

*Josefine Klougart*

# ONE OF US IS SLEEPING

SAMPLE TRANSLATION

*Translated from the Danish  
by Martin Aitken*

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## THE LIGHT COMES CREEPING

THE LIGHT COMES CREEPING IN over the ploughed fields. Slabs of dark clay soil thrust up among each other, bull calves fighting in the stalls, the thud of too much body in a space too small. And the snow, so gently it lies now, upon the ridges; upon the landscape, everything living and everything dead. A coat of cold, a deep, reassuring voice. The landscape, naked, unsentimental. Here is the feeling of missing you, though no one to miss.

A landscape of lace that is frost.

The landscape is the same, and yet the landscape is never the same. Where have I been, I ask myself. My lower lip has burst like the skin of a ripe plum. Falling on the patio, knees and the taste of iron; lying on the concrete behind the rectory, waiting for the tractor to return home with the first load; if we're not up and gone we'll be in trouble. The way they come driving; hunch-backed trailers. One afternoon we're friends enough to play; we leap among the stacked bales. Fall down in between and you'll die of starvation. Like the cat we find, but that's not until autumn. So it hadn't abandoned its litter at all.

The path leading off behind the rectory fields peters out at the boundary that cuts through the conservation area, the croplands, acreage lying fallow. So much depends on it. Order. There's always a man gathering up stones in the field; new ones always appearing, the earth gives birth to them and the piles grow large. Here and there, bigger rocks lie waiting to be collected by the tractor. When the time comes. Perhaps one of the boys will do it. Or perhaps the job is too big for them. The sun goes down behind the dolmen, which is older than the pyramids. So they say. How old is that, one wonders. Brothers have no age beyond the years that divide them. My sisters and I, one age; we become no older than we were.

The glacial landscape, the kettle holes where the ice forced the land into different positions.

I'm not sure. It felt like I was living out of sync, in every way imaginable. I've just fallen and already I'm on my feet, brushing the dirt from my sleeves, smiling to someone passing by, or to nature. It's only when I think back on something that I gain access to all that ought to be mine. You, for example.

I have returned. Something that was lies spread out across the landscape. A carpet of needles at the foot of the trees. A cape of snow, a forest of fingers, and a sky. Antlers of the red deer, Trehøje Hill, the last ten fir trees on its slopes, decimated by the wind, forlorn. This is what we're dealing with.

Oil on troubled waters.

An odd summer dress underneath a sweater and overalls.

IT'S SNOWING again. I think: when will I be able to leave, the roads are blocked and I'm stuck here. I lean forward in the windowsill, towards the pane. The marble of the sill is cold; the winter is. One afternoon in summer I put my cheek to the sill. My lips feel too big, my hands. I push aside a potted plant, I remember that. Climbing up into the windowsill, leaning my back against the sun and the window. The marble is cold; even though the sun has been shining in for hours, the marble sills are cold. Sticky thighs in the heat. Body longing for cold.

Or body longing for warmth.

My hands become, how should I describe it, violet; in the winter, my feet too. A colour that can remind me of something like: blue. This afternoon the snowplough went by every hour; with a weariness that had to do with something other than snow or no snow, it ploughed through the village, which parted obligingly. Two lengths of white. Black asphalt shining through a thin layer of mutilated snow. I thought of mutilated snow, the saddest thing I can think of. And now I think again: when will I be able to leave.

I'm saving up.

Something beautiful from which to depart, something beautiful to sacrifice. It remains nonetheless, left like a shadow, a heaviness in the images. What could have been. Love annulled.

Are we snowed in, I ask.

My mother is doing accounts, some receipts. Number forty-nine, she says, tying an end and looking up at me.

We look out of the window, our eyes coming to a dead end, like railway tracks in a landscape reaching the point where the workers went home and the job is left for some other time, tomorrow or never. There's a sense of: dead end. The railway tracks lying there pointing, turning the landscape into a basin or a picture you can: see.

She contemplates. I understand, that those kinds of thoughts exist. What exactly do I want, where am going, am I able; and she asks me if it's a problem. If I can't get away, if I have to stay here, is it – a problem.

I shrug. I suppose not, I say. But both of us know it is; that it really is a problem.

Cooped up in here.

The winter shuts you in or shuts you out, that's how it feels, a sense of not being able *to get anywhere*. It's inside us both. No way forward and no way back. She wants to know if I can find peace here. You can't really find peace here. That's how she asks. There's a pause. Neither of us breathes. Again I shrug.

I can, I say.

But it's not about finding peace. It makes no difference, peace or no.

I'm in love, I tell her finally, sitting down at the table opposite here. Her eyes dart between me and the receipts; she thinks better of it and pushes them aside.

Yes, she says.

In a way, I can't stand to be anywhere, I say in a voice that sounds brittle, dry, combustible. A ray of sun in a glass would be enough; it would break, and it could happen any time. A threat. Because in a way I've already seen too much. An odd sense, all of a sudden, of things being arbitrary. That it's not my dead man who's important; suddenly it's someone else, the new man, on whom my life *depends*. I think: can I never just be in one place. Without that

magnetism. That's what the snow does. Or that's the illness the snow cannot cover up, cannot heal; the snow as salt falling upon injured raw thoughts raw emotions. When did it happen. In the night the snow comes, the magnetism wells up in me, I wake up magnetic, and as a magnet: held back, bound up, the entire space between me and this new man vibrates like that. A disconcerting tension. Movements drawn in the air, movements revealing themselves – the second before they exist: then perhaps amounting to nothing. Distress at what *could* have been – so precious.

I think: this is anything but precious.

It's foreboding, the way a house can be when you arrive at a late hour and the lights are out. Or early, and: the lights are out. I think I'd rather be in an unhappy relationship with someone than this: to be without someone. Without those eyes to – well, what, exactly. To give me life. All the time to bring me into being, with just a glance. Rather come into being as a stranger, someone else, than this, not to exist at all.

I am in love with the wrong man. And constantly I am leaving someone I love. A person can come unstuck, but I didn't come home for comfort.

It's about the apples. It's that.

You have lost everything.

Nothing is like you remember it, and everything you encounter clutters your picture of *how*. Nothing remains of the world you remember; moreover, it's impossible, it cannot ever have existed. It's something other than love, something other than an absence of love. It's the picture that arises when the two things are placed on top of each other. A blurred picture in which all faces become strangely open and desolate, run through by – well, run through by what, exactly. Time that won't; a room that won't.

And the grief on that account.

The illusionist.

I FALL AND REMAIN lying in the grass. Lying the way I fell. Late August, a tractor idling in the field out back. The door of the cab is wide open, abandoned, mid-sentence.

There is a lack of movement in the landscape.

As though the day in fact is night; as though the sun in fact is a rice-paper lantern suspended from the ceiling, as though someone just wants to make sure everyone is asleep. That no one is reading or talking or fondling each other, looking at comics. In other words: foolery.

But then nothing but foolery exists: all of a sudden foolery is the *only* thing there *is*.

Are you asleep, I whisper to my mother.

There's no answer. The words linger, an echo from before, my dead man's voice; are you asleep, he asks.

And I was.

Or else I was playing dead.

The knots in the ceiling planks resemble almost anything. A five-legged deer. A half-moon, dripping. Something a person doesn't forget in a hurry. An apple tree with red apples in a corner of the garden, those kinds of remains; summer in mid-winter. It's still snowing.

As it has snowed all day, it snows.

As though the snow wants to prove something: that the composure with which snow can fall never has to do with fatigue; the snow is not sedate, it is simply *inhuman*. Like the winter this year, *inhuman* in every respect. Going tirelessly on, repeating itself in patterns no one understands. The dark is pale from the brightness of snow. Every now and then a red apple falls through the grey darkness into the snow, here beneath the tree's basket of a crown, black bark. A snap as the apple strikes the membrane of hard ice that came of the change in the weather that never materialised. Other than as a moment's hesitation in the winter, a

sudden mid-winter assault of: summer. At once the frost came whistling. Then a hard casing of ice, fifty millimetres thick, now with a coat of new snow. It's alright, I say to my sleeping mother, whispering the words in the dark, sleep now.

It can be as simple as that, too.

That you can lie quietly together and be somewhere else, alone.

Yes, says my mother, awakening with a start.

Where have you been, I ask myself, what was it you needed to finish.

Can't you sleep, she asks, turning in the bed. I think: what am I doing here, in my parents' bed. I'm far too old to lie here; have always been.

Everything is the opposite. The snow whirling up, vanishing into a cloud that cannot be distinguished from a sky. I whisper to my mother, yes, I whisper; go back to sleep. She sleeps at once, without transition, departs the room, lying so completely still. For years you don't notice, but then it becomes so clear, death in one's own mother; you see your grandmother in her, her own mother in her. And in fact another face still, recognisable, and yet unfamiliar. A disconcerting face, this third one.

Then she turns over onto her side and sleeps on.

Then turns and sleeps again.

More than once: a face, my mother's face, disappearing. And the third face that can only be my own, the only explanation, mine.

Inhumanly tall grass.

Inhuman nights. I think – I have been so spoiled. Never wanted anything I couldn't have. Now there's only one thing I want, him, and I can have everything I don't want.

Peace and stillness.

ALL THE TIME I HAD the feeling there was only one thing left keeping me in this world. But then one evening we parted. And the morning after I'm still here, alive regardless. I wake not, for I never slept. You have walked home to Frederiksberg, where you now

live. You have a room in a large apartment, and you sleep in the same T-shirt as when you slept with me. You are deceased, and yet you are there, alive and well.

Without me. There in that way.

The morning slips in with the sun, that's how I imagine it; that the morning begins somewhere beyond the ice-cream kiosk and the fishermen on the far spit on the other side of Langelinie, that it enters the city, passes through Østerbro. The sky is poorly sealed, the sun thin and liquid. It pours into the streets from the bottom end, pushing cars and people in towards Rådhuspladsen, out across Amager, Islands Brygge.

I don't know what you thought you had done that evening, lightened your heart, I suppose, but then it was all so much heavier than before, your heart included; that's how it must be. You think something will last, you endure, and somehow: live with.

I think there is a friend, but then there is none.

I thought I knew there was a mother, always, but then perhaps that too has been crossed out.

I climb into the bed, pull the duvet over my legs and put my arm around her. Now I have returned to the landscape I thought would always be there.

Is it still snowing, my mother asks me.

I nod. Yes, it's still snowing.

Did you feed the birds.

Yes, I fed the birds.

I SIT IN A corner of the living room, and yet in the midst of it all. I can sit like this, here on the white sofa, and all the time I am somewhere else. My mother walks past again, a shadow falls across the room, it's mid-afternoon. The shadows play on the walls and everything else. The gardens are asleep; there is unease because everything out there is wrapped up in snow and cannot breathe. The snow has fallen, upon all that is alive and all that is dead; the snow makes it all the same. All that is buried suffocates and rots, or grows and expands beneath the blanket of snow, the snow; a skin



becoming thinner and thinner, pulled taught. The snow creaks, the vice that grips the plants, the shrubs, the tree stumps. My mother looks out of the window. She has a feeling of having lost contact with a part of her own body, an arm that's asleep. She picks at me with her eyes, pinches me to get in. All the time the sense: that her daughter resides in another world. The calamity that resides in that. Being alone, or at least without.

Shut out of one's own house.

A room in the family, a room in the narrative, a former colony now suddenly *standing alone* and yet still resounding from something like: a narrative.

She can't understand how I can do it; but then she doesn't really know what it is I'm doing.

She leans forward over the sofa, places a hand on my knee, retracting it almost immediately, as though the knee were wet, as though it were on fire. Unreal winter, light and howling. Dressed landscapes. The snow remembers every wandering that passes through it, a trace that cannot be wiped away; the snow remembers; the body does. But this winter is perhaps different. This winter, the snow is continually blown into drifts; it snowed again, and again it snowed. It's impossible to remember anything, and yet one cannot be in any doubt that something was *forgotten* beneath the snow, something that would be found in the spring. Beneath the layers of remembered footprints, forgotten, yet as recollections they remain, a latent illness that may return at any time. Awkwardly in spring, awkwardly in a broken face.

I look up at my mother.

Yes, I think, this is a broken face. If you dig with too much abandon, if you dig like a person possessed or don't know when to stop. And my mother's face, my grandmother's, and this third, strange and yet familiar, which is, what else: my own. A feeling of having returned too late, rattling a locked door and knowing your bag is inside. So we share this too, the puzzle of arrival, the eternally postponed arrival at something – well, something what, exactly; *still*, perhaps.

WHEN I THINK BACK on the days in the summer cabin they seem oddly architectural. As though in recollection they share something in common with structures and exact drawings. They are not allowed to be simply days. In recollection they become: *the days when*.

The days surrounding.

These are the days before, these are the days after; they fall like thick hair on each side of a broken face: how long have you known, I ask. My mother phones; I am still in bed, now I sit up.

I am not breathing.

How long have I known, she repeats, buying time.

There's a feeling of sitting on the back seat and being in my parents' hands. Planetary coercion. The sky that hangs above the fields is dirty. The trees stand clustered like animals in the fields.

I've known for almost a week, she says.

I nod.

I'm sorry. She apologises. She didn't want to get in the way of my work. She thought it best to wait. I think about what she imagines I'm working on. Do the others know, I whisper.

Are you there, she asks. I clear my throat. Do the others know, I ask. Again. I think about my sisters.

Yes, she says.

So I'm the last, I think: So they all know, I say.

I know that she nods. I picture her biting her lip so as not to cry. I bite my own lip so as not to cry, and I: cry. Aren't you upset, aren't you afraid, I whimper.

Yes, she whimpers back, yes, but I've cried and cried, I've no tears left, she lies. Maybe she thinks the distance makes me blind, makes us blind.

We've wasted so much time, I think. And the two of us, I say. We've spent so much time on ... I come to a halt.

On what, exactly. Don't you think this puts everything into perspective, I ask her.

I'm not breathing.

Again there's no answer; there is noise and light.

Yes, she says at last, I suppose so, but I'm still just as ... disappointed.

I wipe my nose on the duvet cover. Okay, I say.

Are you coming home soon, she asks. She's standing in the doorway in the kitchen, looking at the birds that keep the air moving so nature doesn't freeze up.

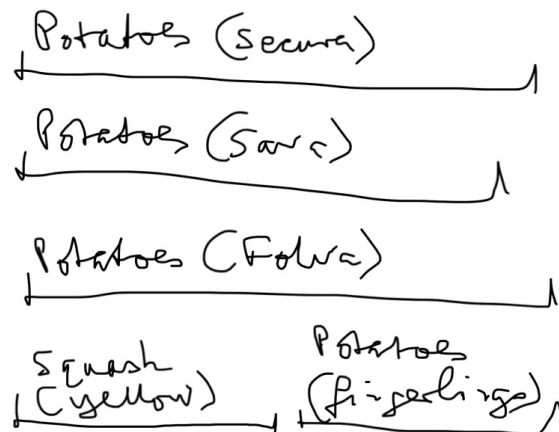
Of course I'm coming home, I answer. I'm not breathing.

The question is if the mother who is telling you she is ill in actual fact is the disease itself. If a person can survive that sort of thing: death entering the stage, a burglary in the home that is life, theft of everything you knew. When you lose your mother, not because she dies, but because she becomes death, the disease that is death.

The conversation ends not by our saying goodbye and hanging up; it's as though we simply become quieter, as though we're standing in an open field, walking backwards, away from each other, speaking with increasingly greater physical distance between us, and eventually we can't hear each other any more, we put down our phones, each on its own surface. The sound of my mother's phone on the sideboard and the sound of my own phone on the dining table.

She goes out to feed the birds. I look out across the sea. I'm not breathing. Everything is still, or there is some other music, detached from the image. It's not music, it's a sound of something unfamiliar, something you don't really know anymore.

WHEN I LIE DOWN in my bed at night I look like a woman lying down in the grass and becoming a heap, a dead calf. I lie down and think: have I risen; I'm in doubt. All that went before. The days. The ones to come. I sleep and do not dream; I am awake in sleep and tell myself a *different* story just to find peace. I tell myself about the vegetable garden at home, my mother presenting it with a pride more usually reserved for mountains; she tells me about the various varieties. There are four rows of potatoes: Secura, Sava, Folva, fingerlings. Half a row of them. She points them out, one by one. I remember the plan of the vegetable garden, the sheet of paper with four lines, one row of this, another of that:



The rows of potatoes run parallel with the hawthorn hedge. On the other side runs the willow she was going to make baskets from, but she never found the time. It became a kind of willow hedge instead. Not inferior, just something else. Another dream that never was. The fruit bushes, blackcurrant, redcurrant, hanging over the path like those standing passengers on trains. Calves and trees. Disappointment. She digs up a potato plant with the spade, squats down and inserts a broad silver spoon in between the small shiny

tubers. The spoon is inherited and is black, its entire surface oxidised apart from the worn area on the underside of the bowl. The spoon makes the same sound as the spade – when it cuts through stony soil, washed in spirits.

YOU'RE CRYING, SAYS my dead man, concerned and reassuring all at once, sounding like someone coming home to an unexpected table, lit candles and food full of promise. I try to smile.

Am I, I ask him in a voice that seems cleansed of all humanity. Or the opposite, a voice that is all too human, as though too much person is pressed into the sounds.

My attempt at a smile makes my face look atrocious.

It's evening. I haven't talked to anyone since I talked to my mother; I don't know what to say to my sisters. I'm not sure we have the same mother; I'm not sure we're a family anymore. When did it get to this, I think to myself, but maybe it was like this always. That we are neither one body, nor one family, or: maybe a family is not the same as a *family*. It's a construct; it's like that because we can't endure anything else. We excuse ourselves, saying some plants resemble others, that some animals do; we're a bunch held together by string; things becoming arbitrary when you least expect it; the stalks wither and the string becomes loose; when it *rustles*. Thoughts rustle, a home, the family, falters. A home revealing itself to be: something other than a home. Rustling. A place that is always a *different* place, a different light there; and then the clatter of homelessness, the body threatening to abandon thought; what remains then, one's good intentions.

And there you stand.

An idea of a home, ideas in general; what use. There are those who come over with us, and those who do not. It can be as simple

as that, too. No bus to pick you up, no bridge built yet, only later on. A fortuitous delay or a delay hardly fortuitous at all, the fatality of a certain hesitation that is thought's expulsion from the body or the blood, the fact that one might never arrive. Those who came over, and those who did not.

(pages missing)

Beneath the winter lies a wandering across the field. A walk through tall grass. Sandals, bare legs, dry sea meadow grass sweeping to one side and another. Grass that breaks and flattens like a tongue fallen out behind me. A heel that becomes visible as I lift it, and which again is a picture trampled underfoot. An island of yellow cudweed. And then: grass again, and self-sown fir, hardly more than twigs almost, sticking out of the ground. That's what they look like. In which case this was before. I am ten years old and we have just taken lease of the land from the state. It's August, and I don't know if the willowherb can flower at this time of year, but I remember the willowherb in bloom, like a whole wall of troubled purple, strangling the brambles. It's that way round, the flowers strangling the brambles, and then in another picture the brambles

alone, blue fingers and red plastic bowls. It's as though the purple of the willowherb is the same colour as the fingers, as though the juice of the brambles reveals itself to be flowers, as though the flowers have been pressed together into hard pellets, these berries, which are now ripe and sweet, and which, well, reveal themselves. Eight kilos. And just as much sugar. And many more jars, and the steam running down the windows. One sees a foot being lifted, then another, placed in front of one leg, then the other, and then again, and the grass bending and falling back in front of us. Hiding the bare legs, which then appear again.

Walking across the field today, the snow creaking, walking there in summer. Yours being the eyes that see the soles of my feet. The landscape actually being you. You lying in a bed in Copenhagen, it being evening, you lifting her hand from your chest once she has fallen asleep. Or just the thought of it. Or the thought of her walking through the same grass. Or turning round to see that no one has been there. I turn and look back. Between the woods and me, the snow disclosing my path, disclosing something else. I don't quite know what. You, perhaps. It could be you.

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I awake. The room is no longer cold, but the bed is damp and clammy. It holds onto the cold. The room faces out onto the back garden, used only when we girls are home, which is seldom now.

My younger sister is always busy. We all are.

Haste, inherited. Have a rest and sit down. A job unfinished. The cold of the sheets is a reproach. I don't really know what it is to feel welcome. I know what it is to belong. But then I begin to doubt anyway.

I feel with delay.

Am always ahead.

I meet you, and immediately I see everything. A pair of scissors cutting exactly into material, the sharp edge finding direction in the weave that is the material's skeleton. The material splits, pulls apart and is a fruit with white flesh. These kinds of moments are the ones I live for, these are the ones I never discover until later. When sitting there thinking that it's too late now to think of whether one should stay a moment longer.

Whether one stayed too long.

Whether one could stay forever and never venture further than that taking a taxi home remained an option.

When such thoughts, thoughts that arrive too late, take possession and refuse to release their grip on one's pale body, my pale body, that trembles with something like: doubt. I know nothing, but I have seen it all. The realisation that goes with that; there is a gaze that *sees*, a gaze that doesn't *know*.



A desire to be recognised as one's self, to find such a human gaze.

Cockeyed days of hoping. Most days are like that. Most gazes.

I'm tired and want only to see clearly. A gaze that is knives and scissors cutting into what really is. That's how I want to see, and it's how I want to be seen. What mayhem it will be. What a mess it will leave behind it, disorder everywhere, disappointment as far as the eye can see. But you. And me, seeing you. Perhaps that's more than enough. Perhaps it's everything one could ask for.

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The bark of the apple tree is black; alone in the garden, black. The tree is there, it cuts into the winter like calligraphy. The winter paints white dogs yellow and the night luminous and in a way unreal, anaesthetised sleep blowing through the streets, a flood of quiet quiet.

The tree is a shadow of another, realer world. That's what I think.

And the apples are still on it, too red, and certainly: too late. Drops hanging from black branches. They hang there today, they

hang all night; not being able to see them in the dark doesn't mean they aren't bright.

There is a small handful of pictures to which I keep coming back. There is a hierarchy of pictures. They are the pictures of the body and the thoughts, the emotions; they won't let go. One returns to them still. Wanting to get closer. Occasionally it happens, nonetheless, in some way or another one manages to *gain access*. A moment: to reach them and show them, give them back to the world. Then, perhaps, one might remember. Everyone has these pictures; four, five or six of them. And it's all about coming closer; they are the thing one writes towards, paints towards; they are what one wishes to say and to share with other eyes. Another gaze. One speaks, and one points, though perhaps no one is there to see. Look, one says, perhaps. How then to hand the picture on, implant it inside another, inside you. That's the question. Whether one can even manage to carry them alone. Whether I can; I need another gaze, another voice to share it with, it's too heavy, and I write in the *expectation*.

At the top of my hierarchy is the picture of the apple tree with its bright apples.

There is a picture of the bedroom window with light coming in, a morning in summer, the panes in need of cleaning; there are cobwebs and some leaves from the purple beech. There is a picture of a pair of espadrille sandals on a bathing jetty; the sea that stretches out behind, a sleeping body, autumn, and no one in sight. A picture of a stable after the animals have been put out to pasture for the summer.

The catastrophes one encounters in one's life may seem unreal, but they are: real. The alienation that makes you think that some people are more real than others is a construct; people are no more or less alien, more or less *real*.

More *people* as such.

And always in the air that stinging slap in the face: for not knowing, after all; that unreality being a matter of ...

Of what – of eventually swallowing one's knowledge of the world: swallowing one's own ideas about knowing anything at all.

One knows so little; one needn't even bother reckoning with it, then at the extremity be pleasantly surprised if, against all expectations, one's assumption should be disconfirmed.

If it should turn out one knew just a part of the world.

Constant motion, collapsing buildings and meticulous work in stone. The unfamiliar as a wall that must be pulled down, continue to be pulled down in order that one might encounter one's own humanity there and perhaps even love someone. Pass on one or two pictures, share them with another, a *you*. That kind of motion *into the world*. An escapism in reverse, a tower I build to be better able to see what is there.

You, for instance.

A desire to see you.

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She can't remember having begun to love him. She can't remember having stopped. There is a love that does not move in that way, forwards or backwards. Such a love exists, a love that is a darkness around people, around me. A desire for constant light.

Walking over the hill towards Stabelhøjen.

The sky growing bigger and bigger, a bigger and bigger sail above one's head the further one penetrates into the landscape. The cows on their way home, out of the landscape again; it's that time of the day, and their udders are heavy and sore; swaying, and squeezed between their legs, oozing milk; the swarm of flies, milling in the air, finding a place in the corner of an eye, the groin. The female calves, which are silent, knees that bend, and stiff hind legs forced past the taut udder. Jets of milk when a leg presses right, white pearls in the couch grass, white pearls resting on the ground, slowly sinking in and leaving behind their moist traces in the clay soil, underneath a clover with only three leaves. The veins on the surface of the stained udders: blue. A wood in which to get lost, and

which is not dark, not only. One can say: that all paths are bright. One can see: a trelliswork keeping different desires in place. You nudge me, to make me turn onto my side.

That's it, you can say.

It's as if our bodies have grown together in that position; all other bodies, those that come later, are incomplete casts of: this. Too much or too little body. I can't remember when we became more than two in this bed. But suddenly there were more of us, and I became another. Are you asleep, I say.

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She thought: Now I shall leave this city and never return. I will let this unreal night remain here, and never come back for it. On the ferry she wrote a message to the new man saying that she hoped to see him, that it might be good for them. Your son, she wrote, it would be good for him to visit the countryside for a while. Don't

think too much about it, she wrote, then deleted it again. She knew he wouldn't come; she knew she ought not to plead like that. Like a dog around the legs, that was how she ran; there was no place she could be anymore, certainly not the flat. Every time he left her flat it became once more a *lonely* place. It was something he did to it; it was how he emptied everything, emptied her.

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But he doesn't understand that I'm using him to postpone death.  
The way I use everything to postpone death.

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Prams in the courtyard. Lots of windows open, duvets, a kind of foam hanging out of bedroom windows, the clatter of bicycle locks, back doors slamming, some green buds, the way nature exists in the city, an absence of all else but brooding on *not* wishing to brood on death and winter and men who are no longer here. Impossible to take leave of something that never was. Something else that could not possibly be taken leave of, exactly because it simply was.

Tangibly, when the past is forced into things, thoughts likewise.

There being a cellar and a lot of things the two have amassed. The indivisible remains, only half figures, half teeth in the mouth; she is broken by all their things; she is broken again by the mere thought of what she can remember and what she has already forgotten.

That, on its own. With no one to witness it, a mitten in the snow, forgotten and concealed all winter, now lying there, seemingly filled out with something that brings to mind a hand, something human about it, the greying suede against the black soil, and ten days later: snowdrops like stars all around it, a sky in the border, in a corner of the garden.

How many such days.

How many days of spring can a person actually manage.

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I suppose I had got used to you, to you being here; the sound of my own heart, the sound of a bush slapping against a window the whole time, all through the night, all through the day.

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But then it wasn't you who had fallen asleep and me who was lying awake; then it's the sound of me alone in a bed and you turning in your sleep next to a body that cannot find peace; one movement connects us all; me waking as you turn in the bed, and another woman getting up. It's not your concern, you might say; I just can't be doing with so much fussing right now. What I need is ...



Room, I say.

It's never one person leaving another; you leave each other, I think to myself. It all happens, one seamless movement; you've become one body, and this body comes apart. There is no blame to apportion; there are many accounts to be settled and no one to invoice. Everything I have is yours. That's the feeling.

In debt, that's what love does to you. At once, you lose everything and begin to borrow. You carry it all around with you: everything you have, and everything you've lent out. That's your body.

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I've never wanted anything before, she understands that now. It's not a competition, you say, meaning: I can't stand to lose any more.

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The dust of the ears of corn, floating in the sun, vanishing in the shade.

Summer.

The leaseholder passes through the stable. He is visible and then not, in the light and in the dark. He walks as though keeping a watch ticking with his steps. When he enters into the darkness all sounds of the stable disappear at once.

But then he is visible in the dark and quite transparent in the sunlight. So that is the way it is. And the shiny tongue of the feeding trough on each side of the aisle, the feeding trough licked clean and shiny over the years, rasping tongues.

With a clatter, the door is slid aside, sun streaming in. The floor ablaze with the light, made to flame by the legs of the cattle that

cause shadows to extend in panic across the concrete. Three at a time, the cows jostle their way up the aisle. Their haunches are pumped and firm, the skin hangs over their bony backs; the udder loose. The legs can break. The cows are always too heavy for themselves. And the jumpy way they proceed, neither walking nor running. They are anything other than enthusiastic. They are anything other than without enthusiasm. It's as though there's something they want to get out of the way, before anyone discovers them to know more than is good. And like a fan, this flow of cattle opens out. All that body falling into place. They are a part of the concrete. Each cow knows its own place. Rather like waves on the shore, their movements are a matter of course, a routine, reminiscent of the forces of nature.

She keeps thinking that's him, that he's changed his mind. A friend calls and apologises. Not so much on his own behalf as love's. It being the way it is, without justice. Justice has nothing to do with love. Justice has to do with business, money.

Fortunately time helps, she lies.

No, he says. Most likely it will never go away; you shouldn't count on that.

No, she says. You know what you're talking about, I think, she says. Someone has forgotten something inside him. No spring can ever make amends. The cows that come out first spill out through the opening, over the yard and across the road. The stiff legs that nearly break into a thousand pieces in a cloud of bonemeal beneath their stomachs; the field, which is soft and on its way up. What's the good of it? And now one goes and sits here again, regardless, on the ground, where the stable was. Now it's just an empty space with the

sky falling down on it. The cows don't pay their way. She thinks: do I? She calls him in Copenhagen. She gets back on her feet and walks through the city. And he hangs on every corner. And another man hangs in her thoughts. And him. And she has a feeling there will be more and more shorter and shorter threads that won't reach together. More long sentences discovered to be false. More short ones that make sense.

Come on, the leaseholder shouts, and slides the door.

Come on, she says to him over the phone. But he has to remain in Copenhagen, there's work that needs him; and his new girlfriend feels bad about us seeing each other, he says. You're not letting go, and of course I'd like to very much, and so on.

A time, inhabiting one's body.

A time for that, and a time for something else. A troubled month or just a troubled night. A magnetic night. An overfilled bed alone. Now this is where you are again. Now the ribbons of snow are the fan the cows were, the tight French braids, some voices, at least three mingling, sentences becoming shorter and shorter.

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I think to myself that I am a person who sees everything that *nearly* is. It's a way of staying unhappy, useless in every respect. To be able to see – not what is, but what *could* be. What's coming, but never arrives; a permanent postponement, a putting off; on its way, just around the corner, and so on. But then once in a while it turns out that the thing that's hidden away there doesn't even exist. That it's something else, and that I am another. *Nearly* is the same as *not*, or at worst *never*. Non-births, undesires, the impossibility of something like circumstances. *Under different circumstances* – it doesn't bear thinking about. I am a guest staggering my way home from a party that never was. Non-places. Whatever they are. It all starts and ends in a conception; eventually it must be swallowed. One's ideas and good intentions, the patience, the ability to convince one's eyes to see: invisible. And to become, with the gaze, fundamentally, an invisible person in the world. To another, who cannot see you, cannot see me. Because he's always disappearing, because he can't get the right distance: close up. Because perhaps he isn't able.

There are people who *cannot* love you. And it has nothing to do with will, nothing to do with desire. It becomes a question of economics: negotiation. Columns, lists of one thing and another. A contract of service. Pay. Or no pay, just voluntary work with expectations and pictures. It's like negatives. I see everything like a contact sheet: everything that's dark is light, the light is hidden in

the dark. But one thinks one sees: a person. There's a resemblance.  
I see the outline.

But then it's certainly not a person I see, suddenly it's not a person I expect. Who will I come home to, who will find me in my bed. A back-to-front person, who *can't*. Useless. Useless in love. And it has nothing to do with justice or ill will or the best intentions. Love can be an economic phantom, riding you through pictures that never turn out. To be. Anything other than pictures, a beautiful dream by which to sleep; by which to wake up black and blue. What are you complaining about; you're almost at the finishing line. And the excuses, the ones one gathers along the way. Bait fed to you by a corrupt keeper.

I forgive you for everything; my body remembers it all. It's impossible to continue and seemingly impossible to escape. It's already too late; when we met we died there in each other's arms, we died there in that gaze.

We drank each other like semi-poisonous drinks. Unthirstily. That is, I saved you for later. Which never came; there was always something fatal about it. The truth is: there may have been something else, too, but things like that are hard to keep separate. The fatality, and something else, like love perhaps, or peace; a home. Everything breaks down, wide belts snapping through the landscape: love, and something that cannot quite be called love.

The fatality of that.

That what one saw isn't what one ever sees; the smallest disappointments, a thirst without a throat, trailing us like homeless dogs. And always the conception of what might have been: begging dogs every time one wants to get up from the table, walk out

through a garden gate, and the future will be waiting there.

Undead, and not even past.

Where have I been, is the thought I think; where have I been, what – naïve. No: lonely. Where did I *look closely*, where did I see it clearly in front of me – everything that nearly was. The person who could love, nearly; this nearly-love that was always replaced by. By what? Reality. Whatever that is. Your reality, I suppose.

*Translated from the Danish  
by Martin Aitken*

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