



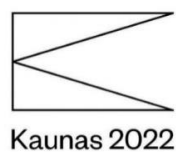
PRIX LAURENCE 2022

CAT. 18-26 YEARS

FINALISTS' TEXTS



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Prix Laurence 2022 – CAT. 18-26 YEARS

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Commisso Martina

Lo scettro di Ra

This is an abridged and translated version of the text. The full text in Italian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3OsqXKc>

L'autre jumeau resta là où il était, avec son dos appuyé sur un pin et avec la tête tournée vers le haut pour regarder le ciel. Je m'approchai de lui . « Qu'est-ce que tu regardes ? » « Une de ces lumières là-haut ça doit être la Pyramide. » Je ne compris pas si ça était une question ou une affirmation. « Et oui. Je me demande comment est elle.» Il haussa les épaules . « Je ne le sais pas et franchement je ne veux pas le savoir. » Je fis semblant de ne pas avoir remarqué l'irritation dans sa voix «À mon avis elle doit être très belle. Je m'imagine une planète bizarre , où tout est extraordinaire et étrange, comme des cascades à l'envers et des métropoles volantes. Et puis le palais des Energies ,tout en cristal et qui donne sur un précipice, avec peut-être l'océan en dessous. » « Sehkmet ne mérite pas de vivre dans un endroit si beau. » « Mais si c'était comme ça ,est-ce que tu aimerais la revoir? » J'eus droit à un demi sourire. « OK, si c'était vraiment comme ça alors ça vaudrait bien la peine de donner un petit coup d'œil. » Je le regardai en travers : je n'avais pas encore compris qui Juan Rivera était réellement et chaque fois que je parlais avec lui ma curiosité grandissait. Pourquoi ne pouvait -il être toujours le jeune homme avec lequel j'étais en train de parler ? Pourquoi de temps en temps il se conduisait comme un fieffé idiot ? Je n'en savais rien, j'étais seulement sûre que y avait en lui quelque chose de très mystérieux que j'aimais un peu, ou mieux, on peut dire , beaucoup. Je haussai les épaules et m'appuyai sur son même arbre. « On pourra aller demander ça à Tom , lui il a été là bas. » « Oui on pourra bien aller lui rendre visite pour le taquiner un peu. La vie en prison doit être barbante. » Puis il posa sa main sur la blessure qu'il avait reçu dans l'affrontement avec notre ancien enseignant de combat. « Maintenant que Tom est en prison , tout va se remettre à sa propre place ? » Je répondit honnêtement « J'aimerais te dire que oui ,mais je crois que non. Il y a encore beaucoup de mystères à résoudre : comment a pu Tom voler le sceptre de Ra? A-t-il été aidé ? Et si oui par qui ?

Peut-être par une énergie trompeuse qui est ,peut-être , le mystérieux méchant qui ne fut jamais retrouvé après la troisième guerre mondiale.? » Il soupira « En effet, tu as raison. Et ce que je pensais être la fin est ,en réalité, le début. » « Oui ,mais quatre c'est mieux qu'un. » Juan baissa enfin son regard et me regarda dans les yeux. Je souris. « Même si notre mission s'est terminée ça ne veut pas dire qu'on va se séparer. » « Est-ce qu'on va rester amis »? « En ce qui me concerne, je resterai votre amie, quoi qu'il advienne. »

En disant ça , j'eus l'impression d'exprimer une espèce de serment et il me sembla que une étoile filante passait dans le ciel. « Eh, est ce que tu l'as vue? » « Vu quoi? » « L'étoile filante! Elle est passée tout juste sur notre tête! » Un sourire échappa à mon ami « Peut-être que non ...peut-être que oui. » Puis il revint à son petit sourire moqueur. « Ne pense pas que, parce qu'on est amis , je serai gentil avec toi dans l'arène. » Je répondis « Eh, rappelle toi que j'ai battu Tom , le meilleur escrimeur de Camp! » « Tu restes quand même un amateur .» « Ah bon? » « Bien sûr et demain je te le démontrerai ». Je le regardai dans les yeux. « Demain à 10h dans l'arène? » Il leva un sourcil. « Qu'est-ce que tu fais maintenant, tu lis dans mes pensées.? » « Peut-être que non peut-être que oui. » « Un drôle de pouvoir ,cadeau de ton père ? » « Non non , un talent naturel. » « Ça va , voyons si tu peux le refaire. Qu'est-ce que je suis en train de penser, maintenant ? » Je regardai les garçons qui s'éclataient ,au rythme de la musique ,tout au loin. Entre eux je vis Ele e Al qui dansaient et s'amusaient à la folie. Je souris ,en espérant de ne pas faire le pas plus long que la jambe « Tu voudrais m'inviter à danser n'est-ce pas?. » Juan ne répondit pas et resta immobile ,avec son dos encore appuyé à l'arbre et avec la tête qui regardait vers le haut, puis tout d'un coup il allongea une main vers moi. Je souris et pensai que celui ci était ,avec toute probabilité , le jour le plus beau de ma vie. Puis je lui serrai sa main et ensemble on se jeta dans la foule dansante.

Darinov Ognyan 'Flame'

The Laddie at the Lake

In shallow waters I lay:
Cold streams
Like serpentine waves
Sliver silver foam
On a green surface;

Mirth is to know
None shall disturb you,
None but the virtue
Of virility.

From distant shores came to me a lad
With a visage so selfedly glad
That he nearly rejoiced at his presence;
(Much like how I did at his presence,
I, too, a simple laddie at the lake)

With a smirking charm he tries my heart to take:

'Salve, marinaio,
Why don't you cry-oh save me!
To the nearest nearby?
Do I provoke no fear or hatred
Nel tuo cuore?
Don't you seek *amore*,
To love or to be loved
More than an animal unferal?
More than a widow whose sterile
Digits can no longer touch?'

Ignorant of the language he co-optedly spoke,
I pondered the aim of this bloke.

His was a glare too manly and wicked:
A Trojan horse whose teeth were thick and
Evidently ravished for flesh.

'Niente non dici?'
He asks with peachy cheeks,
And innocent demeanour,
And teasing stare.

'Why would I fear or hate you,
oh fellow laddie at the lake?'

'Very little is us fellow,
Marinaio. You and I-obey
Different voices, for the ones we hear
Are different.

I am no mere *ragazzino al lago*,
Rather, as you call it,
No mere laddie at the lake.

I love to men make.'

'But I need no love to me made.'

'*Ma finora non sei uomo, ragazzino.*
Non faccio l'amore, faccio l'uomo.
E loro sempre fanno l'odio....'

His good mood left him abruptly.
'Pretty as you are, *ragazzino al lago*,
Don't make your heart rot
With shame. *Chissà* there is us
More fellow than I thought.'

Away swam the merman of the lake.
I oddly started longing for his gestures,
Sea-blue eyes, coarsely bearded,
Inviting grin, youthful spear head,
And unstudied foreignness.

Cold streams brought foam once more,
And the wind blew pollen to my wake.
My naked body shivered in the lake,
And I knew how little I knew...

Daugėla Linas

The megapolis of a spoon

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3k1yRfl>

Translated by Kristina Aurylaitė

fog sews itself a toga
walks downtown
screaming like it's stuck in a barrel
that the new world
will rise again in a spoonful of soup

tired ladies in cafés
eat that soup
without bread
bread has been eaten by pigeons
which sleep on suitcases at the station

and it hurts
that I don't need to think about how to sew a toga
that I've got enough pennies and summers in my hands

just that it's getting more expensive
these weeks to think
in the nooks and crannies of madness

and the newspapers are shrinking
those at the newsstand
on whose windows swollen
reflections of children are sprouting

Gudukaitė Evelina

Light Comes at Dusk

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3v2CCaU>

Translated by Simona Butkutė

Part I

With an oddly enigmatic, calm countenance, Santaras went on stage. The floor was colder than ice, and he moved slowly on his rough feet, mesmerizing the audience. His ailing body was drowning in the density of his white shirt and trousers. On the mould-smelling stage was a huge hollow cube with thin white plastic edges. A glass clock disguised by the makeup of dust hung high, tied to a narrow wire, and behind a red screen door quietly stood a metal bucket filled with fresh milk. The spectators will understand later what this sacred fluid was for. Or maybe they will not. Santaras slid inside the cube, sat down, and crossed his legs as if he was one of the old Shaolin monks, ready for a long meditation. In a low but excited voice, this middle-aged man finally dispelled the deafening silence. "I was once visited by a magical dream. In it, I lost my identity and became a hand of an ancient clock. The most bizarre thing of all is that I was stuck between twelve and one o'clock. Once I struck one o'clock, I'd return to twelve o'clock, then back to one o'clock, and this continued for an eternity. Truly maddening, right? It's always hard for me to explain; it seems that people find everything I say too unclear. But all I can say is that in that dream, I felt safe as if there were no threats or dangers. My words may sound utopian, but at that moment I was not afraid of the dark because I realized that once I closed my eyes, I would see the light. I was not afraid of heights either, because I knew that if I fell, my arms would turn into wide black wings. On the other hand, a troubling thought haunted me – that one day I would just get stuck and be a nobody forever imprisoned in the kingdom of cursed clocks. A disaster would be inevitable, and my doomsday would draw near." Suddenly, totally out of the blue, the clock, which had so far been silent, groaned and began to descend, as if it had been waiting a long time for its hour of glory. A terrible creak echoed in the hall. Santaras looked at the ticking creature for the last time, his gaze brimming with condolence and apology, as if he was an executioner. Then he stood up in a regal manner, lifted the clock like an angel, and hurled it with all his might onto the floor. A rain of shards spilled everywhere. The witnesses of this tragic event, whose eyes were filled with fright, watched this little man slowly sit down on glass shards. He felt no pain, only calm, and spoke further as if nothing had happened: "I forgot to let you in on a secret. I am an old sage, who has never been understood by the world. Even now, as I tell you what has been sleeping deep inside of me for many long years, I feel like you're looking at me, smiling, but you have no clue what this strange man is doing or babbling about. My

whole life, I've been cloaking myself in this absurdity as if it were some vast veil of invisibility. People often listen to me, smile politely, with an expression of interest, pretending they are lost in thought. But once I fall silent, my listeners smile and go their ways without ever turning back, telling me how pleasant it was to meet me or waving their hand. They leave me standing alone. At the time, I felt as if I had bestowed upon others an ocean brimming with life, beating hearts, and pure souls. It seems like you would never understand, even if you dedicated your whole life to it. But after giving away all that is most precious to me, I remain standing in this reeking, turbid river instead of a crystalline ocean." After these fateful words, everything in the hall sank into a gently nurturing shadow of dark blue. At that moment, Santaras felt like a caterpillar, which wanted to escape the cocoon and become the most beautiful butterfly in the world. The thirst for liberty grew stronger and stronger, causing the body to tremble as ecstasy and insanity overflowed it. This pure blue-skinned creature closed his eyes as if he had seen too much, and then slowly, one by one, took off the rags that caged his soul. Santaras gently covered the clock shards with them and left everything to rest in the cube, while he himself, utterly naked and shameless, stood up firmly in front of the audience and looked them straight in the eye. He stared at every pupil eyeing him. The spectators cast each other confused gazes, riddled with discomfort. But it was enough for them to take a closer look at that blue life form standing before them and begin to worship it as the holiest deity. At that moment, it was possible to swear to all the gods and even to the devil that no one had ever seen such mesmerizing purity before. At the end of this divine moment, Santaras grabbed the bucket, which had been resting idly behind the screen door, where warm milk, whiter than white, warmed its cold edges. It will wash away not only the bright skin but also the most secret depths of the soul, allowing the spirit to be born again. Santaras' hands, strong yet hardened by old age, grabbed the bucket and poured out the contents on himself. A river of purest white ran down his body and even the audience got splashed. It is strange how even dolled up ladies did not get offended. On the contrary, their eyes radiated happiness and endless fascination with the spectacle they had just witnessed. After a minute of silence, a white, ghost-like body glanced calmly at the cube lurking behind it. Santaras wanted to be reborn. In the voice of an old wolf rather than of a man, he kept smashing a four-walled prison, trampling it with his feet still wet with the milk, until it turned into an obscure angled object. The spirit, bursting with a dignity born out of the joy that flowed from his heart, subsided and began to weep helplessly because he was finally happy. The audience wept as well. It seemed as if those tears could wash the whole world clean and leave in it only the yellow flowers, paradise caught in their blooms. Unexpectedly, Santaras saw that his own shadow, which had always accompanied him, began to recede until it was completely gone. It might have seemed like a hallucination to an ordinary mortal, but everything was the most certain truth. The gold dust began to fall gracefully from above, the lights slowly fading. It was a miracle. Only astonishment, awe-struck whispers, and restless rustle could be heard in the hall. Silently, like some fluff caught in the wind, Santaras fell to

the ground. Then his life came to a standstill, and his soul sank into the harmony of the night that had come too soon.

Part II

After a long break, the darkness surrounding the body and soul was dispelled by a dazzling white light and three strikes of a gong. One. Two. Pause. Three. Santaras opened his crusty eyelids and stood up as if he had turned into a phoenix, rising from the black ashes. It was possible to see the bright sun in his eyes, something gratifying yet frightening at the same time. No one around him understood why he was afraid. Neither did Santaras. He tried to speak up, to say something wise, clever perhaps, but words were failing him. Barely visible tears trailed down his cheeks. The sage felt strange, he eyed everything as if he was seeing the world and the people around him for the very first time. He gracefully descended from the stage like a Greek god and approached the audience in slow motion, trying to touch their strange faces, to feel every wrinkle and unevenness of their skin. People were not perplexed by the nudity of the new life; they accepted it as their own. Santaras felt this quickly and returned to the stage so that his body could absorb the white light. Finally, he saw his shadow, which he had missed so much. Now everything became clearer. It was birth. That's why his body had sunk into nudity, and silence had thrust its sharp claws into his throat. Instantly, a calm, cradling lullaby resounded, forcing the heart to beat slower. The naked man started dancing, waving his hands, stroking the air with his palms and trying to feel every bit of dust that had fallen on his body. An angel's dance, which lasted but an instant, was interrupted by a strike of the gong. Everything froze, the lullaby ceased, and deadly silence ensued. Santaras' wrinkled palms grabbed the clothes lying underneath the wreckage of that cube. Then came the second strike. Santaras put on his shirt and trousers. A third, fateful strike came, after which the light stepped aside, and darkness came. All that was heard in that emptiness was the rattling of the feet and the loud slam of the door, after which the hall became illuminated again. But Santaras was there no longer. It seemed he had vanished into thin air. The audience stood up, collectively decided that the performance was over, applauded passionately, and left without waiting for anything. Only emptiness reigned. There were only some traces left by the artist that led to something sacred, but no one noticed them.

The night was ineffably beautiful and majestic, and the sky, embraced by its pleasantly cool palms, was adorned with small silver crystals. Santaras gazed at the sea and focused on listening to its sighing for a while. He lay on the fluffy sand that had absorbed the coolness of the night, put his fingers in the sand and closed his weary eyes. Steady breathing carried him into a deep sleep that brought an innocent dream. He saw that he had become the hand of an ancient clock. This time, however, he was no longer stuck between twelve and one o'clock. The clock hand was free and could finally trace the magical circles of the hours. It spun and spun and spun again until it finally broke free from its imprisonment and peace-robbing shackles of time. A dignified smile of peace, serenity, and relief illuminated Santaras' pale face. A strong wind rose, a wave struck another wave in the sea, and the stars

were falling. It was as though the sky and the earth were mingling. Santaras woke up and glanced at the night sky with unspeakable love. There was nothing around. Being the only man on earth, he saw gold dust, falling from under the clouds as if waltzing, which slowly fell on his face one after another and kissed him lovingly.

Hippert Lee

Une nuit d'encre

Devant mes pieds se trouve un grand vide. Un pas de plus et je tombe vers ma mort certaine. J'inspire, comme si c'était la dernière fois que l'air passe par mes narines. Mes poumons se gonflent, une brise fraîche me caresse le visage et me donne la chair de poule.

J'ai vécu toute une vie, pour arriver à ce moment-ci. À cet endroit-ci. Sur cet écueil au milieu de nulle part, au cul du monde. J'expire, mon souffle se mélange aux courants des vents et mon regard monte vers le ciel obscur. Cette nuit-là, ni la lune, ni les étoiles n'éclaircissent le ciel. Je suis seul, dans cette nuit d'encre. Il n'y a que moi, cette obscurité infinie et les vagues qui chantent une balade en se cassant contre les falaises.

C'est une de ces soirées où tout est noir. Je ne parle pas d'une nuit foncée, qui ne permet qu'aux contours d'être visibles. Non je parle d'une nuit obscure et sombre. La présence de l'obscurité remplace la lumière. Un noir opaque m'entoure. Elle dégage une présence pesante et m'empêche de voir ma propre main devant moi.

Seule l'odeur salée de la mer fait comprendre qu'il y a un monde autour de moi. Je me sens comme si l'obscurité était entrain de m'écraser, je ne peux m'empêcher, de garder le regard dans le vide. Oui, tout est si vide, tout est privé de luminosité.

Je le ressens, dans mes yeux, dans mes veines, dans ma tête. Le vide m'envahit, il me prend dans ses bras. Il me remplit, et laisse en arrière une carapace sans âme, sans réflexion. Me voilà, une pierre froide sur la falaise. Il reste un grand rien.

Il y a des histoires sans fin.

Voici une histoire sans début.

Je sors une Marlboro de mon paquet, je la place sur mes lèvres, et je prends un briquet rouge de la poche de mon jean noir. Une petite flamme s'allume et ramène un peu de lumière dans cette nuit. J'allume la cigarette avant que les ténèbres dévorent le peu de lumière que la flamme a émise.

Je suis exactement arrivé où je voulais. Pourquoi alors je me sens aussi perdu ? J'ai retrouvé la paix, que je cherchais tout au long de ma vie. Je ne sais plus comment continuer. Je pense à ma vie. Surtout à ce que j'ai accompli. En tant que comptable, j'ai aidé les riches à garder quelques euros de plus.

Je me rappelle de mes années à l'école, quand chacun m'aimait. Je me dis que j'ai eu une belle vie. J'ai rencontré de merveilleuses femmes, qui m'ont ouvert leurs jambes, mais qui ont toujours gardé leur cœur à l'abri. Parfait pour moi, car je ne voulais jamais m'installer.

J'ai eu des bons amis, que la faucheuse a déjà emportés. Qui étaient là quand j'ai perdu, qui m'ont soutenu. Qui sont absents à l'appel maintenant que je suis au sommet. Personne pour célébrer.

J'ai eu des réponses à la plupart de mes questions. J'ai vu des pays, des paysages, des visages, des sages et des lâches. Bref, ce fût une course, la vie a défilé et filé, pas d'arrivée...

Hélas, la cigarette se consume, j'inspire une dernière fois, puis je lui donne une pichenette et elle s'envole en arc. On voit une petite braise rouge s'éloigner vers la mer, une étincelle qui ne prendra pas feu. J'expire.

Le vent s'est calmé et un grand nuage gris apparaît devant moi. Je ne crois pas mes yeux. Du gris ! Je n'aurais pas pensé apercevoir une couleur ce soir. Le gris défie le noir et le nuage reste. Il s'est installé devant moi et ne semble plus partir. Ce nuage de fumée d'un coup paraît tellement vivant. J'hallucine, je n'en crois pas mes yeux. Cette fumée, elle semble prendre forme et d'un coup un fantôme se trouve devant moi. Une silhouette d'un humain, sans visage, en fumée grise. Même s'il n'a pas d'yeux, il me regarde droit dans les miens. Un sourire se forme, comme s'il allait me buter d'un moment à l'autre.

J'essaie de faire un pas en arrière, je trébuche et j'atterris sur mes fesses. La créature me fixe, sans faire un mouvement. La fumée circule comme un courant, sans dissiper la formation de l'être exposé devant moi.

« Mais je deviens fou !!! » Je m'exclame, comme si je venais de voir un mort.

« Vraiment ? » me répond la fumée.

Incroyable. Un bonhomme en fumée qui me parle !? Un frisson passe tout le long de mon corps. Dire que j'ai la chair de poule serait un mensonge. Je me transforme carrément en poule, je n'arrive qu'à exprimer des bruits.

« heu – neh- poq – heu »

J'essaie de me remettre sur pieds et de me casser d'ici aussi vite que possible.

Malheureusement dès le moment où je suis debout, cette créature disparaît et réapparaît derrière moi et continue de parler comme si ne rien n'était.

« Je suis une construction divine. Mise en place par le tout, on se réfère à moi comme Nephesh »

Là c'est parti en couilles, je tombe à nouveau. Cette fois-ci dans la direction opposée. Ma tête se trouve au-dessus du grand vide. Un mètre de plus et c'est la chute mortelle. Mon cœur bat la chamade, mais la présence de ce « Nephesh » semble avoir un effet calmant sur moi.

« Dis-moi, homme, humain. Tu vois quoi ? » demande Nephesh

Je ne sais pas quel est son problème, il vient de naître de la fumée de ma cigarette et n'a rien d'autre en tête que de me demander ce que je vois ? En plus n'est-il pas évident que je vois la fin?

Je vois des difficultés insurmontables. Je ne vois pas de futur. Tout est si pesant, qu'est-ce qu'il veut que je voie ? Je vois mon corps sans âme nager dans l'obscurité de la mer. C'est pourquoi je suis venu ici. Je m'en fiche si c'est un fantôme, une hallucination ou bien une divinité.

« Rien » je lui réponds.

Il me lance un regard comme s'il avait entendu ce que je viens de penser.

Puis il dit "s'il n'y a rien, il y a tout pour le créer comme tu le désires. À ton image, à ta vision. S'il n'y a vraiment rien, qu'est-ce que tu pourrais désirer de plus ?

Je pense qu'il s'est fixé comme but de me scier les côtes.

« Non, il n'y a rien pour moi. Tout est si joyeux et rempli. Même quand il n'y a rien, il y a de l'air. Le monde est achevé, ainsi je n'ai plus rien à faire. » Là je sens, c'est mon cœur qui parle.

« S'il est achevé, tu as une plénitude de choses à découvrir et à comprendre. Tu es libre de faire ce que tu veux. Tout est plein, tout est rempli, tu te sers comme tu le veux et tu découvres toutes les couleurs. »

Là c'est clair, Nephesh doit être un esprit de contradiction. Je lui dis « oui », il répond par « non ». J'insiste sur non et il pense que « oui ».

J'exclame « Il n'y a que le vide ! ».

Nephesh m'observe sans rien dire. Je me convaincs que c'est une hallucination.

Mes pupilles s'agrandissent en observent le ciel d'encre, et puis, je ressens un calme absolu dans ma tête et je me dis qu'il n'y a qu'une chose logique à faire. Je fais un premier pas. Puis un deuxième. Le troisième ne suit pas, parce que je me trouve sous l'emprise de la gravité. Comme une pierre qui tombe de la falaise.

Il y a des histoires sans début.

En voici une sans fin.

Devant mes pieds se trouve un grand vide. Un pas de plus et je tombe vers ma mort certaine. J'inspire, comme si c'était la dernière fois que l'air passe par mes narines. Mes poumons se gonflent, une brise fraîche me caresse le visage et me donne la chair de poule. J'ai vécu toute une vie pour en arriver ici. À cet endroit-ci. Sur cet écueil au milieu de nulle part, au cul du monde.

Je l'ai déjà vu devant mes yeux. Ce moment-ci. Que j'ai tellement attendu. Bref je m'allume une Marlboro. La flamme du briquet me ramène une petite lueur dans cet endroit vaste. Mais elle aussi disparaît et me laisse au froid. Le froid ne me fait plus rien, avec la vie je suis devenu glacial. J'ai appris, le monde est noir et blanc. J'exhale la dernière tafe de ma cigarette et j'observe un nuage.

Cette fumée, elle semble prendre forme, et tout d'un coup un fantôme se trouve devant moi. Une silhouette humaine, grise comme la fumée. Elle me regarde droit dans les yeux, son visage consiste d'un nez et d'un affreux sourire.

Je m'effraie et je glisse. Cette fois, la chute est venue vers moi. Quelle fin. Je m'écrase sur l'eau glaciale.

Puis...

Certaines histoires commencent au réveil.

J'ouvre mes yeux.

Devant mes pieds se trouve un grand vide. Un pas de plus et je tombe vers ma mort certaine.

Je me dis pour un moment comment c'est de tomber de la falaise. Personnellement, moi, je préfère les surmonter. Je ne sais pas, j'ai une sacrée impression de déjà-vu. Comme si j'avais vécu ce moment-ci au moins 25 fois. Bref, un noir d'encre, une vue d'aveugle.

J'ouvre mon paquet de Marlboro et il ne me reste qu'une cigarette. Je décide de la mettre de côté. Je préfère ne pas déranger l'obscurité. Il faut dire que j'ai vécu toute une vie et j'ai beaucoup appris sur ce monde. Je peux conclure que je le déteste autant que je l'aime. Peut-être que je l'aime quand même un peu plus.

Bref, ici le silence règne. Seule la mer qui chante une fanfare en déifiant la colline. J'inspire, j'expire. Il fait sombre autour de moi. D'un coup, une créature apparaît. Un bonhomme gris. Il me rappelle moi-même. Il a ma taille, la coiffure semblable à la mienne. Aussi, on partage le même sourire. La différence entre nous deux c'est que lui, il est en noir et blanc. Comme s'il était sorti d'un Manga ou d'un film de Charlie Chaplin.

Il vient vers moi. Je devrais me sentir anxieux, mais cet esprit évoque quelque chose de familier, de connu. Je suis calme, on se fixe dans les yeux.

Il se présente comme Nephesh. Puis il me pose une question.

« Qu'est-ce que tu vois »

Il est comme moi, mais sans couleur. Comme s'il avait perdu tous ses pigments. Comme s'il était froid. Je me vois en lui, mais on n'est pas pareil. S'il fait noir autour de moi, c'est parce que moi je suis la lanterne. J'essaie de lui rappeler que les couleurs qu'on porte sont essentielles et chères. Le beau se cache parfois dans les endroits les plus inattendus.

Après longue réflexion je lui réponds « du noir au gris, il y tout un cercle chromatique »

Il me regarde en souriant. « Un monde à connaître, un monde à colorer et un monde à créer » me chuchote une voix.

Devant moi un nuage de fumée grise se dissout et mon regard tombe droit vers un crépuscule du matin, qui enflamme le ciel avec un rouge passionné suivi d'un orange que seul le soleil peut créer en évoquant de la chaleur seul par l'intensité de la couleur et un rose si clair et pur, qu'il rappelle l'amour.

Je m'étonne qu'il ne me reste qu'une cigarette, après tout j'ai acheté le paquet hier.

Je prends de l'herbe et je la mélange avec le tabac de ma dernière cigarette.

J'assemble le tout dans un feuillet et je roule un joint. Pendant que je marche le long de la plage, le sable me caresse les pieds, l'odeur salée devient repoussé par le parfum du vert.

La mer aussi bleue qu'une céanothe et elle reflète la lumière du soleil. Je voyage, la destination importe peu, car je suis arrivé chez moi. J'affiche un grand sourire. La vie reste reste une oeuvre inachevée et on peut colorer l'histoire comme on l'aime...

Kelpšas Jovaras

Ducks be

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3MmUMtG>

Translated by Kristina Aurylaitė

Dare be a different life in de vault of de lake:
Dat no place fo cool dudes and no place fo dey's chicks.
Ducks be at de top of de kingdom
Ducks be de bulk of dat population
Ducks be mighty romantic birds
Ducks be de overlords of bread and baguettes.
Dat where life takes place –
You is juts a bytsandeh.
You ain't got no right to participate in de politics of de lake.
Enjoy it and tsudy it.
Now we at de end of autumn
Everything dyin' – de ducks be reborn.
Now it's de renaissance of de ducks
Dey gon' abolish de lords and kings in dey's lake.
Swans and loons be now on def terms
Pond skaters be gonna skate without skates
Even a hippo surfaces from de bottom of de lake
Nature be recoverin' – long live freedom!

Ducks dance in high society ballrooms
Ducks know how to legally kill.
Ducks finna detsroy capitalism
Ducks fly whereveh dey want and whereveh dey can.
Ducks be you's old man nightmare.

We gon' elect to we's parliament Quack de Duck,
He pledges he'll exterminate de featherless monkeys.
We gon' go to de pond to pray to Yeah Quack,
Dat one gon' drop us some bread from heaven.

In tis world nothin' be clea
It like math – a brainchild of aboriginals.
In tis world de ducks triumph
Dey measure each other necks.
De longeh de neck, de tsrongeh de duck.
De yelloweh de beak, de healthieh its protsate.

Ducks be de jutsice of de world
Ducks' be infinite intellect!

Lileikaitė Milda

Water

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3vBuEoa>

Unfortunately, Milda Lileikaitė cannot take part in the final.

Translated by Sonata Kveselytė and Augustė Strumilaitė

Bliss was all I had.

The room stank of sour sweat, cigarettes, and food gone bad. The wooden floor was covered in take-away boxes, ashtrays, overflowing with cigarette butts, and sleeping bodies. One, two, three. I counted and stepped inside as if I knew what I was doing. I found an empty spot, sat down, leaned against the wall, and pulled on a cigarette. When I finished the first one and the nicotine began to settle down in my body, I took out another one, lit it up, and sucked on it as if it was oxygen. Then I put it out on my hand just like that. To feel at least something. But no, nothing. I smoked one cigarette after another until the pack was empty. But that was not enough either. My so-called friends woke up and suggested another way to feel better. I don't even know what cracked in me. I swallowed the pill. For the first time in my life I didn't care about anything at all.

I would've never thought I'd remember that just by touching a bottle of vodka.

An empty bottle of vodka from my childhood. My brother was hoping to get some cents in exchange for empty bottles. Broken on purpose or not, it burst into hundreds of pieces, which scattered just like my brother's love for me. He didn't take me home, he abandoned me. My mother found me wandering god-knows-where, brought me home to my father, who was sitting there waiting with a leather belt in his big hands. I collapsed like water falling from a high cliff. The magical glass castle shattered. I felt like I was getting scalded, heard the fake leather whirring in the air and an angry voice, which didn't sound like my dad's. Remembering that, I took a big gulp of vodka and smashed the bottle into the wall. Just like when I was a kid.

I barely had a mother.

It seemed that she both was and wasn't there. My life was a stage for her, where her role was that of a servant. She was like an invisible shadow that sticks around but doesn't take much space. She didn't teach me anything; perhaps she thought that life would teach me. I became her favourite experiment. She was interested in how much light there was in me. Life was pulsing through her veins, which extended all over her body like branches, making a unique pulsating picture. She would put everything into a chest, lock it, and would never return to look for answers there. She went with the flow, didn't resist. Maybe she would have never won.

The school was fine until I got a nickname stuck on me.

Insulting, vile, ugly. I got sick every morning just thinking I'd have to go to school. I'd throw up because of the stress, then I'd brush my teeth and drink some water. It would take me longer, but the teachers didn't really care why I was late so often. They only looked at me and judged me. I was considered an irresponsible child. A hell in hell, one hell is not the same as the other. When I had a free minute, I would sneak into the library, where I would become one with various characters. One day all of my classmates started calling me names and humiliating me in other ways as if it all was part of a plan; they were having fun. Then someone asked if anyone had filmed it. Yes, someone had. It seemed that a freezing waterfall fell on me. I became an ice statue. I turned into another exhibit at a museum.

First love hurts the most.

I had been talking to him for a couple of years, but I couldn't confess eye to eye. Once I texted him that I couldn't help thinking about him, but I never got a reply. But then a message struck me like a flash of lightning: "let's just be friends, you are a wonderful girl," he wrote. My friend and I bought a bottle of booze, went to her place, and passed out after three half-full glasses. I wished to forget about my feelings but found myself in a hospital instead. I stayed there until I got detoxed. I wasn't hungry, so I drank only water. Eventually, I threw up everything I had in my stomach. I was sick for a long time, haunted by memories about my mistake. I swore not to fall in love again.

Some boys liked me.

Beautiful, dark-haired, green-eyed, and, above all, "benevolent", as some guy put it. The desire to have someone close never disappeared. That's why one evening I decided to get into the car of a guy I knew. We were driving around my hometown, talking about everything. At last I've met my person, I thought, even though I didn't believe it myself. It was only when he stopped near the park and locked the car doors that I realized I had become a Delight. In school, Delight was a girl who'd be up to do it anywhere, anytime, with anyone.

I always liked the smell of wood. I enjoyed it, I could imagine trees in a forest being cut and then processed until they became paper and pieces of art were printed on them. Books. Stacked atop the table, they would bury the Grand Canyon between me and my dad. The river splitting our worlds apart would rise into the sky in balls of vapor and would bring back the aroma of the earth. His workshop, where the smell of wood lingered in every corner... Sawdust and dust was flying around like golden particles illuminated by the sun. In a blink of an eye I would be in the Sahara, grabbing handfuls of sand and they would sparkle in the sun as they fell down; it was as if they mimicked autumn leaves that glowed like embers in the fire.

Similarly to the other worlds I landed in while reading books, it seemed to be another planet here, in my dad's workshop.

I could sit for hours and watch my dad, a magician from a mysterious land, working. How, like out of a horn-of-plenty, he pulled wooden tables, chairs, frames for

paintings and mirrors, beds, and shelves; he reminded me of Jesus himself. I wished to stop the time, not to rush, to save those precious moments in my memory because they will never be experienced again. Specks of time never slowed; they flowed like water in a swift river carrying away memories that couldn't be captured by a camera, a diary, or memory.

Looking at the sky, I used to see a star map.

I knew the names and locations of constellations by heart. The star map resembled my dad's map. I would never refuse to go on an adventure with my dad, it didn't matter whether it was a short trip to another town or running around in an airfield, trying to fix a paraglider, or sitting in my dad's workshop and watching him work. During the winter, when the ice was thick enough to stand on it without a risk of falling into the water, I would see frosty threads forming a map – a copy of constellations. Water turned into ice, and ice turned into marble, in which vibrant breathing was pulsing. It was a river growing inside me.

Every time I went for a walk, I would eagerly smell the air and the trees.

I used to go to the same place – a dock where a wall of the forest on the other side of the lake would come into view. I used to sit near the dock, lean on an oak. Green buds of my eyes would watch the stars. My feet would slowly reach down from the wooden dock to the water and, soft like silk, it would caress me with its motherly hands. No, I'm not asleep. My body is finally light. Water-bubbles like pearls are rising until they vanish.

Matulionis Dominykas

Rat poison

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3Ez9v1U>

Translated by Kristina Ugolkova and Akvilė Varpiotaitė

On my way home through the empty city, I see some joggers on the streets. All suited up, a dude, a folder under his arm, passes me and dashes forward... A cat in the yard is furiously clawing at something under a car... and I woke up at 10 a.m. and am just now starting to get slight pangs of remorse about my insufficient efforts to get closer to what we call a happy life.

“What’s this you’re smoking? Smell nice,” she says. Finally, after two months in the neighborhood, the ice has been broken!

“Tobacco...” I open my mouth and start about the hazards of tobacco, the benefits, the ways of rolling it – basically, everything I know, so those legs would stay closer to mine for as long as possible. And then I throw the cig away as soon as she finishes hers. I tell her not to quit smoking and leave...

I feel like a perverted pupil, but it doesn’t stop me from fantasizing about the two of us shagging. Is she Happiness? I haven’t even asked her name.

I sit by the sea, searching for something in its vastness – I can only find ships.

A strange old man walks up, picks up kelps next to me with a stick, and pulls out a piece of amber.

“You’re looking the wrong way,” he says sympathetically.

“You sell it,” I’ve got to contradict him somehow.

“No, I collect it and give it out to people or scatter the pieces along the seaside,” a mysterious smile appears in his old wrinkly face.

“Here!” I point my finger at a group of children, running along the shore. “Try telling that to them.”

“You seem to be too old to believe impractical things,” the pensioner shrugs.

“No, it’s just that you’re too old to look sincere.”

“You don’t believe me?” he takes out a handful of amber and squeezes the pieces in his palm. “Here!” He throws the amber straight into the sea. “So, what’re you going to say now?”

“I think you’re very principled and also very naive if you think that a few pieces of amber will convince me of something.”

“You are just too cool to believe it, but if you did trust me, even if my talk was just a lie, you’d be a little happier,” he says and heads for other heaps of kelps.

“Thank you for the lecture!” I shout after him. “You could’ve been a great actor.”

He turns around, “How do you know I wasn’t?”

“You are too well dressed. After all, it’s Lithuania.” He was wearing expensive waterproof clothes, worth at least a couple grand.

“What if I said they weren’t mine?” the old man stares at me.

“Well, I’d say I believe everything you say. I don’t really want to see you undress and throw them into the sea.”

“Young man, you are a boor,” he says and wanders off.

I’m on my way back. My feet are freezing. My teeth chatter. I curse the wind. I’ll never talk to old folks again in my life, I promise to myself. To celebrate my resolution, I start my annual room cleaning ritual. I’m sorting through huge mountains of clothes when I notice a jacket I haven’t seen before. I pick it up and unfold it – a pair of pants falls at my feet. The clothes are identical to those worn by that shabby old man. I sit for half an hour. What an asshole! I’ve seen too many miracles in my life to believe them. A principled old dunce!

I dump the clothes into a dustbin. A neighbor passes by with a girl in her arms and smiles at me. Her husband is ambling behind them. The most ordinary husband in the world, you can find these men on every corner: neither fat, nor thin, nor stylish, nor shabby. Just ordinary. But for me, his face seems the dumbest of all I have seen. But what can I do if I’ve so unexpectedly fallen in love with a married woman?

I don’t want to go home. What if the old man falls out of my closet? After all, I have just found his clothes there. And what if he is completely naked? I’ll have to strangle him right there... No. No! Not knowing what to do, I head to a bar.

A sudden back pain wakes me up. I can barely open my eyes. Seems like I have fallen off my bed. The events of the last night flash before my eyes. A piece of amber in the left pocket of my jacket... Gone. I return to my room and step onto something sharp. Damn! The old man’s stone, smashed against the wall, lies on the floor, shattered into hundreds of pieces.

The events of the night before are beginning to come together. Only the scum and girls with nothing to lose were sitting in that hell hole. I was surprised to recognize a small, tired lump at the bar. I swallowed the lump in my throat and sat down. The old man was talking to the bartender, a piece of amber on his shaking palm.

“Please, take it.”

“Pops, I think you’ve had enough,” said the bright-faced guy apologetically.

“Please, dear, accept this gift and pour me another one.”

The guy poured him a glass, “On the house.”

The old man took a sip but spat it out.

“Non-alcoholic, goddamn it, you’ve got no conscience.”

Exposed, the bartender kept his cool, “Enough, pops, go home.”

“You can’t imagine how old I actually am. Believe me, old enough to know when I’m done. So, please, pour me another one and take this!” He placed a piece of amber on the table.

“We may refuse to serve customers if they are drunk. The rules are not on your side, so for the last time – leave or I’ll call the security.”

“Go to hell!” shrieked the old man helplessly and stumbled out.

I ordered an extra glass and went after that tired old body.

“Here. It’s beer, drink it.”

He started the drink, looked at me, downed it, and frowned.

“Happy now?” he asked.

“What?”

“Come on, you threw away my clothes and went to the bar just like that. Why are you doing this?”

“And you? Happy?”

“What do you mean? Are we starting your games again?”

“But aren’t these your games?” I couldn’t give in to him, but in fact, I just wanted to comfort him.

It started to rain, so we scurried under the roof, and the old man almost fell into a puddle; I caught him by the collar at the last second. The beer he had drunk so quickly was working: he could barely speak.

“It’s hard. And yet, all of you are conspired against me... seems so.”

“People are tired of miracles,” I said. “You’re too old, just like your tricks.”

“The young...” he said weakly. “Why can they... I understand... but how would you feel if you were in my shoes? When you knew you were sinking? But you seem to be standing firm on the ground, albeit cynically.”

“We have got a lot in common,” I said lightly.

“At least, try to believe that I don’t sell the amber,” he pleaded.

I wanted to believe it, but for some reason, I continued to resist. Looking at his fragile figure, I felt only faint nausea. After all, he was right all along.

“Don’t be angry... I’m just unable to believe,” I said through my gritted teeth.

“I am not angry,” he pressed a piece of amber into my hand. “Thanks for the beer.”

“Take it,” I held out my palm with the amber in it. “I don’t need it.”

“Keep it, I’ve got nothing to do with it,” the old man said quietly.

“Thank you for trying to make me happier, maybe next time...” I muttered. Grief gripped my muscles.

“You are lying, there will be no next time.”

“No, you don’t understand what I’m trying to say, I’m not...”

“Of course, there will be, for you, there will be. I know it, there is no other way. But I won’t be there anymore. Ask Joy, trust her... This girl...”

The bartender threw me a glance, but when he saw that I was returning the glass, he cooled down.

“If you take the beer outside, I won’t let you in again.” I nodded.

The piece of amber fell out of my pocket, so I put it back in, and the bartender said coldly:

“It’s a shame to take the last amber from the old man.”

“But he himself...”

“Shameful!” He cut me off. “Shut up and drink your beer, or go!”

I still wanted to ask him why he didn’t believe me, didn’t want to listen, but I kept my mouth shut. The question wasn’t even mine...

“Joy!” someone shouted.

It was that same smiley woman from the neighborhood. A toddler was running around in the yard. I put out my cigarette and approached the girl. She raised her bright eyes at me.

“Joy, I’ve got a question.”

“Aaah,” she said.

“How can I find happiness?” I didn’t know what to expect, but it was worth the shot. The child turned her bright eyes to the sandbox, then lifted her head and looked at the sky.

“I want,” she said, her gaze still fixed on the clouds. “I want a donut,” she said and ran away to play with her ball. The clouds were flowing smoothly. I turned to the neighbor. She was smoking.

“Joy wants a donut,” I said, and she just smiled, as if stifling some reproach. I lifted my eyes to the sky. The clouds kept flowing unbothered.

Rawil Zayn

Les peines hirondelles

Des crayons noirs et bleus pour peindre le ciel et ses moulures,
Du blanc pour les nuages flottant à toute vitesse,
Ceux qui touchent mon bonnet du bout de leurs chaussures.
Et je trempe, dans l'amour de l'océan, mon pinceau avec délicatesse.

J'ai mis dans mon sac quelques larmes de joie,
Qui, quand je marche vers l'art, font des vagues.
Des fioles pour charger les encriers au creux de moi,
Et porter la rude piste du vraisemblable au bout des doigts comme une bague.

La singularité de créer un art indomptable comme la mer,
L'authenticité d'écrire, sur mes toiles, des mots à jamais miens.
Dans un monde où je dessine les sirènes dans les airs,
J'inspire le parfum des injustices, sourire aux lèvres comme un Calimero de rien.

Rawil Zayn

Chère Isabelle Eberhardt

Chère Isabelle Eberhardt,

Une femme, une âme et bien davantage qui a débuté sa merveilleuse vie à lire dans l'ombre des chênes occidentaux, des romans et des mythes dont les pages s'illuminent de jasmin, de safran et des palmiers d'Orient.

Le corps à Genève et l'esprit dans la Perse sultane, vous n'aviez que dix-sept ans lors de l'embarquement bouleversant pour Alger la ville blanche. Laissant pour derniers mots à l'Europe « je pars pour soûler ma tête folle ». Vous avez déambulé, visité et adoré les orangers, les oliviers, les nuits sucrées et les matins blancs avant de froncer les sourcils face aux conflits locaux, face à la conduite occidentale au sud méditerranéen. Indignée sans insolence, vous avez combattu l'impérialisme sur le modèle des rêves de grandes personnes. Vos cheveux désormais coupés à la garçonne couronnés d'un turban et le reste drapé à la manière des bédouins : vous êtes devenue Si Mahmoud. Une femme dissimulée en homme pour ne pas s'attirer les foudres de qui que ce soit, aidant le monde et devenant célèbre dans tout l'Oued pour sa grande générosité, gagnant la confiance du peuple en gravant d'encre les mémoires d'une nation berbère.

Aux aurores et aux crépuscules, vous partiez déambulant comme un homme illustre vers le désert pour y trouver les portes du royaume des inspirations. Écrivant proses et quatrains à la lumière du soleil de vos aspirations. Guerrière littéraire et citoyen audacieux, le général Lyautey s'est épris de vous qui étiez selon ses mots « quelqu'un qui est vraiment soi, hors de tout préjugé, de toute inféodation, de tout cliché et qui passe par la vie aussi libérée de tout que l'oiseau dans l'espace ». Je dis que vous étiez libre, l'affranchissement coulait dans vos veines et l'irrévérence aux normes dans votre conquête du monde vous fortune. Symbole d'un féminisme militant pour les rêves du peuple, les vôtres ainsi que la paix de tous.

À vos vingt sept ans, une tempête fait rage sur Aïn Sefra, incapable de quitter le domicile sans vos manuscrits vous restez sur place à leur recherche. Retrouvée sans vie six jours plus tard, partie ailleurs sur les traces prémonitoires de vos écrits antérieurs. Vous traciez votre poème intitulé Paradis des Eaux et disiez : « J'étais couchée sur de longues herbes aquatiques molles et enveloppantes comme des chevelures, je m'abandonnais aux visions nombreuses, aux extases lentes. Mon esprit quitta mon corps et s'envola de nouveau vers les jardins enchantés et les grands bassins bleuâtres du paradis des eaux ».

Acceptez mes amitiés et mes respects, majestueuse femme de lettres, noble soldat pacifiste, âme aux multiples vies évoquant en moi l'écho du courage auquel j'aspire.

Rosa André Lynn

An Elegy from the Riverbed

“Hope is the thing with feathers”

— Emily Dickinson

When the river came, it made its bed in our house, unbidden and unwelcome. And after making itself comfortable, it told us of a nightmare.

“I didn’t mean to”, it started, brackish water slowly climbing the steps to our basement. “Which does not absolve me of responsibility. But I want you to know that it wasn’t on purpose.”

We sat down on top of the staircase to listen, all huddled together, and considered the river for a moment. Its gentle, repetitive rippling motions across the floor tiles, the soft splashing sounds it made. It could have been peaceful, if it weren’t unwanted.

We waited, as the river wept.

?

“When I visited the old man, I was slow, and quiet.” The river began in a murmur. “It was the middle of the night, and this was an old house. I came up through the imperfect plumbing, steadily and stealthily, and reclaimed everything I could. In the living room, there was a birdcage perched high on top of an old, heavy bookshelf. Inside, the canary looked at me, at foreign waters - impassable and silent.

I lifted the small furniture, the vases, the dusty picture frames. This is what I do: I make things float or sink to be forgotten. There is no in-between.

Next to the old bookshelf, a standing lamp wavered dangerously. It was a chunky thing, all brass and kitsch, the top of it modelled like an opening flower. One of the metal petals caught a bar from the birdcage, and the whole came tumbling down with a splash.

That’s when the old man woke up.”

The river closed in on us in its lament, gaining another step. A rising tide where none should be.

“He almost tripped down the stairs, his eyes fixed on the spot where the cage used to be. Then he waded into me, slippers and trousers soaking, hands reaching out into the water. Until he found what he didn’t want to be looking for.”

We got up, tired of peering into the approaching, darkening waters. Instead, we moved to the front balcony, and looked out over the flooded surroundings. The river blanketed the earth as far as we could see.

“He cupped his calloused hands around a motionless, yellow canary, a setting sun between his palms. These hands had worked stone, cement, and brick for forty-something years; and yet they had never before held something as dead as that little bird.

I cannot get his weeping out of me.”

?

At the end of their tale, the river stilled, as if awaiting judgment. We stayed silent, perched on the balcony, impassable and marble-still. No water could erode us.

When the river finally left, we came in with the shovels, and laid what once had been to rest. Amongst the dirt, the rubble and the mud - no feather stirred.

Ruppert Caroline

Die Salz- und Pfefferfrau

Die Salz- und Pfefferfrau
fühlte sich zerrissen.
Je mehr sie zerrann,
desto mehr klebte
sie sich selbst mit Speisen zusammen.
Gründlich gewürzt mit Pfeffer und Salz,
Nicht bemerkend, dass ihr Herz
durch den Kleber zerklumpte.

Sie ließ sich zusammenfallen
von den anderen
und wunderte sich,
warum sie sich
an manchen Tagen
so klein fühlte.

Sie streute auf alles
Salz und Pfeffer.
Es verdarb ihr den Appetit.
Alles war fortan zu salzig
und alles war zu pfeffrig.
Sie war gefangen in einem
Schwarz-Weiß-Film,
der zudem noch grausig schmeckte.

An manchen Tagen sah sie
das Leben als eine Bahn,
aus der sie längst ausgestiegen war.
Das waren die Tage, an denen ihr
der Pfefferstreuer ausgerutscht war.

An diesen manchen Tagen
brauchte sie eine extra Prise Sicherheit von Menschen,
weil sie sich in der Welt
und in ihr selbst nicht sicher fühlte.

So krallte sie sich fest an der Gefallsucht.
Krallte sich fest am männlichen Blick,
knallte eine dicke Schicht Salz darauf,
sodass es zumindest so aussah

als wäre alles ganz süß.

Auch dieser Kleber machte sie nicht glücklich,
aber gab ihr zumindest Halt.
Doch hatte dieser Halt
sie auch nicht davon abgehalten
weiter zu zerfließen.

Und als sie am Boden lag
inmitten von Salz- und Pfefferbergen,
mehr Pfeffer als Salz eindeutig,
– da tat sie etwas Radikales.

Sie versuchte nicht mehr
sich zusammenzureißen.
Sie ließ das Herz lange
sich zerissen fühlen;
gab ihm Zeit.

Sie ging durch die Zweifel,
durch die Leere, fühlte sich ausgeliefert,
ließ sich weiterhin an manchen Tagen
zusammenfalten
und auseinandernehmen.
Aber sie fing an, sich immer selbst
wieder aufzubauen.
Und lernte sogar,
manchmal zurückzupfeffern,
und sich manche Schuhe erst nicht anzuziehen.

Sie ging durch das Leben,
merkte, dass Manche von den anderen
gar nicht so viel anders waren als sie.
Sie vertraute ihnen ihr salzig-pfeffriges
Geheimnis an, und sie ihr ihres.
Sie hörte auf die kuscheligen Worte
der anderen
und schrieb sie sich mit Edding ins Herz.

Sie ging durch die Mitte
und fand sowas wie die berüchtigte
goldene Farbe in ihr.
Sie fand heraus,

dass in der Mitte
die wahre Lösung
versteckt war.

Ein Schatz, so viel mehr als schwarz und weiß:
blau, und grün und rot und gelb
in allen Schattierungen und Schichten,
ein Farbenschatz,
der ihr Herz zum Heilen brachte.

Es war die Mitte,
es waren die Farben,
es waren die Verbindungen,
es war das Nichtzuernst-
aber Wichtiggenugnehmen
und Genugsein,
Das waren die Schlüssel,
um ihr Herz zu heilen.

Und auch wenn sie hier und da
weiterhin Kleber benutze,
und ab und zu eine Handvoll zu viel Salz,
und an manchen Tagen einen Krug zu viel Pfeffer,
so vermochte sie jedes Mal ein
Pünktchen bademantelrot oder mandarinenorange,
kakaobraun oder froschgummibärchengrün
zu sehen,
welches sie wieder in ihre bunte Mitte zurückführte.

Schockmel Jana

Love and other mental illnesses (a collection of poems)

Love and other mental illnesses (a collection of poems)

The other day a book slipped out of my hands and fell to the floor.
It reminded me of the way I fell for you.
Fast and hard and unstoppable.

"I got you!", she screamed, clutching him tightly in her embrace.
And then she rolled off the cliff,
and took him with her.

It smelt like winter and rain
And I felt okay

Mirrors

You stare into the mirror
Do you like what you see?
And the person that's reflected
Is it who you want to be?

In my dream you hugged me back
Just as tight as I hugged you
And told me that
You missed me too

I'm scared
For if I fly,
When will I fall?
And when I fall,
When will I hit the ground?

Everything good in my life can't compensate for the anger I feel towards it.

Fight or flight;
I've never been a fighter.
Run away from my problems
As soon as they're in sight

Everything was ablaze

Fire

Fire everywhere

And she burned

Catch and release

I listen and feel.

My heart contracts because it remembers

Dancing and feeling free

You didn't even notice

You didn't even care.

You just walked right by

While I was standing there

"You'll be back though, right?"

"Let's hope not."

Maybe it's time for us to break up and fall in love with ourselves

I'd even be happy for you

It's like someone's trying to kill you but you can't run away and scream for help because no one's there and the person trying to kill you. Is you.

It's like someone is occupying your mind and you're conscious through it all but you can't do anything because you're *not in control*.

Hurt me until the physical pain overweighs the emotional mess in my mind

I would've been far better off if I had never met you,

Because now every time I read a book,

It isn't the characters' laugh I hear.

It is yours.

Sokolovaitė Ieva Marija

Epitaph for Death

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3L3mRpS>

Translated by Augustė Strumilaitė

I remember everything. I remember how the two of us buried my cat. The cat was insanely fat and insanely lazy, but his sleepy vegetative state wasn't like the usual laziness and cat-ish slumber. I always thought such lifestyle was equal to absolute, extreme indifference to any events of any worlds. My cat could've even been called a yogi if it were not for the tendency to gobble up everything that wasn't locked away. He didn't care for any of the noises, smells, or changes between day and night, winter and summer, anything at all. What was morning or evening, much less winter or summer, even supposed to mean if life in its entirety consisted only of the couch, the food bowl, the litter box, the couch, the food bowl, the litter box, the couch, the box, the bowl: everyone knows that a circle has no end and no beginning. Of course, I'd sometimes get astonished by such yogi-ish indifference of the cat, by his talent to stay as cool as a cucumber; maybe this shift into a vegetative state really does come close to — what? Meaning, salvation, immortality? I have no idea. It's just that sometimes I'd stare at the never waking ball of fluff and I'd find myself jealous of him. I yearned to curl up, fall asleep – after damning everyone and everything – and never wake up, just like that. Maybe the cat even had dreams, but it's not like I could ever know that.

Maybe in his dreams he lived a different life, elsewhere, maybe he could climb walls or fly. Actually, he had tried to show off a bit by climbing walls back when he was younger, not as fat and not that much into his never-ending floating, stuck exactly halfway between nirvana and samsara. When no one was home to discipline him, I'd watch him claw at the front door, pull on the curtain strings, scratch the upholstered furniture. I would only stare. The couch was hideous anyway and annoyingly green: I thought that the scratch marks wouldn't make much of a difference. I couldn't judge the poor critter just because he tried to leave his mark that would indicate he had been here, in this indifferent, complicated, and hostile world.

Wasn't I the same? I boxed til I dropped and wished secretly to break the other guy's nose, to go against the rules, dislocate his shoulder, crush his jaw, leave some bruises and some scars, essentially, leave any kind of a mark of my existence on the form bouncing in front of me. Wasn't I the same, carefully brushing my teeth every morning and night, hoping that at least my teeth would be beautiful when someone digs up my skull in a hundred years? Hoping that at least my teeth wouldn't rot and decompose but would remain intact. Perhaps they'll be so beautiful that, still in my

skull, they will be displayed in a museum or at least in the corridor of a medical department and passers-by will see evidence that I did live. That's why I wouldn't even think of throwing my slipper at the cat or shooing him away in some other manner. The edge of the couch kept fraying; the door got perforated like a gothic pediment. After coming back from work, my Father would slap the cat on the butt, but the cat wouldn't understand why anymore.

Actually, he got his name because of this yearning he had to leave marks and write his name all over things that got in his way. I named him Marcel in honor of Duchamp.

But that was long ago. Later Marcel became an obese, lethargic furry pillow and there was no coming back from that. The circle had closed, the couch-food-litter cycle became endless and irreversible. It had become so impossibly perpetual and usual that all the furniture scratches and curtain rips attained in his youth had now become completely meaningless. What was the point of leaving a mark if that fat creature was permanently settled in the same spot with no intention to move? It was either surprisingly contemplative or entirely automatic vegetative rhythm of existence that turned Marcel into an abstraction, into an idea of a cat that I knew dwelt at home. Yet, without knowing that, he very likely would not have manifested himself or come into view at all, except for, maybe, clumps of fur he kept shedding. The timeless circle had solidified into a perfect, indestructible, even form without the slightest of cracks; that's why I was rather shocked, or even aghast, when one day the circle burst, cracked, deformed, and shattered.

The way Marcel died was so ridiculous that, to this day, I can't comprehend how and why it happened. As I've said, that cat was talented. One morning, while Mother was still asleep, he slid off the armchair as usual, strolled into the kitchen, making the floor creak as if he was a big man, and sat down in front of the food bowl. He began to crunch on his kibble, but that time he was in such a hurry (can you feel the nuance, the absurd, pathetic, lame joke? Sounds like a final scene written by a horrible director – at least I couldn't find a logical explanation why a yogi cat should be in such an abnormal hurry on a regular day: why? Why in the hell?). But he was in a hurry, chugging down entire chunks so quickly and anxiously, that he began to heave and jerk, the food was moving back and forth, getting stuck in places and loosening in others until the cat began to freeze, still twitching and convulsing.

I watched him from the doorway, my brain wasn't functioning well. The only thing it could process was that freakily suffocating tremor mixed with heaving, the teary laugh of a madman. The signal telling me to act, to move my arms, my legs, to jump towards the poor animal and just press something, tug on something, open his mouth – but it kept getting lost in between my brain and my muscles. That's why I stayed put like an idle puppet, just standing and watching. Marcel was shaking, white foam dripping out of his mouth until he stiffened and slumped with half a bite down his throat, almost throwing up. Goodness gracious, all of it was so gruesome, horrible, beautiful, and brave.

When Mother woke up, I had already huddled back in my room, pretending to be asleep. I heard the exact moment when Mother found the cat's dead body. There was no sound: she didn't yell or heave or react in any other way. I recognized the moment she saw the remains because it was quieter than silence. Then I heard Mother softly murmur as she petted the fur reeking of bile. She'd always cleaned the litter box, bought the deworming pills, and swept balls of fur from all the corners of the house just because after Father had left us, Marcel would sleep on his side of the bed, and by the time Mother went to bed, the spot would be warm.

I was made responsible for getting rid of the body, so I took the biggest trash bag I could find, rolled Marcel into it, cleaned up the stains of blood, vomit, and yellow god-knows-what, and neatly tied the bag. The dead cat got extremely heavy and probably weighed more than he did when alive. I hoisted the bag onto my back and trudged down the stairs, wondering if death is truly so heavy. Or maybe a body gains extra weight because suddenly gravity becomes stronger and more relevant, maybe a dead body turns to stone as if an offering to be placed six feet under. It's weird, cause until then, I assumed that only lightness would be left post-death, that death would take off the heavy weights pulling down one's feet to ground and cut their strings, that finally it would be possible to float away freely like a fucking helium balloon. And all the legends about the precise weight of a soul, the scientific research weighing bodies before and right after death. Turns out – no, it's the complete opposite; one can feel light and float only while alive and not just simply alive, but acutely alive. You know very well that only after meeting you did I find out what it means to be acutely alive, hyperalive, delicately and exhilaratingly alive. That's why I didn't get rid of the little corpse the way Mother had asked me to: I didn't just simply and obviously (it's so heavy to carry after all) drag it to the nearest dumpster and fling it into the pile of black bags full of putrid fishbones, detergent bottles, chocolate wrappers, and filthy diapers. I really could've left Marcel there and it didn't even cross my mind that it would've been outrageous to leave such a massive lump of fur dripping with vomit for the garmen and landfill workers. I thought that one way or the other, in their field of work, they probably routinely see withered flowers, tiny blue bodies of babies in plastic bags, or other such junk. But I didn't dump him there – I couldn't, and it wasn't pity; I'm not sure why the only place suitable for burying him seemed to be your porch. Most likely it was the same lightness that I couldn't shake off, crouching under the weight of the bag. I dragged my feet, adjusting the bag every now and then, moving it from one shoulder to another, and besides that, I also had to carry a shovel, its shaft uncomfortably pressed against my neck. Once I passed the dumpsters, I realized I'd forgotten my gloves, but I didn't return for them.

While you plucked some branches and some blossoms to adorn the grave, I dug up a hole right beside the woodpile near the northern wall of your shack. I was jabbing the shovel into the ground like a madman, but it was so hard and frozen. My hands were freezing, and I could hardly bear it. I stabbed and chopped off lumps of frozen ground, grunted as I piled hard lumps, then I stabbed again and carved it out again.

At last, I managed to carve out a decent hole, pretty shallow and horrid, but there was no need to make it any deeper; I had no intention to create comfort for the afterlife. Besides, that fucking cold, my coarse hands turning blue. I came back to my senses only when you returned and stood with me in front of the hole. We pushed the bag with all its contents into the mother earth, threw lumps of earth over it, then stepped onto the little grave and started treading on it in hopes of flattening out the mound. We were composed and crumbled the lumps with all seriousness at first, but then something broke and we started treading on them more energetically, faster, more foolishly, then we completely lost it and started jumping, spinning, drifting sideways, yanking each other as our hands tore through the sky. Giggling, clowning, and grabbing onto each other; we were kicking, squirming, wriggling our limbs, dancing, howling with laughter until we ran out of breath. We were treading wildly, like at some monsters' ball; our bodies got tangled, we were disheveled, tired, flushed, and panting. I have no idea what had gotten into us; that frenzy burst like a sticky flower bud about to bloom. It burst like a stream of blood, trickled down our feet, burned our cheeks, and then gushed back into our bodies. We untangled our arms, got back into our bodies, and got off the mound; at least the little grave had gotten flatter. We crouched down in silence with only the sound of our pants audible. You placed an odd posy, made of half-wild twigs from your garden, atop the grave. I used my finger to etch the cat's initials on the mound.

With your hand in my hand and the heat from your waist pressed against my side, I muttered a word or two, proper for a burial. I didn't know any prayers or any emotional speeches, besides, it seemed that Marcel wasn't particularly religious; so, in a few broken sentences, I praised the dirt in which his bones and atrophied muscles will decay. The earth is gorgeous, isn't it? Rigid, indestructible, and ancient. And all the countless invertebrates: heaps of worms, centipedes, bugs, woodlice, mites, larvae, bacteria – a whole divinely disgusting microcosmos, angelically neat Olympus, pure reflection of the Elysium unstained by all the egos and superegos. I prayed to the invertebrates, worshipped the Carrion Beetle Blessed Amongst the Crawlies and the Holy Scavenger Larva, because I believed in them; guided by them I slithered towards the light and the truth. When neural ganglia evolve into a brain, freedom ends, I said. Both of us are too fucking far from the sacred image of the worm we were based on, that is, we are a dead-end branch of evolution of a simple worm; a branch that leads nowhere, produces no offspring, and quickly goes extinct. But this – this stupid doom – is a form of our freedom, don't you think? We have no other choice but to dance, get up to our antics, laugh, act silly, tell each other tales about birds, build gardens and play hide-and-seek in them. We will end so soon, but I want to leave a mark on you, I need you to leave a mark on me. Leave a scar on me, a bite wound, pierce my skin and sew your hair beneath it – mark me with you, leave your signature on me, leave a mark that you have been. Press against me, soak into my skin, my blood, my lymph; settle in my bones, crystalize within my joints – I want to creak with the sound of you; wherever I go, I want to sound like you. Leave your mark on me and never again will I be so vulnerable to the goo of

Nothing. Leave your mark on me and never again will I reign like silence, never again will I echo as the empty, maybe we'll get lost and turn to gray, we'll get buried, but leave your mark on me and I will never, ever, ever again resonate like Nothing, like despair, like desolation: I will buzz with you low and inconspicuously like wild grasslands after rain. Grow into me, let's stay like this a moment more, wind thrums the tin roofs so gracefully.

Amen, you parted your lips.

A dog barked in the distance, we bowed to the deceased, rubbed our frozen noses, and went inside.

Staugaitytė Monika

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3L9MMvZ>

War is a TV set

That we stare at as we eat our soup

War is a horror movie

Still on in the middle of the night as we sleep

War is a book for the ending of which

We impatiently turn to the final pages

War is the dentist we fear

War is the crime news

Terrifying and quietly delightful

As we are not the unfortunate ones

War is poems

Such as this poem

That say nothing about war

That sound nicely at most

All poets write about

I know nothing of war

The world is the broadcast of war

Suglia Cosimo

Héichuewen; Déifbuedem

Héichuewen;

Déifbuedem

Schwaarze Schnéi fält

Lavorare! Lavorare! gëtt gejaut

Metall Schlaange schläife géint Gleis

Schwarz Eeër am Bauch

Den aarmen Däiwel danzt

Héichuewen;

Déifbuedem

Schwiefel Schnéi pifft

Spalare! Spalare! gëtt gejaut

Donsteg Drëpsen drëpse géint Stier

Schwiefel Kuel glousen

Den aarmen Däiwel danzt

Héichuewen;

Déifbuedem

Schachtschnéi fält

Più Giù! Più Giù! gëtt gejaut

Spëtz Piosch pucht géint Mauer

Schachtlift erop an erof

Den aarmen Däiwel danzt

Romantesch Gedichter iwwert Héichuewen

anersäits

iwwerschaffen am

Déifbuedem.

Den Nuetshimmel ass Rout

Technologie am Tosch

vu luesem Doud

Also nee, Nik a Paul, se si keng Gëtter

mee, se sinn Är Opfer.

Mëttelmierprolateriat;

mat all

Mëttel de

mir hu gött vun hinne

profitéiert

Den aarmen Däiwel danzt

Héichuewen;

Déifbuedem.

Tahireddine Camal

L'Ère où la Lumière Réfléchit

J'appuie sur l'interrupteur. La lumière
Emplit la pièce entière, prisonnière
Eclairant, mon poème, mes strophes, mes vers.

La tête baissée, les lanternes sont alignées
Dans l'allée. Elles fixent les passants et oublient
De remonter la tête. En face ou à côté
Elles trouveraient des poteaux, des amitiés.

Les phares des voitures observent le monde
Le monde présenté par leur conducteur
Liberté obscure, ils ne pourront la connaître
Pourtant fières de pouvoir émettre des ondes

Indispensables aux festivités, les guirlandes
Se sentent importantes. Elles étendent
Leur fils dans la pièce entière, pourtant
Ont oublié que ce n'est qu'une fois par an

Aspirant à devenir grand, le feu
Risque l'extinction à tout moment
Liberté passionnelle, son unique vœu
Se souvenir de sa lumière à tout temps

Le soleil se lève. Sa lumière
Emplit la pièce entière et me libère
De mon poème, mes strophes, mes vers.

Tahireddine Camal

Je mens

Il faut que j'avoue quelque chose, à vous et surtout à moi
En soi, on le fait tous parfois. Toutefois, on le fait en urgence
Pour protéger, retarder, déguiser. Autrefois, on me disait
« Camal, il ne faut pas mentir ! » Normal, il vaut pas mal dire
La vérité. Mais la sévérité de la vérité surpasse des fois la sincérité
Désirée de moi. Je mentais, je mens, je mentirai. D'un moment
A l'autre, l'obligation est devenue habitude. Maintenant, j'ai l'aptitude de mentir
A moi-même. Je me mens et me malmène. Pourquoi ? A moi ? En vain,
Je me convainc d'une fausse réalité, il faut réaliser, s'imaginer la mentalité
Pour se manipuler à tel point. Ça va si loin, que j'en ai le besoin, même si ça
Empire ma vie. L'envie de mentir, comme une drogue, vogue sur mes
Pensées. Comme récompensé d'avoir tordu la réalité, j'apprécie la dualité
Que j'ai inventé. Je mentais, je mens je mentirai. Je m'en tirais toujours d'affaire,
Y'a rien à y faire. C'est idiot, mais il me le faut. Toujours plus, un opus de fiction
Pour nourrir mon addiction, sans restriction je mens avec conviction, détails dans
Les descriptions, un tel travail d'imagination dans l'illusion. La décision d'avouer
Ce tort me tord l'esprit. Mépris et incompris, je suis conquis par le conflit entre
Vanité et vérité. J'ai évité la fidélité. J'ai mérité la calamité de honte devant tout le
monde.

Je mentais, je mens, je mentirai plus jamais. C'est pas vrai, mais j'essaierai.

Vyšniauskytė Gustė

LiVeD

The original text in Lithuanian can be found on the Prix Laurence website.

<https://bit.ly/3OnM1lb>

Translated by Simona Butkutė

Even in this country, there comes a time when boogers freeze in your nose. This story could be told by all who ever knew her to some extent: her parents, who thought she'd taken some illegal substances, her friends, who thought she was simply refusing to communicate, and a host family that noticed the changes in the girl's behaviour but dismissed them as cultural differences. Even the neighbour who has never greeted her family would have things to say. However, those who knew the most have remained silent. I grant them a voice today. Lovely Bed, Veracious Mirror, Darling Diary, could you tell us how things really were?

She lies down pretty often. It seems that she would stay in my arms forever if she could. I don't tell her that, but the room reeks of footfunk way too often. Yes, there is such a thing, footfunk. Sometimes she tries, well, how do I put it? Don't think ill of me for it's a bit awkward, but I think the youth say something along the lines of "satisfying yourself". Nights are the worst. She keeps tossing, unable to calm down or sleep. I can't rest peacefully either, because my bones are old and I don't have that much energy anymore. She checks her phone, full of unread messages. She reads them, then ignores them. Sometimes I take a look: everyone writes they love her, miss her dearly, and wait for her return. The love in these messages doesn't seem to reach the recipient. I often think, "Child, why are you so withdrawn? Neither here nor now? After all, you are living your dream, and you are not even happy about it! Perhaps it's the attitude of the modern youth that's to blame: lots of ambitions, expectations, and if something fails, then everything is wrong?" I would comfort her, very much so, I just don't know how to. I am here to relieve that all-encompassing fatigue. I try to shut her eyelids tight, but I'm aware she won't sleep either way. She calms down a bit only when she sees the lights of passing cars on the ceiling, just like at her grandparents' place in Kaunas (she's told me about it before).

Then, one night, someone shrieked. A human, but the shriek was inhuman. The sound came from the outside. She pretended not to hear. The shriek came again. Loud. So loud it was impossible to ignore. After a few minutes, it came again. Unable to take it anymore, she approached the window and glanced outside just to see her reflection in it.

She's been eyeing me more often lately. Stares at me for much longer than before. Trying to see herself in me. Alas. We're no twins, after all. To be fair, we're very different. "There's me, and there's you..." If I'm being honest, that scratched forehead of hers and the cheeks don't remind me of anything, not even of her from the week before, and her lips are so rough that every kiss feels like a brush with sandpaper on my cheek. The hair hasn't been washed, of course. I've already gotten used to it. At first, she attempted to hide it to an extent, but now... Clothes are wrinkled. I know she goes to bed in these clothes as well, so no wonder they are so creased. Once I heard her talking on the phone, I don't know with whom, I just remember that she said that the food here was delicious and filling; she'll have put on lots of weight by the time she returns to Lithuania! Wtf, what's with this blather? For real, her trousers literally hang on her hips. And these outfits she picks... NOT STYLISH! Though at times, she applies powder on that scratched forehead of hers and red lipstick on her lips. It's amusing how naive she is! She thinks that her appearance will get her friends and someone to love. Of course, that doesn't work. But so what if it does? Would she feel less lonely? Oh, I doubt she would. She used to read her texts to me, the kind that is, well, you know, lachrymose, or as Romans used to say, "Libri olentes Veneram" (Venus scented books, about love). I, of course, remained courteous, no comments, only my gaze, which is focused and inquisitive. She finished reading one text. It was drastically different from the rest, addressing as it did some psychological issues (though why should I care?). She glared at me uncertainly and said, "This one's literally about me." My conclusion is that the gal's totally nuts, so best stay away from her. That's about it.

We were very close. She opened up to me every day, and thoroughly. I did not spill out any of that to anyone, but now I can't keep it to myself, I just can't. Especially after what happened.

At first, everything looked fine: "Today is exactly one month since I arrived here, and this is my happiest day. As I embark on this journey, I begin a remarkably comprehensive tour of myself. As I get immersed in the culture of wine, baguettes, and berets (yes, kinda clichéd), my adventure gains more flavour." Sometimes she felt poetic: "And in the evening, I opened the window. I stood and admired the lights scattered among the mountains and the coming from somewhere far away." I don't understand what happened, maybe I did something wrong, but eventually, I could no longer understand who was writing text on my pages. The handwriting had become increasingly fragmented, in some parts even unreadable. "Oh, how I much hate those stupid smiles," she wrote on November 25. "All that talk about nothing, addressed to no one. That constant 'ça va?' It escapes my lips, even though it's not even a real question. The same as saying 'bonjour' twice." And here's December 17: "When I get lost, I walk in circles." I tried to explain to her that everyone does it, and there's enough scientific proof, but other sentences disturbed me: "Lately I've been feeling lost. I go somewhere all the time, but I don't arrive, sometimes I even run, but

in the end, I realize I'm standing still." After Christmas, her self-confidence abandoned her completely: "I can't make a decision. Even the simplest one. I just can't. After all, if I choose one, I might miss out on a great opportunity to try something else. Then others or circumstances decide for me, yet I still remain dissatisfied. What if, what if..." The most surprising entry on her daily to-do list was about taking a shower.

I leafed and leafed and leafed through the pages until I finally reached the last one, hoping for a happy ending, but there were merely three brief sentences:

"I never meant anything bad for anyone. I only meant well. But I didn't know how to do good."