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It's strange, I think now, how even what the mind forgets, the body remembers.

How the body remembers apart from the mind: me walking behind a person whose walk seems familiar, my body feeling new hands touching it, a gesture while lighting a cigarette. The body remembers the prepositions: its position in relation to other bodies.

In absence of the other, my body continues to remind me of what's missing.

Similarly, there is the felt experience of cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of something beautiful. Wittgenstein says that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it. There is a bodily sensation coming from the experience of something beautiful, desirable, that maybe also isn't easily understood at first sight. Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photos of it, or describe it to other people. Sometimes, during this process of replication, something completely new occurs, that makes the 'original' unrecognizable.

A visual event may reproduce itself in the realm of touch: our eyes telling our hands to press a pencil on paper. Listening to music makes our body move, give the sound a physical presence. The frequencies spill over into the room and may or may not be visible to others.

*Inga Charlotte Thiele*

## Soon there'll be Apricots

soon there'll be apricots  
they come from Spain or  
the Wachau  
and remind us of the transition  
from spring to summer -  
the first summery breeze,

this time last year.

soft but firm at once with a furry  
surface we make their blood squirt  
out by sticking our teeth in their juicy  
insides.

I guess what I want to ask is: does  
having a hickey mean that someone  
tried to drink your blood?

*Inga Charlotte Thiele*



## The Hair Is Always Different

*All is flux, nothing is stationary.*  
- Heraclitus

The apartment I live in has three windows. Each one is on a different side – south, east, west. The walls are thin, light grey. I own one relatively expensive sofa.

Note: events in this story take place in three different time periods – before, during and after the division on the good and the bad days, which was necessary for various forms of organization, some simply for my life, and some as attempts to make its language known to you. You'll see.

During the division, on the good days all three windows were dirty and the sky behind not very visible and not very important. This was opposed to them being clean, resulting in them mysteriously reflecting light unevenly, resembling a makeshift stained glass (too beautiful) – so has occurred on the bad days. On the good days there was empathy between the people I encountered throughout the day and me. On the good days I wasn't particularly happy. On the good days I thought about an article explaining why we felt as if time was passing faster the older we got. It argued that the more years have passed since our birth, the smaller the significance is of one year. So, in a way, a year, as a measuring unit, was losing its value. Let's take an example of a two-year-old child: for it one year is 50% of its life. So, by the time it turns three, half of its life has passed. (Which does sound impressive.) However, if one is 20 years old, a year is only 5% of their life. With each year accumulating, the percentage one year represents decreases. Nevertheless, I can't help but notice that the capacity of meaning a year can hold decreases along, as that somehow doesn't adapt to the speed that we forever seek to manage. A *metaphor*: we're purposefully cutting our very long hair, by an unchanging unit of measurement, in stable time intervals, until we are completely bald. People can then finally see our tattooed skulls.

On the good days I remembered I had beautiful hair. On a good day I would cut my nails to the flesh. On a good day I would forget you existed. On a good day nothing would happen on the internet, no emails, no notifications.

The apartment I live in has three windows. I shut them tightly and leave. I've lost track of the good and the bad days by now. I am heading south; so is my phone compass telling me. It doesn't take long until I leave the safety of my immediate vicinity, the place where all my attempts to escape ceased – my home, as Naguib Mahfouz cleverly defined it.

I follow the course and slowly enter a forest. Soon, I see other people, finding their way in too, lighting their paths with various torches. The air is moist, my hair sticks to my face. I keep on, feeling increasingly determent. I seem to simply slide into the torrent of people, whose walk has that particular tempo of moving whilst pursuing a pre-decided destination.

This reminds me of another night voyage.

However, that time I was not alone. I was with you, the one I fail not to mention. The place we found ourselves in was poorly lit. It looked like a long tunnel or hallway. The ground was soft, and unlike this forest, there wasn't moisture in the air, which was pleasant. I tripped. You nodded and I was safe. Just like here, there too were others walking together beside us in the sunless tunnel. I nodded back to you, but you didn't look in my direction. You were the most beautiful person I'd ever met. I had secretly carved your name under the table in my room, it's was bit embarrassing, but it was ok, it was worth the rejoicing the act had yielded. I knew you would have never done something like that for or about

me. You possessed a serenity, incomprehensible to me. You never needed such aggressive outlets to feel alive. I subconsciously knew, you didn't care so much about being alive to begin with.

Light has entirely vanished and we stared into the darkness, relying on dormant senses to lead the way. I was saddened that I haven't carved your name onto my thigh or some other body part. I suddenly wouldn't have cared if people on the streets stared at me like I was a freak, I felt breathtaking euphoria; the solution was to shed my blood and wear your name in scabs and scars, a name you didn't even choose yourself.

Oh man. We were walking in silence. The disappearance of light caused my mind to evoke mental images.

My shining naked body: fit, long wet hair, I was not my youngest self, but I was so beautiful. I was observing my body. Sundown. I was sitting on a wooden bench, and there were some incomprehensible voices in the background. I felt the warmth of the air covering me like a thin, silk sheet; my skin was glittering from sweat. I reproduced each mind pixel with clarity. I recalled no before nor after of that moment. In the exaggerated hotness I could sense the bliss of youth, materialized in me. I experienced emptiness, numbness and a kind of buoyancy, simultaneously. All protruding parts of my body were pulsating, sweat was dripping down my face, and then, I saw myself from third person perspective, and it made me strangely uncomfortable, to peek like that.

You squeezed my hand and I was brought back to the walk in the tunnel. However, soon enough the thick darkness made my mind visualize again: On the deepest violet there was a face, painted on the sky by blazing flames, with massive brass earrings, and an expression of uncertainty. It spoke:

*"Things can be so complicated, maybe we just need to:*

*confess that we get paralyzed, and our limbs  
crushed, when faced with all the possibilities;*

Think about the abundance of daily contradictions and the ubiquitous belittlements of the many truths. Maybe

we need to nod to the powerlessness we encounter when attempting to step out of ideology, as we try to see it with new, victorious eyes, which we will never have again.

*We should not forget the irrefutable, burning  
urge to do so nonetheless.*

*We need to come to no conclusions. Every day  
come to no conclusions.*

We have to accept anger and carry it in us, let it bite us on the inside, but not share it with others. Maybe all we owe to the world are these question-raising notions and our devotion to finding ways how not to solve them, but how to contain them. Maybe we need to follow no straights, but only spin in circles and try not to spill."

I tripped again. You lifted me up and held my hand. I believed you smiled at me with compassion, but I could not be certain. The darkness felt so eternal. After a certain, unclear amount of time you stumbled too and fell on your knees. I was neither fast nor strong enough to catch you and hold you. Once you were on the ground, I noticed a tiny crack in the concrete tunnel wall, casting a slim ray of golden light onto your face. You seemed absent; I assumed you were undergoing your mental vision now. Within seconds, your eyes became white, and milky tears ran down your cheeks. You looked like a baby and a mother combined. I don't think to this day you ever realized that happened. Oh, god, you were almost painfully attractive like that. That image saddens me ever since, but there were also times when I masturbated to it.

Back to the tunnel; you stood up quickly, searched for me and, unaware of my (yes) hardly visible and readable intense emotions, as you anyway often were, placed your hand onto my neck and we continued walking towards the end of the tunnel.

\*

The air in the forest is getting physically heavy; all my clothes are damp from the humidity. The trees seem to be coming closer together. The farther I walk the more birches I see. Now, in the middle of the dense forest,

the trees suddenly taper and I perceive an opening into a long, narrow meadow. Birches are lined up on the sides of the opening. They resemble walls, glimmering, lighter than the background vegetation, subtly directing the mass. My hair is completely wet.

Many years later, after the hallway-tunnel voyage, we moved to New York City. I got married to another man and we had a son. You left me, but I will always love you. With my husband everything is different than with you, but I'll come to that later. Here, sometimes, I wake up at night and sit on the sofa, cutting my nails to the flesh in excruciating slowness – utterly unwatchable to others, had anyone ever seen it.

To this journey I have brought only my two most valuable possessions: my phone and an advice given to me when I was 27 years old – the importance of employing a leap of faith when making decisions. The advice suggested doing so because one cannot ever know if one will be satisfied with the consequences or relevance of previously made decisions, so one might as well try and seek some peace in the present day. In opting for the leap of faith, one finds a chance to indirectly encompass all potential futures, exactly by renouncing them, and simply choosing the most preferable one as the outcome. Leap of faith is not truly believing all those fearful detours won't occur, it is a conscious decision to pretend they won't happen. Leap of faith is so real. It is the shortest and most militant way to submit to a belief. With it, the need to believe has been turned into a rational one.

My mother once told me a story of a teacher who wanted to explain how one should solve different issues in life. He advocated solving the crucial, determining matters first and then the more mundane, insignificant ones. To explain why, he had prepared a little experiment. He had brought a glass jar, a pile of sand and two piles of small and slightly bigger rocks, all piles approximately the same size. First, he took the jar and poured the sand in, filling the third of the volume of the jar, and then asking his pupils to imagine the sand as fun, leisure time. Then he took the smaller pebbles and put them in, saying they should represent daily challenges and obstacles, and finally he poured the biggest ones, saying they stand for big life decisions, like career paths or choice

of a partner. They did not seem to fit. Then, he emptied the jar of its content and did it in reverse. Everything fit. The message: one has to deal first with major life issues; one should have order in solving problems, if fun ensues only when important questions are taken care for, life will be harmonious. *All parts are equal. Real vision is as good as hindsight.*

As I walk among the trees I think about this experiment. I fear any concept that can be so clearly explained, additionally by an example containing no factual connections to the matter. Stones do stand for something merciless and opposite of the living. They have even killed. I apply however this knowledge when I go grocery shopping. I often bring a shopping bag barely big enough to fit all that I need. Now, I always first put in the biggest products, followed by the smaller ones, and surprisingly I repeatedly manage to pack everything even though it seemed quite impossible when I began.

These doubtful thoughts don't slow me down though. Here in the forest, nothing can slow down my steps. With each one I make they become more confident, assertive, experienced. The only advice that counts in the practice of walking is just walk more, it doesn't matter how you make your steps, just how many. It's basic math. And, once you start, you never forget it. It's like biking, they say the same for it. Or like HPV: once it's inside of you, it stays in your body forever.

Maybe I need to explain why you left me. In a time when I still haven't made a distinction between the good and the bad days, we had our first misunderstanding, one we had actually never solved. You said something, I said something, and so on. After a lengthy discussion we were both certain we had understood what the other meant – after all, we had known each other so well, the best. However, we were wrong. We couldn't have known this at the time, but there was someone who did. *You and I*: we carried our different lives and steps with us, we gave away snippets into it to each other, amounting to gradually clearer reflections of the complexities they were part of, we have even bridged the inconceivable murky patches with love. Or so we thought.

But, that misunderstanding followed another one. Equally well disguised as the first one – we both thought

we understood everything perfectly. We were not fighting, they were simply occurring in conversations, habits and our lifestyles. We still could have not known about the vast presence of these misunderstandings. Years passed, we were happy. Then one day, there was this app launched. Scientists from NASA and stuff. They could determine, with 100% scientific accuracy, whether two people really understood each other, whether they really knew all the nuances and hidden meanings in each argument or opinion, whether all context was known to the interlocutor. So ridiculous, we thought. But curiosity killed the cat, and so we had decided to kill each other. I downloaded it and confidently pressed ANALYZE. And – a twist. Years of confusion, of unattainable references from times that preceded our togetherness, of homonyms in places we drew equality signs. Of course, we split, like so many others at the time. All those years felt too heavy to carry them further.

You were more vocal about ending it. It was hard to see the failure of one's efforts to tame the love of another human being and turn into a home. It seemed as if we'd reached too few compromises. You said that with each day the results would haunt us further, and unwillingly I knew you to be right. The tiredness that the thought of forgetting this newly acquired knowledge caused didn't level out with remaining with me. Today, I sometimes toy with the idea of trying to have continued nonetheless. But maybe I'm only saying this because I'm here, in this forest, a grown woman, walking alone in the night. It was actually very hard to try and mend something with so many flaws – not only because the demise the app had generated was so detrimental, but

## Feeling

*Feeling greenish blue is the only thing I could do for this APP. I love this game but I can't believe how much fun I wanna was when it was a free version of it and the new update is a great way to get to my mind.*

also because it caused a hype and people perceived it as even more tragic, inevitably resulting in social pressure being too high and making swimming against the current an impossible direction to take. So we gave in, and searched for new ways.

Clothing shopping was a tradition my mother and I have built. My mother grew up in communism, and liked shopping because in her past even the most basic premise of capitalism – having an abundance of things to buy, was lacking. When I was a child, communism was replaced by capitalism, but that is a slow process, so the place I grew up at was a society in transition. My mother was happy to be able to take me shopping and I was enjoying it, because children just love receiving shiny, new things. As I grew up and swapped the society of transition with the one of late neoliberal capitalism, to pursue my personal truths and meet you, I began disliking shopping as part of the integration process. However, in the days after the app, I began succumbing, as this tradition was free from the app destruction. *I bought clothes because I knew everything about it.* It would fill my lungs with clear parental care, recoded in adult terms – something the app never shattered, but something that is forever flattening, at best to a mental image, at worst to a beautiful dress.

My husband and I, just like many others, have found different ways of being together, but I won't talk about them. Some use the app to check conflicts and we have sworn never to use it. We're great and there is no irony; I would never lie to you. I like that I have forgotten which days are bad and which days are good now.

As I walk, I see a small gray bird flying low. Its feathers resemble satin. The bird has released its tiny DNA waste, which lands onto the shoulder of a fellow walker. They stop and joyfully look at the whitish stain. It means luck. I walk on and pass them by. They look as if they've found what they were looking for, maybe unknowingly. As I observe them, the bird just flies by me, leaving me clean. That's alright though, I anyway came here for the visual kick. I prefer seeing the strike of luck than carrying it on my skin. It's enough that my moist body is covered in dust and dirt and that my hair is wet and heavy.

## Sexual

*Sexually I just have a good time and I feel like  
a little bit of a pain*

*Pain is not a bad idea*

*Idea of how much you can be like a lot more  
than you*

*You have an i-Phone*

*i-Phone APPs work great*

*Great games for free*

## Fetish

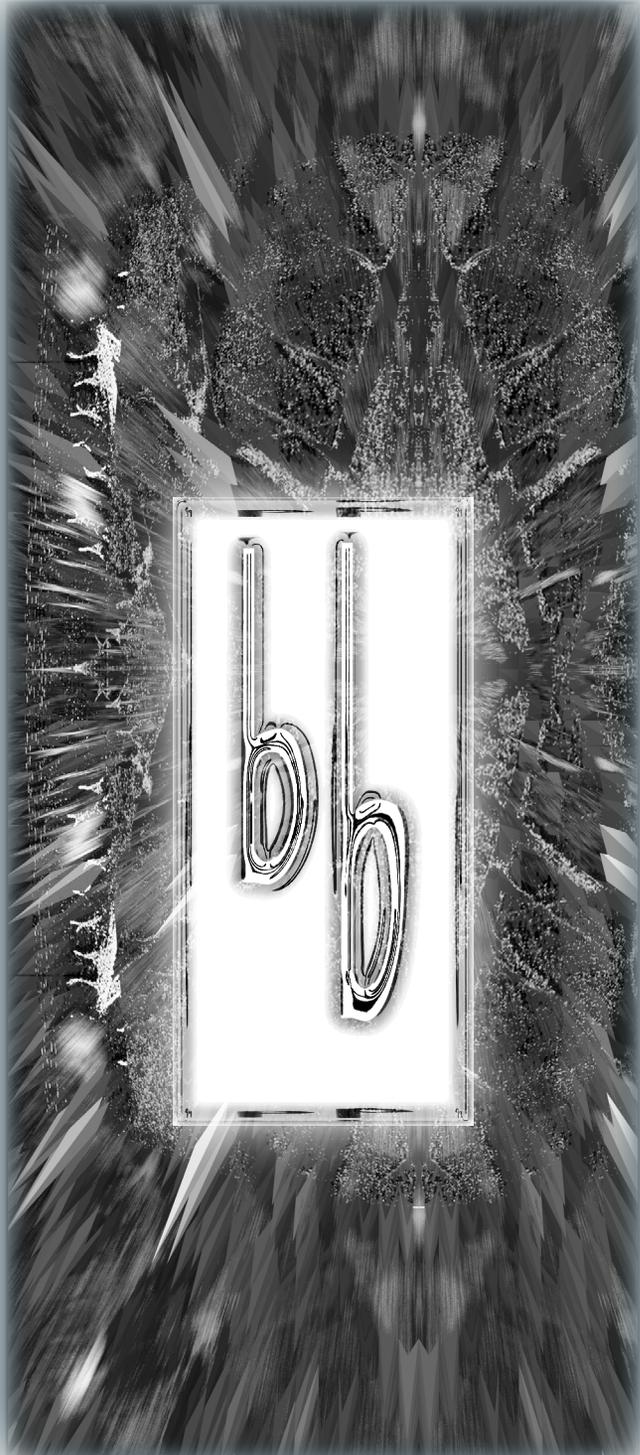
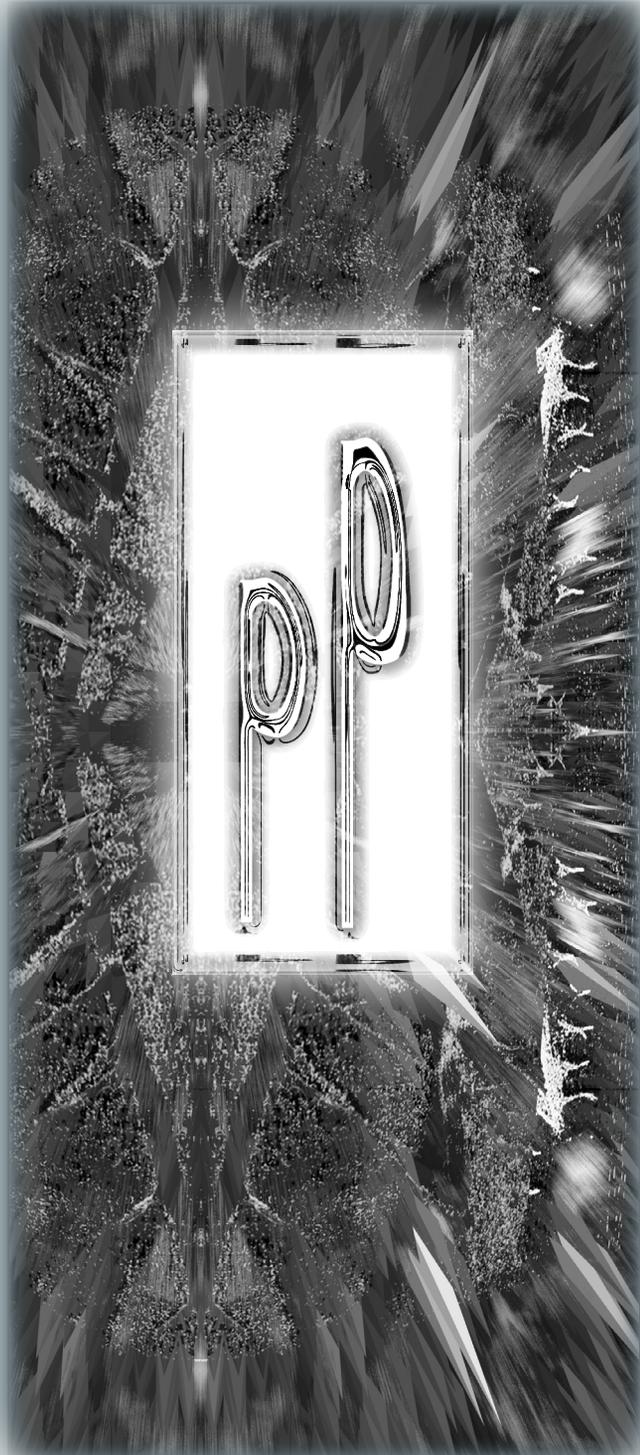
*Fetishizing is a mechanic ball to work with*

*Work work on the 17<sup>th</sup> APP*

*Meltem Calisir*

The long, narrow meadow is ending. My phone is showing me I'm close to home. I'm touching the keys of my three-window apartment in my pocket. I see the edges of the city.

*Julija Zaharijević*



## Three Winged Chicken

mantras of heart stumbling:

apply if

death by jumping over the tellerrand while wearing  
a wingsuit and thinking we can glide in this void

or

death by jumping into a pool while wearing a  
brautkleid: reflection and its underside

\*

kaleidoscopic castle constitution

kaleidoscopic castle constitution

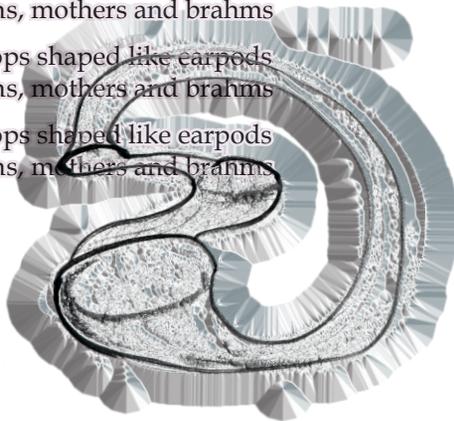
kaleidoscopic castle constitution

\*

crying teardrops shaped like earpods  
brother in arms, mothers and brahms

crying teardrops shaped like earpods  
brother in arms, mothers and brahms

crying teardrops shaped like earpods  
brother in arms, mothers and brahms



unicef french kissed nestle  
black magic was watching - in tears

unicef french kissed nestle  
black magic was watching - in tears

unicef french kissed nestle  
black magic was watching - in tears

\*

it was held in her honor hybrid hyperspace  
trenchcode, paperwall and a plane white face

it was held in her honor hybrid hyperspace  
trenchcode, paperwall and a plane white face

it was held in her honor hybrid hyperspace  
trenchcode, paperwall and a plane white face

\*

electric erosion emote eros emo em'  
sojus sony sauron samsara

electric erosion emote eros emo em'  
sojus sony sauron samsara

electric erosion emote eros emo em'  
sojus sony sauron samsara

*Georg Hampe*

## Kali Grrls

*I live off the night, keeping the day for running errands.* It's not that I have to, I just enjoy it. Keeps the umbilical cord to my old life in place - a girl's gotta' shop, and a girl's gotta' go have lukewarm coffee with a bland friend. I find the façade helpful, comforting even. Some of my kind don't waste the energy and devote themselves one hundred percent to their craft. I consider this monomaniacal, prefer to keep Cerberos on a leash as I usher the souls of the damned to Hades. Although I prefer cats, and have two at my downtown apartment, and a whole fleabag worth at my country house. The ones in my apartment I take good care of, while I let the spawning litter of my feline fiends in the country fend for themselves. I have no plans to change my modus operandi in this regard. When in Rome, they say, and I'm a girl who always had a soft spot for gladiatorial games and the smell of blood cooling on brass-plated jewelry.

I keep fit, run every night, often all night. It's a vigil which reminds me of the mortal coil that carries me, the stardust and eons drowned in blood which my genes have inflicted on the lesser. It's all there, encoded, branded like the sign of Cain on the survivors' forehead. You just gotta' learn to read into it again, allow the crystal mind to decipher what before lay dormant, covered up by the publican wisdom of our forefathers - weak men who rather a pat on the head and a kick in the pants than a shot at true life; the peasants and dirt farmers who did little but serve as vehicle, crowding the waiting room of life until another turn of the gyre comes bubbling up and tears their world to pieces, that great dark zero which hovers over our heads and sucks us back under when we finally throw in the towel. And I can live with that.

In fact, better - I work with it.

It's not that I don't like the quotidian life. As I said, it keeps certain dear memories alive, memories of strolling through golden fields with a sliver of emerald green on the horizon, of my mother's hands which were creased and leathered like the surface of distant planets by years of devoted love.

Or am I just imagining things? My father's occasional festive returns to our small house which overlooked one of the unkempt suburbs of Kishinev... He would always bring a small present. Looking back, he carefully weighed exactly what to bring me - a small rocking horse for Via-the-preschooler, a dark purple satin dress for Via-the-teen, a small letter opener with a ruby-studded hilt as I aged and my proclivities started to manifest.

Mother, father, you are far away, and your daughter will never return. This city has eaten her alive, and she is now a revenant, a zombie, a queen of swords rising from her stone throne and swinging a fiery blade at the darkening heavens. I see the fear of dogs howling at a blind moon, and the petrified butterflies finally breaking out, scattered by the rising wind.

This night I chose to run about in Golemgrad's overgrown periphery, where trees meld with streets lamps. Trying to navigate the railroad tracks through the darkened tenement buildings of old Žižkov, and on across the rusty, spiderwebbed overpass which hangs over a slimy brook by Štvanice island. I set a good pace for myself, first auditing my heartbeat, until finally settling into the rut, the alternating pressure in the ankle and the twirling fibula adding spring to my arch. I always knew how to pace the dark recesses of the foot fetish, getting dicks excited and nipples taut just by turning on my heel.

*Stimulus - response.*

Coming up to a small glade cut through by the train tracks I slow to look in through the one yellow window throwing shade from the ground floor. A white, sparsely furnished room; a man standing over a woman. His back arched forward theatrically, he is bent so close to the seated woman's face that they might be kissing. But they aren't. He gesticulates wildly, finally straightening up, and striking the woman's face in a languid, disciplinary.

The kitchen is small, and the knives are neatly arranged in a cutting block by the microwave. The woman raises her hands to protect herself, the man starts pacing to and fro before the window, gesticulating sternly. The seated figure slumps down, her head hitting the table, she sobs. The knives remain, although I can hear them scream for blood through the windows panes. The steel can taste it. I move

my hand to where my Blade rests hidden under the folds of my running hoodie.

I carry on running past the domestic abuse –this is not my arena. She was not ready to face the darkness which lay outside, beyond the steamed windows of the congested flat. She needed protection and, like any who whimper, she was not ready. The man, just a pawn in another man’s game, barely holding on to the last scraps of validation, before he is again ripped apart by the hands of his foreman at the loading dock. The knot was too tight on that one; it would have only weighed me down.

A figure sits up from a distant pile of gravel, just where I get onto the steel viaduct which passes over Konievova St. below. I see the orange street lights in the distance, beckoning me further on down the railway tracks. The figure rises and approaches slowly, swaggering from side to side, he slows as I approach. A friend of his walks parallel to him, off by the trees in the darkness, equally drunk. They start converging, I can feel the sweet adrenalin rush through my veins and my pulsing wrists give happy twitches between strides.

“Vell girl, where you running tu?” He drawls loud.

“Who you runnin’ from honey?” chimes in the second one, now approaching fast, tasting the kill.

I don’t slow down, I don’t change direction.

“Easy, bitch!” he yells as he lunges forward, craving his fix, just itching to smell dread. I don’t miss a beat, sidestep with the blade in my left hand pointed directly at his shoulder and strike, mid-stride, right where the bone meets the lateral triceps. He stares at me for a second like a hooked fish, unable to move for the fear of pain, and I, slowing slightly, sweep downward toward the elbow all the way until the Blade is free. I don’t look back. They do not have a gun – I know.

Filleted on the tracks – I smile to myself, and lick the bloodied blade once before I put it back in the sheath resting just under my right breast. I give my nipple a pull and taste the hobo’s copper blood between my teeth.

I am Via, I exhale. Via Dragomira.



We run a blog, my girlfriends and I. Mostly fashion and topical opinion pieces, all four of us sharing the writing, design, peddling the brand. The front is Oxana Plath – a group alias which somehow stuck. We dropped the Inc. and now go .org. ‘What does Oxie eat? Who does she fuck?’ We keep the questions coming and always keep a few tucked behind our nickers just in case. Anya thinks about half our reader base knows the deal, and the rest are not worth fretting about. She’s the one keeping the veil up tucked tight around our golden calf, posting the Insta pics, and she’s also the face space for Oxana, who we doll up with the algo in post-production, giving her those trademark pitch black eyes staring out from a bland white face framed by proto-Prussian bangs. She’s beautiful in her own right no doubt, but not something I would spend a night out in the rain for. Anya lives with Helga, an Estonian art school drop-out turned fashionista. The pics and graphic design – that’s her work, and she fine-tunes the filters to make Oxie stand out among the millions of mediocre mood-boreds peddling their own Overton-savvy content. They say that a person’s attention span is now about 15 seconds – like that of a gold fish. It’s the media. The never-ending stream of double binds, private events and forbidden in-groups which shore up the torn-up carcass of web 2.0 stopped interesting me a long time ago, and I’m glad that we now have people who have people for doing that sort of thing.

The last of the core team is Lilith. We don’t know her real name, but never cared enough to find out. She fills in the gaps, picking up the slack where needed, easing tension when things get too catty. I always liked her best, perhaps because of her intense brow which frames her husky eyes

like a marble frame on the Mona Lisa. I also love her appleseed nipples and the foxy sprouts which recently started growing above her vag.

We get by, mostly making money off branded content and a tad invasive promotion strategy which gets us to most of the chic spots. We just don't take no, and then Helga takes some pics of the glitterati eating each other's shit and we get out of there, drunk on the free liquor. The next day headlines are splayed across our feeds - **"SAGVAN MUFF: SPEEDING AT THE HILTON,"** or **"BECCA'S TATS: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL."** It's about the readers, mind.

The rest of the time we shoot pic albums in variously sketchy places - abandoned rocket base in Lipa, apocalypse-proof bunker, the dark room of Pinocchio's... Most of the time we opt for a sex-vampire feel to the whole thing, with a dash of Céline Langerai always peeking out here and there. We have a running contract with their marketing department to have at least two mentions a week. It's worked out so far, but we're getting tired of the laced hemming, and eventually want to get into the fine leather accessories popping up around Bucharest - mostly young craftsmen reclaiming a part of their heritage or something. I'll let Anya fill out the gaps on that one.

As for me, I have most of my money in crypto, currently exploring into some potential tangle-integrated privacy tokens. The boom of 2018 left me with quite a few options - it was moi who proposed to the jocks running the Gitcoin Café to turn their basement into an SM stream studio. They started charging coin for showing johns across the globe two girls and a cup of red wine. You keep those hags on for a couple of hours and charge a few satoshis to each salivating penis and the bills start paying themselves. For a while it was even a little pet project for me - getting the whores and fluffers over to the place, checking out the hardware, then observing from the sidelines and writing the next installment for the blog. A real labor of love.

I remember sitting in the dark on those nights, smoking, the wet heat cooling between my thighs.

But I was in it for the money at the time, and now I no longer need to be. I take it slow, weighing my options carefully. The world can be a wonderful place if you know which cards to play.

Me and Helga recently started hanging out with the French Mafia. Yes, there's such a thing. After the Western-EU reforms last month due to the new Virus, some of the old-time players in the less enfranchised Sardinian families, which used to have the wider Toulouse area in a chokehold at the time, had to relocate. The V4s were obviously the best choice. Prague has become the center for that exodus, and the battles for some of the markets with the Vietnamese and Albanian boys were bloody. But everything moves so fast nowadays. In six days' time, the Frenchies had the PCP and controlled substance production under their control, and were already muscling in on the in-place extortion deals. And thank Bog, 'cause the Frenchies really put some class into all the knee breaking and pistol-whipping.

Nobody saw it coming, nobody ultimately cared since they killed or silenced anyone who might. Soon, we were sipping drinks on the rooftops above Wenceslas square, looking down at the "city of a hundred spires," the Gotham of Mittel Europa, Golemgrad.



But standing there one night, with a champagne glass all dolled up like in a champagne commercial, all I could think of was running across those moonlit rooftops with the satyr wind screaming in my ears and a silenced Glock

suckling at my hip. I turned from the buzz-cut talking head midsentence and went back inside, loitered, half-thinking I'd head out, call up Karla and we could maybe drive around, and then I'd feel her up in the corner of some cozy night box, pardonnez-moi. But that all changed when I saw the tall-one stride in through the elevator door and move amid the catered crowd. There was something erratic in him which electrified those long wispy limbs of his as well as those around. You could never be sure if he would put his arm across your shoulders or smash his Cartier-ringed knuckle right into your left temple. No one could relax around him, and that's how he liked it.

He stopped the hostess carrying tall champagne glasses on a silver tray, her corset overflowing with huge, lily-white breasts. His furrowed forehead stopped her in her tracks; like a mouse cowering in the screech of a night owl. The tall one whipped his arm and, instead of hitting her ruddy cheek with the back of his hand, he picked up a glass and downed it. The girl relaxed, feeling the society's eyes feasting upon her. They all knew what the tall-one was like. He picked up another glass from the silver tray, and slowly extended his palm towards the hostess' face. He patted her like a pouting child, looked about and laughed mirthfully at the crowd. Jeers and a titters all around and the girl was sent on her way with one loud smack on her plump ass. The tall-one's eyes shot about, evaluating his little performance.

I let my awareness slide down my aorta and into my hips, I let it burn there. I lift my ass from the table I was leaning on and set my hips into a figure-eight sway. Adrien was looking lost by the cold cuts and I sidled up, suddenly speaking into his right ear. "Adrien." He jolted and then froze. I could feel the ruffled hairs from his ponytail touch skin. I looked out the window absentmindedly.

"Who was that with the girl?"

"The hostess..." I add after a pause, letting my voice slip into a position of feminine outrage. Adrien turned, smiled at my fascination and spoke about a bozz who came over a week back as part of, he paused, 'restructuralization' back home. It had spilled over into the new market, drawing further West. He took a nervous sip from his glass. "His name is Jean-Paul Pivo," he said, and looked at me with the forget-me-not eyes of a basset dog.

It was Jean-Paul Pivo, and I would be hearing this name more and more as the month dragged on. Summer turned to Autumn, and many old friends started turning up churned, their bowels spilling out on street corners and park benches. Adrian was missing. I still don't know if he beat it to some distant Eurasian shit hole, or bit it somewhere in the dust, but the fact was that he was gone and that I was left without a connection to the made inner circle. I started checking up on Jean-Paul through different channels. He was a sadist, but I knew that much already. That night I saw him first, he had a girl not much younger than the waitress chained up in a box in his Žižkov suite. That one he just used and released to tell about it, but there were others... He cut out Marco's left eye and then continued eating his tajarin al burro while the poor fuck squirmed on his dining-room floor. His cleaning lady apparently washed the blood and piss up without so much as a word.

But what was much worse, Jean-Paul was also a terrible photographer who filled his online albums with half-baked selfies, might-delete-later cutes and dinner pics. It was disgusting to see him smiling vapidly at the camera with a hooker and a Porsche while Vasily, his bodyguard, loomed like a Labrador behind the wheel. It was disgusting to see him flaunt his depravity, his silly little half-marathon victories and his tear-jerking play on his followers' idiocy. A travesty, and the endless flow of sub-par material created a fixation for me which was slowly starting to overtake my sanity. I felt inspired once again, and the power bubbled up inside me, foamed upwards until it finally soaked my reptilian brain in the sweetest bloody froth.

I used to fly into manic rage when I felt the power coming on, but that was long ago. The goddess cares for those she uses, and always gives them promised life.

I was just settling down for bed, practicing the Crane with Blade in my hand, tuning my liver to its jittered frequency when the power finally rose past the base of my skull and inflamed my frontal cortex. I saw red, I wanted blood. I would eat the tall-one's testicles while he watched, his mouth duct-taped over, two blood-shot eyes bulging in panic. The chasm opened up and I saw a dark star flash.

*It was settled.*

I finished my exercises and called up Lilith for a midnight fuck.

An old man in the vestibule of the Main Station once raved at me that the St. Vitus cathedral which towers above the city is actually the prow of a spaceship waiting to take the true believers to the Betelgeuse system. "They are waiting for us there" he screamed before I shoved in his trachea and he started spouting mucus. "Get away, I don't know you!" I yelled while I swept past the sliding glass door.



I smile at the memory now, my red heels feeling awkward on the limestone tiling. I am looking down from the roof of the Triplex club with binoculars in hand, but my eyes occasionally stray in the direction of the Castle, where the tall Gothic spires of St. Vitus prick up like the nipples on a medieval-fair drag queen. I see myself on the cathedral's top-most rood, astraddle a grimacing gargoyle, riding the dark expanses of space with the whole of Prague trailing behind me in the cosmos' silent vacuum. Like a horror out of time I would touch down only at the furthest reaches, where lightless, tired matter is forever banished to expand, ad infinitum. I would break free of this cloaca of a world, pierce the membrane from the inside like a spent condom and fertilize the great Outside. The whole of the cosmos behind me would deflate like a punctured cell, its bowels evacuated out into the emerald beyond.

I am startled from my dream – finally, here comes Jean-Paul and Vasily out the door of Hotel Europa. There is our Anya, waiting on the street in front of the car, dressed in character. Oxana is doing an interview tonight with one of the most interesting new names on the local Instagram and blogging scenes, see? For Jean-Paul this was an offer he could not refuse, and I smile as I see his face, 22.5x zoomed, shaking Oxana's hand, going in for a close smooch, ushering her into his waiting limousine. They drive off past the riding statue of good king Wenceslas and head towards the riverside Holešovice district.

I know that by now, Jean-Paul would have gone through an interesting transformation. It's a shame I wasn't there for the predatory fucking, for the moment of truth, for the mad scramble for his clothes and for his dear life. It's too bad, I think to myself, and slide on the second black latex glove. I round the corner down the metal winding stairs which lead into the bowels of the Gitcoin, and insert a card into the reader next to a large sliding door which opens sideways with a swoosh. There is Oxana – nude, stilettoed with a bullwhip in hand and a wolf mask hiding her features. She paces back and forth before a bed where Jean-Paul is splayed spread-eagled. Sweat is running down his face and his lips pout in mortal concentration. He is hyperventilating and yells out every time Anya whips his loins and stomach. I can see blood running down his nose and past his collar bones, streaming over the plastic-covered sheets and down onto the concrete floor where it sluggishly drains through a small silver grill.

I walk over and take my place on his bloody bedside. Vasily slides the door back into place and locks the latch. An angel passes, and I can see the repeated red blink of the camera standing on a tripod in the corner. Helga's face is illuminated white by the screen's glow. She moves to adjust something on the laptop. Probably the bass levels, I assume, as I listen to the deep reverberation of a night tram running over the tracks on the evening street above.

"Well, look at you." I say and accept the chair Vasily brings me. I can smell boozy sweat and the sour stench of fear. Jean-Paul's fluids slowly drip on the cold concrete floor. His eyes widen as he attempts to place me. He won't. You never see the one who kills you. I run my hand along his jaw, and he turns his face away, shaking. Like a shy boy-child, I tell myself, and think back to the ones he stuffed

into the cage in his basement and then cut them up with a pen-knife, occasionally pausing to suck down an oyster from Giorgio's. I can just see him standing over them, blood trickling down white limbs, digging the show until curtains.

This is not about the girls he snuffed. I know that it may seem that way, but it's not. The universe eats its young, always has, always will. This is about keeping the wheel turning, keeping the whole damn show on the road, and occasionally shuffling up the cards. The surprise on the face of a crooked player when he gets the short end of the stick is what it's all about. The grinning joker just stares up at them from the stack, and they still can't believe it even as they're being cut up.

"Who ze fuck are you?" He intones, his accent sounding out of place within the hollow, echoing walls of the decrepit, soundproofed studio. And I just grin.

We've got all night.

Oxana has had her turn with the nail-studded flog, and I think the scene looks just about right. Let the blood pool on the latex covering, let it bubble from dozens of wheezing slits. He's still got a few minutes of pain left in him, and it is time for the grand finale. I put on my limited-edition Blahnik stilettos, all dolled up with a stack of fine, filigreed anklets. I strip off my shirt, don the massive golden tiara which droops down over my ears and shoulders like a Buddhist stupa, and take the brass scimitar Helga hands me. Our eyes meet, and I know she's rolling. I slutwalk up to the bed, and the heap of blood and tissue which used to be Jean-Paul twitches. His eyes are wide open, unseeing, his breathing labored. We've been here a few hours, and it will soon be 4am Central European. Oxana's arms are red with exertion, and she has sat down with a long-drink in her hand. Only her eyes stay riveted on the tonight's work. She seems pleased, but morning draws near, and it's time for the money shot.

I take one last look at the blood-caked face of a dying son and mount him, my long heels breaking ribs, digging deep into the liver and soft innards. The mass under me wheezes and starts to squirm, he makes my feet dance all of their own. I lean backwards to dip the scimitar in Jean-Paul's blood and bring it back up to my lips. I lick the sweet

copper blood and get into the moment. Crouch down, stick out my reddened tongue, and sweep down with the scimitar, severing the head just below the atlas.

A vacuum opens; we finish the game and now it's time to clean up and go home. We lost a toy, but gained a friend - Vasily shuffles over to the bed without any sign of hesitation. He knows the drill. Helga has stopped rolling by now and is busy saving the data on an encrypted server which will be made accessible only to the most valued, most discrete, and of course maximally paying customers worldwide. If you didn't catch the show folks, tune in anytime; for a small fee... It'll go viral in less than 48 hours. Vasily has brought the body bag and then it's on to the cutting shop. I keep my eyes riveted on him. What do you make of this, little man, I wonder?

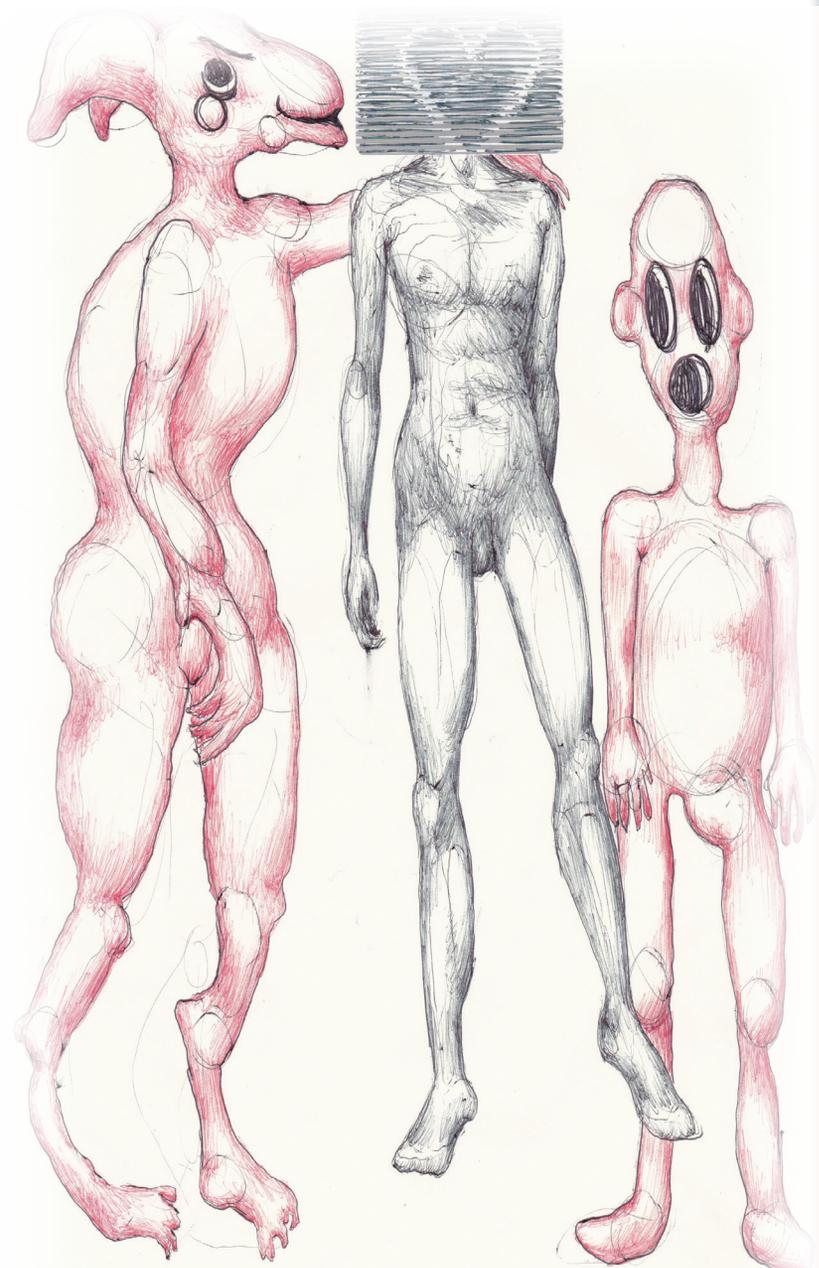
His sunglasses tell me nothing, and I am disappointed. I lock eyes with Anya, who is still excited from the night's work. I kiss her on her soft temple, just before the ear, and we share a moment, just standing there, holding each other, gently rocking side to side. She is humming something under her breath and I can smell the sweat cooling on her ruddy skin like tears on a fresh corpse.

I get the urge to call up Lilith.

Poor thing, she wouldn't have had the stomach for this, but at least she knows when to skip it.

I turn towards the couch, and start putting on my clothes, slowly fastening one buckle a time, enjoying the feel of the fabric between my fingers.

*Vit Van Camp*



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p.4-5 - Ramon Casas, Young Decadent Woman After  
The Dance, 1899 (edit)

p.7 - Claude Monet, Das Pfirsichglas, 1866 (edit)

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