

Ann Cotten

Regret / I fear to thoroughly consider

While you work yourself slowly toward your bed
and gather all your guts to make the jump
from wheelchair to bedside, and scootch your self-sideways
until your hand reaches the thing to pull you up—

(I've noticed you're at pains to lift your arm
above your shoulder, even to lift a thing
as light as the postcards of damaged flesh
of flowers you have been collecting)

—the train I'm in sways through the misty alps
of Semmering, where you will roam no more.
We pass Gloggnitz and Wiener Neustadt, where you've surely hiked

and countless names you may never consider
as candidates for missing or regretting,
whilst I'm still open, ready for delights unknown.

In this, remembering the things you've shown me
sinks through the gel of time as a rewarding treat
nourishing me, like anything that anyone can eat

It's not as if I'm guilty to prefer
small new delights, even the fifteen minutes in the park
talking with gerd through his hungover mind

to keeping strictly to visits that I promised you.
But as I now sit in the train away from you, I see,
though you live only in the moment nowadays,
—your mind an intrepid butterfly, remembering a person's life who could
have been you—
it's not impossible you might have been waiting for me;

you might have told your help to let you sit,
as someone's coming still who will help you to bed.

She didn't come, talked in the park with someone else, instead.
So you must move yourself now. Bit by bit.

FT

A lack of pricing power

China exports plunge

| | Sarah Gordon:

the aggressive selling of payment protection insurance in the UK

the owners of Carillon paid themselves large dividends well aware that small suppliers would go bankrupt if the contractor failed.

Overpriced and overleveraged like the takeover of UK's airports by Spain's Ferrovial in 2006,

derailed by personal acrimony, like the \$22 bn Facebook-WhatsApp deal that closed in 2014

or dangerously ludistic like the €71 bn acquisition of ABN Ammo by RBG and two other European funds/sals in 2007

Calculating a deal premium has always been a dark art...
...most companies are run pretty badly

単位 たんい unit

取得 しゅとく acquisition

満期 まんき full maturity expiration

Trees

*Trees, I don't mean to
step on your roots, it's just
they give me some hold.*

I'm ionic, a tourist, wherever I go,
they call it Neugier,
greed for the new, but it's not like that.
my grandma said guests are like fish, they smell
after three days,
an Iowan stance—you don't seem
to know what to do with 'em—
I never got to know her well.

She said, wear your clothes loose, it's sexier
and she was buying us clothes at a trash chain
child labour on the other end of the line
I was embarrassed
got an oversize sky-blue T-shirt
I didn't understand but wore
wore
wore

Nor do I know now
what I wear.
You put on stuff.

You—Hegel says
Hegel says, you is sometimes you and sometimes it's me—
Someone hands you something,
says put it on,
you put it on,
and live in their eyes.
Somebody turns on the music, you dance
like a boat
like a boat builder building a boat (cause you know what to do)?
No, like a navigator,
supplied with a boat, and with stars. Sure I'll nail,
I'll rub and polish with the rest,
but show me where, show me what
point me in the right direction. I want to pull
if I don't pull, I'll fall,
I'll wither in the ground.

Is it you pull, or I pull? I forgot.
Where is the music? Coming from? I forgot.

But when my check hits the concrete,
something remembers. It's not like it doesn't matter.

Go into the ocean and coming out,
those are the moments, the lon yawns, and the cosmos blinks,
and it jolts.
Enter the work, I say, and stay there
平気, waist-deep in the mud channels
between the kalo, or in my laptop, up over my forehead in docs.
Up and over, is the title of one of them,
a paper on a way of singing of a group of people.

Enter the work, I say, and stay there
—in your laptop, yes—cursor blinking
hold up the torch among the files, like a sullen
cellar full of bottles, labeled in the heat of moments
Meant to get lost, meant to be spit out again,
shipwrecked, as it were, on a plane,
of calm, on the sandy Loss that used to be a sea

where the white wine is now in your heart and it is

bottled, green, narrow, spinning

on the sandy Löss that used to be your future,
is now your past, spinning
on your heart like a manta ray, a soft mantle,
a frown that are ears.

Wherever I go, I am Eeyore, am a tourist, am a stone on a leash,
it looks like it anyway, from the depths of my heart
I peer as from a well, from my mud-coloured eyes,
all I do is see.

I'd like to be a sponge, full of nothing, soft to lie on,
but I'm all elbows. I would clean windows,
as soft leather, or a line of rubber, gliding, close and
gone; but I break them.

As a demon, I stop reading, I go away and go away from there,
I mess up cooking by looking at it.

So I started to learn to look out of the corners of my eyes,
head bowed, always in the shade. And as I wound about,
I know where things are,
they take the place of my mind,
curve by curve,

and speed up in the shallows.

Trees, I don't mean to
tread on your roots, it's just they
're there,
like
I am
Drawing what I need to know

Velibor Čolić

A Manual for Exiles (excerpt from the novel)

1

I am twenty-eight years old and have arrived in Rennes equipped with just three words of French: Jean, Paul and Sartre. I also have my soldier's service book, fifty German marks, a pen and a great big, tattered olive green suitcase made in Yugoslavia. It contains little: a manuscript, a few socks, a lump of soap (evoking a dead frog), a photograph of Emily Dickinson, a shirt and a half (to my mind, a shirt with short arms is only half a shirt), a rosary, two (blank) postcards of Zagreb and a toothbrush. It's late summer 1992 yet I am dressed as if I'm striking out for the North Pole: I am wearing two jackets from another time and a long scarf, ragged suede boots, battered by rain and wind. Naked in the saddle, I am a traveller whose face has been carved out by a metaphysical cold, by that last stage of loneliness, exhaustion and woe. Without feelings, without fear and without shame.

By the train station in Rennes I set down my suitcase and long contemplate my new homeland.

I mumble a stupid and childish accusation, though I know that words cannot erase a thing, that my language is now meaningless, that I am far away, that this *being far away* has become my homeland and fate... It seems as if I have sunk into some underwater universe, where every gesture, movement and word is devoured by a horrifying silence. Like dreams from which you can't awaken; like a curious dance between two divided worlds. I pick up my suitcase and head out into the street. I walk slowly, like I'm on a Sunday stroll. There's nothing to rush for. In less tragic circumstances I might feel free as a hobo. But now I'm just in search of a park and a bench on which I can rest and reflect on where I can spend my first night in Rennes. The park's path under my feet is white and it seems like I'm walking on featherdown. This fine summer afternoon sees the path edged with beautiful white flowers, Queen Anne's lace. As I sit there, I sense that the skies are readying for a proper rain. There aren't many clouds, the sky is still blue, unremarkable, the wind tame, but I still sense that the good God is stirring his cauldron, preparing a cold shower to bid me welcome. Parc de Tanneurs is quiet. The trees' lengthy shadows form stunning arabesques at my feet, like newly awakened pictures dancing before my eyes. I try to make some sense out of them. I am seeking the almighty where He's bound to be found—in nature, as if even that old bearded one were conjured up in this fleeting moment of sublime stillness. Death, of course, is what I'm thinking about. But just a little, as little as can be. To get over my fear, for weeks I have been accustoming myself to a simple, most unphilosophical thought: soon, all of this will be over and there will be total darkness. Memory has been erased. I imagine this void as a silent place somewhere among the heavens and the plane leaves rustling in the wind. I smoke and when the first drops fall everything becomes clear. I no longer feel the bench, much less anger or sadness.

The drops clomp like soldiers on the march. It seems as if they are belabouredly dragging the souls of the dead behind them. The drops draw wet roses on the asphalt and they collect in the mirror of repeating puddles. Then the rain begins to play with the empty cans and plastic bags. There's something palpable in them, like in the eyes of a drunken woman afflicted by insomnia. I am no longer afraid, but neither am I bursting with courage. Under the trees, I listen to the rain. No illusions.

A soldier is what I am. I can smell a human corpse a mile away, I know that a stomach wound is the worst of wounds, and that all the dead have the waxy, peaceful guise of the passing. In the trenches I do not wear a helmet. I tremble constantly, swallow my vomit, write epitaphs to the homeland, a Bosnian flag on my sleeve. My fellow soldiers say, "Isn't he a good Croat? This guy who's all for Bosnia..." A soldier is what I am. Drunk at night, I sing lovely, sad ballads with my fellow fighters and dream of becoming something else, anything else – an ant, a tree, a bird, a snake. I dream of no longer being human. In vain. A soldier is what I am. I have my Kalashnikov, my worthless body, a book of Emily Dickinson, and a war diary with the prayer of St. Augustine scrupulously copied in capital letters.

I am afraid. I get through the eight hours in the trenches with a torturous, cold ball in my stomach. I shoot at an invisible enemy, and then I swallow my vomit, and imagine I am somewhere else, anywhere else. The more hopeless my position, the sweeter my dreams. I dream of silk covering bodies and I give them new silhouettes, I dream of the sky and the sea, of salty Dubrovnik mornings and of snow, the featherdown of my childhood that each year between both Christmases, the Catholic and the Orthodox, dusts our hills.

I dream of trains, of kisses and of the prettiest girls from high school.

I imagine that in this world and the bottomless time I am as simple as a tree or a stone. I envision that I am the lord of the ants and the flies, the commander of the clouds; every time I go into the trench, I call them into line and tell them they should immediately leave our sky and seek out another, a calmer, a more lucid, blue. What I target I am. My head, feet and body are often in the Serbian snipers' line of sight. Why do they not shoot at me? I am no trophy, my life after all is worth less than a black-market bullet.

I know that I am nothing to anybody. Not even a man. I am but a shadow among shadows.

After a long journey across sleeping Europe I make it to France. I have crossed Croatia, Slovenia, Austria and newly united Germany. I have crossed the shameful silence and indifference of the world, the starry nights and the dewy mornings, the villages and the long paths by the heat-softened highways. I look behind the restful Iron Curtain, whose fashions and architecture are still on display. At a gas station in Austria I break down in tears, snivelling by a brick wall, under a neon light, to a lame and inane melody that is whispering *moonlight shadow, moonlight shadow*, as if I need reminding that I have reached the end of my first life. As the second act, the act of exile begins, foretelling a long stretch of suppressed emotions. A weighty, cold and grown-up time.

All quiet on the western front, I say to myself, one border after another. Police and customs, customs and police.

I sit on that bench in Rennes. Tepid, blessed water pours down. Gradually I grasp that I am a refugee. A person without papers and without a face, without a present and without a future. A person whose steps are heavy and whose body is broken, a flower of evil, unearthly, and dispersed like pollen. I no longer have a name, I am neither great nor big nor small, neither son nor brother. I am a dog soaked in oblivion in a long night without a morning, a scar on the face of the world.

I am a refugee.

Today and tomorrow.
Here or elsewhere.
In rain and sun, in summer as in winter. Before men and women.
Before the wise and the crazy, among the trees and in the grass. In the town
as in the village.
I am a refugee.
In heaven as it is on earth.

Translated by Jason Blake

Stefan Feinig

Sector Light in D Minor

She gathers pebbles. Quietly, reflectively, she selects precisely those little stones that rise, almost metaphysically, from the landscape into her field of vision. At first glance, there seems to be no system in her collecting, and yet my daughter, from the endless multitude of scattered stones, chooses only certain pebbles. What criteria guide her selection will likely remain hidden from me forever.

In the silence that enfolds her, she tries to skip flat stones across the water. But she remains unsuccessful. Silence is all around us, and even the sound of pebbles dropping into the sea without truly skipping is part of that elemental ease.

I listen deeply to the silence of both human presence and landscape. The minor scales, after all, is marked by a darker, more melancholic, more sorrowful tone than a major.

Life is still. And the sea remains silent too. Tiny crabs keep stitching shadows to the ground, while my own immense reflection drifts through the sunlight like a mirage across this coastal hush. Then, suddenly, a faint breeze begins to stir.

I imagine the wind upon the water slowly finding its own voice and language. In a slanting script it patiently practices new letters on the surface of the sea. In that moment, the wind seems like language itself, as precious as the written word of humankind.

Nature writes itself into the world. And it endlessly tells a story of life that will never come to an end. In this act of writing, the brown leaves around us are as valuable as the Dead Sea Scrolls. And the pebbles, twigs, and leaves my daughter places into her backpack carry a wisdom no less significant than that which once radiated from the Library of Alexandria.

Suddenly I am seized by the certainty that nature—whatever human beings may make or do will always outlast us. It has already outlived us, and will continue to do so, while it is stretching itself without limit into past and future at once.

"Little crabs are much older than we humans," I tell her. "You can kill as many as you like, but they will still outlive us... The crabs are merely waiting for humans to disappear, you know? For children to grow up, to become older and older—though their childhood will never end, no matter how many years they carry upon their backs." I go on explaining, although in truth I do not know exactly what I mean by it. Do I?

My daughter smiles and hands me a sun-warmed stone. The sun has warmed it. From a distance of one hundred and fifty million kilometers. Without purpose, perhaps, one might think, albeit though perhaps not without kindness.

"*Sten*," my daughter says in Swedish.

"And what is that in Slovene?" I ask.

She thinks for a moment, then shakes her head.

"*Jag vet inte*," she explains in Swedish that she does not know the Slovene word for it, though I have explained it to her many times, and though she has used the Slovene word for stone, *kamen*, often enough in other situations.

"*Kamen*," I say. "That is the Slovene word for stone."

"*Sten, kamen*, stone," she says, placing the stone in her hand atop another one on the ground, as if building a tower. Yet I imagine that she would rather build a house from all the things she has collected.

"*Voda* means water," she suddenly explains to me. "*Vatten*."

The languages she speaks simply well up out of her into the world. All at once. In chaos. Yet not with equal force. Her multilingualism is more like a sector light, one that does not illuminate the horizon uniformly, but sends its beams in different directions, in different colors and with different intensities.

I imagine that multilingualism is an entirely new way of orienting oneself in the world. Then I think again of the house she is building. A house that begins as a tower, but is meant to become a house. I know this, because that is her theme at the moment. Because she has just learned to draw a house.

"Hus, hiša, house," she says, and for a moment I feel as though she can read my thoughts.

In Western culture, language has, since the time of Odysseus, always been an attempt to find a home—a homeland that may no longer exist the very moment we name it.

Is homeland something that comes into being only when we tell it, over and over, as a story?

The media that bear Odysseus on his long journey are the sea and language. Both seem infinite.

Poseidon curses Odysseus, and so his return home lasts ten years. When the gods finally decide that he may return, he must relive all his ordeals once again as he tells his son of his wandering. Odysseus tells and tells, so that he may have a future, so that he may return to his homeland—to a place where he will no longer be at home, no matter how often he repeats his tale.

Was Odysseus's wandering perhaps only a strange exile he imposed upon himself, so that he might never truly arrive home? Or is home something altogether different? Something that must first be spoken—whenever, wherever, in whatever language?

The sea is an open surface inviting the imagination to roam across it for long stretches, freely, without compulsion, entirely of its own will. In water as in words, one can easily lose oneself, sink, and disappear utterly, beyond recognition.

And is there not beauty in this too?

Or rather: if beauty is anything at all, if it means anything at all—is that not precisely what beauty is?

To get lost. To wander astray.

Anywhere.

To find oneself.

To find oneself again.

Anywhere.

Any time.

In any language.

Beautiful is:

To be four years old and gather signs everywhere. To read the world, to truly read life: in the gravel, in the water, in the stones, in the reeds, in the breaking of waves and the murmuring swell of the tide—and from this life to build a world in the shape of a story.

To be four years old and catch life in every glance, to imprint something sacred upon memory, with a reality that is almost divine and constant—amid the sensory transience of the gaze, which, in remembering, writes a story that lasts forever.

I think of the primordial sea from which the first bacteria were born. It was about thirty-seven degrees Celsius.

I remember how my daughter held my hand on the way here. Our hands, too, were warm—about thirty-seven degrees Celsius.

I imagine what it was like long ago, thousands of years ago, when there were no humans around to call this place beautiful or ugly, to describe it—because there were not yet concepts for anything at all.

Then I imagine the future. In my mind I draw a future in which I am no longer there.

What will remain?

In the unsettling dream that came to me years ago abroad, in Yokohama, I return one hundred years after I have mysteriously vanished from time to my parents' house, hoping to meet the descendants of my brother there, who might still know me. Perhaps my story has survived after all—the story of a distant ancestor who once simply disappeared from space and time.

In this vision, I am certain that my brother continued speaking of me after I vanished, because we were very close. Moved by the story, which his children probably took for madness, they passed it on—to their children as well. And so on.

At the end of the dream sequence, I stand before my parents' house, which, according to the absurd logic of dreams, still looks exactly as it once did, that is, as it does today.

I ring the bell and wait. All the while, I imagine what it would be like if a stranger came up and said he was my great-great-grandfather's brother.

The message and meaning of that unsettling dream are not entirely clear to me. Not then. And even less so now. Perhaps I simply know, instinctively, where my roots lie. Or perhaps I am only passionately asking what will remain of me.

And what will remain?

A story?

A legend?

Words?

Narratives?

The road to small happiness lies hidden in the foam, in the waves of the sea, in the silent stones that line the shore. The days gone by have never been so densely gathered as around the solitary house my daughter has just built.

What will remain of this?

With a stick, I write something in the sand. A word from childhood that I still remember.

My daughter looks at me inquiringly, then laughs and traces the letters with a twig. The word of my childhood should become hers as well.

A childhood word.

Because I remember it, I know that I was once a child. And yet that child no longer seems entirely to be me. I am no longer sure whether the images circling in my head are truly my own childhood memories—or whether someone told them to me, and I simply took them into memory. Did I really experience all of this? Or did I merely invent it? Perhaps I read it somewhere and have forgotten where.

I try to find the time that has slipped away from me, that remains trapped in the child I once was.

Perhaps homeland is not a place, but time.

And life?

Language.

Many languages.

Words.

Writing.

And writing is one long wavering line, a wave coming from far away, one that began long before me and will continue long after I am gone. Precisely because the element of language is fluid: slow, deep, latent, carrying, forceful, primordial, engulfing, storing, life-giving, inexhaustible, mirror-like, harboring monsters, and dissolving.

Water is like language, forever in motion.

It is naive to believe that the stories we tell ourselves again and again have no effect on us, that they do not shape us the way water shapes a landscape. And it is just as naive to think that these stories have no will of their own.

Sometimes things arise within me that I have learned to call childhood memories, because they seem so intimate. Traces of an attempt to unravel the threads that have woven me. Unprocessed stories my parents deposited within me.

I remember many things, mixed together, with varying intensity.

Sector light.

Then I look out to the sea and think of how all this—all my thoughts, all my life—will disappear.

Where to?

The tide washes over me. The ebb carries me away.

Where to?

Does the tide bring new things?

What things?

In what language?

My daughter and I walk quietly side by side, without speaking. Each of us recognizes the dead animals the sea has gathered along the shore.

Silence.

Silence is all-encompassing; even the sound of the sea is a kind of silence.

Between us: the drifting of remnants, the debris of our traces, lying in the half-light. The traces we have walked, the traces we will still pick up, and also all those tracks we never dared to follow.

I remember.

Whenever we think we are making memories, we are in fact dealing with forms of becoming.

Becoming.

I remember a song from my childhood—and suddenly I am once again entirely a child.

Translated by the author

Said Khatibi

Achour

If not for the knife I had plunged into my cousin's shoulder, I wouldn't have been saved from death, and would not have lived to tell my tale which began that morning when the heat scorched my dark bald spot and my anger raged against those who had made me leave the village. I was startled by what I saw laying before me. I furrowed my brow and staggered over to a juniper tree. I struck the ground with my staff to block my sheep's path. I counted them off from one to six, then drove them home where I caught sight of my daughter, Louisa, who was not yet twelve. She was leaning her pencil-thin body against the door as she played with her brother, Salim, who had just learned to walk. He was naked save for a green shirt that went down to his belly button. I shouted at her to put the sheep in the pen. She straightened up to carry out my order. My staff landed on the ground in front of her where I had thrown it like a javelin. When she called out to ask me "Where're you going, Papa?" I was already gone, leaving dust in my wake.

I went back to where the body had been dumped on its back, legs apart, on the sloping ground among the wormwood plants. "Dear Lord!" I stroked my chin which I hadn't shaved for a week, then raised my right palm up to my temple, horrified at the sight of drying blood running from her nose to her left shoulder. I turned my eyes to the opening of her beige shirt where a gold necklace came into view. "God forgive her." I felt a sharp pain in my stomach.

I examined her long, black hair that ended in half-twisted tufts. Her eyes were brown and she had black kohl on her eyelashes. Her round nose looked like a grape dusted with bits of dirt. I noticed a scar on her lower jaw as I imagined her family's anguish upon hearing the news. She looked to be in her twenties. I noticed she was thinner than my wife, with softer skin, guessing she was a nurse or a teacher. I was baffled. How did she get here? No woman in her right mind would venture alone into this wild meadow where poisonous and medicinal plants proliferate, attached to the edge of the city like an appendix (I had heard this analogy from a municipal employee). The only people here were the poor souls who crowded into informal dwellings they built out of tin, cane, and straw, hoping that one day the world would look kindly on them and they could move into houses with running water and electricity.

I wanted to place my hand on her forehead and recite some verses from the Qur'an ("My Lord's words heal the dead") but I couldn't bring myself to touch her. I was still possessed by a shyness of women that I had internalized as a result of my mother's strictness with me when I was young. I still lower my eyes and might blush until she disappears from sight when a woman I don't know crosses my path. I looked at the pearl earring in her ear and realized that my daughter had never worn jewelry a day in her life. I took two steps back, scared that someone might happen upon me and accuse me of a crime I did not commit. I noticed a watch sparkling on her right wrist and pink nail polish on her long nails. I wondered what might be in the purse lying between her legs. Money or gold?

I rushed to a security barrier located on the road opposite the meadow where they check vehicles' documents and issue speeding tickets. It's set up every day from seven in the morning to eight at night. Two patrols alternate shifts. I saluted the policemen stationed there, my jaw trembling, then added some broken words: "Dead... I saw her... laying there..." I pointed in the direction of the body. One of the policemen craned his neck toward me and said, "You're sick!" as he scratched his right calf. "Souls... you'll see... with your own eyes..." The two policemen exchanged puzzled looks. Then I got into their car with them and told them where to go.

We followed a dirt road dotted with stones and lined with dry streams. The sound of Qur'an recitation came out of a loudspeaker from one of the nearby mosques calling the approaching Friday prayer. I was terrified they would accuse me of something I didn't do.

One of the policemen put a glove on and felt her neck for a pulse. He uttered, "Oh Lord!" then spit on the ground to his left. Slowly, he looked up before addressing his colleague: "She's been struck on the back of the neck."

He got on his wireless radio and specified his location (I had learned the word "wireless" from the Imam). We waited less than twenty minutes for the ambulance to arrive, passing the time in silence as we watched the hopping locusts which had invaded the city some months ago and no longer raised an eyebrow. A doctor came forward to examine the dead body which did not take more than a couple of minutes. Then another police car arrived. Two men got out. They encircled the area with yellow tape. One of them took pictures of the victim and the other grabbed her purse without looking at what was inside. Then they left. I heard the ambulance driver whisper to the doctor, "These sons of bitches," gesturing with his head toward my neighbors who had started to emerge from their dwellings to take a look, not a single one of them daring to come close. I saw Louisa off in the distance in front of our door, her arms around her brother. Then, after covering it with a white sheet, two paramedics picked up the body. A policeman asked me for my name

"Achour Hadeeri."

As he pulled the glove off his hand, the other one barked: "Come with us!"

I was gripped by fear. I remembered that I had not yet sufficiently grazed my flocks. I usually drive them for three hours or more so they can gobble down the wormwood that quenches their thirst, or I might give them some leafy carob tree branches to fatten them up. I thought about asking the two policemen for permission to give the sheep some of the dry bread my daughter collects from the neighborhoods downtown, or to ask my wife to do it instead, but I was afraid of what they might say. The frowns on their faces indicated to me that they knew who the victim was.

As soon as we got to the police station, the first policeman disappeared while the second one addressed a colleague standing behind the reception desk:

"Has the boss arrived yet?"

"He has."

I went with the policeman to the first floor.

He sat me down on a wooden chair in a smoke-filled waiting area. He went into an office, the door creaking as he opened it. As soon as he came back out, he ordered me in. My face went pale as I thought about what I had done over the past few days. Perhaps I had committed a sin that God was punishing me for. I couldn't think of anything of note. Mine is the life of the hard-working stiff. I wake up in the morning a little before or after seven. I perform my prayers, then listlessly sip my tea. I fill the metal basins with water from the well adjacent to the mosque. I pasture my sheep then gather up some wood for the cookfire. I might buy some simple items from a store or a sidewalk vendor after negotiating the price, after which I return home to inspect the animals' pen before lying down on my straw mat. I gnaw on something to warm my stomach and wait for nightfall to get into bed. Every Thursday I head to the cattle market where I watch the rise and fall of prices, waiting for the most opportune time to buy a head or sell another in order to keep my business going. From time to time, I get a day of work on a construction site, the wages of which help me bear the cost of living.

My mind drifted when the Police Inspector suggested I sit. I was embarrassed by my appearance. I was wearing a crimson-red shirt with only the bottom two buttons remaining, dusty black pants, and white plastic sandals with my big toe sticking out.

"Your parents' names?"

"Mouhhad and Ramla Ben Addi."

"Are you married?"

"I am."

"Do you have children?"

"Two."

The Inspector, whom they called "the boss," wrote down in a green-covered notebook that I was born in 1955. He guessed I was no taller than a hundred and seventy centimeters. He deemed it unlikely that I was guilty from the unfaltering way that I spoke, and because I had reported the dead woman and agreed to come to the station; all evidence that exonerated me, as he put it. Another policeman sitting next to him typed what I said on a typewriter whose clacking sound could be heard dozens of meters away.

I heard the Inspector, whose name was Hamid, tell his colleague that the forensic policeman on the scene found only a white silk handkerchief, some nail polish, a bottle of perfume, and some cash in the dead woman's purse. There were no documents that might point to her identity. "We'll await the missing persons' report in order to identify her."

I sat still in my chair which had arms and was comfortable. I only spoke when spoken to. How did I spend my days? The names and occupations of my neighbors? An image of Salim popped into my head. He's my first-born son. I'm closer to him than I am to my daughter. Sitting in that spacious, sparsely-furnished office with its electric ceiling fan and the smell of deodorant – that's right, deodorant, not cologne, for I know the difference between the two even

though I don't use either one – made me miss my son.

"Over the last few days, have you noticed any strangers wandering around the meadow?"

"No."

As long as I was there, I thought I should lodge a complaint against my neighbor, Sheikh Lahmar, who dyes his beard red with henna. Women line up every day in front of his door to get amulets, their screams constantly ringing in my ears as he rids them of the spirits that inhabit them. Before I could say a word, a policeman entered the office carrying just-developed photos of the victim. Hamid gasped as he grabbed his head, his lower jaw trembling: "No... I must be dreaming!" he yelled, then ran out of the room. It made me regret ever reporting the body.

Translated by Alexander E. Elinson

Ana Marwan

Shedding Skin

A year ago Vera had her height measured as part of a driving licence checkup. She was two centimetres taller than the last time. The doctor responded to her amazement with a wave of the hand, as if he were shooing away a housefly, and said something about morning or evening or posture or a measuring mistake by the previous doctor. But last time Mother, who is precise, measured her and Vera herself took the measurements seriously, standing upright every time. That evening she repeated the exercise at home, with the same result, and the next day she took the train to Mother's, who still has that line drawn on the frame of the bedroom door, dashes drawn at random intervals, indicating the year and Vera's height. Even this doorframe confirmed that she had grown. The last line was done twenty years ago, at the age of twenty; after twenty a woman stops growing.

A week later she noticed that her hat was too small. She'd had it for ten years already and could no longer remember whether it had been too small from the start, from the time it had arrived in the mail. Since she was never one to send things back, she perhaps told herself, *it'll be fine*, as she often did. It must have been a mail order because you can only find hats that expensive in little boutiques where the owner says, *It looks great on you!* And you can't be *just looking around, thank you*, you're pushed into a euphoria that makes you agree, *Yes, it's wonderful!*, and you're forced to buy some entirely unsuitable hat.

Cases like this, when, for example, a hat that used to fit suddenly feels too tight, that is, when a certain inkling is suddenly confirmed, make Vera emerge from her inertia. Regardless of how chaotic and messy her hard drive is, she sees it as no waste of time to create a new folder, label it "Hat," and fill it not only with photos where she is wearing the hat but also with those probably taken right after removal. She examines them closely; in the ones where she's wearing a hat, she looks to see how its seated or on her head, and in the ones where she's hatless, she seeks out traces of an indentation or red marks at the top of her forehead.

In none of the photos does she see what she sees in the mirror. Of course, she allows for the possibility that her skin is losing its elasticity with age and that the indentations no longer disappear. She is also aware that her head hasn't necessarily grown, that it's also possible that the hat has shrunk.

She cannot get rid of this nagging doubt, which will keep lingering in the back of her big head. She took a measurement and wrote the number down in her journal so she could track the development. Then she placed her hand on the next page and traced it with a pencil, just like you do when you're little.

It's odd to grow after you're forty. Vera's behaviour is completely rational.

Maybe she's shedding her skin.

For her skin is also peeling. Every other day she stands before the bathroom mirror and removes flakes of skin from her cheeks. Like she's shucking corn.

This can't be just in the head, she's convinced, since in addition to snakes and dragonflies also hermit crabs moult. She read about this only after she:

- drew a parallel between herself and them due to her frequent moving from one to another,
- noticed that she was growing.

She has often been told, by those that don't know her, that she mustn't change a thing in the house she's living in, by those that don't know how she hates to meddle with things (Others, who also don't know her, confuse this quality with laziness). (But the times have long past when anyone who would reproach her for presumed qualities.))

She can stay for two more years of the five they promised her before her brother-in-law comes back. Vera thinks it won't be difficult, that she's not going to miss this house. Yet she hasn't forgotten the odd contortions of memory that she has, to her surprise, witnessed. She'll have to let herself be surprised anew.

Her present house is right next to the tracks, but the train doesn't stop nearby. The nearest station is forty minutes by bike. When the snow comes, she crosses barren corn fields on foot, which takes her just as long. When she takes the train to town, she passes her own house ten minutes faster. She could of course bike in the same direction, but then she would have to cycle 50 minutes to the station. And just as long on the way back. That would, of course, be more efficient, since she could leave home a whole 12 minutes later, but she has no desire to cycle 100 minutes if she has the possibility of cycling only 80 minutes. Moreover, she is fortunate enough not to be in a position that would be rendered considerably worse through inefficiency.

Thujas grow around the house, just as that same foreign tree grows around the other houses in the village. They can well divide what is *foreign* from what is *mine*.

When she hears the train behind the little trees, Vera knows: it's ten past four.

In five minutes, the church bell will ring.

She has never been so in tune with the passing of time. Now she learns, like Pavlov's dog with that bell, what colour the light is at certain times in a certain season, how the shadows fall.

Ever since she's been living in the village, she's been getting up earlier than she ever did—to the sound of the bell, the train, the rooster.

She's moved so many times that she knows how each house leaves a mark. A third of the qualities she calls her own come from the house, she'd say now.

Twenty years ago she still would have said she was, *by nature*, such and such and such, but now she thinks that *by nature* just meant the first house, the favoured one, and that in this case, the language across the border is more precise: *von Haus aus*. By the house.

We can learn much from languages.

Vera grants the possibility that loneliness spread through the house as it stood empty for so many years, before it got into her. Her peeling skin is certainly porous; surely such an invisible, elusive thing can seep through a person's thin skin.

This makes Vera think of that grand old pianist who said that, for him, unlike all those who were so fervently chasing an ideal, he didn't care what kind of piano they put on stage for him. He never demanded adjusted strings, he let each one sound different.

That is how Vera wants to be in her houses.

The word *my* is a summation Vera uses to make it easier to communicate, something that is *by nature* and *by house* hard enough already. No house has been hers in the human sense. But she has always been able to find an empty or half-empty house she could move for the time being. Like a hermit crab, she took a leap of faith from one to the next, her bare backside at the mercy of the sky.

Not just the house, also moving house has determined her. Over time she reduced the number of things she needs to 47.

Forty-seven is also the number of things she can keep monitor of without having to search for them. She wastes not a minute looking for things. This is no great ability, given the objectively small number of things, but it's crucial to emphasize that houses also contain many of their own things, which sometimes obscure hers or at least create a cluttered scene that makes searching significantly more difficult. However, she always finds a place for her each of her 47 things that lets her remember where they are. She doesn't move them around; she leaves them right where she uses them. Just like the apple trees in the garden, she never has to search for any of her belongings.

Vera has thus grown from a person who can't stand disorder to one who thinks order is fine.

She of course understands the point of searching for small objects. It is like the pain caused by beautiful but uncomfortable shoes. But now she doesn't need little searches to replace the big one, doesn't need little pains to overshadow the big one, now Vera can now renounce everything, big and small, and take comfort in the sofa in any house. Increasingly, she is becoming someone who knows exactly what she doesn't want.

Translated by Jason Blake

Natalija Milovanović

Foreign Species

(Lyubov)

To depart is to recognize
new species of the unutterable,

running wild amidst the tenses,
rapidly and tenaciously,

like invasive, foreign species
that take no notice of the permaculture.

That doesn't mean nobody's listening,
that nobody's trying to pull out the weeds,

but with each passing day
the past becomes more uncertain,

depending on who tells it
and what they tell themselves.

Translated by Lukas Debeljak

Perspectives

The neighbor on the balcony is making
a bird house,
a person house,
for the admiration of
the human gaze.

What is a red roof with a grey chimney
to a blackbird or a sparrow or a finch?

Why can't you simply
see beauty,
you ask me,
thinking,
why can't you see, why do you focus
only on the flaws in everything around you?

And then I remember
those sparrows
in Premuda falling
from their nests,
and the waiter on the ladder
returning them to the doorframe,
saving them from the cats,
all the while muttering:
fuck it, little one,
where do you think you're going if you can't fly?

Beauty is easier to see
from a birds-eye perspective
than from a frog's,
revealing the scars.

Translated by Lukas Debeljak

The Crane

My father said that cemeteries
know the intimate histories of the neighborhood.
When you walk through a cemetery, there is no place more alive.

My favorite place in the Žale cemetery
is the monument to Soviet soldiers
where a flock of stone cranes
eternally prepares for flight
like all unexpected deaths that flutter off
before even realizing they have occurred.

My father and I are silent on the question
of where immigrants are laid to rest.
When we're dead, will we still look toward the places
where we once imagined our headstones to be
as we took our daily walks?
Do the ones who say they don't care, really not care?
He says we should scatter him
into the air or the water so that he won't nourish any roots.

Years ago, he drew a gravestone for his own father
just like they had together drawn the plan for a house that now collects
dust in some distant countryside. In the heart of silence
a compromised star fades above the man's name,
an uncompromising Catholic cross above the woman's.

Will he go to his parents to add yet another symbol
or will we scatter him wherever,
despite the fine, like a crane,
so that wherever I walk I can think:
there is no place more alive.

Translated by Lukas Debeljak

The World Goes On

It was a luminous August night and a great deluge.
The water carried a mass of gorged and bloated
white worms from overturned bins of
organic waste. There were hundreds of them,

they swam in the current for at least ten meters or so
until they were swept down the drain.
Hedgehogs crouched beneath the tops of bushes
waiting to get at the drowning ones.

There was a deluge and a white moon and white worms,
there was nature itself *with its maddening neutrality*
its untameable, prodigal omnipotence.^{*4}
I saw it all up close but I was never there.

*

It was a bright July night, a couple of years later,
and it was a great deluge, again on the full moon.
And there was a man with a big umbrella,
waiting for me, soaking wet, welcoming me beneath it.

Without questions or schemes
and mainly without expectations.
We walked against the current for another ten meters or so
before I disappeared into a doorway that he knew,

as he used to live there himself, he added in passing,
and mainly without additional questions,
with a mild smile that immediately
showed me what good neighbors we would make.

Nothing changed, yes, nature went on,
pounding down, prodigal, even-handed,
but I was there and there was a person, who had
shown *what kind of world I would want to live in*.

Translated by Lukas Debeljak

Foreign Softness

The world for which you were prepared
doesn't exist.

Those who prepared you
have nothing left to say.

They don't know whether it's always been like this,
probably not. After brief reflection
on the shocks of the past few decades
they say, maybe, I don't know.

Everyone feels their own blows the hardest,
every foreign softness feels too hard.
The world stands, always the worst,
always the best that it's ever been.

Translated by Lukas Debeljak

Neven Ušumović

The Nightingale's Tongue

(excerpts from the short story)

2.

If, by any chance, I lived, say, in Istria, I wouldn't have to invent the beauties of my homeland. In the case of the Subotica landscapes and sights, I relied on the power of nostalgia. There were several of them: Austro-Hungarian nostalgia, purely Hungarian, Jewish, and even the current Yugonostalgia. My target audience was very wide and the small tourist groups I gathered on my educational paths were made up of so many different nationalities that they were much more versatile than the current mixture in Vojvodina: along with the Hungarians and Germans, that is Austrians, there were also some Jews of untraceable national identities, Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, and sometimes even some lost Italian or American would get interested in going on a trip with us.

In time, the offer included only two well thought-out one-day trips, with a night spent under the tents in Hrastovača: one trip ended at Palić Lake, and the other one at Ludoš Lake. Hrastovača is seven kilometers away from the center of Subotica and is close to the suburb Makova sedmica. It is one of the forests of the protected natural area: the Subotica Sands. From the city center we would set off on foot or on bikes, following a wide road whose rims slowly disappeared in the sand, which allowed us the freedom of roaming across the vast plain; a string of houses on the flank got thinner and thinner until it diminished into a farm, an orchard and a vineyard. The groups that I led mostly enjoyed seeing flocks of sheep that languidly grazed on rare edible grass in the areas close to the forest. A delicious surprise was awaiting my guests in the refrigerator of the hunting lodge: the sour sheep milk that my dear 'business partner', old Matyas, provided for me.

The growing interest in this type of trips in a few years turned my story into a routine too. Unlike Zrilić, I avoided history; my story tolerated it as much as it was naturalized in the surroundings. Of course, nothing around us was authentic: the percentage of indigenous forests went down below 10%, and although our forest was called Hrastovača/Oak Grove (comprising indigenous trees of the common oak), we were surrounded with pine and acacia groves, not to mention nettle trees! The immediate proximity of the Hungarian border had its good and bad sides: the little water that allowed us to call Kereš (Koros) a little river was being used by the Hungarians for their fish ponds. However, in return, from Hungary we imported game for our hunting grounds that were growing in popularity: fallow deer were entering Serbia aided by the Ministry... The popularity of the hunting grounds, needless to say, was proportionate to some of the illegal hunting activities, but that is a different story altogether.

True, until this very moment I have been avoiding the hunters' stories: as my business developed (which, at first, I considered an excuse for not earning my wages working in the fields and orchards like the majority of my friends), it enhanced the sweetness of my language that, as the demand increased, I slowly acquired, or, if I may say so, formed... Opulence and diversity, as the seminal Vojvodina leitmotifs, are also the unavoidable decorations of my currency of words; spaciousness and virginity (the permanent place: Obedska Swamp was first put under protection in 1874, two years after the first national park in the world, the

Yellowstone!) are the next pair of devices for the expressive bravura in my language; and then, in the absence of any real watery phenomena, there are comparisons with a roaring sea (the ruling wind!), great deserts (the sand that cracks under the teeth) and oases, which are spread in space in a mosaic-like manner, as if they followed the thirst and desire of the tourist ascetics. On the whole, I represented it as a miniature trip into the desert world, a harmless one just as the word 'Sands' suggests.

At first, we didn't spend the night in the forest. Not until the hunters, after they had redecorated the hunting lodge, provided us with the logistics. For camping, since the number of the hunters was sometimes higher than the accommodation capacities in the lodge, did I make use of that possibility. Silent nights under the arches of the oak trees, whisper by a crackling fire, the sounds and smells that crawled into our tents and dreams, and took as beyond the nearby rim of the forest into the regions of the dark, was something that fueled me to go on trips like that, and it was also the main reason why I haven't quit this job. [...]

5.

"Eichelhafer?"

"Eichhornchen!"

It was our way of greeting each other. When everybody fell asleep and massive silence took over the camping site, I got out of the tent and went for a walk into the forest. Eichelhafer, Eichhornchen, Eichelhafer, Eichhornchen...

This greeting, of course, was invented by Jelena, just as she did a lot of other little things that our world consisted of. Those little things were my buried treasure, until Tunde brought it to light with her figure. Jelena suddenly appeared to be so close to me, I could see her in the figure of the celebrated beauty; it was her shadow, her glow, her fire.

By accident, I came to the rim where the shooting range began. A dark clearing was opening up among the trees, so I changed direction, for there must have been at least one soldier if not the entire guarding unit. I went deeper into the oak trees and after a few steps I noticed that the width and height of those trees was getting bigger as I was moving away from the shooting range. It took my half an hour at the most to finally reach a real forest.

Those were the trees I knew well, but I never dared bring my group up to this place. Jelena took me all the way to that part of the forest several times. We used to sit there, each by a separate tree and we used to listen to the leaves rustle, breathing in the air surged with the fragrances of an ancient life. Jelena was actually very cynical; her hatred of the city, of people in general, took her to those extremes. Before that, she would spend all her time in Mulberry Grove, that big park next to the Hall of Sports at Radijalac. I also lived in that block and used to run away from the hot high-rise buildings into the shade of the forest. Moving from one bench to another carrying a book in my hand, I spent one whole day with Jelena: she sat next to me and our reading turned into a competition of the type which one of us would get up first and leave. When Mulberry Grove sank into total darkness, we realized we had no choice but to introduce each other. Starting from the next day, we set dates in the park.

She was older than me; she was already finishing her biology studies in Novi Sad. Our meetings would turn into scientific investigations of particular trees. She didn't like huge, 'pumped-up' plane trees that were the landmark of Mulberry Grove, as well as the whole of Radijalac; with great pleasure she would reveal to me the world of insects that drilled holes in

its roots and would put a little bug on the tip of her index finger, giving me a speech in its praise as if it and its bite were going to pull down the odious tree eventually! Jelena was looking for the oak trees; she knew exactly how many of them there were in the park. After we had seen them all, a few months later, Hrastovača spontaneously popped up in our minds, as our only possible retreat, and as it turned out soon afterward: our sanctuary.

The war was not over yet, so it was not clever to go toward the shooting range. We used to pass by the convoys of military vehicles full of armed soldiers. However, nobody ever spoke to us; we only used to catch a desperate gaze or two coming from under the deep shade of a truck tilt. Our feet were sinking into the sand; the wind was blowing it into our eyes, we washed our mouths from time to time to get rid of it, we coughed. It was all part of our ritual enjoyment of being together and walking toward the forest. It was nice to know that there was a boundary of this ghastly city, this state, this time that could be crossed. Even if it was for just a few hours, we were on the other side nevertheless, Jelena used to say on our way back. And Jelena had actually crossed onto 'the other side' much earlier than that and was only sharing that with me for a couple of hours. However, I have, capitalizing on that, started my cheap and tawdry tourist business.

But, I didn't take my tourists to these trees. I didn't dare go that far since Jelena had disappeared. Incidentally, Eiche, in German, means the oak tree, so the Germans named both the squirrel and the jay after their favorite tree: Eichhornchen is the squirrel, and Eichelhahe is the jay. And here I am, among our oak trees. I hugged the first tree that seemed to be Jelena's tree and stayed like that for a long time.

In these trees the souls of my ancestors live, she told me, during our last trip together, the souls as small as these bugs, she giggled. I picked up a dried-up sample of such an entity (and again I heard Jelena's voice: *Cicindela germanica*!), I put it into my pocket and returned to the camp.

Translated by Domagoj Orlić