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Nēthrā

A non - specialist journal for lively minds



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

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Nēthrā

**Editor
Ameena Hussein**



International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

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Cover illustration: *Birds of Iowa City* by Kyoko Yoshida.

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Roman Skaskiw grew up in New York City. He completed an undergraduate degree in computer science at Stanford University. He is currently a fiction student at the Iowa Writer's Workshop.

Ma Thida is a fiction writer, physician, and activist. Her many short stories contained disguised criticism of the Burmese government led to six years in solitary confinement without access to reading or writing materials. In 1999 she was pardoned and released on humanitarian grounds. She is now the editor of a youth magazine as well as a surgeon at the Muslim Free Hospital which treats poor patients at no cost.

K.V. Tirumalesh is a linguist and poet. He is a distinguished professor of linguistics at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad. He has published several collections of poetry and translated the works of poets such as Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens into Kannada.

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Kyoko Yoshida is a fiction and nonfiction writer and translator. She lectures on topics in American literature and is currently Assistant Professor of English at Keio University in Tokyo.

In August 2005, 36 writers from 30 different countries met for ten weeks at the University of Iowa's prestigious International Writing Program (IWP). I was fortunate to be one of them and it was an experience that was unique, rewarding, stimulating and humbling.

The IWP was begun in 1967 by Paul Engle and Hualing Neh Engle. It was the first residency to reach across national borders and remains unique in the world of creative writing. Over the years the IWP has hosted more than a 1000 writers from over 100 different countries.

This issue of *Nethra* is dedicated to the IWP – both the writers and administrators of the program. In the interest of space it was impossible to ask all of them to contribute towards this issue, but rest assured that future issues will continue to offer contributions from the other participants. We had fiction writers, poets, dramatists, film makers, journalists and political commentators with us. A significant factor was that almost all of those who attended were activists in some form or another be it human rights, labor rights, gender rights or minority rights. Their writing reflects their concerns. In this issue I set the stage with a piece entitled *Home*, which will give readers a brief idea of our environment in the physical sense. Then we have Ma Thida from Burma who writes a fictionalized account of a visit by activists to an orphanage. Sharon Hass depicts the moral debate of being witness to a thief steal a bag of cookies

and realizes that being judgmental is a dodgy thing. Estabraq Ahmed's ironic and humorous story of the consequences of mistranslation is relevant to our time, while Mani Rao's opines on home, country and immigrant identity is cleverly portrayed in a sharp edgy piece entitled *Cunt-tree*. Roman Skwaski the only contributor in this issue not from the IWP but from the Iowa Writer's Workshop offers us a beautifully written story of an immigrant's history that in its simplicity tells us the story of a thousand immigrant histories. These are just a few of the pieces that are contained in this issue of *Nethra*. George Santayana once said: *To cement a new friendship, especially between foreigners or persons of a different social world, a spark with which both were secretly charged must fly from person to person, and cut across accidents of place and time*. Many sparks flew, many friendships were cemented and to the IWP of 2005 I say *Thank you!*

Ameena Hussein



First Person

Home

Ameena Hussein

For the next three months our home is to be the Iowa House Hotel. It is a brick building that sits parallel to the Iowa River. We have been assigned all the rooms on the second floor and a few rooms on the third floor. The rooms on the third floor all have what I call the prison view – red somber brick wall, two steel chimneys, and small patch of blue sky. The rooms on the second floor are divided into two. River view and prison view. The river view has a beautiful vista of the river, two bridges, people, ducks and geese. The prison view rooms have a similar lookout as from the third floor but the small patch of blue sky is smaller. There seems to be no rhyme or reason for room assignment.

I have a room on the third floor. Prison view. But am happy to be away from the rest of the writers as I have a feeling that in time to come I will be content to escape to my little quarter. The others on the third floor are: Josef, my neighbour but who will eventually swap his third floor prison room for a second floor river room when his wife comes; John, Said, Leila and Yvonne. Ayu comes later.

We each have a room of adequate size. It has a double bed, bedside table, chair, TV, table, microwave, fridge and closet. House-keeping will come once a week, on Saturday, Sunday or Monday.

Later when we have lived in the Iowa House Hotel for about two months the corridors of the second floor begin to smell like an apartment building. Once I heard a baby wailing. Whose? Strange

indeed! Little waste paper baskets line the corridors at night with food odours wafting up and down revealing the intimate private dinners for one that are being had behind closed doors. Towards late evening Nihad's pipe scents the second floor corridor with its delectable blend of spice. Sometime towards the end of the residency a door is firmly put up between the writers' rooms and the administrative rooms. The excessive smoke was bothering administrators. It makes the *Daily Iowan* headline! In contrast the corridors of the third floor smell of expensive perfume, businessmen and doctors and sometimes drunken visitors run up and down the corridors at 2 in the morning!

There is a medium sized breakfast room on the second floor. It serves sugared cereal, donuts, skim milk or two percent milk but never whole milk, tea, coffee, orange juice and cranberry juice, wheat bread and white bread and sometimes bagels with cream cheese. There is peanut butter, jam and butter in little disposable containers. Disposable cups, knives, spoons and forks, plates and bowls line a wall. The newspapers are kept on a stand by the side. The breakfast room is a good place to meet the writers and observe their breakfast habits. Tea tipped into cereal, Milk drunk from bowls, jam and bread as opposed to bread and jam, oranges smothered in yogurt are some of the culinary delights.

As time goes on I begin to siphon off supplies from the breakfast room. First to go are the cups, bowls and little containers of peanut butter, jam and butter. Then the bagels and cream cheese begin to find their way to my room for emergency meals. Soon I have a little stack of supplies on top of the TV cabinet that inspire and awe my infrequent visitors at my cunning foresight.

Next to the breakfast room is the common computer room. There are two computers and Ethernet cables for fast internet. The third floor residents have got Ethernet in their rooms while the second floor residents have only dial-up. I hardly go there but it's a good place to meet someone if you are feeling lonely or so I thought.

Once when I was feeling especially lonely I went there. No-one came.

The large room next to the common room is reserved for larger gatherings. It is called 217 for short. We meet there for Open Mike on Tuesdays, to have parties and other serious meetings. By the end of the residency 217 has seen some strange and wild parties. Music is played on Josef's computer and speakers, lights are dimmed, alcohol flows and people dance in weird and beautiful ways. The day I acted as DJ the party goers were discontent and eventually I resigned and went to bed in disgust.

There is a laundry room at the end of the second floor. Originally it was coin operated but it is, for the entire duration of our residency, free. I become obsessed with laundry and find myself creeping down two, three times a week to wash my clothes. Some of the writers are entertained by my obsession. Zahiye in particular whose room is opposite the laundry room. She laughs knowingly each time she catches me in there.

I have bought a large bottle of *Tide* which I offer freely to all and sundry but very few have taken me up on my generous offer. I fear they think that I am quite capable of using it all up. The first few times I wanted to do laundry I fell into the bad books of the Iowa House housekeeping employees. It turns out that they too do the hotel laundry in this very same laundry room. So now, I time it artfully for late evening or early afternoon. My laundry always has adventures. There was a time someone took my still wet clothes out of the dryer so that they could dry their own clothes. Sometimes they walk out with one sock. I dream of starting a laundry war but never meet my invisible opponent. Once I found that I had been drying some man's clothes together with my own. Instead of confiscating the clothes and identifying the suspect, I meekly leave his clothes on top of the dryer to be collected later. Half an hour later they are still there. I give into temptation and steal a pair of socks. I am running out of socks and think of it as payment for doing the laundry.

Mary Nazareth has her office at the end of the corridor down the second floor. She flits from floor to floor, taking care of us. She brings us medicine and flowers when we are ill and takes care of odd food requests that we just can't live without. She delivers our mail and brings us once a month, preferably right at the beginning, that all important cheque for our living expenses. She takes care of birthday cakes and faithfully attends all our activities in a brave show of support. Her husband Peter Nazareth hosts Open Mike on Tuesdays and always talks about Elvis.

Iowa House either has air-conditioning or heating. It is never in a state of nothingness. During the cold days in September we shiver because the heater could only be turned on in October. During the hot days in October we switch off the heater and open the windows and let in more hot air as the air conditioner has ceased to function. The Iowa River is also an extension of home. During the warm months we live outside, lying on the grass, reading books, eating, drinking and welcoming anyone who wants to join us. During the cold months we sit on the benches and do what Sharon terms 'benching'. This means enclosed in our coats and jackets we shiver in unison as we gaze at the river. The river has three geese and around 40 ducks who regard the surrounding areas as their territory. In their world vision all food in the vicinity has to be shared either voluntary or forced. Some scenarios that arise from this policy are writers holding their lunch over their heads running away from the three aggressive geese followed by about ten security force ducks. On warm nights, we creep down to the river and sit close to the water on stone steps; we furtively drink questionable liquids in coffee mugs and chain smoke tobacco and herb cigarettes. We talk about God and souls and food and sex.

Soon we all come to regard Iowa House with great affection. When I say home, I mean Iowa House, as in saying *I want to go home* while sipping a last beer at the Foxhead bar. It has become my sanctuary and retreat when I want to hide from the world. On rainy days I sit on my bed and gaze out into the prison view that takes on a Zen like quality in the grey day. It has become my room of my own!

New Leaves Should Not be Ripped By Thorns¹

Ma Thida

*'Shan state's cherry-blossom covered hills
Are happy home to many races.
Shan and Kachin, Mon and Kayah
All gather there with smiling faces.'*

The melodious sound of the children singing 'Happy Home' drifted out of the white-washed brick church and into the surrounding air. Ah-tar had never heard the song before. But she could see that they were all joining in together, even though some voices were faint and some made no sound at all.

The children started the song afresh. They were showing no signs of flagging, unlike Ah-tar, who was exhausted just listening to them. Some were sitting on the floor, some kneeling, some squatting, some sitting with their legs out in front of them, some cross-legged, some unsteady on their wobbly legs, some supporting themselves on crutches. Ah-tar looked on compassionately. Then, when she saw one child had a white cotton bandage wrapped around her eyes, she realized that not all of them might be able to see her.

'This child can't walk. He's had polio.'

¹ Published in Youq-shin-amyu-te magazine in June 1989. Writer gave a copy to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a Birthday present. This story is totally based on the real event that happened during the campaign trip in February 1989. Writer traveled along with her. Only the ending is added while writing the story.

The sister picked the boy up, holding him under his armpits to show his weak legs. Ah-tar recalled the various things she had been taught in medical school about testing tensile strength, tissues, reflexes and so on. But she was out of practice², and could do nothing to help the poor child.

'Perhaps he would get better if he was given physiotherapy. If he practices walking regularly, his legs should get stronger.'

When she heard Ma Suu's suggestion, the sister flashed a faint smile. Ah-tar did not want or need to hear the sister's answer. Ah-tar knew that whatever the sister said, it could not hide the fact that they were in an orphanage, a 'Happy Home', on Ye-aye-kwin hill in Taunggyi.

'A doctor used to come and examine them once a month. This one's nine. He's been like this since he was born.'

Another poor little girl was brought to them. She was a sweet little thing, about three years old, with wide eyes and a swollen chest. 'Do you get tired easily little one? Do you get a tight chest or a fever?'

'Thinn Thinn, answer the lady.'

The little girl didn't reply, so the sister answered for her. She often got tired, she said, and breathless. Phrases like Tetralogy of Fallot were hidden in the dim distant recesses of Ah-tar's mind but she guessed that the child had got congenital heart disease with a weakness of the four chambers of the heart. If that was the case, Thinn Thinn should undergo an operation. All they needed to do was take her to a pediatrician at Taunggyi Hospital.

² At that time, all universities were closed.

These two are twins. This is the oldest. We're not sure if he has eyes because his eyelids are always shut. The younger one's OK though. These two over here are blind too. There are eight boys in their family, three of them here, five at home. The third's eyesight isn't too good either.

'Who are the parents.'

'They live in Hopong township. They're very poor.'

The sister was expecting all of Ah-tar's questions, but she nonetheless took great care in answering them fully. Ah-tar felt sad when she heard the answers: 'eight brothers'... 'parents very poor'.. 'three of them live here' ... 'two of them are blind' .. 'the other one can't see too well'. Thoughts raced through her mind. Clearly they weren't orphans.

Instead, they had been abandoned by their parents, pushed out of the family nest, and denied the warmth, attention and tender loving care which the other five children were receiving. Was it because they were handicapped? What had they done to deserve this? Why were the children and their parents so poor? What had they done in their former lives? And what would these children do once they were older? How would they survive? How had they come here in the first place? She had so many questions she wanted to ask, so many thoughts racing around her head, but the tears were welling up in her throat and her sorrow made her silent.

'This one's blind too. She helps look after the children and does the cooking.'

'Well aren't you clever! And how are you today?' Ma Ma Suu clasped the blind woman's hands close to her chest and greeted her warmly. 'I'm well. How are you, friend?'

'You mustn't call the lady 'friend'.'

'Of course she can.'

'Friend'. Ah-tar had traveled with Ma Ma Suu on many trips. Most of the people who came along on the trips, and the people that they met on the way referred to her as 'Ma Ma Suu', 'Aunty Suu', 'Daw Daw Suu', or simply 'suu'. The sister had felt uncomfortable and tried to stop the blind woman from calling Ma Ma Suu 'Friend' but Ma Ma was not in the least bit bothered. Ah-tar wanted to tell the sister that it was OK. This blind woman did not know who Ma Suu was. She called everyone who showered kindness on her 'Friend'. And why not? It was a beautiful term for all the friends that this woman had, even though she did not know their faces.

'These two help out with the children and the cooking as well.' The two ladies smiled proudly. One was a hunchback.

'This one's from Hopong too. He can break firewood using his feet.'

The man was well built and sturdy but his arms were unusually short.

'Did your mother ever mention anything to you when you were little, for example, that she took strong medicine when she was pregnant with you?

'Why, Ah-tar, do you think this is a Thalidomide case?'

The man shook his head. She realized it was a highly unlikely explanation. After all, where would you get medicines like that in a place like this?

'His father died when he was young, and his mother got cerebral malaria and went crazy. But there's nothing wrong with him.'

'Oh...I see.'

The sister pointed out another little boy to Ah-tar. He was a sweet little thing, with a thin layer of thanaka on his face. Again, there was nothing wrong with this little boy except that his parents were very poor and, once again, it was this which had brought him to the orphanage.

'This one is a bit backward for his age.'

In this case it was the child, and not the parents, who had the mental problems. But as with the rest, he had ended up abandoned here at the orphanage.

'This one is blind too, but he can sing and play the guitar quite well. He wants to sing you a song he wrote about his life.'

The man sat on a deck chair with his head bowed low over a hollow guitar. He was about the same age as Ah-tar. He began to pluck the guitar strings and then to sing quietly in a tremulous voice:

*'As I walk alone in life
I think about my family.
I'll never see my mother again,
Nor my father, nor my brother.
That thought makes me sad.*

*Father, where are you now?
I want to see your face.
Mother, please come back to me.
When your letter came
I cried and cried.*

*So I walk alone today
All the world's forget me.
I wish I had some parents
To wipe away my tears.*

Father, where are you now?

*I want to see your face.
Mother, please come back to me.'*

There was a lump in Ah-tar's throat and the tears rolled down her cheeks. Her lips were trembling, and she could not muster a sound. She didn't need to hear any more, or ask any questions. The man's song 'Father, where are you now?', 'Mother, please come back to me' painted as full a picture as she needed of life in the orphanage. 'Ah-tar, it's getting late. We'd better make a donation and then get going.'

Ma Ma Suu sighed as she spoke. They were both choked up with emotion at what they had seen. Ah-tar nodded and they walked out to the front of the building through the children, the orphans, the abandoned, the disabled and retarded. It was not their fault that they had ended up here. Their parents were poor, or sick, or insane. But it was the children who ended up neglected and deprived of love, living in this orphanage, hoping that someone would become their parents.

Ah-tar felt deep sorrow for the children. While it might be the parents or the children who had the financial or physical or mental problems, it was always the children who suffered. There is a saying 'A leaf gets torn whether it falls on the thorn or the thorn falls on it'. In this instance, the thorns had fallen. The young leaves. The young children, were innocent. They had committed no crime. But there were still thorns- poverty, sickness, incapacity- that ripped them apart. If places like this orphanage did not exist, who would take responsibility for them and prevent them from being homeless?

*'Thank you , thank you
To our friends who take care of us.
We wish you good health and happiness
And that we'll all meet again.'*

The children's farewell rhymes followed them out. They wished them well, with heartfelt goodwill.

The evening sun was low and falling behind the range of hills. The hunchback woman took Ah-tar's hand and shook it warmly.

'Do come back won't you if you're in the area? We'll be waiting.'
'I won't wait until I'm in the area. I'll be back before then.'

It was a heartfelt promise. As the song went 'We'll meet again...'
Ah-tar offered up a little prayer on behalf of all children, that they should not be abandoned in an orphanage despite having committed no sin. 'May they never be punished for sins which they did not commit.'³

Dedicated to my fellow Shans whom we met on the White Pagoda in Taunggyi,
23-2-1989.

³ This could be a reference to political prisoners being sent to jail for crimes they did not commit.

Grave No. 1

Edi Shukriu

I open it earth on earth
Stone by stone...

What's whispered in their quietness?
What's breaking the centuries silence of the bones?

An opened grave in front of me:

A rusty sword
from bloody battles

An arrow
Silent
forever

A sleeping skeleton
ready to revenge over the enemy

What's this nature hiding
smiling upon daily games that come and go?
What's the language of Pashtriku¹
banded over present time?

What terrible battles prevail the canyon of Damjan
in its breast?

This is a legend. It's not a grave...

Grave No 2

I brought light

The light kissed her lips
and the sleeping princess woke up:

Looked around, smiled sweetly
and embraced the dawn
The birth

Today's a holiday. The day against death

The Illyrian girl took the road of the river
greeted the old Drini
(being aged for her too)

Welcomed river with her soft body

then put on the dresses
left in the museum of waiting,

Put her scarf over her shoulders beaten by the night,

took the pearls
from the desk of the past
and
with the known female elegance
(not lost over centuries)
put it on the long neck

By hours she sat by the quiet Drini
watching the beauty
unharmd by times,

Brought greeting to the sun,
Shook the sand off the legs

And with the walk of an Illyrian doe
returned to the grave No. 2

It was the day of death. She become immortal
Became a legend.

¹ High montaigne west of the town Prizren.

Independence Day

Anna Rogozhnikova

Everybody loves India. Although Columbus discovered America, he dreamed of India. Say "Hollywood" and intellectuals will knit their brows. Say "Bollywood" and even intellectuals will smile leniently. As for us, we never dine at McDonald's, we usually dine at an Indian restaurant.

He is beautiful. Me too. We completely satisfy each other's aesthetic needs. That's why we usually sit opposite each other during the meal.

Rice, a chicken curry, mango juice and daring erotic fantasies.

-Independence is important, - it's the fifth time he's been saying this today. Today my hero is celebrating the Independence day. He's even put on a t-shirt with Che Guevara's portrait. A symbolist.

-You, women, easily run into addiction because you are not able to divide sex and love.

-Exactly! We love sex too much. Therefore they are indivisible for us.

- It's a sophism.

- I love sophisms, you know. But not as much as sex, of course.

He threateningly bends over the table (Che Guevara smiles guiltily):

-Ok, you may love sex, you may love sophisms, you may love anything you want! But promise not to fall in love with me

I cease to listen to him. I study inhabitants of the restaurant. There are not many of them: Monday, eleven p.m. and so on. Three girls at a window. Long red hair, black curls and French braid. Jeans, flip-flops and silk tops. "Love hurts" by Comme des Garçons and, if I'm not mistaken, "Addict" by Dior- a kind of ironic aroma-therapy for those who take things too seriously. These girls are not able to divide sex and love also. I smile to this charming idea.

- lose yourselves emotions I don't want bla-bla-bla.....

All this nonsense makes pepper so hot-tempered and it makes vinegar really sour. The chicken curry keeps itself under control. I look back. A wonderful hundred-and-fifty-year-old chef stands in the kitchen's door. A lilac Martian complexion, magnificent white moustache and big black eyes. He is more than just a chef – he is a work of art. I smile to him admiringly. He admiringly smiles me back.

-I don't want to limit myself with a relationship, - the lovely and independent talking head goes on.

I nod and look on the left. Tattooed students - very cool guys. They speak French and thereby cause even greater respect. Painters, probably. Probably, ethno futurists. I smile broadly to them, but they don't notice. They are too cool.

-You are cute.

Finally! There is something worthy of being listened.

-And you do have a contagious smile.

-Really? Nobody's told me this before.

-I'm not the first one.

The Thief

Sharon Hass

The last item on the shopping list was bread. Two o'clock in the afternoon. August. And the insistence to walk all the way to the bread shop. Specification is the sign of affluence and civilization; that which accommodates variety. I direct my steps toward the comforting scholasticism of bread, options of grain, types of pastry – and the choice made earlier, in a past time, at home – the thrill of finding the shape of a will. Despite the heat, this is what I need to pull myself together, the ritual of the hostess preparing for guests. The extended negotiation and the giving preceded by strategy. If I give as I wish, I could find rest in the giving.

I take my place in line. An elderly couple: they too know in advance what they want, but somehow they lack the joy of simulated choice; pointing in itself is a sign of lost chances, of losing one's hold on life. Having inquired what half-loaves are left and sampled some morsels, they decide in a whispered consultation to chose the sunflower bread once again. Though a bit pricey, it's the best, they tell the saleswoman. The woman in front of me, dressed in red with large black-framed glasses, is hiding behind a big woman laden with shopping bags whose turn is coming up. The woman in red is ceaselessly groping the boxes of cookies stacked on our right, the ones you're meant to take on your own. She takes one and puts it into a plastic bag. Out of the corner of my eye, only half seeing the motion of the theft, I am so stunned to see a thief in action, that immediately my face shows too great an interest, spoiling all her secrecy. Not looking at me she fiddles with the box of cookies, rattling it slightly, as though masking the secret by this delicate noise. By letting something slip by she leaves room for doubt. But I do

No, he isn't. A big black man gave me the compliment yesterday. I saw him in the street, smiled to him, and he answered loudly and impatiently: "Your smile is contagious!" How could I forget!

My spirits rise, I go up in my self-estimation, I turn up my nose proudly.

-Thanks, thanks, thanks! I adore compliments, I collect them. And I nearly lost the most magnificent compliment in my life, but you gave it back to me. MMM, thanks.
-You're welcome.

And here we sit smiling to each other like two idiots. We would like to find ourselves in a bedroom. There's been nothing in our lives we wanted to do so much, even to piss.

-Can we have the check, please! Pleeceaaaaaase!

But those Hindus, they never hurry. Of course, they have no need to hurry – they've got three hundred reincarnations ahead. But we are not Hindus! We'll die out like dinosaurs if we don't have sex in the nearest thirty minutes. Hindus do not understand us: a waiter brings a rice pudding.

-At the restaurant's expense. The chef's dessert. We are always glad to see smiling young ladies here.

Yeah! The whole world is on my side today. And though the pudding is too sweet to bring me any physiological pleasure, morally I triumph. As if I walked arm-in-arm with the Providence or tapped the Lord on the shoulder or drank Bruderschaft with my guardian angel. That's my understanding of independence.

Translated from the Russian

not doubt. She backs away toward the door, giving me her place in the line. I know you, I tell her voicelessly. So shut up, her face retorts. We'll see, I don't know, I reply. I'll kill you. You can't – we're surrounded by people. Profusion will protect me. You don't say, she mocks – profusion whirls you in the wind till you rot in motion. Once a day I deserve something nobody knows of. Today it's sesame cookies. And what about the young saleswoman and stocktaking and the boss's accusations – who will pay for your desires. God will pay. Oh, God, I pant. The only one who doesn't surprise himself, which is why we can no longer find refuge from the daily shock of loss.

I feel her staring at my back. I've taken her place in line and she has withdrawn to its end. Other people press into the store. I see her turning to the shelves, taking the box out of her bag, replacing it among the cookie boxes. I feel somewhat disappointed. After all, who am I to know what she needs, and can one prevent matter from overflowing beyond its bounds – her obsession infects me, I'm already nearly drunk with some dark invisible substance that binds us together like love. No, not like love – we are each other's riddle and we're seeking an outlet for the wonder – how is it possible to recognize that which is sealed inside its own nature – and the code, we already know, has been completely destroyed.

I glance at her again. Once more she places the cookies in the bag and once more our gazes cross from behind. I am the victim of a crime. I want to tell the saleswoman politely, this woman is a thief, please. But my night is already lying there in mid-day, and my sins revealed to her – naturally, only sinners recognize their kind. I am familiar with all the motions of theft, the distractions, and the small noises of innocence. But she frightens me. The risks you take. The poorness of the truth. And the panic, the terrible panic that we shall never receive as much as we give, this panic in its turn protects us from the disappointing feebleness of our generosity. The two of us, dreaming of robbery and revenge, standing in line for bread. She must have cookies, I must leave home. She wanted to have it

for free and I've already made her pay with the anguish and rage of discovery; I want to betray effortlessly, with a kiss, but keep paying the price. Take it, take the goddamned cookies, I say, while asking for poppy-seed cake and three kinds of rolls – and I am overtaken by black vertigo. No banister. No alliance. No word of accord. Only seeing. And sedimented seeing. While I pay she gets back in line with the concealed cookies to continue the game – stay away from me or I'll kill you, I signal to her as I step out of the store. Don't worry, she replies – your kind I can recognize anywhere.

*The above is an extract from a book of essays **And There Came Out this Calf**, due to be published in 2007.*

Trans. Amalia Ziv

Anticipation

Estabraq Ahmad

The seconds were ticking by and I was in a tight spot. Everyone waited nervously for my reply. They wanted an answer that would bring salvation, even in my stammering voice. I faced a dilemma, and, though it was not the same as before, I felt a familiar spasm in my chest, as if I were going to have an asthma attack. His deep voice was hounding me, and his relentless stare was urging me on. But the real hell was the tick-tock of the clock, coupled with the question drumming uncontrollably in my brain – “How did they choose me?”

“Answer, please! Your time is running out.”

His elegant smile only served to heighten the legion of confusion inside me, wreaking havoc with my train of thought, and filling me with worry and dread. Anxiety coursed through me, reducing my thoughts to a mounting scream of desire to flee. His eyes were like abysses of chaos, releasing malevolent birds of hatred that smothered even the scarecrow guarding the thought-fields of my mind. I became weaker.

“Do you know the answer or not?”

I felt like he had said it a thousand times with threatening gestures, tapping his hand insistently on his knee. My skin started to feel as if little ants were crawling all over it, and I was overcome by uneasiness. Tormented by the thick fog in my throat, my face turned crimson with shame. I damned my memory for the thousandth time - how

could I forget to bring my handkerchief with me? I was looking for *any* excuse to delay my answer... Oh how I hated the power of questions!

I remembered the time I was called as a witness for a traffic accident. The investigator said to me: “Don’t pretend to be ignorant. I want to know what really happened.” Forgetfulness clouded my mind, and the images of the accident conspired against me, shattering and jumbling. I felt a strange creeping sensation on my skin. The investigator gave me a handkerchief and I tried repeatedly to wipe my embarrassment away. I asked for a glass of water, and he waited a long time for me to calm down, for my lips to open and tell the truth about what had happened... Could I do the same here?

He spoke from the well of distress. His voice swooped down on me: “We can’t wait any longer. Give us the answer now!” My mind was full of whispers. I heard my friends urging me to take this special assignment and my mother’s prayer for my success. I remembered my younger brother’s pride that I had been chosen, the cautious smile of my wife, affirming my superiority, and my baby’s sweet, gurgling laugh. Then I felt the answer approaching, breaking from my lips, and my voice rumbled with it, and I ...expelled it.

At first, everyone was happy with my simultaneous translation of the talks between the President and the foreign delegation. The President thanked me, and I rushed home, gathered my family and fled across the border. News soon followed that I had incorrectly translated the foreign delegation’s answer: their military would *not* give any assistance in the next disaster. Thank God I was long gone by then.

The Algerian

John Mateer

Cross-legged with us on the carpet in a Melbourne lounge-room
while we munch on powdery white biscuits and sip green tea,
he tells of the Someone who guides his dervishes without a word,
who even when he isn't there actually is.

Were we real and in the Australian desert,
before our prayers and endless whirling
we would, like the Afghan cameleers, have cleansed ourselves
with sand from all the world's oceans.

And then this friend with us here on the Persian carpet
would have also been someone else and everywhere else.

On Translation

- New Year's Eve 2004

John Mateer

Behind the white gables of Perth mosque,
around the corner from the block of flats where she used to live,

she who held my heart in her hands like an injured bird,
whose laugh tinkled like a meditation bell waking me,

down a narrow street of old workers cottages, in a friend's
backyard
a bearded man, whose eyes are Sumerian,

whose deep voice is calm and burning like Zoroastrian fire,
recites a classical Persian poem:

*When I am drunk I wander down the street
unaware that I am passing the house of my beloved.*

Then the poem modernized:

*I'm so drunk when I wander down the street of my beloved
that only when I'm pissing against the wall I realize it's hers.*

O were I drunk enough to lean against my ex-beloved's door
having nothing in mind but the words of an Iranian's poem!

Ghazal

John Mateer

As soon as the life-guards are off-duty,
a dark, invisible hand is pulling him through the curtains of his
memory.

Then his parents – not weeping – are calling out his name,
scanning the swimmers in the Cottesloe swell to see

the young man who isn't there, who last week had told
how he was already elsewhere, within earshot of Allah, and free.

And they are asking: *What is love if you can't find your baby?*
What is a voice, if his face is turned away, permanently?

Nothing but a foreign breeze, hot, easterly,
flipping though the blank book of waves, searching for his name?

Opinion

Cuntree

Mani Rao

The real question today: will an immigrant fight against her home-
cuntree?

If you had to take sides, be clear-cut.

Fidelity.

One person, one cuntree. As in the whole truth.

Will immigrants held hostage in adopted homes be rescued by the
mother-cuntree? Ported across bloody borders back to safe ghetto?
Remember the fractures. India-Pakistan. India-Bangladesh. The
Chinese in Indonesia.¹ If it can happen to them, it can happen to
me.

No relatives? No Chinese lover?

G raft.

Worse for hybrids, always having to travel with footnotes.

Differentiate between refugees, colonizers and adventurers.
When Alexander (the Great) visited India - not invaded, as he
thought - the kind Indian King² enquired if people back home did
not have enough food to eat.

Where are you from.

WhrrrrrrRrrrrrFrrrrr. I arrrrrived in Hong Kong with two suitcases.
Rented a room on Canton Road. The first morning, a walk to the
chimm.sah.tchoy Cultural Centre.³ At the promenade, hordes of

students yelling at the sea, throwing at it. Something happened right there and then.

I call prospective clients, present my credentials and get work at once. Nobody asks me if I know their cousins or school friends. They pay on time. 30-day credit period. The only race here is commerce.

Ignorant! You know nothing about it because you are tall and good-looking.
(True, but -) Disagree. Evidence: immigration signage.

India: Indians / Foreigners

Japan: Citizens / Aliens

China: Chinese Nationals / Foreigners

Taiwan: Taiwanese / Non-Taiwanese

Hong Kong: Residents / Visitors

Summary: India is for Indians, as the name implies. Japan is a planet, the rest is outer space. China is a nation for the Chinese, all Chinese are China's. Taiwan is not for the non-Taiwanese, negation as a precise method. Hong Kong is a place to visit or reside in, no more, no less.

The signage really ought to say Stuck/Free.

I (too) know that landlords and ladies prefer westerners but it is because you cook smelly food.

Infidel.

(False)

ADVERTISEMENT: All is forgiven - come back home!

Return to tyrannosaurus hetero-sapien a-lie-nation? I'd rather hang on to a stump and float out to sea. You won't understand. (= I can't explain.)

You remind me of Trishanku.⁴ Neither here nor there.

Trishanku was a king of the Solar dynasty, ruler of the kingdom of Ayodhya. He wanted to go to heaven while still in his mortal body. The gods would not let him in. He took his plea to arrogant, easily-

flattered Sage Vishwamitra, who said 'yes'. Vishwamitra cloned the Sapta Rishi Mandala (Ursa Major) in the Southern Sky, cloned heaven, and began to clone Indra (the god). That's when Gods & Co. intervened, and after a meeting and a negotiation, everyone agreed to compromise. Trishanku's new, custom-made heaven could stay, but without new gods, and Trishanku would have to remain upside down, looking away from the heaven he had wanted to inhabit. This is a story in the Ramayana, the Indian epic about boundaries.

Heyhowzlife after the handover? Heydidyoutry to vacate when S.A.R.S came out of the barracks?⁵

Look who's yellow!

I spy! I spy!

It's a Bird - It's a Rat -

Flea, Flu, Fly!

Message Received - *If you like paper money, you must be dead.*

Reply: Money? What Money?

One day an architect got a lot of people together in a place too small for them and yelled - "sit!" That's how Hong Kong's design came about. Nobody objected. After the buildings went up, one woman who worked for a proper-tease company raised her hand and asked where she was expected to spit, when every place was taken. That was when they invented plumbing. You could tell it was an afterthought.

Money Cat, Greedy Cat. ⁶The left arm is broken, slung and ringing Gimme Gimme Gimme. The whiskers are too stiff, and the buttocks too large to move.

When I resigned from a job I'd done for years, my colleagues got a teacup designed with a poem from one of my books. In Univers font, 20 point size, along the curve of the teacup, looking like a slogan. It was a one-word poem: Hopemoreness. There was a typo. The teacup became a Hong Kong souvenir: Hopemoreless. A nudge for all the times I was called *Mulley/Malley* instead of *Mani/Money/Munny*, and I knee-jerked: *M-A-N-I = Mother Apple Nothing India.*

A Writers Festival.

Panel: Powers of Observation.

A, E and I discuss the writer as observer. Chaired by O.

A talked about the many varieties of wattles he spotted when he moved to Tasmania and began to obsess about planting native plants in his garden. Surprising how things show up when you look for them.

Audience member complained there was very little opportunity to observe anything in Melbourne, what with the monotony of clean space and concrete flyovers. But in Istanbul, in Mumbai, so much to see!⁷⁸

I responded, don't remember seeing anything in Mumbai, but last week, wonder-struck by the varying sizes and types of muffins in the Melbourne cafes.

General laughter.

Doctor cross-cultural Love.

Look at all those sad Asian family girls and those bad Asian Wanchai girls dangling on the arms of the dilapidated mid-life alcoholic white men.

Your: heart-failure. Their: love and laughter.

But some of these couples can't even converse.

Speechless, even sweeter, the body language! If all the Asian women are coupling with all the Western men, then, all the Western women and Asian men are on their way to extinction.

That's absurd. You push things too far.

I ?

Don't want to eat snake-soup.

Be longing!

Grow new tongue, exercise new voice muscles.

Language as route.

English knows me best.

Oh that! Common wealth. The English Patient.

Your roots?

My wings.

Globalisation.

When India 'opened up' in the early 90s, many Indian professionals, on the phone and in meetings with multi-nationals, found out they were as good as anyone else, smelt air, packed portfolio and bought air-ticket. You went to the Middle-East if you were a mercenary, everywhere else if you were internationally-minded. Chose Hong Kong / Singapore/ Bangkok / Kuala Lumpur over New York or London because cheaper flights, lower risks. Besides, S.E.Asia might shape up to be the stop-over, the first leg of the Marco Polo to London and New York.

Has there been any discourse about this particular wave?

No. Everyone's looking East-West. Tell me more about China's adoration of Taiwanese pop music, Taiwan's fancy for Korean toys, Hong Kong's idle craze for Korean soap operas, too much lime in Singapore's cocktail, Japan getting into Indian fabrics.

Localisation.

After the Article 23 march⁹, my black T-shirt met an articulate cabbie in the rear-view mirror. He said: So, you are one of us.

CHAO S is also a building near the Sheung Wan market. The missing apostrophe fell to indifference in the Chao family.

(Endnotes)

¹ 1947 Indian independence and partition of the country with the formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh and violent regrouping of populations into separate regions based on religion. 1998 Chinese attacked in Indonesia and forced to flee the country.

² 4th century BC. A legend about the conversation between Alexander and the Indian King Porus (Puru).

³ Tsim Sha Tsui is an area in Hong Kong. The English rendition of a Chinese name is not a good indication of how to pronounce it.

⁴ A story / legend from the Ramayana

⁵ SARS epidemic 2002 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) was believed to have originated in China and reinforced Hong Kong people's mistrust of China. Barracks is a reference to People's Liberation Army posted in Hong Kong, but confined to the barracks so as not to intimidate Hong Kong people. Yellow reference to Chinese skin colour. Flu refers to Bird Flu. Paper money is burned as an offering to ancestors, symbolising fortune in the after-life. SARS was found to spread through the poor plumbing infrastructure of Hong Kong multi-storeyed buildings.

- ⁶ A Hong Kong icon, used by merchants supposed to be good luck in business. A white paper mache cat, with one arm raised.
- The Age Melbourne Writers' Festival. Excerpts from a panel discussion, called Powers of Observation, chaired by Peter Goldsworthy. The co-panelist mentioned is John Armstrong who talked about wattles in Tasmania. I was the panelist who brought up the case of muffins.
- ⁸ Wanchai is a nightlife-district in Hong Kong, and one of the centers of the city's commercial sex industry.
- ⁹ Article 23 amendment
- ¹⁰ A building in Sheung Wan with a broken signage. Chinese names written phonetically in English are a common source of humour for English-speaking immigrants.



Storyteller

Roman Skaskiw

I was born in a village whose name, roughly translated, means storyteller. I remember that my mother's name was Sofia, that she kept a piece of garlic under one corner of our tablecloth, and that my father, a farmer, also tended white rose bushes. One night, my father took me across windy fields of wheat to a tree whose branches were ornamented with our countrymen and told me to make note of it, because it shouldn't be forgotten.

I threw stones at the police when they came to our village, and nodded in approval when I heard that Polish homes had been set ablaze, because this was revolution. We were going to change the world at last.

In our schoolhouse we studied hard because knowledge is a shelter in adversity and a beacon of hope. Knowledge is power. This is what the schoolmaster told us before he was taken away and shot. My schoolmates and I swore to remember him.

Then the rumors came of a victorious red army, of a Nazi retreat, but there were many rumors. At age thirteen I was conscripted into the German army, and tried to forget the desperate pain my mother held in her eyes on the morning I left. "A free Ukraine," I told her. Conscripts were taken west by train, because Ukrainians, Poles and Russians they said, were all the same, and could not be trusted on the eastern front. We were going to fight the Americans, but when we got there, the war was already over,

and the Americans drove us in trucks to the displaced persons camp in Salzburg, where I first tasted pineapples and bananas, and attended a gymnasium. I continued my education, and stole fruit to sell to the local towns people. I learned about the Yalta Conference and the iron curtain, and tried to pass letters through it to tell my mother that I was unharmed, that I thought of her often, and that I wanted to go home, but could not. The banners which appeared one day said in Russian: "Countrymen, return to your father land. You are forgiven," and we asked each other: forgiven for what? That was when my friend took out his boot laces and tied a loop to the top of our triple bunk. I was lucky.

I came to New York City and owned one pair of pants and two shirts and didn't write any letters home because I was ashamed. Then all able-bodied men of my age were called upon to serve their new nation. I was there at the Chosin Reservoir, stamping my frozen feet, when we ran out of ammunition, and there during the disastrous, stumbling retreat to Hagaru-ri, when trucks carrying the wounded overturned, scattering them onto the snow. I remember what my closest friends moaned as they crawled about, trying to light fires for warmth. I consoled them in my broken English, swearing to them before we left that their names would never be forgotten.

The GI Bill helped. So did Corporal Wintergreen, who became my roommate in Alphabet City. I studied English and philosophy and the chocolate colored curls of the girl who made sandwiches at a corner Deli. I told her, walking back from an opera at Lincoln Center, that I'd sell my soul to kiss her just once. She obliged, and put my soul in the locket charm she wore on her ankle.

I mailed photographs home, and told them in separate letters that I was as happy as any man could possibly be, that they would soon be grandparents, that their granddaughter's name was Sofia, that I was well-respected at my job in the county clerk's office, that I was about to buy a house, that their grand daughter had started

school, that they should write back. Send a picture, a note, a rose petal, a grain of wheat, anything.

I taught my daughter to play chess, told her to study hard, and always forgave her for rolling her eyes, and fumbling with her plastic bracelets the way she did when I tried to tell her about her father's life. I forgave her privately, after my temper was lost, raising a toast to my lonely self, as torturous little-girl sobs sounded from behind slammed doors. When the doctor told me something malignant was growing inside of me, I laughed and told him I'd known about it all my life. I paid off the mortgage, bought a tomb stone, and painted pale water colored forms that never sufficiently resembled my memories.

I listen to local news on a transistor radio kept by my bedside. Last I heard, my daughter was a biology student, catching butterflies for research in Colorado. There is a traffic jam on the Coskuisco Bridge and savage troubles in some far-away place.

My wife worries too much. She doesn't understand that sometimes, even though she sits by my bed, I must ignore her. Concentrating is difficult. Even as I drift in and out of sleep, I review the inventory in my head – names, places, people, things, and the events and emotions that connect them to one another. There is much to remember.

My daughter is on her way to visit me. She's catching a flight. Perhaps a train. She will be here soon. I am sure of it. And then I will say it all out loud, in one great gush. And she'll take careful notes, writing down every detail. These things should be remembered.

I am in an endless field of wheat, sighing and heaving in the wind. There is a dark form on the horizon, a person maybe, and sense of urgency in the sky.

Ashoka, the Beloved of Gods

K.V. Tirumalesh

Ashoka the beloved of Gods built highways
In his kingdom. Sank wells.
Planted trees on either side.
Established free almshouses
And erected stones inscribed with edicts.
Travelers had no fear of robbers in his days.
In towns and cities people used to sleep
With the doors of their houses open.

—So learning by rote
They have opened shops now
Or have become teachers lawyers doctors
Or clerks
This town's several faces
Teeth stomach sleep and
A gigantic Y-A-W-N.

Crabs (of the beach)

K.V. Tirumalesh

On the beach where the huge waves
Have shored up wheat-colored sands
Crabs of the same color
Run heartily.

They are so tiny
That you can easily
Put a hundred
In your shirt pocket

Only if you can catch them
For if they spot humans
They enter the sand
And vanish.

The waves run over them
And if you think they are washed away
They emerge from the sand
As if nothing happened.

One two three a hundred
Countless. You cannot
Distinguish one from the other.
All crabs are alike to our eyes. Just as

We wouldn't make out
The Mayor
Who is taking a walk right now
Had we been them.

Hypothetically

Antonio Ungar

I.

Four in the morning. My friend Simon sits at his desk looking at the damp pavement shining on the other side of the dirty window. There's a cup of cold coffee on top of a book. Simon has stopped writing a draft of a lousy article about film, and is bored. The room is on the second floor of a house like all the others in this miserable, damp and dark neighborhood. It has old Formica floors, stained walls that were once gray and a worn out electric burner. The unmade bed is in a corner, a light bulb hangs from a cord over the desk.

On the other side of the window, under a frigid city winter, there is a street where garbage accumulates and drunks vomit, where fighting dogs shit and everything quickly freezes. On the other side is the city of London. City of miserable men where the sleet never stops. City of mad old women always walking, endlessly. City divided by an immense river, black and slow.

Simon is 25 years old, thin, hunched over, long hair, a white face with green eyes. He's now playing with the ash tray, distracting himself thinking of how he will use the pounds from his monthly salary as an editor of boring articles for a mediocre magazine. He's thinking of the coming winter, the many days before spring. All of a sudden a man screams.

He focuses his ears like the poor dog he is: more screams, blows. He gets up and walks toward the window. It's from the house next door. It's a Barnes fight - the Barnes brothers, his neighbors. The older one, Freddy, is 220 pounds of muscle and the pride of the neighborhood because one year he was a member of the champion national youth rugby team, and he can drink 17 pints of beer one after the other. He can also roll a car over with his own hands, just him, and every time he does it, every time he rolls over a car parked in the wrong place in his street, the whole neighborhood applauds and whistles like only the English know how to applaud and whistle, that is watching with their heads bent forward, spitting out what saliva they haven't swallowed, their English eyes with a slight smile, their mouths issuing an indistinct sound.

Freddy's brother Teddy is considerably drunker - a cow of more than 250 pounds. He's disabled by a double hip fracture from a car accident caused by his constant drunkenness, an accident that also left him with one bad eye, slowness of movement and speech, and a constant drooling that his brother Freddy diligently wipes from his mouth.

Simon hears Freddy Barnes shouting obscenities that scatter against the walls as Teddy groans. They're in a room that Simon has seen from the street of broken down sofas and photos of nude women. He hears what sounds like Freddy breaking a chair against the wall and a plate being smashed. He listens to poor Teddy, with a voice that seems to have been chewing his cud for a thousand years, lost in a wetter and less organized time, defending himself as he can by repeating senseless words in an infinite litany. The shouts and blows against the walls lessen, silences grow, making the air tense before each explosion.

After a half hour of violent and soundless battle, Simon understands. A complete sentence from his Freddy Barnes' spittle-filled mouth explains: Freddy wants to break every piece of furniture in the house and shout at the top of his goddamned lungs, and if he needs

to, to kill right then and there that mass of useless flesh that is Teddy Barnes, because a wad of bills that had been growing thicker in a sealed cookie tin on the white refrigerator has disappeared.

Teddy groans as he crawls along, pursued by Freddy's curses; as he whimpers before falling heavily, perhaps on the yellow sofa. Now he speaks again, but louder. He strings together more words now, sentences without meaning that have been sunken in his huge and wet, cow-like brain since his mother was alive. And he says things like you must not not not not drink so much tonight, Freddy, go back to Dorham that your father would have done Freddy not drink so much.

Simon, my friend, on the other side of the wall is listening to this, paralyzed by his curiosity for the poor dog, but also by his morbid fear that makes him smile. Suddenly he remembers the new gadget, a prodigy of technology that has been lying in a drawer in his room. He takes out a tiny microphone and proceeds to hang it from a nail inserted right next to the Barnes window. Five meters of cable run from the microphone to a CD recorder in which a laser beam will burn a diskette and clearly record every scream and blow and tearing limb from limb of the brutes in the house next door. Two small speakers will allow him to hear everything better.

Simon looks at the set-up with a smile, presses the required button and installs himself next to the window.

Freddy is very drunk. The twenty bills lost amounted to two thousand pounds, the entire capital of the family to buy a new refrigerator and a damned motorcycle; to live for the rest of the month. And the only thing left is a box with an empty tin that smells of the oranges on top of the refrigerator. Freddy knows that even if Teddy didn't take the money, he saw who did. He is quite sure that his brother is hiding something, that if from the beginning of the whole thing he doesn't say anything, groans and sways from foot to foot looking at the floor like a child, like an

idiot, it's because he knows something. And if it isn't Teddy, somebody else in the neighborhood now has the damned bills, and Freddy Barnes is going to find out who. And so he has to thrash Teddy and drag his body through every room in the damned house.

At regular intervals, as it comes out of the black recording box, Freddy's voice lowers and he attacks something and screams obscenities, very drunk (he must have a bottle in his hand, must be pacing around Teddy looking into his eyes, shouting right into his face, almost spitting at him). Then there are large periods of silence. Perhaps Freddy sits down to rest in a corner, to look at the red walls and his brother's body. And every day for the rest of the month he'll have to make do with a single pound.

Sitting in his corner, Simon – scared, cold, almost smiling – imagines that Freddy found out early about the tin, that he was looking all over the house and didn't find anything. That he asked Teddy until he started to scream at him, that Teddy kept his mouth closed and retreated into an autistic state. He imagines that Freddy then went to the pub, sat down at the bar, growling, and orders all the gin he can drink before closing time, unable to come to terms with the lost savings. That because of all this that Freddy is an animal, that now he's going to find the money or kill his brother Teddy Barnes once and for all.

Freddy Barnes' words, like desperate knives, now scream of the past: the accident that left Teddy crippled. The goddamned drinking mania. The money. The goddamned money that has to turn up before he wakes up, for Christ's sake.

He talks, to himself, almost sobbing, for more than a half hour. Until it seems fatigue gets the best of him. Through the miniature speakers he hears exhaustion, impotence, on the verge of tears. It seems he's finally fallen asleep on the carpet like a drunken corpse. Simon imagines the two brothers waking up the next day: even

more tired, and just as lost, poor, fat and like animals. Hungry, alone, but more tired.

It seems that now everything is coming to an end.

Simon imagines Freddy sitting in a corner, dead drunk, crying like he's never cried in his whole life, defeated by that shitty life, that shitty house, by that brother who's now making an idiot of himself, bellows words to himself, words that are not his own but are those of his dead mother, buried in a cemetery between two highways in the fog – words that won't bring back the twenty 100 pound notes in a tin of cookies that smells like oranges.

What Simon doesn't expect is that Freddy suddenly gets up from his silence, that he crosses the wooden living room floor with long strides that he knocks over a table with plates along the way. That without any warning, saying nothing, he picks up the massive early 1980s television set with his rugby champion arms, and with that stone box above his head, crosses into the bedroom, concentrating seriously like a drunk, and throws it out the window. And that that stone box again becomes a television the instant it smashes on the ground, and that all its little glassy circuits, wires, red and green bits, crystal fuses are smashed to pieces.

And then there's another silence. My friend Simon is now even more scared. Through his window he could see the windows in the house next door shaking. Now he is looking at the shards of the television in front of his door getting wet on the sidewalk. There is a minute of silence. Simon imagines Teddy beginning to understand, slowly, very slowly, that there will be no more television, that the television is gone. There's a continual crying – long and low.

And then all of a sudden a desperate scream like a bear pierced by a spear, like a dog hit by a car, like Teddy Barnes, the monster who has lost his head. He is almost like a whale when he rises on his two little legs that haven't been able to support him for ten years,

and he waddles across the room and launches himself down the stairs.

And then Freddy begins to scream goddamned Irish dog Ted Barnes don't even think about running away rat coward because I'll blow your brains out fat son of a thousand damned bitches idiot, you've already done enough damage. And he keeps on with his litany while he goes down the stairs, following his brother's racket, very slowly, sacredly remaining upright in his drunkenness. Simon knows the house next door, it's identical to his, and so he knows that Teddy is going to the kitchen. Through the little bathroom window, standing on the toilet, Simon can see Teddy Barnes is opening all the cabinets, hopeless, breaking everything, knocking everything over, before his brother gets downstairs preceded by the few insults that he has left before exhausting himself. Simon sees how Teddy is able to open a drawer and how his shaking hands take out something black that he weighs between his fingers, how he goes back to where he came from, in the direction of the hall.

There's another instant of silence.

Later there's a Freddy Barnes battle cry that scatters across the garden and is heard through the black speakers. The sound of a chair being destroyed. And then, suddenly, an explosion. Huge, heavy, echoing throughout the whole neighborhood in the frozen silence of four o'clock in the morning. Simon feels his knees hardening from fear, he puts one hand on the edge of the sink. There are five seconds of sharp, tense silence. Another huge explosion that makes him tighten his grip even more. The noise rushes out, losing itself in the empty streets, again leaving everything in total silence.

Simon remains still, lost. Then, slowly, with his eyes clouded and unbalanced like a drunk, he is able to go back to his room. As he does so he imagines, without knowing why, the empty streets of the city, the traffic lights blinking yellow in the mist. The smoke rising from a chimney.

Below, at the Barnes' door, the lock is turning. Simon slowly moves away from the desk, approaches the window. A huge man opens the door; Simon can see his blond, round and half-bald head. The man groans, staggers. He takes a few sluggish steps toward the street. It seems that he's about to fall face down. He has on a dirty white shirt that covers his immense belly. He has a revolver in his hand.

It's the younger Barnes. From above, his body seems larger, fatter, balder and paler. He shakes, stumbles. He reaches the edge of the sidewalk and lets himself fall on his ass, with his feet on the street. With both hands, he's clutching the gun between his legs. He rocks back and forth, back and forth, with the gun tightly in his hands, between his bent legs. He only looks straight ahead, rocking back and forth, with his back to Simon. He looks at the billboards, the garbage, the school wall. He understands nothing.

No one has emerged to look at what is happening, no one wants to know. The police will take an hour to get there. From his window, Simon keeps looking at the man rocking back and forth, groaning out loud, getting soaked and crying in the rain, now completely lost. Simon sits at the desk, looks, and can't do anything. He doesn't think, he can't think anything.

Then he begins to think about that man, about the police who will arrive, about himself, sitting down in that house, in that goddamned neighborhood, in that city that is not his, looking at that spectacle, hearing through speakers the groans of a murderer waiting for his fate.

II.

Teddy Barnes has been sitting for a half hour on the sidewalk in the drizzle, observed by Simon from the closed window. A neighbor shows up, perhaps someone has called the police. But the policeman must be busy that night, because Teddy continues to rock back and

forth from his waist in the drizzle. And Simon continues to watch him.

Simon has had time to think about many things. Without realizing it, looking at that man on the sidewalk from the window, Simon is thinking about himself. He's realized he's alone in the world sitting there. And he's also realized that he is free, and always has been. And that he can do whatever he wants. He can leave that whore of a city, and can become someone live, real. If he wants. Someone real. He thinks now that he's finally going to get up from that desk.

That he's going to put all his clothes in a backpack, that he's going to get the money from the bank, that he's going to go out walking, going to pass by that bilious body that is still trembling on the sidewalk. That he's going to walk to the train station and leave and finally dedicate himself to what he has always wanted to do. He will live by stealing, he will sleep in the parks. And perhaps it would be best for him, too, to buy a revolver. To use it to hold up a store, to go on surviving.

Or to go to Australia, where every meter of land that he steps on will be unknown territory. And to dedicate himself to stealing. And to walking. Until they kill him. Perhaps he will also make love to a large, brown woman in an abandoned cottage in the desert. He will get drunk with truck drivers at a gas station. He will gamble all his money in a card game and sleep in an Australian jail one night with an aborigine.

Or he will leave, right now, to where that woman in the office lives, the one with blue eyes and big tits, who still hasn't woken up yet. It won't be difficult: enter her house slowly through the garden balcony, open the little glass door, walk into her room. Silence her with one blow, put tape over her mouth. Leave with her in her car in the morning, cross the Channel. Go to Spain, over to Africa. Cover every kilometer of road, until the last death, with that bound slave in the car.

Suddenly he hears the noise of sirens outside.

The immense, lost man now shakes more slowly, soaked by the constant drizzle. With his neck stiff, with the pistol between his legs, clutched fast by his fingers. The rain continues. A policeman stops ten meters from the murderer, he knows that there are thirty guns pointed at the man's head. He spreads Teddy's legs and cries out: throw away the weapon and put your hands behind your neck.

When the policeman is a meter away, he strikes Teddy's temple with the barrel of the pistol, he takes a very good look at him, he begins to kneel down next to him, to put his free hand under the bent legs of the giant. He grabs the weapon in his fingers. The giant won't let it go. The policeman manages to loosen the fat fingers from the murder weapon. He throws it on the pavement, far from the body.

Teddy Barnes looks into his eyes, slowly, not yet knowing anything more. Who is he. What is he. What is he doing there. And again looks straight ahead.

A small truck approaches noisily on the street. Ten armed policemen are trotting behind it. Simon sees how they hoist Teddy up, a dead weight, how they bend his neck and place him in the back seat of the car. Two policemen get in with him.

III.

A month later now. Simon is sitting at the dining table of a friend, across from a plate of fish and a tall glass of white wine. He smiles. In his right hand he holds the hand of his girl friend, who's not particularly pretty. He looks at her eyes for a moment. Then he gets up, clearing his throat and asking everyone's attention to tell the story of the big news of the night.

The big news is that the week before his contract at the academic journal where he works was extended for two more years. They will continue to pay him the same salary for the same movie reviews. He and his girl friend are going to rent an apartment in Mainstream, very close to the house where he had his bachelor pad. My friend is thinking about applying for English citizenship.

When he finishes he looks at all of us, radiant. He proposes a toast. To his girl friend. To us. We all stand up. I look at his smiling mouth, a shine of saliva on his lower lip, his small eyes, sweet and happy. Like a street dog. When he sits down, he removes his little hands from the wine glass and from the skin of his girl friend to again hold the fork and eat another piece of fish. He lifts it up to his lips and takes a brief horizontal look around the table, without blinking, never letting go of his smile. He looks at me, smiling, as if he wanted to ask something.

I can only bend my head and lift my glass. To congratulate him, with the glass raised and trying out my best smile.

Nine Beautiful Things

Zoltán Pék

For Krisztina

Although the Krishna guy didn't actually say anything when she turned him down, his eyes, pale and cold like a Pepsi bottle label bleached by rain, promised a karmic mudslide worse than eternal damnation. She didn't take it to heart. She had been down that road many times before. The familiar path that lay in front of her like a blind but faithful dog.

She was on her way to work, crammed on the bus among the commuters-in-misfortune, shutting down her mind as always so as to fan away the something smelling of bad breath and just-awakened armpits but was, really, the cologne of desperation and tiredness. Eyes closed, hands holding on to the pole damp with somebody else's sleepiness, she tried hard to keep her mind vacuum-sealed.

Then she felt the cell-phone vibrate in her purse. She fished it out. Then message was a number only: 9.

Sender unknown. Her first reaction was to look around to see if somebody was joking but she saw no one familiar. Of course, given her height she could hardly see anything in the mass of backs and shoulders.

Again, she looked at the message, must be a wrong number, and put the phone back. As she raised her head, her ear, like that of a swimmer, got plugged and bobbed up into the flow of a strong, husky voice immediately behind her:

"...Very simple. I'll tell you. Nine beautiful things. That's it. You only have to find nine beautiful things and stick to them for one month. But you have to be careful picking those nine things. You have to believe in them. This is crucial. First you choose nine beautiful things, then, say from the following morning, you keep them in mind whatever you do and wherever you go. They shouldn't distract you, though, can't be obstacles. You should just make them part of your daily routine. Be alert for the nine beautiful things, and little by little they elevate you, lift you to a new and higher state of awareness. You'll be happier, more content with the world. If you follow this method, you can achieve whatever you want."

At the next stop she let the crowd push her off, and then she needed to grab a lamppost because her legs trembled and there was a faint but definitely sick feeling in her stomach. For a moment she thought she was pregnant but that just wasn't possible. Because. Biological reasons. Must be something else.

She looked at herself in the window of the travel agency. Her blouse was a blur, a monstrous black-eye, her skirt a faded flag of some uninviting country. Deliberately she ignored her face and instead looked beyond the glass, past the posters for last minute trips to Greece, her favorite-favorite place, and could make out—or so she thought—her colleagues; shapes moving, ghosts of pure malice, products of genetic cross-breeding between the mean and the meaningless. They themselves did not have the strength to be cruel with her; it came to them naturally and continuously, making each of her days an eternity in Hell.

She just had to go in. One two three steps, that was the plan it wasn't much of a plan, she just started walking. Couldn't sit, needed to keep going as if the sense of motion, the constant vibration, the shifting of space would somehow make it—this state of hers—momentary, illusory even and, most of all, pregnant with possibilities. Anything could happen since this was the moment in the making. Her thoughts fluttered, unwilling to settle down on their perch,

giving themselves over to excitement and expectation; pigeons clamoring in an empty square.

This wasn't a state, because it was not stationary. This wasn't a mood, in the sense of good or bad humor; on the contrary, this was moodlessness, or more properly, the middle phase in the arc of a mood-swing which would never reach the outer points. In this way, that is, being on the way, she was granted an interval of freedom; freedom from worry, anxiety and guilt. There would be time for all that, but not now—now she was just a drifting body, an area of consciousness, floating on and pushed by gentle gusts of coincidence and whim.

In this game of self-effacement, turning corners was critical. The edges could hurt you and the unforeseeable lurked behind them. From her experience she figured that people tended to take the middle course so she could easily avoid them. The outer orbit was a lot safer, as it were only the distracted who hurried at the curb. The space of velocity. Turning corners alongside a wall was, however, a question of inner strength. You could literally bump into others, make physical contact, which was most of the time embarrassing, though she had also had some electrifying experiences. For example, she had once collided with an older man and felt her self dissolve into a shower of sparks as their auras clashed.

What she found was that there were laws; the moment you abandoned one set of rules was the moment you drifted into another. She didn't mind that, after a time. It was interesting to experiment with the different pulls of these force-fields.

Meanwhile, her senses remained operational, receiving, decoding and recording the signals of the world on their own. These pictures and sensations were imprinted on her, and she remembered them only later on. No, it was not that she recalled them—rather they re-called her, or called upon her at the most inconvenient moments. They came in flashes, tiny pinpricks that made her freeze

in mid-step; memory injections with an immediate but evanescent effect. So, the pictures: three dogs around a fountain, not your usual stray uglies but really beautiful creatures with stately postures in front of the baroque backdrop of the bubbling water. A man at the traffic lights speaking into the air, "I'm broken, don't break me". Her ex-boyfriend, coming out of a shop with a crying baby. In one neighborhood she ran into the sound of a woman wailing, and the cry stuck to her like gossamer until the next corner she ran into a compact, murmuring mob. In the middle of the human circle a man was lying on the sidewalk. He looked all right, at a cursory glance at least; neat clothes, no sign of injury at all. He lay sideways with his right arm under his head, his eyes open looking at the forest of feet around him. He seemed calm and composed, which in turn frustrated the crowd even more.

"What's he doing down there?"

"I don't know, just got here myself."

"Nothing."

"Nothing? What do you mean, nothing?"

"He's just lying down. I saw the whole thing. I was shopping across the street at that new store, there's a sale you know, I bought this blouse there yesterday and came back..."

"Nice blouse."

"Thank you. That's why I wanted to come back. So there I was, and I looked up and saw...."

"Yes? Yes?"

"He just stood here. People were rushing all around, well, it's Thursday morning after all, and he was in the way. And then he simply lay down."

"Did someone push him?"

"No."

"Sick?"

"No, he just lay down. As if taking a nap or something."

A policeman appeared. The mob hushed, all attention focused on The Man.

"Sir?"

"Yes."

"Sir, why are you lying there? Are you hurt?"

"No."

"So you are not hurt. Not sick? Nothing wrong?"

"Not really, no."

"Then would you get up, please?"

"Why?"

"You cannot lie here."

"Why not?"

"You are bothering people."

"I didn't ask them to stand around."

"I have to ask you to get up, sir. We don't want any trouble, sir, so—"

He didn't look distressed, just sad. Or preoccupied, rather; maybe searching for his beautiful thing, while the mob stood around and watched him groping for the truth as she was tired of being continuously out of place. This day, this year had been a mess, a series of blind turns into all the wrong alleys. Needing something to hold on to, she realized that, yet struggled against it. To have something meant to depend on it, and the thought itself suffocated her. She wanted to have somebody, of course, but on her own terms, and looking at the man next to the puddle she understood that she didn't know what these terms were.

The man was sitting on the just-watered lawn, next to a small puddle. Obviously, he didn't mind the grass being wet and cold. Didn't even notice it, he was so immersed in what he was doing, and what he was doing was making mudballs. Scooped up a good handful of mud from out of the puddle, and kneaded it with both hands into a ball the size of a child's fist. It was slow and scrupulous work, craftsmanship really; he rolled the mud over and over between his palms, clockwise and back, smoothing its creases into spherical immaculateness, holding up the ball into the light over and over again so as to check it, as God must have done with Earth before hurdling it off.

After an eternity, after endless polishing and re-polishing, he carefully put down the mudball beside him. She could see... nine mudballs! Truth be told, there were only eight, but she saw what she wanted to see. So much for signs.

What amazed her was his composure. A homeless could have—should have—done a hundred other, saner things but he was making mudballs. Enjoying it. She wondered what he'd do with them. Throw them at a target? Crush them underfoot? But that was

the point. For him, it didn't matter. He was in the moment, completely and unashamedly in the flesh.

His time clocked in a different rhythm, or even in a different direction, as if this urban pre-historic pottery was not robbing him of time; on the contrary, each new ball contained more time, was a globe of moments to be shaken up at will, like one can do with those glass paperweights.

And while he was gaining time, she ate up hers, losing in one day her job and all the confidence she had carefully shelved away since the break-up. And the worst was still before her: she had to tell her mom, who would take it as a confirmation of her conviction that her daughter's life had inevitably and ultimately derailed. Isn't that a kind of balance, though, this creating and losing of time? What if it was her role to maintain the balance? Somebody had to lose, after all.

She had to get out. Out of this day, out of this city. Go somewhere, begin again. But how? She remembered the message:

9. Some sort of a guidance Nine lives? Nine horsemen of the apocalypse? Nine lovers with trampled hearts? Nine fine rhymes? She fished out her cell-phone and started to go through the names. God, this was one long list. She never thought she'd need so many people. All the tall and short, blond and brown people; people with attitude and malice; people with good hearts. She dialed the ninth number.

"Tell me a beautiful thing."

"Hi. A what?"

She could see that the deterioration of friendships was going to be inevitable. Ildiko and she had been close friends for some thirty years now, and though they both considered their connection

important, at least she hoped so, new people and new relationships slowly but inexorably pried them apart.

"A beautiful thing."

"What's this about? Listen, I got loads of work here..."

"I quit."

"What? How?"

"I just didn't go in. I quit."

"But why?"

"Why? Didn't I tell you yesterday?"

"And didn't I tell you to try to hold on? A little longer at least."

"Well I couldn't."

"But you have no money. No plan. You need this job."

"You know this isn't the kind of stuff I can take right now. I'll get it soon enough from everyone."

"What do you expect from me then? To pat you on the back and say, 'What a great decision, girl'? I can't do that. I'm your friend. I tell you the truth."

"And what if I don't want the truth?"

"You don't, do you? Then what do you want?"

Nine beautiful things, she thought but did not say. Hung up. The man on the grass was working on a new mudball, attending to the furrows of the world with aching care the bus lumbered away, and the few people left dispersed right away, as if feeling something in the air.

She had known the street to be flat but now it seemed to be slanting. No, it wasn't the street; it was the sky, it pushed down, pressed on her like an over-weight yet tender lover.

She could see the overpass, the critical part of the journey. Not that anything ever happened, but her father used to scare her with it, trying to make her not to stay out late. The streetlights couldn't penetrate the mass of concrete and blackness, and sometimes the homeless took shelter there. Now it looked all right.

She was aware of being alone, and she didn't care. Yes, this used to drive Dad mad. A girl who wasn't afraid.

The sound of her steps fell away, with an absent undertone.

And then she saw him.

A man stood in the shadow by the wall. Something about him. He was waiting. Not a homeless, though she couldn't see him clearly. For a moment she recalled the Krishna guy, but this one wasn't a man of belief. A figure of darkness and cold.

Her heart leapt up in her throat, her ears shut dead. Just don't look at him. Go ahead. He doesn't move. He's waiting.

I was waiting.

He's not waiting for you.

I wasn't waiting for her.

She stared ahead into the overpass, straining her eyes not to move. The edges of her field of vision began to waver, the houses blurred shapes in a drizzle of neon-pollen.

He was looking at you.

I was looking at her. Instead of doing what I had to. I was there to grab the child and take him to the place with no windows, and to do this with speed and without words. But there I stood, looking at her, me, a brute struck down by wonder, one who let the child go because of the fleeting sight of this girl who already disappeared under the overpass, dissolving in the darkness the columns looked distorted, curved as if seen through a fish-eye lens, pillars of a colonnade leading to an *agora*, where the public gathers and debates, and where, for the first time in her life, she was ready to stand up and speak, like the others, the confident ones, to speak for her vision of life, for the choosing of paths, for loss, despair and guilt, and about the Nine Beautiful Things.

Holy Is What My Mother Calls Holy

Josef Haslinger

My mother used to pray to a holy man. No one in the region where I grew up had heard of Father Freinademetz, except my mother. My mother had gained a reputation regarding the fulfilments of her prayers. Her trick was that she prayed to one that no-one else knew of. She prayed to Father Freinademetz.

She didn't start with Father Freinademetz; she had tried lots of other saints and members of the Blessed. They had been of not much use. Except Father Freinademetz. This holy guy obviously had all the time in heaven to fulfil the wishes of my mother, in fact, not only the wishes concerning her own life, but also the wishes concerning my life. Thus in my life Father Freinademetz acted as the Secret Service of my mother.

My mother is old now. When she praises the power of religion she is relying on the experience of her whole life. There is no argument against experience. According to the life of my mother, Father Freinademetz is a major source of holiness. If you rely on him, anything could happen.

Take me, for example. Father Freinademetz was the secret organizer of my development. I was not even aware that someone was guiding me according to the plans of my mother. If I had known, I would have fought him. I fought everyone who tried to control my life. I was a stubborn character. And so was Father Freinademetz. He knew that he couldn't act openly. He didn't appear in the middle of the night introducing himself: Hi, I'm Father Freinademetz. These are the wishes of your mother concerning your future and I'm going

to fulfil them. You better follow it faithfully otherwise I will have to force you.

No, he didn't act like a simpleminded teacher. His way of spreading his holy influence was much more sophisticated.

I imagine the pedagogical system of his holiness. He was lying in a hammock over viewing all these ordinary wishes steaming up from earth. If there was a wish of someone who was just too lazy to go for it by himself, Father Freinademetz ignored the wish. But if it was a hearty warm wish from a deep religious soul of a regular customer like the soul of my mother, Father Freinademetz weighed the wish with both his holy hands, and his holy mind started to analyse the situation. After considering all the possible outcomes he softly began to redirect the strings of my destiny.

My mother wanted me to become a priest. In order to get the right qualification for the profession of a priest I was sent to a monastery. The problem was that in the very moment I was offered to the priests of the monastery, my mother lost her own influence on my further education. She was allowed to see me only once a month for a couple of hours. So she sent her Secret Service.

Father Freinademetz took a sharp look at my overall performance. Especially, I imagine, he considered the likeliness of my sexual development and then he decided: This guy should not become a priest, he should become a writer. And here I am, proving that there is a holy man called Father Freinademetz who used all his holy power to direct the development of my life. Look at me. I am the proof that there is an outside to our world, something that we are not able to catch within our mind but which does nevertheless exist. Look at me. I am the confirmation theology was looking for from the Middle Ages to our times. Don't argue about destiny. Just look at me. My mother wanted me to become a priest and I became a writer! That's not a big difference.

The old German Romantic writer Novalis, my personal poetical buddy, as I might call him, suggested that poets and priests used to be of the same profession. And then he suggested that today that similar identity of priests and poets might come back with some help of poetry written in a missionary spirit. Father Freinademetz may have been a reader of Novalis. Probably not on earth, but in heaven. Maybe he was not only a reader of Novalis, maybe he was one of the missionaries Novalis had sent out to romanticise the world. Imagine that: The old German poet, Novalis, acting via Father Freinademetz and both were directed by my mother. This sounds crazy but it seems to be the secret truth of my curriculum vitae.

Zapping through the TV-channels of Austria, I happened to view a documentary about catholic missionary work. And there was Father Freinademetz, the son of a small Tyrolean mountain farmer, who was selected by his teacher to become a priest. First of all I learned that the First Name of Father Freinademetz was Josef. That gave me some thought. Did my mother chose my name not because of the father of Jesus Christ but because of a Tyrolean missionary?

And if it is exactly what happened, what does it mean? Was Father Freinademetz in those times still a free lance holy man or was he already acting as an agent of Novalis? Does that mean that Novalis had chosen and secretly prepared his later biographer because I wrote my dissertation about Novalis? This is a serious question for me. Did I think I was writing on Novalis while in reality Novalis was writing on himself by using Father Freinademetz, my mother and me as slaves of fulfilment?

The documentation said that Father Josef Freinademetz was one of those unlucky guys who tried to Christianise China. Instead of Chinese people becoming Christians, the intruding Christians were becoming victims of the Confucian uprising. Father Freinademetz, the blessed man of my childhood who saved, no, not saved, but the one who guided my life, fortunately was not killed by the Chinese like other missionaries. He died of Typhus in the year 1908.

As I told you my mother just couldn't stop using the holy forces of Father Freinademetz. To become a writer or a priest may not be a big difference, but in the case of my sister the prayers of my mother actually implored the eternal forces to return her to the living. By then, my sister was practically a dead child, given up by all physicians of the hospital. But there was one nun. My mother and the nun shared a secret. Both of them prayed to Father Freinademetz. And they managed to convince him to execute a miracle. And he did.

For a special task like this Father Freinademetz needed the help of God, I imagine. But God doesn't like these kinds of miracles. He created man mortal because he had some concern about our happiness. Only mortal people can be happy people. God doesn't like arguing about mortality. So Father Freinademetz made a deal. He said to God: I will try to prevent this unworthy Josef becoming a priest of your Holiness, and you save the life of his sister. That was a deal God obviously could agree with.

So here I stand as a witness that things happen beyond our control. I just have one wish. Please keep away from Father Josef Freinademetz as long as my mother is still alive. He is not my holy man, he is not your holy man, he is the holy man of my mother. And he has a strong commitment towards his regular customers. As every holy man might have. If you are not a regular customer in the business of holiness just keep away from that matter. As I might do in the future.

The Poem at the Beginning

Lidija Dimkowska

Brotsky got scared, he got scared he might be hit
 by a bomb, a water-melon or the evil eye of a Struga maiden,
 and back then we still didn't have e-mail
 for him to ask me in Subject already: Is there a war going on in
 Macedonia?
 so he didn't come. And those four days, they say,
 the University in Michigan was being painted,
 and at home the cleaning lady, Sevda from Bosnia,
 had spilled some bleach in the living room and a terrible stench
 spread all over the place.
 Brotsky opened the windows and went out into the night
 and had nowhere to go until the apartment was aired
 until his Department of literature was painted. For four days Brotsky
 wandered through Michigan, he went from church to church
 (and when sad, they say, entered only the Orthodox)
 and suddenly he came across the small Macedonian church
 raised by grandfather Ilija in memory of his mother Petkana of
 Struga,
 and just then it was Vespers, and two singers chanted in Macedonian:
 Mother of God, rejoice, birthgiving Maria.
 Brotsky listened and his hands got sweaty from his trousers
 and every time they made the cross he choked
 as if swimming in the waters of
Genesis;

The Mother of God saw the collar on his shirt start crying,

then an old woman approached him with boiled wheat
 and told him: Take some son, this is in memory of my mother-in-
 law
 Petkana of Struga,
 God bless her soul, she brought up my children.
 Brotsky then searched his back pocket and took out the letter
 about the Golden Wreath for Poetry '91. But the old woman
 just kept on offering: have some, son, have some of this wheat,
 you're pale, take care you don't get sick, and as for wreaths - God
 forbid,
 it's too early for you!
 We the old must have our turn first!
 Brotsky ate and cried, gulped and choked
 and on the Monday, when the University opened again,
 gave his literature students the following topic for their essays:
 "What percentage of a man lives when he's alive
 and what percentage dies when he dies?"
 And for two hours he read and re-read
 Marina Cvetaeva's "Poem of the End".

Trans by Ljubica Arsovska and Margaret Reid

Decent Girl

Lidija Dimkovska

I took to a "Second Hand" my view in the future
but nobody would buy it. The net is prickly
and there are no more heroes. Sorrow is purely physical pain.
If there's no water, let the eye-fluid hanging on the
glasses drop. If you wear no glasses,
pretend you are Chinese (one eye looking eastward
plus one looking westward equals *écriture féminine* in
a male society). The fashion of the Orientals
comes back in a package with dietetic food.
Bless me too while I'm still
a decent girl. Tomorrow or the day after I'll lose
my sinfulness,
I'll wear embroidered blouses from the Ethnographic Museum
of Macedonia, and somebody will have to pay for them.
To survive, we'd best turn the lector's apartment
into a gallery. We shall exhibit
varicose veins, dried umbilicuses, retinas
and broken hearts in direct proportion
to South-American soap operas
(tell me why you left me and married my sister)
and sorrow is purely physical pain
and in my country cured by surgical operation.
Here I recognise it by the pain in my index finger
crucial in the expansion of mobile phone networks.
I don't know why my uncle didn't beat me in a sack
At this age it's best if somebody else
cuts your umbilical cord, and I
am not afraid of Virginia Woolf,

I fear Lidija Dimkovska. Have you heard of her?
A woman not wholly christened, whose friends
have all taken the vow,
the bodiless woman and all those she's loved remain unmarried.
That almost to exhaustion non-woman of yours
(probably sponsored by Soros to become tender?)
almost to the negation the idea of Medea, Judea, of her.
No, I'm not afraid of the numbers 1, 4, 7
in the eye-clinic, or of mortgages
on religious holidays, what I'm afraid of is the existing attitude
towards God
of the God who does not exist, and I'm afraid of his great eyes
Alas, what a multitude of words! Dictionaries are a lucrative job.
You sit at home and play: Something beginning with...!
From now on I shall speak in onomatopoeia,
Or better, in metaonomatopeia. Be that as it may,
it was nice meeting you, Father. Were I not a woman
you could've taken my confession. But I don't mind this either.
We're having tea, biting each other's nails
and we're licking our lips. Chirp-chirp! Metachirp-metachirp.

Transl by Ljubica Arsovska and Margaret Reid

Me

Zahiye Kundus

Looking for a place
 For the relief place
 Looking for you in time
 In the absence
 Send me your address
 I looked for the address
 Asked the place, said bygone
 Asked the bygone, said it's never been there
 Write to her... maybe she will look for the address
 Send it to me so I can write you a letter bearded by time
 To a place in past
 Who knows maybe I'll be your first visitor?
 Think thoroughly in your seeing
 I'm inviting myself over a cup of coffee
 Offering you my name as a gift or for giving you a listening place,
 so you can offer
 me the string of time

I banned my soul
 In love and in none
 In taking off my clothes and putting them on
 In my waking and sleeping
 In my backbone and my deterrence
 In a smile
 In thirst

And hunger
 In awareness and contortion

I banned my soul
 In the same and contrary words
 In the between colors
 In the margins
 In love
 In the memory and history
 In the blue and violet
 In the child and woman
 In need for lifetime

And I do not stop talking
 Some hate it
 Some laugh
 Some get interested
 And some the sound passes them
 And some never been there

And I narrate
 About you and the prophet

They claimed Cleopatra was blonde
 I'm from yafa looking for the bygone

Milk Bath

Kyoko Yoshida

I

Now Miyuri has to spend four hours bathing all by herself. There is nothing to do in Minomachi but to bathe. Six public hot-spring baths, located along the two parallel Main Streets which take you less than twenty minutes to walk through, are all Minomachi has to offer to the tourists.

It is in the middle of September—too early for the Japan Sea crabs which, in winter, city dwellers in Osaka and Kobe slobber over. It is too late for swimming. It is Saturday, and it is three o'clock in the afternoon—too early to get poached in the hot spring though Miyuri had been jolted for five hours in the train from Osaka for the hot spring. This is not exactly what she intended, however. She had a question to ask him: a romantic and lethal question. Though her lover cannot get into the same bathtub with her, going to the baths with him would make a great difference: finishing the bath at the arranged time and sharing a can of lemon soda with him on the ripped faux-leather sofa in the front lobby, describing to each other the designs of the bathroom and the dressing room, competing in weight (the lighter the winner, of course), browsing cheap souvenir shops, rambling through shabby alleys. Those trifling pleasures are a serious matter in a hot spring resort. However, her precious partner, an unknown cartoon artist, had sat up for nights to finish up his work before the deadline—actually, it was two days after the *official* deadline—and had been churned in the centrifuge train all the way to Minomachi with Miyuri, and the hellish sweetness

of the liqueur-sodden fruit cake served last night at the inn burned and knocked him out with fever at last. At night, he was too frazzled to fall asleep. This morning, he seemed even more exhausted than the night before, and begged her to be left alone so that he could get some sleep, so she promised to rendezvous at seven at the guesthouse's room.

Miyuri goes out of the inn, takes a bus and a boat across the river to a basaltic cavern and to a tiny aquarium—whose well-ventilated cafeteria puts the visitors in front of the tanks into a carnivorous dilemma with its crisp smoke of grilled fish while they are trying to impress their children (or girlfriends) with the story of salmon that travel thousands of miles to their home river—and returns to the front door of the inn, then glances at her watch. Three o'clock. She has exhausted all the sights already. The last thing she can do is to indulge in the six public baths from the first dip to the last drop for four hours until the Sleeping Beauty wakes up. Dressed in the guesthouse's *yukata*, with a pink plastic soap case borrowed from the guesthouse in a small wicker basket with the hotel name woven in with magenta stained cane, slipping on woman's clogs on which the hotel name is also printed, she flows out to Main Street, seen off by the landlady, and stands for a moment in the quiet, bright street, embarrassed at finding out she is the only one wearing a bathrobe on the street.

II

The narrow town of Minomachi, like a dragon or rather a baby snake lying at the bottom of a ravine, is more of a gloomy mountain village than a seaside resort. On both sides of the trickling river are willow and cherry lined streets, only wide enough for a bus to pass. The old-fashioned but newly built stone bridges connect both streets, along which stand haughty hotels of wooden houses easily a hundred years old. Every gate is magnificent. A shrunken doorman in *happi* is loitering at a deserted carriage entrance in the front yard, scratching the graveled ground with his sandaled toe and chewing the edge of

the towel around his neck. Inside the vestibules are mostly exquisite courtyards—landscaped with, for example, stone lampposts—they whet her taste (Miyuri the courtyard aficionado) but their overwhelming gorgeousness and off-seasonal emptiness discourage her from browsing inside.

Between these luxurious hotels, thrifty inns, crammed like sun burnt paperbacks squeezed between the gold embossed encyclopedias, expose their crumbling eaves and jerrybuilt, artificial lumber spines. They do not have any extra estate to waste for gardens. Their buildings have more than three stories with a wooden bowfront on each floor facing the street. An old man is looking down the street, relaxed in his *yukata*, leaning against the latticework on the second floor of an old hotel. His cigarette flakes snow on Miyuri's shoulder. From the street, she can look up into most of his suite's ceilings. She knows that the suite holds nothing curious for her or for any Japanese tourist for that matter—a typical hot spring resort's hotel furnishing: a hard-wood floored narrow drawing room with bowfront and a six *tatami*-matted room with a tea table. This kind of room has no secret: everyone is sure what he will find inside before checking.

The inn that Miyuri has reserved is, in consideration of their budget, one of those paperback guesthouses, antiquated and compact. The meager landlady in a blue dress ushered the two up into a room in the rear side of the house on the second floor: a dim, six *tatami*-matted nook with a window facing the lichened wall of the valley a few feet away. Entering the room, she smelt the aged, full-bodied bouquet of the mold and the moisture's brewery. But it was too late to retreat.

This town is a fine miniature of the ideal medicinal spring resort. The whole town is enthusiastic to realize its balneal fantasy. Strip bars in a dim side alley (A bent woman beckons from an obscure corner), pinball machines and rifle games (Packages of rock-hard chocolate and damp cigarettes on the revolving round shelves. Cork

bullets. Smack! Smack!) are waiting for you behind the aluminum sliding doors under the gimcrack signs. The small liquor shops prosper selling the local sake. Every souvenir shop displays the identical items for the same price: large rice crackers (which get damp overnight), smoked cuttlefish, dried horse mackerel, key chains, flashy-colored picture cards, stuffed animals.... All the details of Minomachi compose parts of a replica—a replica of a lost Japanese hot spring village, which has never existed to begin with.

Descending the lane into the depth of the gorge, Miyuri imagines how intangible she would look from the panorama tower at the ropeway station on the summit, where Miyuri and her boyfriend climbed yesterday. The tower is above the tip of the slender serpent tail that commands the snaky figure of the town in a full bird's-eye view. Those tourists in the valley, don't they look like sperms penetrating into the cavern, crawling here and there along the stream? She fancies another couple on the view roof, who may at this moment be gazing down at her tottering along the street. The hot spring town stuck to the mountain's cleavage and the trickling brooklet—moderate rain would turn the rivulet to an affluent flow. It would flow into the main stream behind the railway station on the bottomland, no higher than sea level. The main stream does not meander and the water is still. The dry riverbed would become sopping wet when the tide is full.

The reedy marshes across the river hold a great heronry. Under the flush of a mackerel evening sky, thousands of egrets tinted in coral would shower in unison, flapping down to the sough. Beyond the heronry, if it were cloudy as yesterday, the seagreen and the mintgreen of the morass grass, the moonstone blue of the river surface not reflecting the sun, the celadon blue of the Japan Sea laced with the breaker waves in oxidized silver, and the liquid jade green sky with fat cream poured in—all those colors would be fused and mirror on one's cornea behind the cool moist veil of the early autumn. The horizon must be the end of this world, the world of the living, but one would not see the line. One would only smell the soothing mist that blurs the border between the two worlds.

III

Turning the gentle curve, Miyuri comes out near the approach of a massive stone bridge where willows rustle. Between the willows, she finds *Yanagi-yu*, "the Willow Bath." The stone monument at the entrance of this bathhouse reads that there had been no willow here until a certain novelist planted willows in front of this spa in his novella to romanticize its landscape. His last visit here was a week before he committed a double suicide with someone else's wife. Miyuri read his last note left for his elder brother, in which the novelist described how he and his mistress were making love at this moment and how happily they were going to die together. Double suicide was in fashion those days. A humanist writer, a pornographic suicide note. Post-coital bodies in the lukewarm water. Rustles of the willows brushing against the lovers' slackened bellies. Did he write it before undressing his love, or after they reached the climax and together went through a little death? The only authentic love suicide note is the one written while making love, whether alone or together. Did she read what he wrote? Did she reach where he reached, too? You come and die or you fail to come, try again, fail, and die. A phone always rings before a climax and your bladder becomes heavy, you press your abdomen hard, the doorbell rings twice, you want to cry, but your lachrymal glands are dry, this moment you are supposed to be making love, but all you can think of is your sore clitoris and that's when you decide you kill yourself for love. Now for the first time, she stands at the very place she has visited so many times in his book.

The Willow Bath is a square bathplace; every part of the building is a golden-balanced rectangular. Miyuri likes the rustic bathroom inside. The whole floor, walls, and bathtub are made of maroon granite, whose surfaces have gained a smooth luster absorbing the permeating essence of the spring. It's a sunken bath like Roman or Chinese baths, that way the floor seems more spacious. The plain walls and the high ceiling hold a functional grace.

Miyuri gradually enters the water from the steps in the tub. The water is light and tepid. The hot spring in Minomachi does not have any symptoms she has been used to at other hot springs. It is thoroughly transparent and odorless. The only feature is a strong salty taste, the common characteristic of any seaside hot spring. The hot spring in Miyuri's mind has the peculiar eggshell-burning odor of sulfur, the geothermal heat that you feel even through the pavement, the chamois smoke belching and surging over the slate blue roofs, the rusty hotel balconies eaten by the sulfur steam, the muddy water in tattletale gray like weak cement, the bronze turbid water heavier than pure water, the colloid that does not plash when you walk inside, and your skin turned slick and smooth in the water. Some springs are toxic, so people just come and watch them. Some baths are too hot, so they steam rice and chicken or boil eggs until the water turns mild enough to bathe. One spa does not spring hot water but heats the beach, where people are buried in a row with their heads sticking out like matchsticks. Miyuri was born and raised in volcanic Kyushu Island, and she has bathed in various hot springs. She has found that every hot spring is alive and has a character. But she feels the water in Minomachi is dead. It lacks some *vim*, the vital power of spa, or say, the thermal energy of magma. Minomachi is a long, long gentle slope that never reaches the peak. Where the lovers never reach.

Miyuri is soaked in the warm water up to her neck, with her eyes closed and her lips apart, breathing slowly. The blood rushes up to her face, so she seats herself (her yet cool soft buttock) on the edge of the tub to chill out. She hears a couple of aged male voices echoing over the partition wall. There are two old women in the woman's bath: they are washing themselves facing the faucets on the wall. As they have their own large bottles of shampoo, they must be local inhabitants. Tourists do not wash their hair.

Miyuri gets into the water again. Then another old woman and seemingly her middle-aged daughter enter followed by three women in their mid-fifties, and the bathroom suddenly becomes busy, so Miyuri flees from the bath.

The floor of the dressing room is covered with a mat made of thin-torn bamboo, which is not fresh straw-like ocher but taupe. The surface of the carpet is slippery because of the human grease and the foot pressure over years. Miyuri notices, drying herself on the hotel towel, that her fingertips are not sodden. It is a matter of the osmotic pressure: the spring water of Minomachi being greater in the concentration of salt than her fluid, it does not provide moisture to her like normal baths, but it deprives her of water. Then Miyuri thinks, like any young woman would, that the bloat should subside and her body should get slimmer, and she becomes a little elated. She glances at the large mirror by the scale. She tells herself that she is not fat, but the truth is that the gravity is defeating her muscle. She soon sniffs away her fancy and smells her fingertips. She misses the pale maze relief on her fingertips that resembles the wrinkles on the cerebral cortex. The sodden relief has been always the to ken of the pleasure of bathing for her, but the water in Minomachi is too feeble to impress the mark on her body. Hold me tight, my love, the woman says, but his grip is so tender. He has taken his pills already. The woman is left with her bottle to gobble. She has no choice, for he failed to leave his mark on her.

IV

Outside it is fairly dark already though the wall clock in the lobby tells her ten after four. The street lamps have not been lit yet. For Myopic Miyuri, the world is dimmest at this time of the day. She has three more hours to bathe.

There are not many people on the street, but chartered buses frequently pass by. Being out of the season, but still a weekend, many overnight tourists from big cities may come. Miyuri has to step aside when the buses pass by. Then a red minicar of a young family and a shiny SUV of a spoiled college student.

She deviates from the street and strays into an alley, to avoid the cars. There they still come roaring. It is worse in the narrow road. The exhaust fumes adhere to her washed skin. The noise of engines she's never heard so close terrifies her. They drive anywhere on the Earth. Everywhere. You raise your hand in the Gobi Desert and a cab will stop in a second. Cans and plastic bags, cast on the shore of a deserted island. A smoky dullness like lees slowly sinks to the bottom of Miyuri. Before she finds herself angry, misery drowns her indignation. When she becomes frustrated with her permanently impotent pique, she hears the pattering of rain. She checks the map pursed in her *yukata* sleeve as she hurries to the nearest bathhouse, *Jizo-yu* or "the Ksitigarbha Bath", which turns out to be closed that day. The heavy raindrops spatter *poco a poco* and print the black polka-dot pattern on the pavement. They reach her scalp and start dripping down her nose.

V

Fortunately, another bath is not far from the Ksitigarbha Bath. That is *Gosho-yu*, "the Palace Bath," where some princess bathed eight hundred years ago. The front monument quotes words from a novel by another dead writer (this novelist did not commit suicide—he had visited Minomachi to heal his wounds from a street-car accident), in which the Palace Bath is described "as deep as to reach one's nipples." She enters the door with great expectation, for she has never got into such a deep bath before, but she will be disappointed soon. The novel was first published seventy years ago. The bath was rebuilt, of course. It is hipbone deep. A shrunken woman comes to greet her. There is no other person in the front lobby. Miyuri stoops down over her clogs to put them aside, but the lady hurries to her saying, "No, no, no... I shall do it. Please, please come in."

There is a tiny courtyard, as small as a linen closet, beyond the glassed wall of the lobby. Under a dwarfish stone lamp, now the

misty rain is wetting the milky quartz beads and the subtle shrubbery sticking out from underneath. The woman's bath inside has a more formal courtyard, composed of several ash and bamboo trees, a bamboo-woven screen, *Ophiopogon Japonicus*, or the dragon-barbel grass, as the underbrush, and a delicate stone lamp with an electric bulb in it. She is the only person in the room. Miyuri is fond of every courtyard in the world, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish.... She does not care about the shallow bathtub any more. Soaked in the lukewarm water in the horsebean-shaped tub, looking at the foggy glitter upon the washed grass through the glass, she is happy. There is a little fountain in the bathtub. The fresh air flowing down from the ceiling windows keeps her head cool, while her body relaxes in the lush, thermal spring. The body is light in the salt water. She watches her belly dancing under the concentric ripples from the fountain. She kicks the wall of the bathtub and stretches herself, floating in the water, then swashes the water, dog paddling across the tub, and gets out to try the steam bath behind the glass door.

On her opening the heavy door, the salty steam flows out of the room into which she slowly steps. It is a long and narrow room and has a bluish marble bench on the wall facing the big window. Miyuri rubs the glass so she can see the garden through it. Three nozzles on the ceiling swoosh the spa spring in fine mist, which whooshes, mizzles and swooshes, sprinkling minerals to refresh her organs. Miyuri lies on the marmoreal bench on her back and closes her eyes, loosening up her muscles and draining all the energy out of her body. The myriad mist flocks on her eyelashes, grows into drops, rushing down her blushed cheeks. Every cell inside her is separated to absorb the ocean water. She takes a deep breath. She hears the sound of the sliding door open and the murmur of voices. She raises her body and sits upright on the bench before six women come into the steam bath. The merry wives of Minomachi. The candid atmosphere of spa resort has made them so. "Six fat hips squeezed on one bench!" One of them exclaims, (there are seven including Miyuri) and they all laugh together. Miyuri feels the hip of the woman next to her, cooler than hers, fresh and plump like

the hors d'oeuvres ham. Their rich bodies are signs of felicity, transmitting a warm feeling of bliss to the people next to them. That is how they make one another happy. Miyuri tells herself that she should leave this crowded bench, but a delightful satisfaction makes her hesitate. The wives have Tokyo accents: their deep and bitter vowels are unique to the natives there. People in the West never speak like that. Their chattering pleases Miyuri's ears like an exotic tongue. While Miyuri seeks the opportunity to leave, one of them stands up to get out, and so she follows the woman out of the steam bath.

In the main chamber of the bath, there are several people bathing and washing. Miyuri sits under the ceiling window to cool down. A middle-aged woman says hello and sits close to Miyuri.

"Where are you from?" The woman's voice is low and calm.

"I'm from Kyoto. And you, Madame?"

"Yokohama. We've just been to Kyoto on our way here. I love Kyoto."

Yes, she knows every Japanese woman loves Kyoto, the millenary capital; to be more precise, every woman knows every other woman loves Kyoto. But their idea of romantic Kyoto confuses her. Kyoto is a cursed city, Miyuri thinks. That is where all the memories have accumulated for centuries, and memories are never sweet, they are bitter at best—usually they bite. Once you live there a day longer than the tourists, you feel the damnation. Otherwise she wouldn't have escaped the city for a shabby spa resort. It's a kind of elope, isn't it? Into a village created by double suicidal artists from the city created by paranoiacs.

Miyuri wonders if she has been an inhabitant of an imaginary city called Kyoto—rivers and mountains, stone steps and wooden bridges, (Is the woman here thinking of the same landscape as Miyuri is?) geisha and maiko (and maiko-costumed tourists), noh and

kabuki, combs and rouge, green tea and sweets, cherry blossoms, fireflies (and students' fireworks and a police squad), maples and ginkgo trees, palaces and treasures, shrines and temples, pagodas. Tombs. Ruins. Kyoto *is* Japan. The nostalgia of Kyoto. How can we feel nostalgic for something we have never lost nor possessed to begin with? The nostalgia of Minomachi. Kyoto is an index of the nationhood. Miyuri may be living in the index. Thumb through the section M. Do you find her?

The woman says that they visited Misora Mihari Memorial Museum in Kyoto. Lady Misora is a dead diva, the greatest star of their generation. While her parents watched Lady Misora sing on TV, always shedding tears, Miyuri wished for more fun shows, cartoons, perhaps. Her songs vaguely warned Miyuri against the universally depressing adult life. Now Miyuri likes Lady Misora's songs better —quietly dramatic and bitterly merry —if that's the only way to enjoy depression of adult life.

After an hour she dries her body and comes out to the front lobby. The woman in the front recognizes her, and presents the exact clogs for her: it is her job to identify the tourists with their clogs, matching the name of the hotel printed on their *yukata* with that on the clogs. Miyuri wants to show the Palace Bath's courtyards to her boyfriend, wants to share the view from the lobby, and wants him to reconnoiter the courtyard of the men's bath. She actually thinks of him for the first time in this long languid afternoon, which surprises her. So, she is fine by herself. Miyuri thought of herself an independent woman, yet thought he would not live without her. Yes, she had wanted to ask him a question—maybe those suicidal writers had no chance to take baths by themselves for four hours—just be in the water, stroll and gaze at the sky, at a loss what to do in the next few hours, few days... and the rest of their lives. This laziness, this loneliness might have spared them the final solution. Then how fortunate she is to be left alone. How terribly intoxicating and how simply terrible it is to be someone's side forever.

VI

It has stopped raining outside. The street has become crowded with tourists, mostly middle-aged female tourists in *yukata*.

Probably tours of the wives' clubs. Those chartered buses must have poured out the tourists into the streets while she was in the Palace Bath. The closer she walks up to the mountain, the loftier the hotel buildings become, and the more people are wandering about in the identical hotel-made *yukata*. The sun has set; the river is lined with new retro gas lamps. Miyuri approaches *Kobnoyu*, "the Crane's Bath," the largest bathhouse in Minomachi. The front lobby is at the peak of its evening bathing hour before dinner. It is five thirty. The staffs are running around the front door holding two pairs of clogs in each hand. Miyuri's brain feels steamed from the long bathing; she enters automatically into the dressing room. The larger indoor bathroom is full of tourists. The water is deep and too hot for her already poached body. Then she remembers that the landlady recommended the open-air bath that shows through the glass wall: a bower on the stone-paved ground. She walks straight up to the door.

VII

Under the roof, rough rocks form a bath. At the back of the bower, the musk mallow, retaining its deep color of the summer, covers the ground. A short lamppost of malachite is among the mallow grass. Seven women are bathing in three groups. Miyuri sits alone in the lukewarm liquid and observes them. Three women of nineteen or twenty years old are amusingly discussing the varieties of pubic hair growth, at which other bathers' ears prick up. All the seven women are either thin or heavy: no moderation. One woman is marvelously fat. She fascinates Miyuri. Her favorite nude photograph is one of the monochrome three-dimensional pictures, a Japanese souvenir for the Victorian Englishmen to enjoy with special spectacles. A woman is combing her hair after bath, with

her breasts bared out of her shabby linen kimono. She pulls her long, abundant hair horizontally across her face. Her face is hidden behind the hair, which must be the photographer's artifice. The only and the whole attraction of the picture is the lushness of her brachia and breasts. Her upper arms are well muscled, but they are not built like a Hellenic Venus with impressive biceps, for a considerable amount of fat muffles around her muscle. Her arms look like tanned, shining cylinders and her both breasts form perfect hemispheres. Gravity is completely defeated. Every curved surface of her skin is stuffed with fat and muscle. Her beauty is almost a terror to Miyuri. One never finds such an arrogant, haughty beauty overflowed with vivacity in this country today, and probably, one never will.

In the past, Minomachi was a balneotherapeutic place, not a sightseeing spot. People visited here to cure their external wounds. A woman would massage her limbs. A lacerated scar on a woman's shoulder blade would turn to pink in the warm water. A maimed malleolus would be soaked in the serum hot spring. A large macula in an animal shape—maybe a mouse—under a woman's right bosom. Mammocks of glass emerging from the margarine skin. A woman complaining about her migraine. A young mother mundifying her baby's wound mumbling the mantric prayer. Heal us, the mellifluous water. Warm us to the marrow. Mosses in motley colors on the rocks. Musty mushrooms would emerge among the mosses. Leaf mold mulching the feet of maple trees. The moon in the murky sky would mirror on the mellow water.

Their breasts would not be distorted by the wired brassieres. Their stocky waists would not be buckled up to the last inch. Their fingernails would not be enameled in red. Their thick black hair would not be permanently waved nor bleached. Of course, women today are beautiful. How refined they look today! Yet some sort of beauty is lost forever. We will never be able to reunite the once dismembered body. Mothers suckling their babies on the streetcars have been replaced by the nude photograph advertisements on the

commuter trains. A feeling of the irreparable loss; the memory of milk bath—this imaginary memory.

Two summers ago in Bali, Miyuri visited a small art museum, exhibiting the paintings by a German artist who had settled and died in Bali in the first half of the last century. He had married a Balinese woman and had painted women in the island, who all had worn nothing but their traditional sarongs. They were working, dancing and resting spontaneously in his paintings. The Balinese now, even men, wore shirts to hide their chests from the eyes of each other and the outsiders. An old European woman sighed an audible sigh and said to her husband in English that she was sorry that today's Balinese had lost their innocence.

Innocence? This place is not your Garden of Eden. This is not your shelter from the tumult of civilization. She was sorry that that woman had not yet lost her innocence. When would it ever happen? An irresponsible anger surged in Miyuri, but dullness and shame soon suffocated that anger. She remembered the conversation with a Balinese hotel manager that morning.

He had been impressed by the economic prosperity in Japan like every average Balinese had, but Miyuri's persuasion was that Bali should not change from the way it had been.

"I hope more Japanese companies will come to Bali. They work hard. I think we should develop our land more," he said.

"Why, I don't like Bali to become busy and ugly. Your land has a priceless charm. You shouldn't destroy it. You'll regret it some day."

The manager serenely smiled and said, "I don't think so."

Miyuri did not understand. On the other hand she knew well that the humble Balinese wished to live a life like that of the foreign

tourists while worshipping their gods with flowers and blossoms every morning. The priceless charm was priceless for them.

The Paradise is lost a priori. The beauty is never to be regained. It only exists in the souvenir photographs neatly boxed up with a pair of spectacles, forgotten in the dim smoking room. Only the memory remains. A fake memory, the banal balneal fantasy, but the only legitimate memory, desperately needed. Miyuri needs it; the hotel manager needs it; the couple at the Balinese museum needs it; people in Minomachi need it. People make painstaking efforts to copy the Minomachi in novels just to disappoint us. But we cannot stop making those clumsy efforts.

The echo of karaoke oozes out of the tall, modern hotel beyond the bower of the bath.

VIII

The musty odor is mingled with the smell of her boyfriend's sweat in the guesthouse's room. His steady breathing makes sounds like a steam engine slowing down. It is a sign that he is fast asleep. He gnashes his teeth. It is ten to seven. Miyuri sits by the tea table and opens a booklet she bought in a local bookshop. *Famous writers who visited Minomachi*. She soon closes it, and watches outside the window, resting her cheek on her hand. Beyond the window mirroring her transparent face, are an air conditioner, two empty plastic bottles of Coke, and an abandoned pot of green orchid. She is still thinking of the question. She knows what to ask, but she does not whether to ask.

The man turns around on his futon, murmuring something, and then blinks his eyes. Just then the clock clicks seven o'clock. The timing gives Miyuri a tranquil smile. "Slept well? I'm *so* hungry. Shall we go out and eat?"

Submissions

Send manuscripts to the Editor, Nethra, 2 Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka. E-mail submissions (nethra@icescolombo.org) will also be considered. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Please include your contact details. We will consider manuscripts in the following subject areas:

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