

HER ROYAL MAJESTY



ISSUE TWELVE
SPRING 2012

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A man once told me he preferred museums to life because he liked representations of things more than the things themselves. I was outraged; I took personal offence. *Life! What about real life?!* A while later, though, I was struck with the realisation that as a writer and editor, I spend most of my time coming up with metaphors for things that distance them from the things being described. F. Scott Fitzgerald doesn't write about the sky in *The Great Gatsby*, he writes about how in the late afternoon the heavens "bloomed in the window for a moment like the blue honey of the Mediterranean." In Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Bernard describes the sky as "the panorama of life."

Artists (this includes writers) see things through a filter and this in turn colours their perception of the thing. This isn't news, I know, but I had never thought about how this takes us away from the thing itself. Plato kicked the artists out of his Republic because their representations are twice removed from the thing being represented. There is the ideal of the table and then there is the actual table, which is one degree from the truth of the table. If there is a painting or description of the table, then this is even further from the truth of the original table. The artist's table is not really a table, then; it is something different. In distancing the object from its ideal, we can see artists as making something new, fresh. Making it exotic.

Exotic, Greek for "foreign," comes from the prefix *exo*: from the outside. The sense of "unusual" or "strange" was first recorded in English in the early 1620s. Funnily enough, the first publication of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is dated to 1623.

It is believed that Shakespeare drew inspiration for this play from real letters written by William Strachey, a passenger aboard the Sea Venture - a ship that crashed in 1609 on the uninhabited island of Bermuda. Through language, spirits, and magic, *The Tempest* explores both sides of foreignness. The men on the boat - Alonso, Sebastian, Ferdinand, Gonzalo

and Antonio - land shipwrecked on this island and must face the unknown. Its sounds, its tastes, its inhabitants: everything is strange.

But for Miranda, having grown up in isolation on this otherwise uninhabited island, regular human society seems exotic. Caliban, too, has grown up in isolation, but as the monster of the island, tamed and tortured by Prospero.

Here, we can see Said's *Orientalism* philosophy as well as its mirror image: the 'Other' is imagined and then confronted by those both from and away. When is it useful to think of things as "exotic" and when is it important to "de-exoticise" them? Is it always a negative act to exoticise something or someone? Not necessarily. I think it has to do with making things strange and new; seeing things with curiosity and reverence; seeing things as an artist does.

I've been working as a live model for my friend Rosy Lamb, a painter whose work has been published several times in this magazine. The process of being looked at so closely somehow created distance: I didn't feel like she was really looking at me, but at the same time, she was looking closer than most do. Rosy was seeing the whole scene, though: she once explained that my body had the same priority as the objects in the background. When you paint something, she said, everything becomes equal. When I saw the finished painting and looked into the eyes of the me that she had painted, it was disorienting and surprising and strange. I had become exotic to myself.

The works we've chosen to publish in this issue explore different permutations of The Exotic: we present the perspectives of those that are from both home and away. Stories of transformation and princes are paired with explorations of religion and faith. You will be presented with numerous alternative, exotic worlds and ideas and we hope you find the selection here as beautiful and surprising as we do.

Harriet Alida Lye
Editor in Chief



BILLIE HOLIDAY

BY ANNA THOMAS

A plosive is a stop consonant in which the vocal tract is blocked;
All air flow ceases.

The occlusion may be done with the tongue,
Example, 'fruit.'

Or with the lips,
Example, 'crop.'

× STEALING FROM THE BARON BY WILLIAM KECKLER

THE DIMENSIONS OF A SHADOW

BY ALICE MUNRO (NÉE LAIDLAW)

Previously published in *Folio*, v.4.2, 1950

Miss Abelhart came out of the church alone. Her feet made quick, sharp, certain sounds on the cement steps—not the light tapping sounds pumps make, but harder, heavier claps. Miss Abelhart was wearing oxfords. She wore also a light tweed coat, a straight ugly coat, and an absurd little black hat. Most of her clothes were chosen for their ugliness or absurdity, and she wore them with a certain defiance, as though she proudly recognized in them a drabness closely akin to her own.

She was not ugly or absurd, in herself, only a little dried and hollowed, with straw hair tightly and tastelessly curled, and skin somewhat roughened, as if she had been for a long time facing a harsh wind. There was no blood in her cheeks, and something like dust lay over her face. People who looked at her knew that she was old, and had been old always. She was thirty-three.

A woman's shrill call came from the brightness of the church porch, "Miss Abelhart, Miss Abelhart, we're having a temperance meeting downstairs!"

Miss Abelhart stopped, and half-turned. Her pale eyes narrowed, and grew cunning and afraid.

"Miss Abelhart!" the voice called again. "Aren't you coming, Miss Abelhart?"

Miss Abelhart hesitated. Then quite clearly and deliberately, she said, "No."

"What? Aren't you coming?"

"No. No, I'm not coming." Miss Abelhart walked away very quickly, feeling, at first, rather buoyant and victorious, then rather afraid. Temperance meetings and prayer circles and church on Sundays made a pale semblance of a life for her, fettered her in the neat routine of the little town. After all, it was foolish to break a fetter, and walk into nothing. So good to be free for a moment, and then so terrible to be endlessly alone.

"No," said Miss Abelhart, under her breath. "No. I'm not coming...." Her voice trailed away in a dubious undertone. Then she caught herself up sharply, and tightened her lips and glanced stealthily about her. Often lately she found that she was talking to herself.

It was June, and the night had not come yet. The sky was hidden in pale soft clouds, promising rain, and the air was warm and still. The dusty, hurrying smells of the day were not in it, only the heavy sweetness of lilacs, already past their prime, and the rich scent of peonies. Peonies drooped by the garden gate, their deep reds darkened, and their petals fallen together, because they belonged to the day. All polite garden flowers belonged to the day; when night came, only the fragile smells of them floated and faded on the air. Perhaps on the hills outside the town there were night-

flowers, wild and scentless, stars buried in the long grass—but those Miss Abelhart would never see.

She walked more slowly, now, forbearing, like a child, to step on the cracks in the sidewalk. The sidewalk, she thought, is divided into squares, and the squares make a block, small and tight, and the blocks make a tidy pattern. The town is a pattern, hidden in the dark. Miss Abelhart looked at the houses on either side of the street—houses of brick and stone, decent with porches and steps and shutters. They were closed houses watching covertly with hooded eyes, knowing their places in the pattern. Yet some of them had lamps lit, in the windows...

Three girls were standing in the yellow circle under a street light. They looked at Miss Abelhart, and said hello, and smiled the quick bland smiles they kept for a teacher. Miss Abelhart saw the lovely clarity of their features, and the grace of their young bodies, and looked away from them. She straightened her shoulders and walked more stiffly, more carefully, feeling the girls' clear eyes at her back.

She thought of the boy. The thought of him was never far from the surface of her mind, always wavering, like a shadow, over her consciousness. Girls like those were for him. Their long light limbs, and their soft mouths and the tender fullness of their cheeks were only for his pleasure. They smiled at him and followed him with their eyes; they waited for him and wanted him. One of those he would choose.

But he does not look at them as he looks at me. They are young and common and willing...

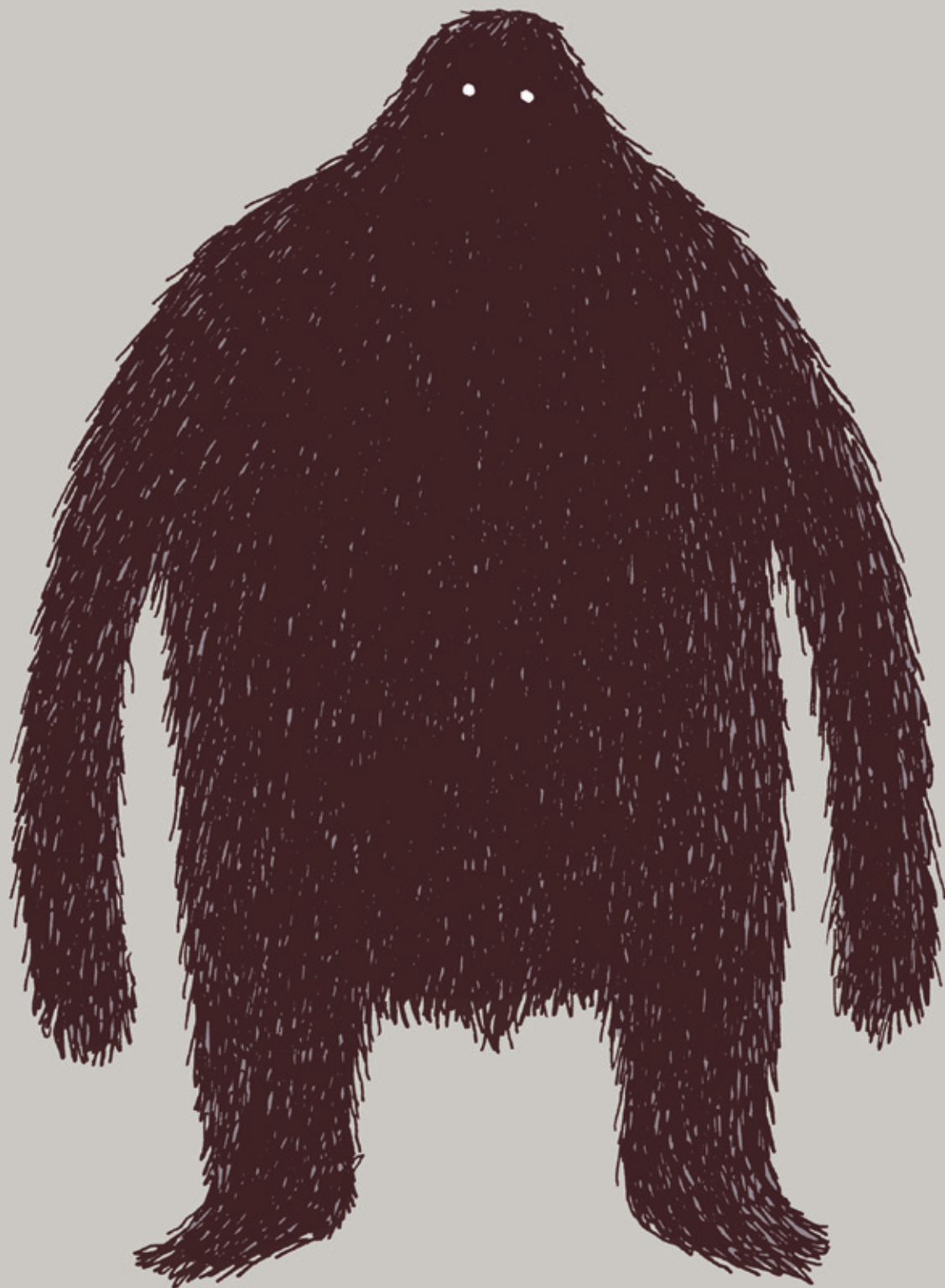
Very clearly in her mind, she saw the picture of the boy. He was sitting in a Latin class; his dark hair was tumbled and his forehead wrinkled in puzzlement, his long legs stretched carelessly across the aisle. Then, slowly he lifted his head and smiled, his brown eyes twinkling to hazel, and his mouth twisted up at one corner, so that he looked like a roguish, beautiful little boy. He was beautiful, in a curious and imperfect way. His slim body was too frail and graceful, his untidy curls too picturesque, and his smile too charming, but he was beautiful. When she thought of him, Miss Abelhart felt a great tenderness and anguish.

It was the second week of June. In four days the school closed, and he would be gone.

She realized that she had been walking towards the school. Once Sunday had been a day for forgetting conjugations and subjunctives and Virgil, a day for breathing air untainted by chalk dust and the subtle odor of human boredom. Now it was an empty day, stretching and yearning toward Monday, when the days of meaning and possibility began again. Every day for five days, Monday till Friday, he sat for forty minutes at a desk in front of her and frowned over grammar or stumbled through a translation. Every day he stood facing her in Assembly and met her once or twice in the halls, perhaps walked down the hill with her, by accident, at four o'clock—and watched her, and hid secret things under his words.

She felt the familiar cold sensation of fear. *I am making this up; it cannot be true. It is impossible. If I keep on, I will be mad...But it is true. I am not imagining. Please, God, I am not going crazy...*

She crossed the street, and stood in front of the school. The school held the early darkness



Not to feel much interest. So I'm adding here

around it, becoming shadowy and indistinct. Only the blind slits of windows and the long fingers of ivy stood out black in the shadows. At night, the school was lonely. Soon now it would be lonely for all the summer—lonely always because the boy would not come back in the fall, with the others. The little insistent fear was swallowed up in emptiness and Miss Abelhart did not want to look at the school any longer. She turned away.

Then she saw him. The boy was standing quite motionless at the end of the walk, and he was watching her. He wore a dun colored raincoat; his hair was rumpled and his hands were shoved deep into his pockets. When he saw her looking at him, he said, "Hello, Miss Abelhart."

"Hello," she said quietly.

He walked toward her. He smiled.

"What are you doing up here?" he asked.

"I'm just walking." She was trembling. It was very strange to meet him away from the security of the Latin room, outside the tight little circle of the life in the school. It occurred to her that she had never seen him before when it was not daytime. At night his face was pale, and a little unreal.

"I was looking at the school," he said. "I don't know, I got thinking, and I just stood and looked at it."

"What did you think about?" asked Miss Abelhart.

"Oh, I thought that I only had four days left to go here. I'm not coming back, you know, if I get my year."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, it seems funny, after five years, I mean, it will seem funny. You get used to it." He was quiet a moment, and then he said, slowly, as if he could not quite find words for what was in his mind.

"This last year—it seems longer than all the rest of the time, more important, or something. Maybe because I'm older. I don't know."

Then he said quite suddenly, "This year was the first year you were here."

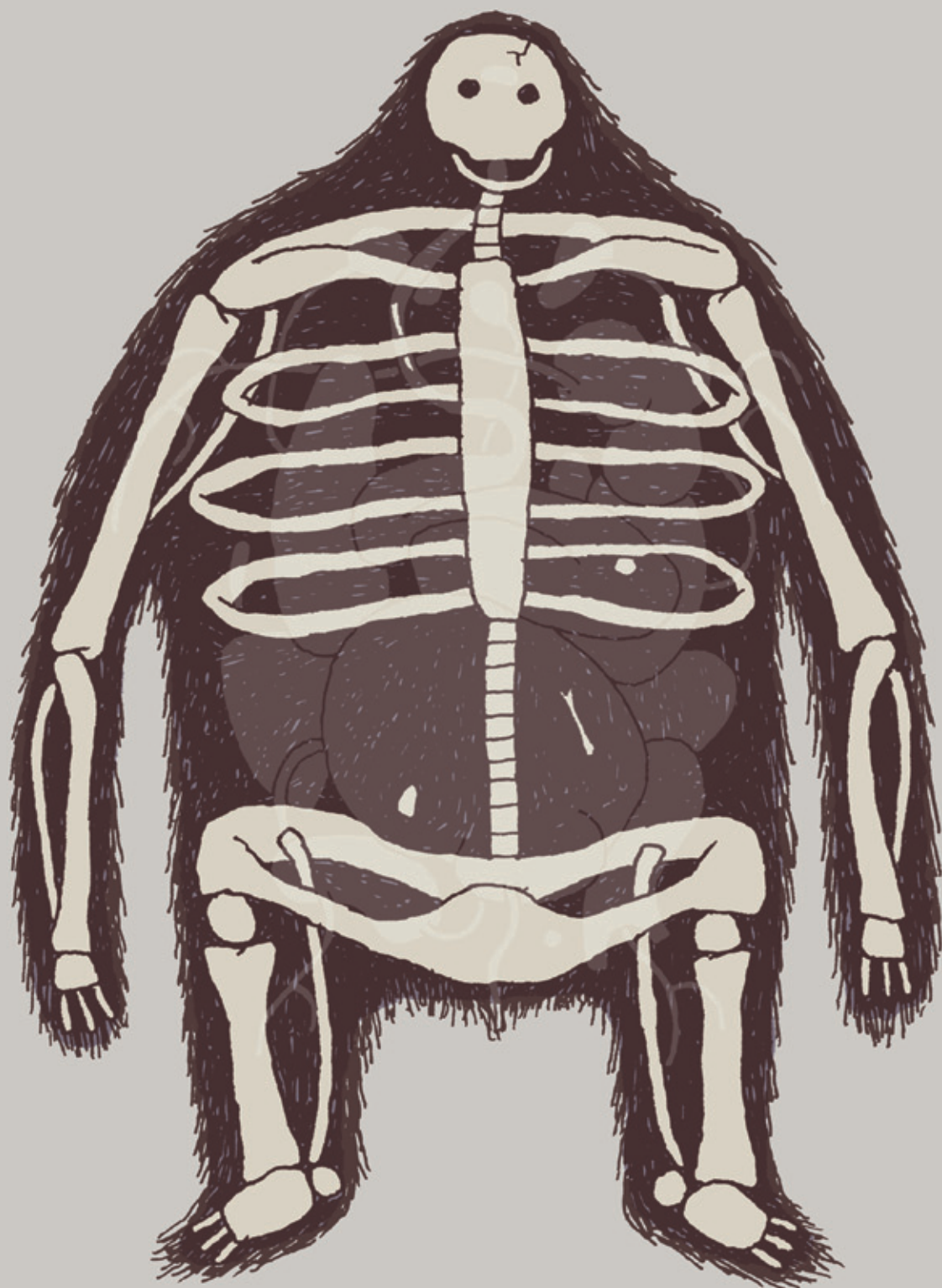
The incredible words had been spoken. Then, after all, it was true. Miss Abelhart did not believe for a moment that she had heard him, and when she knew she had, a deep shiver passed over her whole body, and she was happy and afraid. He was here then; he was looking at her, and telling her, and he was himself, not the restless, beloved shadow that ate the substance of her mind.

"Yes," she said, "it seems a long time to me, too."

It was odd how much he looked like the boy at college—a little like the boy at home too. Perhaps it was only the way the dark blurred his face—or perhaps it was the look of arrogance and embarrassment he wore, the young look that had been on all their faces. Now he would tell her.

"I had a terrible case on you," he said. "I guess you must have noticed it. It lasted all year. I couldn't seem to help it—"

The news that she's gone missing, that any tip



On her whereabouts will be highly prized.

“Yes.” She looked at him steadily, without shame or surprise; her cheeks warmed a little with the slow deep beating of her heart.

“You knew, didn’t you?” he said.

“Yes.”

“I couldn’t believe it at first. I thought it was awful.”

“Did you?”

“I mean, you expect to have crushes on kids, but—hell, you’re years older than I am. Maybe as old as my mother, I don’t know.”

“No, not that old.”

“I’m sorry. But you’re not pretty, you’re not—oh, damn, I don’t know what I mean!”

“You mean,” said Miss Abelhart, “that I am sexless. Like a block of wood or a husk of corn.”

“No!” The boy flushed and floundered. “No, no, you’re not.”

“But to other people, I am. Barren and sterile and useless.” The things that had lain so darkly hidden were given sound and shape and hung in frozen words on the air.

“I don’t know,” the boy said. “It doesn’t matter. But you’re so smart. I wouldn’t want to be that smart. You know everything nobody else does, and they’re all afraid of you.” He smiled. “I don’t have to worry, do I? I’m not even smart enough to get Upper School Latin.”

“I can’t help it, I really can’t,” said Miss Abelhart earnestly. “I’m not smart at all. It’s this town. If you knew what I do, trying to be like other people, the meetings I go to, the things I say...”

“But it doesn’t do any good. People know you aren’t like they are. They laugh at you.”

“You said a moment ago they were afraid of me.”

“They are, sometimes. Other times they laugh. I never thought I’d have a crush on somebody everyone laughed at...”

Miss Abelhart asked evenly, “Isn’t there any word for it besides ‘crush’? It sounds so crude, so—infantile.”

“Well, that’s what it was! I hated myself about it. I was scared to death all the kids would find out. I laughed at you more than anybody, so they wouldn’t...”

She was very pale again, but she did not flinch. She only said, “Did you? That was clever.”

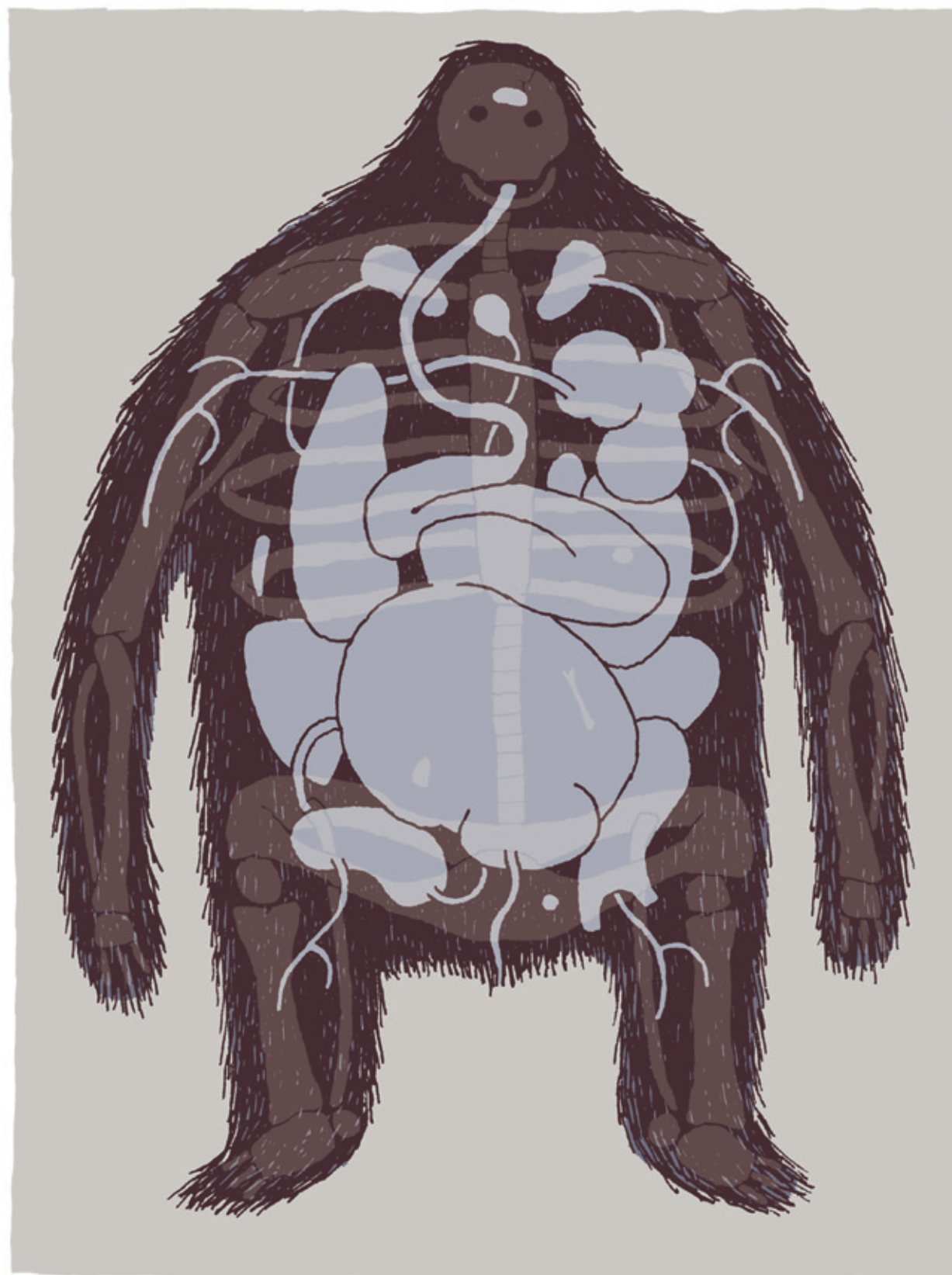
The boy was bewildered. “Oh, no! It only made it worse after. I couldn’t help it. It kept getting worse—. All I’m trying to say is I couldn’t understand it – why it was you. I couldn’t see what it was about you.”

“Maybe it wasn’t anything about me,” said Miss Abelhart. “Did you ever think that once in her life, a woman has a right to have someone look at her and not see anything about her, just her, herself? Every woman has a right, no matter how old or ugly she is. Someone should love her, even because she is ugly.”

“It isn’t loving. I don’t know what it is. I kept thinking it’d go away. Things like that don’t keep on.”

“Tell me how it began,” said Miss Abelhart, more calmly. “Walk with me and tell me about it.”

Cora Stokes, female, African-American,



Forty-seven, five feet, five inches,

They began to walk, side by side, not looking at each other, not touching, through the quiet streets of the town. The town clock struck nine. They walked under a street light and their shadows whirled about their feet. Miss Abelhart's shadow was black and solid and cleanly drawn, but the boy's was long and misty, curving like smoke over the sidewalk and the grass.

"I can't explain how it started," said the boy, in the same tired, troubled voice. "I guess it was in the fall. Not right after you came. I didn't even notice you then, except I thought you knew a lot of Latin."

"And nothing else?"

"I guess so."

"I didn't. I don't. Go on."

"Then we were doing that play, 'As You Like It'. You were cutting it down, sort of ending it, and you came to watch the practices."

"Yes, you were Orlando."

Young Orlando, in tights and a homemade green suit, that would have made another boy foolish and ashamed. Tall and gallant and lovely, moving like a wild young animal on a bit of wooden stage.

"Then I started talking to you and going around where you were, even sometimes I'd watch to see if you were listening when I said my lines—"

Stiffly, terribly, the way high school boys always say Shakespeare. But you were smiling and shaking the curls from your forehead, and the sun went down outside and the smoke of burning leaves came in through the window.

"Then in the winter, I'd be waiting, underneath, all morning till it was time for Latin. I'd sit and watch you and listen to you, and I put something into everything you said. As if you were talking to me in a way nobody else could understand. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes. Yes, I know."

"I didn't let on, though. I watched you at Assembly. Sometimes I thought you looked at me. I knew every time you were standing at your door, when I went by. If you weren't there, I'd pretend I'd forgotten a book or something, and go back, so maybe you'd be there when I went past again.

"I can't remember what all I did," the boy went on quickly. "It was the damndest, craziest thing. One day you came into the 'Wreck Room' at noon when I was playing the piano for the kids, and you asked me to play something. I played that piece for a week after. I could have played it in my sleep. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

The "Wreck Room" at noon is noise and smoke and laughing and the little tin notes of the piano and the girls with long legs and loud voices, dancing. But you did not play for them. You looked at me when you played, and you smiled secretly, slowly...

"When I got a chance to talk to you, I couldn't," he said. "I could feel my insides jumping around whenever you spoke to me, even if it was just something about Horace. Oh, I was ashamed of

Slender, with a mole on her chin

myself! I didn't know how it could happen, and now I don't know how it can stop—."

They stood still. They had come to the end of a street. The town stopped suddenly and there was no pattern any more, only the empty, broken country, pathless in the dark.

They turned, and walked back into the town, back to Miss Abelhart's boarding-house. The sound of Miss Abelhart's footsteps was the only sound in the night. The boy walked noiselessly. Once Miss Abelhart thought that he had gone away, silently, but when she turned he was still close beside her.

"I don't know how it can stop," the boy repeated. "I don't know what to do."

Miss Abelhart looked at him, and saw his face white, cracked with hurt and bewilderment. She wanted to stroke his hair tenderly with her fingers, and hold his head gently in her hands. She did not touch him. She stared at him, fascinated, almost unbelieving.

"It is you, isn't it?" she whispered. "You are here?"

"What are you talking like that for?"

"Sometimes I look at you and your face waves; just as if you were under water, and you seem to be going away from me... farther and farther... I must be dizzy."

"Yes."

"Only it seems as if you couldn't be real."

"Why?"

"The way you talked—what you told me..."

"I just told you. I had to tell you sometime."

Miss Abelhart shook her head.

"The others," she said, "the others never told me. I went on for so long and they looked at me and talked, but they never told me. Then they went away. I never saw them any more."

"What others?"

"Oh, you didn't know them, did you? I forgot. It doesn't matter anyway." She put her hand on his arm to stop him, to make him listen carefully to the important thing.

"I don't think they ever really loved me at all," she said. "They never did. I just thought it. I made up things in my head and then watched for all the times they looked at me, and remembered all the things they said... maybe they didn't like me, even. They felt sorry for me, or curious. Maybe they were laughing at me—I never thought of all of this, till now."

"Who was laughing at you?"

"You were, too. You told me. But not now. I can see by your eye you're not laughing now. You— — love me."

The boy winced and tightened his lips, but he said nothing.

"Don't you?" Miss Abelhart's voice grew harsh. "Don't you? Don't you?"

"I don't know—oh, yes. Yes, yes I do."

He was defeated. Miss Abelhart grew quieter, and did not speak again for a moment.

"It's so odd," she said sadly. "None of the others did, and now you do. It doesn't matter about them. I might have been making it up about you, too, you know. I couldn't have borne it, if I had been. I waited so often. I couldn't have waited any more. It makes me sorry," she said, "because it happened too late. It doesn't really make any difference, though. It would always have been too late. It's something to have," she said. "A woman has to have something, even a husk of a woman like me. I always knew a woman had to have something, and now I have..."

"You talk like you were glad," the boy broke out fiercely.

"It's very cruel of me. But I never had anything else. I don't even feel sorry for you really. I've suffered, always. No one else has. I never saw anyone's face look like that, for me..."

The boy gave a low furious exclamation, almost like a cry, and Miss Abelhart stopped suddenly. She took his face in her hands.

"Oh, I am cruel! You must forget about it. You will forget, won't you?"

He twisted away from her. "Don't look at me like that!" he whispered hoarsely. "Don't look at me!"

"I don't care if you forget," she said. "I don't care if I don't have anything for the rest of my life. Oh, you don't understand, do you?"

He did not answer. He did not even turn his head.

"You are so young," she said gently. Then, "Go home now. I'll go the rest of the way by myself."

The three girls whom she had seen earlier in the evening walked past them. They were giggling together and glancing furtively from the corners of their eyes. The boy did not even look at them.

"Go home," said Miss Abelhart. "It's all right now. Goodbye."

The boy did not say goodbye. He turned and went away. In a moment she could not see him at all. His body had faded into thin darkness.

Miss Abelhart walked haltingly along the street towards her boarding-house. She was crying, and the close, sweet night pressed around her, making her weak and sick. The night was full of poisonous fragrance and whirling, dissolving shadows, and she was dizzy, very dizzy. The girls ahead of her were laughing and glancing behind; their shrill excited voices eddied in circles around her brain.

"She had her hands out. Like this. You'd think she was trying to hold onto something."

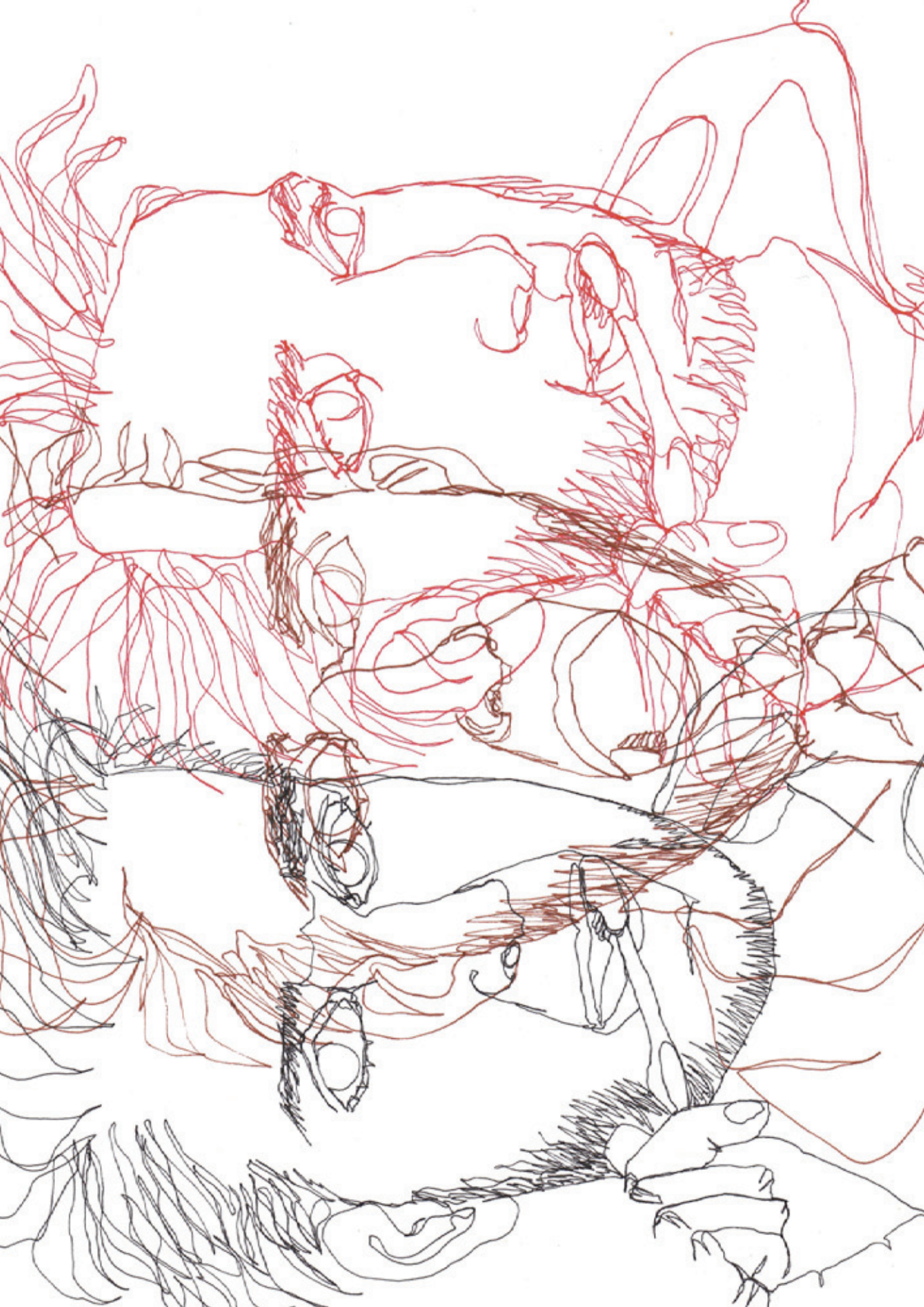
"She thought she was talking to somebody. She was saying go home, or something."

"You are so young,' that's what she said. She was staring and staring, just like there was a person..."

"Jesus Christ! That's it! She thought there was somebody right there beside her!"

There was a little gasp of horror from the three of them. They looked at each other, struck silent for a moment; then they broke into high nervous laughter.

Miss Abelhart staggered once, and leaned back against a lamp-post. She pressed her hands to her head and stared into the outer night. The night was black, the color of madness. The laughter of the girls rose crazily and screamed about her ears, and then fell away. Miss Abelhart was alone in a bottomless silence.



HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

BY JOHN WILLIAMS

Even the IRS sympathizes with your plight, how some decisions don't deduct. Will organic milk break the budget? Do you want the two or four year protection plan? And the thermostat — which base temperature is most economical anyway? First World problems are still problems, and you are solution rather than solvent, caulking gun at the ready, unsealed bathroom tiles set right. Beware what seeps through the cracks. A little moisture grows a lot of mold, why last night's dream of the girl who smiled at you across the bar is a natural disaster no policy can protect against, no premium afford. CEO of this nuclear unit, you must not let your particles drift. If divorce is fission, marriage is plutonium. Come. Sit down. Warm your hands by its constant decay.

× BRUSHING TEETH AT 19H10, 290312 BY BRIT BACHMANN

In the cardiac wing by a night nurse



Who didn't like the looks of her chart.

SURFACES OF SOUND

BY AMANDA DENNIS

There is always something to listen to...especially chatters, a surfeit of dialogues. With this constant train of sounds/OMNI-PRESENCE, silence is avoided like a disease/ABSENCE/DEATH.

Trinh Minh-Ha, When the Moon Waxes Red

Threads of sunlight descended from holes the size of pinheads in the mottled canopy above the flower stall. I selected eleven lotus blossoms from the muddy bucket and watched the woman's hands as she wrapped them in newspaper and tied the bundle with a rubber band. From Payong Market on the western edge of Chiang Mai, I hired a *tuk tuk* and navigated the teeming thoroughfares by the university before entering a matrix of quiet side streets, where there emanated a clicking of looms and the gurgle of water from a small stream. Women worked methodically at these looms inside their huts, while others washed clothes outdoors in buckets filled with water from the stream. The driver made idle chatter.

"Khun bpen kon Amereega, na ka? Bpen ajarn, chai mai ka?"

"I'm American. Yes, a teacher."

"Yuu tee nai, ka? A yuu tao rai?"

Always the same conversation. "I am twenty-two. I stay in Chiangrai."

Orange-saffron—the folds of a novice's robe—struck the senses as I climbed out of the *tuk tuk*. The monk was leaning against the monastery gate—wrought iron with bougainvillea branches woven through. A patch of sunlight fell across his face and, catching sight of me, he beamed, blinking in the glare. I walked in awe of his orange aura, very slowly, through the gate's narrow aperture.

(1) The tone shifts to that of an Orientalist travelogue: an expatriate comments on the provincial charm of an exotic village. The parody of Orientalism is a self-reflexive move. Self-consciously I develop the inner life of only one character: the western woman who reports on Asia. The Thai characters are ornamental. I cannot say everything. I make no claim to afford unmediated access to reality. Is this a parody? Or a variation on the same Orientalist song?

Till a week ago, a teacher of botany

I.

"I am Pra New. Every day there is reporting. You see the head monk. Do three prostrations. Say: 'Sawadee krap, Pra Ajarn Suphan.' Also greet his translator. Her name: Mae Chi Pom Pitt."

The brusque, cheeky monk in charge of the first day's instruction gives us sparse orders. Ill-at-ease in our white folds of fabric, we want to know what the head monk expects of us. And how should we spend the intervening time between reporting sessions?

"Wake up: 4:30am. Breakfast: 6:30am. Lunch: 11:30am. Tonight. Opening ceremony: 5:00pm. Until then, meditation. Walking. Sitting. Alternating. No speaking."

I remain—immobilized—on the porch of the central *wat*, waiting for further instruction. Alone, I walk the length of the temple terrace. Once, then again. Will this movement become a walking meditation? It doesn't.

I turn down the stairs and follow the path Pra New took moments ago. I knock softly at the screen door to his welcome office. He has disappeared. Above his desk a small placard clacks against the wall in the breeze. Its letters are fading and their paint is peeling: IN VIPASSANA, BUDDHA POINTS TO THE PATH. YOU FIND THE WAY YOURSELF.

"Can I help you?" Pra New asks from over my shoulder. I turn to face him. Had he been there all along?

"You have a question?" He persists.

"No, nevermind." I did, but I can't remember what it was. I study the sign again.

"I think—...." I turn around again and he is gone.

Alone I watch the hands of Pra New's clock, lulled by the predictable spasms of the second hand. In the three hours before the opening ceremony I should fill a third of the day's quota: five walking sessions, twenty minutes each, four sitting... Instead I find myself moving purposefully across the temple grounds under the pretext of exploration. Once I understand my surroundings, the geography of this space, I will be able to begin.

I pass the refectory and the towering *stupa*, the reliquary with its flakes of gold. White figures in the grid of stone courtyards are either sitting placidly or goose-stepping like mental patients or sleep walkers, engaged in their practice. I reach the library—a pristine building circumscribed by a snaking balcony and guarded by two *naga* statues, their serpent tails glinting. Fans turn inside the main room, reticulating patterns of light and shadow. Elder monks meditate under these nets

of light in their earth-toned robes. I sit cross-legged on the marble floor—cool to the soles of the feet—set my timer, and try to breathe a rising-falling rhythm.

I hear silence. In its unstructured space, old wounds summon voices from memory.² Divisions of meaning and time collapse without the support of sound. In silence, we find what our lives are structured to ignore.³ In the space of unmarked moments, words well up from within:

Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think. Mother's voice speeds and cracks. HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME, she says. It's time togetup, it's time togetup, it's time togetup in the morning. Father's verses gallop like horses' hooves when he sings. It's the first day of spring. The tulip is in bloom.

When the voices cease, *the silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me*. I try to tell someone—Mae Chi Pom Pitt, the clear-eyed translator with a wide smile. At reporting, the voice that gurgles from my body is strange, stuttering, raw with emotion: *It's lone-lonely. Here*. Light peals of laughter radiate from Mae Chi Pom Pitt's lips. In the timbre of her laugh there is the warmth of possibilities not yet explored.

II.

BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

To the Buddha I go for refuge.

DHAMMAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

To the Dharma I go for refuge.

SANGHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

To the Sangha I go for refuge.

In a red-carpeted room, opposite gaudy, glittered Buddha statues, I kneel with my palms together, listening to *Pali* and mumbling words I do not understand. Pra Ajarn Suphan smiles with benevolence from his cushioned dais as I and

(2) It seems that when all the clutter and noise of everyday life is reduced to such brutal minimalism, that the usual control valves are released and images well up from within. Bill Viola, "The Sound of One Line Scanning."

(3) One tries in vain to work so as not to hear it, to think rapidly so as to mask it. Or to make up a program, a fragile point that barely links us to a suddenly improbably tomorrow. How to pass beyond this peace that lies in wait for us. A silence so great that hopelessness is shamed. Clarice Lispector, *Soulstorm*.

several other white-robed students offer eleven lotus blossoms, give ourselves up to our practice, and utter vows of silence in a monochrome drone. Words move over my mouth and melody emanates, soft and scratchy, from my throat: NIBBANASSA ME BHANTE SACCIKARANATHAYA KAMMATTHANAM AHAM SUKHITO HOMI NIDDUKKHO HOMI AVERO HOMI ABHAYA PAJJO HOMI ANIGHO HOMI SUKHIATTANAM PARIHARAMI.⁴ We repeat sounds in unison, the timbres of our voices mixing and grating against each other, our syllables overlapping and missing. We grope for the rhythm and phrasing of the *Pali* chants, but this bassy elixir has no sense or reference.

In between night and morning, when the sky is stretched glass, I wind down through the last minutes of a sitting meditation. Intuiting the brightening light of the day, inhaling sweet clouds of incense smoke spiraling up from smoldering slits in the darkness, I hear the light clapping of sandaled feet on the stones and the rustling of robes. The monks are returning from the village where they beg for alms. Their movements sound at a lesser decibel than the gongs gathering us to our morning meal: a cacophony jangling, overtones tangling, ringing through the fading shades of night. Six tones moan over, inter-bleeding, leading, un-heading, cutting away the day from darkness.⁵

A patchwork of white and orange: shadows in the weak moonlight congregate in front of the refectory. Small tables, laminated pages with Pali prayers translated into Thai script with its looping letters, flags, flourishes and symbols. Gravelly murmurs circulate, barely more audible than whispers. The fullness of the sound wakes in incremental crescendoes, flowing like a current in and out of these bodies. Heartbeats punctuate our prayer-song with nonsound.

“Hunger’s made my body *empfindlich*,” I tell the German sitting next to me. She hushes me. In our bowls there are dissolving grains of rice flecked with green from the tails of scallions.

“What is this?”

“It’s rice.”

“Rice soup, of sorts.”

“No. We call it *Khao Tom*.” The Thai’s voice soars over the ‘ao’ sound, high then low, hitting ‘tom’ like the short, rich beat of a hand drum.

(4) [A certain culture ...] is eager for art, for music, provided that such art and such music be clear, that they “translate” an emotion and represent a signified (the poem’s “meaning”): an art which vaccinates enjoyment (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion)[...]. Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice.”

(5) The “grain” of the voice is not—or not only—its timbre; the signifying it affords cannot be better defined than by the friction between music and something else, which is the language (and not the message at all). Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice.”

“*Der Reis. Du bist ja gereizt. Schon, der Reiz.*” My German friend laughs for the duration of the meal.⁶

I stir the substance in the bowl. It was rice but it is now denatured. It is rice without its grain, viscous, more liquid than solid, but lost in the border-regions between the two. The German’s huffing reprisals provide our only soundtrack. Still somewhat hollow from hunger, I prostrate myself three times and wash my dish in the sink.

The tepid pre-dawn gives way to waves of heat that crash through the afternoons: it is Thailand’s hot season. My robe is wet with sweat. The scream of cicadas punctures my mediation the way an alarm bell alters the course of a dream. I search my memory for the myth of the cicadas: if I can imbue this sound with history, I can control the mental image it creates. Then these busy thoughts cede to what’s more interesting: the patina of sound. I notice strands of individual outputs blending together, the choral composite nature of noise.

I get up too quickly and stumble across the stones to the rear gate of the courtyard, making for the shade of a green plastic canopy. Underneath, picnic tables are populated by a spattering of nuns sipping tea. Or are they meditators in the same white garb, taking a break? They speak like the cicadas; I can’t assimilate their sounds or make sense of their voices. There is a change in me. Is it related to the heat? It’s a problem of articulation—I can no longer cut up streams of noise. But it’s also a problem of connection: I can’t string sound into sense; staccato stutters exist apart and alone. I cannot identify the language they are speaking as my own.

A nun ladles some substance from a large clay pot – clots of greenjelly weave through an algae-colored liquid. A man slurps his drink. His lips seem to come apart from his body. Dizzy, I turn and knock the pot from its perch. It cracks into innumerable shards that clatter as they hit the cement floor. I slide, falling into the table, but a pair of hands pushes me upright. I recognize Mae Chi Pom Pitt’s warm smile. With her hand on the small of my back she indicates my position in the surrounding space.

(6) The German woman pokes fun at the narrator, who misuses *empfindlich* (usually translated into English as “sensitive”), by playing on the phonological link between *Reis* and *Reiz*, the latter being a general term for “stimulus” that carries sexual innuendos. Puns are ways for language to create a meaning on its material surface through the resounding and rebounding of sound.

III.

The surfaces of the stones are cratered and rough. My feet discern their textures as I pace the courtyard, my mind moving inside the present as each moment flows seamlessly into its successor. The timer sounds. I sit, and begin again.

After all the effort expended in the stagnating heat, after my attempts in these ten days to reach some *goal*, to master the knowledge of the art of Vipassana, the reward, the prize I was seeking is this awareness: I move with everything that can ever be found.⁷ Here, in this space of pleasure, of enjoyment, language works upon *itself for nothing*.⁸ Now there is the lightness of evening descending.

There were never any quotas to fill nor truths to unearth. I try to play in sound and silence, reorienting meanings from the periphery. I know now that there is no center.⁹

The gut reaction to the constant pulling away of the present is to wrap one's arms around it and cling, shutting out impermanence. Now the past in its vivid detail, like the excitement of future plans, peels off the present like a false skin. Empty of structures, this present flows beneath a metropolis of pretentions. One can move inside its moments. The only sustainable emotion is suffering. I let go, and the earth moves me through blue to blood-orange gold. The day falls away.

As my timer sounds, I open my eyes to pools of leaves swirling up from the ground, circling in tides of breeze as others cascade in lazy descent from above. I pick up a broom from the side of the hut adjacent to the courtyard. We sweep in silence, the eternal silence that beats under the scratching of our brooms, the chanting of novices from the central *wat*, the chirping of cicadas and my spontaneous query:

"Why are you called 'New?'" He looks up from the ground, his serious expression broken by a broad smile.

"New. Like every moment."

We open again to the silence, pushing leaves across the stones with repetitive bursts of movement, of sound.

notice

what you
notice.



(7) [W]hat is carefully, precariously given to be read is that there is nothing there to read; here again we come to that exemption of meaning, (that exemption from meaning as well) which we Westerners can barely understand, since for us to attack meaning is to hide or to invert it, but never to "absent it." Roland Barthes *Empire of Signs*.

(8) Barthes describes "a space of pleasure, of enjoyment, a site where the language works upon itself for nothing, i.e., in perversion," "The Grain of the Voice."

(9) According to Western metaphysics, "every center is the site of truth." Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*.



POEM TAKEN APART AND PUT BACK TOGETHER

BY ANNE SIMPSON

Beginning

Take the paleness of the belly, rounding from one side to the other, with one or two shimmering tracks, the kind that snails leave on a sidewalk. A way to meet the world, wallpaper the bathroom. Think, for instance, of your fingertips. Those tiny maps of cities you think you've visited. Bristol, perhaps, or Seattle. But these are far more intricate. Freeways, byways, thoroughfares. Even the small yellow lights describing the truck's rectangular load in the dark. Such traffic. Are you sure there's not another way around the noon light? How harsh it is. So many things are offered up. Your palm, open. Begging exposes the wrist. (Expand on this in the conclusion.)

Middle

Skin wraps itself around the city, hoping for a shape. It has nothing of its own, only the refusal to fit exactly. (No thesis evident in the argument.) Early light, puckering water. That shrewdness between the trees. So your fingers. So mine. There's no seam, no place where it starts. Mussel shells, with their rippled steps, their mauve hierarchies. No one ever talks about courtesy anymore. No one mentions wisdom. They're lifting weights at the gym. It's too much to look directly at the sun, with its smooth rhetorical devices. Look at the details. How one thing contains the next, cupping it gently. Take any galaxy.

End

It's true that women look older in the afternoon light than men of the same age. The middle kingdom. As for the small rugs of the elbows, they could be regarded as jovial. I don't want to go back to the qualities of light at this hour. Sometimes there's a scent of benzine, that implausible sweetness, a little cloying. Imagine if you could hear the draftsmanship of light. It lends itself to everything. (Lack of supporting evidence.) What animal darted between the trees this morning? The palaces of its tracks will be locked in ice. So much ice gliding over the world, leaving ridged patterns between the eyebrows. What if the inner became outer? A cape lined with white silk. Your inconsequential fevers pulled inside out. Your amygdala, with its folding maps of world history. Let's go back to the beginning, imagine infancy as a cloud. Only then will we stop talking to ourselves, hands held to our ears. Hello? Why didn't you just text me?



TUNNELLING

BY BLAKE KIMZEY

He was born slight, two weeks premature. This was Michigan, mid-April 1957. In the minutes following delivery the doctor blanched, refused to cut the boy's umbilical cord, his hands trembling. He burst through the delivery room doors in green cap and gown, in a panic, searching for the ward chaplain. The hospital was rooted in a Pentecostal enclave, a pine-choked town of less than 5000 people. The doctor directed the chaplain to lay hands on the boy's ringed stomach, to discern what this deformity meant and ask God to heal the boy. But the chaplain refused to look upon the newborn, said he could not lay hands on the boy because he was not made in the image of God. Outside, a light, steady rain persisted.

The doctor, a rigidly capable man in his fifties, paced the small length of the delivery room in an effort to recall his medical schooling, his text books, medical lore, anything to form a grain of understanding: what he saw did not line up with what he knew, what he believed. He was on the verge of hysteria.

The overhead lights in the delivery room were bright white. At an angle, held to the light, grooves defined the boy's belly. His midsection was a slick gelatinous cushion, the skin accordioned like concentric bands ringing his abdomen from waist to collarbone. Everything else about the boy was normal: two arms and two legs, a penis, and a beautiful head with eyes, nose, ears, and a tiny mouth all in their proper place. The doctor and the nurses, every one of them veterans who had worked together on an English airfield during the Second World War, had never seen anything like this boy.

Legs still in the stirrups, the mother's face was white like milled flour. She

× THE LOVERS BY MATTHEW ROSE

One by her daughter, Trish, eleven,

had lost a pint or more of blood and was faint when her husband implored one of the nurses to cut the umbilical chord. The mother was wheeled out of the room and taken to recovery one floor down. The doctor left, without word, his face buried in his hands. The father stayed and took the boy in his thick logging arms.

The boy wailed, drew short of breath, and wailed some more. His birth fluids bloodied the father's flannel shirt and forearms. A sticky mucous—not blood, not amniotic fluid—coated the boy's midsection.

The father held his son delicately and rocked him back and forth. He was a father for the first time at 33 — he had just missed the war — and refused to let the nurses swaddle the boy, though it was frightfully cold in the room. The father told the nurses he would keep the boy warm. He bent his head to the boy's chest, wanting to see the concentric bands up close, and listen to the boy's heart, each tiny thump a miracle. Eventually, the father allowed the nurse to swaddle the boy, and they joined the mother in her recovery room. That night, only the mother slept.

×

The next day the family was discharged before breakfast. The father wanted to take the boy away, to the family's rolling acreage in the wilds of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, near the Ontario border. It was their summer cottage, inherited after the mother's father had passed away the previous spring. There the father could fish for trout and salmon and hunt deer; he could revive the old victory garden and plant potatoes, onions, radishes, and tomatoes. At the father's request the administrators made no birth record of the boy, nor did the hospital want to lay claim to him. The ward chaplain blessed the mop water before the delivery room was cleaned, and everyone involved resolved to keep the secret of the boy's birth, his deformity, fearful of the certain godlessness of the family.

Curbside, the mother sat in a daze in her wheelchair letting the last of the morphine work its way through her sore body. The family was in the rear of the hospital by the ambulatory entrance, out of sight. The nurse who cut the boy's umbilical cord helped the mother into the family's black Hudson Commodore; she had written her address and telephone number on a small piece of paper and handed it to the mother. She said to call if they ever needed anything. The boy, swaddled, squirmed in the mother's arms. The

cloth was damp around the stomach, and the mother could feel the power of the muscular contractions in the boy's tiny midsection. She had felt this when the boy was still in her womb.

It took almost three hours to get home, to their cottage on the outskirts of an unincorporated township. The father drove slow and steady northward on the winding two-lane highway. Rows of quaking aspens banded the road on either side. The spring thaw brought with it bright green and blooming vegetation in the woods beyond the road, ringing the great Lake Michigan a half mile west.

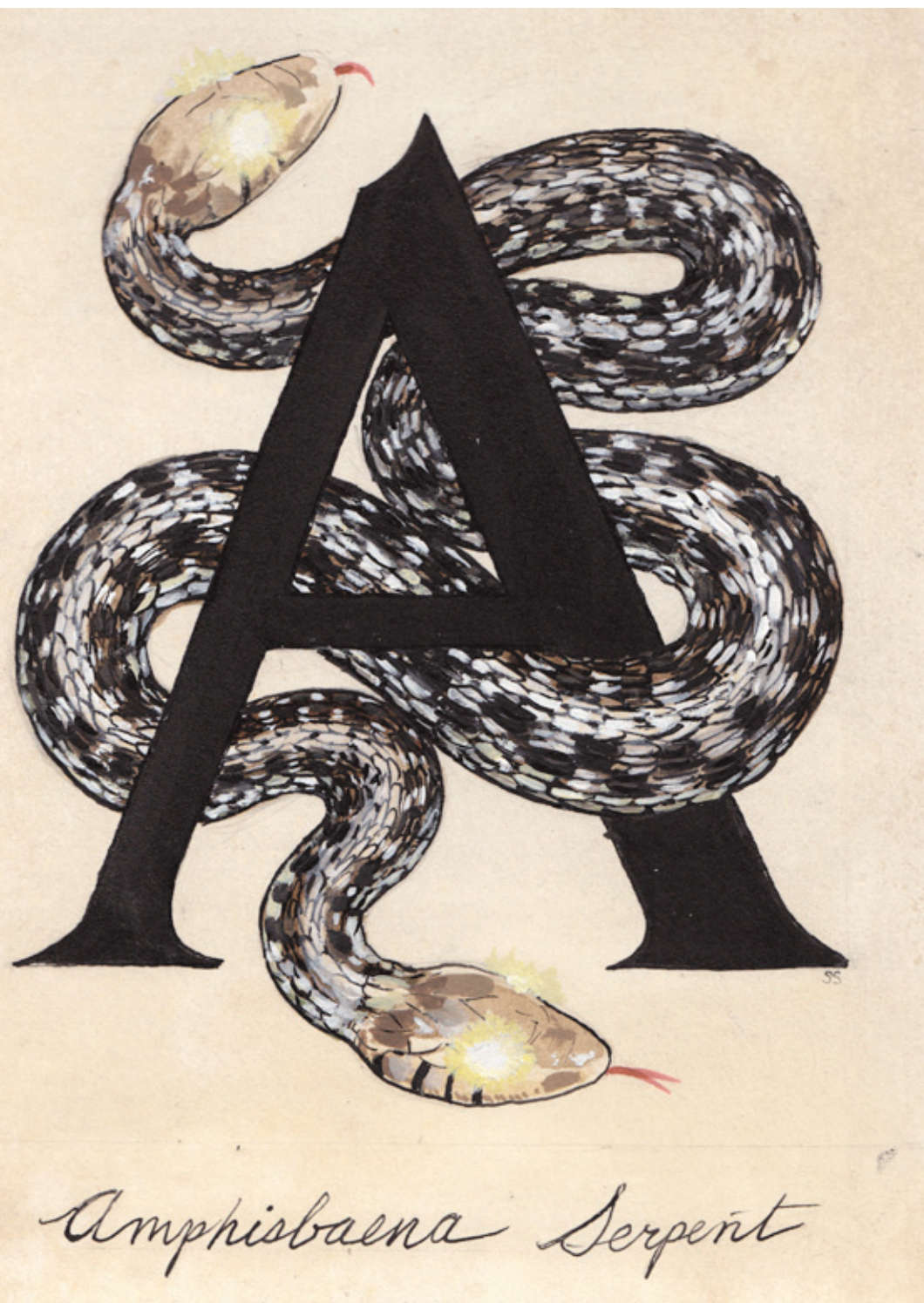
There was a 45-minute car-ferry across the Straits of Mackinac. In the distance Mackinac Bridge, which was set to connect the Upper Peninsula with Lower Michigan, was nearing completion and set to open in November. The father held the boy on the ferry, sheltered him from the wind and also from inquisitive older women. The boy was his greatest joy. He kissed the boy's forehead and looked at the near-complete Mackinac Bridge and regarded it as an unwelcome intrusion. He was taking the boy north, where he would be safe from the outside world.

×

The boy grew fast. His torso was the first to stretch, and the color of his skin faded to dead lavender. In a matter of months the boy was the size of a toddler, and his arms were muscular. The father recognized the family logging genes with pride.

The mother had not yet adjusted to the boy. She had fallen into a thick depression. He wouldn't take to her breast milk and her bosom swelled and cramped, and she would sit in pain at the end of her bed sobbing, milking herself for relief. She kept a leather-bound journal on her nightstand, but only noted the dates at the top of the page as they passed, and could not bring herself to write about the boy.

Most mornings the father found the corners of the boy's mouth crusted with dirt, bits of soil caught in the wispy meringue of hair atop his head. This mystery was solved in early June. Summer had encroached on the property, and afternoon sunlight stretched deep into the evening. The wooden cottage sat like a lone Monopoly piece on the property; its wrap-around porch and picture windows looked out at a small patch of open meadow that rolled toward the clear blue water over a glacial lake not forty yards away. The



father had just hung a porch swing, had fashioned every bit of it in the woodshed behind the cottage, back where his father-in-law's old maroon Ford F1 pick-up was still garaged. The mother, outside for the first time in days, was coaxed into spreading a picnic quilt. The three of them sat together in the yard, half shaded by the large pine spiking upward out of the soft, fertile ground.

After studying the porch swing from their vantage point on the front lawn, the father decided it was tilted ever so slightly to the left and he resolved to raise the left side by one chain-link. The mother was clutching her breasts and looking out toward the lake at three blue herons standing in shallow water. The boy, in nothing but a cloth diaper and a bonnet to shade him from the sun, held his small hands at his sides and slithered off the patchwork quilt. There was rich loamy soil between the blades of grass and the boy found it and buried his mouth in the dirt and ate. The father bounded off the porch when he saw the boy face down in the grass, worried that the boy was suffocating. The father cried to the mother and his booming voice snapped her from a trance.

The father got to the boy and picked him up in one sweeping motion. There was a slight, rounded depression in the yard where the boy had eaten away the bits of grass and soil. By now the boy was heavy, had been growing without the benefit of breast milk for weeks. Gently, the father placed the boy on the ground, and he began to eat again. Five, ten minutes passed, and the boy created a minor concavity in the lawn, now ankle deep. The father studied the boy, and after another minute or so the boy was satisfied and, like a normal baby, crawled back to the quilt. The father had seen the boy move like this before. Sometimes he crawled, and other times he moved quickly on his belly like a snake, or a worm. The father took the boy in his arms and wiped the boy's chin, where wet soil had muddied and streaked his face. You have to watch the boy, the father said. You have to watch him. But the mother didn't regard her husband, paid him no mind. She cradled her chest and walked toward the house, to bed.

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The father had been taking photographs of the boy with his father-in-law's old Polaroid Model 95 since the day of his birth, and now, if he looked at the pictures in quick succession, or flipped through them as if they were a deck of playing cards, he could watch the boy change from one frame to the next, as if he were watching a miniature black and white movie. The father knew how to develop film. He would eagerly come out of a makeshift darkroom in the guest bedroom and add the latest picture and flip through the growing booklet. Sometimes he ruined an exposure and would steam it for hours. The mother would stay in her bedroom most days, and had no interest in the flipbook, wouldn't look at it when the father brought it in. But the father would show it to the boy in the mornings, and tell the boy that he was going to grow up big and strong like his father.

One night in late August the father took the boy out to the front porch. Neither could sleep, and a curtain of rain was falling. The boy loved the rain, loved to play in the mud and bury his head in the dirt until his mouth grew tired of burrowing. By now shallow holes dotted the meadow around the cottage. Some were rather deep and the boy, now six months old and the size of a six year old, was fast and powerful. He couldn't yet talk, but he made sounds with his mouth and nodded his head yes or no.

After a while, this became routine. The father would take the boy outside and watch him play with the moon high overhead, reflecting off the lake. Sometimes clouds would roll in and the canopy of trees would hold darkness below their limbs. This would make it hard to find the boy. On nights like this the father would put his head in the cavernous holes and call after the boy until he grew hoarse. Retrieving him could take hours, especially in the rain. The father, harried, would dart from hole to hole slipping in the mud, frantically searching. Then the boy would silently surprise his father and sidle up next to him. The father would yell in his relief, pick up the sodden boy and press him to his chest. Then they would wade out into the lake water, the father clutching the boy, letting the gentle water wash over their soiled bodies.

×

By the following April the boy looked like he was 12. He could talk, he was tall when he walked upright, and the rings from his belly had formed all over his body. He produced a steady coat of mucous from his pores. The

father had built the boy an open-air room in the wood shed so that he could be outside and burrow whenever he pleased. The father would sit on the porch in his swing and watch the boy, and when he couldn't see the boy he would simply listen for him tunneling through the yard, making figure eights around and under the roots of the biggest trees.

One evening, a dry night after days of steady rain, the boy ran from the wood shed and stood before his father on the porch. It was the first time that the two had stood near eye to eye. In the dim porch light the two looked cut from the same stone. The boy hugged his father and they held on to each other for several minutes. The father knew what this meant, and asked if he would see the boy again. The boy nodded, and said that he would, someday. Then the father said, don't break your mother's heart. He couldn't bring himself to tell the boy not to break his own. The boy said he loved him, and dropped to his stomach and slid off the front porch. The boy wriggled from his clothes and disappeared into the first hole he came to, his feet trailing out of sight.

The father sat staring at the hole until the sun came up. It had misted throughout the night and moisture choked the air. By mid-morning the father was asleep in the porch swing. He woke when the mother slammed the trunk of their old Commodore. She said they needed to leave, put this all behind them. The father had the keys in a kitchen drawer. When he opened the drawer he saw a crumpled piece of paper with an address on it. He remembered the nurse and retrieved a sheet of paper from the roll-top desk. The father simply wrote "the boy is gone" in neat cursive. He didn't sign the letter, found an envelope and stamp, and was done with it. In the living room he picked up the photo flipbook, now swollen with more than 300 pictures, and watched his boy grow from a baby into whatever it was he had become. The father's eyes grew glassy.

He met his wife by the Commodore. He handed the flipbook and the letter to her, along with the keys, and said he couldn't leave. She didn't protest, and he didn't expect her to. They said goodbye and held each other until he kissed her on the cheek. He imagined his wife driving back over the newly completed Mackinac Bridge toward Traverse City, looking in the rearview mirror at the thick forests of the Upper Peninsula, thinking about the boy, and hoping no one else would ever find him. The thought terrified him.





A RIVER SONG

BY STUART DISCHELL

Some rivers look good from a distance,
Ogled in blue along the tree-lined banks

Or in black dresses with crystal buttons
Stretching their arms at night after the dance—

But my river honey slips between buildings,
Hides beneath highways and under bridges.

Out of work she's poor and like many city people
Has a place she comes from back in the country.

× FRENCH INDIAN BOY BY KIT BROWN

To Second Baptist on Randolph Street.

A VISIT FROM THE PRINCE

BY AARON AKIRA

I was just sitting down to write for the evening when my cell phone rang. It was in the pocket of my pants, which were on the couch in the living room where I had left them. (In the summer I often take them off the moment I return from the office.) I crossed the apartment and shook my pants upside down by the cuffs. It was my agent.

“Any news?” I asked. I’d recently given him a draft of a novel. It was a semi-autobiographical work, set in my suburban hometown, in which I recounted the untimely death of the girl to whom I’d lost my virginity. Everything was true to life, except the death, but the girl and I were still friends, and I knew she’d forgive me, in the event the novel ever got published. I had heard nothing from my agent in months.

“I’d say so!” my agent said. “The Prince is coming to visit.”

“Who?”

“The Prince! You! He’s coming to visit *you*.”

I had never heard my agent get excited before. Ordinarily even his praise contained dampeners, such as when he termed my novel “a firehose of tears.”

“I suggest you put some pants on,” he said.

I paced to the window and peered out into the waning sunlight. In the street below there were people in colourful costumes assembling, as if for a parade. “It’s oppressively hot in here,” I said. “How do you know what I’m wearing?”

“I’m across the street. There’s going to be a parade.”

“For whom?”

“The Prince!”

I thought I could see my agent standing in a doorway, waving his arms in frustration. “Listen,” he said. “You have to get the air-conditioning sorted before the Prince arrives.” He gave me the number of a repair company. I decided to broach the subject of money, because I didn’t have any.

“I can only work with what I’m given,” he said. “The Prince arrives in thirty. Talk later.”

From the street below came the sounds of a band practicing scales. I shut the drapes. My apartment was a mess. There was no place for the Prince to even sit down. I crossed back into my bedroom, thinking I might still finish the sentence I started

before my agent phoned:

The next day the curator took a long lunch and

I crouched on my bed, considering this. But whatever spell I’d been under was broken - I couldn’t think of a single thing the curator needed to do the next day on his lunch break. I didn’t know any art curators well enough to ask what they did on lunch breaks. It’s not like they work in shifts, I reflected. Curators can have lunch anytime they want.

I gathered my papers with regret and considered what to wear. The heat in my top floor apartment at this time of year was Amazonian. Anything I put on would be drenched by the time the Prince arrived. I remembered to phone the air-conditioner repair company. Initially they said they could do nothing until the following week, but when I explained the situation - the Prince, etc. - they said they’d come before nightfall. I was pressing them for an exact time when the parade began, making it impossible to hear one another. I hung up and began collecting stray socks and boxer shorts from my living room floor. My doorbell rang as I was doing this. To my relief it was not the Prince but rather my girlfriend, Gladys, who had brought Cantonese food.

“I only have an hour,” she said. “I brought oranges.”

I helped her clear space on the table for the small plastic sacks of lo mein, congee and century egg and I told her she’d overlap with the Prince’s visit, at least some of it, depending on how long the Prince intended to stay at my apartment. She had been undoing the straps of her heels but now she halted, distraught. “I have to go home and change!”

I told her she looked fine to me. But it’s true she was in her work clothes. She worked nights at a cocktail bar. She was the manager. “Maybe it’s an informal visit,” I ventured. “He probably visits some people formally, and some people informally.”

“There will be cameras,” she said. “You better put some pants on.”

“I was just doing that.”

“And the birds...” With her wrist she pushed her black hair back from her eyes, a waitress habit she had, intended to avoid hand-hair contact.

“What birds?”

“The Prince travels with a gaggle of male peacocks,” she said. “I’ve seen them on TV.” She had her coat back on. “I’ll run home and get a dress. You better clean up. Dust. Find birdseed.” She pecked me on the cheek and ducked out the door.

I stared at the Cantonese food, strewn over my scrunched tablecloth amid two overfull ashtrays, a stack of unopened bills, and a bowl of oranges. I doubted that protocol required me to feed the peacocks. I ate an orange. Dinner would be cold by the time Gladys returned. We didn’t get to see each other often on account of our

conflicting schedules. By the time I left the office of the theatre I helped run, she was usually helping her bartenders set up their stations, slicing limes and lemons, preparing cherry marinades. I began packing a portion of the Cantonese into Tupperware for Gladys to take to work. The phone rang again. It was the air-conditioning people: they were going to be late. I said it was nice of them to call, which it was. There was nothing else I could do. The Prince was just out of luck when it came to cool air this evening. Or I was out of luck. I had no idea what was at stake in this rendezvous. I called my agent back.

“Why are you still pantless?” he interrupted.

“If you’re just going to wait down there staring up at me, you might as well come help me get this place in order.” I opened my windows to air out the room.

He demurred, saying it wasn’t his thing, royals. It sounded like he didn’t want to be seen as tagging along. “Wait until the Prince arrives,” he said. “If the Prince mentions me first, I’ll come up.”

“Like you just happened to be passing by.”

“Exactly.”

“If you didn’t arrange this, who did?”

“The Prince is very spontaneous. That’s what I’ve read.”

He excused himself: the parade was starting. My windowpanes were soon rattling from the bass drum. The Prince was probably nearby. I arranged my couch cushions to hide a ketchup stain that had come from a previous owner. I wasn’t certain about protocol. Does the Prince remain standing? If the Prince remains standing, shall I also remain standing? Should the air-conditioning repair team arrive during the Prince’s visit, are they too obliged to stand, even if the nature of their work often requires kneeling or ladders and is self-evidently peripheral to the occasion? Will the Prince view my kitchen? Must the dishes be done? May not the door leading to the kitchen simply be closed, and left outside his royal purview? These questions occupied me as I over-watered some plants Gladys had left in my apartment. Soon the watering can was empty, and my doorbell was ringing.

The Prince himself! Almost entirely obscured by the glare of a half-dozen white flash umbrellas. Cameras whirled, the sound of locusts descending, accompanied by hushed laughter. “Pants,” said someone. The Prince offered me his hand. Each finger bore a ring, and none of the rings went together - a strange heterogeneity of metals, gems, and tiny found objects, a hand assembled by a team of magpies. “A great pleasure to meet you,” said the Prince, looking at the crush of cameramen assembled behind him. Behind the cameramen stood the Prince’s entourage, a troupe

of Greek-looking men in sequined purple leotards bearing an enormous gilt throne, and behind them, a queue of honking male peacocks, extending down to the stairwell on the opposite side of the building. I stood aside to let the procession file into my apartment. As they passed, I wondered whether I’d closed the kitchen door, or merely thought about closing it.

When I returned to the living room I saw that the Prince’s aides had pushed my couch and coffee table against the wall to make way for the throne where the Prince sat. This was a relief. I sat too, on my windowsill. The parade outside was in full swing. I had to close the windows. The entourage stood at the foot of his throne, while the peacocks set about exploring my apartment, one jumping on my dining table to peck at the orange peels I’d left.

“Very hot in here!” the Prince exclaimed. On this cue, the members of his entourage reached into their thigh-high leather boots and produced corrugated Oriental fans, the size of cymbals, with which they proceeded to create a tornado of breezes. Thumbtacks detached from posters on my walls, ashes from makeshift ashtrays filled the air, and the peacocks lowered their skulls in discomfort. I saw a page from the short story I’d got stuck on soaring through the maelstrom.

“It’s being taken care of,” I shouted. “This very evening.”

“We shan’t keep you too long,” shouted the Prince. I wondered then if he thought I myself would be repairing the AC.

“An honour to have you,” I said, though I had no idea why he’d chosen me, of all the tenants of my building, of all the citizens of the city, the nation.

“Nonsense,” shouted the Prince. “It is I who should thank you for this occasion. I am grateful to be permitted this opportunity to demonstrate my continued support for, and devotion to, the arts.”

His entourage applauded, and the wind fell. My heart rose. “Your Highness is familiar with my work?” Perhaps my agent had been busier than I gave him credit for..

“Of course. I take great pains to remain informed. I particularly appreciate your office management of the Seacrest Theatre, a place, it is said, where one never lacks for coffee filters or a bulldog clip.”

After a few beats of pure bewilderment, I thanked him. But inwardly I was furious, for office work at the Seacrest amounted to menial mud-schlepping and number-fudging. By my yardstick it was a huge embarrassment to be photographed here with the Prince, without pants on, in connection to my uninspiring day job. I couldn’t just shoo him out, though.

“Theatre administration is no child’s play!” the Prince continued. “In my youth I took a shine to theatre, and purchased several. I insisted on doing everything myself.



Little did I know the real drama was backstage!”

“In fact what I do, mainly, is write,” I said. “I’m a writer.”

“You too! This greatly interests me!”

He seemed ready to elaborate but the grind of a key inserted itself into the room and all heads turned toward the door where Gladys entered, wearing a tiger-lily dress I’d once bought for her. Its effect was diminished among the shimmering tails of the roving peacocks, and the Prince’s own attire, a cacophony of brocaded wraps, capes, and asymmetrical tailoring, as though he’d fallen asleep with his clothes on, and upon waking, put more clothes on, doubles of everything.

“Aaron!” Gladys said. “Pants?”

“Your Highness,” I said, “My girlfriend...”

“How do you do,” said the Prince.

Gladys executed a clumsy curtsy. I saw she was still wearing the same shoes, the ones she intended to wear to the bar.

“Are you also a writer and an administrator of theatre?” asked the Prince, without irony.

“No, your Highness. I administrate a cocktail bar. The Bigfoot Ballroom.”

“I adore cocktails!”

“She’s also an actress,” I interjected. “We met at the theatre.”

“Has anyone offered the Prince a drink?” Gladys asked, as though there were more of us present, hosting. Without waiting, she left for the kitchen. My cell phone began ringing, inaccessible in the couch where I’d left it. I spoke over the sound.

“Is your Highness interested in any particular sort of writing?”

The Prince was foraging among the folds of his gowns, probably to see if it was his own phone that was ringing. It seemed he had several phones.

“Everything from Sappho to back issues of *Luxury Auto*,” he said. “But chiefly poetry, plays, fiction, self-help, history, investigative journalism, religious studies, and Sudoku.” The Prince accepted a Negroni from Gladys before continuing. “Sports biographies, anthroposophical studies, fishing handbooks, sociological texts, and, of late, slave diaries.” We asked how he managed to sustain such varied interests, and the Prince professed to having been indoctrinated in speed-reading techniques from a young age. He told us of a drafty château in the Loire, where the morning’s riding and archery lessons were followed by rigorous exercises in skimming, meta-guiding, and chunking. The Prince paused when the doorbell sounded. Gladys answered it and I bade the Prince continue.

“I learned trades also,” he said. “For several years it was thought I should become a breeder of horses. There’s an art to that too, you know. It was only my fierce devotion

to my prayer routine that prevented...”

The Prince paused again, because two squat men in cargo shorts and baseball caps now squeezed into the room, toting tool bags. Gladys led them through wordlessly to the kitchen, where the AC unit was. They had no sooner closed the door when a crash was heard, brittle and cartoonish, as if they’d just entered a prop closet. The dishes, I reflected. Gladys exited the kitchen, blushing in apology. She curtsied again, better this time. I put some music on, an album by The Lemonheads.

“Good group,” said the Prince. “Under-rated.”

I’d been about to change it, thinking the Prince might prefer something classical, or more arty. A whirring now emanated from the kitchen, and the crowd gathered outside had begun chanting, so I raised the volume.

“You guys should come to my DJ night,” said the Prince. He drained his cocktail.

“What are they chanting?” asked Gladys. As she approached the window, it shattered. She jumped back with a scream. A peacock honked, trafficky-sounding. The doorbell rang again.

“It’s a golf ball,” said the Prince, pointing to the floor by the window. I picked it up and ceremoniously handed it to the Prince, I’m not sure why. Then I answered the door.

It was my agent. Most of his jacket and shirt had been torn off. “No one’s mentioned you,” I confessed. My agent collapsed into my arms.

“The parade has turned violent,” he whispered.

“The Prince’s blood,” said Gladys. “That’s what they’re chanting.”

“The Prince’s love!” cried my agent, pushing his way into the room. He knelt.

“Who’s this one?” the Prince asked me.

“This is my agent,” I explained.

“A theatrical agent?”

“For my books.”

“His Highness should see his work,” said my agent. “Moving material. Dead girls.”

Boredom crossed the Prince’s delicate white features. “I have an idea,” he said, widening his eyes. A tomato arced through my broken window. To everyone’s surprise, it didn’t splatter, just rolled into a corner, where the peacocks took an interest in it. “Let’s start a band,” the Prince said.

“What sort of band?” my agent asked. I hadn’t known he took an interest in music.

“Just the blues. Strictly no-bullshit traditionalist Delta blues. With electronic elements.”

“That could be cool,” said Gladys. Her ex had been a musician, I recalled.

“I don’t know,” I began. It could also be stressful. I had read a lot of rock ‘n’

roll diaries, probably more than the Prince had. Flaky promoters, van breakdowns, chain motels, obscure quests for amp cables, gray ponytails, the odd arrest, a diet of Pringles and hash browns... The Prince, I thought, was deceiving himself. Romanticizing things. He wouldn't take well to that lifestyle. I myself tended to get carsick on buses, especially when I read books. "I'm really trying to focus on fiction right now," I said.

Just then the repairmen exited the kitchen, leaving the door open. A chill invaded the room. They doffed their baseball caps at the Prince and, before leaving, handed Gladys a piece of yellow paper, presumably the bill. She handed the paper to me and I handed it to my agent, who handed it to a member of the Prince's mustachioed retinue, who folded it carefully into a flight-worthy airplane and launched it out my broken window, where its flight path shortly coincided with that of a flaming arrow. I pretended to take no notice of any of this.

Then the Prince suggested he and I write something together. A work of fiction. The room gazed at me in expectation. It was a terrible idea, I thought, like two people trying to jointly pilot a skateboard. But I couldn't say no with my agent around. I showed his Highness the sentence I'd been unable to finish. The Prince regarded the paper for what seemed like a long time. Meanwhile it had become impossible for his retinue to ignore the growing threat from the parade in the street below my apartment. Four of the men produced Kalashnikovs from their boots and took up positions at my street-facing windows..

"Who was relieving him during his lunch break?" the Prince finally asked.

"The curator probably just put a sign on the door."

The Prince shook his head. My agent shot me a look.

"Or he has assistants. Unpaid interns. Daughters of privilege, bad at math."

"All the curators working for me," said the Prince, "work in six-hour relays."

"Wow. No kidding."

The gun-toting members of the retinue glanced back from their stations, nodding, as if they too were proud of this aspect of the Prince's administration.

"Otherwise, I find they get burned out," the Prince explained. "It's hard work, you know. Discriminating between things." He winced as one of the armed men squeezed off some warning shots. We had no reason to believe they weren't warning shots. "Would you like to come see some of my galleries?" asked the Prince.

I began to say "Sure," but Gladys gently stood on my toe. She tapped her wrist.

"We'll go by helicopter," the Prince assured us. "Do you have roof access?"

I explained that the landlord wouldn't give us the key. We used to have the key. There had been an episode that first summer involving a friend of a friend, the hood

of a neighbour's car, an empty bottle of Corona. My agent told me sotto voce to shut up about my landlord.

"We can have him slain," the Prince suggested, leaning back in his throne. His retinue fired a few more rounds over or into the crowd. Half a minute passed, none of us speaking over the gunfire. The peacocks in the room seemed to sense the mounting awkwardness, taking a new interest in each other's plumage, pennies on the floor, their own grooming.

"It seems a little drastic," I said at last.

"To kill," added Gladys.

"Just to avoid traffic caused by the parade held in your honour on the roads leading to your galleries," I finished.

The Prince furrowed his brow in consideration.

"How far are the galleries?" asked my agent.

"I see what you mean," said the Prince after a moment. "Infinite power, exquisite tastes. I get carried away."

We agreed. A lack of empathy was totally understandable.

"Might it be," said the Prince, leaning in, "merely a feature of a habitus or system of dispositions operating within a field of aesthetic rituals identifiable and even openly lauded as means of reproducing pre-existing social hierarchies that can be said to retain the general outline of the comparatively savage pre-modern social structure from which they descend ? This tendency to value art over life ?"

"It's a thorny issue," we confirmed. From the streets below rose sounds of wailing and sirens.

"Discuss!" the Prince cried, rubbing his jewelled fingers.

But Gladys had to go to work. The Prince insisted on loaning her two of his men to accompany her to the bus stop. We could tell he was disappointed. His peacocks folded their tails and congregated near the door, like guests prematurely donning overcoats. The Prince descended from his golden throne and he asked if he could have an orange for the road. I gave him the whole sack, as a gesture. My agent offered to carry it for him. I watched the Prince's entourage hoist his throne carefully through my narrow door. The displaced furniture left a gaping hole in the center of my living room where the throne had been. I suddenly felt certain I would never see the Prince again. Such a scintillating, vast personality, so well rounded, such a bon vivant... As I closed the door behind the last peacock and turned, pantless, to face my bare apartment strewn with gray feathers and broken glass, it seemed a great shame.

But, to my surprise, the Prince has continued to pay frequent visits, surrounding me with his heraldry, usually on calm evenings when I am not otherwise engaged.



× MY DOUBLE BY WILLIAM KECKLER

Worried she has no room in her heart

PATRICIAN PLEASURES

BY HEATHER HARTLEY

“Pandora’s Box” at 4:00 p.m.,
A nap in cashmere socks,
Rum, bum, and concertina,
A thousand contacts.
Two black whores in Austin, Texas—
Posh, posh, posh.
Mantras and foie gras and Pinot Noir.
A red silk scarf.
A gold wing over the mantle,
A house in the south,
The exterminating angel.
Desiderata, palimpsest, incunabula.
Penny dreadful.
A gratuitous act.
No cash.
Farandole, Tarantella, Pavane.
‘I Spy,’
E-Bay.
The first wife,
War and Peace,
The second.
A hoof stuffed in a slipper,
O my Machiavellian amour,
Patrician pleasures
Kill, my kill,
Kill my kill.

For two back-biting colleagues,



A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT OF SECRET COURTYARD GARDENS ADMIRER BY MISSIONARIES TRAVELLED FAR FROM PEKING

BY SUZANNE JOINSON

“We passed from one garden to another through small openings in the division walls, sometimes low and half-hidden, but always alluring, such as Alice met in Wonderland, and which we, like her, found to be magic openings leading to further outlooks and to evermore fascinating adventures.”

(Cable 141)

For English female missionaries arriving in China in the early part of the twentieth century, the missionary endeavour presented the ultimate paradox: self-denial and giving one's life to the cause was rewarded with the self-fulfilment of living an exciting and challenging life with many freedoms. By 1919 the China Inland Mission consisted of six times as many single women as married, yet the responsibility of creating an English home in the courtyard gardens of China still dominated their working lives. These unfamiliar garden spaces, arranged around the concept of privacy and seclusion, were embraced by the missionaries who set up “ladies’ houses” amongst the roses and deciduous trees. In doing so they created quiet but revolutionary corners within which to operate outside of normative and restrictive social pressures.

× FEMME BY MATTHEW ROSE

(continued with no break)

The English women newly arrived from Sussex or Surrey and sent to Peking or Chih-kioh-ching or Tsinchow encountered unfamiliar cities dominated by walls. Behind these walls were traditional courtyard dwellings usually composed of several one-floor buildings arranged around one, two or sometimes more courtyard spaces, all accessed via a single door. More often than not, this architecture at first inspired despondency and despair. Their letters home spoke of oppression and claustrophobia brought on by the inward-facing indigenous houses built on top of the ghosts of thousands of years of inhabitation. The lack of external windows meant no outward view and this was a difficult architectural and psychological position for the English women to comprehend. Quickly, though, the missionaries reported an appreciation of the sheltered spaces which hid them, and protected them from the sun, and the walls which kept out fierce sandstorms were useful to a foreigner engaged in the struggle to survive what they often saw as hostile or difficult terrain.

Travelling to China — as remote and distant a land as it was possible to reach — offered both adventure and the thrill of birthing new souls out of a heathen darkness, but who were these women who came so far with the intention of converting natives? What kind of English woman found herself confronting

a bewildering country, whose unfathomable customs and languages were as impenetrable as the labyrinthine mazes of the market places and bazaars? Some were married, come to support their husbands in their religious endeavours. Others came from missionary families and many were single women who in their homeland may have been called Old Maids or Spinsters. Throughout the late nineteenth century single women were still usually assigned to a married household on the assumption that all women needed the protection of a married (European) male, but from 1914 onwards, as — due to World War One — the population of single women increased it became acceptable for missionary women to cohabit in groups, without men.

These new boarding arrangements took full advantage of the compounds and walls of the traditional courtyard house which usually consisted of a main living room in the South, adjacent rooms East and West and the Northern walls entirely closed. The courtyard garden was a communal space for all, organised around water, either a fountain or irrigation system, and the internal rooms had large windows covered with decorative paper and wooden screens which opened out onto attractive, hidden gardens. The English women were conscious of being thought eccentric or unusual by the locals, and so the essential quality these houses provided was

privacy. Behind these narrow doorways alternative female societies developed, governed by a strongly self-sufficient approach to survival against the actual or imagined threats of the 'local and native' lands that lay outside and beyond.

At home there were few viable alternatives to marriage for women. Teaching was respectable, as was library or secretarial work, but missionary life provided an escape from perceived confines and expectations of womanhood. Unlike the much-mocked 'New Woman' or suffragette, the qualities required for missions were inherently 'female': unconditional giving, self-abnegation, sacrifice, life-time commitment, devotion to others, to the Church and the mission. The missionary women considered themselves human manifestations of the evangelical spirit of self-denial for the greater good, and if self-denial was an inherently feminine

quality then single women were the most feminine because they had given up not only home, but also the opportunity for married life. Yet worries of being seen as "odd women" remained; the missionary Elizabeth Perkins wrote anxiously, 'I don't think I'm queer yet!!!' (Hunter 56).

Outside the walls, the Boxer revolution and its aftermath raged; there was much anti-foreign sentiment and suspicion from authorities to be endured and local communities did not respond as hoped to attempts at conversion from these unusual looking visitors. The missionaries, almost entirely disconnected from Western society-mores whilst not quite appropriated into local customs, began to transgress within the hybrid topography they cultivated amongst the fig trees and fountains. Dressed in curious outfits composed of a mish-mash of European tailoring





and Chinese smocks, as their clothing laws became diffused so did their countenance. Despite the emphasis on pious, womanly self-abnegation they were unsexed in some cases and downright masculinised in others.

The “ladies’ houses” gave the women, many of whom were displaced by war or their own restless souls, a relatively stable - if somewhat unconventional - home with some traditional elements of family life: frictions, arguments, tensions, nervous and physical breakdowns, and of course, love. In the mode of the time, close female friendships were considered natural and letters and diaries frequently refer to physical and emotional intimacy. Friends are often described as a young woman’s ‘special’ and often semi-maternal relationships between older, experienced women and younger new recruits were mentioned. This, from a letter home by twenty five year old missionary Lucy Mead in 1911:

When we reached Pangkiachuang about 8:30 we had supper and visit. I had nice hot bath and when returned to my room found Miss Grace in bed. My we did cuddle up and love each other! “Two are better far than one For labour of for fight – For how can one keep warm alone – Or serve his cause aright? Beats hot water bags out of sight.”.... We slept that night and early morning Miss Grace got up to crawl in with Miss Gertrude – we



Two teachers she'd assign some serious time

exchanged hugs and I went to sleep and next I knew 'twas 8 o'clock.
(Hunter 77)

More often than not, the innocence of tone in the descriptions of these friendships suggests a diffused sexuality, though clearly within an atmosphere of intense female society. The shared circumstances of the courtyard houses contributed to a dissolution of any sense of the personal: rooms were shared, every communal space overlooked, the windows opened on to one another and all of this meant that the only opportunity for private conversations was to sleep in a bed with a friend. Lucy Mead wrote that she slept with a friend, ‘for fun of it... We don’t talk much after we get to bed til we wake up and don’t go to breakfast.’(Hunter 75)

Despite the opportunities for intimacy afforded by the closely-arranged living conditions, the women were never allowed to forget the original missionary impulse: to be a part of the mission demands denial of the self and repression of the individual. There may have been privacy from the eyes of the world, but within the courtyard houses there was no allowance for personal space and this hot-house, radical way of living proved overwhelming for some young women who wrote home of breakdowns and personal collapses. For many, though, the construction of

the “ladies’ houses” meant that through forging a group-identity, lone women could subsume personal idiosyncrasies and curious behaviours to an institutionalized norm.

As the Christian ideal has always emphasized the home as a territory in which the believer can create a personal example of spiritual well-being, cleanliness, order and devout living, so the missionaries in self-imposed exile engaged in home-making as a meaningful activity and an attempt to stabilize the intense and complicated interpersonal relationships that necessarily arose between them. In 1918 missionary Lia Ashmore:

took the time to count 249 rose blossoms in her garden, which also included tall lilies, peach and plum blossoms. Alice Linam’s garden in isolated Yenping contained eighty-nine rosebuses alone. Flower seeds often came from family gardens at home and became a way of asserting living continuities. In the darkness of the otherness of the Chinese cities, the Western women allied their spirits, and perhaps their mission as well, to the growth of blossoms remembered from childhood.
(Hunter 131)

Many letters reveal attempts to transplant a Christian section of home-land into their small square patch of desert,

as if the rose bush might contain the power to fend off evil idols loose in the heathen wilds and the uneasy disturbances occurring within their own selves.

Other missionaries, such as Mildred Cable and sisters Evangeline and Francesca French, made it their life's work to continually seek out the hidden female spaces of far-flung China. In the 1920s 'The Trio', as they were known, reached the Palace Gardens of the magnificent King of the Gobi, Maksud Shah, known to his own people as the Khan, and known by all to be insane. Deep in the Gobi desert, the palace and gardens of the Khan were famous for their beauty. They were led along a confusing maze of passages. Fascinated, they peered into rooms lined with Khotan rugs, silk cushions and embroidered satins. Through the paper-lined windows they glimpsed private gardens, lush and green, where white peacocks displayed their impressive tails and women walked without veils until finally, they gained access to one of the famous harems of the East, or their Westernised vision: the East-as-Harem, the East-as-Woman. To penetrate the cloistered rooms and gardens where dark-skinned slaves served green tea with jasmine flowers was to achieve the ultimate mission because, 'in Britain the 'plight' of the Oriental woman and of enslaved concubines occupied missionaries and feminists alike'. (Lewis 96)

Later Mildred Cable wrote:

An atmosphere of tragedy hung over the whole household... The women of this madman's harem were numerous. They all dressed in emerald silk, and, like other Likchun women, wore a small, round, embroidered cap, which held the veil in place. Innumerable children ran from one part of the palace to another, laughing, squabbling, crying, complaining and carrying gossip. Every woman in the building had but one concern, and that was to become the mother of a son who would secure her a permanent place in the harem. They were slaves whose invisible cages were none the less fearsome because the prisoners were fed with luxurious food and wore delicate silken robes.
(Cable 136)

The Khan was away, but the missionaries had been given permission to remain in the summer palace as long as they wished, and all of their needs were to be met. After endless eating and answering of questions they were eventually given permission to wander the gardens which contained tall, narrow-leafed cypresses and willows whose shadows flickered across the garden. As well as the pigeons they saw swans, doves and singing birds amongst the citrus and lemon trees. They touched



the walnut trees in the enclosures, and were invited to eat the fruit that grew in clusters on bushes and plants: peaches, jujube dates, figs, mulberries and cherries, all surrounded by sprays of flowers.

Happily, they wandered amongst the pavilions and verandas and their aim of establishing a mission in the heart of the Gobi seemed far away. For days they ate peaches and allowed themselves to sleep for long nights, twelve, sometimes thirteen, or fourteen hours in the blackness of the shuttered spaces. Mildred and Francesca in one room as a couple, Evangeline, happily alone in the other. They were transported, entirely, from the conforms of the world outside the palace borders.

Then one day the message came: *the Khan is dead*. Revolution and change was sweeping China at an unprecedented rate. The Khan's heir — Khan Nazir — was expelled to Urumchi and imprisoned. Mildred, Francesca and Evangeline were forced to flee. Later, Mildred wrote in her journal that she had heard that the Palace Gardens were burnt to the ground by revolutionaries and that the pavilions and fruit trees and the whole vast estate was destroyed. Several years on Mildred even came across some of the women she had met in the harem, refugees now after the wars and devastations of the region, and she observed that despite their newly humble status – living in

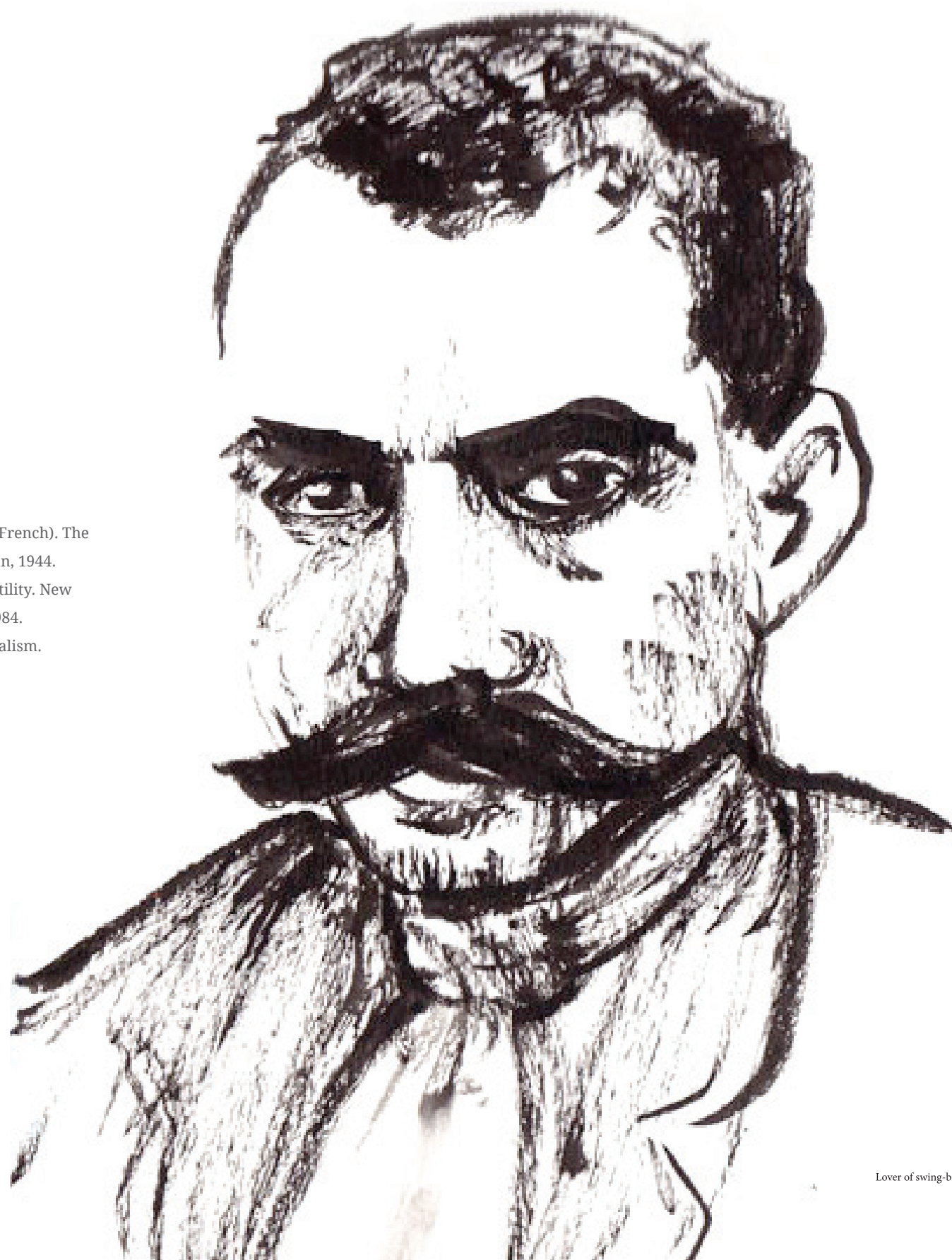
mud houses without any luxuries – they seemed happier than when they were trapped inside the palace.

In both the modest courtyard houses of the provincial cities and the wonderful palace gardens of the Khan, English missionaries embraced the emphasis of the inward-facing rooms and the clustering of walls so very different from the end of the Victorian-era households of their homeland. They came to understand that the creation of an inward-facing sanctuary was more than simply a garden; it was a prerequisite for the privacy needed in which to develop an inner-world, a room – or, the room – for the hidden and insular qualities of the spirit. In many senses the enclosing walls and buildings are a metaphorical gesture indicating the boundaries of a heavenly place. After all, what is the surrounding desert if not death and desiccation? Many women missionaries found a heaven of sorts in a secret place which they filled with English roses, where they were allowed to be as they wished and love as they wanted. As with all houses, though, solid walls are no guarantee of safety from outside forces and tensions. The influence of the powerful Soviet State and the rise of communism soon meant the expulsion of all foreigners from China, and with it came the end of a rich and complex history of English missionary flowering in the sun-baked desert.

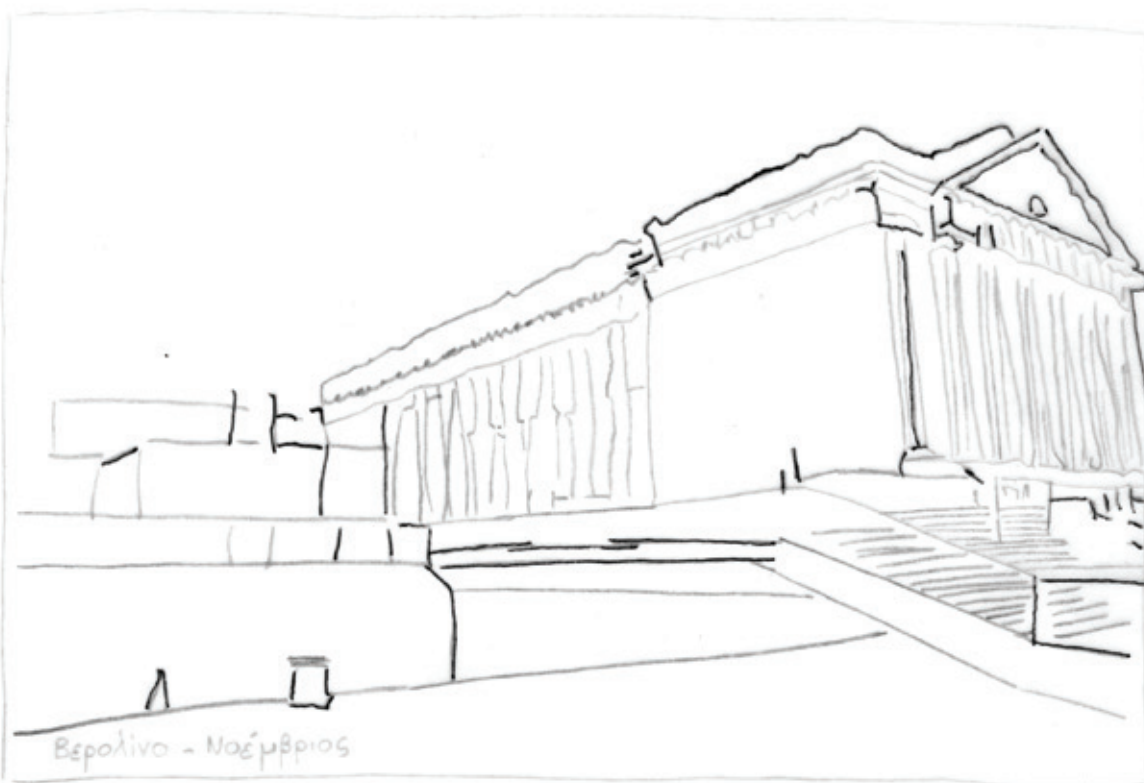
And doesn't relent as she did the last time.

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Lover of swing-band music. Owner of a canary



She gives the run of the house an hour at dusk,

THE HISTORY OF ATLANTIS

A COLLABORATIVE POEM
BY ROSA RANKIN-GEE AND HARRIET ALIDA LYE

The Minoans discovered
The other side of blue.
The opposite of sky: the
underworld.

The day that Hades won
And fire melted quick on the land,
a whole new language was born.
Books and mantes both burned,
The history of land, love -
Ran red.
Blue splintered into cobalt, indigo,
Fear, loss.

What you never think of is
how slow it flows.

The time of day that for her seems least confining,

UNE JEUNESSE TURQUE by Guillaume Loiret

*A photo-drama inspired by photographs gathered from flea markets in Istanbul (2011-12).
The photos are real, their history imagined.*

Un drame photographique à base de tirages anonymes rassemblés à Istanbul en 2011-2012.

Most open to possibility, to change.





Je m'appelle Selda, comme la chanteuse.
À côté c'est mon petit-frère, Celâl.
Il est beau, n'est-ce pas ?
Il est beau, et il est fier.
Je n'ai pas vu Celâl depuis
vingt-cinq ans.
Depuis le jour où il a refusé
d'être un homme.



1964

Celâl et moi, c'est moi et Celâl.
On court dans les rues de Yeniköy,
On mange des baklavas entre les repas,
On prend le tram pour Beyoğlu,
On lance du pain et des pierres
aux mouettes qui saturent le ciel.



Papa, papa, papa. Il est beau,
n'est-ce pas ? Il est beau et il est
fier. Pour les autres, il est Veyssel
Bey. Pour moi c'est le roi. Papa fait
des affaires. Il passe de longs moments
au téléphone, lissant sa moustache,
fumant ses Samson. Il parle d'import et
d'export, de clients européens, de bien
étudier pour réussir. Un jour qu'il
demandait à Celâl ce qu'il voudrait
faire quand il serait un homme, mon
frère répondit sans hésiter : "je veux
épouser Selda". Ce jour-là mon cœur a
fondu, et le regard de papa s'est durci.



Papa et maman s'aiment beaucoup. Ils ont eu un mariage heureux, ils le répètent
souvent. Ils s'entendent sur tout, sauf la politique. Maman était kémaliste, mais
elle parle de plus en plus du parti ouvrier. Elle aime bien Deniz Gezmiş, elle le
trouve beau et courageux.



1968

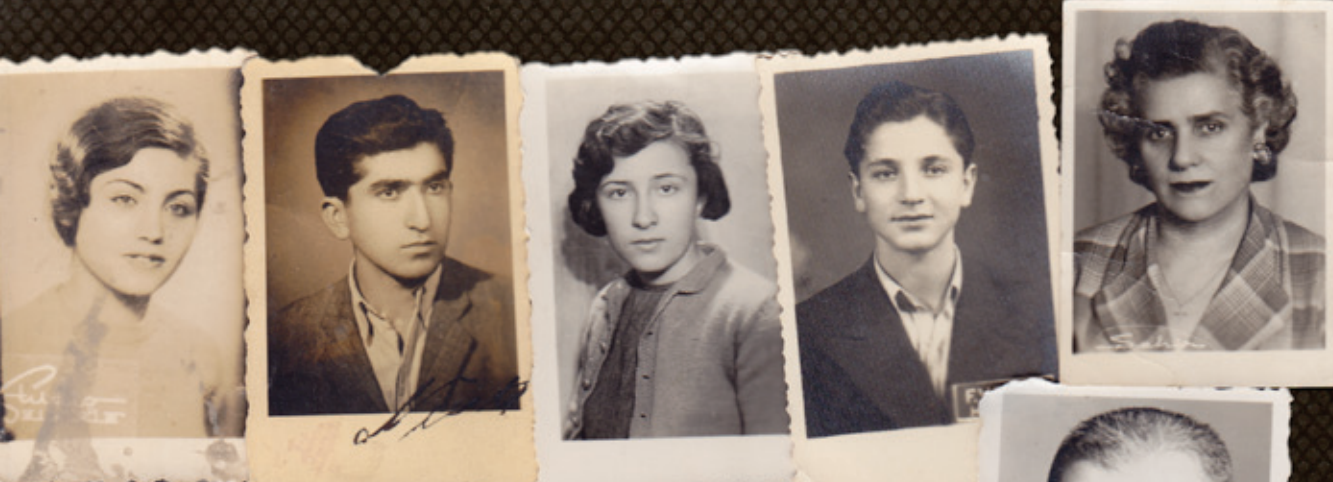
Papa était kémaliste, mais depuis la mort de
son père, il dit qu'il retrouve ses racines
musulmanes. Il fréquente la mosquée, et le
soir il se plonge dans un coran fatigué dont la
couverture subjugue Celâl : un sabre triomphant
qui fait penser à un pénis dressé.

- À quoi tu penses Celâl ?
- À ailleurs, à partout sauf ici.
- Pourquoi tu veux partir ?
- Pour combattre avec l'armée.
- Pourquoi ?
- Atatürk a chargé la jeunesse
de protéger son héritage !

1971

- Celâl, tu sais qu'oncle Hanim vient nous voir
la semaine prochaine ? Et aussi Leyla, Hekim,
Refika, tante Nezihe, beaucoup de monde.
- Oui, papa m'en a parlé. C'est pour Kurban
Bayrami. Il veut une grande fête de famille.
- Il m'a aussi acheté un costume, sombre à
boutons dorés, encore pire que celui de l'école.
- Regarde par la fenêtre, il y a déjà le mouton,
pour la cérémonie, au fond du jardin.
- Où ça ?
- Là-bas, au fond !





D'ordinaire on ne fête pas vraiment Kurban Bayramı, la fête du sacrifice. D'ailleurs, personne que je connais n'attache vraiment d'importance à l'islam. Mais cette année papa est en pleine crise mystique, il a invité tous les proches d'Istanbul, et il veut qu'on égorgé un mouton selon la tradition. Il y aura nos cousins préférés Leyla et Hekim, aussi blonds et élancés que Celâl et moi sommes petits et bruns. Neşet Bey, un neveu éloigné de papa, toujours habillé de drôle de manière, avec des vêtements trop petits, ou trop grands, qui ont l'air luxueux mais on sait bien qu'il les achète en Egypte pour trois fois rien. Yıldız, qui à vingt ans porte toujours des chemisiers de petite fille. Oncle Murat, le scientifique, professeur dans une grande école à Ankara, petites lunettes rondes et bouche cousue, célibataire, toujours en retard. La sœur de maman, Belkıs, qui a les traits durs et la diction hachée de l'actrice Toto Karaca. Avec Celâl, elle nous fait peur, on l'évite, avec précaution, pour ne pas la vexer. C'est la femme d'oncle Hanım, Hanım le pieu, Hanım le sage. Il est gentil, mais il parle beaucoup : du coran, du prophète, d'une chute qui dure soixante-dix ans, d'un pont aussi fin qu'un cheveu qu'il faudra traverser pour rencontrer Allah. Avec Celâl, on ne comprend pas tout mais on a pris l'habitude d'approuver en silence. Et Hüseyin, Cevat, Bilge, Nezihe, Perihan. Et tante Gizem, Gizem la folle, Gizem la pute. Elle avait dix-sept ans, elle était sûre qu'il l'épouserait, elle fut répudiée par son père, insultée, battue, elle n'avait ni argent ni diplôme, elle ne pu quitter Istanbul, et aucun homme ne voulut d'elle : Gizem était, aux yeux de tous, celle qui s'était donnée trop tôt. Tante Gizem parle souvent toute seule.



Je suis dans le couloir, je marche vers la chambre de Celâl, j'arrive devant sa porte, j'entends crier, c'est papa, je n'ose plus avancer, le carillon retentit dans mon dos, ce sont les invités qui arrivent, j'entends les pas rapides de maman vers l'entrée, j'entends à nouveau crier, j'entends les mots "fils", "sang", "vie", je reviens vers le salon.

Il fait froid, c'est le 4 janvier 1971, c'est la fête du sacrifice, c'est le jour où Celâl est parti.

La fête est réussie. Les femmes boivent du thé, les hommes du raki. Les discussions couvrent la musique religieuse qui s'échappe d'un gramophone-valise posé à même le sol. Un petit groupe s'est formé autour de Neşet Bey, qui parle avec animation de la "putréfaction du gouvernement de Süleyman Demirel", d'un risque "d'explosion de la nation". Je cherche Celâl des yeux et le voici qui entre au salon, teint de cire dans un costume sombre, suivi de papa. Les débats prennent fin et tout le monde se tourne vers eux.

"Je vous interdit d'aller voir le mouton". Il est là pour Kurban, ce n'est pas un jeu. Je vous interdit". Malgré la loi du père, j'étais allée plusieurs fois voir le mouton, attaché à un pieu, au fond du jardin. Je l'avais caressé, je lui avais même donné un nom. Je savais qu'il devait être égorgé en hommage à Dieu, "car si on n'obéit pas à Dieu, c'est le chaos", avait dit papa.



Les hommes entourent le mouton. Je suis derrière, je vois mal. Je vois le henné qui coule le long de sa laine, la corde qui noue ses pattes, la buée qu'il exhale en geignant.

Je vois le père et le fils.

Papa, grave, récitant une prière alors qu'il tend lentement un couteau à Celâl. Celâl l'empoigne, frissonne au contact du manche glacé, et approche d'oncle Hanım, qui, accroupi, tient fermement l'animal par le museau et offre sa gorge à la lame. "Allah Akhbar" crie oncle Hanım, mais Celâl a figé son geste et regarde vers papa. Les secondes s'écoulent dans le froid, le mouton gémit, la main de Celâl tremble, ses yeux virent caviar, je ne sais pas s'il entend papa lui crier : "sois un homme, Celâl !"

Mon frère vomit abondamment dans le trou qui devait recueillir le sang du sacrifice. Mon père le bouscule, saisit le couteau, de l'écume barbouille ses lèvres, il hurle : "Regarde, regarde, comment il fallait faire ! Regarde ce qu'aurait fait un homme ! Regarde ce qu'aurait fait mon fils !" Et il pose la lame sur le cou blanc, mais le mouton se débat, la lame dérape, le sang jaillit en flot épais qui maculent la terre et les hommes.





1978

"Catatonie". C'est ce que le médecin a dit en séparant bien les syllabes et en me désignant du menton. Je ne bouge plus, je ne parle plus. Je n'avale que la soupe de lentilles et le jus d'oranges. Je vomis souvent, je fais au lit. Ça fait longtemps maintenant, je ne sais plus depuis quand ça dure.



Après le sang je n'ai pas de souvenirs. Ce que je sais, je l'ai entendu. Celâl qui se dresse, les mains chargées de désespoir. Celâl qui s'enfuit de la maison. Celâl qui ne revient pas. L'attente, la police, l'attente. Celâl qui ne revient toujours pas.



Papa coule son affaire. Son haleine s'imprègne de l'odeur du raki, et sa moustache d'un filet jaunâtre. Il ne sort de son bureau sous aucun prétexte. Parfois je l'entends dire : "quand on a honte de sa vie, on la cache"

1981

Et finalement. Finalement. Maman s'évanouit en dépliant la lettre, il faut faire intervenir les secours. C'est mon nom sur l'enveloppe, mais je ne connais pas l'écriture. À l'intérieur il y a une lettre, et une photo.



sevgin öylevine çok
seviyorum, benimle birlik
için güzel olduğunu

ph'i inceledim ve ümit
aylar geçirmek için çırp
oduna gönlünü oldim.
çok seviyor ve çok iyi
m sürecini aşmamış
ğine yol açıyor zaman
ken farkında olmamış
m bazı yerleri onto-
"starmeliyiz. Bir insan
n silip etmek pozitif
den gelmek çok yontu
ncedeyin sanırım!
nda söyledin bunu.
n verip kendimi zama
na otmadan önce
mek istiyorum.
çok güzeldi. Bir
bir bozukluğu çürüt
ve son derece in
kayın biliyorum.
virli olduğunu an
ıyor. Bu da sanırım
bir özellik.

Beni seviyorum! (Bir şey değil.)

C'est Celâl, mon petit-frère. Il est beau, n'est-ce pas ? Il est beau et il est fier. Au dos de la photo, il a écrit :

"Partout où le soleil se lève et se couche, dans le tourbillon de la ville, ou sous le ciel de la ferme, la vie est toujours la même, tantôt amère, tantôt douce."

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i bir konu
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geçirdiğimize üç gün ve konuştuk
konularla ilgisi yok. Otobusta
ten arıdan altına katıldı. Bu
ni "Seviyorum" sözcüğü ile bağıntılı
Ben bu sözcüğü çok sık tekr
rum gatiye. Dokuyarakla (belki) senin
pek fazla bir şey ifade etmiyor.
garcetten köf olsun diye söyle
yorum. İçimden süratli söylemek
yor. Aslında bunu kelimelerle akt
yarine hissettirmem gerekir sen.
halele fazla hissettiremiyorum ki



× DAYS LIKE THESE SERIES BY MATTHEW ROSE

If your life seems closed to the possibility

[OSTRICH]

BY ROSE HUNTER

what an odd bird what a flightless shimmer
 cancan dancer under misty arches
 what a kicker while talking about mayhem
 next to the taco stand ostrich klatsch
 makes it all personal or
 ostrich in a grocery store
 will read the fine print and if an ostrich
 says he does not eat sugar i do not believe it and say so
 what i consider an unpromising start
 discourse on the difference between artificial sweeteners that is
 to get taxonomical too quick and

to explain at length an ostrich will
 psychoanalyze sure
 but anyone would seem an odd bird after a lion
 reinforce it an ostrich is kind
 i can dig that
 and to bury his head in the sand
 it's not even true but he will
 lie low and press his neck to the ground
 in an attempt to become less visible ostrich futility
 watering can on burning plain
 with vase like curvature of neck
 once i said i would treat a lion as a ming
 take no lion to no fairs no circuses or and that he would do the same
 it didn't turn out
 so come here come closer adder neck
 ostriches
 wear pink as well as mint
 but feel no need to call it salmon

Of lasting significance, I guarantee it will change

THE TEMPEST

CALIBAN

Act I, scene II

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

Act II, scene II

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall and make him
By inch-meal a disease! His spirits hear me
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,
Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i' the mire,
Nor lead me, like a firebrand, in the dark
Out of my way, unless he bid 'em; but
For every trifle are they set upon me;
Sometimes like apes that mow and chatter at me
And after bite me, then like hedgehogs which
Lie, tumbling in my barefoot way and mount
Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I
All wound with adders who with cloven tongues
Do hiss me into madness.

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MIRANDA

Act I, scene II

O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,
Dash'd all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perish'd!
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and
The fraughting souls within her.

Act I, scene II

This
Is the third man that e'er I saw; the first
That e'er I sigh'd for.

Act V, scene I

O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!



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*“...the wilderness found him out early, and had taken vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude
--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating.”*

Joseph Conrad, Heart of darkness

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