

PANDORA

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Letter from the Department Head

It was with great excitement that I opened Pandora's box for the second issue of the VHS English Writing Department's literary magazine. Following Pandora's "birth" in Spring 2009 I was eager to see what our VHS creative writing students had been working on this semester. In these pages not only did I discover an exhilarating variety of writing styles and subjects, but I also experienced the international character of the authors. Here are the works of eleven individuals, each with their roots in a different country or culture, who have come together at the VHS to develop their writing skills in English, which for most is a foreign language. With each piece I found myself being gently pulled into one of thirteen other worlds, tenderly carried through the images and emotions created for me by the words on the page.

Congratulations to our students and their tutor, Patricia Bartholomew, on this exciting selection of writing and artwork.

-Julia Shirtliff
Director of Studies, English

From the Editor's Desk

The editorial desk is pleased to bring you this second issue of Pandora. In this issue, you will find the very best of the creative writing emerging from our programs. We have stories running the literary gamut: from comedy to tragedy; fiction to essays to poetry. Although our writers come from many different countries, their themes speak to the universality and difficulty of human experience.

Writing is about relationships and connections: finding the right relationships to connect words to make sentences; to connect sentences to make paragraphs; paragraphs to make stories. But more than that, writing is about building relationships among people by connecting them through the shared experience of reading.

I hope you enjoy reading this second issue of Pandora as much as I have enjoyed putting it together.

PANDORA

PATRICIA BARTHOLOMEW, EDITOR

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The Ride

Fiction by Elli von Bothmer

I will not die. I have never believed in dying. I have never been very attached to rules, so this final rule that when the day is done you have to leave the playground, was definitely something other people had to follow – not me. Why? Well, it just didn't apply.

It wasn't that I felt divine. Why should there be life on earth when I wasn't around? What a boring place it would be then. I had to be here because I belonged to life. That was all. I was convinced of that. I hadn't given too much thought to it.

Or maybe I just couldn't imagine.

Until the one day I could.

I've been on this ride before. And I will be again. This I keep telling myself while fear beats the shit out of me. This is my mantra. It will save me. It must. Death isn't on my schedule. Not now. Not then. Not ever. This is my second mantra.

No sound, no motion. Only bright, white light. I close my eyes in a strange urge to defend myself.

The Atacama is one of the most hostile places in the world. It is dry, dry and dusty, brittle even, no rain has kissed its grounds for hundreds of days, months, maybe years. My grandfather kept telling me about when he had once crashed there in a propeller plane but after surviving that almost died of thirst.

After a while my eyes get used to the place. Cautiously. Through the narrow slots between my lashes I begin to detect my surroundings, which I see, in the very first moment: sand, stones and silence; and then: neglected ducked, shabby shacks like colony of cardboard boxes, sand coloured, of course; a single power pole – in my inner eye a hanged cowboy dangles, dirty leather boots clapping together with a brief sound whenever the wind wishes it; a spiny greyish bush that tries to grasp you if you dare to look at it too closely; then: a hidden dusty path that leads directly to the far away snow covered mountains – straight to heaven.

Through the crisp, sweet, early morning air, heat is already lurking like a female lion lying in the shade under a tree, with sleepy yellow eyes, still open enough to watch the scene, nose slightly lifted--scenting the enemy. Vigilance covered by patience.

All of a sudden: puff. The lioness reaches out. Kills with a strike.

Yet there are no lions in Chile.

The sun is queen here. And at the moment she reaches her highest point, looks down from high above and hits hard, ready for fight, ready to melt your poor little life away. In the desert, the sun is the boss; the heat is nothing but her bondsman, her slave, sent out to fulfil her wishes.



“Stallion” Brush and Ink by Hye-yeon Cho

The sun knows no mercy. Not even for the heat. It can do whatever it wants: the heat can struggle; the heat can fight – in the evening it will be sent to bed like a little child, without argument. It wouldn't obey straight away. The heat would linger, hesitate, hope for mother sun to change her mind. But sun leaves without a word. Leaves the house for the cold to come.

How do you find heaven in the desert? Take a horseback ride. You might expect something different. (I did, and so did my friends.) But on a closer look: heaven and hell can be similar.

"Horses for rent", a handwritten sign says in faded longhand on a Chiquita-banana-box. We find an Indian idly sitting in the shade, leaning at the gate of a paddock.

One horse in the herd catches my eye: strikes me like an unexpected encounter with someone with whom you have had a disturbing relationship - a light pinch in your heart to wake you up.

I automatically turn to this creature, mesmerised by its vibrancy. Greasy night-green flies circle its quivering ears.

This animal has got that little something that makes it stand out from the rest. It is not only its height, nor its outrageous blackness, believe me. I know what I'm talking about, I have a nose for that. This horse has character, and goodness is not its main feature.

The animal is perfectly aware of me. Quivers run through its skin in irregular intervals. Starting at the tail, they speed up to the neck, like a shot. In its short shrubby mane, that in a strange way doesn't match to the proud appearance of this animal, the tic gets lost, just to show up again the very moment you don't expect it, making its way back from the neck to the tail again.

The drunken Indian has a nose too, it seems. "A tall man needs a tall horse", he says, pointing first at me, then at the animal: "Asesino". He turns to me and grins. Needle-thin rivers of blood meander through the white of his eyes. I ignore the foul smell of hard liquor. It's the animal I'm interested in, not the guy.

The closer I get, the more daunting the horse becomes: it is not tall – it is huge! And it's

ready. Our eyes meet; two huge, black bullets shining back at me. Shining. Insane. A mere look and the animal trembles in nervousness.

"Don't show fear," I say to myself. "Just don't. It is going to sense it and then I'm lost." A cool and metallic perfume numbs my senses. I've been on this ride before.

What does the horse see when it looks at me? Does it realise I am someone from the backstreets? That I will defend myself? That I'm of its kind and recognize troublemakers without looking – the way a drug addict recognises his dealer?

Bambam — bambam — bambam — my heartbeat hammers rhythmically at my temples, rushes through my auditory canals, nags at my nerves as it grows louder and louder.

The horse starts shuffling its hooves. Snorts angrily. Wags its head, dripping white foam slowly on the ground.

This horse is a natural phenomenon. Personified provocation. A volcano. I love it. It is restless. I am too.

Together we are going to experience something neither of us has experienced before. It flutters in the air. We both sense it – the dark shade that roams around your nightmares.

It would be easy to walk away. I don't. I submit myself to fate, come hell or high water. I am not the kind of person to shy from a crazy horse.

Chilean horses in general – maybe I should impart this information right away – might be different from all other horses. In their veins the blood of the stubborn "burro" fights with that of an animal trained for competition. Rodeo. Raised to compete.

One day I saw a shyer successfully rid itself of a rider by galloping as close to a line of thorny trees as it could get. It was ready for murder. Clunckluncklunckluncklung the mans' head hit every single trunk until he fell like a ripe, bursting fruit.

They fetch a ladder for me to climb the horse. And here I am. Saddle worn out, reins wretched, stirrups too short. At least, the iron knob fixed at the horses' neck seems solid.

I've been riding before, I don't care about those things. I smile at my friends. They look tiny on their average sized horses. They are not comfortable; I can tell, but they try to keep up appearances. If it hadn't been for me, they would have had a much easier time in life; they have had to realise this so many times by now, but I never forced them to accompany me. They just always followed.

Now, on top of this trembling mountain I feel calm again. The fever has gone. Everything is possible now. I feel as a soldier must feel when leaving for the battlefield, knowing that he will either come back victorious or not come back at all.

Slowly we start a trancelike trotting. I enjoy drinking the fresh air. I am relaxed. Everything is just fine. I start wondering about all this needless inward fuss at the beginning of the trip, my insane fantasy making up odd realities... High above, expanded white clouds keep rushing through the sky and dissolve into the blue within seconds. Time lapses.

All of a sudden, my horse starts to gallop. Runs, runs, runs. Stones and sticks and thorns and rocks can't make it stop. I see soil, rocks, little dust-coloured flowers from far away and as detailed as if through a magnifying glass at the same time. I try to rein the animal – a fatal fault. Feeling my attempt to control it, the horse gets wilder and wilder, stamps and revolts, stops and pressures onward.

I dig my hands into its furious mane until my hands hurt. "Just don't fall down", I whisper to myself. I am nothing but brains and fear and burning hands now. "Asesino" – only now I realise the meaning of his name: Asesino means "Killer". My clenched teeth creak.

Faster and faster the horse becomes. And so do the other horses, following their leader devotedly and fearlessly, ready to give their lives for the cause – my friends on their backs. Kings

and vassals.

Their breath in his neck, the soil vibrating under their desperate steps, Asesino speeds up again, performing a "danse macabre".

"Dadamdadamdadamdadam", the hooves' sound on the granite ground fill my ears, my heart beating in the hooves' pace. He will go on running forever. I am sweating as if to save the world.

Unexpectedly he stops. Runs. Turns to the left at full speed, making me dangerously tilt.

But I'll be on the ride again.

The horse enjoys the bittersweet smell of fear, of death. It accelerates. I think I hear it laughing.

Asesino will be running forever, Asesino will forever be the first. Asesino is the devil himself.

It's the devil I'm riding – In search of the heavens I have found hell.

It runs. Stops. Runs. Stops. I bite its mane. Left. Right. Stop. Go.

Stones and sticks and rocks. Sticks and rocks. Rocks....

Suddenly, everything is different again. Sound: switched off. Pain: numbed. Fear: gone. Freedom was never as true and deep.

No longer do I painfully jump up and down in the rhythm of the devil. I relax the grip, spit out the horses' hair that I had been eating in my effort to hold on, stop to desperately dig my burning hands on whatever they find to grasp at.

All is soft and harmonic now, calm and peaceful, bathed in silvery light. Undiluted purity.

I am wrapped in cotton. I ride a cloud. This is a dream. This is heaven.

I'm on the ride. The best I have ever had.

Breathtaking landscapes pass by. Slowly. My spirits are calmed, reconciled. From far away I hear a secret song, enticing, tempting.

I follow the melody. And there is the cross. Dark wood.

It appears right before my eyes. It is the one I know from the place where I was born, at the entrance to the church of my childhood. I recognise the tiny letters somebody carved in the left corner: "heaven".

And then there are people: my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters, cousins and aunts, friends and comrades. Everybody I know seems to be there. Even my grandfather, he must be here too, undoubtedly, this peculiar smell of cold tobacco and kirsch couldn't be anyone else's. But, why are they weeping, crying, hugging one another in a way I had never seen them do before? What are they doing?

Why do they seem so distressed?

And: Where am I?

The company begins to walk towards the gate of the small stone-church I was baptized in. That's where the enchanting voice of the bells is coming from, seductively inviting me in. They keep seducing me, I want to see the sound, to touch it, want to float in it.

As I am about to follow its voice, to enter the church, suddenly I rudely wake up. I dive from this dazzling trance back into real life at the speed of light. "Try not to fall", I hear myself thinking. "You are about to die!"

My family, my friends, the church, the chimes are gone.

My hands automatically grip the reins again. They hurt. The hot body of the horse seems to slow down. Oh no, this time you won't get me, Asesino!

You have done that before just to speed up even more after. I prepare for another devil's ride. Blood drips from my swollen hands. I tighten the grip.

If there will be death, it's either you or the two of us who are to bite the dust. That's for sure. I will not leave without you. And – if that's to be my fate – I want to die with my eyes open.

You won't obey my order to calm down, so I will make you go on running, I am going to make you obey.

I grip the rotten reins and tug it with all

my forces.

Finally you will understand who the master is. I will be breaking your will. You didn't obey when I asked you to stop. But I know: If I ask you to run, you wouldn't stop either. You couldn't. You know it could cost your life. But you will obey, for it was my request that you run. You are trapped, Asesino. Checkmate. The game is over.

We will go through it, though, and I will show no mercy now – I will survive. I won't let a crazy horse take me over. I've been on the ride before...

I can sense the effort it takes you to keep on running. You're trembling, but it's not for an abundance of energy. Your bearing has changed. Your head hangs down, you can't really see where you're going anymore. The snorting I got used to on this trip is different now – it's not haughtiness as it was but exhaustion.

I appreciate the way you keep up, trying to stay alive, unwilling to surrender before the very end. I truly empathize with you and if you weren't already bound to die I would spare you. It will be minutes now. I won't humiliate you by doing so in the last moments of your ever provoking life.

And then all goes very fast. The animal breaks down. Lets its breath out like a balloon losing shape. Phiiiit. Not much left. Then its legs x as it slowly goes down. Slowly, slowly, as if to save me. I manage to jump away the very moment before Asesino finally collapses. A bag of potatoes. No elegance left. Skin and bones, a heap of boiling flesh, white strands of saliva smearing about its face, nostrils, eyes. Blood drips out of its ear. Asesino is gone. But he keeps looking at me with his huge eyes, like two beings of their own. Wide open. Just the way I would have wanted to die myself.

This time I didn't.

It was close.

Goodbye Baby

Fiction by Lenore Becks

She noticed it at once, as she used the toilet that night. A small red trace on the toilet paper. Of course she had registered all the typical signs these past few days. Hadn't she been extremely short-tempered? Her belly had felt bloated and her breasts had been particularly sensitive. As usual her partner was pleasantly surprised by her intensified sex drive and just yesterday night she experienced an extreme tiredness, which was an absolutely certain hint that her period would begin the very next day. It had been almost impossible to ignore all these signs. She was disappointed anyway. She knew of course that she hadn't been under treatment this last month. They decided to have a break after her last miscarriage. However she couldn't help hoping that a spontaneous pregnancy was still possible.

"I got my period", she told her partner as she returned to the kitchen. "It's just in time, isn't it", he commented. She nodded wordlessly. They cleared up the dishes together.

On Thursday she would have an appointment at 8am at the practice for fertility treatment. He moaned as she told him about it. It was the only day of the week that he could have slept in. But of course he would get up with her.

As she arrived at the practice, the waiting area was crowded like always. Slightly too loud meditative music was flooding the room. They didn't seem to have a big choice of CDs. Today Smetana's "The Moldau" was playing again. Although she liked the piece, in the long run the continuous repetitions were more annoying than relaxing. She had noted this in an anonymous patient survey half a year ago, but nothing had changed.

In her frequent visits to the practice in all the different stages of her treatment process

during the past months, she had have time enough to observe the daily regime at this place. At this early hour, at which she was in today, normally mostly women occupy the seats in the waiting area. Usually they are in their mid thirties or early forties, fashionably dressed, ready to hurry on to their jobs after the ultrasound or the blood sample. Silently, with suppressed impatience they are waiting to be called up. Later on in the morning, the time the doctors will carry out minor vaginal operations on their patients, more men will begin to appear in the waiting area. After theatrically kissing their wives goodbye and wishing them good luck, they open up their laptops, switch on their mobile phones and transform the waiting area into a home office. The espresso machine, set up in the corner for patients, is at last extensively used and the medical assistants are busy refilling it with milk and water. In the afternoon consultation talks will take place and the waiting area fills up again with nervous couples. Holding hands the therapy newcomers sit densely together and talk in whispers to each other.

The numerous medical assistants are clearly the youngest and the most relaxed ones among the waiting mass of patients. Busily they pace around, trying to domesticate their vitality to a tolerable extent for the tense looking patients. Only if a toddler turns up at the practice, which seldom enough happens, they joke and laugh uncontrollably.

She always wondered why most of the women didn't talk to each other in the waiting area. Actually there must exist a strong need to discuss the whole procedure, since in internet forums she found an active ex-

change on this subject. Her own desire to talk about her problem intensified the longer she was under treatment. However she would have never dared to contact anybody in the waiting area. She didn't know, how to get into a conversation with someone there. Should she for instance ask: "Well, how is it going with you? How many trials have you had?" or even worse "The last time I was at least a little bit pregnant. Have you had any miscarriages so far?" She even thought about joining a support group for couples with fertility problems, but she couldn't find one in her region.

She entered the ultrasound room after waiting for about an hour. Her gynaecologist joined her a few minutes later. It always confused her that she first glanced at the computer screen before she greeted her. She had the impression that her doctor otherwise wouldn't remember her. Nevertheless she trusted this woman's competence. In a way she liked her distant manner. She was always to the point, strictly concerned with the treatment process, never asked her any personal questions. Lately it seemed to her, as if she tried to be friendlier and it happened that she said some encouraging, optimistic things to take along. Maybe this was also due to the patient survey. Sometimes, however, it also bothered her, that her doctor simply was not a warm-hearted character. Then she wished that she would ask an empathetic question, like "How do you cope with the situation?" But this never occurred in their consultation talks. This woman simply had the detached charisma that usually is said to be typical for people from Northern Germany. An odd contrast to the intimate topics they touched.

They discussed her next fertilization trial, while she still was sitting half-naked on the treatment chair. After their first in vitro fertilization eight supernumerary egg cells had been frozen. There were still four of these fertilized frozen egg cells left. Earlier she and her partner had decided to take back two of them at this trial. The remaining two they wanted to preserve for their fourth and last trial.

She had turned 40 last summer. It hadn't

been a happy birthday party. She had been too much aware of the fact that their wish for having a child would soon have reached its biological barrier. So much the worse as a friend at the party had told her: "With 40 I would feel too old for having children." The day after the party she had mostly stayed in bed. For hours she had brooded over her unfair chances in life. When her partner returned home from his regular photography meeting that night, he had found her drenched in tears. She had scared him with her morbid view of the future and her hysterical crying. That was the time when they had decided to go on with the treatment for only one more year. If within the next treatment cycle she would not have become pregnant, they would give up. "Goodbye baby!"

Nowadays she looked forward to this date. She couldn't go on like this much longer. Last autumn she had quitted her job as an administration secretary. She had needed more time for the extensive treatment. In the past two months she finally felt more relaxed. She had started to work as a volunteer in a home for disabled people. The misfortune of the people she saw there, made her own destiny of childlessness less fatal.

Her gynaecologist proposed to begin with defrosting two egg cells. In the case that one egg cell would get broken within the process, her doctor advised to defrost the remaining two egg cells and to insert three embryos into her womb. Alarmed she looked up. That would deprive her of her last chance. "In this case, I would rather have only one more defrosted. Then I have at least one more trial to go with the remaining one", she said. "It is not about working through trials", her gynaecologist replied somewhat irritated. She flushed and stammered an explanation while she quickly dressed again. "Well, the hormone laboratory will call you to get to a final decision", her doctor bid farewell and rushed out of the room. The sadness overwhelmed her as she left the practice. The



“Formality” Acrylic on Canvas by Selina McPhee. Selina.McPhee@gmx.de

high spirits she had been in this morning were gone. Walking towards the car park she felt the bitter taste of disillusion on her tongue. Once again she felt betrayed in her expectations.

He hadn't want to have a child at first. He hadn't really been able to imagine their life with a baby. He had thought it would be terrible stressful. “I don't think you can stand it, if you don't get to sleep at night”, he had told her when she had first come up with this topic. Later on he had liked the idea of having a little girl who would be similar to her. Shortly after this she had secretly

observed him, how he had carefully examined scientific construction kits at a toy shop. He had started to dream of a little girl, who would be gifted in natural sciences. Once he had told her about a colleague at his school who had become a father and had proudly displayed photos of his baby daughter. It had seemed to her that he had liked the image of himself in a similar role.

She would name her daughter Sarah. Four years ago, as they had just started the therapy, she had once attended a service in a

catholic church in their quarter. The reading from the Genesis on that morning was about Abraham's wife Sarah, who didn't believe in God's promise that she will shortly bear a son: "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have the pleasure?" She had taken this event as a good omen. Hadn't this been a clear hint, that they shouldn't abandon hope too early?

On Good Friday they went on a one-day hiking trip with his parents. He was an only child and strangely enough both his parents were only children too. She had the suspicion that in his family fertility problems might be well known; however, his mother had always denied this when she addressed this topic.

They were lucky with the weather. It was a beautiful sunny spring day and pretty warm for this time of the year. She had planned the hiking tour and had chosen an ambitious distance, so it would be a challenge for everybody. She liked his parents, compared to her own ailing old parents they were healthy and fit. However she always felt a little uncomfortable in their presence. She knew of course that they were waiting and hoping for a grandchild. So far they didn't talk much to his parents about their unfulfilled wish for a baby, especially he avoided talking to them about this topic. "That's nothing to them", he rudely had cut off her urge to involve them in what was on her mind. As she quitted her job, she had though insisted on letting them know that they had started a fertility treatment.

His Mum walked next to her on today's hike. She started to keep on asking her unpleasant questions, about the progresses in the treatment, her next job plans or his career prospects. These questions were either too personal or she didn't know the answer to it herself. It increasingly annoyed her. His Mum didn't seem to understand how much their infertility stressed her. Regarding her own job plans she tried to explain that she was desperately in need of finding a new perspective in life, that she wanted a radical change in her professional life, if they couldn't have this child. However as long as she was under treatment she couldn't go on with her career. All her attempts

were in vain. Like a spider his Mum sucked her dry. The more she struggled the tighter the net of questions was weaved around her. In despair she looked out for him. He was walking far ahead with his father. She was relieved when they caught up with them at a parting of the ways. "Couldn't you walk with your Mum for a change", she whispered furiously to him as they fell behind his parents on the next stretch of way. Puzzled, he looked at her.

The practice usually called her at noon, between 1 and 3pm, to let her know the result of her morning blood draw. She was nervously expecting the call today. In the morning she had been in for her pregnancy test. Two weeks ago the transfer of two embryos into her womb had successfully taken place. By now her period had not started, so she was cautiously optimistic regarding the result. In particular since she strictly kept to all the rules these past two weeks. She hadn't smoke a single cigarette, she had abstained from alcohol – although this had been hard from time to time –, she hadn't take a hot bath and she hadn't resumed her swim training, which was after all her favourite hobby. Initially she hadn't been faithful to all the rules. However as she hadn't fallen pregnant, she had the strange idea this might be her fault.

As the phone rang, she tried to keep calm and let it ring several times. They shouldn't notice that she had been waiting for it the whole morning. She could tell by the tone of the voice the result of the blood test by the way the medical assistant pronounced her name. A long drawn-out, compassionate undertone meant a negative result.

She picked up the receiver. It was the practice. The young female on the phone drew out the "o" in her last name. Then she said, "I am so sorry, we couldn't find any pregnancy hormones in your blood test. You will get your period within the next days. Do

not continue with the medication anymore.” She suppressed her disappointment and quickly terminated the call. Blankness spread out inside her. She didn’t cry anymore. She had gone through this too often by now. Nevertheless, deep inside herself, she always thought, that one day it would work out. “What if it never will happen?”, she thought by herself with a trace of panic. It felt like she would lose her footing, as if she would slide into a situation she couldn’t control anymore. She couldn’t really imagine her life without a family on her own. All the new perspectives she tried to find these past months seemed suddenly to be worthless again. She didn’t want to live this other life of a childless couple. Like a house of cards all her tediously initiated projects collapsed. She couldn’t concentrate anymore on her work this afternoon. Disturbed she paced around the house. To her Mum she was unusually rude on the phone and unlike else she didn’t have the patience to listen to her lamentations on her father’s health condition.

When he returned home that night, she told him right away the result of the blood test. They silently hugged each other for a long time. All had been said.

“Let’s have a farewell ritual for our unborn child”, she said determinedly. It was a sultry Sunday in late August, the overripe apples were falling off the apple tree that stood in the middle of their tiny garden. They rested in the shadow of the shelter. The heat of the afternoon let all movements slow down. Even their noisy neighbours seem to have retreated into their house. Her voice had broken the peaceful silence. In the last trial all their remaining cryopreserved egg cells had been used up. The pregnancy test had been negative again. In the suffocating heat of the afternoon they had just finally decided, that they would not continue with the fertility treatment anymore. Despite that he was surprised by her suggestion of having a farewell ritual, even feared that it might make her feel miserable again. “It is an important symbol for me that I have let go of my desire for a child. It will make it easier for me to start something new”, she explained

quickly as she recognised the uncertainty in his eyes. “Ok, I will join you”, he agreed hoarsely. He moved awkwardly in his chair.

The next week she made all the preparations for the farewell ritual and set time and place. On a Friday they drove to the river when dusk fell. It was a pleasant and warm evening – the heat of the day had disappeared and mosquitos were dancing in the soft air. The calm water of the river took on a golden colour in the setting sun.

Since she had chosen a place way outside the city, there were only few people around who were still strolling at the riverside. Together they walked wordlessly along the banks until they found the stairs, which led directly to the water surface. He followed her slowly as she nimbly climbed down the stairs. Silently she crouched down and unpacked the little paper boat, which she had accurately folded at home the day before. Standing close behind her he watched her how she took a tea candle out of her bag and placed it in the middle of the boat. Without having been asked, he knelt down next to her and shielded the boat from the light breeze, which suddenly came up, so she could light the candle. As soon as the candlewick burned she bent forward and launched the boat carefully to the water. She straightened up again and took his hand. The wind blew a little stronger now. The sun had finally disappeared behind the clouds at the horizon and darkness quickly fell. In the stronger breeze their little paper boat would have no chance to persist on the open water. In the twilight they watched the fragile object as it slowly disappeared in the darkness. Tears were running down her cheeks while she watched the movement of the uneasy flame on the river. The boat steadily floated downstream. She stared into the fast-growing darkness, anxious not to lose track of the light. When she finally took refuge in his eyes, she noticed that he looked miserable. She sighed deeply: “Don’t worry. I am feeling okay. It helps me. It frees me. We are free now.”

Job Interview

Fiction by Prisca Feingold

Sometimes I wonder how I got that job. I mean I am not qualified, not motivated, it does not pay, I am on duty 24/7. But I had no choice.

Well, there was one ability that seemed to have qualified me in some mysterious way. I once was pregnant. The job interview was an obligatory part of the prenatal screening program for pregnant women between 17 and 43 years of age in order to guarantee the mother's and the baby's health. When I remember correctly that got me that job I hate:

"You are pregnant? You got the job."

"But I do not want it."

"You got the job."

"But I am not qualified. I cannot hold a vacuum cleaner, I cannot replace the dust bag, and there is something wrong with my eyes that disables me from noticing dust in the first place."

"Are you pregnant?"

"Well, yes. But that will go away. Won't I lose my qualification then? In the job de-

scription I saw that you also have to do grocery shopping, even extreme grocery shopping with a baby tied to your body with some Indian scarf and a toddler sitting in the seat of the cart, both of them crying. And all that after a night with hardly any sleep. I really cannot do that. I am not qualified."

"But you are pregnant?"

"Yes, I think so, but only for a short while. Honestly I will get over it!"

"Just relax! Don't worry, that is all you need, the only job requirement. Just think of the good things, you cannot get fired!"

"But if I do not like the job which am sure will be the case, can I quit?"

"Ahahaha, ahahaha ...!"

"?"

"But the money is okay? I mean it is a step or two up from where I am now?"

"What money?"

"Okay, that job with no money, no career and odd working hours day and night, seven



“Keys” Stock Photo

days a week. Presume, just presume I accept, how much vacation am I entitled to during the first year?”

“What vacation?”

“And the second year?”

“Look, I think you are getting the wrong idea here. You are not entitled to vacation at all, no holidays, Christmas is high season, as are summer school vacations. If you are lucky you might get two or three days off after the first fifteen years.”

“Hmm ... fifteen years.”

“The job concept is planned on eighteen to twenty-two years. You cannot get fired, you cannot quit. You are responsible for the complete outcome of the school results of the offspring. You have to guide them patiently and tolerantly through the terrible twos and then through the terrible teens which has proved to be somewhat harder, but by then you should have learned.”

“What role does the father play here?”

“Your father. He can visit you of course, if you make it nice for him and give him good homecooked food and see to it that the children are seen but not heard.”

“No, I mean the father of the baby, the man who got me pregnant!”

“Well, he will be a father, same treatment to all fathers, no matter what generation! They earn the family income, and their nerves are very sensitive. And they need a lot of sleep, especially when the children are still small. And encourage him to indulge in a hobby because you won’t have enough time for him when the baby keeps you busy.”

“Sex?”

“He will want it all the time because he will be jealous of the baby. Treat him very carefully and humour him whenever he wants it.”

“What am I supposed to do in the likely case of getting an overdose of household work and child care?”

“Well, that is not known to ever have

been found in women. However, what can be a mild indication of having to slow down is that it will affect your sex drive. But other than that you just cannot overdose, on the contrary the more you do, the more comfortable your loved ones will be. And just think of the development of the children. It is scientifically proven that there is nothing more important than a caring mother who spends endless hours of quality time of constant stimulation with her children.”

“O.k. That is good to know. If I want a minute for myself, say to have a shower, what can I do? Is it o.k. for them to watch TV? Or for their Dad to watch them?”

“Well, you really have to weigh the pros and cons here very carefully. It has been proven to very unhealthy for children of all ages to watch TV instead of doing something genuinely creative like embellishing the walls with finger paint or forming clay sculptures on the kitchen table. Still, if you need to do some heavy shopping like a couple of crates of healthy mineral water for the family and you really – and don’t use this as an excuse, this can only be an exception – cannot carry your sweet little ones at the same time, they may watch TV for as long as twenty minutes.”

“Their dad?”

“That’s what I am trying to say, the above described scenario can only be executed if your husband – I hope you are married to the father of your children – agrees to watch them for a short while, because he will be very exhausted from toiling for the family income five days a week. Never forget that. And before you ask, yes he is in constant danger of overdosing on household and childcare. How far can you go? If he agrees and only then he might accept to read a good night story as you are cleaning up the kitchen, preparing school lunches for the next day and doing one last load of laundry. In the case you have already seen to all that, you will read the story, and he can start to relax in front of the TV.”

“And then what?”

“When the children are in bed, the household for the day is done and the next day has been prepared for, then would be a good time for you

to have that shower so that you can present yourself to your husband fresh as a spring flower after a light rain.”

“Me a spring flower! I will of course try to have everything ready in time for us to have recreational quality time, and to help him keep his strength for another day of hard work in the office or a sportive weekend.”

“You get the idea! And you are aware that it won’t do the bread winner any good if he has to replace his leisure time by family time. That would not be natural and could make him cranky. Do not expect him to play babysitter when he has to play in an important tennis tournament. As I said it is important, but you might want to compare the importance of active sports with family responsibilities. Don’t! The new job will make you wear blinkers and your husband is the only one to judge what is important. But I guess in your case you are aware because you already know your husband!”

“Oh yes, he really likes his hours on the tennis court! And it is such a big responsibility for him to earn the money for us all and to have such an important hobby. When is the time for me to pursue my hobby?”

“And that would be ...?”

“I am writing plays for and acting in a private theater group!”

“Is it important?”

“For me yes, it is a lot of fun.”

“Fun! It is of course not important. It won’t get your family any further. It is only important for you.”

“Well, I won’t be that selfish! I am not that kind of person!”

“Okay, that should be all then. You have the right attitude. It is a job, you know that is very popular, especially after pregnancy. Not that you have a choice.”

“O.k., I am glad. What do I have to do?”

“Just sign here ... and there.”

“That’s all? Well, thank you so much!”

“You are welcome. Good luck!”

Poems by Barbara Thimm

Simile

Like a wave that breaks on a rock giving
Up its shape in a gesture, or a lock giving

Way to a delicate tool pushed with great force,
Or a woman undressing, her back giving

In to the light, or a stone in still lakes,
Or a sound that sounds like a clock giving

The hour and stopping, or a babbling child who turns
Out to be deaf, or a slack rope giving

To the weight of a living body, or the voice
In my head mocking; and grieving.

Moves

What we leave behind:

Wood fires over the fields, their smell
in your shirt, the color of my lips and hair.
Books we will not read again,

missing pieces of a game, a broken
banister, his hand on my cheek.
The sweetness in my mouth.

The sound of leaves and
dusk and dawn and how
they blended on the bedroom wall.

Friends we never made,
the nuts and bolts we used to mend
what could be mended.

In the end, you say,
we'll all be dead.

What end is that? And where?

The Hunter and the Wolf

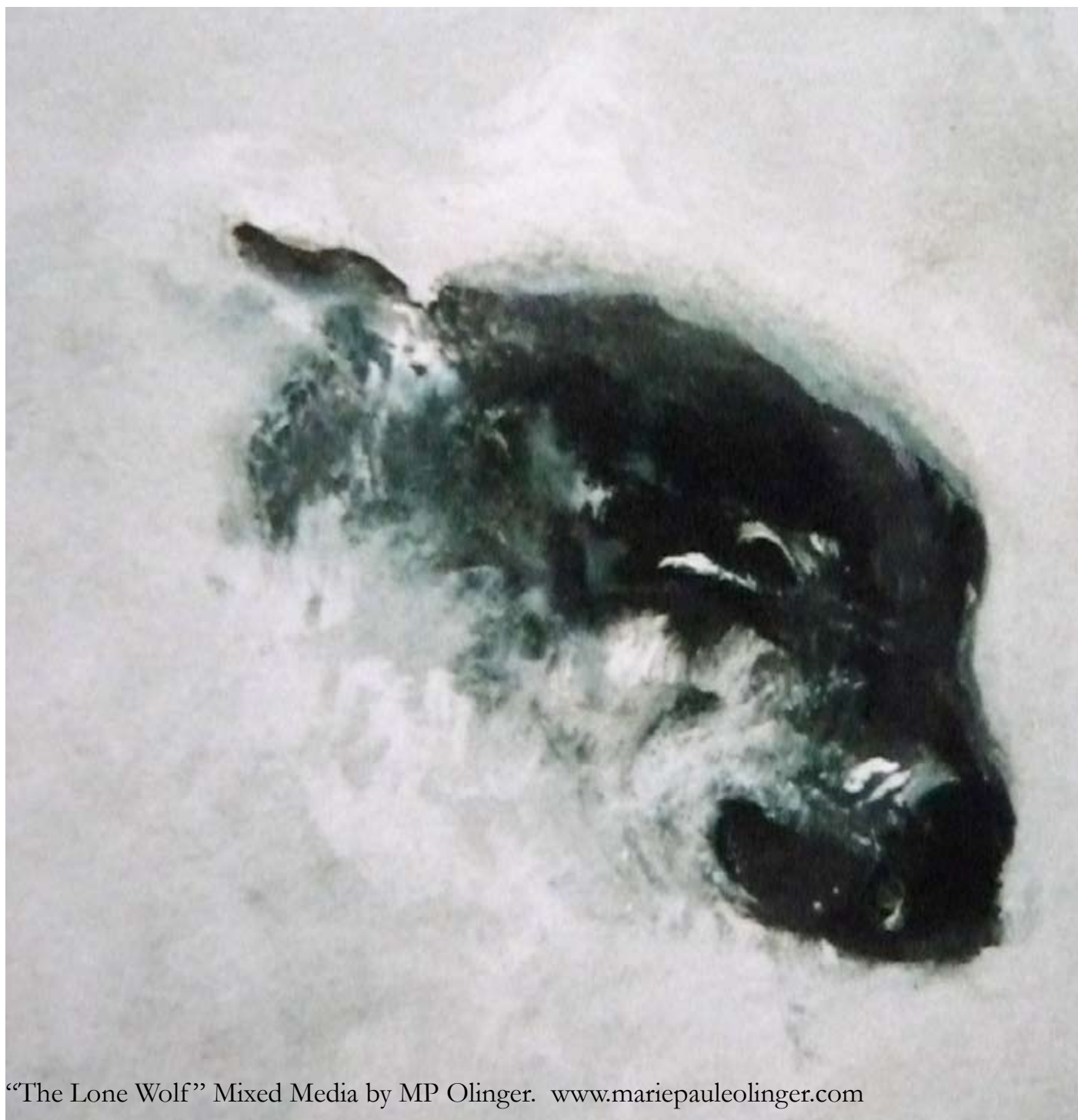
Fiction by Marie-Paule Olinger

The howling of the snowstorm swallowed the lone wolf's lament as the storm swept over the hills of Montana. The old cabin ached under the white onslaught as the braying of sheep, the racketing of hens, and the furious barking of his dogs had kept Mike alert through the starless night. Yet it was the absolute stillness, the absence of any sign of life outside his isolated farmhouse that catapulted him out of his bed's safety. He grabbed his lambskin jacket and his Winchester, and stormed out into the chilly air.

Twelve months ago he had settled in the area. It was a new beginning, a simpler way of living, and a fresh chance at mastering life. He was damned, if he would let a bloody wolf kill off his livelihood and all his hopes. Mike crossed the courtyard fighting his way through the blizzard. As he approached the stables he didn't notice the fresh wolf prints in the snow, he only wondered that the latched door was ajar. The moment he set foot in the stables, silence, and the sweet odour of death greeted him. Mike froze and held his breath, and with trembling hands he switched on the light.

A couple of hens perched on the safety of their racks. They peeked down onto the carriage below. The flock of lambs huddled silently together in the far corner of the den. In the middle of the stable one lamb was fighting for its life, blood gashing through a deep wound in its belly. The straw took on a murky shade of red. Mike's mouth went dry, as he swallowed the bitter taste of bile. Shakily he knelt down, and gently lifted the dying animal into his arms. He turned and recounted his sheep. Then he saw the dragged path of blood-drenched straw leading out into the yard. He recounted his sheep and realised that another little one was missing. Mike left the stables on unsteady legs. He put the dying lamb into the soft snow and with a heavy heart closed its eyes. The sound of his rifle reverberated through the crack of dawn, as Mike released the lamb from its agony.

With clenched fists, his shoulders hunched into the warmth of his coat, Mike followed the bloody trail along the frozen river. The crystal-line snow was specked with drops of blood, and Mike was acutely alert of every hush in the air.



“The Lone Wolf” Mixed Media by MP Olinger. www.mariepauleolinger.com

The wolf's trail led him deep into the woods.

Dark clouds scuttled on the horizon as Mike reached the creek of Middleton. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks. A low growling crept over the clearing. For a second the lone wolf's dark silhouette contrasted sharply against the birth of a new day. The big grey stood motionless over its kill. Turning his majestic head in defiance, his slanted amber eyes locked with Mike's. Like in a cathedral, the pale morning light filtered through snowed under trees, and the forest held its breath. The flapping of raven wings brushing against frosted airwaves broke

the spell, and the wolf's fur bristled. Mike lifted his rifle. The rancid smell of danger tiptoed around man and beast, and time seemed to expand. Mike kept his index finger on the trigger.

As the bullets hit the stumbling wolf one by one, Mike felt a rush of adrenalin warm his heart. With his head held high he carefully approached his fallen prey. Yet as he drew nearer his pride turned stale. The she-wolf had bravely died, doing what she-wolves do, trying to fend for her cub.

His Playlist

Fiction by Yuki Higashino

The desktop picture on the Macintosh computer Hector got from his parents for his last birthday was a black and white picture of Nirvana, and it was casting pale light on an otherwise dark room. He could barely make out the faces on his posters, but he wasn't paying attention to them nor anything else in his small room anyway. He was not up at three in the morning to examine his room after several hours of fruitless attempts to fall asleep. He opened his email account and typed in his password. His fingers and keyboard were pretty much the only things he could see clearly in the gray light emanating from the grunge icons. Two new mails. In the first one, Facebook was dutifully informing him that Kevin, an insignificant member among the group he hung around with at school, was having a great time with his family at holiday in Cornwall. Whatever he thought.

The insomnia he'd been having for nearly a month since the beginning of summer break was his top-secret. He cherished it with great pride and told no one. It was the first sign of irregularity, of trouble and disturbance, the arrival he had longed

for for very very long time. He resented the sheer ordinariness of his life bitterly. He wished that his father, a not-so-senior executive at a Japanese insurance company on Liverpool Street, didn't exist at all. Further he wished that his mother, a bank clerk at local Barclays, was an impoverished single mother with drug problem. He pictured himself to be a hopeless working class teenager from Manchester forming a punk band with his mates, but in reality he was doing his A-Level without much difficulty in suburban Surrey, and he was very middleclass. His family kept a cocker spaniel named Lucy. He was aware of his comfort in life and had no desire to give it up. He believed he was cursing the fates for putting him in a situation where he lacked any justification to revolt. He even had no obstacles in playing his highly unaccomplished guitar. His father was a Clash fan and had had his turn in trying to play guitar back in his days. He felt the comfort of his life to be the great



“Ipod” Stock Photo

injustice of the world that prevented him from being different. So this insomnia was a blessing. He knew that insomnia could be a symptom of disturbed psyche, and he had heard of Freud (never read any of his stuff but Wikipediaed him). He thought it to be the beginning of his stable and boring mind's end, and the glorious life of the mentally disturbed was unfolding. Maybe soon, he'd be so fucked up that he might be able to summon enough courage to be like Kurt Cobain or Ian Curtis. Wouldn't that be cool?

'Dear Customer, Thank you for participating in the product research of our new innovation "Psychocandy". Each one of the pills from this line, produced exclusively for our customers by highly distinguished neurology and gastronomy specialists, will induce psychological disorders of famous historical figures. You ordered "Price of Stardom: Rock Stars with depressive tendencies". If you are satisfied with this product, why not try "Military Glory: From Alexander the Great to Hitler" for homicidal

impulses, or "The Ophelia Effect" for feminine nervous breakdown? Yours Truly, Knitting Sheep Sweets and Medicine Ltd.' The second email was clearly a spam. Hector was surprised that it came through to his Inbox.

He knew that in replying to the spam mail, he would be attracting a lot more. But it was too spot-on; it was as if the virtual world was watching him. Strange though as it was, he felt only natural that it was his laptop that signaled true understanding of his character before anyone else. He never had a girlfriend, so he spent the most intimate time imaginable, practically every night with his Mac. It kept all his favorite music for him, and it held his social life together. It assisted him in his school work, and it knew all his sexual preferences. So when he read those sentences on his laptop screen, he felt a bond, he felt he could trust it. "To whom it may concern, My name is Hector Hutchinson. I received your email regarding the purchase of your product "Psychocandy". Perplexed as I am since I have no memory of

ever contacting you before, I am interested in your product nevertheless...'

To his astonishment, the product arrived next morning in an ordinarily A5 padded envelope. He wondered why it bore no company logo or name, just "Lisa Wilkie" as the sender's name with a Brighton address.

'Do you know anyone in Brighton?' asked his mother holding a spoonful of dried fruit granola.

'I ordered free information about a new band there'.

'Each one of these pills will reproduce the mental problems of a famous deceased rock star. In order to have exactly the same symptom as your chosen rock star, you must take two pills of each type. Taking one will induce milder symptoms of the same mental disorder. The effect regardless of the number of the pills you take will last for 24 hours' read the typed text that came with the pills. Whoever made this drug had made zero packaging effort. It came in a small white box with nothing on it, and the text was printed on a cheap LaserJet paper, with the text typed in Times New Roman. 'Yellow – Jim Morrison, Blue – Syd Barrett, Red – Kurt Cobain...' and so on. Four pills for each color. He took one Richey Edwards and ten hours later he was lying in a hospital bed.

His mother found him in his room covered with blood. He had made several cuts in his left arm with a razor blade. They were all not very deep, and his arteries were intact, nine stitches in total but his mother freaked out. She sobbed, and asked him what was wrong; was there anything he wanted, and whether she has been a bad mother. Hector overheard her crying even more when talking to a doctor in the hallway outside his hospital ward, sniveling that she felt like he was a different person, and the doctor assuring her it was because of the anesthetic, and he can go home with her in an hour, but he should go to bed immediately because he had lost quite a lot of blood. And no shower for a few days. He listened to all this in profound existential detachment.

Lying in his bed the next morning, he was seriously depressed. The effect of the pill stopped about an hour ago and so had the tremendous existential despair that was so sweet and special. For the first time in his life he suffered, really suffered. He had loved it. He had the sensation of being initiated to the chosen few, to those who insist on being unique individuals. The bandage on his left arm was the confirmation of his authenticity. The reaction of his parents and the doctor had showed that his action was beyond their comprehension. In the semi-delirium of the drug-induced depression he branded them as Philistines; he was just too different. But once the effect was over, he felt neither courage nor desire to hurt himself. The despair was gone. He was depressed for the loss, but it was nothing compared to the utmost despondency of the chemically induced Richey Edwards persona. He was sad, but he was just sad, nothing special. Prior to taking the pill, he read the last sentence in the prescription that said 'As this product is still in its development, we have only limited stock. Hence we can offer only one box to each customer until further development.' There were about ten more personalities he could try, but that just meant he had only twenty more days to be unique, of not being what he really was, an obscure and healthy white suburban boy. He was afraid. Above everything, he was afraid that even this fear was nothing like the epic sorrow of being that a real person he believed should be feeling. It was too much for him to face the fact that even at that point he lacked any urge to do anything drastic to himself. He was truly boring.

That evening around 2AM Hector took all four of the Ian Curtis pills.

When his mother discovered his body hanging in the closet the next morning, "Closer" was playing in a loop on his iTunes.

The Hailstorm

Non-fiction by Ute Süßbrich

When, in the early afternoon, I leave my house, the sky has already darkened. I pass by the castle, where a crocheting woman is smiling at me, and asks, if I am the foreign journalist who would write about Bisaccia. She is Giuseppina, who always sits in front of the entry to her house, observing what's going on at the piazza. I tell her that I am now thinking of writing more than an article. I feel so good here. She seems amused. As vivid as it is now, it will only last until August, she says assuredly. Within the next few weeks I won't find a soul here any more. The cold will come down with fog, and the streets will be drawn into a silence that hurts. Giuseppina invites me to sit next to her on a stool, but I have to go on to see the quarter above the old school.

"There is a storm coming down" she warns me. And indeed, it just looks like that: deep clouds and heaviness in the air. To make the trip right now seems foolhardy to Giuseppina. "It won't just be a rain shower", she warns me another time before dedicating herself to the border of her cloth again.

From the Piazza several pathways lead to the upper quarter called Forno. Here, there had once been the central bakery where everyone came to bake his own bread. Its ruin lies five feet from the graveyard. But my trip today

pushes me in the opposite direction, to the east, where the village was broadened in the second half of the 20th century. In the meantime powerful clouds have come up, bulging and grey. They concentrate the sunlight. As it hits the doors and windows, it lights the pathway with dancing spots. Old women lean and squat in front of their houses. They appear like creatures from another era, motionless, timelessly they persist, waiting for nothing but the passing time. Strange to see how the filtered sunlight brings their gracefulness up once more, by the colours of the doors, the facades and the frames of the windows, now, for some moments, for me. Even the blue house numbers on the white enamel are gleaming tearfully. These objects insist on their right to be, on them stick so many stories, that they themselves do not have the ability to remember. Only the leaflets on the window's glass tell upon the yellowed paper what once was of importance, and now have become historical mind-marks under the free sky.

Then the lane turns into a small pathway that separates a kitchen-garden from pure wilderness. Soon the path is overgrown by grass. I climb from stone to stone, follow the signs that I interpret as the path. I don't reach very far. It ends abruptly in front of a monstrous gap: a

long stretched aisle goes south-east. Instinctively I take a step back. I didn't expect this! Here, on this cliff, the village breaks literally away: a deep abyss yawns towards me, and it seems even more dangerous because of the village's proximity. Now I understand, yes, I even feel the invisible power of the earth under my feet. Great work had been given to build up this pitch: in order that the situation would not worsen, the pitch had been systematically secured, tubes of steel embrace it and separate the two tops of earth from each other, so that they cannot drag the earth's stratum further along. Who knows, how long this construction can resist the downward pressure. It is a question of time as apparently is everything in Bisaccia.

I follow a sharp turn of the street back to the centre of the village. In the curve stands a two-story house with a wild garden. weeds spread like growing hair. Walls are covered by moss and yellow tangle. Further on houses rise to airy heights. They stand like observation towers over the village and then down into the softly swinging countryside. The wind stands still, and I am alone, alone and filled with a strangely beautiful mood. Through a translucent glass bell, I feel uplifted by strangely familiar streams of light. Ultra fine dust dances, gleams, floats. Now it is all about entering one of the houses, to look from one of those windows into distance, the village so close.

It begins to rain and I go with a forced march towards the Piazza. Hoppla, now the bad weather really breaks through. The sky is a mass of clouds, and all of a sudden gives way to what the heat had taken out of every pore of the land. I am soaked immediately. I pull off my shoes and wade through the running stream. Where the loggias decorate the houses and the piazza is not far, but small hailstones begin to drop. Giuseppina was right! I utter imprecations, but still, it is adventurous. Then I see a door opened. An old woman makes a sign to come into her house. Water streams in front of her. As soon as I am close to the door, she pushes me in. Only moments ago floating in magic worlds, I now

feel trapped. The storm whips against the door and I am enclosed, enclosed together with an old, mute woman under a dark coat of glass.

She looks through a slit, steadily watching the weather, saying nothing as though she were on her own. A bewildering loneliness envelops her. Then, within myself, a feeling of solidarity rises. She appears close to me, this woman, her life, her forlornness. Together we stare outside, waiting for the hailstorm to stop. But from the inside the hail pieces hit so strongly that it sounds like being at a German eve-of-the-wedding celebration: with the clinking above us, one thinks of shattering porcelain.

All of the sudden a whisper comes over her lips: once upon the time Bisaccia was beautiful, some decennia ago, anyhow before the earthquake. Broken into two parts now, the situation has become desperate. She shakes her head and falls silent again, then she bolts the door. I beg her to leave Aja at least. But with the next swap of water, she closes it rigorously.

From the first floor the turmoil of a TV western comes down to us. I hear a child and the voice of a woman, then there is also a man speaking. The family lets the old woman sit here, alone, as though she wouldn't be part of them. The house, she whispers now, has been completely redone, from the inside as well as from the outside. "It is really nice", I say to encourage her, but she looks disdainful. Something flashes through her, and as though she had to defend herself from a spirit, an offender, she gesticulates with her hands in direction to the door. I peer around and discover a painting above my head. It shines in weird colours: one sees a procession that moves towards a church, in front of this, a young couple. The sky has the same reddish pastel as the nipples of the woman, who presents herself next to her partner in the sack coat, exposed, looking lasciviously at the spectator. The hand of the man in the sack coat touches her breast.

He grins. This obscene painting here, above the head of this woman, hurts. It bewilders me. Is someone making fun of the old woman? Does she actually know what is welcoming her guests? The storm continues loudly. I stay in my seat, still, just like her. But then the need to jump outside becomes stronger. I want to get out of here, want to be on the piazza. The weather has calmed down a bit, and I say to the woman, I will go to the bar. One jump and I am out on the street. She shakes her head: it is still raining.

The drying after the hailstorm evokes my sensuality. I smell the earth, stones, wet leaves. Pulling off my slippery shoes again, I feel the warm and sleek stone ground and the watery film under my feet. Life does hold me again! Running until I am soaked to the skin, running to the piazza, dancing to the Scorzese. Maria welcomes me: her greeting is directed to me as to a good friend. Men are sitting at the tables, playing cards, reading newspapers. In the damp of the room they come together as in a stable. Their voices drone loudly. They don't take any notice of me. But I may stay, I can feel, and that is good.

There is Francesco. He is laughing into my face, is as happy as I am. I stop my writing. I want to tell him about the house in the curve, in which I would like to move; the pitch, that would make Bisaccia crumble into depths; and obviously about the old woman. I know that he will be interested in these things. He loves my stories, emphatic, sympathetic, emotionally charged. And then we speak about that woman. It is a pity, he doesn't know her. I owe her something, I feel. I want to show her, that she, af-

ter all, is not alone. I decide to buy a box of ice cream for her. Nothing better comes to my mind. Francesco says, that would do, and gives me his company, I am glad for it.

As we bow into the street, I immediately reckon that she sits there just like before, staring into emptiness. I offer my unfit present, saying "Thank you!" but she makes me a sign of refusal, without looking at me: what should she make out of this? She looks at Francesco, with reproach. I have offended her. Francesco laughs. I shouldn't take it too seriously, he says, pushes his arm under mine and draws me back into the familiar houses of Bisaccia.

Excerpt from: *Oben der Himmel, unten das Dorf. Mein Mosaik für Bisaccia, einem südit- alienischen Dorf*, 2009. by Ute Süßbrich



"Campo" Photo by Ute Süßbrich

Let the Line Flow

Essay on Painting and Drawing by Marie-Paule Olinger

Some paintings do come more easily than others. A few years ago I was working on a piece that I had battled with for some time, when the girl next to my studio knocked on my door and invited me over for a cuppa. We had two cups of coffee, a long chat, and she had several cigarettes.

After a while I started to feel slightly funny and put it down to the strong smell of turpentine. Then it dawned on me that she had had one joint after the other. When I went back to my studio, dazed by the smell of it all, I had left all inhibitions behind in the swirl of smoke. And what do you know? The paint now flowed freely. My brush became an extension of my right arm, and I got lost in the sensation of sweeping colours over the canvas. Then, with one final movement I swept the last brushstroke onto the work. Hallelujah! After weeks of struggle, I signed the painting, and closed up for the day.

The finished painting should not show signs of struggle or hard labour. Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917) said: The artist should fear to become the slave of detail. He should strive to express his thoughts and feelings and not the surface of it. Because what avails a storm cloud accurate in form and colour, if the storm is not therein? The artist should be able to convey the

passion and love for his subject, onto the canvas. The artist should be able to weave something of his emotional response to his subject; he should be able to put something of his own soul into his artwork.

To be an artist is a decision one makes. It's living through one's eyes, having an open mind, and being in touch with one's inner sensations. It takes years to learn the rules of life drawing and painting. Then it will take many years to learn to forget all the rules, in order to be able to bend them to one's own creative will. The freedom in expression that results through learning and then unlearning opens up many new avenues. Knowing the rules, being able to ignore the rules, gives birth to the unlimited potential in expressing ones thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

To express his thoughts, his feelings, and his full potential the painter has many tools on hand. One of the main tools of the artist is his brush. The brush, an extension of the artist's arms, follows his thoughts, his inner muse. To use the brush with virtuoso is like learning to use the skills of the sword –forceful and decisive, with concentration and calm precision, yet free and swift. For the artwork to shine with energy one has to cut loose from the



“In and Out” Mixed Media by MP Olinger



“Moving” Mixed Media by MP Olinger

strait jacket of safe routines. Instead one needs to learn slapping paint and inks onto one's support, and let the freedom of lively brushwork take its place. “Make a mark and leave it”, my art teacher Maggie Hambling, used to bark. Bold brushwork can breathe life into your drawings and paintings. Boldness, as Goethe proclaimed, has magic and power in it. Boldness transforms the mundane into something strong and vital.

The creative vitality in my studio is reflected by: candlesticks on wooden tables, watermarks on drawing boards, quills, reed pens, charcoal, red clay and colour loaded sable brushes. We let the brushes loose: let them dance over the paper. Indian drumming pounds through the speakers and vibrates in our ears. Brush in hand—slapping, dragging red, blue, and green ink over pristine soft or rough texture. Make a mark and leave it! The smell of shellac wafts in the air. Black Indian ink, wet

clay, and a multitude of colours smudge our fingernails. Our inner dialogue takes form and shape. Let it go, let it flow. Now I mix indigo and red. The brush halts in mid-air. With allegro I splatter, drag, and hammer colours all over the surface. One more dip into the ink vessel. One more dip into the unconscious. Colours swirl in my mind and find their way onto paper. Brush and pencil dance a furious pas-de-deux over the piece, feathered quills, charcoal, chalk and terracotta clay follow suit – all the while the model keeps moving. All the while we feel the beat of the drumming. All the while with our eyes out there on the truth we get in touch with our inner sensations.

Sense, feel the position, taste the body – make a mark and leave it. Taste the music, feel the rhythm, sense the beat, and keep

your eyes on the model. Charcoal marks on wetted paper are chasing black ink slaps; hard pencil lines rain down, and soft feather lines hush over the paper. Follow the model's bone structure with your eyes. Sense that pose and hold it. Hold that moment- hold that position. Hush! See that line, see that curve, and capture it on paper.

The vocabulary of good drawing marks should be diverse and dialectic: opulent, poor, exploratory, decisive, tentative, emphatic, gentle, and abrupt. When the artist brush is no longer required to record a superfluous array of details, it can concentrate on creating bold forms and impressions of feeling and atmosphere. It is then that the artwork takes on a spiritual quality. Look below the surface—feel the mood of the model, sense the atmosphere, get in touch with your inner vocabulary, feel the music through the palms of your hands, and with your eyes fixed on the model, put brush to paper.

Follow the beat of that heart, eyelashes quivering against soft cheeks. Follow the lines and curves of the body. A tanned hand covering the sex, the movement of a white curvaceous hip, sense the hot flickering candlelight

dancing over that tender breast. Catch that moment and ban it onto the surface. Be there in the moment, and still your mind. Listen, not just with your ears, but listen with your body, with your whole being. Like a river, flowing over rocks and pebbles let go of control. Don't give exactitude a chance to kill the music in your work.

Matisse wrote: exactitude is not always the truth. The artist should follow his inner impulses. He needs courage, to let go of control. He must learn the rules to be able to break the rules. Not, to relax into any safeness, and he should trust his instincts and let the unconscious guide his hand. The artist must keep taking risks for his art to evolve, because it is only then, that he will be able to say something original and personal in his work.

When the dynamics of inner vision and outer reality fuse together. When I paint what touches me, when the landscape of the soul reveals itself to me, when the music of the heart takes charge in my mind, when I follow my inner line, when I let go of control, when I let the unconscious guide me and let the line flow, then the chances of producing something meaningful in my art are good, and that without the need of grass.

My Dream of America

Poem by Elizabeth van Brooks

Swing on porch the evening whispers in my ear
of life walked under heavens that stretch
as far as golden lands, sheep cloud only break the rest

of blue reflected on to salty seas surrender my heart
to faithless waves and as I dive the many
coloured fish ignore my wonder rise to

breathe the air the pine will share,
in snow capped mountains from which to fly
with eagle wings back to a porch where

collect rough leaves of mint and sage and add
to reaped from mother earth that hums a lullaby of old
that soothes arising to my life.

The Carp

Fiction by Ewa De Boer

I

It always started in mid-December. Until then our small Polish town Dobrze was peaceful and lazy: houses, trees and streets, all covered in a glittering layer of snow. But as if by magic, the windows opened wide and women's hands suddenly started polishing the glass panes with such a frenzy that a stranger might think they had not done it for ages. The carpets left their cosy places in the living rooms, were carried as heavy rolls on men's strong shoulders through the narrow staircases to the carpet hangers outside. Then came the beating with a rhythmical "boom, boom, boom", the collective mockery of the vacuum cleaner industry. Some zealots would spread them on the snow, thrash and roll them again, leaving dirty traces of a whole year outside. A Christmas cleansing: first the carpets; then the souls.

We turned suddenly into industrious ants: we moved to and fro, carried bags and parcels,

created crowds and queues in front of the shops. Times were hard in the late sixties, but on several occasions the state showed generosity towards its working citizens! And so, shortly before Christmas, the concerned government spent some precious US dollars on exotic fruits and other desirable products.

"Oranges!" Someone shouted.

"Where?" answered a choir of excited voices.

After the place had been revealed, our feet trudged through the snow. Some of us were faster than others, the strongest and most determined galloped in order to reach the counter before the golden fruits were sold out. The paradise-like egalitarian system had its rules: one person could buy only one kilogram of the precious commodity. Rumour had it that some sales girls (usually they were women who worked in the shops) had already chosen the best pieces for themselves and

their families, or even kept the fruits as a cash. You could swap them for chocolate or ham. The old Phoenicians would have wondered what had happened to their brilliant invention: money...

There were also some gifts from a few like-minded friends in the world, always keen to help. One of them was Fidel Castro who always sent some shipments of oranges. They were exactly like the whole system: unripe and sour.

The queue became a kind of our socialist agora where we met, talked, and complained. Before Christmas we could even spend a whole night sitting on folding chairs and waiting for the morning delivery of carp, the obligatory ingredient of Christmas Eve supper. Without this particular fish, the feast might be declared invalid.

"They all think we're stupid and don't notice anything!" said the blond woman who coordinated the queue. She was responsible for the attendance list and checked it every half an hour.

"My neighbour is a high-ranking party member and he gets everything delivered to his home, even a wonderful pine tree", she added in bitter voice.

"Oh, yes", confirmed an older man, a Thermos flask with hot tea and some sandwiches in front of him on his camping table. He looked around and continued in a conspiratorial tone: "They all are hypocrites! I know someone who is the Party Secretary but goes to Christmas Mass every year! He drives about 30 kilometres in order not to bump into someone he knows!"

And so, after long hours of waiting we went back home tired but also happy. We had our prize fish, still alive in a bucket or a net shopper but with a death sentence hanging over it. We also shed our problems for a while and had new stories to tell. In those days only a few heard of psychotherapy. The queue was our shrink.

II

The Przepczyk family lived in this small town and was, like everybody else, busy with all the last arrangements for Christmas. The carpets

and the windows in their three-room-apartment were dirt-free; a beautiful green tree was waiting on the balcony. The fridge was already filled with meat, ham and other delicacies, all obtained in a queue or "organised" by Marta Przepczyk, who had so called good connections everywhere. The three children, thirteen-year-old Marek, his two years younger sister Anna, and seven-year-old Maciek participated in all those rituals with some excitement which recurred every year: their small hearts were beating faster in anticipation of all the events that especially the older siblings had already experienced in the right sequence.

They gave up sniffing around in order to find their Christmas presents; they knew the gifts had been well guarded in their neighbours' apartment. They enthusiastically helped their mother with baking or running errands. They brought some fresh bread or vegetables from the nearby shops: potatoes, dried fruits, beetroot, and sauerkraut. The latter was stored in big wooden barrels: green and white cabbage leaves had been already chopped in the autumn and mixed with salt, carrots, dill, and caraway seeds. They filled the small shops with a sour smell that tickled the noses and reminded them of the approaching cooking orgy.

Christmas Eve was the most traditional family feast celebrated in Poland. There had to be always twelve different dishes. According to tradition one should fast on Christmas Eve, and that meant food without meat. So the tables were groaning under the weight of red beetroot soup with dumplings filled with forest mushrooms, fish soup, dumplings with mushrooms and sauerkraut, chick-peas with cabbage, home-made noodles with poppy seeds and raisins, dried-fruit compote, different kind of cakes and, of course, the carp.

This had always been the most important part of the supper: fried, cooked, or in jelly, but at the same time the most tragic hero of the feast. Somewhere in the world its

distant relatives could even reach the age of a hundred, but the Polish tradition had already sealed the fate of the species in this country.

Five carp had been swimming in family Przepżyk's bath for a few days before the event.

"Mama, I would like to take a bath! Why does the fish have still to be there?" complained Maciek.

"Come on, darling! You can wash in the plastic tub. The carp must get rid of the mud otherwise they will taste earthy. Mr. Kowal is going to kill them tomorrow, anyway", answered the mother.

Mr. Kowal was the neighbour who helped with the execution because Marta's husband always had a good excuse not to attend the act. He despised blood.

Anna regularly locked herself in the bathroom. She sat on the toilet seat next to the tub and watched the fish tirelessly crossing the narrow space of the white enamel container, like prisoners exercising in their cells. Their impassive stare fascinated Anna, the constant stretching and closing of their mouths, like a soundless cry, filled her with sympathy and sadness. She also knew this year she would not touch the carp during supper. But now her meditation was suddenly interrupted by a knocking on the bathroom door. "Mama, mama, I must go to the loo and Anna is still sitting there!" she recognized Maciek's voice.

Then her mother's: "Anna, please come out! What are you doing there all this time?"

Anna left the bathroom and followed her mother into the kitchen. After a few minutes Maciek joined them.

"Is it true that animals can speak in a human voice on Christmas Eve?" he asked all of a sudden.

"You are stupid! Animals never speak!"

Marek appeared at the kitchen entrance.

Marta Przepżyk shook her head.

"Legend has it, that at midnight on Christmas Eve, animals possess the power of speech. God was grateful for their help in comforting baby Jesus in the stable, so he gave them voices", she said.

The children were still.

"But the carp never has the chance to speak, then!" said Maciek.

"You're right, you will eat it up before it could ever utter a sound!" commented the older brother.

The next day, December 23rd, the small apartment turned into a beehive. The scents of cooked dried fruits, forest mushrooms, and sauerkraut filled the air. They not only reached the nostrils but apparently some parts of brain, so that they could easily be recalled years later. Mother and daughter were busy making dough for the dumplings when a sudden cry cut through the silence. It was Marek.

"Someone has stolen a carp!" he shouted.

Marta frowned; she knew that her older son loved jokes. But the boy entered the kitchen and everybody could see his agitation.

"Come and look!" he roared. "There are only four instead of five! One has disappeared!" They all ran to the bathroom and could see Marek was not joking. There were only four carp in the tub.

"It's not possible. It couldn't simply have vanished into thin air", the mother decided as she looked at the floor. But the bathroom was small and she knew that her effort was in vain. Suddenly her hand touched her mouth, her eyes became darker.

"Maciek!" she whispered.

All of them could remember the conversation of the previous night.

"He has taken the fish and hidden it somewhere, just to give it the chance to speak on Christmas night", concluded Marek. Then he looked at Anna.

"You have always felt sorry for them!" he said. "Perhaps you have taken the fish and thrown it back into the pond somewhere!" was

the next accusation.

"And what about you?" shouted Anna in an agitated voice. "You have sold it to get money for your airplane magazines!"

"Please stop this immediately!" their mother intervened. "We have to ask Maciek first", she had made up her mind.

Her youngest son was easy to find, he was outside playing hockey with his friends. The father was summoned from the neighbour's apartment where he was repairing Christmas tree lights.

The family sat in the living room. The children did not speak; they knew this kind of inquisition. It could take hours till one of them confessed. Anna, who sat next to her father, could smell alcohol on his breath. Unlike many others he drank only on special occasions. But it was impossible to decline a glass of wódka when helping the neighbours on Christmas Eve. It was a custom. In this particular situation even one sip would make the things more difficult for the children as Mr. Przeprzyk gained the confidence he usually lacked when sober.

"So", he began. "One of you has taken the carp away. And all three of you claim to be innocent", his gaze wandered over the children's frightened faces.

"You won't leave this room till one of you can tell me what happened. And there won't be any Christmas gifts this year. You know how difficult it was for your mother to buy the carp and you're just messing about."

His voice became loud and serious. Maciek started to sob. Anna was determined to sit there to the last breath, she had nothing to confess and felt sorry for her mother who had always wanted peace in the family, and did not care about the lost fish.

"I have nothing to do with it!" assured Marek. "Ask the other two and let me go", he continued.

"I don't want any arguments here! Only facts. The sooner someone tells the truth, the better", was the answer.

Silence. After a while Maciek started fidgeting.

"I must go for a pee", he uttered in a wailing voice.

"Of course, you can go", the mother said. "And I think we all should go on with our work. Four carp are more than enough for supper".

Her husband gave her an angry look. Maciek left the room without a sound.

"You can go and do your work" Mr. Przeprzyk turned to his wife. "They will stay here, come what may".

He opened his mouth to continue when Maciek came back from the bathroom, quite out of breath.

"The toilet is blocked!" he shouted. "It stinks horribly...".

His father's face reddened.

"As luck would have it!" he bawled.

"You're always throwing things in it that don't belong there! It would be really nice to be left without a toilet over Christmas!"

Marta rose to her feet and went to the bathroom, that meanwhile became a site of domestic disasters. In fact, the toilet did not look good. Without saying a word she went down and knocked on Mr. Kowal's door. He opened it immediately.

"Oh, Marta, I'm just on my way to you to deal with the carp", he said.

"Staszek, I'm so grateful for your help. But we have another problem".

She briefly told him the events.

"Don't worry. I just have to fetch some tools. I'll be with you in a few minutes."

Half an hour later the secret of the missing carp was revealed. Mr. Kowal found the fish in the toilet pipe which was too narrow for it. The carp had been on its way to freedom or perhaps in search for some more oxygen. It had jumped out of the tub and landed in the toilet. But at least it was not eaten up. The Przeprzyk family could use their bathroom again, and years later, the Polish Plumber became famous throughout Europe.

A Mutual Silent Desire

Fiction by Núria Planas

She was beautiful: big and hazel eyes, long and dark hair, a slim but strong body with a uniformed tan and, her genuine belief that she was not so gorgeous.

He was handsome: big, dark and intelligent eyes, short, extremely short, strong and black hair and his well-defined muscles without being ridiculously big could be noticed underneath his clothes.

She was a teacher of literature of the Community College in Raleigh, NC.

He was student at the same Community College and he wanted to study arts at the University in Raleigh, NC.

It was the first day of the academic year, and as always, she was very enthusiastic about her new students' interests.

It was his first day of class, and whenever he started a new academic year, he was extremely enthusiastic regarding the subjects, other students and teachers.

She was explaining the great American writers to the students, and suddenly, she realized that somebody was staring at her, shamelessly. Even though she could not see who was "studying" her, she knew that who was looking intently at her was a man: it was that kind of looking with a sexual desire that embarrassed her.

He was sitting in the second row. As soon she had entered the classroom, he could not stop staring at her. He was really attracted to her, like a magnet attracts metal.

She could not find who was staring at her. Finally, she saw him and he knew that she had seen him. Their eyes met.

"I have a lot of experience," it seemed

her eyes said.

"I can powerfully embrace your whole body," she had the feeling that his eyes told her.

He liked her smile, fresh, mature and wide, that showed him her rich and intense life, not like those young girls who did not smile but rather squeaked, afraid to get wrinkles if they smiled too broadly.

She liked his look, young, hopeful, and naïve, that showed her his insolent youth, that quality that only young people have and let, the not so young people know, subconsciously, that they already have lost theirs.

He liked her experience, even though he knew that at some point as he got older he would have it.

She liked his evident youth, even though she knew that she would never again have it.

Suddenly, in the middle of the class, while she was talking she imagined him, entirely naked, his beardless but powerful body, underneath hers. Maybe, for the first time in her life, she imagined that silently, but with security that only maturity gives you, she was sliding her body over his, beginning from his feet. Gently, she would smell, taste and touch that young body that would get excited by her. She nearly sensed his member, powerful and without hesitation, penetrating her.

Stop it! she said to herself, or I won't be able to finish the class.

The boy, looking at her and trying desperately to concentrate on her words, imagined her naked body underneath his. A body maybe with some wrinkles, but still majestic and full of sensuality that would appreciate his embracing,

not like those young girls whose perfect bodies would hesitate to arch, embarrassed to show pleasure. He, vigorously, would smell, taste and touch that mature body beginning from behind her ears, following her neck and, afterwards, those sensual, round and hard breasts. Later, he would...

I have to stop it, he forced to himself, or I'll have to leave the classroom.

"My God, you're stupid! And look at you, your legs are like pig-legs! Who do you think would want to marry a woman like you? Do you want to become a teacher? Only people who are stupid decide to become teachers!"

These had been always the gentle remarks from her mother. Her mother was a rich, and snobby painter from New York who had, at all the times, wanted to become famous. However, she had never succeeded. Her daughter had been the result of one crazy night that had destroyed her plans. Consequently, the young woman grew up entirely convinced that she was stupid, ugly with horrible legs and that nobody would ever marry her.

"Jesus Christ son! What do you think you are doing? You want to go to the university and study Arts? Are you a fagot? Look at your muscles, they are ridiculously small! I'm sure that you'll never be able to keep an erection."

These had been always the positive statements from his father. His father was the typical red neck from the Mid-West. He had been a wrestler and he loved when his muscles tore his shirts. His dream was that his son would follow his steps and now, it turned out that that delicate creature wanted to become an artist. Consequently, that boy grew up being convinced that not only he was ugly, but also he was unable to make a woman have pleasure while having sex.

Sometimes, she imagined that she was sexually desired by men.

Sometimes, he had the fantasy that wom-

en looked at him with sexual desire.

Even though, neither of them had high self-esteem, both had their fantasies.

She had married a conceited man who loved to be admired all the time. Thank God, that she had had the strength to divorce him a while ago.

He had dated several young girls who thought that Paris was in Africa. He was glad that finally he had put an end to those stupid relationships.

You are so painfully handsome, she thought feeling her nipples harden.

You are so hot, he thought feeling his member getting hard.

Why not let myself be embraced by his majestic body? But come on, who would look at me and at this age? Not a boy like that! She scolded herself.

Why not let myself be caressed by her sensual body? But who would like to be with me? Not a woman like that! He thought scolding himself.

Plus, I am sure that I could be his mother and he would tell me, "hey old lady, who do you think you are?"

Plus, I am sure that I could be her son and she would tell me, "hey kid, I don't have time to waste with "kiddies" like you!"

The teacher continued explaining the Americans writers. She knew that she would never flirt with that boy.

The student kept listening to the explanation. He knew that he would never initiate his desires to the woman.

That night, the woman caressed her body with her fingertips and thought about the boy. He is too young for me anyway...

That night, the boy touched his body with his hands and thought about the woman. She is too old for me anyway...

My England

Non-fiction by Francesca Krueger

26th of July 2005, heading back to our holiday home in East Finchley, London, England, Suburbia:

It is the first day of our vacation.

We have just been diverted from the High Road on to Summers Lane, a short-cut I use sometimes. It is a small road, with many roundabouts, recognizable only by the painted white dots in the middle of the road and now this small road has to hold the traffic of a three lane road in its entirety. The police give no explanations and politely but resolutely wave puzzled drivers on into a humble residential road, past hastily erected cordons. I assume there to be trouble on the Motorway again, which runs under the bridge leading to East Finchley. I turn on the radio and am informed that our corner of the world and its High Road unbelievably are in the middle of terrorist investigations, connected to the July bombings and would-be bombings on the London Underground. While we were at lunch Police found a car with traces of explosive material.

I concentrate on the task of getting my two boys home. A ride that on a bad day takes 10 minutes, turns into two hours of snails travail. The picturesquely named road is lined on both sides with parked cars and two-story terraced houses built too close to the road. They are nothing more than doll houses, leaning together as if for support. Peeling paint, cracks and grime belie their tutti-frutti colouring and regal architecture.

“When are we there, what is happening, why is it taking so long?”, the children quiz me through the air that is ripe with car fumes. We cannot keep the windows closed as the car heats up under the sun.

“We can’t go any faster. Please understand, be patient, it will take as long as it takes!”, I answer, with increasing impatience towards them and the situation.

Outside no claxon is impatiently sounded. Drivers temper their emotions with a stoical English resolve, so as not to show they have been inconvenienced by something negligible as terrorists. Car motors hum patiently in moral support.

I feel guilty relief as the children finally sink

into a sticky slumber. They are only 6 and 11 years old. They don't understand my panic, the moment, the weight.

I curse the arrogant assumption that after the attacks there would be no safer place. I should have stayed away.

And yet this city belongs to me. This is where I know my way around, where unknown ladies call you darling, where Sundays are spent on a Heath. A Heath, like Wuthering Heights kind of Heath! I long for its green from this cemented moment.

We squeeze across the bridge over the tracks of the Tube, moving ever closer to our safe haven. I try a stoic face.

I worry that my parents will worry. Little do I know that amongst the barrage of news about a tracked down would-be assassins, the

crawl down Summers Lane is not even a shadow of a sigh in world events.

It feels so much bigger as I live it.

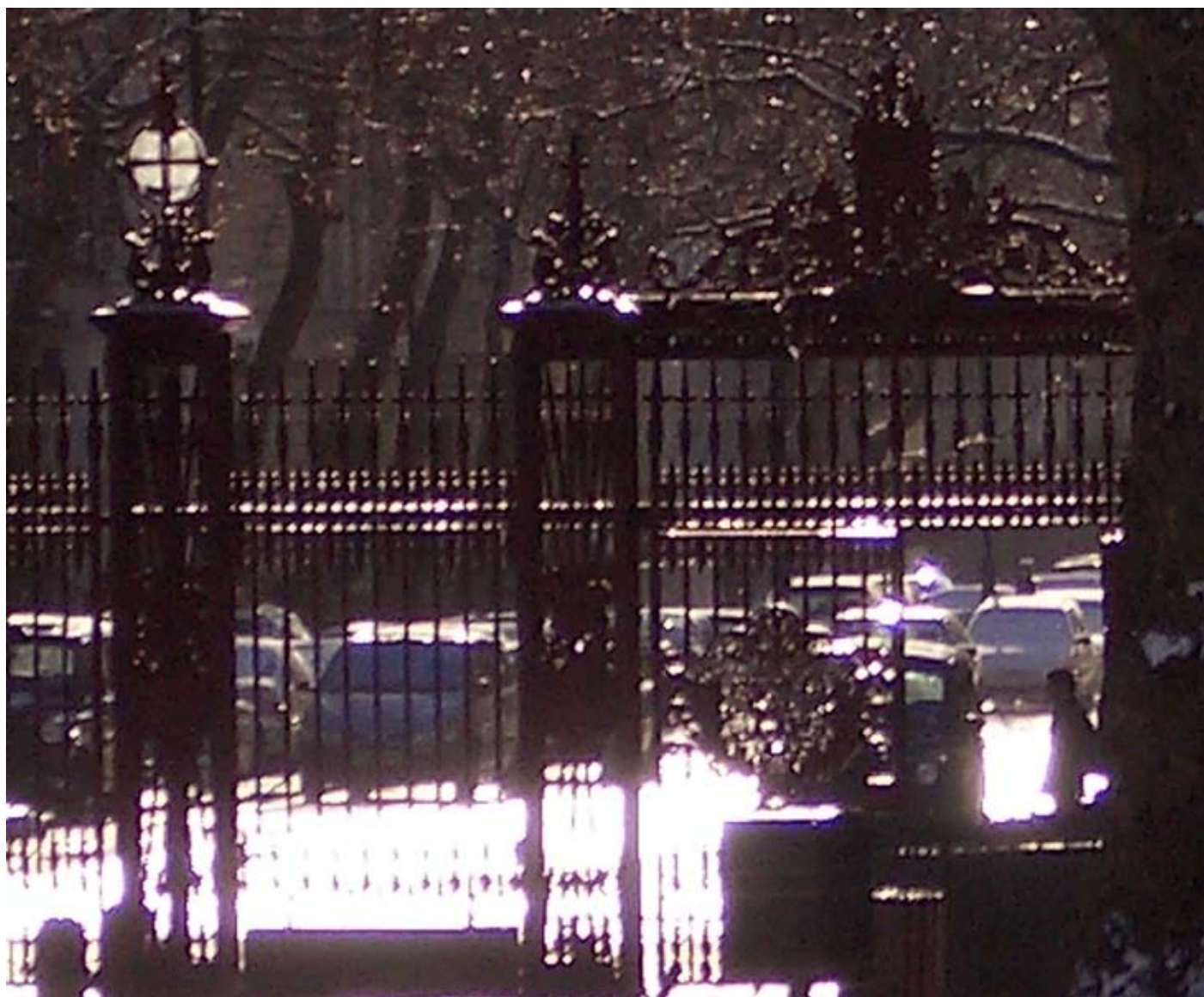
Wikipedia, amongst entries about the failed suicide bombing in London of the 21st of July 2005:

“On 26 July it was reported that police had seized a vehicle abandoned in East Finchley, north London. The BBC reported that the vehicle was a white VW Golf which was not owned by any of the suspects but which was thought to have been used by them.”

Visit Francesca on her blogs:

<http://lettersfromgermany.wordpress.com>

<http://lettersfrombritain.wordpress.com>



“London in Winter” Photo by M.P. Olinger. www.mariepauleolinger.com

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