

Islands toward which the ocean rubs

(– *Hello resistance!* )

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An anticyclone moves west over the Baltic Sea. Who knows what's to come. The crust of the earth is pressed down by ice. Mighty enough, the ice begins to move. Nothing is the same anymore. Some years later an island rises from the sea: Nidingen. The view from here is great; you can really see quite far if you give it a try. Open your eyes, keep them open, do not blink! But I don't see much at all; fog narrows my sight. I can just about hear the wasp that flew in through the door yesterday when the storm was over, but I cannot find it.

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"In what way does the fact that you're the daughter of a lighthouse keeper influence your life?" I asked. "I know how to be on my own without feeling lonely", she said. "And I have the ability to pay attention to and create meaning around that which is to be found in my immediate surrounding." The island on which my mother grew up is one kilometer long and 300 meters wide. Many people felt lonesome and isolated during the pandemic; I doubt my mother was one of them. I'm curious to know whether her experiences make her resilient toward such feelings or if she just learned how to cope with them.

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Once I vomited in one of the twin lighthouses on the island. The towers were built around 1830 from heavy stone blocks previously used for the fortress in a town further south. Three-toed seagulls nest in the deep window frames. The birds came to the island in the sixties and were first observed by my grandfather as he sat by the kitchen table with his morning coffee and glanced out the window. I wanted to get to the top of the lighthouse and got ready to climb the narrow spiral staircase. The stench of sea-gull faeces put a stop to my plan, and after throwing up I ran outside gasping for air.

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Mittens are not for rowers; the coach was absolutely sure about this. I wanted to row like Ida Lewis, so I threw the mittens to the side and took my place by the oars. Ida Lewis was a lighthouse keeper on Lime Rock Light in New England, and she knew very well how to handle a boat. She inherited the profession from her father; not too many women did. When most of the lighthouses around the world were automated in the late seventies the lighthouse keepers suddenly became redundant and the profession disappeared over night. It did however remain a world reserved for men until the very end.

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The earthworms in Tjernobyl knew the catastrophe was coming long before the people did. One day a farmer noticed that all the worms in his field were gone; they had dug themselves deep into the ground. Of all the voices on air today I want to listen to that of Svetlana Alexievich. Who to turn to in these shuddering times, but a historian of the soul? The first chapter of *War's Unwomanly Face* is called "Man is bigger than war" – this would be where to start. But when the reports came about the Russian military attacking Ukraine from the Belarusian border, I was with the worms in the underground.

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Getting under the skin of the world is not always easy. Its logic is not like mine. Tomorrow I will go out searching for holes in the ground where I can hide. Giants' kettles are meant to be good for this purpose. I will have to travel far to detect them; the bedrock must be the right kind. Those pits are old and cold; I'd better bring a blanket with me. Some hollows are filled with water, but isn't it a bit early for a swim? How thankful I was to realize that in a landlocked country like the one I'm currently in, magic things can still be found.

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It has been a long day. Nothing special happened. I woke up. I drank black tea and ate a sandwich. I took my bike to school. I sat down on a chair. Next to my chair were some other chairs. Together they formed a large circle. There were people sitting on some of the other chairs. A group of people came in after me. They sat down on chairs that were still empty. We were in the basement. I listened to a couple of people who spoke about important things. Veggie Gulasch with spätzli for lunch. Coffee. A discussion was supposed to happen; it didn't make sense to me. I cycled back home.

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We lie out from the harbour and set course for the island toward which the ocean rubs. When we are close enough we can see a small group of people circling the island. They have their backs to each other. Some of them slide down on their knees and let their heads slip down below the water line: Bladderwrack, wing kelp, dead man's bootlaces. Salty tongues and sea tulips. A few felled tree trunks grow between the pebbles. Sea kale, thrift, yarrow in full bloom. Driftwood join the lazy waves on the beaches out west. We disembark and pull the boat up on the shore. Terminal moraine under our feet.

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A common dream among the people whose dreams Charlotte Beradt collected and wrote down between 1933 and 1939 in Hitler's Germany was the following: I dream that dreaming is forbidden, but that I still do. Beradt, who had to flee Germany in 1939, considered the dream material to be a contribution to the structural psychology of total domination, which could contribute to the interpretation of a reality that was developing into a nightmare. I came across the book *Das Dritte Reich des Traums* in 2018 during a period when I was suffering from uncanny nightmares myself. When the nightmares returned the other night, I was reminded of Beradt.

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I'm standing on a ladder in the crown of a rampant plum tree. I'm about to prune it; that is why I have a saw in one hand and a pair of pruning shears in the other. The saw is dull, so are the shears. I have never cropped a tree before; it took me two hours to get the stick out of my ass and get to the point where I am now. On my first try, I saw myself in the finger. But it is not that bad, just a little pain and some blood. Mittens might not be for rowers; gloves, however, are a gardener's best friend.

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I am still standing on the ladder in the crown of that plum tree when Someone who is passing by on the other side of the hedge suddenly stops and turns in my direction: "Don't you know that in sinister times like these, talking about trees is almost a crime?" "Do you mean because a conversation about trees contains the silence of so many other things?" I answer. "Something in that direction I guess", Someone replies and disappears along the walkway. The plum tree stands stripped and tamed. I regret not asking Someone for her name and what we must get ready to talk about.

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After having listened to the radio program "Sommar i P1" in July 2014, conservative parliament member Gunnar Axén threw his TV out the window and decided to stop paying for public service. The poet Athena Farrokhzad was speaking on the most popular radio program in Sweden, and he was furious. Farrokhzad used the polyphonic voices of contemporary and historical poets to deliver an extraordinary political speech. Not only did Farrokhzad shed light on structural racism, classism and neo-fascism within late capitalism; she also proved exactly how explosive words can be. I suppose Gunnar Axén felt the urge to meet radical thought with radical action.

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There is a ladder, and the ladder was always there. I know what it is for; it leads to the basement. Underneath the ladder, in the basement, a diving suit is hanging on a hock. The diving helmet is standing on a shelf next to the hock. The helmet is getting on, and it's heavy and hard. The copper has oxidized; the grids covering the cabin windows are worn. On the back of the helmet there is a tap; one could connect the helmet to a tube through this tap and fill the helmet with air. But the tube is missing; nobody has been breathing in this basement for a long time.

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I'm hanging out with a bunch of paintings in my studio. They have been accompanying me for two years now and I finally feel that I'm getting to know them. For a long time they pissed me off; I even put them away and decided never to see them again. That was during the fall; since then much has changed. There are five of them; in posture they resemble each other but their temperaments are quite different. I think my problem was that I failed to acknowledge that searching for the immutable does not mean giving up the idea of transformation; it just means deepening one's relationship to it.

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In case that last sentence sounded a bit religious to your ears – it was. Before I go any further into the topic: I'm not about to join any kind of church. After all, I grew up in one of the most religiously unclear countries in the world: Sweden may be highly secularized, but it has a very strong cultural touch of (Lutheran) Protestantism. My father refused to enter church even for weddings, and my mother hid under the kitchen table when Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on the door to save us. I'm not baptized and did not go through any confirmation ceremony. God; in any imaginable form, is most likely forever out of my reach.

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So it's clear that I'm out of my depth here. It's just that some of the thoughts Mechthild von Magdeburg wrote down in her book *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* resonate so well with some of the thoughts that come to me in the practice of painting. Mechthild von Magdeburg was a mystic who knew lots about immutability and transformation. She described her physical experiences of meeting God as a paradoxical state in which stillness and movement coincide, and she experienced the divine as something at once peculiarly familiar and distinctively secret to us. Her mission: to highlight the unspeakability of the secret and to repeatedly let the most familiar be articulated.

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It started a bit too early for my taste. First I opened one eye. Then I opened the other. My wife mumbled "good night" from under a pile of pillows. I smelled my armpits and decided not to take a shower. I ate something white and creamy. Had no time to drink anything black whatsoever. Too many people on the radio feature I listened to on the train expressed their disgust at people like me. Unfortunately they continued after I got on the bus too. I felt a bit sick when I got off the bus. At 7:10 I rang the bell at work and shouted "good morning!" in the hallway.

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I approached my aunt after dinner but before dessert. I had decided on this strategy several weeks earlier as I sat in my apartment in Basel and tried to formulate my matter in writing. I imagined my aunt reading the perfectly pretentious text I had just written and immediately deleted all versions of it. After all I had been working on establishing a relationship to her for a couple of years; what I wanted now was to open a conversation, not to scare her away. My aunt stroked her grey shaved hair and squinted curiously at me: "you should probably talk to my brother instead, but ok, I'm in."

★

I'm in the south-west part of Sweden on a research trip and I'm exhausted. Last night I tried to write a list of things I could have written about had I not been so tired, but when the list only contained 89 meaningless words despite my effort and I fell asleep on the computer, I gave up. I have spent so much time on trains and busses, asked so many questions, looked at so many photographs, listened to so many stories; now all I want to do is lie down in a horizontal position in a dark room and let the impressions buzz around before they can fall into place.

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The treasure I have found is not spectacular or shimmering but it is magnificent. It is made of words and images and I carry only a small fraction of it with me in my suitcase. I keep the suitcase close to me now, afraid as I am of losing it. I brought it with me to the exhibition in Stockholm yesterday and I drank coffee with it afterwards. Lap-See Lam's journey through time smoothed all my wrinkles, but I kept my hand steady on the handle and bid my time. Tomorrow I will travel back to Basel again and I cannot wait to unwrap that gift and finally press play.

★

Come closer! I would like to show you something. This is my world. You have to be very close to grasp it. If you keep distance you will miss everything; it cannot be summarized! Coming at it too rapidly is not the best idea either; you will most likely come out on the other side thinking there was nothing. Where and when it begins and ends is not so clear, but you might realize that this world is connected to yours if you approach attentively enough. My best advice is to stay for a while after arriving. I am so happy you made it; we will have a great time. Welcome!

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What I could also write about:

- The importance of being very specific
- Words as small pieces of dynamite
- Walter Benjamin's thesis nr 6
- The torture of structurelessness
- The condition for freedom in dependency
- The sound of ice beginning to melt on the lakes
- The smell of thawed soil in the woods
- Why and how unreflected pedagogical strategies contribute to the (re)establishment of power structures on a practical level meanwhile those same power structures are being rejected in theory.
- My day job
- Ervin Goffman and his *Communication Conduct in an Island Community*
- Finding out that my grandmother kept a diary

What else?

★

My sister gave me *The second sex* for my twelfth birthday and no persuasion was needed for me to give myself to it. If she had decided that the only two things worth living for was Simone de Beauvoir and Morrissey, then the only two things I would be ready to die for was Morrissey and Simone de Beauvoir. I called my sister in an act of desperation some years later, wondering how on earth my girlfriend could abandon me. Between my sobs she reminded me that in order to meet the other as an equal, one must also fully accept that the other is free – to leave.

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The teddy bear is threadbare but still wants to join us for a walk. She grabs one arm and I grab the other; we are the same height and the bear swings between us as we walk up the muddy hill. She looks at me from the side; her face is older than mine. She screams "AOAH" and grabs my hand. The bear falls to the ground. I wipe the smudgy mire away. She says "schön schön schön." I let it slide. We walk hand in hand though the forest on its bare ground; I look around for some moss to rest in, but mouldy beech leaves are all I find.

★

Strike your bell, sister! What dribbles out of me now is not necessarily mine, but rather the ravages of time. Some say she was courageous, on her own she was. Some say she was anxious, probably alone as well. To say "I am all of that and much more", would mean to jump ahead in time; that wouldn't do. One dog watch after the other; there's no change of guard in sight – just rain. Perhaps nobody listened to the foghorn when the message came: *dit dit dit, dah dah dah, dit dit dit*. Perhaps they were blinded by what they saw: white teeth and a soft "*all's well*."

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A veil of mist covered the two towers as we rowed upstream in the quiet drizzle. I was in the front and gave a steady pace. When the surface of the water stirred up and we found ourselves rowing in the teeth of a sudden wind, we fell out of time. In that tiny gap between before and after the sky descended upon us; hail hit our frozen heads and hands before it rolled on towards warmer destinations. As soon as I thought to myself I hope this never ends it was over. The eight of us squeezed the oars and turned the boat in the direction of a hot shower.

★

I am high up in the sky on a window sill facing south. The sun is blinding me and I see red everywhere when I close my eyes. The two towers loom behind the bleak facade of an old factory; the flashes of cadmium lights on top of them are warning signs. The air is thick and thin at the same time; I need a mask to breathe. Someone is approaching in the long corridor; who can that be? Everybody I know is already inside with me. I lie down on the paint stained floor in my paint stained coat and let go; I even disappear.

★

We were in the kitchen discussing why to choose a large saucepan instead of a small one for the spaghetti when he stuck out his arms and declared in a convinced voice : "If you sense something, you know it." I asked him if he could give an example that would prove his point. The frying pan standing next to the pan filled to the brim with water for the spaghetti made a disquieting sound. He put the kitchen fan on position two and said with pride: "I noticed that it was good to put on the fan now. But to put it on three would be unreasonable."

★

In the beginning there was already light. The sun bathed the island in bleeding rays during the long-spun day; the moon kept its promise at night and rose staunchly above the lonesome cay. But the light cones from more distant stars and planets never managed to disclose the island completely; it remained for itself. The first night after the Danes brought fire to the island in 1624 mareel glowed up the entire sea in oceans of fluorescent blues, as if to say – we are also here! The sun and the moon viewed the spectacle with skepticism. Nobody was ready for what was coming; it was beyond all of them.



★

Now yesterday has become today and I'm still a bit empty. Stop! Not true – I'm actually not empty, my head is full of ideas for further texts, they just don't land on the paper right now. Yesterday I was painting again for the first time in weeks, and I realized that since I began with the daily writing, all I have been doing in my studio is exactly that – write. I know that one must surrender to the process as an artist, and right now it's just quite intense. I think of work work work all the time time time. Tack och hej för mig.

★

Today I read some of the texts I have written so far in front of my fellow classmates at HGK. I can't tell how it went; I was too nervous to pay attention to what happened in the room. I placed a glass of water next to me on the table, but my hands were shaking so much that I didn't even consider touching the glass during the whole presentation. I think I did perfectly fine, but I need a lot of practice to be able to feel some comfort in future situations of the same kind. Now: time to celebrate myself for not letting the fear stop me from trying.

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A mother said: – My mother used to iron the sheets in my bed before I went to sleep.

A mother said: – My mother was always on her feet.

A mother said: – She went away some time when I was a child.

A mother said: – I don't know where or why.

A mother said: – That's just how it was back then.

A mother said: – On my first school day my mother followed me all the way.

A mother said: – A horrible, horrible day.

A mother said: – I didn't want her to leave me there.

A mother said: – But she did.

A mother said.

★

The clock made of wood is hanging next to a door in a house with radioactive walls. Blue concrete was used to build the house with the radioactive walls. Those who built the house did not know that concrete of the kind they used for the construction of the house contained radon; hence the radioactive walls. The clock on the wall next to the door was first placed on another wall in the house with the radioactive walls when my grandparents moved in. My aunt moved the clock to the wall next to the door when she took over the house with the radioactive walls from her parents.

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Consider the following before you start digging: some spades are better than others should your goal be a fine hole. A shovel might be better if you're dreaming of a great hole but don't have any time for it. To dig a deep hole you need a pointy shovel but it must not be too large; the work can get very heavy. A spade with a straight edge is perfect for creating neat edges, but who cares about neat edges really? What you do need is patience to stay with the trouble. The outcome depends first and foremost on the quality of the soil: sand equals problems, mud, better luck.

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As long as the clock on the wall next to the door in the house with the radioactive walls is ticking there is still time. Images are waiting to be made from the balls of yarn under the loom in the room on the other side of the door. Barren landscapes balance on the thin threads of the warp; memories wind around the weft and meander their way back and forth through the undulating land. Small fragments of now are tied in right before the piece of cloth is done. The clock hanging on the wall on the other side of the door strikes five. On the radio they say: "*an overcast day today.*"

★

"You seem insecure." The owner leaned back and placed his arms behind his neck. He glanced at the man sitting on his left, turned to the women on his right and finally laid his eyes on me. Three weeks earlier had I moved to Basel. Only recently had I begun to speak German. I got, needless to say, nervous when my first job interview turned in this strange direction. My achievement was now being evaluated in front of my own eyes and I didn't know how to defend myself. Afterwards I couldn't help but wonder who was the most insecure; the person who used his power for diminution, or I.

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Class privilege means having personal relationships with people from a privileged social class. Class privilege means getting invited to dinner by people from this social class. Class privilege means spending the dinner complaining about sleeping problems with the professor at a renowned university, chatting about a Netflix series with the former artistic director of a major art museum or brainstorming titles for a new book project with the director of a leading publishing house. If social class means feeling a sense of belonging within a given community, then class privilege means feeling a sense of belonging with the privileged. Class traveling, on the other hand, means lacking this sense of belonging everywhere.

★

The sleek rock is still warm under my belly. Charnockite, feldspar and quartz once ran through the billowy veins of the gneiss but ossified long before I came here. The smooth rock no longer moves and the deep furrows in shades of greys rest calmly under the weight of my indolent body. The longer I stay, the softer my bones. My chin sinks into the stone, and my ribs slide apart so that my pelvis can find a comfortable position. I stretch out my arms to the side and search with wilty fingers over the surface covered with lichen to find some cool cracks to liven them up in.

★

"Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present." Claudia Rankine recalls this quote from a conversation between Homi Bhabha and Toni Morrison in an essay in the book *Just Us – An american conversation*. Throughout the book Rankine effectively makes manifest how white people fail to recognize the continuum of structural racism in society and how, in this particular essay, this failure becomes visible through a white friend's reluctance to perceive those who committed racist crimes in college forty years ago as possible white nationalists today.

★

I see you in a car. You sit in the driver's seat. Your hands grip the steering wheel. You are on your way home. You keep a sleepy eye on the road through the rearview mirror. What you see: magenta clouds in a dusky sky. What I see: something dangling under the mirror; a small head with cross-stitch eyes and plastered wounds on the cheeks. No mouth. You are on your way home to your family. Later you create an image of that ride but sneak out of it immediately. As I contemplate that image now hanging in the room above the loom, I realize your face is not in it.

★

I never thought twice about seeing a doctor before I came to Switzerland. I used to go when my body felt strange or I had pain I couldn't place. As a fifteen-year-old I went to the dentist to get braces, as a seventeen-year-old I visited the youth clinic for contraceptives, and in my twenties I was called to regular preventive check-ups for cervical cancer. I never worried about being able to pay the bill; I knew it would be affordable. When I called the doctor last week, however, it wasn't without both hesitation (perhaps it's not really necessary?) and worry (can I really afford this now?).

★

"It was a beautiful beginning, but then you said "welcome!" in an almost aggressive tone and I was like": he put his hands above his head and made a dismissive face. I said: "I never had any intention of sounding "welcoming". "I wanted to mediate a kind of sarcasm in the reading of a text whose tone is very ambiguous." We were obviously both confused but for very different reasons. He interpreted my tone as a flaw in the reading rather than as a conscious part of it. Was there perhaps the underlying expectation that I should perform the very opposite of what I did; meekness let's say?

★

This week I'm writing an application, and I immediately tense up from head to toe and start to feel very sorry for myself. It's quite a tedious procedure most of the time I do it: firstly because it forces me to conceptualize my practice, which is not bad at all – just difficult, because of the sudden change of perspective from inside to outside; secondly because of the connection to pressure and competition; I simply want and work for something that many other people also want – and work for. Last but not least there's that thing of spending hour after hour after hour by the computer: it's just simply so tiring.

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The final scene in the film "I hope I'm loud when I'm dead" (2018) by artist and filmmaker Beatrice Gibson is a reenactment of the final scene in Claire Denise's "Beau Travail" from 1991. I saw Gibson's film before Denise's; it was during a seminar called "Art & Radical Love" held by Gibson last fall. Not until last night did I watch "Beau Travail" but when Denis Lavant begins to dance in the empty night club, Gibson's version came back to my mind. Lavant dances on his own, Gibson with her son. No matter what, the moves were so contagious I couldn't sleep before I had tried them out as well.

★

I am not a lighthouse. I cannot sweep with the torch in my hand as elegantly as the tower. I cannot spin around myself with pompous bearing at all. I cannot root without woe. I forgot what I came for. I no longer know why I reached for the flashlight or why I slipped into the ocean. I just push through the tough water and point my lamp arbitrarily at its wobbly surface. I sink down and make a volt before I swim on with open eyes to search for that spot with the sandy sea bed. I stand on my hands, stretch out my legs, and begin to sway with the waves.

★

We are keepers too, you know. First we met in this curious dream and then we met again under that towering tree and since that day we keep meeting every now and then under a marvellous rain. We crossed paths in a carpeted corridor in the east and travelled together to a tender bubble of firs in the north before we let some roots grow together in the fertile soil of the south. We move in different velocities and in different directions during the day whilst exploring the walls of the peculiar world. At night we return home to ask each other: "who have you become while you were gone?"

★

In my ongoing search for writers and artists who combine text and image in their work, I recently came across Herta Müller's book *Der Beamte sagte*. I love Müller's writing in general, but it was a nice surprise to realise that she also makes collages. In *Der Beamte sagte* it is not only the images accompanying the text fragments that are made in collage technique, the words are too. Each word has been cut out from magazines or newspapers by the writer, rather than being typed out letter by letter. The result is a wonderful collection of poems that are visually just as saturated with meaning as they are verbally.

★

Not a single word do I want to write, one is one too many already, I have nothing to say today. Not a single brush stroke with any single brush in any single color do I want to put on any canvas either; I wish I had stayed at home instead of coming all the way here to stare at the paintings in front of me. I'm going home now, although I don't particularly feel like going home at all. Before I go I have to clean the brushes I used despite the fact that I didn't want to use any brushes, and I really hate cleaning brushes, that's for sure.

★

Whenever I wait until late in the evening to sit down and write the 111 words for the day, there seems to be a lack of building material for the construction of them. And should – against all odds – the smallest of seeds for an idea come to my mind after some sluggish brain-work time, then I'm unfortunately too lazy to make something exciting out of it. If I don't manage to get to the task done before five pm, a nagging feeling of doing over-time to make a deadline takes away all of the fun. My goal: to do the writing nevertheless, and to write more often in the morning.

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Coming out as a lesbian was a short but intense process; coming out as an artist has been a life-long sneaking around in the outskirts of a longing without daring to approach its center. I fell in love with a woman in the city I had just arrived in. I was twenty-five but felt like fourteen; she broke my heart a week later. By then I had already discovered the shining new room in me that was my home, and I wanted to show everyone how much it glittered. It took me twenty years to arrive at a similar reassuring point of departure as an artist, and it happens just now.

★

He lives in a world of his own and he likes it: a decent place of logic and order; a small but fine universe with solvable problems. The shape of the navyblue forage-cap on his head matches that of the boat which he is now steering soberly with one hand toward the slender horizon; meanwhile the other hand is resting patiently on the cap to protect it from taking off in the speed wind. Somebody has mistaken the sea for a garbage station again; he is here to search for the wasted rubbish on its surface and in its depths, and to pick it up again as soon as he finds it.

★

"Are you recording with that thing?" She points at the audio recorder located between us on the kitchen table. It's a graceless object; yesterday I was stopped at the airport when the security staff couldn't identify the outdated device. "He used to threaten me whenever we were in a fight and shout " – I AM RECORDING THIS!" and I wonder if he perhaps was using a recorder like that?" "He loved technical gadgets you know; I hate them." I notice that the small pieces of dynamite slip out seemingly without effort, and as if the experiences contained in that quiet outburst were not worth dwelling on, she changes the subject.

★

Two years have passed since that night she woke me up because she couldn't breathe, and still she's not well. Two years of life in brackets have come to an end for some of us, but still she's not well. Two years of traveling accompanied by insidious uncertainty on a blue journey with pitfalls of anger, and swamps of loss and sorrow vast along the way; no, she's not well. She's tired; tired of drawing the map herself, tired from moving her aching body without the solace from any given itinerary. Short moments of arrival at glades of trust to bask in, or woolly lifelines to sit and laugh on, are indispensable.

★

It's one pm and the day has already showed itself from its best side; I've been woken up by a giant wasp buzzing around the open door; I've had breakfast on the balcony and coffee in the hammock; I've hoovered the apartment and I've had a long shower. I can hear my wife doing the dishes in the kitchen, while she's listening to the radio. Soon we'll go for a swim, and then we'll meet up with a friend and her kids in the garden. Later we'll all throw ourselves in front of the screen and follow the drama of the Eurovision Song Contest. Summer holidays at home, it feels like.

★

The man on the tram would rather have a dog as a partner than my wife, and he wants me to go back to Germany where I, who didn't respond to his verbal attacks in Swiss German, naturally must come from. Although I have gotten (somewhat) used to the disapproving glances that the androgyny of my wife sometimes provokes, or to the subtle homophobic utterances that a kiss between us might cause, this was the first time in Basel that I experienced such a violent ambush from a complete stranger. It's a slippery slope: let us never unplug the plug of democracy, behind which a sludgy flood of hatred bides its time.

★

I'm listening to the novel *Paradise* by Abdulrazak Gurnah while cleaning the toilets. It's not the most pleasant part of my job, must however be done, and in the company of a good book the task becomes almost enjoyable. The plot is simple, the perspective radical: we follow the young boy Yusuf who is given away as a debt slave to an Arabic merchant in east Africa sometime before the outbreak of the first world war. Since the perspective is exclusively Yusuf's, the reader only perceives the Germans, who have already begun their brutal colonization of the area, with his gaze. What is made visible through those eyes is everything but flattering.

★

It only makes sense to approach infinity from the inside of a tent. I woke up this morning knowing instantaneously that I must build one (days with a clear mission are simply the best). Not a dusty green tent like the one stored away somewhere in the mouldy attic above me, but a fantastical red one with numerous layers of cloth on top of each other: transparent and opaque, shiny and matte, bright and saturated. Stabilised with nothing but my own porous bone structure, I will embark on an extraordinary journey from underneath a shield of soft and multi-layered beauty; a journey that begins and ends with my own implosion.

★

Although I often feel like a complete outsider in a group where life more than anything seems to be about getting as wasted as possible as often as possible, studying in my thirties also does come with some advantages. I finally know what I want from my studies, and (most of the time) I also know how to get it. I have made (initially devastating, gradually idealistic, eventually grounded) choices throughout my educational and working life so far, but having gone through all those experiences on the bumpy road of life – detours and full-stops included – I'm at least more confident in the present and less worried about the future.

★

Oh, dear. I am alone in the dark again, lying under a layer of scum at the bottom of a bucket on top of which somebody has put a lid and gone for a swim elsewhere. There is an unbearable smell of old pigments and rotten cloth in the spotty water down here. I am a dragon now, puffing out the smoke of disappointment from my giant nostrils. The situation is not without irony: first I wrote a vignette of confidence from a mountain top of self-esteem, then I received two rejections in one day and quickly slid down from the delightful summit and ended up in this shithole.

★

Whenever I approach a crowd or find myself within a group of strangers, my first impulse is to run and hide. When I started dancing tango in Stockholm some years ago, this was my hardest challenge. I began to go out dancing on my own at night, and since I didn't know anybody in the scene but really wanted to dance, I just had to approach strangers. I learned the dance very quickly, but the social uneasiness never went away completely. Now I'm faced with a challenge even harder: whereas the social game in tango is structured in a relatively transparent way, the social game at art openings is certainly not.

★

When he took off in the opposite direction to the one we were heading in, I cursed and ran after his goal-oriented body knowing that I would not be able to stop him. I wasn't worried, just slightly annoyed – this was before my coffee break. I expected him to make his way either to the cafeteria to steal milk, or to the meadow to feed the goats (or even set them free). Today turned out to be a goat day, but this time it only took thirty minutes before he would let me escort him to work, and I could go and drink my morning coffee.

★

She cannot for the life of her understand why everything must be so neat all the time. She let the spruce hedge that separates her garden from the neighbours' grow wild because she likes it, not because she wanted to end up in this unfortunate situation. "Those bastards even had the courage to send me a letter, in which they told me what a horrible person I was for digging that ditch next to the hedge last spring. It was on my side of the boundary, I know it!" She laughs when she shows me the letter now, but for some reason I have a hard time laughing with her.

★

I'm part of a writing group in which the participants meet regularly to share extracts of their own material as well as to give feed back to the others. One of the participants has been working on a novel for many years, and she is now in the finishing phase. Yesterday she told us her script has been roughly 500 pages for quite some time, but she keeps changing the order of the chapters, adding new information to the plot, and experimenting with the narrative perspective. I always thought it was a complete miracle that novels were written at all, and to get a glimpse of the process is just amazing.

★

Remnants of a body bounce on the surface of a rumbling canvas in the aftermath of a ruinous earthquake. Tremors shook it out of shape. This newfound land of serenity accommodates all future cataclysms: more will fall. A mother now takes charge; she bakes a hopeful cake both sweet and sour in taste, then she waits. Meanwhile a wilful daughter is stealing pebbles for her muddled pond on the border between wet and dry in a narrow country without sea shores. A sister cuts herself a piece of mother's cake – it's her birthday – and when she smiles at a father, invited but overruled, there's smashed blueberries between her teeth.

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