



OREAD

**AN INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE
OF LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION**

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**A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE
IN TRANSLATION**

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Robert Lalonde

Translation by Jean-Paul Murray

from The Little Thief

November 1898 - February 1899 (*excerpt*)

1.

The season swoons on the eve of November. In the small Melikhovo graveyard, the dead sleep under blazing foliage. He spat blood again this morning. Macha, his sister, got upset, and he left without eating breakfast, slamming the door. He walks along a path lined with coppery bushes, worm-eaten wood crosses and angels with chipped wings.

“It’s so peaceful here. Death has always been waiting for me. I feel I can deal with it this morning, even desire it, wherever it may lurk. I’ll have done with spitting blood, family worries, impossible words, and all those patients. I’ll sleep without dreaming of a better world and vanish like thin smoke, as though I’d never been...”

Suddenly, to the left, a stream catches his eye. Water from a ditch is spilling over, surging, cascading, singing as it does in May. With his “reluctant professor’s voice,” as Macha calls it, he cries out to the sky and to the graveyard’s dwellers: “No! Not now! Not right away!”

Deep inside him, someone is protesting. It’s a powerful uprising, a stampede through his entire being, from the lock sweeping his forehead to the calluses on his heels.

“It’s too soon! I’m only thirty-eight and there’s still so much to do! I promised to build walls for the Melikhovo school, but they’re not up yet! My miserable play needs one more act! What will my family do without me! I’m their sole breadwinner...”

Under a tall coppery oak, he decides death will have to wait. A flock of

starlings swoops down on the path's only leafless tree with a deafening racket, as though to help him celebrate his final decision.

"Dear friends, go away! I can't, though it's not for lack of wanting to! How I'd like to follow you to Italy, Greece, and even to Yalta the lukewarm!"
Suddenly, the birds fall silent.

* * *

Dear Master,

You won't believe it, but I'm Yegorushka from the Steppe—yours, of course—born and still living in the small village of Slavyansk, right in the middle of the savannah you know so well. Our house is next to the small cemetery you mention in your beautiful story. At this very moment, from the window of my room, I see "stains from over-ripe cherries bleeding onto white wooden crosses and the plaster of gravestones." I know the Steppe wind's melancholy song by heart. At times, "it blows from the right, at times from the left, at times from above, at times from under the earth, like an invisible spirit." A beautiful and sad melody that echoed through my childhood.

I'm eighteen years old now. People say I don't look my age, that I'm nine years old one day, and sixty the next. My father—I lost my mother nearly six years ago—constantly tells me: "You're by turns sententious as a scientist and mischievous as a domovoy."

Your portrait, dear master, is pinned to my bedroom wall, between an icon of Christ's crucifixion and a map of greater Russia. I want you to know that I don't believe in the alleged divine power of Jesus any more than I do in the survival of our ill-fated country. Like you, I want to become a doctor and writer. Like you, I believe in both progress and wonders.

Attached, please find a brief story. It came to me like one of the apparitions Yegorushka has in your story. Burn it if it isn't worth rabbit droppings. But please write to me! It would give me tremendous joy to meet you, know you, and walk with you along a road of your choice.

With all my affectionate admiration,

Your Yegorushka from the Steppe

P.S.: Enclosed, please find a stamp for your reply.

The story wasn't worth much save for one sentence, and only one, which glimmered amid a jumble of tired expressions and drab metaphors, like a thin vein of silver deep inside a rock. "She laughed like a little girl who jumps in icy water." And there were these nine words from his letter as well: "Like you, I believe in both progress and wonders."

Macha tiptoes into the room, placing the tea tray on the corner of his desk. Seeing her standing like a statue in front of him, he says: "What is it now, sister?"

"Do you know the councillors have been waiting for you for nearly an hour at the schoolmaster's?"

"Really?"

"Really!"

"I'll write the boy a word before I go."

"Another? It's the fifth one this month!"

"This one deserves a response."

"You answer every one of them!"

"That's right! Because you never can tell. Besides, he's a sharp boy: he sent a stamp for the reply."

"You're not saying you're doing this to save money..."

"Get out of here, shoo!"

"At least grab the snack I made for you!"

Macha leaves the room, smiling.

Dear Yegorushka,

Are you one of those people who feel absent in the company of others? Is this why you want to write? If it is, then you must never describe the character only as he is. You must know what he dreams of! Never speak about what you don't know, what you don't understand. You must not paint life as it is, nor how it should be, but how you see it in your dreams—at least, when you begin to write. Tell yourself that intelligence alone isn't enough to show your intelligence. You must put your heart into it.

Look, I suggest you write a brief story about one of the following themes—three pages, no more!

1. The house burned down after the miscreants left.

2. They put dirty table cloths on the beds instead of sheets.

3. He'd felt happiness only once in his life: under an umbrella.

Have you read all of Turgenev, Maupassant, Thoreau, and especially Tolstoy, with whom I just spoke on the phone? He sends his regards and asks me to remind you that what you believe in exists fatally.

Anton Chekhov, *Melikhovo*

* * *

His coat's turned-up collar hides his face, and he runs from the theatre like a burglar. Why did he agree to come to Moscow? The calamity was predictable. The dress rehearsal angered him, as the writing had two years earlier. First, the play still isn't finished, the structure is shaky, and it lacks the right tone. He'd drowned emotion in pointless contemplations and philosophical quibbling in the style of Turgenev. And then all the actors held forth, one hand on the heart, the other on the forehead, their gaze riveted to the absurd chandelier above their heads. Ugh! And yet he knew it. He isn't made for the theatre. Offering new forms to these clownish crowd pleasers—how pretentious! And all that backstage gossip: “my hat is hiding my eyes,” “this dress makes me look horribly fat,” “these shoes are murder on my toes,” “what will critics think of Nina's rambling delusion, at the beginning of the play?,” “they're going to wear us out,” “Where's my fan?,” “will they serve oysters at the opening night dinner?,” “fortunately, we'll get back to the Dumas play right after!” and “so on,” to borrow the expression old man Sorin uses all the time. He's also being played by a bewigged second-rate actor dressed like the Vicomte de Paris! Treplev's lyrical flights into the troubling realm of the irrational, and the crazy idea he'd latched on to: begin forte and end pianissimo... A dog's breakfast! The suicide of his miserable failed writer in the wings at the end of the final act, what a letdown! They burst out laughing, and a voice cried out right after the gunshot: “Well, there'll be champagne later in the foyer!”

He walks all night in the driving rain, shouting at street lamps, picking on the shadows of passersby, nailing shut the mouth of some stuck-up statue, some coachman asleep under an umbrella, some villager coming out of a tavern, crying out to them: “Maligning new talent is like blaming the apple tree that flowers before the others, at the back of the orchard! The

tree's got nothing to do with it; you're the ones who can't see..."

Only one tender face shines in his mind's eye, that of beautiful Olga Leonardovna Kniper, who's playing Arkadina.

At the crack of dawn, he's at the train station. He's going back to Melikhovo, where his family are expecting him, and where he left his workers high and dry, sitting on a pile of bricks.

The railcar reeks of cold tobacco and cheap vodka. Scowling, he takes off his spectacles with his left hand, tosses them into the air, catching them with his right one. He throws them up again, before they land on his head, making him burst out with mad laughter. Slipping them into his pocket, he crumples a sheet of paper. "No doubt a litany of phony praise shoved into my pocket by some aspiring playwright desperate for success. Or a list from Macha: savoury cakes or three tins of pickled herring, to be urgently brought home?... He pulls the wrinkled paper from his pocket and reads:

My Dear Master,

I chose the happy man under his umbrella. I hope the story pleases you, even if it's a little short...

"The boy, naturally!" He'd slipped the letter into his pocket and completely forgot about it. He won't read it. Not now. He closes his eyes and Yegorushka immediately appears, standing in the middle of the Melikhovo orchard. The May breeze sweeps a red lock on his forehead. Apple flowers are snowing down on the umbrella he holds high above his head.

* * *

Every morning of this endless November, Yegor goes out to meet old Kurov, the postman, cutting through the cow meadow's tall grass like a charging wild boar, crossing three large fields, catching his boots in the mud of a path gullied by endless rain. The old man apologizes for being empty-handed, fiddles with his cap, talks about a squall, drizzle, a hail storm, fallen trees blocking the road.

This morning, like a stab wound to the ribs, the truth suddenly hits him: the master won't write. He forgot, the story annoys him; worse yet, he thought it was stupid. His own insignificance makes his heart stop. It's better to get lost in the forest than among men who write and are so eager to be turncoats.

Pulling out a pocketknife, he wounds the trunk of a birch tree that had been minding its own business.

I loved you.

I was mad.

* * *

My Dear Boy Yegor,

I'm returning your short tale, which I rearranged a little. While I salute your temerity, I deplore your lack of effort. Writing demands willingness and desire, while you only frolic and lark about. Moreover, you're alone, which is annoying and sad. Your poor fellow under the umbrella deserved better. His calf-love gaiety and his carefree pining for his belle are unlikely and inconsequential in the first place. You should have started with fear, the terror of being abandoned, the stubborn sadness of solitude. For example, you could have had him think back to the previous day when, out of despair, he had his watchcase engraved with an inscription: "For man, the desert is everywhere." You had to paint him as unhappy at first, mortified by his wet shoes, taking it out on his hat, which he'd worn with pride till then, now seeing it as ugly, ridiculous, unbecoming. So much so that, when he sees the silhouette of his beloved appear in the distance, he has only one agonizing desire: to run away, convinced he doesn't deserve his good fortune, this violent happiness he'd long been hoping for. And then, unbeknownst to him, when he realizes it really is her walking towards him, so radiant that he doesn't recognize her at first, filling him with the intolerable certainty that the petty college assessor he is cannot, must not be in love, that he has neither the right, nor the strength, nor the means to be—he earns only two-hundred rubles a month. And so, when his belle does slide under the umbrella with the silky smoothness of a cat, his heart explodes like the birth of a star.

Although I may be babbling on in this reply, I want you to know that I'm disgusted with my life and work. I walked into literature through a hidden door, and all I can think of this morning is setting fire to that sinister building. The theatre is a curse, and prose a hell that mimics the prison on Sakhalin Island, where convicts merrily go about all day long with flowers in their mouths—when com-

pared with scribblers who are absurdly obsessed with giving meaning to words that are worn out from loitering everywhere. From now on, I'll only write stories filled with demons, smouldering women and wizards. And I'll be rich, bored to death, but delivered from the true and the beautiful, which are poisoned flowers. My only consolation today: the wall I promised to build for the Melikhovo school is finally up. To thank me for my trouble and tenacity—and for the thousands of rubles I somehow managed to pull out of a pocket as full of holes as a fishing net—the municipal council kindly gave me a wool scarf. It's rough as steel wool and chafes my neck horribly. Perfectly knit for me, since I always want things done too well!

In your next letter—though you may be too angry to write me—I'd like you to tell me what it's like to be eighteen years old, your hopes and fears, living in Slavyansk, in the heart of my beloved Steppe.

It's snowing heavily. Behind his closed door, my father is mumbling some passage or other from his old dog-eared bible. Nothing is left of the violent and sad man who ruined my life in Taganrog. He's now a senile old man, who gutlessly handed me his role as head of the family, a role way beyond my meagre abilities, and which I'd gladly do without.

My sister Macha is an angel, a dark angel. Her kindness is redoubtable. As for my brother Micha... No, some other time, son, I'm far too downhearted.

"You need what you don't know. What you know is of no use to you." (Faust)

Read Tolstoy: *Anna Karenina* at the very least!

So long, son,

Anton

* * *

There's nothing he can do for her. The lungs are horribly affected. Her pillow is stained with blood. All he has in his medical bag is a flask of quinine. It's useless against her illness, but it will lower the fever. She grabs his hand, kisses it like a poor woman in a Pushkin tale does the palm of her tyrannical husband. The squall whistles in the window, the cold rises from the dirt

floor. “Misery, never-ending misery! She’ll sleep, so that’s one good thing...”

He throws on his fur coat and quietly slips away. White trees against the twilight’s reddish sky dazzle but don’t move him. The scene is beautiful, but that’s all. As he climbs into the troika, he feels something snap in his chest. He leans forward, as though stabbed with a knife, and vomits blood on the snow. “It looks like a hibiscus flower... Oh, Nice, the Riviera! Well of course, what was I thinking of?...” He’ll go, suddenly it’s settled! Besides, Kovaleski insists: he must take care of his health, go south. He’s not gravely ill, only exhausted. He realizes that he’s been wanting to leave for several months, to return to the land of his dear Maupassant, which he’s been thinking of translating into Russian for a long time. He’ll ask Suvorin for an advance, and *Les Temps nouveaux* will surely buy two or three of the short stories he’ll churn under the bright Nice sun. “I’ll complete my mastery of Zola’s language, lazing like a lizard on my balcony overlooking the sea, forgetting the endless grind, the worries, Macha, Micha, Melikhovo’s damned school, my patients and the small number of viperous women I keep writing to, who say they adore me, who never show up to the appointments I schedule...”

He’s disgusted with the books he’s published, bored stiff by compliments, and indifferent towards his critics. His soul is no longer a soul, but a torn muscle flapping deep inside him. He must hide and wait somewhere, that’s it! And then get back to writing, passionately this time, subjectively and by putting time into it! Forget about twenty pages a day—four at the very most! And read, read! To finally put an end to his awful moujik’s ignorance.

His youth vanished while he hurriedly scribbled comical or gloomy stories on the corner of tavern tables, to pocket money—never enough money! “When I think about it, nurturing a fear of death, as I do, is idiotic! Existence is a never-ending series of cruelties and trivialities, woven together like the grass blades of an eagle’s nest, whose bottom is covered with rotting filth! (Remember that metaphor for one of your short stories!)”

He raises the whip. Another useless gesture: the horse began trotting on his own. He covers himself with a wolf skin. His heart beats so heavily that it pounds against his ribs. “This certainly is a beautiful scene: this tarnished silver sky, the profiles of sleeping trees, at times ship masts, at times gallows, against the fog-covered mountain...” Closing his eyes, he suddenly contemplates the blue-green stillness of the sun-drenched sea. “Oh, to be able to write this, to be a poet and know how to blend the white snow flurry with the blinding light of the sea, the real with the fanciful, fear with hope, shackled freedom with dreams of a better world!”

André Major
Translation by Jean-Paul Murray

from The Devil's Wind

1.

The sky has darkened, looming hard and heavy over everything. Maple leaves flip over, revealing their dull undersides, whitecaps roll across the lake and a rumbling runs through the trees. The wind seems to have gone mad. A wind that heralds autumn, with the din of a torrent through dense foliage. The sun is setting in the huge red ditch along the horizon, and the men who work outdoors are presumably heading home, carrying their tools. Suddenly, Albert-du-Lac sees a man coming from the mountain, not walking, but tumbling and rolling down the path. It's Tom, known as Crooked Leg, flying towards him fast as a swallow. Albert has never seen the wobbly Tom in such a hell of a rush. He's running, zigzagging as though to get away from a swarm of angry horseflies. Albert holds back Loup, who's barking, ears pricked. Tom, who's scared of everything, is scared of Loup, and the dog knows it. Barking with such obvious scorn, he makes his master blush.

Tom finally stops in front of Albert, panting, chin smeared with dirt and drool. His eyes have popped out of his head, as though fear had torn them from his orbits. Albert has known fear, strong and noisy as spring runoff, and seen it in others. But never had he stood before a man completely overwhelmed by it, save perhaps when his godfather was on his last legs, hanging on to his wife's arms, whimpering like a trapped hare. People thought they pitied him, and were ashamed of his great weakness, of his mad desire to struggle against eternal sleep and the end of everything. At this late hour, Crooked Leg looked like Albert's godfather: he wasn't a pretty sight.

"Did you see the Devil?"

Tom can't get over what he saw. He stares at Albert's house, a modest wood structure with a rusty tin roof.

“Come in for a drink,” says Albert, who’s figured everything out.

“With the dog?” Tom asks, still shaking.

Feeling targeted, the animal growls and his master has trouble holding him back. Tom is sweating fear, which is enough to excite and anger the dog.

“Go inside while I tie him up,” says Albert, bothered over knowing him so well.

Marie-Ange screamed when she saw him, his hair like porcupine quills, his dirty whiskered face and lips heavy with froth. She doesn’t like looking at him, not that he disgusts her, but she feels inhibited when he’s around and he scares her. Yet, she knows she’s likely the only woman in the village he can speak to without stuttering, without cracking his knuckles, without lowering his eyes in shame, and not only because he admires Albert. Strangely, she feels he knows everything about her, about her husband, and others as well, who’ve always mistreated him. And he lives alone on the mountain to avoid shouting his shame at them over knowing too much, to avoid telling them a few home truths right to their face. Alone, it must be understood, because he was nasty, he carried off La Verte; no one believes she followed him willingly, but no one lifted a finger, since La Verte belonged to no one and everyone. Folks thought an orphan girl was well suited to the no good Tom. Anyhow, he’s still here, and she’d like to know for how long. Albert finally comes in, quiet as usual, with slow gestures, as though everything about him was carefully calculated. He opens the door of the small cupboard above the sink, and takes out a bottle of wine. Tom is seated with his red hands on his knees to give them a break from shaking. Albert hands him a glass filled to the brim, which he noisily knocks back. The wine doesn’t get passed the knot in his throat, making an awful noise. He tries to say a word or two, but it’s only gibberish.

“More?”

He nods like a child; the wine comforts and warms him. This time, it goes down without too much noise. His forehead is moist, his cheeks are burning.

“It’s the Devil’s wind. It came from over there (he says, pointing northwards), it was looking for me.”

“Come on,” says Albert, “it’s the north wind, everyone knows that.”

“No, I tell you it was the Devil’s wind. It wanted to get me. It blew my house down, it was calling me, I heard it like I’m looking at you! I didn’t wait for it; I ran. It followed me, going around the mountain to corral me. I

ran, you saw me. It wanted to get me..."

"The wind blows by," says Albert, "it doesn't take anything."

Tom gets angry: "Well, it sure took her away! It blew my cabin down and it now wants me! Acting as though it owns the mountain. It's jealous of me."

He glances at the window, fearing his worst enemy is on the prowl. "It came around last night. Not for long. It was pressing lightly against the door. I put out the fire. It must've thought I'd gone. It takes advantage of the fall to appear. Without leaves, it blows freely everywhere. It blew my cabin down, and took La Verte. But it got angry when I rebuilt the cabin, and it came back to scare me."

She stops drying the dishes; a shiver runs through her. Listening to him, she thinks he's telling the truth. Without knowing it, she also looks out the window at the wind stirring the lake and twisting birch branches. You never know. So many things happen. And who can prove the Devil doesn't exist?

"I've known that blasted wind for too long. It comes looking for me in winter especially. It once threw me in the water, even if I wasn't bothering anyone. Besides, I'm alone now, it took her from me. What more can be said, right?"

"Nothing more," admits Albert, who, indeed, has nothing else to say.

"It's perfectly able to wreck my cabin again, it sure can!"

He shouts this, seeing the wind furiously battering everything through the window. "If it starts to rain, I suppose it'll die down." But the rain is a long time coming, it keeps Tom waiting, prolonging his torture. And the two men drink wine while the woman listens to the fire's manly voice, which sometimes smothers the wind's animal wailing. And then great swathes of rain lash the windows. Tom drinks, keeping his eyes fixed above his glass for fear the least distraction may be fatal to him. He sees the rain hasn't calmed the wind, that it's even joined it, and that both are waiting for him, calling him. The wind and rain shout as they hit the roof of Albert-the-Calm's cabin: "Crooked Leg, your time's up. Come! Your time's up. Come so we can take you away!" They'll take him away, like they took La Verte. The Devil's idea is what blows the north wind.

"I tell you it's the Devil's wind! Last night, the wind was furious. It was growling at my door. My fire dwindled when it heard it and I doused it to calm the wind."

"And I," says Albert, who feels a little tipsy, "I know it was the north wind because I saw it coming."

“It played a trick on you, took you for a ride. It’s a hypocrite, I know it.”

Marie-Ange looks at them; she sides with her husband, Albert, who isn’t making anything up, who chases crazy ideas out of Tom’s big head. Albert doesn’t have black nails like Tom, who gets dirty by just touching bread crumbs. Albert is tall, slender and proud, he has long hands that seem to drink whatever they touch. He grabs the bottle of red wine and immediately appears to be drinking it with his hands. Tom is the complete opposite. For starters, he’s short and scrawny. His joints are round like acorns. His hands break and knock over everything; his overly round eyes stare endlessly. He doesn’t know how to hide his fear. Albert never shows his fear to others: he runs off to smash it against the mountain, break its back, strangle it, drown it in the lake, or soothe and caress it if need be.

He learned solitude before it pledged its life to him, after he gave it the signal. Tom should have learned solitude, as well, and far sooner, instead of kidnapping La Verte, locking her up in his cabin like a wild animal to be trained by taking its freedom away. People laughed at his legs. He left the village with fear in his stomach. A strong wind was blowing on the mountain. So, one night, he came back to the village to take La Verte, wanted by no one and wanting no one. Nobody suspected anything for weeks. People were contemplating autumn and shivering. Leaves were dying beautifully. Bird songs had vanished. Sometimes, in the evening, a frog croaked a throaty sound. The other night, Crooked Leg fell at Albert’s feet, begging him to save La Verte, whom he said the wind had carried away, to punish him, Tom, who was suddenly alone with his bowed legs. But it was too late. On reaching Tom’s cabin, Albert saw only debris. The wind was laughing in the fir trees.

Tom didn’t want to stay there alone, so he walked down the mountain with Albert, moaning pitifully. He calmed down a little after being drowned with red wine. Once drunk, he went back to his cabin, sadness weighing him down, the cancer of loneliness filling his heart. Now and again, he’d show up to trade a jackrabbit or pheasant for carrots, cabbages, or corn from Albert’s garden. Tonight, however, he only brought an exaggerated fear that might have overwhelmed Marie-Ange, had Albert not been there to stress that the north wind was never, ever, the Devil’s wind. Suddenly, she got the impression she didn’t know Albert, though she’d been living with him for two years already. He’d showed up in the village one morning in May. She was stacking loaves of bread on the bakery shelf when she first saw him looking at her through the window. The weather was mild. The air smelled

of fresh earth and lovemaking with the sun; a blend of outdoor smells and fresh-baked bread. She was alone and realized the heat had reddened her cheeks. He then walked in, his gaze travelling from her blushing face to the loaves that seemed to caress his large brown eyes that were filled with moist shadows. He was confounding the girl and the loaves. Tonight, she remembers this, looking at him drinking wine, quiet as he was then and keeping his secrets to himself.

* * *

He doesn't speak. She only had to look into his eyes to sense some things, and wonder about so many other secrets.

The following mornings, he'd show up soon as the bakery opened, shirt unbuttoned, pipe in his teeth, smiling at times, but most often distant. She handed him the bread, which he paid for distractedly. One day, she summoned the courage to ask him where he lived, which still amazes her. Gesturing with his arm, he pointed to the mountain behind the village. Yet there was nothing and no one over there, except Crooked Leg, wind, animals, trees and loneliness. All he said before leaving was "It's really nice."

In the fall, he'd come back with his shirt buttoned up, wearing a leather jacket that was so worn it could have been handed down by a voyageur ancestor. It's his most prized possession and he still wears it. And when she wanted to throw it out, last year, he bluntly told her to mind her own business. She wonders what brought him here, what prompted him, one day that fall, to invite her into his life. All she knows is that, on an autumn day filled with red leaves and beautiful honey-coloured sunlight, he'd said: "I fixed up the house by the lake. Would you like to see it?" She wiped her hands on her white apron. The lump in her throat was so tight she couldn't speak. Blood was burning her skin.

"When?"

"Tonight, if you can."

She could, of course, on condition she didn't tell her father, who'd grown wary from widowhood, and depended on his only daughter to run the bakery and household. Almost every night that October, she'd visit Albert, saying she needed to get a little fresh air. He never whispered a word of love to her. But he didn't resist her for very long, and then following so many caresses, what can you say, they ended up needing each other. The father, who had eyes to see, knew what was happening. So she had to spend her evenings

at home with him. It was long and sad. Albert was growing away from her, no doubt dreaming of his past. And then, on Christmas Eve, the father told them: "Get married or break up." And since she could no longer imagine living without him, she spoke of marriage, and so did he. The business was quickly settled, maybe too quickly, because she can see today that she still knows little about him, that he even scares her when he goes off for hours, returning in a dark mood, hunched, without saying a word for the rest of the evening. She's beginning to doubt his love, but Albert speaks out again: "Don't go back up there, if you're scared of the wind."

"I really have to, I do," Tom says. "If I don't want to forget her..."

"But the wind always returns, one day or the other. That's how it is."

She likes to hear him speak this way: he knows what lasts, what passes, what must be kept in the heart.

"If I spend the night somewhere else, she might come back and I won't be there," says Tom, who increasingly looks like a man on death row.

"You can sleep here if you want," says Albert.

"But what about her? You're forgetting about her. It's not the same in your case, your wife is with you, in your house, you don't have to close the door, she doesn't want to leave. She wanted to follow you. Unlike La Verte. She'd yell, and keep saying no. So much so that I had to put my hand over her mouth. I carried her up the mountain on my back. And then... I won't say another word. Things you already know. After that, the wind took her from me."

The rain suddenly stops, but the wind keeps twisting tree branches and prowling around the house. Saliva flows from Tom's thick lips: "Before it happened, she stole my knife and hid it in the cabin, but go figure where. One night, thinking I was fast asleep, she tried to cut open my stomach." He unbuttons his shirt, showing them a long scar on his chest that disappears into a tuft of hair. "She was shaking too much," he said, "the knife cut me, but not too deeply. I wasn't sleeping, I wanted to see whether she'd go through with it and do this to me. I tied her up. She looked at me bleed. She cried a lot! Wanted me to hide this. I was doing my best to have her take a good look at the wound she cut into me. Next night, the damned wind took her away."

Marie-Ange shivers, pulling a shawl over her shoulders. Albert tosses branches into the fire, then a log. The three of them listen to the spruce and pine crackling; oozing resin, the wood spreads a sweet fragrance through the house. Albert would gladly burn only conifers, just for the smell. But

the wood burns quickly; it flares up easily and dissolves into grey embers.

“I also have a story to tell you,” says Albert. “Listen carefully. One morning, when I was by the sea, near a village called Les Méchins, where the wind was even fiercer than it is here, I saw an unusual looking man, tall as a pine tree and completely bald. It was early morning, as I said. A stiff wind was blowing, cold and bitter—it was the end of fall. He came out of a cave, and I could see him from far away, hopping and shouting like a child, waving at me not to go near the sea, as though he owned all of it. I told myself: ‘Hang on, buddy, I don’t take orders from the Devil, still less from a monkey like you.’ I kept walking briskly. Once I reached the edge, near the cave, I could clearly see that this giant had only one eye, a really big one, awkwardly placed in the middle of his forehead, without any eyebrows. He was naked and drooling. Maybe he wanted to eat me, who knows? When he came near to touch me, I ran straight ahead, passing through his legs. And then I lit a fire on the shore. Meanwhile, the giant was far from idle: he was devouring children who’d wandered by his cave. The big eye had a healthy appetite. He ate them whole, bones and everything. You could hear him chewing from a mile away. I knew he wouldn’t bother me because I wasn’t scared of him. Are you listening?”

“Yes, yes I am,” shouts Tom, mouth agape, eyes shining.

Marie-Ange had also been taken in by the voice of Albert-the-Calm, who’d never spoken of such terrible things. She wondered whether the wine had stirred his imagination a little or whether—and why not?—he was telling the truth.

“Over there, where you were, the Devil doesn’t wear the wind’s disguise; he shows himself, you can see him clearly in front of you. But, around here, the wind goes all over, it’s everywhere at once,” says Tom after mulling over Albert’s story.

“You should know that the Devil is fearful. If you’re not afraid of him, he messes his pants.”

“I’m more afraid than he is. That’s why he keeps bothering me.”

“No,” says Albert, “he didn’t follow you into the house because he knows I’m not scared of him. Nor is Marie-Ange.”

It’s pitch-dark now. Tom’s face is greasy, he stirs about on his chair, jumping whenever the fire snaps or crackles.

Albert makes a new attempt: “La Verte certainly won’t come back as long as you’re scared of the wind.” That said, he pulls on his high boots, lacing them slowly, almost ritually, while Marie-Ange closes her eyes, feeling

Tom looking at her chest, slowing her breathing, aware the gentle motion of her bosom has a powerful effect under the man's burning gaze. She regrets not having sown the button of her blouse, which reveals white flesh right up to her cleavage. This takes Tom's breath away; the air he breathes makes noise in his nostrils. And the wine makes him dizzy; all he can think of is this very white flesh that, come to think of it, must be the tenderest of meats. Albert lights his pipe with a twig he stuck into the fire, then goes outside, throwing his brown jacket onto his shoulders.

Outside, the wind has turned into a fresh breeze. He walks among the tender birches and sumacs, which are unaffected by autumn. Lighthearted, he raises his arms to the sky, heavily pumping the moist air. He gets the urge to roll in the leaves and grass, to run towards the lake. He has a song on his lips:

There was an old Indian
All black and dirty
Ouich'ka!
With his old blanket
And tobacco pouch
Ouich'ka!
Oh! Oh! *tenaouich'tenaga!*

He takes his pipe from his mouth, to better keep singing his song:

Your friend is dead,
Dead and buried
Ouich'ka!
Four old Indians
Carry the corners of the blanket.
Ouich'ka!

He forgot the rest, to hell with it! But his pipe went out. Licked by the breeze, the few remaining birch leaves flutter. He hungers for those leaves but, in front of him, from a coppice blocking his view of the lake, he sees a naked woman walking towards him. One of those dazzling and dreamy women who make you lose your head when you're in their arms. Suddenly, she's on him and they roll around in the cool sand, losing themselves, finding themselves, again making gestures that bend the body like a beautiful

bow, delivering them from their past and all the rest. Closing his eyes, he then blows the breath of his youth inside her. The whole lake has risen inside him, carrying him away before receding, leaving him there, on the shore, but where's the body of that beautiful intimate ghost?

Suddenly, he hears a woman's screams! They seem to be coming from the house. Walking in, he sees Tom, yes, Crooked Leg, pressing Marie-Ange's back against his stomach with one hand, while trying to open her blouse with the other. She was twisting with anger and helplessness. Albert lunges at Tom, punching him in the face again and again. Blows rain down on Tom until he lets go of the woman, covering his face with his big dirty hands. But Albert continues to punch him mercilessly—although his hands are sore—and the more he finds Tom's face pitiful, the angrier he gets. Tom's lips look like a crushed prune, open and bleeding its juice. Marie-Ange cries abruptly, calming Albert down. He takes off his boots, and burps repeatedly. Extremely upset, she takes refuge in her bedroom, automatically rubbing her neck where Tom squeezed her too tightly. She waits for her husband to join her before getting undressed. His hands are shaking. Heavy with wine, he drops onto the bed like a dead weight.

Naïm Kattan

Translation by Antonio D'Alfonso

from Celebrations

Dear Maurice,

We've seen much of one another these past weeks, and yet I've got the impression that we scarcely spoke. I'm wondering if we actually know one another. Wait, let me say this in one breathe but using different terms: Who better than you could talk of my works and me? During the last couple of months you went out of your way with much effort and in every way possible to organize this party for my seventh birthday. I confess that last night upon my coming back home, I locked myself in my office and, most perfunctorily, pushed the idea of slipping into bed out of my mind. I needed to relive, or live, every moment of the evening.

How many touching testimonies, such moving memories and revelations, indeed revelations about my career, facets, and circumstances I had totally forgotten. I hate myself for not having seriously taken friendship and affection. Friends and colleagues gathered here are responsible for these generous exaggerations, these invented sentiments, and worse their lies, though they might have been loving. Please don't think that I'm ungrateful or humbled. Perhaps I'm the victim of professional biases. The methodologies utilized for our research end up being habits, and as an historian I have to study facts and question hasty affirmations, I have learned to doubt any conclusion that is positive. Today, I have come to consider the need to know myself as being worse than futile: it is a threat.

All of my life, I dare not call it professional, for this part of me was fundamental, throughout the years, while I spent my days and nights analyzing documents, I noticed forgetting who I was, removed from my emotions, so as to avoid falling into a trap where I have to choose one fact over another, thus betraying a prejudice, pulling out a text rather than another that would

confirm my hypothesis. Moreover, after having listened to men and women who, one after the other, spoke solely of my qualities, I took out a mirror and, no matter how deforming it was, I looked at myself.

Maurice, I must reiterate my thanks and heartfelt gratitude. For many years, we ran into one another in university corridors and other places. I was touched when recently I discovered the esteem you had for my works. I won't spend a second in believing that this admirable – to use your term – extended to my person. I won't use false modesty, but I do want you to know that though I distrust the merits you think I have, I doubt neither your friendship nor your sincerity for which I feel a profound gratitude.

It is not at all my intention here to rectify your appraisal of me. You could attribute my attitude to what you could call discretion or what our colleague Hamel called timidity. I feel it impertive to be the historian of my progress and clarify some facts, not because I had kept them hidden which up till now I felt no need to speak about them bet. Let me start with my birth. In your talk you barely brushed on the topic, it was as though my origins contained some unspeakable secret, at least in your mind was of secondary importance. I do admit that I never delved into these details too complicated to explain in a sentence. I always believed, perhaps wrongly, that such matters belonged to the private realm and so was of no one else's concern. Since last night, I've been doing some thinking. I was wrong not to mention the twists and turns of my life, even if reluctantly, or the least flaunt as possible. It is perhaps too late, yet there is an urgency for me to lay out the chronology of events so that one could understand how these unfolded, letting him distinguish the main poles I used when taking important decisions.

When you mentioned my birth, you used the adjective 'turbulent'. That put a smile on my lips. When I heard the adjective I twitched, yet upon reflection the term is pretty accurate. Born in Aleppo, my father grew up in its Jewish community, one of the oldest cities in Judaism. My mother, Turkish, was a descendant of the survivors during the Spanish Inquisition. She often boasted being Western which put her at a higher level than my father. My father, however, was not annoyed, nor insulted, and turned her origins into an honorable thing. Later, in a number of occasions, he would use it to his advantage. He would say, 'My wife belongs to an old European family.' And according to the situation he would as, 'from Spain' or 'from Turkey'.

Certificate mention Aleppo as my birthplace. People ask me if I've ever been back. I answer 'no' and do not talk of the political climate. I've never

longed to visit the city. You spoke of my Syrian origins. Technically this is true. But Syria sounds rather weird to my ears. I must have been seven or eight when my father took us down to Brazil. I grew up in the absurd megapolis called Sao Paulo, which I visited since every so often. Our family lived there in the tightly-knit Jewish community from Aleppo: millionaires, but there were also plebeians; winners as well as losers. My father belonged to the second clan. My parents, especially my mother, found it unbearable to live in the shadow of his wealthy cousins. These cousins were numerous, though what true family link they shared was far from obvious. But it was thanks to one of these families that we moved to Brooklyn.

From my point of view, those were busy years. I would not call them happy years, because my father had to work hard to hold on to his lifestyle. He was the owner of a small business, selling socks and nylons on Atlantic Avenue. In those days, it was a Jewish and Arabic district. My father no longer had to measure up to his rich cousins of Sao Paulo living in luxurious houses, with a dozen servants, going to fabulous parties held at the Jewish Club. His Brooklyn cousins were in the same boat as my father, and so my mother treated them condescendingly.

When I was seventeen, my parents send me to college first at Brandeis and then to Yale. I got to know Boston better than the streets of New York where I could wander about. Brooklyn was fortified castle but also our prison. My father worked long hours. When I grew up and no longer needed a caretaker my mother went to help my father. At first as a cashier and gradually got involved in the administration of the business.

She had the knack of attracting new clients and especially turning them into faithful buyers. With her mixture of Oriental charm and American efficiency. Thanks to her, the store prospered, and so I was able to study at university without financial worries. Scholarships, too, helped.

United in their love for their only son, my parents bickered but in no time patched things up with a hug. Unfortunately, I was undeniably the sole reason for their constant quarreling. My mother wanted me to become a doctor, the head of some laboratory, the director of an hospital and the winner of the Nobel Prize, and all at the same time. For my father I could have become the long-awaited jurist who would change the American constitution and the creator of the new world order. His country of adoption needed someone like me; Yale was the best place for aspiring lawyers. Speechless, I listened to my parents' Homeric projects: to find the cure for cancer or even lead the U.S.A. to the top of countries in the world when it came to legal

matters. My mother boasted about being a follower of Rambam, and my father, less conservative – we were after all Americans – of the Brandeis and Frankfurter groups. In truth, he went all the way to Moses, but never could pronounce the name.

I was more cautious and found any excuse to walk out on their endless arguments. I needed to leave and breathe. Despite their infinite love for me, they never bothered to ask me what I thought. Is it unavoidable here to add that I loved my parents dearly though I could not stand being near them? Once away, I grew closer to them. Thanks to distance, I learned how to love them for who they were. But I am stepping ahead of myself.

A Yale friend had visited Middlebury while I was graduating from Brandeis. Studying political science, this friend had brought students to Montreal in order to analyze a kind of government that was different from the U.S. government. During their trip, my friend met a young woman from Quebec. They fixed a date to meet in Stowe during the ski season and ended spending the summer months up in the Laurentians. His love of Canada fused with his love for Gisèle who would become his wife. He spoke of Canada without end, so much so he sparked curiosity in me for the place. I finally traveled with him to Montreal, where I found, I think, my way to reconcile myself with my parents. Neither medicine, nor Law. History. What a deception. ‘What will you do tomorrow?’ Teach? Write! With time my parents got used to the idea, and told their friends who would listen that their son would become a university professor.

Now that I was living in Montreal, I would travel down during holidays and from time to time on weekends. Meeting my parents gradually turned into celebrations. With study and other activities distancing me from my parents I joyfully hugged them.

I have used to word ‘history’ but what do I mean by history? My father believed the most important history book was the Bible. My mother, in agreement with him, nourished the remarkable wish that I would become a major historian in her new homeland, the U.S.A. Without particular attachment to Canada, except moral gratitude, I was able to delve with intellectual detachment into its history about which few scholars knew.

After completing a Masters degree on the Ottoman Empire, I enrolled into the Doctorate program at Rochester on French Canada under the supervision of mentor and friend Mason Wade. The rest you know. You evoked it all finely in your talk, and despite the praise and, if I dare say, admiration about which I won’t complain, I don’t believe I deserve any of this.

I don't have any regrets, except for my mother who passed away from cancer twenty years ago. It dawns on me that perhaps she had secretly foreseen her death and wished me to find a cure that would spare humanity of this plague. Years later, conversing with my father, now a prisoner of Alzheimer in an institution, I have come to reconcile myself with my choices, telling myself that history was my way of keeping memory alive.

One last thing before I go. You spoke of my life garnished with success. That was a kind compliment even though I never think of such things. In fact, I don't understand what success means. No doubt in private I hoped that some young student – at my age all students are young – would analyze my works. In this field, success, including the one attributed to me, is ephemeral, like life. Many have a tendency of transforming success into an idol, but, as all idols, it is a symbol of death. No way do I wish to leave you with the impression that these are the utterances of a bitter, old man.

I'm glad that you only brushed over my personal life, my family. Had you decided to plunge into such matters you would have had to use all your imagination to speak of success. If I had been a young man, I would have had to revert to religious ideas. I would have asked the following question: 'Did I use all the talent God has given me to help others?' Strangely enough, contrarily to what happens to the elderly, I have become less religious. Questions that I ask myself would need to be asked from a different angle. Have I lived a full life? Totally every single day? During every hour of my life? Once my daughter – she decided to be inconspicuous last night, did you see her in the audience? – sent me a quote from a writer: 'The life of a man should be measured by the joy he offered others.' In my mind, I have had to be humbler, less ambitious. How many times have I avoided causing pain in people around me?

Trust me, this is not false modesty. Life did not teach me much about happiness. At most, it pointed the way to the path on which I could avoid causing pain to others as well as to myself. On this point, I can say that life has not been failure. Wounds take forever to heal, even those that are not visible. But that is another dimension of my life. I believe it is best to keep that under cover. I won't speak a word to you about it.

The idea of this birthday party, I owe it to you. I might have poorly expressed my full gratitude. I'm profoundly touched by your friendship. It is never easy to express such an emotion with words. A simple gesture, in appearance easily performed, is certainly more eloquent than any word expressed. Yours are totally tangible. Thank you one more time. From the

heart, René.

* * *

I am rereading this letter. What should I have concealed. Is what we say of our own childhood untrue, just as what one might say of his parents? Like others, Maurice would have known where I was born and the jobs held by my parents. There, my city of birth. What else can I bring out in the open? Sure, the narrow and busy streets with the fragrance of bananas and the stench of fish and urine. Our house with its long hallways and roof, the winter sun, the garden. Fragments that with the passing of years have dissipated like vain dreams resisted.

My father would evoke this city only to recall the wealth lost and nobility preserved – which encouraged my mother back to her origins. Did she feel ashamed or was she simply indifferent when she approached the future as promises dwindled away? She lived hoping that the family would become wish, respected, and a son whose goals would all be attained. Sao Paulo surfaced in my mind with its unforgettable scenes of misery. Had we really experienced such moments?

I did not care to know the truth. Images of a landscapes on fire keep flashing like setting that haunt me every day, creating barriers to any sense of indifference.

My father was behind the times when it came to his enlarged family's successes and wealth. He was running about day in day out, never pausing, breathless, tired, the sad eyes of a man stayed on course, forgotten by choice, never once felt the right to complain. All that he was permitted to do was to cling to dreams his wife would repopulate with fresh images. Yes, according to the people who knew them, my parents got along very well, united as they walked up the path of will power. But I knew within that my parents were taking on separate roads that never crossed. In Aleppo, they were constantly arguing, and did not worry if their yelling would awaken the neighbors. Then again we ourselves did not hear the screaming because we were drowning in it.

In Brazil, we were foreigners, more in our relatives' eyes blinded by maids and jewelry than in the eyes of natives. My parents kept their mouths shut struck by some form mutism. They even stopped saying they were Jew-

ish. I recall the bar mitzvah of a distant cousin held at the Jewish Club. For my mother, it was like stepping into a world unknown to her. Swimming pools, tennis classes, restaurants, a secluded cage into which one entered with a special invitation. Were we just visiting intruders who forced shut doors, breaking and entering?

Clearly we were strangers. I do not remember if mine was a happy childhood, I do not believe ever having a childhood per se. In Aleppo as soon as I was able to read and write Arabic it was like opening a different book. My father insisted that I recite the Kaddish in Hebrew: 'I want you to recite it at my wake.' He made me promise. Yes, Dad. I kept the promise. For a number of years before walking out of religion, as one leaves a house or a city. I would come back to it periodically, regretfully as though I were trespassing. Other times, I was obeying the Law as by rote, a reminder of fidelity – this is what I qualified it perhaps wrongly. By being taciturn my parents were able to bury everything in silence. They no longer fought. What was the us – it made no sense like life itself. Without setting eyes on me, they discussed my future, as though it did not concern me at all. They loved me, no doubt. I refrain from being comfortably ungrateful. The slightest cough would keep my mother awake, and my father would drive kilometers for a book for me. They covered me with words, wrapping me with advice. In their eyes, I was handsome, intelligent, strong-willed, obstinate, possessing every quality to reach summits of grandeur. As soon as I got to know a city inside out, its alleys and dead-ends, they would announce that we were moving again. Aleppo, Sao Paulo, Brooklyn, hope waiting for them at the start. But quickly words here before resurfaced, the same tiresome gathering of our belongings. Down on the street below, there was misery. I became of age to recognize emptiness, playing no longer seems feasible, and boredom dropped on me like cloak.

I have walked through many cities which I was unable to appreciate. During various events and rites I was a spectator, assisting and not understanding. Between Aleppo and Sao Paulo the shift was so great that as a child I did not grasp their differences. These were even greater in Brooklyn. Was I finally becoming aware of these dissimilarities because I had reached the age of reason? Or were the similarities between Sao Paulo and New York so many that I did not where they differed? A maelstrom was sucking me, preventing me to think straight. Each one of my reactions, even though I was not complaining or shutting down, was met by my mother's words: 'This is how it is here. So be it.' These sentences acted as a guideline, a rule

of conduct. Who were we to question our fate? Were we to rebuild New York city according to the image we had of Aleppo we had willingly left behind? I did not have the energy to blame my parents for having deracinated me from our world? Instinctively I chose to look ahead, chose the future, action, grabbing hold of my existence. This is how I lost the power to pour the blame on people or to feel guilty for being condemned to run away and for the next day.

Had I intentionally buried away my childhood and teenage years, and then negate them completely for having lived through them? The confusion. I was born in a city I will never get to know. So be it. Wished for. Chosen. Convincing myself that the path would never lead me back, I have swept it aside and erase it totally. It does not exist anymore the city has flown away, bound for another city faded like a dream. I am living in America where everything is possible, what can be, all permissible. Should I blame my parents for having stolen history from me? Simple persons who would not stop yelling, their hands moving, protesting that they have done everything they could to built a fortune for me, my happiness. I most probably did not answer their call, did not live up to their expectations.

A friend went on a trip, crossing the long and invisible border, and falls in love with a woman, a different kind of person in a different country. Where that friend is I do not know, I cannot even remember his facial features. As for the woman? Much like the women from Queen or Long Island, she no longer hoped to run into a prince charming, and prayed to meet a good working fellow who can offer them a house and some jewelry. She crossed over the invisible border of illusions and moved abroad to her adopted country. A most trivial matter. Canada so dear to me, I had to invent it. In those days I did not believe in difference for I had never noticed any. This land which became my life, I had to invent it from the bottom up. As for encouragement and excuse, I applied myself to elucidate documents of a past that was not mine, to which I did not belong, and which I could approach with total detachment. Indeed. Everybody says it, claiming that I am a serious researcher and, as is expected, a respectable one at that. What deception! Inventing history while erasing one's memory. Who cares if memory is torn to pieces, its fragments floating within, without connections, and made up of separations and desire as deliberate as they might be, growing along the way with pain, buried in forgetfulness and unexpressed suffering.

What then? Others have walked a similar path, trying to unearth the

traces that lead to the past, hoping to avoid confusion. These did not worry about failing, they never looked back with embarrassment. But who are these others? I do not even recall the student friend with whom I had come to this country. I was no fugitive. No one was hunting me down. I was following the example set by my mother, I kept my eyes set ahead of me, looking forward. There was nothing behind me. I was born again continuously. Did I want to live? Resign? Surrender to death?

For the Jewish holidays – Passover, Yom Kippour, Sukkot – my cook the meal and set the table the way her mother had done before her. She would not ask why my father went along with it, his eyes lowered to the floor. It was a holiday. Which one? Others celebrated their holidays too. But in their eyes it was we who were the foreigners. In each city we lived in, we would stick together without glancing at some foreign calendar. We did not think about what the others thought. Why did we have to celebrate some obscure feast? Every house, every street, every store front that lay buried somewhere would suddenly rise up from the darkness, surface, greeting the world. I quickly drop a shroud, and mask them.

Throughout the years, I used my studies to protect myself of the ghosts that haunted me. Today, I celebrated as an ancestor, a man who is grateful to the many who have raised me on a pedestal.

I pause, no time to be calm. There is this hurting in me brought about by the inconspicuous loss I wished to cover up. I did not have a childhood. I never was a teenager. My ears are ringing, heat reddens my face. No one can hide his life with impunity. If one does not deal with his childhood, if one does not question it, expect adulthood to be set ablaze. We wander through ensuing years without looking at them pass by, and become shadows. The man you celebrated is a surrogate, a supporting actor, without a past, without a present. A snoop who grazes the surface of events. I study and classify lives, condense them in numbers. I know every detail, as insignificant as it might be. Not only have I chosen history to escape time, pretending to dig deeply, I have worked arduously at finding something sure behind which to hide my detachment. I chose to analyze without bias or expectation the history of a country I scarcely knew. I had one wish and that was to hit the road.

Coming from nowhere, I looked forward, carried by chance or, as I used to say ironically, I was following my fate, that imperious, superior, and futile force. I claimed that I did not believe in revelation, did not believe in no gods. Has I become the slave of archives, the servant of documents?

Later, whenever researchers questioned me about my religion, I would answer that I preferred not to have one, or not to show it so that I could maintain my freedom and the rigor necessary to analyze documents. At first, those who did come out as Catholics and, in the case of the few Anglophones I frequented, their particular Protestant denomination would brutally bombard me with their queries. I would bounce back playing the role of the victim trampled by conscience and privacy. Jews concluded that I was ashamed of being a Jew or had secretly converted to Christianity, and so avoided me altogether. Christians left me to my fuzziness.

University work and research were convenient scapegoats. We swam together in the waters of objectivity and impartiality. Immigrants and the children of immigrants wondered: 'How did you make it?' Followed their stories. Ostracization, rejection, the silent treatment, invisibility, a blend of fear, indifference, suspicion, and irritation. 'We're not welcomed here,' they said confiding in me as to a brother or an accomplice of misfortune. 'How did you dodge hostility and animosity? What had you to do to be accepted and celebrated?' All I wanted to reply was by asking them: 'How did you do it? You celebrate your love of this country and applaud the warmth of its population.'

Do we possess a double idiom? I think not. These people truly loved this country. They blessed it and required no other. And yet there was so much resentment building up in them. So much suppressed anger, cruel deception, and broken dreams. It is too easy to blame a country, a city, a people for our own failings, faults, and misfortune. When we do blame them we are in fact tossing aside our responsibilities for the unfolding and progress of our destiny.

What about me in all of this? I have flown across and barely brushed against resistance, rejection, and dismissal. I did not come to this country with the hands of a beggar. Traveler without luggage, I was appropriating the history and past that were not mine. What better manner to flatter and reassure my hosts? In spite of myths riddled with prejudice, I will not repeat that your history is boring, though it might appear as lacking heroes and warfare to the passing spectator. On the other hand, it is filled with passion. Is this not the best proof that a foreigner's choices will bring him multiple births? I take nothing away from anyone. I give. Generosity! A man who moves out of New York, leaving continents behind, countries, memories, and who ends up here, opening himself to the unexpected, embracing all, welcoming the new and unknown memories.

I was, of course, received with suspiciousness, fear, uncertainty, but I turned my eyes from all of that. That sort of stuff had nothing to do with me, especially when these were combined with concealed criticism and rumors. I was already elsewhere. My world belonged to me, and no one would take that away from me. I could jump over any obstacle presented before me, I glided right over them, grazing them at best, making sure I had my feet on the ground, that I was not losing myself in a sky of illusion, a lost paradise, making sure I was sound and safe in a different memory bank, a history that I was inventing step by step. I drifted away intentionally, avoiding traps, pit holes, and walls. Doors in front of me opened wide. Doors I could not see, or simply did not exist.

I was not being purposely duplicitous, lucidly calculating, even if I was unaware of being so. I swept my variable and multiple pasts aside. I needed to find myself away from any past. So what a marvel it was when I was able to delve into a new history. Was this also a trap? I rejected such an idea even if traps presented themselves before me. Instead of avoiding them, I chose to walk on the edge on any abyss and over obstacles. Since I was soaring above it all, I was safe when I looked down from my refuge in the sky.

Michel Albert

Translation by Donald Winkler

from New Shoes on Scorched Earth

My father who is in heaven...

New shoes on the parquet
shined to the nines
strike and resound
like a military march
I'm on my way to one last viewing
in my school uniform, short hair
my lessons learned by heart
in his bed eyes closed
under an oxygen mask
my sister holds his hand
strokes his brow
his thin hair whitened
by radiation
he fights for breath between two worlds
a great aunt I don't know
intones an Our Father
he's leaving us
I no longer know the words
I mumble along politely
feel sad and free

A cigarette at my toe tips
adrift at the end of the corridor
near the coffee machine
my shoes pinch
no sugar please!
hands come near
faces present themselves
reappear
override the body
great uncle little cousin
I'm not really there
scorched earth

A simple orderly mass
the sermon the collection
the priest sets the pace
stand, sit
kneel, stand, sit
a marriage waits in the wings
my shoes are fitting better
my father already cremated
with no advance notice
in the centre aisle
the family divided
pending the next death
his cap and a photo circled by flowers
the will arrives in the mail
a carbon copy
no mention of the children

Would you like some of the ashes?
I'm asked between two sandwiches at the reception
a consolation prize
thank you for the thought
I suggest the top of a lovely hill
but the mantelpiece gets the nod
it's like an elegant hunting trophy
a first-class shrine
for cold winter days
I harbour the memory of a man
that's already heavy to bear.

You start thinking then everything eludes you
why hoard the ashes
or even pay them visits
today at the bank a teller
she asked me to sign a book
then three more tellers
my cheque on hold for three days
I was touched by this encounter
it's not often that a poet
is read by four tellers

A big joint in the ashtray
when's the next exit
time passes more slowly
when blindsided by laughter on the radio
you reach for your beer
on top of the dashboard
as the plains sleep on.

Running full out in the centre aisle
the nurses' aides on my tail
oxygen tanks slung over their shoulders
I seek the freedom of nothingness
like a fox knowing the pack is near
and the hunting horns blaring in unison
I head for the river
try my luck on the other side

Alone in his progress
the man moves on slowly
then forges ahead
to dissolve in the distance
another will take his place
then another
like an endless line
shot at close range
an ad on the TV news
his body is here
a small pool of blood
there'll be a store at the next exit
a trite tale
nothing in sand is conserved

Robert Giroux

Translation by Antonio D'Alfonso

from Toward the Rising Sun

Mediterraneans (*excerpt*)

What is the use of speaking
and making hand-over-mouth statements
against one's will by brandishing
fist raised
scaring the pants off of us
writing and saying nothing
as if it all were coming from elsewhere

In other words
the screens screen words
doubt persists

What is the use
the answer borrows paths line after line
you feel how the answer crosses over
the humble question

Eastern Landscape

White snowflakes and swirling of supple women
draped with Turkish lace gowns
against green meadow bloated with rain
vast flatlands and dark green
young trees in bloom
in the distance
seem like dandelion froth or
fragile felt of frost
as clear as glass

Wax window
apparition for self only
tell yourself that I shan't say much more
the wind dragged resine odours if...
I raised my hand
the women slid down to the river
vanishing
white snowflakes and swirling

Is Albania trembling yet?

Earthquake in Kator

Majestic grey mountains continue to haunt
the edgeless shoreline
bloated contorting
the outcry more dangerous
than the convoluted roads and
the bridge like an endless sidewalk with clumsily unbound flowers
leaking roofs broken windowpanes leprous walls uninhabited homes
shaking from the rooftops to the ground
hell hiccups its spasmodic seizures
vomiting sulfur and feral dogs
running
rats

Untrue tranquility flattened by fatal tides
silent trepidation of important solemn men
women wrapped in black
children watching and the elderly concentrated
lend a hand to one another
they have generous bushy mustaches
trailer tents kaki tents
rainstorm of words on us eyes
light up with sunlight and sea breeze
mourning follows the white barren rage
who to blame...
no one knows where tears flow to
no one knows which saint to pray to
his wounds
wordlessness

Voltaire's sarcastic wink
Tito's grim wink
before the storm will swallow everything
side-splitting mockery for being a slave to power
chance unpredictable and obscure

Kator
It was the time before the spring blossoms
the golden broom and the bindweed rose
when every fruit blooms and wine already spoiled
is shared

Sarajevo

And what if

The right hand is wet
or the voice giggles
against the frost white
on windows
women
are bent forward
white touch of blue night
unbelievably tall
as if without a history

And what if
the ancient history of language and signs
are riddled with words

Then out of nowhere
a fugue furious and disguised
that one must yell, fight, get turned on
watchwords are spat out of language
such senseless wastage blinds
such dispossession
such a degrading escape
bitterness crossed through

The Burden of Time

Crete is a lyrical lie
unchanged without digression
snow-capped mountains and sand mules
a surrendering of white and blue valleys
where goats smile mischievously
misery wears a purple veil
the quick of stone on soil
like a snare
sterile toil
beneath the vain roaster's stubble
and the black of silent women
cypress statues in the olive groves
shadows meditating whispering
serenity

Ageless mythology
molded rock legends
lace labyrinth language
Nato's shadow
black gold iron onto sand
weird radars
buses are surrounded by beggars
bazar chrome
folklore nickel neon
among concrete hotels bustling
with cicadas
in broad daylight famous ruins trampled on
alibi time's ferryman designated
staggering or drunk with salt and sun
no use for / no profit from rambling
wrinkles around eyes dinosaur hand

Let's go then to Italy
there
the honey from the stones of Crete
buzzes in the palm of our hands
and tumbles over the taciturn white minarets
in the proud ancient homes
of Venice

Italy's Body Language

The marriage blue gold tingles me with emotion
I've surely said this before
the blue of golden mosaics in Ravenna
you must see them!
or else
the continuous rebirthing so Italian
the white archways leading to eternity
the pink marble of lions watch over the gates of silence
melting under the tireless caresses of time
the tiles are buffed by shoes
coming and going
today of lazy voyeurs
Political power molded in stone
temple cult icon square
for the communion of people gathered
at the church square
power of symbols of landowners and weed
carved stone
the hardened language of time was made to last
But let's be serious
Beside our fascination for people
we much prefer the rising hour of summer
to all these lies
let's hum 'O Sole Mio'
to ourselves

Bernard Pozier

Translation by Antonio D'Alfonso

from We Are What We Love

The Diary of Agony (*excerpt*)

1

I stare at the picture-wake of a sailboat slowly floating away into the distance, and then closer and closer into my horizon, against my will, my love is sinking, like the boat in Émile Nelligan's poem.

I'm unable to hold you near me, even against your wish, you drift away, escaping from yourself.

You will not grow old, and we will not sit together as an ageing couple.

*right from the start of the journey
ineluctable becoming
the end sneaks in*

*pulling the sail tautly
we get ready to go*

*looking into the horizon
already sliding beyond
we rise our eyes
in anticipation
no longer able to see a thing*

It began like in Boris Vian's *The Foam of Days*; illness blossomed in your chest, but soon sickness hauled out its credentials of horror, setting in motion the litany vocabulary of terrorism and the entire arsenal of appropriation.

Every single thing charged against your body, as you learned how life can be the dirt that nibbles at your gut, literally, metaphorically.

At the time, however, we considered it all harmless, we knew nothing about it, not even if something else might exist within.

*at end's wit
always
a mirage in the long-awaited oasis
we notice there the outline of a sanctuary
the authentic failure of any pilgrimage*

*yet
all that counted was
the landscape
the journey
the walking*

3

Despair in the non-realization, we stepped into the maze of a nightmare, a calvary, hell, and hour after hour, attachment, detachment.

Suddenly it was not blood but time that rushed in your veins.

You began to discuss your own death with serenity.

*from the initial phase
up to the last
air eventually became scarce
like the second
on the thread in a needle
on the time of flesh
deliberately
we scoffed at*

4

I feel ashamed as I walk now, because you can't, you who used to walk everywhere.

I climb the staircase, carrying the weight of knowing that you will never again climb a single stair.

I stare at men and women who walk about unaware that they will have the privilege of seeing, reading, writing, walking, living, and loving.

In the extreme paleness of objects, I often forget what a mortal being I am.

*one step at a time
a simple gait
thoughtlessly
like breathing
toward the infinite
unknowingly
the impossible future
of actions
quotidian
irrelevant
essential
ephemeral*

When you notice her progressively deteriorate, your fingers are unable to find the right page, signs no longer concord with your wishes, a letter will not fit its form, and then you understand that writing is the organized seismograph of the body and soul.

My hand on yours, one more time, we trace your initials.

*in the lines of the palms of our hands
what have we written
heartline
headline
lifeline
palm on palm
day on day
night on night*

*one inside the other
bit by bit
vanishing*

6

We had to burn this illness that ate you.

They pour into the tiny purple marble urn the little that remains
of you, and then cement your name down.

A surname, a given name, two dates.

I reread your name, but you were no longer there.

*my heart
is a black hole
the ridge of which you consume
as you wait
for the day
yours
there is
once again
nothing left*

7

When I was a child I used to spend some time in a boarding house, in others words: away from my home, locked in a stranger's home.

Now that I am no longer a child, I still feel like a boarder, but in as opposite situation. From now on I will become the prisoner of solitude in my own home.

I used know to be two with you.

*not to forget
not to deny
not to betray
and yet
we have to reinvent
life
a little more
every second*

how

Why this illness, this suffering, this death? Why you? Why us?

Is there something on the other side of life?

Flowers are in bloom; the sky is blue; the sun shines innocently;
should I now say that none of this is for you? You are no more.

How can a person abruptly turn into a thing? Literally change
into an inanimate object?

Where does breath go? The soul? Consciousness? Whatever it is
that animates us? The process of thought?

Maybe you know if something exists afterward. Or are you like
we living beings who unaware of it?

*hold on to everything
in spite of the absurdity
that never stops its work
this and nothing
this absence to selfhood
frightening
this unexplained of nothingness
in us
and we must continue to be*

Paul Chamberland

Translation by Antonio D'Alfonso

from The Intimate Frailty of Mortals (excerpt)

I

Wheat perhaps,
roots, reddish outstretch of roots on a twig
branching out to the golden corn ear
erect under the solar euphoria.

There is fish, water.
Water too, yes,
when the Earth was alive...

We are fragile if we turn out to be poets:
we soon find ourselves standing against our limits
not too wisely.

Holding ourselves responsible for this or claiming to be so
is laughable, ridiculous too.
A poem seems to be random writing.

In ruins yet crystal-clear,
such might be the single word of poetry
when the Earth faces its end.
Will it be so?

Before all vanishes we will need time
to put a name on everything, as we did at the beginning,
in the Garden of Eden.
But naming is possible only if we use silence that cannot lie.
And such might be the Poem.
And such might be the Earth.

A face moved by pity
glimpsed through the leaves of trees,
through the blaze from weapons.
The raucous groan of hunger,
the breath noxious – for everyone in this world.

A face radiant with tears.
Buddha is walking amid the dead,
his robe rustles
as he announces it is time to wake up.

We are looking for solutions,
but we have no idea how to bring this about.

The Earth trembles, bricked in its voicelessness.
The Earth? ... What are we thinking of?
The pink recess of the mouths of the young,
is like the Earth.

This is where the intimacy hides,
and melts into the common whisper of the living,
this is where hides the Earth.
We are unable to sever the Earth from us.
We are unable to.
If we do, we will no longer be human beings.

In the end what there is to understand
is little, and boundless.
Ancient words are heard,
those of the apostle:
without love,
I am no one.

As subdued as a smile
under the tears,
inheriting an entire landscape,
without changing a thing in it,
as peaceful as discretion,
as joyful as a face
rising about the crowd.

The leaves of trees have no idea what they are doing.
Wood knows only wood.
The human, he, sounds falsely.
He imagines he is crafty enough to detune
the tuning machine of the universe.

Trees and birds can't do a thing about it.
The lack of power is synonymous to
sanctioning absence.
Tied down to his contortions,
the master and creator of nature
drudges at his seclusion.

But how, accountable for his actions,
does he become one with justice?

The hare pricks up its ears hearing footsteps.
Gaias overcoat rises and falls.
Venus's liquid glistens with the evening's golden softness.

In Sarajevo, a sniper guns down a child.
The blood is cold dew on the cracks of the city,
wished-for libation... What does evil taste like?

The moon floats, exuding the rarest of milk.

I worm my way into the fluff of a wing.
I throw myself against sapwood, sweetness, corn salad.
I give into the vortex rising from my guts, I vaginate myself
outside and offer myself mucous membrane (beauty of starlight).

In the wing night a thousand suns beat and vest its heat on me.
With all its limbs the framework of animal screams works hand
 in hand with me,
multiplying my trajectories.
Here I am shattered comet,
frozen status,
rebellion in ruins,
rushing into the jaws of space.

Mouths replete with earth,
thousands of dead bodies scooped into graves,
summer of 1994 in Goma, Africa.
Screaming by stratum, generation
after generation of the dead piled one
on top of the other.

The living get distracted and forget
the whys and hows
of what others can do to their fellow humans.
With Hiroshima and Auschwitz we created,
it seems, white legends –
incomprehensible to our contemporaries
for whom the massacres in Bosnia
are comparable to the sacrifices of the Aztecs
lost in the unreachable recesses of destiny.

The intimate frailty of mortals,
savage and stolen warmth,
staggering into breath,
palms, cheeks, sole of feet:
huddling up of guts like a foetus
in the organic night – at the tiniest of alerts,
the human beast strikes back, must lie low.

On every side hostility
activates the uproar of the masses,
parade. There, the panache
of warriors, rituals of rage,
training of troops:
species, divided, confined,
one clan after another, exoskeletons
tied to gods. But the entire empire
sooner or later turns back
to its forgotten and looted origins:
marrow of victims.

Lori Saint-Martin

Translation by Peter McCambridge

from The Closed Door (excerpt)

CATHERINE

It might all blow up in my face if I open this door.

Turn the key in the ignition and a car explodes into a fireball.

Pull the trigger and a life shatters into blood and fragments.

Push a button at rush hour and a subway train explodes.

Flames, screams. And here I am, alone in the doorway, a bunch of keys in my hand, my eyes glued to the handle.

For just a touch over thirty-four years I've been living with Bluebeard. Thirty-four and counting (sometimes I count the days). He's not so bad, deep down. I'm still alive, after all: look, I can smile, I can walk. He hasn't slit my throat despite the indelible scarlet stain on the shiny key. He loves me, he sleeps beside me, he is even faithful to me in his own way. But this is his castle. Here is the door to his studio, out of bounds. I've spent my life on the wrong side of closed doors, him inside with another woman.

PHILIPPE

The here and now does not exist: we are always the slightest bit out of step with others, the fraction of eternity that light takes to travel between the desired object or the loved one and ourselves. We think we talk to each other, touch each other, but it's just an illusion. Even with the most beloved of all, our wife. Here she is, sitting at the table, buttering her bread. She brings her cup to her lips, looks up at me with her wrinkled, touching face, or her wrinkled, depressing face, depending on the day, and, paper in hand, comments with irony or indignation on the news, but in her head, she might be elsewhere: indifferent, hostile, or simply distracted. Tender absentees, that's what we have become after all these years. We have found peace, or the pretence of it.

Lips move, sound follows, a shade too late. Is the old face that looks back at me in the mirror telling the truth? Do my paintings speak of the world or, as always, of my retreat within? Of my little ways, transferred to canvas? A handful of obsessions: is that what an artist's style really is?

We're all alone, at the beginning and at the end. But I can only be content alone with her.

CATHERINE

And it's happening again, this time, like all the other times. It had been a while, though. I had almost forgotten. I had been able to work, as I always can whenever he's painting something else.

The machine is well oiled, implacable. For days on end he has been locked up in his studio with that young woman. She comes and goes according to Philippe's mood and how his work is coming along. I, of course, have been banished. As though I don't know what's brewing behind the door. He needs me to know. That's our pact, our ritual, but I must not see a thing. Or show that I've seen. Every time it's the same game, with them inching closer together, moving towards the same outcome. Some day soon, ashamed and proud, he'll come tell me everything.

Here's the worst of it: I have the key to the studio. I hold all the keys, and I always have. If I've stayed outside, it's also because I'm a coward, afraid to see. He always shuts himself away, even when he is alone. I must always be able to go in there; I must never go in there. That's how an old marriage is: a series of moves that are never made. A long hallway of closed doors.

The images are precise, piercing. I brush them away with my hand, but they soon come back buzzing around me. Even when I am in my own little studio, at the other end of the house. Far from their little games, I am no closer to myself. Brushes, canvas, colours like flashes of life: sometimes I do manage to forget. But not as much as he forgets me.

PHILIPPE

They are naked; I am fully clothed. Standing before them, I am their doctor and their psychoanalyst rolled into one. Their naked bodies reveal their secrets, their shadows. A glove turned inside out, a belly sliced open by a blade, and all is revealed, exposed to my eye. My hand holds firm; I have no fear of blood. At least, not of other people's. My mother wanted me to be a surgeon; my father, a judge, in his image. Both have had their way.

My odd little ways have become famous; my models know I require them to be docile. They adopt the pose I have chosen, the expression I order them to wear. Their youthfulness and sparkle, offered up to me alone. Pliable, obedient bodies.

I grow old; they stay young. I savour their blend of arrogance—the great man chose *me*—and fear. As soon as they begin to pose, they are dispossessed. They show off, naturally. Their look says: you want me, but you can't have me. I will have this one, just as I had the others. I've had them all, naked before me, more mine like this than they ever will be in my arms. I can almost touch their fear of not being beautiful on the canvas, of being unmasked.

It is too warm in the studio; the air crackles. Between this young woman's body and my hand, a desire forms. I tremble with contained longing. I refuse to take a single step toward her. Out of this tension, the painting is born.

This one suddenly lifts her head and meets my gaze. Naughty, naughty. Her eyes the colour of bracken, her skin where freckles come to dance. And above all, the assurance of just being there, in her body. Her smell of mud and flowers. That unwavering look.

I think of Élise, suddenly, when for years her memory had almost let me be. The shock of bright red hair, the delicate skin. And a great wave of tiredness washes over me. What if I have awakened a sleeping dog that's going to jump for my throat?

CATHERINE

Before the money, before the glory, we chose each other. I was fleeing my grey childhood, becoming someone else. Philippe had his immense talent and, towering over him, the even more immense shadow of his father. He had broken off all contact, as had I, and was living in just as much poverty. It was later that he—that we—became rich, to our great shame. And we painted. He always did, I did at times, even though every day without colour seemed to me to be a wasted day. And there were, for both of us—but particularly for him—exhibitions, museums, books about us, documentaries, everything we had dreamt of. Three daughters. They are young women already, like the ones he paints. Summers, trips, vernissages. Time slipped past us quietly, without too many accidents, at least on the face of it. But perhaps that's what having a successful marriage is: filling in the cracks, grinning from ear to ear with one finger in the dike. Picking up all that broken glass without losing a hand.

PHILIPPE

Afterward, I never had to tell them it was over. For me, nothing had begun. Some of them would get ideas and try to cling on. One or two, more brazen or more desperate, threatened to tell Catherine everything. Shall we go together then? Some of them took me at my word.

I learned to control myself until the painting was finished. Before, desire knows no bounds; expectation fills the room with electricity. They crackle and quiver. The brush traces the shape of their breasts, the inside of their thighs. I can tell by their dreamy eyes, their relaxed hands, that they enjoy being naked in front of me, waiting for my touch.

I always choose models of the same age, ever further from my own. But my fame has grown, and their desire, too, despite the ravages of time. My nasty reputation does not keep them away; each thinks she will be the one to win me over.

Their skin resists and gets in my way. I want more: muscles, entrails, the underground babble of blood. I flay them alive, rip my way in. Further, further. Life is a screen, a membrane to be punctured. The truth is beyond, behind. I fuck them to death, I paint them to death. Since thou shalt not kill, I paint.

They believe, the poor darlings, that I'm granting them immortality. They are nothing, mere shapes to be captured, objects like an empty room or a chain-link fence.

What I love are the images I take from them.

CATHERINE

Clarisse rushes in, dressed in magnolia: her new love is taking her on a trip!

And I can see her, not so long ago, her face crumpled, her beauty gone: her husband left her one night in November, the night he came back from a business trip. Standing in the doorway, he said: I wasn't alone. I'm leaving with her. I'll send for my things. He turned and stepped back into the taxi that, she suddenly saw, was waiting for him at the corner.

A long marriage, what she had thought to be a true meeting of souls: gone in a flash. The scene is as old as the world itself, but the pain that shoots up is all new, all red. He smiled, pleased with himself, a scarf she had never seen before tied preciously around his neck. A gift, no doubt. She could have strangled him with it.

He turned off his phone, his office pleaded ignorance the next day, and Clarisse stayed in bed for weeks. I brought her soup, made her eat while I watched. Six months without so much as touching a paintbrush, six months of barely leaving the house. Then one day she began to paint huge withered tulips. Very realistic, heartbreaking really. She had grown a little plump (her husband liked slim women like the one she had once been), but then she faded away to nothing. At a touch over fifty, she had looked thirty-five, and then the pain turned her into an old woman. Little by little, her glow came back and here she is, ready to fly away with her new man.

They are taking things a little too fast, but Clarisse needs to be swept off her feet. I open a bottle of sparkling wine, bring out the nuts, the olives, the cheese sticks I made for the curator who is coming to see Philippe—I'll have to find something else for her—and we sit in the living room in the intimate circle of a single lamp. Toasts, laughter, Philippe comes in and she tells the whole story all over again. They're going to Rome! They're going to Venice! They're leaving in two weeks!

Philippe and I don't look at each other, but I can tell what he's thinking: she's a little bit kooky, Clarisse, but we love her. I can also see, behind his smile, an old shadow. Just as he leaps to his feet and loudly kisses Clarisse on the cheeks, raising his glass theatrically, Élise is there. He's thinking of

her; I wonder if he ever stopped thinking of her. I also know he can tell I'm thinking of her, and he's thoughtful enough, though it's also to avoid a pointless scene—for Philippe, all scenes are pointless, apart from his own—not to stir up these old, these very old, ashes. Instead, he goes off in search of another bottle and we talk Clarisse into staying for dinner. Three can be a very stable figure, after all. And a husband and wife should never tell each other absolutely everything.

Patrice Desbiens

from The Art of Disappearing

The Age of Tender Love Songs

The age of tender love songs
is gone

A tear has coagulated under
the skin

Mirrors break
reflecting the
perfection of madness

I am a Stranger Superimposed

I am a stranger superimposed
on flowered curtains

This pen is noisy
scratching like an old
Ink Spots record

I am a dead baby under
hamburger skies

The smokers breathe
thru me

I forgot one of my legs
on the bus
oh

I came here
I am here now
and remain faithfully
but

the poem goes on

The Road to Panic

The road to panic
is so
well-oiled

The priest arrives
in a police car
to administer the
last sacraments

He speaks like
Elmer Fudd and
waves his crucifix around
like a .38

Honest
suntan faces
line the
crime scene

Electric Gazelle

Electric gazelle
sleeping
beside me

Astronauts
have travelled
the troubled space
of her body

Who is she
what does she
want
?

Ask her

disaster

Ottawa

At the bus station
I paid a quarter
for a shit
and

there was
no
toilet paper

Sad tourist in
my own
country

I wiped my ass
with my map
of Canada

Inflation

Diane says
the bread shrinks
as the days
go by

She steps back
a few paces &
disappears

Over the house
the clouds are fat &
hungry-looking &
cruise by at
ninety miles an hour

When I was in Timmins

When I was in Timmins
a long long time ago
the trains always left
without me

taking
the broken baggage
of my dreams and
leaving me there
under the sun

like a fire with
a wooden leg

Emily

With light for legs
Emily waltzes in the night

The earth like a party dress
around her body
she knows everything
and everything
knows her

Each time
the party starts with
and ends
with a question

Like birth
like death

like love

Moving Day

Someone is living
in your body

His rent is
late

He wants to jump
from the roof
of your mouth

He wants to burn
your books and
steal your girlfriend

It's time for you
to move

Contributors

Born in 1957, Michel Albert holds a bachelor's degree in French literature from McGill University. He has translated several works into French: *Playground*, Georges Bowering (Triptyque 1999), David McFadden's *Still Life with Fruits* (Triptych, 1999), Irving Layton's *L'Essentiel* (Triptyque Edition, 2000) *Journal of Cabbagetown*, by Juan Butler (Triptych Edition, 2003). He also translated into English *A dive into my essence*, by Claude Péloquin (Guernica editions, 1990). In 1981 he was awarded the Scarlett Key Award from McGill University.

Born in 1939, Paul Chamberland published two major poetry collections, *Terre Québec* (1964) and *L'Afficheur hurle* (1965) that would forever shift the landscape of French-language Quebec literature. He founded with colleagues the cultural magazine, *Parti pris*. He taught at the Université du Québec à Montréal until 2004. In 2007, he received the prestigious Prix Athanase-David. He is a member of the Académie des lettres du Québec.

A poet, novelist, essayist and translator, Antonio D'Alfonso has published more than forty titles and has made three feature films. He is the founder of Guernica Editions which he managed for thirty-three years before passing it on to new owners in 2010. He has won the Trillium Award and other prizes. He lives in Montreal.

Patrice Desbiens is a Francophone Canadian poet. He was born in Timmins, Ontario and began his career as a journalist. Since making his literary debut in 1972, he has been regarded as one of Canada's most successful French-language poets. He has received many awards for his poetry, including the Prix Champlain in 1997 for *Un pépin de pomme sur un poêle à bois* and the Prix de poésie Terrasses Saint-Sulpice-Estuaire for *La Fissure de la fiction* in 1998. He was also a finalist for the Governor General's Prize in 1985, for his book *Dans l'après-midi cardiaque*.

Robert Giroux taught at Sherbrooke University for twenty-five years. Parallel to his teaching career, he was the publisher of Editions Triptyque between 1980-2016. He was also part of the editorial committee of the magazine *Moebius*. Author of more than a dozen books, Giroux initiated his writing with a book dedicated to Stéphane Mallarmé in 1978. He has given conferences in Canada and Europe and is a serious analyst of popular songs and

music. He lives in Montreal.

Jonathan Kaplansky studied at Tufts University and Université de Paris III, receiving an MA in French Language and Literature from McGill University and an MA in Translation from the University of Ottawa. He has translated works by Annie Ernaux, Hélène Rioux and Simon Brault, among others. Originally from Saint John, New Brunswick, he currently lives in Montreal.

Naïm Kattan is a Canadian novelist, essayist and critic of Iraqi Jewish origin. He has said that he was born three times: first in Baghdad, then in Paris and a third birth in Montréal. Kattan wrote a literary column in *Le Devoir*, and for close to 25 years he headed the writing and publishing division of the Canada Council for the Arts Writing and Publication program. Kattan was also an Associate professor in the Department of Literary Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

A star of film, stage and television, as well as a playwright and translator, **Robert Lalonde** is one of Quebec's leading novelists. Born in Oka, Quebec, in 1947, he studied at the Séminaire Sainte-Thérèse and Montreal's Conservatoire national d'art dramatique. The author of over 20 books, his first novel, *La belle épouvante*, won the 1981 Robert Cliche Prize, while his *Le Petit aigle à tête blanche* won the 1994 Governor General's Award for French Fiction, as well as the 1995 Prix France-Québec. His translation of Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* was a finalist for the 1999 John Glassco Prize.

André Major is a writer from Quebec most noted for his novel *Les Rescapés*, which won the Governor General's Award for French-language fiction in 1976. He was later nominated in the same category in 1987 for *L'Hiver au cœur* and in 1995 for *La Vie provisoire*, and for the Governor General's Award for French-language non-fiction in 2008 for *L'Esprit vagabond*. A poet in the early 1960s, he was a founding member alongside Paul Chamberland, André Brochu, Pierre Maheu and Jean-Marc Piotte of the political and cultural magazine *Parti pris* in 1963. His most recent novel, *À quoi ça rime?*, was published in 2013.

Peter McCambridge is the translator of half a dozen books, the founding editor at QuebecReads.com, and a past winner of the John Dryden Translation Prize. He lives in Québec City.

A writer, certified translator, researcher and communications specialist, **Jean-Paul Murray** has translated nineteen books. From 1995 to 1998, he was

managing editor of *Cité libre*, a magazine founded by Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He was the magazine's English translating coordinator from 1998 to 2000. Among his *Cité libre* translations are works by Allan Cairns, Jacques Hébert, Mordecai Richler, F.R. Scott and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. In 2015, he was French-language translator for the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. An experience from which he is still recovering.

Born in Trois-Rivières in 1955, **Bernard Pozier** is the editor-in-chief at the Écrits des Forges, vice-president at the Maison de la poésie de Montréal, and a member of the Academic Council for Letras en la mar. In 2013, he received the Calaveritas Award from the Mexican Consulate in Montreal. His latest books include *Naître et vivre et Mourir* (2003), *Biens et maux* (2007), *Carnets de México* (2009), *Agonique agenda* (2009), *Post-scriptum* (2011), and *Le temps bouge la Terre passe* (2013).

Lori Saint-Martin teaches literature at the Université du Québec à Montréal and has published various critical essays as well as three short story collections. She is a well-known and award-winning literary translator, working in tandem with Paul Gagné. *The Closed Door*, which first appeared in French as *Les Portes closes*, is her first novel.

Donald Winkler is a Montreal-based literary translator and documentary filmmaker. In the realm of poetry, he has made films on Irving Layton, P.K. Page, F.R. Scott, among others. And, among others, he has translated Roland Giguère and Pierre Nepveu. He is a three-time winner of the Governor General's Award for French to English translation.

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