col wrestling.»

We started working as security personnel at the regional fights. Of course, compared to the American matches, they were completely different—slapdash and provincial—but we expected nothing more. The matches took place in municipal gyms, at schools. Along the base of the ring there were banners advertising hairdressers, or, at most, car dealerships. For lighting there were just four spotlights, and the scripts were churned out by a bunch of chubby guys trying to imitate Dan Peterson and Recalcati. At the end of the show we even had to do cleanup ourselves. But who cared? Suddenly wrestling was there, real, right in front of our eyes. Slowly, over time, they even started calling us into the ring, mostly as jobbers, to get wailed on by—and lose to—the more famous wrestlers. Then, at last, they assigned us characters. That's how we got our start, and over time we got better and better. Eugenio even more than me: things worked out really well for him. The audience loved him, little Davidino always in the front row. The girls went crazy for him. Then at a certain point, he stopped. And I kept going.

\* \* \*

Ten years after we got our starts in wrestling, Eugenio called to ask me a favor. By then, three years had passed since his brother died suddenly in a motorcycle accident, but I could still picture Davidino rooting wildly for us in the stands like it was yesterday. After he lost Davidino, Eugenio stopped caring about wrestling. Fighting no longer had the same thrill for me either. But there he was, on the three-year anniversary of his brother's death, breathing heavily on the other end of the line: "Listen dipshit, I wanna give it another shot."

Era da tempo che non lo vedevo così acceso, e non ho indagato oltre. Semplicemente, ho pensato a Davidino. Ho portato Eugenio nello stanzino dei creativi dell'IWE, la mia federazione, che mi hanno accolto con larghi sorrisi. Dopo tutti quegli anni, erano ancora innamorati del mio personaggio: Capitan Coraggio, un lottatore maestoso, con la tutina azzurra e gli occhialini rossi, in lotta contro il crimine per la vittoria del bene. Il tradizionale face, insomma, un wrestler buono. La mia mossa speciale si chiama Manovra del Coraggio, e consiste nel salire su uno dei quattro pali del ring, rivolgersi al nemico steso al suolo e saltarci sopra con una capriola, arrivandoci a cavalcioni. Nessun furfante può avere scampo contro Capitan Coraggio.

«Com'è che non sei ad allenarti, campione?» mi ha domandato Vinciguerra, il creativo storico.

«The Big Nose si è strappato il quadricipite, l'incontro salta.»

«Una bella rogna, dobbiamo anche sistemare il match del 27.»

«C'è un match il 27?»

«Sì, e col Nasone nel main event.»

«Stiamo valutando le alternative» ha aggiunto un giovane pieno di tatuaggi.

«Vi ho portato un amico. Ha iniziato qualche anno fa, magari potreste...»

«No capitano, non se ne parla» mi ha subito zittito il giovane creativo. Poi, verso Eugenio: «Nulla di personale, ma il roster è completo, l'IWE non può assumere altri atleti.»

«Che, assumere? No, lo farei gratis.»

Vinciguerra ha sospirato. L'altro scuoteva la testa.

He was suddenly my old friend again, the guy who was always ready to bust my balls.

“Meaning...?”

“Meaning?” he repeated, mimicking me.

“I wanna get back into wrestling.”

It had been forever since I’d seen him so fired up, so I wasn’t going to pry.

Of course my thoughts went straight to Davidino. I brought Eugenio to the creatives at IWE, my federation. As usual, they were stuck in some closet at central headquarters. They welcomed me with great big smiles. After all these years, they were still in love with my character: Captain Courage, a stately warrior, with a blue singlet and red goggles, fighting crime for the triumph of Good. The quintessential *face*, the good-guy wrestler. My special move was called the Courage Maneuver. It consisted of climbing on top of the four ring-posts, turning toward my enemy sprawled out on the ground and doing a flip on top of him, pinning him in a straddle. No villain stands a chance against Captain Courage.

“How come you’re not rehearsing, champ?” the plot-guy Vinciguerra asked me.

“Big Cheese pulled his quad. The match got called off.”

“Man, what a pain in the ass. We still have to figure out the match on the 27th, too.”

“There’s a match on the 27th?”

“Yeah, and Big Cheese is the main event. We’re weighing our options right now,” added a young guy covered in tattoos.

“I brought you boys a friend of mine. We got our start together a while back, maybe you guys could . . .”

“Don’t even go there Captain,” the plot guy shut me up right

«Comunque non potresti essere pronto per il 27.»  
«Deve solo riprendere confidenza col ring» mi sono in-  
tromesso io. «Lottavamo insieme, qualche anno fa.»  
È stato allora che Vinciguerra ha squadrato Eugenio.  
«Sai che forse mi ricordo di te? Vivida Vendetta?»  
«Viscida.»  
«Viscida Vendetta, certo. Eri bravo, giovane.»  
«Allora?» ho incalzato io.  
Vinciguerra è rimasto in silenzio, poi ha sussurrato qualcosa  
al ragazzo coi tatuaggi, che ha scrollato le spalle.  
«Facciamo una prova il 27, e vediamo come va» ha concluso  
infine.

Era fatta. Più o meno: c'era da parlarne coi dirigenti, trovare  
un personaggio, sistemarlo nel posto più umile della scaletta...

«Scordati il main event» ha detto Vinciguerra, «ti met-  
tiamo a metà, prima della pausa. Per la gimmick... Potremmo  
riciclare quella di Guerre Stellari, che piaceva tanto al Roberti.  
Che ne dici, Toni?»

Il ragazzo con i tatuaggi si è grattato la testa.

«È un heel, basato su Dart Fener. Non so se è adatto a te.»

«È perfetto» ha scandito Eugenio.

Così è nato Dark Skinwalker, il signore oscuro, la malvagità  
dallo spazio profondo, il volto nero della forza. Ed è riuscito  
a farsi ricordare fin dal primo incontro. Ha schienato il face  
di turno come prevedeva il canovaccio, e stava per andarsene.  
Il pubblico rimaneva in silenzio, deluso, come a volte succede  
quando il buono perde. Qualche bambino si teneva le dita  
sugli occhi. «Capitan Coraggio, ti sto cercando.» Se ne è uscito  
così, quel volpone. I giovani spettatori sono subito insorti. Il  
signore oscuro già si faceva odiare, e avrebbe continuato per



away. Then to Eugenio: "It's nothing personal, ok, it's just the roster is full. The IWE can't hire any more athletes."

"Hire? I'm doing this for free, buddy."

Vinciguerra sighed. The other guy shook his head.

"Anyways, you couldn't be ready for the 27th."

"He just has to get his ring-legs back," I threw in. "We used to fight together, a few years back." At that, Vinciguerra looked Eugenio up and down.

"You know, I think I remember you. Rampant Revenge?"

"Rotten Revenge."

"'Rotten Revenge,' of course! You were brilliant, man."

"So?" I prodded.

Vinciguerra was quiet for a while, then whispered something to the guy with the tattoos, who shrugged.

"Let's do a test run on the 27th, see how it goes," he said at last.

It was a go. More or less. We had to run it by the bosses, find a character for Eugenio, get him set up on the lowest rung of the ladder.

"You can forget the main event," said Vinciguerra, "We'll put you in the middle, before the break. We could recycle that Star Wars gimmick for the backstory. Roberti loved that shit. What do you say Tony?"

The guy with the tattoos scratched his head with one hand. After a while he looked up at my friend.

"He's a *heel*, based on Darth Vader. I don't really think it's a good fit for you."

"It's perfect," Eugenio said with conviction.

Thus Dark Skinwalker was born, the Dark Lord, the bane of deep space, the dark side of The Force. He managed to

tutti gli incontri successivi. A prescindere dall'avversario, se ne andava invocando il mio nome, insinuando la minaccia di un duello finale tra me e lui, l'idea che solo l'intervento di Capitano Coraggio avrebbe messo fine a quella faida.

\* \* \*

Il match si è svolto nella palestra di una scuola media, quasi due anni dopo. Era sera, fuori faceva buio. C'erano almeno duecento bambini sulle gradinate, i loro accompagnatori, qualche insegnante e, qua e là, i pochi tifosi adulti che come noi erano cresciuti guardando la WWE. Il brusio è scemato non appena le luci si sono spente ed è partita la marcia imperiale. Tutte le teste erano voltate verso il ring, per l'inarrestabile arrivo di Dark Skinwalker. Lui ha raggiunto il quadrato, abbagliato dalle strobo, ma il pubblico non fischiava, questa volta. La musica, poi, è cambiata: la colonna sonora di Superman annunciava il mio ingresso. Sono uscito dai camerini correndo, col braccio alzato, l'espressione impavida.

Ci siamo posizionati l'uno di fronte all'altro, guardinghi, fino al segnale d'inizio.

«Aspetto questo momento da tanto tempo...» ha gridato il mio acerrimo nemico.

«È giunta la tua ora, Dark Skinwalker.»

Abbiamo iniziato a muoverci in cerchio, scrutandoci. Fuori dal ring, nessuno fiatava. All'improvviso si è lanciato su di me col pugno chiuso. Io ho schivato il primo fendente, ma non il secondo. È stato come essere travolti da un alano. Sono capitolato a terra, e in un attimo il nemico mi era sopra, a riempirmi di botte. Ogni volta che scuotevo il corpo, il pubblico sussultava. C'erano anche le grida di incitamento,

make an impression right from the start. That first match, he turned his back to the *face* he was fighting, as indicated in the script, and was about to leave. The audience stayed quiet, downcast, as happens sometimes when the good guy loses. The younger fans put their hands over their eyes.

“Captain Courage, I’m looking for you...”

That’s how he left the stage, the little devil. The younger spectators rose up in mutiny right away. The Dark Lord was already making himself hated, and would continue to do so for all of the following matches. Leaving his opponent behind, he walked off, invoking my name, making dark references to a final duel between him and me. Only if Captain Courage stepped in would there be an end to this feud. That was the idea.

\* \* \*

The match was held in a middle school gym, two years after his return to the scene. It was evening and already dark outside. There were at least two hundred kids in the stands, along with their chaperones, a couple of school teachers and, peppered around, a handful of adult fans who, like us, had grown up watching the WWF. The chatter faded as soon as the lights went out and the imperial march started up. Every head was turned toward the ring. He entered the ring, dazzled by the strobe lights, but the audience didn’t boo this time. Then the music changed. The soundtrack to Superman announced my entrance. I ran from the wings with my arm raised, my expression fearless.

We squared off, eyeing one another, waiting for the signal to begin.

parecchie. Sono riuscito ad alzarmi. Ho spinto indietro Dark Skinwalker, che ha sfruttato il colpo per rimbalzare sulle corde elastiche e tornarmi addosso. L'ho evitato. Lui è finito sui tiranti opposti, e nel secondo rimpallo mi ha preso. Gridava, mentre mi riservava un'altra sfilza di cazzotti.

Infine si è ritratto. Sono scattato in piedi mentre imprecava contro la folla. Gli sono arrivato alle spalle, prima di schienarlo con un back suplex. A terra, Dark è rotolato verso il bordo per scivolare fuori dal ring. Voleva portare il combattimento tra il pubblico, permettere loro di assaporare da vicino il confronto finale. L'ho seguito fino agli spalti. Voltandosi, mi ha preso il collo con la destra per assestarmi un pugno con la sinistra. Sentivo la fatica, era come se qualcosa non andasse. Mi ha mollato, ma solo per poter afferrare una sedia e scagliarmela contro. A forza di calci è riuscito a spingermi contro la base del quadrato. Non mi restava alternativa che risalire. Lui però mi ha stretto le caviglie facendomi scivolare giù di nuovo, prima di partire con una seconda raffica di ceffoni. Poi è salito su. Ansimava. L'ho raggiunto, ma lui è stato più furbo di me. Ha allungato le braccia verso il mio collo. Dark Skinwalker stava per soffocarmi con la sua mossa finale.

«Bramo il tuo respiro» ha rantolato.

Poi, qualcosa in lui si è spezzato. Forse per lo sforzo eccessivo. Ha allentato la presa, e io sono caduto in piedi. Non c'era tempo da perdere. L'ho atterrato con un calcio all'altezza dei polpacci. Nonostante l'esultanza dei miei tifosi, lo sentivo gemere.

Era giunto il momento della Manovra del Coraggio. Sono salito sul paletto più vicino, per poi voltarmi verso il mio avversario esanime e saltare col massimo dell'energia. Quando

"I've waited for this moment for so long," shouted my arch nemesis.

"Your time has come Dark Skinwalker."

We started to circle each other, staring one another down. Outside the ring, everyone held their breath. Suddenly he launched himself at me with a clenched fist. I dodged the first blow, but not the second. It felt like getting tackled by a Great Dane. I collapsed to the floor, and in the blink of an eye my enemy was on top of me, pummeling me. Each time my body convulsed, the audience shuddered. But there were shouts of encouragement as well, and not just a few. I managed to get back up. I drove Dark Skinwalker back, but he used my blow to bounce off the elastic ropes and dive at me. I dodged him. He ended up on the opposite ropes, and on his second ricochet, he grabbed me. He screamed as he unleashed another string of violent blows.

Eventually he retreated. I leapt to my feet while he was shouting into the crowd. I sneaked up behind him before slamming him to the ground with a back suplex. On the ground, Dark rolled over to the edge to slip out of the ring. He wanted to bring the fight into the crowd, to let them savor, up close, our final showdown. I followed him into the bleachers. He turned around, grabbed me by the neck with his right hand and dealt me a blow with the left. I sensed that he was straining; it felt like something wasn't right. He let go of me but only so he could grab a chair and hurl it at me. With a series of kicks he managed to pin me against the base of the ring. I had no choice but to climb up. But he took hold of my ankles, dragging me down again. I managed to get away, kicking him off. Then he followed me up into the ring. He was

ho toccato terra, il ring ha tremato. Il pubblico tratteneva il respiro. L'arbitro contava i secondi prima di chiudere l'incontro. Uno. Due. Tre. Avevo vinto, e le grida dei giovani fan ne erano la controprova. Dark Skinwalker non si muoveva. Mi ha mormorato qualche parola, ma lì per lì non ci ho fatto caso. Nello sguardo aveva impresso una specie di sorriso.

Rideva a denti stretti, però. Ho subito chiamato l'arbitro perché lo aiutasse, mentre la palestra veniva sgombrata. Quando è arrivata l'ambulanza, con Eugenio sono salito io, con l'uniforme di Capitano Coraggio ancora addosso.

Mi sembra un secolo da quando è entrato in sala operatoria. Fisso un muro bianco da chissà quante ore. Sull'ambulanza sembrava che nessuno ci capisse niente, i paramedici sostenevano che l'attacco non fosse dovuto alle botte, mi chiedevano informazioni sulla famiglia, se soffrisse di qualcosa. A quanto ne sapevo io no. E se fosse caduto in modo sbagliato? Se colpendolo gli avessi preso un organo, o rotto qualcosa?

Non mi do pace. È tutta una pagliacciata, fin quando qualcuno non si fa male. Stavolta quel qualcuno è il mio migliore amico, una persona buona. E non posso fare a meno di rivederlo disteso sul ring, sconfitto per sempre, mentre mi guardava e aveva, nello sguardo, una specie di sorriso.

«Li senti, come sono felici?» aveva mormorato.

gasping for breath. I ran up to him, but he outsmarted me. He reached out and grabbed my neck. Dark Skinwalker was going to suffocate me using his finishing move.

“I will suck the life out of you,” he gasped.

But then something inside him broke. Maybe from overexertion. He loosened his grip on me and I fell to my feet. I had no time to lose. I brought him down with a kick to his upper calves. I heard him moan over the cheering of my fans.

The time had come for the Courage Maneuver. I climbed the nearest post, turned toward my lifeless opponent, and jumped with maximum force. When I hit the ground, the ring shook. The audience held its breath. The referee counted out the seconds to call the match. One. Two. Three. I had won, and the cries of the young fans were my proof. Dark Skinwalker wasn't moving. He muttered a few words, but in the moment, I didn't pay him any attention. On his face was a sort of smile.

Then I noticed he was laughing through clenched teeth. Right away, I called the referee to help him as the gym began clearing out. When the ambulance arrived, I went in with Eugenio, my Captain Courage costume still on.

It feels like he's been in the operating room for an eternity. I've been staring at this white wall for god knows how long. In the ambulance it seemed like no one knew what was going on. The paramedics promised me that his attack was not caused by me hitting him. They asked for information about his family, asked if he was suffering from any illness. No, not as far as I know, no. But what if something had gone wrong? What if, when hitting him, I had hit an organ or broken something?

I can't calm down. Everything's fun and games until





someone gets hurt. This time, that someone is my best friend, a good man. And I just keep seeing him stretched out in the ring, defeated forever, and looking at me with a kind of smile on his face.

“You hear them? Hear how happy they are?” That’s what he murmured.

# SHANE MICHAEL MANIERI

## POEMS

### MARSH HAWK

A marsh hawk comes to the meadow  
moss hanging from its beak.  
When it craves attention it raises its back  
and spikes high-slurred whistles.

In the east, it hugs the contours of the land.  
When it's angry it bellows.  
I have reeds to cage my hawk in.  
I worry for those who don't know

how to make a cage.  
A glass-bottle green grasshopper  
with its antennae tries desperately to survive  
being hunted by my hawk.

My hawk's screech reminds me of an alligator.  
My hawk is here and so is my cage.

traduzione di Annalisa Ambrosio

## POESIE

### FALCO IN GABBIA

Un falco di palude viene alla radura,  
il muschio che pende dal volto.  
Se desidera attenzione solleva il dorso  
e pianta acuti fischi tremolanti.

Verso est, cinge i contorni della terra.  
Se è arrabbiato ulula.  
Io per ingabbiare il mio falco ho dei giunchi.  
Mi rammarico per quelli che non sanno

come costruire una gabbia.  
Una cavalletta verde bottiglia  
con le antenne cerca, disperata, di sopravvivere  
incalzata dal mio falco.

Lo strido del falco mi ricorda un alligatore.  
Il mio falco è qui e anche la mia gabbia.

## THE ROOM OF THE SEVERED HAND

*for D'Annunzio*

Old dusty chair, ransom letters, desk of funeral

Quills, I cannot write

This room,

My decadent lapping at bruises in the

wood: Room of ruin, room of sores, my sanctuary,

Where the ceilings and walls are patterned

With the shapes of severed hands, busts of gods headless

torsos, leopard rugs, *All that I have I have given.*

In my small bed made to resemble both

Cradle and coffin, lay me to rest.

## LA STANZA DELLE MANI MOZZATE

*A D'Annunzio*

Vecchia sedia impolverata, lettere di ricatto, altare di morte  
penne, non posso scrivere

questa stanza,

l'indulgente leccare i lividi del legno:

stanza di rovine, stanza di piaghe, mio rifugio,

dove soffitti e pareti sono addobbati

con le forme di mani mozzate, busti di dei,

torsi decapitati, tappeti di leopardo, *tutto ciò che avevo l'ho dato.*  
Nel mio piccolo letto fatto per somigliare a entrambe,

culla e bara, requiescam in pace.

## SISTER

I'm embarrassed of you.  
Why do you sleep in temples

and let snakes lick your ear,  
cooped up in your cackling cornucopia?

Do you not know the moon flags  
you with its come-hither finger

and spikes a silver hook through your nose,  
inching you closer, closer?

No one believes your story,  
pick yourself up off the floor.

*I have my gods, you say,  
but you wouldn't know how...*

And then the snakes slither off  
with your body.

## SORELLA

Di te, io mi imbarazzo.  
Perché dormi nei templi

e lasci i serpenti a leccarti l'orecchio,  
compressa nella tua chiocciante cornucopia.

Non sai che la luna ti chiama  
con il suo dito seducente

e ti pianta un uncino d'argento nel naso,  
ti porta vicina, più vicina.

Nessuno crede alla tua storia,  
levati da terra.

*Ho le mie divinità, tu dici,  
ma non sapresti come...*

Allora i serpenti scivolano via  
insieme al tuo corpo.

## NECESSARY DRAGONFLY

Confused thing

Molting under a wordless pool,

Feeding on crustaceans at the bottom,

Moving through darkest wood

Into cool light. How did you get here?

Let your torch ignite

The thickening garment: orange, rush-red, into emerald veined.

Expend your blue skies,

Feast on your array of armament.



## LIBELLULA NECESSARIA

Creatura confusa

mutante sotto lo stagno silenzioso,  
che ti nutri di crostacei sul fondo,

che ti muovi attraverso il bosco più nero

verso una fredda luce. Come sei arrivata?

Lascia che bruci la tua torcia

la spessa veste: arancio, rosso giunco, fino alle vene di smeraldo.

Sperpera i celesti,

consuma il tuo dispiegamento di forze.

## THE GIFT OF THE LAKE

Two brown pelicans float low  
along the surface of the lake.

Their bodies kite and scissor  
the armored air

as I push along the stretch  
of bridge we used to cross.

Your ashes now in the backseat  
in a box, a radiant heart

in an steel-tight womb. The lake  
seems different now:

damned-up, and ghostly-  
green, a clenched fist

frozen in time, an achy sponge  
dried of strength and peace needed

to spring forth blood from a sun.

Then one pelican cargoes down,  
cracking the surface of the lake:

a winter pull into icy glass,  
lighting the veins like a plated tomb.

The other dives in after  
emerging from the lake with embers in her mouth.

## IL DONO DEL LAGO

Due cormorani bruni planano  
sulla superficie del lago

i corpi volano e sforbiciano  
la corazza d'aria

mentre mi spingo sul tratto  
di ponte che noi attraversavamo.

Le tue ceneri adesso sul sedile posteriore  
in una scatola, un cuore raggiante,

in un utero di acciaio.

Il lago sembra diverso adesso:

dannato e spettrale,  
un pugno teso congelato nel tempo,

una spugna dolente  
prosciugata di forza e bisognosa di pace

per spillare sangue dal sole.

Poi un cormorano si butta in picchiata,  
frangendo la superficie del lago,

uno strappo d'inverno dentro il vetro ghiacciato  
che illumina le venature come una lapide dorata.

L'altra si tuffa più tardi,  
ed emerge dal lago con braci nella bocca.

## THE SISTER WHO BECAME A SWAN

It was her hair  
    she lost herself in,

feathers  
    unfolding, unraveling,

a bister of bone  
    bellowing in a loveless lock.

A tawny thing  
    perched in the shade,

and then the grey lifted  
    and she became greater and wing.

## LA SORELLA CHE DIVENNE CIGNO

Erano i suoi capelli  
ci si perse dentro,

piume  
in fiore, come a disfarsi,

un osso di bistro  
che ulula in una stretta senza amore.

Una creatura fulva  
arrampicata nell'ombra,

e dopo il buio crebbe  
e lei divenne più grande e alata.

# ANNALISA AMBROSIO

## LA BIGLIA

È un periodo di pace nella storia della nazione e le case sui viali si vanno imborghesendo. Nell'aria la tregua si traduce in un sentore di marzo, nel profumo di cibo alle sette della sera, nel rumore rassicurante delle stoviglie nelle cucine al pian terreno. Uno spicchio di luna inizia a comparire e acquista mano mano una nettezza più viva, come un'immagine che si sviluppa sulla vecchia carta da fotografia.

Lisa, ora, la vede appena accennata, una trasparente trama di tulle, mentre la televisione della madre raglia in sottofondo. Un ragazzo, passando con il barboncino al guinzaglio, osserva la sua sagoma opaca, contro la luce. Si mette a guardarla perché sembra dipinta, così nitida e composta, i capelli raccolti in alto, un gomito appoggiato al davanzale e il braccio sinistro nell'aria, con l'esile e vacua andatura del fumo che spira dal tocco di sigaretta tra le sue dita. Quando ha finito di fumare, Lisa si volta e scompare dal quadrato di porpora. Lo fa con un movimento solo, saldo: spegnere la sigaretta e svuotare il quadro, e intanto sospirare la sua domanda.

“Ti ricordi della mia biglia?”

Sotto la luce piena della cucina ci sono due donne. Lisa è bella, molto bella, elegante senza frivolezza. Scivola sicura dentro la sua voce. La seconda donna ha lo stesso naso, la stessa bocca, lo stesso mento. Solo che in lei, questi caratteri, sfioriti, sono accordati da un cattivo maestro e stanno attaccati a forza, senza grazia. La madre di Lisa si volta e prosegue fino

translation by Shane Michael Manieri

## THE MARBLE

It is a period of peace in the history of Italy, and all the houses on the avenues have become more and more bourgeois. There is a truce in the air that is tinged with the subtle hint of March and mixes with the scent of food in the evening air. The comforting sound of dishes emanates from the kitchen on the ground floor. A sliver of the moon appears from out of nowhere, as sharp as an image coming into focus on a piece of developing paper.

Lisa is sitting to the side of a piece of tulle fabric curtain near the window, as her mother's television hums in the background. A boy walks by with a poodle on a leash and observes her opaque silhouette against the kitchen light, and stares at her as if staring at a painting, so neat, so composed, hair gathered in a bun, right elbow resting on the windowsill, left arm in the air, with a mindless stream of smoke from a cigarette twisting and looping up from the cigarette held tightly between her fingers. When she's finished smoking, she turns and disappears from the purple rectangle. With a steady movement she stabs out her cigarette, leaves the window frame, and emits a sound.

"Do you remember my marble I used to have?" she asks her mother.

Two women are now sitting beneath the kitchen light. Lisa is beautiful, very beautiful, elegant and never disadorned. The tone of her voice always self-assured. The second woman has

al carrello metallico.

“Quale biglia?”

Spinge il carrello della televisione con lenti passi strisciati verso la poltrona di cuoio del salotto. Lisa ha superato l'età delle biglie e da più di trent'anni la polvere si accumula sul coperchio fiorato della scatola delle bambole, giù in cantina. Il suo ventre piatto non tiene la forma di nessun figlio. Nessuna biglia che c'entri con nessun nipote.

“Quella che ho perso in campagna.”

“In campagna? L'hai persa che eri una bambina.”

“Sì, quella.”

“Come mai ti è venuta in mente ancora?”

“Così.”

Altre sei volte nella vita, quella stessa domanda: una volta a Natale, un Natale rarissimo con tutta quella neve, una volta sul treno verso il mare, un'altra volta sottobraccio al mercato del pesce sul corso, un'altra volta piegate sulle panche scomode della chiesa al rosario di una zia. Una volta Lisa aveva la varicella e urlava a pieni polmoni nel dormiveglia. Una volta era mattina e oggi, ancora. Le madri hanno memoria inutile.

“E me lo chiedi adesso, di nuovo?” Ha gli occhi già grandi e liquidi, che non sia l'ultima, questa volta. “Che cos'è che vuoi sapere?”

“Com'è andata esattamente? Te lo ricordi?”

\* \* \*

Le sue mani. Le sue mani a sei anni, minuscole unghie smaltate di rosa. Un giorno di festa. Le chiome degli alberi che mutano in ombra la traiettoria dei raggi di sole sul terreno, al ritmo del vento. Il torrente che brontola e l'odore caldo del



the same nose, the same mouth, even the same chin, faded only by time and bad habits. Lisa's mother turns to adjust the TV on the swivel stand.

"What marble?" She turns the TV slowly toward her leather lounge chair. Lisa is past the age for playing with marbles, and for over thirty years her flowered doll box has sat in the cellar collecting dust. She doesn't look pregnant. And there are no grandchildren.

"The one I lost in the country."

"In the country? You lost that when you were a little girl?"

"Yeah, that one."

"What made you think of that?"

"Because."

The same question, six other times in Lisa's life: once at Christmas, a rare Christmas, with all that snow. Once on the train on the way to the sea. Once holding her mother's hand at the seafood market. Once kneeling on the uncomfortable benches at church while her aunt recited the Holy Rosary. Once when she had the chickenpox, screaming her lungs out. Once some random morning. And now, again, today.

"And you ask me now. Again?" Her mother's eyes large and glazed over, just as they were the last time she asked. "What do you want to know?"

"How did I lose it exactly? Do you remember?" Lisa said.

\* \* \*

Her hands. Her six-year-old hands. A holiday. The way the treetops change the sunlight hitting the ground depending upon the rhythm of the wind. The stream, the way it grumbles and twists, and the country smell of cow dung in the air.

letame. L'astuccio di panno tra le mani. I sassi sotto il sedere e le dita che faticano a sciogliere il laccio. E l'emozione di rivedere le cose che ha nascosto, le sue cose, dentro l'astuccio. Lo sa che dentro ci sono un campione di profumo da uomo, un orologio da polso, un taccuino giallo, un pezzo di corteccia con la resina dura, e poi c'è la biglia. Una biglia dall'anima viola. La biglia che ha voluto tra tutte, laggiù, al distributore di fronte alla panetteria. Quella viola, l'unica viola. Quella che guarda da giorni senza che il nonno se ne accorga. E se n'è accorto oggi, l'unico giorno che serve, quando la macchina senza volontà la espelle, inghiottita la moneta. Dopo c'è la strada verso casa, la strada di terra che sbuffa sotto i loro passi. Oltre il cancello, di fianco alle ortensie, Lisa siede sul rettangolo di pietrisco. È un attimo, l'astuccio si apre tra le sue mani. Lo apre con foga, perché la biglia è scivolata al fondo, bisogna togliere l'ingombrante frammento di corteccia. Lisa sente un tintinnio di vetro. Assomiglia a quello del cucchiaino del caffè sul lavatoio in ceramica della cucina. Poi più nulla, la biglia dov'è? Dov'è la biglia viola? Non è possibile, le cose non scompaiono così in fretta. Non è possibile perdere una biglia in uno spazio così piccolo. Se fosse grande, capirei. Ma è un piccolo rettangolo di pietre che conosco come le mie tasche. Quindi, impegnati Lisa e la troverai. Impegnati senza piangere. Chinati sul rettangolo, cerca l'unica forma perfetta, ascolta la nota acuta che suonano le pietre sorde.

*Fermi! Se non ci muoviamo, può darsi che si trovi ancora, se non spostiamo le pietre. Fermi! Nessuno passi o si sposteranno! Mettiamoci tutti a cercare! Vedrai che quando torna il sole la troviamo. Vedrai che se ci proviamo tutti insieme la troviamo. Com'è andata? La biglia stava nell'astuccio, poi l'astuccio è aperto e la biglia è scomparsa.*

The cloth pouch, the pebbles under her butt, and her fingers struggling to untie the cord. The thrill to see the things, her things, it hid inside.

Lisa knows what's inside: a men's fragrance sample, a wristwatch, a yellow notebook, a piece of bark with resin, and then, the marble. The one with a purple core, like a cat-eye, as if it had a soul. The one she wanted most of all, over there, in front of the bakery. The purple one. The only purple one. The one she stared at for days without her grandfather ever noticing—until that particular day. The one the machine as if by fate, after swallowing the coin, spat out.

Once home, just beyond the gate, beside the hydrangea, Lisa plops down on the rock garden and rips open the pouch. She tears at it quickly to get to the marble, which had slid to the bottom. She removes the bulky piece of bark resin. She hears the clink of glass. Which sounds like a teaspoon clanking against a ceramic kitchen sink. Then nothing. Where's the marble? Where's the purple marble? It's impossible! It couldn't have disappeared that quickly. Lisa knows what it looks like like the back of her hand. So where is it? She has to find it without crying. Think about it. Stoop down. Get real close, she tells herself. And look for its perfect roundness. Listen for the acute note playing on deaf pebbles.

*Stop! If no one moves, it may still be here. We mustn't move a single stone. Stop! No steps. Don't move! Everyone must try! When the sun hits it we might see it. We'll find it if we all look together. This is how it went: the marble was in the pouch, then the pouch was open, and now it's vanished.*

“Ricordo che mettevi le pietre da una parte, per vederci sotto, le ammucchiavi sul bordo.”

“Volevo toglierle tutte, arrivare alla terra.”

“Tuo nonno avrebbe svuotato il giardino pur di trovarla, eppure era assurdo che stessimo tutti lì a cercare una cosa così insignificante.”

“Ricostruisci questa storia sempre allo stesso modo.”

“Perché è andata così, anche se oramai mi sembra solo una storia.”

“Ricordi il tuo racconto, non ricordi il fatto.”

“Tu, piuttosto, sei sicura che questa benedetta biglia viola fosse uscita dal distributore?”

“Certo.”

La madre divarica le gambe rinchiuse nel nailon che le abbronza e le arrotonda.

“Da quel giorno hai smesso di giocare con le biglie, tutto qui, si chiama trauma infantile.” Si alza con fatica, apre la ribaltina di un armadio basso del salotto, estrae un pacchetto azzurro di gelatine alla frutta e se ne spinge una in bocca. “D'altronde, già allora, era un gioco passato di moda.”

“Pensavo che persa quella...” Lisa traccia nell'aria una parabola ascendente con l'indice teso, a ribadire mai più.

“Possibile che non ti sia mai capitato di perdere qualcosa?”

“E con questo?”

“A volte penso che perdiamo cose tutto il tempo.”

“Capita, ma non mi sembra che ci manchi niente”, trangugia lo zucchero.

“A me manca quello che perdo da un momento all'altro, a te no?”

\* \* \*

"I remember you on the edge of the pebble garden, digging," Lisa's mother says, "and then you put something in your hand."

"I was trying to move them out of the way to get to underneath."

"Your grandfather all but emptied the garden to try to find it for you. It was absurd that we were all trying to find something so small and unimportant."

"Tell me the story again."

"It was long ago, Lisa. Now that's all it is... a story."

"Yeah well, you remember your story. And not what really happened."

"Are you sure that damn marble even came out of the machine, Lisa?"

"Of course."

Lisa's mother, wearing tan stockings, uncrosses her legs, "From that day on though you stopped playing marbles. That much I remember. Childhood trauma." She gets up with great difficulty, opens the lower cabinet door under the TV, and pulls out a pack of blue jelly beans and pops one into her mouth, "For that matter, the game was already out of fashion."

"I thought I lost it." Lisa gestures a digging motion with her index finger to reiterate the desperate searching for, and thinks: I may never see it again.

Then adds, "Haven't you ever lost something?"

"Is that supposed to be a trick question?"

"We lose things all the time."

"It happens, but it doesn't always have to be a big deal." Lisa's mother pops another jelly bean in her mouth.

"I miss things when I lose them, don't you, Mom?"

“Di solito me ne faccio una ragione.”

Lisa si alza rapida, sfila il telecomando del televisore dalla pila di cuscini che sta sul divano. Lo spegne. Il brusio scompare, qualche rondine garrisce sul cielo del quartiere.

“Per te sembra che nulla faccia differenza. Io quanto meno resto fedele alle cose che ho perso”, parla con la sigaretta infilata tra le labbra, mentre le mani frugano nella borsa in cerca dell'accendino.

“Finirai per starci molto male a fare l'intellettuale romantico in questo modo.”

“Di questo passo parleremo soltanto più di che cosa mangiare per cena...”

“Qualcuno se ne deve occupare.”

“Sei ferma al vecchio mondo, mamma, stai ancora tirando il fiato per non essere morta sotto le bombe, la noia in fondo ti piace.”

“Ma quale noia?”

“Avere la pancia piena, stare qui come adesso, chiuse in casa, a pensare che tutto ci va bene.” Lisa inspira forte il fumo.

“Tu non sai per cosa valga la pena di crucciarsi davvero, specie se a quarant'anni t'importa ancora di una biglia.”

“Dico solo che ho bisogno anch'io di sperare.”

“Non capisco da dove ti vengano certi pensieri.”

Lisa si sposta un ciuffo dietro l'orecchio, le sfugge.

“Se dovessi dire, quando è che sei diventata adulta, ti ricordi un momento in cui hai capito come girava il mondo?”

“Non mi hai chiesto queste cose da adolescente, e me le chiedi ora...” La madre accavalla le gambe e sistema il colletto della camicia. “Credo di aver avuto il primo mestruo il diciotto giugno o giù di lì, la prima estate di guerra.”

“Usually, yes, if I have a good reason to.”

Lisa jumps up and grabs the remote from a pile of pillows on the couch and turns off the TV, the mindless noise disappears. The sound of swallows chirping flutters through the sky outside the window. “I guess nothing matters to you. At least I’m faithful to the things I’ve lost,” she says with a cigarette dangling between her lips, her hands rummaging through her purse searching for a lighter.

“You’re going to end up a sorry case if you continue to play an intellectual romantic like that, Lisa.”

“Well at least that way we’ll have more talk about more than just what’s for dinner.”

“Well someone has to cook.”

“Mom, you’re so old-world. You’re still holding your breath like you’re taking cover from air-raids. It’s boredom. And you like it.”

“What do you mean, boredom?”

“The boredom of a full stomach, of being here, locked up in this house, thinking everything is just fine.” Lisa blows out cloud of smoke.

“You didn’t go through the war... And that’s not fair... You don’t know what it was like... Nor what’s worth fretting over, really! And for forty years you’ve been worrying about a marble.”

“I’m just saying I need a little hope.”

“I don’t understand where these thoughts keep coming from.”

“Do you remember the moment you grew up, when you became a woman?” Lisa says, “When you understood how the world worked?” Lisa pushes a lock of hair behind her ear.

“Parlavo di tutt'altra cosa”.

Adesso la madre ride di gusto, con le rughe intorno agli occhi che diventano sottilissime. “Scommetto che ricominci con la biglia.”

Le scapole di Lisa si contraggono.

“Mi sono fatta l'idea di essere diventata adulta quel giorno, a cercare.”

“Sii gentile, fammi capire di che cosa parliamo.”

“Parlo di tutto e di tutti. La signora Dori che hai licenziato il mese scorso per quella faccenda degli stracci caduti nel cortile. La sentenza assurda della scorsa settimana. Parlo della nostra casa in campagna, dei moltissimi ombrelli che hai lasciato chissà dove.”

“E dunque?”

“Non hai avuto l'impressione di capire qualcosa quando li hai persi, almeno una volta?”

“Sì, per qualche minuto ho pensato di tornare indietro, poi ho valutato che magari qualcun altro li aveva già presi, per usarli, specie se pioveva.”

“Dimenticare è il tuo modo di vivere.”

“Quale sarebbe il tuo, Lisa?”

“Com'è possibile non trovare una biglia di punto in bianco?”, reclina la testa in attesa.

“Non c'è nessun segreto, è solo una questione di risorse, quando ci vuole troppo tempo non vale la pena di cercare.” Tira gli occhiali fino alla punta del naso e la guarda con gli occhi nudi, per vederla sfocare. Problema risolto. Dopo si alza, attraversa la cucina di terracotta e tira la tenda sulla via, scompaiono i tetti, marzo, la luna.

“Non me lo chiedere più di questa biglia, mi fai paura. Mi fa



"You didn't ask me these types of things as a teenager. So why now?" Her mother recrosses her legs and fixes her shirt collar. "I think I had my first period around June 18th or so, the first summer during the war."

"I don't mean that, mother."

Her mother begins to laugh helplessly. Her eyes squint and wrinkle. "I bet you'll start up with the marble again."

Lisa shrugs in disbelief, "I guess looking for it was the first time I knew what it felt like to feel love."

"Wait. What are we actually talking about?" her mother says.

"I'm talking about everything and everyone. Last month you fired Mrs. Dori because sheets fell off of the clothesline, which is absurd. I'm talking about the many umbrellas that you left behind, who knows where."

"And your point is?"

"Do you never feel the need to go looking for what you've lost?"

"Well, after I realized the umbrellas were gone, I thought of going back, then I thought maybe someone else might've taken and used them, especially if it was raining."

"Forget! Forget! Forget! That's the way you live your life."

"And what's yours, Lisa?"

"How could we not have found the marble... point blank." She reclines her head, waiting.

"There're no secrets, Lisa. It's a matter of resources. If it takes that long to find something, then maybe it's not worth it." She pulls her glasses to the tip of the nose and looks at Lisa with a naked blur. Problem solved. She crosses the terra-cotta kitchen floor, pulls open the curtain to the road, the disap-

paura sapere che hai sofferto tanto per una cosa così stupida.”

“Ero convinta di ritrovarla.”

“Cosa ti è mancato? Non so.”

\* \* \*

Poi parlano d'altro, a lungo, finché Lisa si veste per affrontare l'aria della sera. Cammina veloce stretta nell'impermeabile, i passi sicuri al centro del marciapiede. A ogni passo il ciondolo le batte sullo sterno. Cammina per la città buia e si sente di possederla tutta. L'acqua di pece del fiume scorre calma sotto il filo del ponte. Sale prima la strada di casa, poi le scale di marmo, i tacchi muti sotto il collo del piede teso. La chiave gira quattro volte nella porta di legno. Lisa si spoglia, indossa la camicia da notte bianca, si stira sul letto. Le lenzuola sono pulite. Il corpo di donna si rilassa al centro delle due piazze, la pelle chiara scura nel confronto con la candeggina. Tutto è morbido, su tutto s'impone sottoforma d'insenatura il calco del ciondolo duro.

Il ciondolo porta incastonata la biglia viola. Quella biglia viola. Ha ricomprato la casa di campagna qualche mese prima, ha fatto dissodare il terreno dove stava il pietrisco, ha trovato la biglia, ha rivenduto la casa. Poi ha chiamato un gioielliere dall'aria stanca, dimesso, stupito, *vuole la biglia coperta d'oro bianco, sì?* e adesso la biglia pende in mezzo al suo petto, *da tenere in mezzo al petto, sì?*, ricoperta da un sottile strato argenteo, camuffata, irriconoscibile, *gliela metto una catena bella lunga, sì?*

Ha un livido tra un seno e l'altro, Lisa, la sfera di vetro preme ogni notte durante il sonno contro il suo sterno. Si rialza, apre la finestra, controlla la chiusura della collana, sente

pearing roofs, and the March moon. Then continues, "Don't ask me about the marble anymore, please, it's beginning to worry me. It's unsettling to know that you've suffered over something so stupid."

"I was convinced I'd find it though," Lisa says.

"You don't even know what it is you're looking for."

\* \* \*

They then don't speak for at least an hour until Lisa, putting on her evening clothes, decides to go out for a walk. Outside, she takes confident strides in the middle of the sidewalk, and with every step a pendant beats against her sternum, keeping time. She comes to a viaduct and looks out at the river and feels something take over her whole body. The water, as dark as tar, flows calmly beneath her. She heads back to the house without a sound except for the clicking of her heels against the marble staircase, which leads to the front door of the house. She turns the key four times. Once in, she gets undressed, puts on a white nightgown, and stretches into bed. Her sheets are clean and tight. She wedges herself between two pillows. Her pale skin, dark in comparison, against the bleached white sheets. Everything is soft. Everything, including the pendant around her neck, makes an impressing on the bed, as a meteorite or a footprint impressed on the surface of the moon.

The pendant was like a door to the valley leading to her heart, to the marble. The purple marble. Lisa bought the manor house she used to live in as child, dug up the soil where the crushed stones once laid, and found the violet ball, then put the house back on the market. Tired, crazed, exhausted, and thunderstruck, she called a jeweler, *I'd like to have a*

il ciondolo scivolare come un pendolo sulla superficie liscia della pelle. La biglia è rimasta tra le pietre per decenni, si è infossata nella terra, la biglia non poteva essere scomparsa e, infatti, adesso se l'è ripresa. Eppure ancora, nel miraggio della notte, la cerca e la vede nella luna. Dove stanno le altre cose perse che non sono di vetro? Dove stanno con la loro anima incolore? L'unica biglia dall'anima viola in un boccione di mille, nasconderla in un posto sicuro, smarrirla. Per addormentarsi Lisa conta le pietre del rettangolo di pietrisco. Sa che deve ammucciarle lungo il perimetro, guardare là sotto, spostarsi piano, vincere il buio. È dolce pensare di ritrovare. Dolce e tristissimo. Quando si pensa di ritrovare, le unghie si allungano e i capelli si arricciano e il cuore batte più lento per conservare forza per la sorpresa del dopo, e la pelle resta tesa, di pesca, sugli zigomi alti, sulle cosce magre i muscoli si confermano saldi, gli occhi mobili e svegli, le labbra calde. Intanto, il livido si allarga. Allora la vita si allunga e insieme non si dà mai pace.

Eccome se c'è, il segreto.

*marble set in white gold, please*—and now the little ball hangs in the middle of her chest—*the chain just long enough so it's near my heart, yes, that's right*—disguised and unrecognizable—a *long beautiful chain, yes.*

There are bruises now between Lisa's two breasts where the silvery ball presses up against her sternum every night while she sleeps. When she gets up to open windows she checks the clasp. The pendant moves like a pendulum ball back and forth on the smooth surface of her skin. Yes, the ball remained among the pebbles for decades sunken into the ground. The ball that she knew wasn't gone, and now, in fact, was found. Just as the moon, like a mirage, when it's new is dark yet still there. But where do other lost things go? Are they floating around out there like destitute souls, colorlessly? Do they end up in bottles on the surface of some forgotten planet? Or do they simply disappear?

As she falls asleep, Lisa counts the pebbles she moved around in the rock garden, the heaps along the perimeter, and even the ones below the surface. There's something wonderful, she thinks, in knowing that she's found the thing she lost all those years ago. Wonderful and sad. When she looks back—her nails now longer, her curly hair more unruly, her heart beating slower to conserve strength for the surprise of later years, and her skin no longer taut like the skin of a fish high on her cheekbones— she remembers her slim thigh muscles, her mobile and alert eyes, her hot lips. But on her heart, bruises. Life, like suffering, goes on.

But she'll always have the secret.



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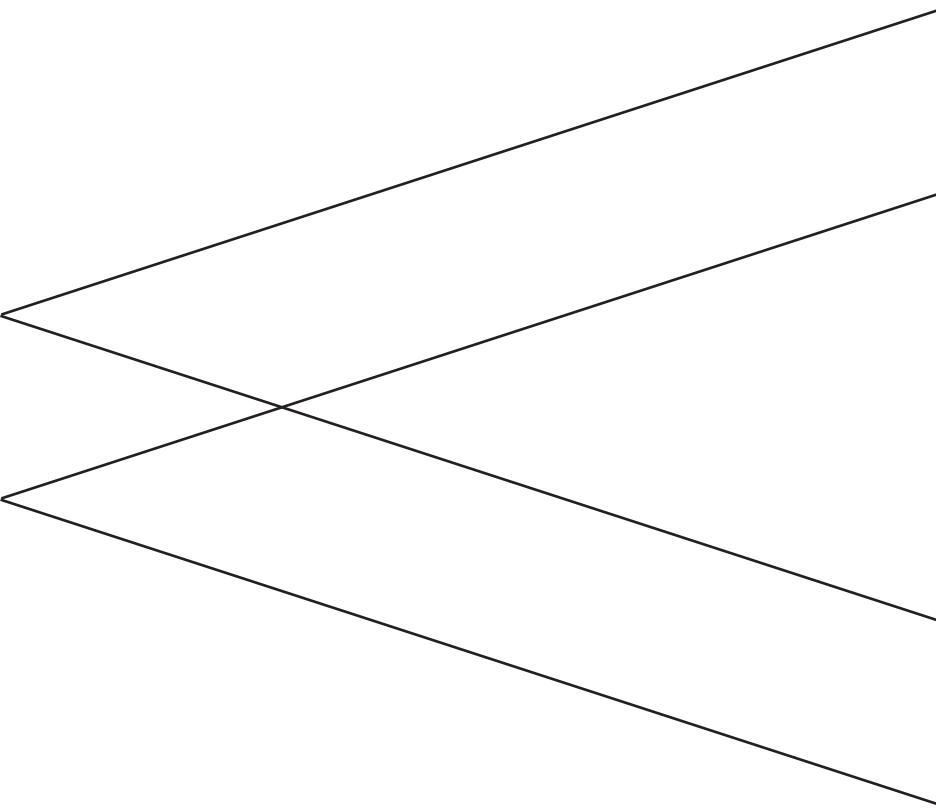
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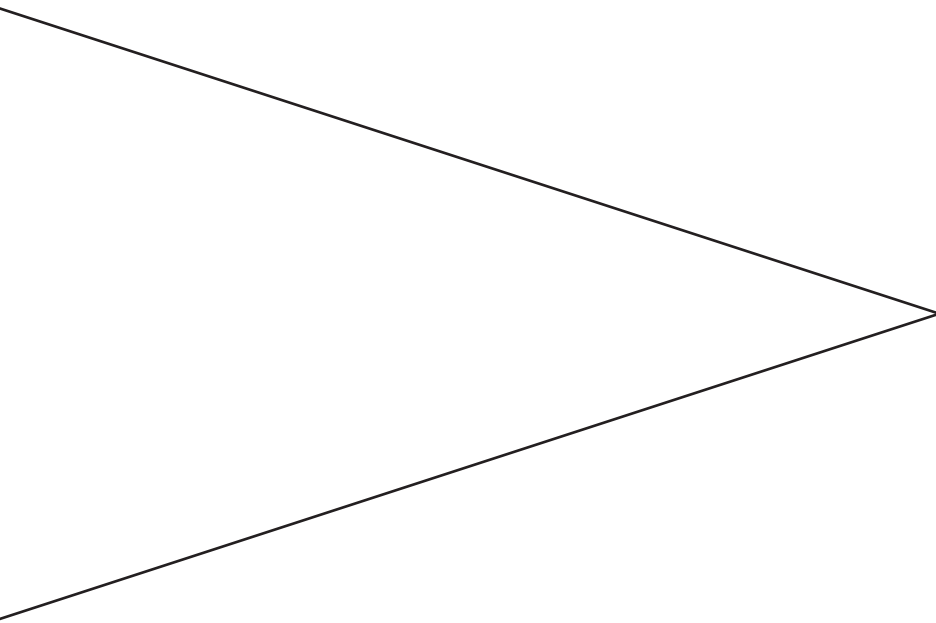
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WORD FOR WORD  
PARAULA PER PARAULA

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS  
& MÀSTER EN CREACIÓ LITERÀRIA DE LA  
UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA—IDEC

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INSTITUT RAMON LLULL  
& THE FUNDACIÓ HAN NEFKENS

2014-2015

# SCOTT SHANAHAN

## I WAS RIGHT

They entered the restaurant. I hid in the car. I told my mother I'd just finished up something rather big on the train, and just couldn't stomach one thing more. I simply wanted to lay down my head and digest. It was around seven. Dark. A Thursday. Just as well it could have been a Monday or Tuesday or Friday, or one of those every other Wednesdays, since I rehearsed then, too. I played lead saxophone in jazz band, and clarinet in concert band, where I also lead. I was very, very good. And recently I'd realized I had a flair for piano. I practiced at home, in private. It mattered my friends not think I was a pianist. I didn't want to hear their shit.

Among other things, our school was private and Catholic, and urban in a general sense. The majority of us commuted in from the outside. We awoke stiff in the morning and went home stiff at night, like real grown men. All of us in band (those of us I liked) rode the 5:05 train home together after rehearsal ended, all with pretenses to five o'clock shadows. We were all sorts of friends. Geographically, mostly.

This was my junior year, when I was really starting to become something for myself.

I had a friend, a junior also: Pete. Pete played a burnished gray trumpet with a glowing bell, fun to see yourself in. He lived one town away. It was a far one town. One time his father drove me home after rehearsal. The week before the Christmas concert, rehearsals ran long—so long that we'd

traducció d'Aina Baraldés

## TENIA RAÓ

Van entrar al restaurant. Jo em vaig amagar al cotxe. Li vaig dir a la mare que tot just m'havia acabat una cosa més aviat difícil de pair al tren i que no podia menjar res. Que només volia reposar i fer la digestió. Eren els volts de les set; fosc. Un dijous. Podria haver estat un dilluns o un dimarts o un divendres, o un de cada dos dimecres, ja que també assajava aquells dies. Tocava el primer saxofon a la banda de jazz i el clarinet a l'orquestra de cambra, on també era primer. Era molt i molt bo. I feia poc que li havia trobat el gust al piano. Practicava a casa, en privat. Era important que els meus amics no sabessin que era pianista. No volia escoltar la seva merda de comentaris.

Entre d'altres coses, la nostra escola era privada i catòlica, i urbana en un sentit general. La majoria vivíem fora i hi anàvem amb tren. Ens despertàvem encarcerats al matí i tornàvem a casa encarcerats al vespre, com els homes de debò. Tots els d'orquestra (tots els que em queien bé) agafàvem junts el de les cinc i cinc després de l'assaig, tots amb les barbes incipients de torn. Érem amics de tota mena. Per geografia, sobre tot.

Llavors feia segon a l'institut i començava a fer-me un nom.

Tenia un amic, també de segon: en Pete. En Pete tocava una trompeta grisa brunyida amb una campana lluent on feia gràcia veure-s'hi reflectit. Vivia un poble més enllà que jo. Un poble bastant més enllà. Una vegada el seu pare em va portar a casa després de l'assaig.

La setmana abans del concert de Nadal els assajos s'allar-

have to miss the 5:05 and be stuck to find alternate routes. But Mr. Leonardi had it all figured out. Pete and I were buddies, I lived nearby, and well, he didn't mind, so if my parents with *their* car... I remember learning that Mr. Leonardi was a man of his sports. That is, we listened to sports radio the whole highway back. He was a Patriots fan, like every other man I then knew, and was highly obliged to show it. Once—out of politeness, I supposed—he turned down the volume and asked with real curiosity whether I was into sports talk too. I said no, which was the truth. To make up for it, I named a talk radio station I did enjoy, truly, entirely right-wing politics, a move I now see to be less than elegant. Mr. Leonardi looked as if I'd just sacked him two yards from the end zone. "Well," he said, lifting his chin feyly toward the radio, "there's nothing wrong with a little red-blooded entertainment." I greeted his enthusiasm in kind.

As it turned out, I lived twenty minutes farther than Mr. Leonardi had accounted for, and the next time I saw him, I was graduating.

Pete, if you believe it, was a bit of an ass. But he'd made friends with me, and I didn't protest. I had started as a friendless freshman, honestly content with it—when he called me a dirty hippy. I guess my hockey hair was long. A few days later, the first rehearsal of my high school career, when he pulled his beautiful gleaming trumpet from its bed of black fleece, I was more contented still.

But junior year was our time. In band, no one ranked above us—last year's seniors had graduated, and the only other junior was a timid, tumid, torpid kid from inside the city. We were undeniable partners, Pete and I. That fall, when all the

gaven molt; tant que ens tocava perdre el tren de les cinc i cinc i quedar-nos penjats buscant rutes alternatives. Però el senyor Leonardi ho tenia tot pensat. En Pete i jo érem amics, jo vivia a la vora i, bé, a ell no li feia res, així que si als meus pares amb el *nostre* cotxe... Recordo que vaig aprendre que el senyor Leonardi hi entenia molt, d'esports. Vam escoltar una emissora esportiva durant tot el trajecte de tornada. Era fan dels Patriots, com tots els altres homes que jo coneixia aleshores, i se sentia molt inclinat a fer-ho notar. Una vegada, llavors vaig pensar que era per educació, va abaixar el volum i em va demanar amb curiositat genuïna si a mi també m'agradaven els col·loquis d'esport. Li vaig dir que no, que era la veritat. Per compensar, vaig parlar-li d'un programa que sí que m'agradava, de debò, en una emissora molt de dretes, un comentari que ara m'adono que distava molt de ser elegant. El senyor Leonardi em va mirar com si hagués marcat en pròpia.

—En fi— va dir assenyalant la ràdio amb la barbeta amb aire ofès—, em sembla que de vegades també va bé gaudir de coses un pèl més excitants. Vaig contestar-li amb el mateix grau d'entusiasme.

Va resultar que jo vivia vint minuts més lluny del que el senyor Leonardi es pensava, i quan el vaig tornar a veure, ja em graduava.

En Pete, per cert, era una mica malparit. Però li havia caigut en gràcia i a mi ja m'estava bé. Jo havia començat primer sense amics, honestament satisfet, quan em va titllar de hippy pollós. Suposo que el meu pentinat de jugador de hòquei era massa llarg. Uns quants dies més tard, el dia del primer assaig a l'institut, quan va treure's aquella trompeta magníficament abril·lantada del llit de vellut negre, encara vaig quedar més satisfet.

new freshmen appeared, inexperienced, practically trembling, Pete made sure to prop himself up. He renamed Chris, the new trumpet, “Trumpet.” In the woodwinds, my section, there was a new flautist—“Flute Boy”—whose full identity is to this day indeterminate. I did my best to follow Pete’s example with the remaining freshmen, Matt, Louis, and Tony, but I soon found it too embarrassing. When finally I gave up even the semblance of superiority, and when Pete saw how quietly I’d abandoned him, he gave up too. Even Pete couldn’t stand losing a partner.

That was how we all got together, the train group: Pete, me, Chris, and Mike, Chris’s twin. We all lived on the South Shore, and Chris and Mike and I in the same small town; we all took the 5:05, Chris and Mike and I till the end of the line.

If you haven’t had the experience yourself, there’s a certain way that adolescent boys in all-boys schools will act. Homosexuality isn’t the word. Homosexuality is never the intention. Your average guy won’t fuck his best friend, which is not to say there’s nothing there. I understand now the normalcy in this, and how much it has to do with an emerging sense of self and society. Society, puberty—each will teach you how to be a person among people.

Pete and I knew that Chris’s twin Mike was gay by such a logic. Mike was gay, we agreed in being certain, but I don’t think Pete ever imagined what that literally meant. Probably this had everything to do with our own sex lives, which were still waiting to take off. Between the two of us, I was hesitantly acknowledged to be the furthest along, with one immemorial blowjob from my overly titted Polish girlfriend. So when we finally put our heads together and came, at long last, to the



Però segon va ser el nostre any. A l'orquestra, no hi havia ningú per sobre nostre. Els veterans s'havien graduat i l'únic altre noi de segon era un nen tímid, túbid, tòtil de la ciutat. Érem companys innegables, en Pete i jo. Aquella tardor, quan van aparèixer tots els de primer, inexperimentats, tremolant com fulles, en Pete va fer els possibles per fer-se notar. Va batejar en Chris, el nou trompeta, "Trompeta". A vent, la meva secció, hi havia un nou flautista, "en Flauteta", la veritable identitat del qual encara avui dia no coneixem. Em vaig esforçar a seguir l'exemple d'en Pete amb la resta dels nous, en Matt, en Louis i en Tony, però de seguida vaig veure que em feia massa vergonya. Quan a la fi vaig deixar estar les pretensions de superioritat i quan en Pete va veure que l'havia abandonat silenciosament, ell també ho va deixar estar. Ni tan sols en Pete podia suportar perdre un company.

Així és com ens vam ajuntar tots plegats, el grup del tren: en Pete, jo, en Chris i en Mike, el bessó d'en Chris. Tots quatre vivíem a South Shore i en Chris, en Mike i jo al mateix poble. Tots quatre agafàvem el tren de les cinc i cinc, en Chris, en Mike i jo fins al final del recorregut.

Per si no ho heu viscut mai en persona, els nois adolescents que van a una escola només per nois actuen d'una manera particular. Homosexualitat no és la paraula. Homosexualitat no és mai la intenció. En general, un noi qualsevol no es follarà el seu millor amic, la qual cosa no vol dir que no hi hagi res entre ells. Ara entenc la normalitat de tot això, i fins a quin punt forma part d'un sentit emergent d'un mateix i de la societat. Societat, pubertat, cadascuna t'ensenyarà com ser una persona entre la gent.

En Pete i jo sabíem que el bessó d'en Chris, en Mike, era gai

agreement—the dude liked dudes—we took Mike’s many girl friends and his many trips downtown for nicer shoes as proof of his gayness in addition to gayness itself.

We were proud of our discovery, significantly so. Not informing Mike himself made us prouder, as only secrets do. And since I was the first to be suspicious, I only had to be the proudest. For whole weeks after I felt a great, spreading warmth in the pit of my stomach.

The victory lasted less than I would have liked. After my joke became our joke, and then the subsequent high, followed shortly by the transition to common fact, I felt myself losing hold of a thing for which I’d really developed a taste.

I decided without deciding that it was time to make a move. If I could count on something, it was the length of the school day. Mike, Chris, and I boarded the train before 7 in the morning, and didn’t come home again until after 6. We might begin the ride back loud and sniggering, but figure in the train’s rhythmic rocking over the rails, and we always ended it in silence, asleep, nuzzled against the nearest reliable surface.

Before I did a thing, I made the case to Pete—to gauge his reaction, yes, but more to stem off any later misunderstandings. Didn’t Pete find it at all suspicious, I asked, one day, that Chris didn’t have a lady friend? Pete sensed I was up to something immediately. He grinned and agreed. He said I should take my Polish girlfriend—my now decidedly ex-girlfriend—and throw her at Chris, for the sake of science. I didn’t ask what kind of science. It was too funny. I told him there was no chance I’d ever be seeing her again, which was more than fine with me. Pete eyed me in a way very like his father, but then exploded with enthusiasm, as if I was funnier than no one.

per aquesta simple lògica. En Mike era gai, estàvem d'acord a estar-ne segurs, però em sembla que en Pete no s'havia imaginat què significava literalment. És molt probable que tot això vingués arran de les nostres pròpies vides sexuals, que encara estaven gairebé per encetar. Dels dos, havia quedat dubtosament establert que jo era el que anava més avançat, amb una mamada immemorial de la meva xicoteta polonesa mamelluda. Així que, quan finalment vam discutir-ho i vam arribar a la conclusió, per fi, que al xaval li agradaven els xavals, vam decidir que totes les amigues d'en Mike i tots els viatges al centre per comprar sabates noves eren una prova més de la seva homosexualitat, a banda de l'homosexualitat en si.

Estàvem orgullosos del nostre descobriment, moltíssim. No informar-ne al propi Mike ens feia estar-ne encara més orgullosos, com només fan els secrets. I com que jo havia estat el primer de sospitar, em pertocava a mi estar-ne més orgullós que ningú. Durant setmanes i setmanes vaig notar una meravellosa sensació d'escalfor a la boca de l'estómac que se m'escampava per tot el cos.

La victòria va durar menys del que m'hauria agradat. Un cop la meva broma va passar a ser la nostra broma, i l'excitament subsequënt de seguida va donar pas a la transició a un fet establert, vaig sentir que perdia el control d'una cosa a què havia trobat el gust.

Vaig decidir sense decidir-ho que era el moment de passar a l'acció. Si hi havia res en què podia comptar, era en la llargada dels dies escolars. En Mike, en Chris i jo pujàvem al tren abans de les set del matí i no tornàvem a casa fins passades les sis. Podia ser que comencéssim el trajecte entre crits i rialles, però amb el sotragueig rítmic del tren sobre les vies,

By the end of the week the story was official: Chris also liked dudes.

Of course I was uneasy. It was one thing to call Chris gay. It was quite another to know. I brought my doubts directly to Pete. He was even more ecstatic. We had accepted Mike too easily, I said: We can't just go making accusations. He wondered why not. Because it was quick, I said. It was too smooth. Because it was, I shrieked, unfair.

To be fair, in fact, I didn't suspect Chris until I had to.

The whole thing would be very straightforward. Since I got off the train last, one stop past Pete, I would have better luck. Naturally I'd choose a day when Mike wasn't around. Chris and I had to be alone, as I explained it, so he would feel entirely safe.

When the train pulled into Halifax, Pete squeezed me painfully hard on the shoulder and strode fast out of the car, not looking back.

"So it's just you and me," I said to Chris, when the train picked up again and we were beyond any chance of Pete's reappearing.

I chatted a bit. I tried to speak as casually as possible, so he could feel the press of my language.

Chris, more skilled than I had calculated, looked on ahead.

So I yawned fantastically long. I closed my eyes. The lightened train swayed and squeaked as it swept over the tracks, roaring back over itself as it passed into a long tunnel undermining the highway. My head tipped back and forth, slipping farther and farther down until dream, or the look of it, overpowered me. I sunk into Chris's soft left shoulder.

I gave it a count so I wouldn't need to fake the number for

sempre l'acabàvem en silenci, endormiscats i arraulits contra la superfície més fiable que teníem a l'abast.

Abans de fer res, vaig exposar-ho a en Pete, per mesurar la seva reacció, sí, però també per tallar de soca-rel qualsevol malentès que hi pogués haver més tard. No ho trobava estrany, vaig demanar-li un dia, que en Chris no tingués cap amigueta? En Pete va intuir que en duia alguna de cap immediatament. Va somriure i va fer que sí. Va dir que hauria d'agafar la meva xicota polonesa, ja decididament ex-xicota, i encolomar-li a en Chris en nom de la ciència. No vaig demanar-li quin tipus de ciència. Era massa divertit. Li vaig dir que de ben segur no la tornaria a veure mai més, la qual cosa m'estava la mar de bé. En Pete em va mirar com m'havia mirat el seu pare, però aleshores va explotar amb entusiasme, com si jo fos la persona més divertida del món.

Cap al final de la setmana la història era oficial: a en Chris també li agradaven el xavals.

És clar que jo no acabava d'estar tranquil. Dir que en Chris era gai era una cosa, però saber-ho era molt diferent. Vaig explicar els meus dubtes a en Pete. Ell estava encara més extasiat. Havíem acceptat en Mike massa fàcilment, vaig dir-li: no podem anar pel món acusant al personal. Ell no veia per què no. Perquè era precipitat, vaig dir. Era massa fàcil. Perquè era, vaig xisclar, injust.

En el fons, no havia sospitat d'en Chris fins que no m'havia calgut.

Tot plegat seria molt senzill. Com que jo era l'últim de baixar del tren, una parada després que en Pete, ho tindria més fàcil. Naturalment, triaria un dia que en Mike no hi fos. En Chris i jo havíem d'estar sols, tal com vaig dir, perquè se sentís del tot segur.

Pete later; for personal use as well, although I still forgot it.

Any self-respecting teenaged, suburban, conservative, Catholic, heterosexual male would have known how to quickly shake him off.

I stopped counting when the curls of his hair warmed my ear.

I didn't much like being right.

Quan el tren va aturar-se a Halifax, en Pete em va estrènyer l'espatlla tan fort que em va fer mal i va afanyar-se a sortir del vagó, sense mirar enrere.

—Bé doncs, només quedem tu i jo—vaig dir-li a en Chris quan el tren va arrencar de nou i ja no hi havia cap possibilitat que en Pete reaparegués.

Vam xerrar una miqueta. Vaig mirar de parlar amb tanta naturalitat com vaig poder perquè notés la intenció de les meves paraules.

En Chris, amb més destresa de la que jo havia previst, va seguir mirant endavant.

Així que vaig fer un badall extraordinari. Vaig tancar els ulls. El tren, ara més lleuger, es balancejava i grinyolava a mesura que lliscava per les vies, i va travessar el seu propi rugit en passar per sota del túnel llarguíssim que soscavava l'autopista. Jo feia cabotades i vaig anar caient, avall, avall fins que el son, aparentment, es va apoderar de mi. Vaig repenjar el cap en la suavíssima espatlla esquerra d'en Chris.

Vaig comptar per no haver d'inventar-me un número per a en Pete, i per ús personal també, però me'n vaig oblidar.

Qualsevol mascle adolescent, heterosexual, catòlic, conservador, suburbà que es respectés a si mateix hauria sabut com desfer-se'n de seguida.

Vaig deixar de comptar quan els seus rínxols em van escalfar l'orella.

No em agradar gens tenir raó.

# AINA BARALDÉS

## CONVERSES D'ASCENSOR

En Josep torna cap a casa amb la sensació d'estar cansat malgrat no haver fet res. S'ha passat vuit hores en una oficina davant d'un ordinador i només s'ha aixecat de la cadira per anar al lavabo i comprar un entrepà fred que no tenia gust de res. Amb tot, el dia no se li ha fet especialment llarg, perquè tornar a casa no li fa il·lusió. Ha de passar pel supermercat a comprar quatre coses per fer companyia a l'únic iogurt que té a la nevera, ha de fer bugada i escombrar una mica el pis. També ha de trucar al lampista perquè se li ha embussat la pica de la cuina. Això és tot el que ha de fer avui. És un dia buit, com l'anterior, com el següent.

Quan arriba al seu edifici, un bloc gris i compacte de deu pisos d'alçada, s'atura a treure el correu de la bústia. Factura, factura, propaganda, factura i una carta pel veí del davant. Mentre espera l'ascensor, arriba la veïna del tercer, una noia menuda i simpàtica, que per poc no arriba a la trentena i que en Josep sempre ha trobat molt exòtica. Se saluden i pugen junts.

—Tot bé?—li pregunta la noia.

—Prou. I tu, tot bé?

Ella li dispara un somriure fulgurant i li mostra una mà amb una manicura perfecta i un anell de diamants.

—Ahir el meu xicot em va demanar que ens caséssim—es mossega una mica el llavi—. Em va portar a un restaurant molt car i va amagar l'anell a les postres, com a les pel·lícules!



translation by Scott Shanahan

## IDLE CHATTER

Josep heads home feeling exhausted, although he didn't do a thing all day. He spent the last eight hours in the office behind his computer, leaving his chair only once, to go to the bathroom and get himself a sandwich, cold and tasteless anyway. Yet the day couldn't have felt that long, because he's not exactly dying to get home. He still has to stop by the supermarket for a thing or two to join the lone yogurt in his fridge. There's still the laundry to do. There's the apartment, which needs sweeping. Then he has to call the plumber to unclog the kitchen sink. And that's everything, everything he has to do today. It's an empty day, just like the one before it, just like the one to come.

When he arrives at his building, a compact, gray cinderblock ten stories tall, he stops to get his mail. Bill, bill, pamphlet, bill, and a letter, meant for his next-door neighbor. His neighbor from four walks in while he's waiting for the elevator. She's a small, sweet girl, maybe thirty, and Josep has always found her quite exotic. They exchange hellos and ride up together.

"How's it going?"

"It's going. You?"

She shoots him a luminous smile and shows off her perfectly manicured hand, her diamond ring.

"My boyfriend proposed to me yesterday." She gnaws on her lip. "He took me to a really expensive restaurant and snuck it

—Ostres, Laura, moltes felicitats!

—Gràcies—es mira l'anell i segueix parlant sense apartar la mirada de la joia—. Estic tan contenta que no em sé estar d'ensenyar-lo a tothom. Oi que és bonic? És que el meu promès—canta la paraula que encara li sona estranya—és un sol.

Quan l'ascensor s'atura al tercer, en Josep la torna a felicitar, però ella no el sent, ara mateix la realitat és al seu cap i el món exterior li sembla una distorsió grotesca d'allò que ella veu i sent en les seves fantasies. Surt de l'ascensor i mentre s'entreté a buscar les claus, fa tant soroll com li és possible. Obre la porta i saluda amb veu alta, deixa les claus sobre el moble del rebedor, es treu l'àbric i observa el seu voltant. Tot és al seu lloc, les sabates d'ell estan ben col·locades, l'àbric penjat sense presses. Avança pel passadís i torna a saludar. Aquesta vegada, ell li contesta des del menjador. Està assegut al sofà i mira la televisió amb una Coca-Cola als dits. Quan la veu, li dedica un somriure i li demana com ha anat el dia. Ella li fa un petó, entra al dormitori per canviar-se i es relaxa del tot quan veu que el llit està fet tal com l'ha deixat al matí. S'hi asseu i es torna a mirar l'anell mentre pensa que s'ha de calmar, que allò va ser una relliscada, que ja s'ha acabat, que l'estima a ella i que li fa molta il·lusió casar-se, que és el que sempre ha volgut. Alça la vista i es veu al mirall. És el que sempre has volgut, es diu i es torna a posar el somriure, surt al menjador i s'arrauleix al costat del seu promès.

Mentrestant, en Josep ha arribat al seu pis. Entra a casa sense dir hola, ja no el sorprèn que ningú no contesti. Deixa les bosses del supermercat a sobre la taula: menjar en envasos de plàstic d'una sola ració. Sopa sense ganes davant del televisor i

into my dessert, just like they do in the movies.”

“No way, Laura. Congratulations.”

“Thanks.” She looks at the ring and goes right on talking, her eyes still glued to the piece of jewelry. “I’m just so happy, I can’t help showing it to everyone I see. Isn’t it pretty? My fiancé”—she’s still not used to the word, and she sings it—“is such an angel.”

When the elevator gets to four, Josep once more congratulates her, not that she hears him. Reality is nowhere right now but inside her own head, and the world outside of it is nothing but a caricature of what she sees and hears in her fantasies. She gets off the elevator and rifles around for her keys, making all the noise she can. She opens the door, shouting hello, and drops the keys on the console by the entrance. She takes off her coat and looks around. Everything is in its place. His shoes are nice and neat. His coat is properly hung. She goes down the hall and again says hello. This time he answers. He’s on the couch in the living room, watching TV with a Coke in his hand. When he notices her, he shoots her a smile and asks how her day went. She gives him a kiss, then goes to the bedroom to change. She finally relaxes when she sees the bed is still made, just the way she left it this morning. She sits down and gives the ring another stare, telling herself she really has to calm down. It was just a slip, and it’s over now. He loves her, and he’s thrilled to be marrying her. This is everything she has ever wanted. She looks up, catching her reflection in the mirror. It’s what you’ve always wanted, she says to herself, donning the smile again, and returning to the living room to curl up beside her fiancé.

Josep, meanwhile, arrives at his apartment. He walks inside

se'n va al llit per pur avorriment. Abans d'adormir-se, pensa en el somriure ple de promeses de la veïna i s'imagina el seu futur, un futur de blanc i de criatures, i sap que en aquell mateix moment, uns quants pisos més avall, ella és al llit amb algú que l'estima. Li passa pel cap que ell no ha somrigut en tot el dia, però ni en té ganes, ni té ningú a qui somriure.

\* \* \*

En Josep torna cap a casa amb la sensació d'estar cansat malgrat no haver fet res. A la feina no ha obert boca en tot el dia, només ha contestat els correus electrònics del seu cap, que seu tres taules més enllà. Quan arriba, aguanta la porta d'entrada al veí del cinquè que ve carregat de paquets, i esperen en silenci que arribi l'ascensor. Un cop dins l'home li pregunta si tot va bé.

—Prou. I vostè, tot bé?

L'home té una cara afable i un somriure vell. Li assenjala els paquets amb un cop de cap i el mira il·lusionat. Llavors la cara li canvia i el somriure el torna jove, quasi infantil.

—La meva filla està embarassada. Avui ens han dit que serà un nen!

—Enhorabona, Ricard. És el primer?

—Si, noi, ja em fan avi. L'avi Ricard—diu per acostumar-s'hi, i té la sensació que el futur se li allarga indefinidament—. He passat per la botiga de joguines i li he comprat algunes cosetes. Com que no he tingut cap nen, mai no havia pogut comprar gaire pilotes de futbol... li he comprat l'equipament del Barça sencer!

—Ben fet—li contesta en Josep amb un somriure de cortesia.

without saying hello, and he's past being shocked that no one answers. He drops the supermarket bags on the table. TV dinners, single-serving. He eats dinner listlessly in front of the TV, then goes to bed purely out of boredom. As he falls asleep, he imagines his neighbor's smile, so brimming with promise, as well as her future, a future all in white, with plenty of children, knowing she is in bed at that very moment, just a few floors below, with a man who loves her. It occurs to him that he hasn't smiled once all day, not that he feels like it, or has anyone to smile for.

\* \* \*

Josep heads home feeling exhausted, although he hasn't done a thing all day. He didn't open his mouth once the whole day at work. He did nothing but answer emails from his boss, who sits just three cubicles away. He holds open the door when he gets to the building; his neighbor from six is weighed down with packages. They wait for the elevator in silence. Once inside, the man asks how it's going.

"Going. What about you?"

The man has a friendly face and an old smile. He nods at the packages, giving Josep a look of excitement. Then his face changes, and his smile is young again, almost child-like.

"My daughter is pregnant. Today she told me it's going to be a boy."

"Congrats, Ricard. Your first?"

"That's right. I'm a grandpa now. Grandpa Ricard," he says, testing out the word, as though it promised his own endless future. "I stopped by the toy store and picked up a few little things. I've never had a boy before, so I've never had to buy a

Quan en Ricard arriba el seu pis, en Josep s'aparta per fer-li lloc i s'acomia amb un cop de cap, que ell li retorna amb gentilesa. Deixa les bosses a terra i es treu les claus de la butxaca. Un cop dins de casa, se'n va a la cuina i se serveix un got d'aigua de Vichy amb cura de no vessar-la. En beu tres glops, deixa el got sobre la taula i se'l mira fins que l'aigua deixa de bellugar-se. Aleshores el torna agafar fent un esforç per mantenir les mans fermes, però no ho aconsegueix del tot. Sospira i s'acaba la beguda amb el pes de la vellesa als dits. En acabat, se'n va a l'estudi i mentre espera que l'ordinador s'encengui, posa els regals que ha comprat en caixes de cartró, les embala i hi escriu una adreça en un idioma estrany. Sent un sorollet electrònic que li comença a ser familiar i respon a la petició de video-conferència. La seva filla, acabada de llevar, apareix en pantalla i el saluda amb efusió. El troba a faltar, diu. Potser quan hagi nascut el nen i sigui prou gran per viatjar, podran venir-lo a veure.

En aquell moment, en Josep treu les escombraries i s'imagina el veí portant el nét al camp del Barça o preparant-li el berenar després de l'escola. Se l'imagina la nit de reis, o fent de cangur al nen algun cap de setmana, i pensa que això li deu portar records de quan ell era pare d'una criatura.

Entra a casa amb tots aquests pensaments al cap, amb la comparació a flor de pell, però no li cal mirar al voltant per saber que les seves parets són orfes de records i de fotografies, i que totes les lleixes són plenes d'objectes sense valor i buits de vida.

\* \* \*

En Josep torna de la feina tard. Ha tingut una reunió a

soccer ball...I bought him all the Barça gear!”

“Well done,” Josep answers, with a polite smile.

When they get to Ricard’s floor, Josep moves to one side to let him off, nodding a goodbye that Ricard courteously returns. Ricard drops his bags on the floor and pulls his keys out of his pocket. When he gets inside his apartment, he goes into the kitchen and pours himself a glass of Vichy water, trying carefully not to spill it. He takes three sips and sets the glass back down on the table, keeping his eyes fixed on it until the water completely settles. He goes to grab it again, doing his best to keep his hands steady—unsuccessfully. He takes a breath and empties the glass, old age weighing down his fingers. Finished at last, he ventures into the study. As he waits for the computer to power up, he places all the gifts he’s bought into cardboard boxes, and sealing up the boxes, writes out an address in a strange language. He hears the beeping noise he’s begun to grow accustomed to; he answers the chat request. His daughter, who has only just gotten out of bed, appears on the screen. She greets him exuberantly. She says she misses him. Maybe, she says, they’ll come and visit once the baby is born and big enough to travel.

At that moment, Josep is on his way out with his bottles, imagining Ricard with his grandson at Camp Nou, or making the boy a snack after school. He imagines them on Christmas morning, or Ricard babysitting on the weekend, and he thinks of all the memories this must bring back from when Ricard was a father.

Josep enters his house with all of these thoughts swirling in his head, dimly aware of a parallel—not that he needs to look around to know his walls are barren of photographs as well as

última hora que s'ha allargat massa sense cap mena de motiu. Està cansat i fastiguejat i té ganes de tenir vacances, encara que se les passi dormint al seu pis. Camina darrere d'un home jove que duu un abric molt car i unes sabates italianes i automàticament es mira les seves sabates que són de fa dues temporades i tenen la punta una mica gastada. Caminen junts durant una bona estona i en Josep se sorprèn de veure que l'home entra al seu bloc. A l'ascensor s'adona que és el noi del setè, un noi que en sortir de la universitat se'n va anar a fer la volta al món fins que va conèixer un home que li va oferir feina en una gran multinacional.

—Hola, Josep—el saluda quan el veu—, com anem?

—Prou bé, i tu?—se'l mira de dalt a baix—sembla que la feina et prova.

El noi riu un somriure car i fa que sí amb el cap.

—No em puc queixar. Tot just acabo de tornar d'una reunió a Nova York, que està preciosa en aquesta època de l'any. Els accionistes volien que m'hi quedés un parell de setmanes més, però jo tenia ganes de venir a veure la dona—li pica l'ullet—, ja m'entens.

—Caram, quina enveja.

El noi riu i fa un gest amb les espatlles, a mig camí entre una disculpa i falsa modèstia. Quan les portes s'obren al setè pis, s'acomiada i baixa de l'ascensor. Mentre obre la porta li sona el telèfon de la feina i respon. La seva dona, que el sent arribar, surt de la cuina amb el davantal posat i un petó preparat als llavis. Ell penja, li fa un petó ràpid i li diu que eren de l'oficina i que hi ha de tornar per un assumpte urgent.

—Però si fa dues setmanes que no et veig!

—Ja ho sé, carinyo, però és que és important. Et prometo



memories, or that every shelf is full of objects worthless and devoid of life.

\* \* \*

Josep leaves work late. He had a last-minute meeting that ran long for no apparent reason. He's exhausted and irritated and feels like taking a few of his vacation days, even if he'll just spend them at home, anyway, sleeping. He's walking behind a young man sporting an expensive coat and Italian shoes. Without thinking he looks down at his own shoes, which are now two seasons old and showing a bit of wear at the toe. They walk like this, together, for a good while—and Josep is surprised when he sees the man walk into Josep's own building. Josep follows after. Only when Josep is right beside him does it dawn on him that this is his neighbor from eight—a guy who traveled the world fresh out of college until someone offered him a job at a multinational.

"Hi, Josep," says the guy when he notices his neighbor.  
"How are we doing?"

"Doing. How are things?" Josep looks him up and down.  
"Work seems to be going well."

The guy chuckles and dons a pricey smile, nodding in the affirmative.

"Can't complain. Just got back from a meeting in New York, which is lovely this time of year. The shareholders wanted me to stick around a few more weeks, but I wanted to get back and see the little woman." He winks. "You get me."

"Great. I'm jealous."

The guy laughs and shrugs, half in apology, half in mock modesty. When the doors open on the eighth floor, the guy

que demà tindrè temps. T'estimo.

I surt de casa tal com ha entrat. La seva dona se'n va al menjador, apaga les espelmes i guarda els plats bons mentre s'empassa les ganes de plorar. Si això segueix així, pensa, me'n vaig.

Just quan el noi del setè para un taxi davant de l'edifici, en Josep entra a casa. La pica de la cuina encara no funciona i avui tampoc no ha trucat al lampista. Obre la nevera, però no té ganes de cuinar, així que demana menjar xinès per telèfon i mentre se'l menja pensa que probablement allò és tot el que mai no arribarà a experimentar de l'Àsia i que possiblement el seu veí, que de segur que ha menjat en els millors restaurants de tots els continents, es faria un fart de riure si el veiés.

\* \* \*

En Josep torna a casa capficat per la feina. Fa més de deu anys que fa el mateix i l'únic canvi que ha vist mai ha estat la retallada del sou dels treballadors del seu departament, que van ser els primers de caure quan va començar la crisi. Avui els han dit que no hi ha previsions de tornar a cobrar el sou normal aquest any, ni la paga doble, ni la panera de Nadal. Potser s'hauria de sentir més agraït pel fet de conservar la feina encara, ara que per altra banda, potser si li agradés, si se sentís valorat o necessari, li seria més fàcil; però no li agrada, no li agrada gens. Al principi li semblava que seria una bona manera de fer currículum i guanyar uns quants diners per poder-se emancipar; que seria una cosa provisional, una feina que havia de ser només el primer graó d'una escala molt llarga. Un cop s'hi va haver acostumat, però, no va acabar de trobar el moment de fer el salt. Li feia mandra posar-se a buscar una

says goodbye and gets off. His work phone rings as he's opening the door. He picks up. His wife, who has heard him walk in, comes out of the kitchen with an apron around her waist and a kiss prepared on her lips. He bends down, giving her a quick peck. It was the office calling, he says: there has been an emergency. He's got to turn right around.

"But it's been two weeks since I've seen you!"

"I know, babe, but it's important. I'll have more time tomorrow, I promise. I love you."

And he leaves the house just as he entered it. His wife goes into the dining room and blows out the candles and puts away the good plates, choking down the urge to cry. If this keeps up, she thinks, I'm out of here.

Just as the guy from eight is hailing a taxi in front of the building, Josep walks into his apartment. The kitchen sink still isn't working, not that he called the plumber today either. He opens the fridge, although he doesn't feel like cooking, so he calls out for Chinese, thinking all the while as he eats that this is probably the most he'll ever experience of Asia, and how possibly his neighbor, who has eaten for sure in all the finest restaurants in every continent, would die of laughter if he could only see him now.

\* \* \*

Josep returns home with work still on his mind. For more than ten years he's been doing the same thing, and the only changes he's ever noticed in his department have been in their salaries, which were the first to be slashed when the recession hit. Today they learned there were no plans to return them to their normal salaries this year, or give out bonuses, not even

altra feina, i quan va instal·lar-se al seu apartament (de lloguer, perquè algun dia en marxaria), necessitava el sou per pagar les mensualitats. Com tantes altres coses a la seva vida, la seva feina, i en conseqüència, el seu estil de vida, havia caigut en un estat eternament provisional.

Ara sent que la vida li passa pel davant i que ell no avança, que ha carregat tant la maleta dels somnis i projectes de futur que no la pot aixecar i s'està al terra, un recordatori malèvol de tot allò que havia volgut fer i que ell mateix s'ha cuidat de relegar, posposar i oblidar. Quan va ser l'última vegada que et vas divertir? es pregunta. Quina és l'última pel·lícula que has vist al cinema? Ni idea. Sempre està ocupat, sempre té excuses, sempre li fa mandra tot. Els seus amics li truquen de tant en tant, però ja no és igual. Recorda els dies que passaven junts a l'institut i més tard a la universitat, les tardes que dedicaven a somniar futurs i a dibuixar projectes que tots sabien que no farien mai. Això és impossible, deia quan els altres proposaven fer un viatge a la Xina, o llogar un vaixell de vela per navegar fins a Gibraltar. A ell li semblava impossible, i ara sap que per ell ho era. Alguns dels seus amics, però, aquells que no ho sabien, han acabat vivint a l'Àsia o traient-se el carnet de patró.

Ara, davant de l'ascensor, pensa en la noia del tercer i en el veí del cinquè i en el futur que els espera, en tots els projectes i les esperances que tenen. En canvi, ell està sol. No té altre futur que la mateixa porqueria de sempre desgastada i empobrida per l'edat, ni és capaç d'imaginar que res pugui treure'l d'aquell circuit tancat, d'aquell buit infinit que no té escapatòria. Puja sol a l'ascensor i les parets l'asfixien. És així la seva vida? Quatre parets idèntiques i un mirall que reflecteix la mateixa cara, la mateixa buidor, la seva angúnia i el seu

the Christmas bonus. Perhaps he should feel more grateful for the fact that at least he's still got a job, even though it would be easier if, on the other hand, he maybe liked what he did or felt valued or needed. Yet he doesn't like his job; he doesn't like it one bit. At first it seemed like a good way to build his résumé and earn a little money to get himself on his feet—a temporary arrangement, a first step up a very long ladder. But once he got comfortable, he couldn't ever seem to manage to find the right time to make the leap. He was lazy about looking for a different job, but once he moved into his apartment (a rental, because he wouldn't be there forever), he found he needed the money to keep up with his rent. As with so many other things in his life, his job (and so too, his style of life) had fallen into a state of perpetual transience.

Now all he feels is stuck as life passes before him, while the suitcase that he's stuffed full of all his plans and dreams sits on the ground right in front of him, too heavy to lift, now nothing more than a nasty reminder of all the things he had wanted to do but has only managed to dismiss, put off, or ignore. When, he wonders, was the last time he enjoyed himself? When was the last time he went to the movies? Not a clue. He's always busy, he always has excuses, he's lazy about everything. His friends call him every now and again, but it's just not the same anymore. He remembers the days they used to spend together in high school and then college, all the afternoons they would devote to dreaming up their big futures and sketching out plans that not one of them ever believed would truly materialize. That's far-fetched, he would say whenever they suggested a trip to China or chartering a boat and sailing down to Gibraltar. These things all seemed impossible to him, and now

desencant? Per sempre més? Prem l'últim número i nota que el mecanisme l'alça, com un cuc mecànic que perfora la terra fins a la superfície. Potser a dalt hi ha consol, potser és l'única sortida. S'obren les portes i puja el darrer tram d'escalas fins al terrat.

És un dia gris de novembre, fa fred i ja és fosc. Els llums de la ciutat cremen i el trànsit és bastant dens. Milers de persones es mouen en aquella ciutat, al seus peus. Centenars de milers, i tots van a algun lloc. Tots tenen un objectiu, algú que els espera a casa, un sopar a taula, una butlleta de loteria guanyadora, o simplement una idea, una esperança, la il·lusió que demà pot passar alguna cosa, que demà serà millor. Potser és això, pensa mentre s'enfila al mur que fa de barana, potser si no hagués perdut la il·lusió, si m'hagués imposat un objectiu, la vida m'hauria tractat diferent. Però ara ja és tard. Ara té la sensació d'estar cansat de viure malgrat no haver fet res i aquest últim pensament és el que l'empeny a fer un pas endavant i llençar-se al buit.

La caiguda l'allibera, i durant un moment, se sent feliç perquè ha trencat la seva rutina, i pensa que potser no era del tot impossible i té ganes de somriure malgrat no tenir ningú a qui somriure. En aquell instant, abans de trencar-se tots els ossos i esberlar-se el cap contra el ciment, somriu, però de seguida se li tenyeix el somriure de resignació. Al cap i a la fi, potser la vida es reservava aquest miracle pel comiat.

he knows that for him they were. He never wound up living in Asia, or earning a captain's license, but they did, the more daring ones.

Now, in front of the elevator, he thinks about the girl on four and the neighbor on six and the futures awaiting them, about all their plans and aspirations. Josep is alone. His only future is the same old, same old; tired out and weak as time keeps right on passing; and he just isn't able to think of anything to release him from this closed circuit, this yawning infinity with no salvation in sight. He rides up alone in the elevator and the walls are choking him. Is this his life? Four identical walls, and a mirror that reflects the same face, the same emptiness, his own anguish and alienation? Will it be this way forever? He presses the last number, noting the way the machine takes him up, like a mechanical worm punching through earth toward the surface. Perhaps there's some consolation waiting above, perhaps it's the only way out. He opens the doors and climbs the last stretch of stairs up to the roof.

It's a gray November day, cold and already dark. The city lights are burning and the traffic is seething. People on foot are crisscrossing this city in the thousands. Hundreds of thousands, and every one of them, headed somewhere. They all have a goal or a person waiting for them at home or a dinner on the table or a winning lottery ticket, or simply an idea, a hope, the delusion that tomorrow something will happen, that tomorrow will be better. Maybe that's it, he thinks as he lifts himself on top of the safety wall, maybe if I had held onto my dreams, if I had set myself a goal, life would have turned out different. But it's too late now. He feels exhausted with life,





although he hasn't done a single thing with his. And so it is this final thought that pushes him to step forward and throw himself into the void.

The fall is liberating, and for a moment, he feels happy because he has broken his routine, and he thinks that perhaps it wasn't so entirely impossible and he feels like smiling without having anyone to smile for. In that moment, before breaking all his bones and splitting his head open across the cement, he smiles, but suddenly the smile is tainted with resignation. When all is said and done, perhaps life was saving this miracle for the farewell.

# ALICIA MARIA MEIER

## TORNADO SEASON

Every month's first Monday, the reminder: real silence must be born of sound. The great white noise machine snuffed out the squeals of schoolkids on their jungle gyms and the squabbles of the dumpster divers in the alleys, all of which sprawled out as part and parcel of our low-rent high-rise view. Midday, moist May, and all would give way to the low moan of the sirens.

We lived our springs, at first, in mutual contentment. Cumuli like these were outside of my vocabulary, had come to me only in thriller films and canvases of French Romantics. The subversion of my expectations stirred in me a perverse fascination, and for the first few seasons I'd press my nose against the windows as the storms rolled in on the massive Midwest sky. They say, for example, that the clouds turn green, and we easterners believe it, but I never found that to be true, only ever watched them fade from white to yellow to black, like a stop-motion bruise. They say you'll see an arm stretch down from heaven, spin grotesquely at its joints and claim each thing within its touch, but for all the times I watched intently I only ever saw a solid wall.

You, meanwhile, Arkansas-bred, found some comfort in the familiar yearly tempests. They conjured memories of snuggling with your brothers beneath a mattress, making shadow puppets, telling riddles, as the speakers played their modulated round.

traducció de Marta Carnicero Hernanz

## TEMPORADA DE TORNADOS

Cada primer dilluns de mes, el recordatori: l'autèntic silenci ha de sorgir del so. Comuna enorme màquina de soroll blanc, el toc de les alarmes engolia els crits dels escolars a parcs i places i les baralles dels espigoladors d'escombraries als carrerons, que s'estenien indestriables de les vistes del nostre altíssim bloc de lloguer baix. Migdia, maig moll, i tot plegat duria al plany somort de les sirenes.

Al principi vivíem les nostres primaveres amb mútua complaença. Cúmuls com aquells eren fora del meu vocabulari; els coneixia només de les pel·lícules d'intriga i els quadres dels romàntics francesos. La inversió de les meves expectatives em despertava una fascinació perversa, i les primeres temporades aixafava el nas contra les finestres quan les tempestes avançaven pel cel desmesurat de l'Oest Mitjà. Diuen, per exemple, que els núvols es tornen verds, i els que venim de l'est ens ho creiem, però en realitat jo no ho vaig veure mai: només els vaig veure virar del blanc al groc i d'allà al negre, com fotogrames d'un morat succeint-se a poc a poc. Diuen que es veu un braç sortint del cel, giravoltant absurdament i cobrant-se el que tingui a l'abast, però per més que m'ho mirava atentament només hi veia un mur massís.

Mentrestant, tu, que ets fill d'Arkansas, trobaves cert confort en les tempestes familiars que tornaven cada any. Et duien records de quan us arraulíeu sota un matalàs amb els germans, feïeu ombres xineses i explicàveu endevinalles sentint

I'll admit that, for all our years there, we went essentially unscathed. The lone exception was the inconvenience of an April morning when we pushed the door open into seventh-story sky to find the balcony bathed in tiny tempered crystals, like moon jellies washed up on shore. My semiconscious slumbering mind had registered the warning wail but not the ensuing shatter of a neighbor's furniture some stories above. We swept them up, the shards, and went about our ritual. We drank our coffee as we checked all our belongings were secured.

But there were stories, of EF5s that flipped cars and flattened homes. There was the one that hit the airport, so powerful it ripped the concrete runways from the soil. There was the girl down the street at the art school who was thrown from a scaffold while painting through what should have been a mild twister miles off, and broke her back in two.

Was that how I began to fear? It doesn't seem so. There was no inciting incident. It happened slowly, as affection does.

\* \* \*

The inciting incident, I told the doctor, occurred on I-55, near Cape Girardeau. Cruise control on eighty as thick rain-drops began to pop against the windshield like tiny fireworks. The gusts grew so violent that you swerved to correct against them. Others pulled off, locked doors, huddled up in concrete rest-stop restrooms, and I shivered as I imagined us picked up off the road, swirling helpless round the eye—but you never touched the brakes.

Where were we coming from? What was that strip-mall town, halfway between your parents home and ours, right

la sonsònia dels altaveus.

Admeto que, per tots els anys que vam ser allà, en vam sortir prou ben parats. L'única excepció va ser la petita molèstia d'un matí d'abril, quan vam empènyer la porta cap al cel del setè i vam trobar el balcó banyat en bocins de vidre trempat, com meduses arrossegades fins a la sorra. El meu subconscient ensopit havia registrat el crit d'avís, però no la trencadissa posterior del moble d'un veí uns quants pisos per sobre. Els vam escombrar, els trossets, i vam reprendre el nostre ritual. Vàrem prendre el cafè mentre comprovàvem que tot estigués ben subjecte.

Corrien històries d'EF5s, però: tornados extrems que capgiraven cotxes i arrasaven cases. N'hi va haver un que va afectar l'aeroport, tan potent que va arrencar les pistes de formigó. Hi va haver aquella noia de l'escola d'art de més avall, que va volar d'una bastida quan pintava durant el que havia de ser una tromba suau quilòmetres enllà, i es va partir l'esquena.

Va ser així que vaig començar a tenir por? No ho sembla pas. No hi va haver cap detonant. Va arribar a poc a poc, tal com passa amb l'afecte.

\* \* \*

El detonant, vaig explicar al metge, va tenir lloc a la I-55, prop de Cape Girardeau: el control de velocitat fixat a 130 quan unes gotes gruixudes començaven a esclatar contra el parabrisa com focs d'artifici en miniatura. Les ràfegues es feien tan violentes que havies de donar un cop de volant per redreçar-te. Alguns aturaven el cotxe, tancaven panys, s'arrupien als lavabos de formigó d'àrees de descans, i jo tremolava només d'imaginar-me que ens xuclaven de l'asfalt i

about on the state line, where was that steakhouse? Blytheville. They called it *Blathvull*—I hadn't thought they'd really speak that way, *braht waht lahts* and all that—and we let them snap away: those first photos, flash-washed, goofy-grinned, with the neon highway signage blaring in the background.

The doctor said, *take this one once a day in the morning for three days, and then take twice, and take up to three of this one when you feel your heart begin to race.* The doctor said, *you are of the appropriate age for onset of this type of phobia.*

\* \* \*

The inciting incident, I told my mother, occurred at home. Wherever it was you were when the light went gold, it didn't matter. The windows rattled and the air grew cold and I could see it. You were wrecked and hanging sideways in the Lincoln, your head embedded in the spider glass, pinned beneath some mammoth fractured bough. When you came home, I was hidden in the closet I had cleared for your possessions.

My mother said, *the hallucinations are, admittedly, worrisome.* My mother said, *nonetheless, you know, this happened to me too.* She spoke of flight: of how one day she was at ease with the idea of being cloud-carried in an object of such confounding mass, and the next, it seemed, the scene before her eyes had changed.

She recounted that first vision. Night flight, and the lights in the cabin fell away in segments, the side panels, the overheads. There was a moment in which they were suspended in the blackness, and then before her: a mass of groping hands, the blind feeble grasps of the free-falling, fingers and forearms of all colors and sizes, all swimming desperately upwards—until

giravoltàvem desvalguts al voltant del fibló, però tu mai no vas tocar els frens.

D'on era que veníem? Com es deia aquell polígon comercial, a mig camí entre casa dels teus pares i la nostra, just a la frontera de l'estat, on hi havia aquella braseria? Blytheville. Ta mare en deia *Blåtval* (no havia pensat que ells da fet parlaven així, amb las as molt obertas, com si duguessin una anorma patata ficada a la boca) i els vam deixar fer fotos, les primeres: cremats pel flaix, mostrant les dents amb un somrís de sòmines, amb els llums llampants dels neons de carretera cridaners al fons.

El metge va dir, Aquesta, pren-te-la un cop al dia al matí durant tres dies, i després te'n prens el doble, i d'aquesta pren-ne fins a tres quan sentis que el cor se't comença a desbocar. El metge va dir, Tens l'edat justa perquè es manifesti aquest tipus de fòbia.

\* \* \*

El detonant, vaig dir a la mare, va tenir lloc a casa. Tant era on paraves quan la llum es feia groga: jo sentia el tremolor de les finestres, l'aire que es refredava i ho veia clar. Estaves destrossat, enforcat d'una banda del Lincoln, amb el cap encastat a la teranyina del parabrisa, aixafat per un soc asclat i feixuc. Quan arribaves a casa, estava amagada a l'armari que havia buidat per a les teves coses.

Ma mare va dir, Les al·lucinacions són preocupants, ho reconec. Tot i això, també va dir, Ara, saps què? A mi també em passava. Va parlar de volar: de com un dia estava en pau amb la idea que els núvols se l'enduguessin en un objecte de massa tan desconcertant i l'endemà, pel que semblava, als seus ulls

each found his own, and passenger-by-passenger the space was lit once more. She tried to breathe. Then, a growing scream from the engines. A violent forward thrust. A drop of the stomach, and they were heaven-bound.

She grasped a stranger's hand as wheels departed that first inch from solid ground, began counting one hundred and eighty golden seconds with intermittent *mississippis*, ticking off the moments when the likelihood is highest for a plane to fail, to stall, to fall. She sucked in one nostril and pushed out with the other, five, seven, eight, as if her own inflated lungs alone could keep the tin aloft. Her body was improbably, impossibly alive with fear, and for those first ten thousand feet she wailed like a child with his ears stuffed up, and someone asked her, *is this your first time*, and she offered battered passport, and he frowned, and she choked out, *no, this is not my first time flying, but it's the first time I've seen the years ahead*. As the aircraft evened and her rogue consciousness quieted, she drifted off, exhausted, dreaming of her newborn baby girl.

\* \* \*

The inciting incident, I told myself back then, was our first meeting in Seville. Amid the constant, killing scent of orange blossoms, you picked the nylon like a native son, and the regulars played *palmas* to your song, and I saw myself standing, listening there, in that riverside flamenco bar, forever.

The textbooks said: *Lee Krasner was an astraphobe*. The night her husband made *Blue Poles*, whiskey-mad and shattering glass basters on the floor, Lee was curled crying some rooms off in a corner by the bed. She feared the seething ocean storm. Her husband's pained painting would sell for quite a



l'escena havia canviat.

Li va narrar aquella primera visió. En vol nocturn, els llums de la cabina s'anaven apagant per seccions: els dels panells laterals, els dels compartiments superiors. Per un moment es van quedar surant a la foscor, i llavors, davant seu, tot de mans alçades buscant a les palpentres; les aferrades febles i cegues dels qui s'enfonsen al buit, dits i avantbraços de totes mides i colors nedant desesperadament amunt, fins que cadascú va trobar el seu llum i, passatger per passatger, l'espai es va anar il·luminant de nou. Va intentar respirar. Llavors, el crit creixent de les turbines. Una empenta violenta endavant. Una caiguda de l'estómac i tots cap al cel.

Va agafar la mà d'un desconegut mentre les rodes se separaven els primers centímetres de la terra ferma, i va començar a comptar els cent vuitanta segons crítics intercalant-hi *missis-sipis* per controlar més bé el temps, descartant un per un els moments en què la probabilitat que l'avió es calés, que fallés, que caigués, era més alta. Inspirava per un nariu i expirava per l'altre, cinc, set, vuit, com si inflant els pulmons en tingués prou per mantenir aquella ferralla suspesa en l'aire. El seu cos estava improbablement viu, impossiblement viu de por, i durant els primers tres mil metres va plorar com una criatura amb les orelles taponades, i algú li va preguntar És la primera vegada?, i ella va ensenyar el passaport masegat, i ell va arrufar el nas, i ella li va contestar entre ofecs que No, no és el primer cop que volo, però sí que és el primer que veig els anys que em queden per davant. Mentre l'avió s'anivellava i la consciència maliciosa se li calmava, es va adormir, cansada, somiant la seva petita acabada de néixer.

sum, and though no one would ask Lee at auction what it was like that morning after, as the summer sun steamed the rain-soaked sand, and the artist slept while she picked the splinters from his splattered soles, she didn't mind.

Her love for him was so great it might be measured in increments of panic. In units of desperate fear of loss.

\* \* \*

The ending, as they are, is easier to pin. One Saturday, squash in the skillet, wine on our perch, and the wind picked up, and the cautionary chorus began. I scurried in, while you leaned long over the ledge to look, vertigo tugging at your hems, and I cried, *you'll fall!* And you said, *impossible*.

*Let's go to the laundry room*, I said, wanting to bury us in soil and cinderblock, but you had never had a basement. A colossal wave moved across the landscape extinguishing the streetlamps one by one, and you were on the bow of the balcony, wind-whipped, wet, in rapture. Surrounding you your hand-sown garden: your little pets, which I'd tethered in their pots for days like these, bent and snapped and sacrificed themselves, but you refused to yield. I saw the shivering panes burst inward, on the carpet, tiny tempered crystals like bobbing man o' wars. I cried knees to chin in a corner of the kitchen, *come in*, I begged, *come in, close the door*, and I saw you sucked away.

Impossible, and the next day the tulips bloomed.

Before they'd have the chance to wither with the swampy summer's heat I'd evacuate back to the coast. Charcoal clouds and red lightning spoke the tongue I'd been brought up in, and that fall I'd watch from my fire escape five stories up as a

\* \* \*

El detonant, em vaig dir llavors, va ser la nostra primera trobada a Sevilla. Enmig de l'aroma brutal, persistent, de tarongina, polsaves les cordes com un nadiu i els parroquians t'acompanyaven amb palmes, i jo em vaig veure allà dreta, escoltant, en aquell bar flamenc de la riba, per sempre.

Els llibres de text deien: Lee Krasner era brontofòbica. La nit que el seu home va pintar *Blue Poles*, boig de whisky i rebotent pipetes de vidre contra el terra, ella plorava a l'altra punta de la casa, arraulida en una cantonada, a la vora del llit. L'espantava la fúria de la tempesta oceànica. La tela torturada del seu marit es vendria per una bona suma i, encara que ningú no li preguntaria a cap subhasta com havia anat el matí següent, quan el sol de l'estiu arrencava vapor de la sorra xopa i l'artista dormia mentre ella li treia les esberles de les soles esquitxades, a ella tant li feia.

L'amor que li tenia era tan gran que es podia mesurar en graus de pànic. En unitats de por desesperada davant la pèrdua.

\* \* \*

El final, com sol passar, és més fàcil de veure. Un dissabte—fent un vi a la terrassa, carabassa a la paella—el vent va agafar força i les alarmes d'advertència van començar a cridar a l'uníson. Vaig córrer a amagar-me a dins mentre tu t'abocaves per la finestra per mirar-t'ho, el vertigen tibant-te les vores de la roba, i jo et vaig xisclar, Cauràs! i tu em vas contestar, Impossible.

Baixem al safareig, vaig dir, volent enterrar-nos sota terra i ciment, però tu no havies tingut mai soterrani. Una onada

hurricane rolled in on the low-hanging city sky.

\* \* \*

Yesterday I pulled up the *Post-Dispatch* to check some local score. The front page bore the story: Man Falls to Death from High Rise. Sure enough, twenty-third floor, he fell, not jumped, on a twister's day, from our building on the west end of the park. The white-haired doorman who would say *good morning* at any time of night was the one who found him, and I wanted to call and tell you it was possible, that he might have found you too, splintered like so much broken glass.

colossal travessava el paisatge apagant els fanals d'un en un, i tu eres a la proa del balcó, xarbotat pel vent, xop, en èxtasi. Al teu voltant, el teu jardí plantat a mà: els teus petitons, que jo havia assegurat als seus testos per a dies com aquell, es corbaven i cruixien i se sacrificaven, però tu no volies cedir. Vaig veure com les finestres tremoloses rebentaven cap endins sobre la catifa, petits vidres trempats com meduses verinoses basculant amb l'aigua. Plorava cargolada a la cantonada de la cuina, Entra, et suplicava, Entra, tanca la porta, i vaig veure com se t'empassava.

Impossible: i l'endemà les tulipes van florir.

Abans que es marcissin amb la calor fangosa de l'estiu jo ja havia fugit a la costa. Els núvols negres i els llamps vermells parlaven la llengua amb què em van criar, i aquella tardor, de l'escala d'incendis del meu cinquè, vaig veure passar un huracà pel cel opressiu de la ciutat.

\* \* \*

Ahir em vaig connectar al *Post-Dispatch*, el nostre diari d'aquella època, per veure els resultats dels partits. La notícia apareixia en portada: Un home mor en caure d'un gratacels. Ja ho pots ben dir, que havia de ser un gratacels: d'un vint-i-dosè va caure, no saltar, del nostre edifici a l'extrem oest del parc, en un dia de tornado. El porter de blens blancs que et deia bon dia a tota hora de la nit va ser qui el va trobar, i jo volia trucar-te i dir-te que no ho era, d'impossible: que també t'hauria pogut trobar a tu, fet miques, com tot aquell munt de vidre esberlat.

# MARTA CARNICERO HERNANZ

## ELS PETITS DETALLS ODIOSOS

[Extracte]

### I.

Al principi no vaig voler preguntar res. Ja és fort que et truqui una germana que no tenies per dir-te que ton pare et vol veure abans que sigui tard. ¿Quina mena d'insensible es preocupa per saber qui li ha donat el telèfon? És el tipus de detall sense importància que pot tenir-te capficada la tarda sencera. Si era tan fàcil de localitzar per què no m'ha trucat abans, et repeteixes. No pas ella, la germana que no tenies, sinó ell, el pare que tampoc tenies. Quinze anys abans, posem per cas. Vint-i-un, per anar bé.

Jo odiava el pare i el vaig odiar encara més quan vaig saber que havia estimat una altra filla. Amb la Núria, ho reconec, vaig gastar la fredor que reservo a les telefonistes que interrompen el sopar preguntant pel cap de família amb veu melosa. Li vaig dir que ho lamentava però que el meu pare es deia Clément, si és que per pare entenem l'home que hi és quan el necessites i no quan et necessita ell a tu. Vaig sentir el silenci a l'altra banda (ara sé que era un silenci d'hospital, de passadís il·luminat per fluorescents després que marxi l'última visita) i un sospir que no podria precisar si va ser un sospir o l'ofec d'un sanglot. Recordo haver pensat que no tenia dret a ser cruel amb algú de qui cinc minuts abans desconeixia l'existència. Em vaig acomiadar tan amablement com vaig saber i vaig tornar a engegar la ràdio. No eren ni les nou, però l'incident

translation by Alicia Maria Meier

## THE LITTLE LOATHSOME DETAILS

[Excerpt]

### I.

At first I didn't want to ask. It's enough of a shock when a sister you didn't have calls to tell you that your father wants to see you before it's too late. How heartless do you have to be to worry about who gave the girl your number? But it's the sort of unimportant detail that will gnaw at you all afternoon. *If I was so easy to reach*, you'll wonder incessantly, *why did I never get a call before?* Not from her, the sister you didn't have, but from him, the father you didn't have either. Fifteen years ago, say. Or better, twenty-one.

I had hated my father for years, and my hatred only deepened when I learned that he had loved another daughter. I'll admit I treated Núria with the sort of iciness I normally reserved for telemarketers who interrupt dinner, asking for the head of the household in their sickly-sweet tones. I told her that I was sorry, but that my father was a man named Clément, if we could agree that by the term father one traditionally meant the sort of man who was there when you needed him and not just when he needed you. On the other end of the line I heard silence (a silence I now know was that of a hospital, of those fluorescent-lit halls long after the last visitor has left), and a sigh that could as well have been a sigh as a choked-back sob. I remember thinking I had no right to be so cruel to someone whom five minutes earlier I hadn't

tenia regust de sotrac telefònic rebentant la matinada.

El telèfon va tornar a sonar. Em va saltar el cor pensant en l'Éric: cada cop que sonava el telèfon em vessava alguna cosa per dins i me l'imaginava a l'altra banda, i llavors em deia Ara sí i pensava que havia arribat el moment i que tot estava a punt de canviar. Encara em passa avui; ho reconec. De seguida vaig veure que les trucades havien anat massa seguides perquè no fos la Núria tornant de nou a la càrrega. Em convenia mantenir-me ferma. Li diria que ho sentia, que no podia fer res per ella, que fes el favor d'estalviar-se la insistència.

No era la meva germana qui trucava, sinó l'última persona que m'hauria imaginat donant-li meu telèfon, o potser l'única que l'hi podia haver donat.

¿Mama? Tot just entro al pàrquing...¿Va bé si et truco en deu minuts?

## II.

El vespre en què la Núria va trucar, feia tres mesos (setze setmanes, per ser exactes) que ho havíem deixat estar. Amb l'Éric, vull dir. Vaig ser jo; aquesta és la definitiva. La mare no en sap res, encara: detectar un rastre de llàstima a les seves paraules m'acabaria d'ensorrar i ja estic prou fluixa. Sé que hauria de sortir més (ella hi insistiria), però res no m'omple prou com per buscar una cangur que es faci càrrec de la nena un vespre, alguna nit.

No sempre ha estat així, és clar. Sortint del primer fracàs amb l'Éric (ja en van uns quants) no volia dir que no a cap proposta, a cap activitat. Tenia, i tinc encara, pànic de quedar-me sola, de no tenir al costat algú que em refermi en la idea que sóc una dona vàlida, mínimament atractiva, amb un sentit



known existed. I wrapped up the conversation as politely as I could, and turned on the radio. It wasn't even nine, but the call hit me like one that jolts you into waking before dawn.

The phone rang again. My heart leapt at the thought of Éric: every time it rang something welled up inside me, and I would imagine him on the other end of the line, and I would say it's time, and would convince myself that the moment had come at last, that everything was on the verge of change. I'll admit that it still happens to this day. Then I saw that the calls had come too quickly one after the next; it had to be Núria giving it another go. I knew I'd better stay firm. I would tell her that I was sorry, that I couldn't do anything for her, that she should spare herself the trouble of persisting.

It wasn't my sister calling, but the last person I would have imagined might have given her my number—or perhaps the only one who could have.

*Mama? I just pulled into the parking lot. Can I give you a call in ten?*

## II.

The evening Núria called it had been three months (sixteen weeks, to be precise) since we had ended things. Éric and I, I mean. It was me; it was definitive. My mother still doesn't know: I'm still too fragile, and the slightest trace of pity in her words would be enough to make me fall apart. I know I should get out more (she would insist it so), but nothing sounds potentially fulfilling enough to be worth the trouble of finding a sitter to look after the girl for an evening, for a night.

It wasn't always like this, of course. Fresh off my first failure with Éric (there have been a number since) I wouldn't say no

de l'humor prou fi. En aquell temps no concebia que una noia que valgués la pena pogués estar sense parella i la comunitat masculina no se la rifés. Més tard vaig descobrir que estar sola no era una conseqüència, sinó una elecció: si m'ho hagués proposat hauria dormit acompanyada cada nit, però això quedava lluny del que buscava.

Quant a la meva relació amb l'Éric tenia clar que, per afins que fóssim ell i jo, el fet de trobar una parella compatible, algú amb qui arribar a ser raonablement feliç, era només qüestió de probabilitats, i m'ho repetia tant que havia arribat a convertir-ho en un mantra. Dic raonablement feliç perquè veia inviable trobar algú amb qui em pogués entendre tan bé, i perquè la probabilitat de superar en intensitat els bons moments semblava tan minsa que ni perdía el temps a considerar-la.

No és que sigui de les il·luses que creuen que d'entre la població mundial han anat a topar-se amb la seva mitja taronja: amb l'Éric hi havia molts moments que no eren, ni molt menys, per tirar coets. De tant en tant, sense saber ben bé per què, les meves paraules no eren acollides amb l'actitud de sempre. Fruit d'un imprevist o de la frustració perquè les coses no havien sortit com s'esperava, l'humor de l'Éric s'enfosquia i qualsevol detall es convertia en excusa per provocar una bronca que no admetia defensa. Amb una certa pràctica vaig aprendre a veure-les venir com un cel encapotat que s'acosta de lluny. No sempre tenia temps de posar-me a cobert, però amb el temps havia anat fabricant un repertori de recursos que resultava més o menys pràctic: de vegades em feia la tonta, d'altres redoblava l'actitud carinyosa a mesura que ell pujava el to, en certs moments demanava disculpes per coses que no havia fet. La regla d'or era evitar portar-li la contrària o posar en

to any plan or proposition. I was—I still am—panicked at the thought of not having someone at my side to reaffirm my own conviction that I'm a decent woman: at least marginally attractive, humorous enough. In those days it was inconceivable to me that any worthwhile woman wouldn't have already been snatched up. Only later did I discover that to be alone wasn't a consequence but a choice: had I wanted to I could have gone to bed with someone every night, though that was far from what I sought.

Where my relationship with Éric was concerned, I thought it obvious that however well-suited we had been, finding another compatible partner—someone with whom I could be reasonably happy—was no more than a matter of odds, and I repeated this to myself so regularly that it became my mantra. I say reasonably happy, because I thought the likelihood of finding someone else who truly understood me so slim—and because it seemed to me so improbable that I might enjoy any moment with another man more than I once had with him that I didn't waste time considering the thought.

It wasn't as though I was so naïve as to believe that given the entire world population I would just happen upon my other half: with Éric there were plenty of moments that weren't worth writing home about, to say the least. Occasionally—I never knew quite why—my words wouldn't be received as I expected. Some frustration would take him by surprise, some plan would go awry, and his mood would blacken, and any little thing might provoke in him a rage against which he'd allow me no defense. With some practice I learned to spot these moments coming, like storm clouds rolling in on a clear sky. I wasn't always given enough warning to take cover, but over

dubte les seves premisses. I esperar: saber esperar el moment més adequat per plantejar les coses. Tard o d'hora tornava a guanyar-lo l'estat d'eufòria al qual jo estava enganxada, perquè quan ell era feliç jo no podia demanar res més.

### III.

Mirant-ho tot en perspectiva sé que m'hauria d'haver enfadat, però quan la mare em va demanar que m'escoltés la Núria i anés a Barcelona no en tenia motius, encara. Quan finalment vaig conèixer la veritat (vaig descobrir-ho tot a l'hospital i la mare, després, no va saber negar-m'ho) tenia altres raons per preocupar-me, i més tard, quan tot va haver acabat, enfadar-se havia perdut tot el sentit.

Del que va dir aquell dimecres, després que la Núria i jo ens coneguéssim per telèfon recordo, sobretot, haver descobert que la mare havia deixat enrere la rancúnia, com si el temps li hagués mostrat que no hi ha una veritat única, més enllà de la que ens fabriquem per convertir el passat en un espai habitable on poder tornar sense trasbals. Recordo el silenci de la mare abans de deixar caure el veredict. És terminal, va dir, i és el teu pare. Si no vas a Barcelona potser un dia et sabrà greu, Naïma.

### IV.

Un cop vaig sentir dir a la mare que hauria d'existir una paraula especial per referir-se a la traïció d'algú que estimes. La falta, va insistir-hi, mereixeria ser castigada amb una pena diferent, menys justa, perquè algú amb capacitat de fer tant mal no mereix cap mena de justícia. Aquests van ser els pensaments pels quals es va deixar portar durant molts

time I accumulated a repertoire of resources that served well enough: sometimes I played dumb; other times, as his tone grew darker, I'd take my own more dulcet, or beg forgiveness for things I hadn't done. The golden rule was to avoid contradicting him, or doubting his premise. And to wait: to know to wait for the appropriate moment to revisit the issue. Sooner or later he would return to that ecstatic state he'd hooked me with—when he was happy, I could want for nothing more.

### III.

In hindsight, I should have been angry—but when my mother asked that I hear Núria out, that I go to Barcelona, I didn't yet have reason to be. When I finally learned the truth (everything would come to light at the hospital, and my mother, then, would have to stop denying) I was otherwise preoccupied, and later, when everything was said and done, anger had lost all meaning.

What I remember most clearly about my mother's Wednesday call, just after Núria and I had met by phone, was the revelation that she seemed to have no lingering resentment—as though time had shown her that there is no one single truth beyond the one we fabricate to make the past inhabitable, a place we can revisit undisturbed.

I remember how she fell silent before delivering the verdict. *It's terminal*, she said, and *he's your father. You may always regret it if you don't go to Barcelona, Naïma.*

### IV.

I once heard my mother say there should be a special word

anys, i ara sé que el fet que ens acabéssim traslladant a viure a Nantes, on els avis residien per èpoques, va tenir a veure amb la necessitat de fer pagar l'engany al pare. Quan anys després la mare es va sentir prou forta per deixar enrere la rancúnia ja era tard per arreglar res: ell havia acabat resignant-se a les imposicions maternes i jo interpretant la seva absència com a prova d'abandonament. Puc donar fe que el càstig va ser injust perquè jo mateixa en vaig sortir damnificada. És possible que la mare no fos conscient del seu error, que pensés que el pare no estava facultat per estimar-me i que jo en tindria prou amb ella si ella s'abocava prou en mi, com si la ràbia que sentia pel seu exmarit pogués justificar una decisió tan bèstia. Avui diu que es penedeix del que va fer, però sé que continua pensant que no va ser per tant, emparant-se en l'absurditat que deixar d'estimar-la a ella volia dir abandonar-nos a les dues, que mare i filla érem un tot que es pren o es deixa i tu sabràs, Marcel, què et convé més.

Sé, perquè la conec massa, que la mare se sent incòmoda per la meva insistència a buscar explicacions per un fet que considera massa antic, com si l'antiguitat n'hagués de fer prescriure la injustícia. Se'm fa estrany que no s'adoni que el meu sentiment no és tan lluny de la ràbia que ella sentia en descobrir, tot lligant caps (fins i tot anys després de separar-se), l'enèsima evidència de l'engany. No hi fa res que fos una mentida massa antiga, perquè el simple fet de recordar-se confiada, aliena a tot (buscant un vol per escapar-se amb el pare o embolicant *The World of Apples* amb la delectació d'haver trobat el regal just) li encetava l'esòfag com un llimac arrossegant una bava agra. Llavors posava aquella cara que li conec bé i mirava a través de mi amb ulls de no ser-hi, per repetir-me en to d'epifania que

to refer to a betrayal by someone you love. The offense, she insisted, deserved a separate sentence, something less just, because a person with the capacity to do such damage doesn't deserve justice. I carried her words with me for years, and I now understand that our move to Nantes, where my grandparents had lived on and off for years, was her way of punishing my father for his betrayal. When, years later, my mother had grown strong enough again to shed a bit of bitterness, it was too late to make things right: my father had resigned himself to following her maternal directives, and I interpreted his absence as evidence of abandonment. I can attest that the sentence was far from just, because I was the one who felt the damage. It's possible my mother wasn't conscious of her error, that she truly believed that my father wasn't capable of loving me, that her love alone would be enough if she could just shower me with enough of it—as if the fury she felt towards her ex-husband could justify such a recklessly disproportionate reaction. Today she swears that she regrets what she did, but I know she still thinks that it was not for naught. She still hides behind the absurd notion that my father giving up on loving her meant giving up on both of us, that mother and child were a single unit one could take or leave, *and you know, Marcel, which you should do.*

I know, because I know her well, that my mother is uncomfortable with my persistent search for explanations for something that happened *so long ago*, as if there were a statute of limitations on injustice. It baffles me that she can't understand that what I feel is not so far from the anger she once felt at discovering the umpteenth deception, connecting all the dots even years after the separation. It didn't matter

el ridícul més terrible, Ima, és el que es fa sense saber-ho. Si et quedaves en silenci i feies atenció, quasi podies sentir com se li escapava la consciència per refugiar-se en un algun lloc del seu passat remot. La mare s'instal·lava en la memòria com en una fonda antiga de províncies, i abandonava el cos a la intempèrie, allà mateix, com una soca morta.

## V.

Molts cops m'he preguntat fins a quin punt l'Éric sortia deliberadament a buscar brega, si era conscient que havia d'aferrar-se a detalls estúpids (un verb mal triat, un adjectiu!) per justificar un mal humor que venia d'abans; si arribava a creure realment, com assegurava, en la presumpta càrrega ofensiva continguda en les meves paraules. El to que gastava en despenjar el telèfon era un indicatiu de l'estat de la qüestió i servia d'alerta a l'hora d'anar amb peus de plom; la broma que un dia feia gràcia l'endemà era motiu de contrarietat. Davant d'aquella situació l'única sortida era fugir, penjar el telèfon amb qualsevol excusa abans no arribés la sang al riu i esperar que passessin les hores. L'endemà era com si l'ofensa s'hagués esvaït o no hagués existit mai, i de vegades fins i tot demanava disculpes per la seva reacció. El problema eren les converses en persona, de les quals no podia fugir sense deixar-lo plantat perquè ell ho hauria vist com una ofensa: periòdicament, davant la seva insistència, queia en l'error de mirar de raonar-hi, de voler justificar les meves paraules per demostrar que eren als antípodes de la intenció que ell els atribuïa. Dic error perquè durant la conversa no em deixava acabar ni una frase, i jo m'anava posant nerviosa fins que em costava respirar i només sabia aflluixar la pressió plorant. Intueixo que l'Éric



that the lie was *so long ago*, because every memory of foolish confidence (of searching for a flight to run off with my father, or wrapping up *The World of Apples* with delight at having found the perfect gift) would cause a rising in her throat like the sour trail of slime left by a slug. Her face would set in a familiar way, and she'd look straight past me with a faraway gaze, as she repeated as though it were epiphany that *the most terrible humiliations, Ima, are the ones we unwittingly bring upon ourselves*. If you kept quiet and paid close attention, you could almost feel her slipping out of consciousness, taking refuge somewhere in her remote past. My mother would install herself in her memory as though it were an old provincial inn, and leave her body behind, right before you in the open air, like a dead stump.

## V.

I've wondered many times to what extent Éric picked his fights deliberately—whether he was conscious of his need to cling to those stupid details (a poorly chosen verb, an adjective!) to justify a preexisting bad mood, or if he truly believed, as he always claimed, in the alleged offense of whatever I had said. His tone when answering the phone was always indicative of the state of things, and warned me when I should proceed with caution: the joke that had been funny just a day before the next became a cause for conflict. The only way out when this happened was to flee—to find any excuse to hang up before things got out of hand and then to wait it out. The next day the transgression would have vanished as if it had never been at all, and sometimes he would even apologize for his reaction. Conversing face-to-face was the real problem.

coneixia massa bé la intenció real del que li havia dit, però acceptar-ho hagués frustrat una discussió que per ell era necessària en aquell precís moment. Necessitava treure aquella ira acumulada i sabia que jo seria allà, provant d'entendre'l, mirant de donar a la situació la importància que ell hi volia veure sense adonar-me que tot plegat només tenia a veure amb l'estat d'ànim de l'Éric, per a qui un dia el món era una merda i l'endemà un lloc que has de venir a conèixer.

Tot això era fa temps, quan encara no hi havia la Camille. Ara necessito una estabilitat que abans podia permetre'm no tenir. Últimament, però, torno a pensar massa en l'Éric, i el pitjor és que el record dels mals moments s'ha començat a esvaïr. De tot plegat només n'he parlat amb la Steffi, a qui truco quan el pes a l'estómac es fa tan fort que necessito plorar, o preguntar-me com he arribat fins aquí, o totes dues coses. A la nit em fico al llit així que la Camille s'adorm. De vegades estic tan cansada que avanço l'hora de sopar i abaixo les persianes. És hora d'anar a dormir, li dic. Qualsevol diria que tracto la meva filla com si fos un canari, pobreta.

Tot seria diferent si la Camille dormís fins l'endemà d'una tirada, suposo. Cada nit, quan es desperta, em desvetllo i torno a caure en el mateix error. L'endemà estic baldada, és clar. En Bruno repeteix que tot això no m'ajuda. No és ell qui ho diu, de fet: la seva feina consisteix a fer preguntes. És increïble fins a quin punt explicar la vida a un desconegut serveix per posar en ordre les idees. És ell qui m'ha demanat que escrigui perquè ho faig, què hi veig, què busco en les meves evasions nocturnes. O potser no ha estat ell sinó jo, que he decidit seure a posar-ho en paraules, perquè escriure, quan es tracta de mirar de posar ordre, m'ajuda més encara que parlar.

I couldn't flee and strand him there without it being seen as an affront. Periodically, barraged by his insistence, I would make the mistake of trying to reason with him—of trying to show him that his words were diametrically opposed to the intent he was claiming to assign them. I say mistake, because he wouldn't even let me finish a sentence, and I would get so nervous that I couldn't catch my breath, and would relieve the pressure in the only way that I knew how: by breaking down in tears. I'm afraid that Éric knew too well exactly what his words meant, but to accept this would undermine the argument he so needed at that moment. He needed to release his pent-up anger, and knew that I would be there, trying to understand him, trying to treat the situation with the weight he wanted, without realizing that all of this for him was just a matter of his mood: in Éric's eyes one day the world was shit, and the next it was nirvana.

All of this was long ago, long before Camille. Now I need a sort of stability that in those days I could afford to go without. Lately, though, I've been giving Éric too much thought again, and the worst of it is that my memories of the bad times have begun to fade. I've told only Steffi, whom I call whenever the knots in my stomach grow so tight I need to cry, or when I'm wondering how I wound up where I am—or both. At night, I go to bed when Camille does. Some days I'm so tired that I serve her dinner early, then draw all the blinds. *Time for bed*, I tell her. Someone looking in might say I'm treating my daughter like a canary. Poor thing.

Everything would be different if she slept through the night, I suppose. Every night when she awakens I awaken too, and commit the same mistake. The next day, of course,

Pel que fa a les preguntes del Bruno tinc clar que no, que no m'ajuda, però conèixer la teoria no implica tenir capacitats per portar-la a la pràctica. Cada nit, després de donar un biberó a la Camille i deixar-la al bressol amb bolquers nets, encenc l'ordinador i hi torno.

\* \* \*

BRUNO1.doc. El primer cop va ser Noto. Recordava els carrers empedrats d'una ciutat colossal perduda al sud de Siracusa, les façanes habitades pels coloms sota un blau impossible, els vents atàvics envolant les plomes entre carreus definitius tallats en pedra tosca. I la noció vaga, o potser la convicció, d'haver estat feliç amb l'Éric resseguint amb els dits les rues de la pedra, sentint al palmell la tebior quasi humana de murs i escalinates abandonats al sol, abraçant columnes d'una catedral antiga gastada per vents amb la paciència dels segles.

La memòria és l'exemple de la mentida perfecta: no hi ha un sol cotxe al record d'aquells carrers costeruts que ens duïen, de baixada, cap a un horitzó blavós. Destriem els records que volem conservar i els fabriquem a mida, els matisem per llimar-ne els cantells esmolats i fer-los assumibles, els convertim en còdols que ens omplen les butxaques amb el pes dels anys. En portem alguns tancats als punys com un tresor d'infantesa. Ens enganyem. Als meus records l'enyorança pel pare és tolerable i fins i tot deixa un regust dolç de nostàlgia. Els moments dolorosos amb l'Éric ja no hi són, com el seu rastre al pijama que no he volgut rentar i conservo encara sota el coixí. És potser per això que visc en el passat, que torno cada nit a l'escenari intacte d'una felicitat recordada. Camino

I'm wrecked. Bruno always tells me this is doing me no good. Though in fact he doesn't say it: his job is to ask questions. It's incredible the degree to which explaining your life to a stranger can tidy up your mind. It was Bruno who asked me to record what I do, what I see, what I look for in my nocturnal flights. Or perhaps it wasn't him but me: perhaps I decided to sit down and put them into words, because writing is of much more use than talking when it comes to finding order in my life.

Regarding Bruno's questions: I know, of course, that this is doing me no good, but familiarity with an idea doesn't necessarily imply that you can put it into practice. Every night after giving Camille her bottle and leaving her freshly changed in the crib, I start up the computer, and return to it.

\* \* \*

BRUNO1.doc. The first time it was Noto. I remember the streets of that colossal lost city south of Syracuse, the facades dotted with doves beneath an impossible blue, the primeval winds sending feathers flying along pumice-cobbled alleys. And the vague sensation, or perhaps conviction, of having been happy with Éric, tracing the pathways in the stone with my fingers, feeling with my palms the almost human warmth of sunbaked walls and stairways, embracing the columns of an old cathedral wind-worn with the persistence of centuries.

Memory is the perfect lie: there's not a single car in my recollections of those steep streets that carried us downhill towards a sapphire horizon. We choose the memories we want to keep and tailor them to taste; we file down their sharpest edges and turn them into pebbles; we stuff them in our

carrer avall sota mènsules de pedra i reixats, recorro murs conventuals i esglésies massa grans com per ser omplertes. Sento el repic prehistòric dels campanars anunciant l'arribada d'un capvespre que no vindrà mai, perquè el cel de Noto, a Google, té sempre el mateix to de blau i la llum, calculo, és llum de mitja tarda. Ni rastre, doncs, del cel de civilització perduda, com d'incendi o de volcà, que tinc a la memòria. Ni rastre del cel de realisme màgic ni dels pagesos assenyalant el núvol cendrós amb l'emoció filtrada pel costum. Ni rastre de les plomes, com si les quatre nonnas del poble haguessin sortit a escombrar-les en previsió del pas dels senyors de l'street view i el seu cotxe futurista i estiguessin esperant, atrapades en un plec del temps, l'arribada del capvespre per tornar a apujar persianes.

Ni rastre de l'Éric, tampoc. O potser només el rastre.

pockets to fill them with the weight of time. Some of them we carry around in our closed fists like a childhood treasure. We fool ourselves.

In my memories, my longing for my father is tolerable, even leaves a sweet nostalgic aftertaste. The painful moments with Éric cease to exist, like his scent on the pajamas that I haven't brought myself to launder and still keep beneath my pillow. Perhaps this is why I live in the past, why each night I return to the intact scenes of remembered happiness. I stroll down the street under stone corbels and wrought-iron fences; I wander along convent walls and past churches too large to ever fill. I hear the prehistoric ringing of the bells announcing an evening that will never come, because the sky in Noto, should you Google it, is always the same shade of blue, and the light, I'd say, is the light of mid-afternoon. Not a trace, then, of the sky of lost civilization, like a fire or volcano, that I remember. Not a trace of the magical-realist sky, nor of the farmers pointing at the cloud of ash, reacting as by habit. Not a trace of the feathers, as if the *nonnas* of the village have swept them up in anticipation of the street-view team and their futuristic vehicle, and now remain, trapped in a fold of time, waiting for nightfall so they can raise the blinds again.

No trace of Éric, either. Or maybe just a trace.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND TRANSLATORS



SCOTT SHANAHAN is a New York-based translator of Catalan and Spanish, currently at work on a collection of surreal prose poetry by acclaimed Catalan writer Mercè Rodoreda. His recent readerly interests include stories about the intersection of community and social class, not least because he's now writing one himself.

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AINA BARALDÉS I SALAET studied Translation and Interpretation Studies at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She finished her degree online from the United States, where she worked as an au pair. She then completed graduate studies in Creative Writing and Publishing. She is currently coordinating a children's book imprint at Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial.

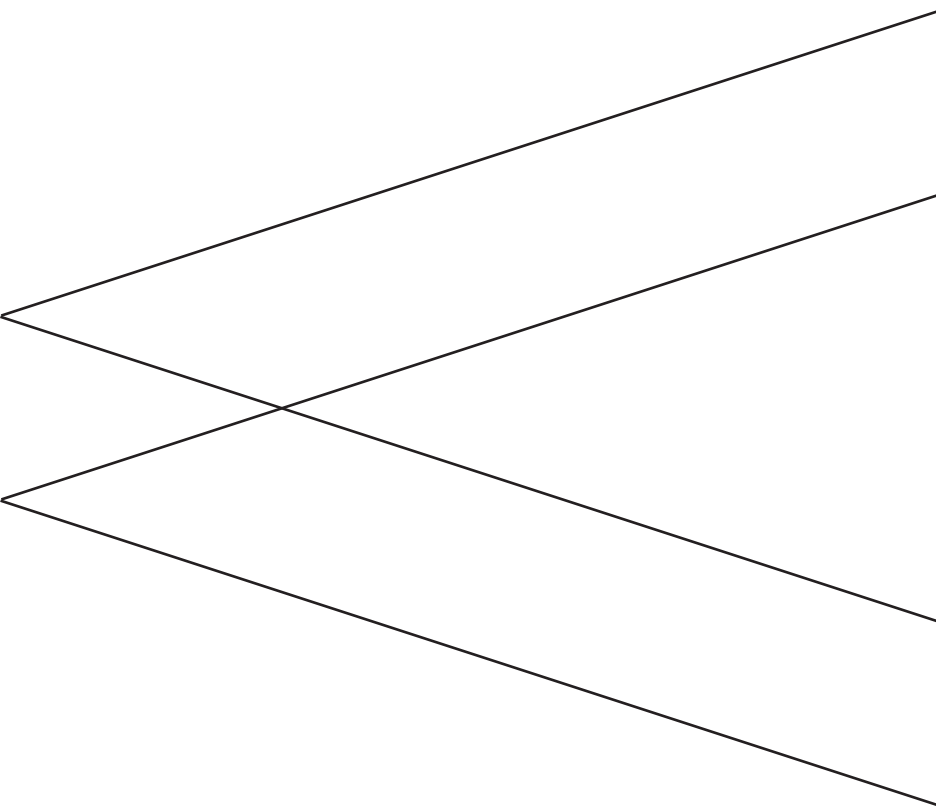
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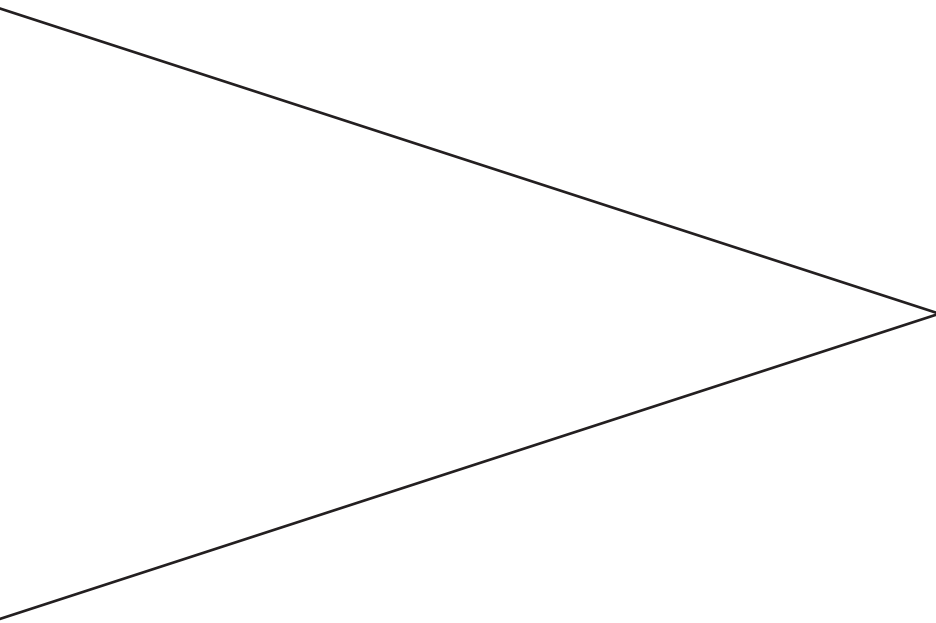
ALICIA MARIA MEIER studied photography and design at Washington University in St. Louis and ELISAVA School of Design in Barcelona, and writes primarily on visual arts. She earned her M.F.A. in Nonfiction Writing and Literary Translation from Columbia University in 2015, and is currently at work on a book about the impact Barcelona's tourist industry has had on the city's visual landscape and on the region's independence cause.

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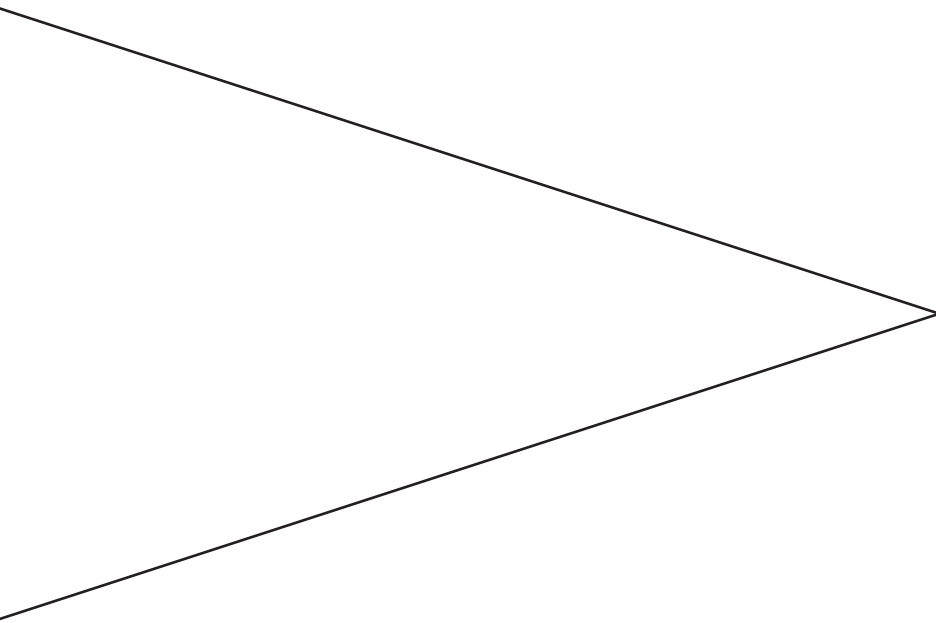
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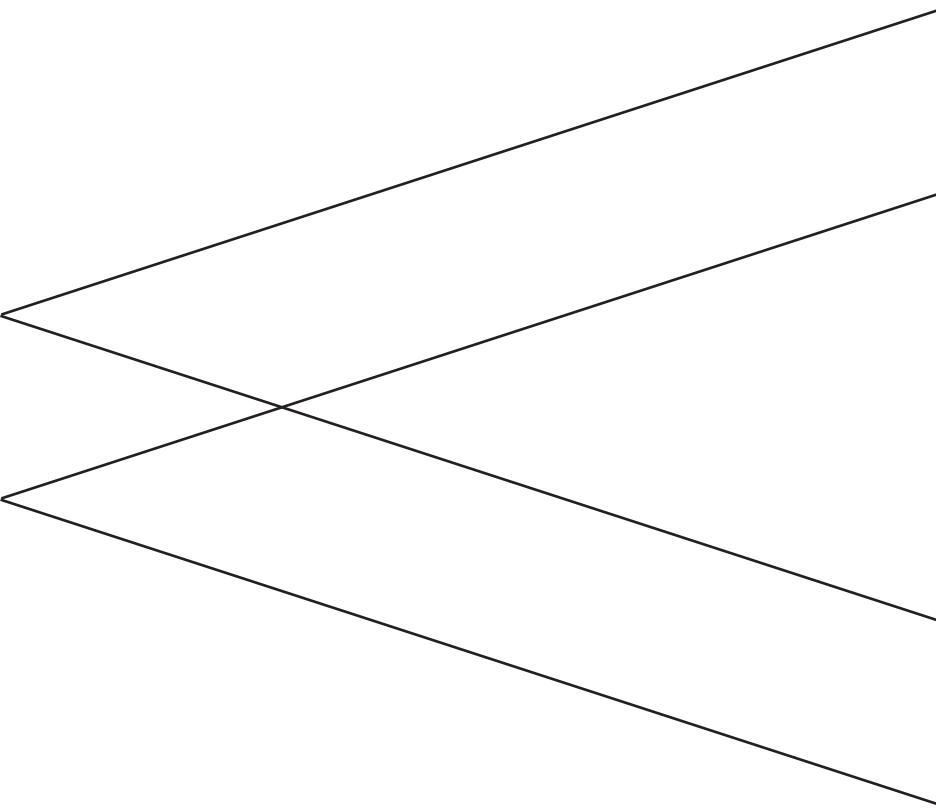
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Ugly Duckling Presse







**PARTICIPATING  
INSTITUTIONS**

The Master of Fine Arts Writing Program of 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 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 B.A. in Creative Writing, focusing on poetry, prose, and drama, an M.A. 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 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, bookshops, publishers, and festivals throughout Italy and Europe.

The Màster en Creació Literària at the UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA—IDEC seeks to build a relationship between the creative activity of current authors and high-level academia, enhancing the education of writers. The essential intention of the Master is for participants to develop their ability to write original texts in one of the key genres of contemporary creation, in addition to acquiring knowledge about general literary issues, learning to judge both their own works as well as others from different periods, and preparing for the first stages of practical experience in the professional sphere.

The INSTITUT RAMON LLULL is a public body founded with the purpose of promoting Catalan language studies at universities abroad, the translation of literature and thought written in Catalan, and Catalan cultural production in other areas like theatre, film, circus, dance, music, the visual arts, design and architecture.

Founded in Barcelona in 2009 by Dutch writer and arts patron Han Nefkens, the FUNDACIÓ HAN NEFKENS seeks to stimulate artistic creation in Barcelona by providing support to international artists creating and collaborating on artwork in the city.

