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# I&tp perspectives | *communication*

creative writing project



# l&tp perspectives | communication

creative writing project

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This first collection of short stories written in winter semester 2019/2020 on the underlying topic of 'communication' comprises the work of the students of the Language and Text Production course of the Masters Programme in English and American Studies.

The pictures have been chosen as an incentive to produce divergent and varied texts with distinct writing styles, raising a variety of issues approached from different perspectives.

Whether the writer's aim was to make a statement, criticise, raise awareness or simply entertain, the reader is left with more than food for thought.

Bitter or sweet, optimistic or pessimistic - whatever the images and feelings evoked - each short story is well thought-out, unique and original!



## framing one's life

by marco achenrainer

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

Setting goals. Pursuing goals. Achieving goals. That is what life is all about. At least that is what I have been told. “You have to find proper friends at school that are your age – that is the first thing to do”, my supporting but controlling mother (who does not know that many people one could regard as friends) told me when I was a 12-year-old boy who was about to complete primary education (after attending school for six years and not the regular four ones) and looking forward to middle school. “Try to work on your mathematical skills or you won’t have a chance to get along at Greenwood School”, Mrs. Fairfax, my 46-year-old teacher at primary school, instructed me to do. “Son, you need to find a nice girl. Mom and I will not be here forever. Who is going to take care of you then?”, my conservative, narrow-minded father who thought one could not survive without being fed and surrounded by a nurturing alma mater said.

There I stood. In front of school. It was a foggy but only mediocre cold day in September. School had just begun, and as Greenwood teachers would usually do, they organised a three-day hiking trip in order to increase class community. “My dear children, you’ll see, hiking in the mountains, sitting together by the campfire and playing games in the hut we’ve rented will bring all of us closer together. That’s our goal for this trip”. Goals. Why was everybody so obsessed with these goals? “Jim”, Mr. Anderson said, “you don’t seem to be looking forward to our trip, is there anything...”. “I am looking forward to it”, I replied, but did not really feel what I said. A few minutes later, we started our trip. Greenwood School

The first part was the steepest. While I was trying to figure out how far the snow had come down overnight, I felt that I was running out of breath. “Mr. Anderson, can we take a short break?”, Lucy, one of my new classmates, said. She really spoke from my soul. A break – that was all I needed. Five, possibly, ten minutes. “Alright, let’s take a short break. Ten minutes”.

Lucy and I decided to spend these ten minutes in the cube that had been set up near the hiking path. There was a simple reason for our decision: the padded bench inside the cube. I went to the glass barrier at the front side of the cube. “What are your goals in life?”, Lucy asked me – out of nothing. These goals again. Goals. Is there anything else people talk about than their life goals? “I don’t know”, I responded. Once again, I did not say what I meant. Of course I had thought about where my life is supposed to lead – how I would frame it. I think one could argue that the people surrounding me have been forcing me to think about this frame. My frame. Would I go to university after school or would I rather work in the private sector and make a living on my own? Who am I going to share my life with? One person that sticks with me for the rest of her life? ... Flat or detached house? Maybe I should look for a floating houseboat? No, where would I find anything like this – I live in the Alps and that is completely weird. But would I stay here for the rest of my life? “We need to go. Our ten minutes are over”, Lucy pulled me out of my thoughts.

Before we reached the hut Mr. Anderson had rented for the trip, we had planned to spend the evening outside by the campfire. What a wonderful idea! Spending the evening outside when the thermometer shows -5°C and you are at an altitude of 2039m! “Everybody listen to me. Everybody needs to collect at least ten pieces of wood for our campfire. We want it to last for at least three hours – that’s our goal.” Goals, I was tired of hearing anything about what I was supposed to do. However, I felt like I had to do what Mr. Anderson instructed us to do. While I was running around and looking for some wood that would be dry enough to be regarded suitable campfire material, I saw another of the cubes our local tourism centre had set up. I was astonished by the fact that it looked exactly like the first one: from the bottom to the top. Actually, it was not that astonishing because there was no need for planning different cubes if one is planned perfectly.

Goals. Do I have any? Sitting in the cube and thinking about this question was slowly driving me crazy. Who dared prescribe that everybody needs to set goals and frame his or her life? I mean, when is the point people decide on their friends, partners, level of education, accommodation, lifestyle, eating habits and hobbies? At the age of twelve? My mother, father and primary school teacher would argue for that age – or even one or two years prior. But there is one thing they do not take into consideration: life is a fluent constellation of events and frames should be constructed in a way that they can be adjusted and rearranged as necessary.

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# lost in the open

by **theresa bischofer**

He was standing there. Looking outside the big window, staring almost. All he could see on the other side of the glass was pure nature. Nothing there could be associated with the makings of mankind, nothing in his field of vision could be traced back to human interventions. Yet he knew, even at his young age, that he was not seeing the whole picture, that this little excerpt was, unfortunately, not the whole truth. It did not reflect reality as it were.

It was almost grotesque this situation, for him. He was standing there in this big building. Made of tons of concrete and glass. There was nothing in there that reminded him of nature, freedom, of our origins. Except for the big glass windows that allowed for a spectacular view to the outside. That was what made this situation so peculiar to him. There he was, standing inside this room made from human hands, with everything reminiscent of man's doing. Designer lamps. The coffee shop he had passed by. Multicoloured carpets on the floor. People everywhere, jabbering all the time. Yet, at the same time, there was this endless vastness out there. Pure nature. Mountains. Trees. Birds. No sign of human interference. Ironically, those big glass walls that isolated him from the outside were precisely what made it possible for him to perceive what was out there. They separated him from the outside. Still, they connected, too. He could see the discrepancy. Indeed, feel it. With all his heart. All of a sudden he realised that this scenery perfectly reflected his life. Him trapped in that building, looking at the outside through a big glass window. It was just like he felt all the time. Trapped in his life, not able to break out and feel free. Feel free. Like the birds outside. Freedom. Contentment. Serenity. That's what he wanted to feel. It reminded him of the days when they were still living with his grandpa. Suddenly, the memories poured down on him. So heavy and abrupt, like an upcoming thunderstorm in the mountains. The flashes of memories struck first, the thunder of evoked emotions followed. His heart began to feel heavy, tearing him down, like a heavy stone drawn by gravity. And he felt that all-consuming sadness again.

“Hey, have you already seen the exhibition of minerals?” He was paralysed, staring outside the window. Not comprehending what she was saying. Birds. He could see them flying out there. Free, like the wind. “What are you doing there? Come on, we’ve paid a lot for that. You’ve got to at least look at the exhibition.” The birds, they were using the air current to sail. Gliding, weightless, jauntily. “Let’s go, we’ve booked a table for 2.30, there’s not so much time left. You really like stones, don’t you?” She lay her arm around his shoulder and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “But mom, I was watching the birds outside”, he finally managed to say. “Come on now, sweetheart, there’s more interesting things to see here.” He acquiesced. There was no point in explaining it, anyways. He knew she wouldn’t understand.

It was white. Not a strong, intense white like the one of the sink in the bathroom but rather milky, like a veil of clouds, almost transparent in some spots. Other parts were crystal clear and he could actually see through them. He loved quartzes. Or mountain crystals, like his grandpa used to call them. He liked that term better as the transparent parts really looked like crystals and that’s what they are, anyways. Seeing them here in the mineral exhibition, nestled in black velvets, was not the same as looking for them on long hikes in the mountains with his grandpa. But they reminded him of those days, when they still lived in the small village at the foot of the mountain, high above the valley. He could almost hear the sound of the rooster singing at sunrise, smell the scent of the hay in the barn. His parents’ decision was still completely incomprehensible to him. Why do we orientate our lives to money? Decide on where to move, where to live, just because of money? Instead of listening to our heart, living where we feel at ease and where we are satisfied. Why does money have to be all-dominant in our lives? “You’re too young to understand that”, his parents had said back then. “You will understand once you’ve grown up. We can no longer afford living here. The farm alone does not bring in enough money for us.” And so they moved away, to the city, where his father took on a new job that did not make him happy at all. He could see it in his face when he left in the mornings and when he entered through the heavy front door in the evenings. The corners of his mouth seemed to have dropped just a little bit, not enough for anyone else to notice, but he could easily tell the difference. The expression of lightness and contentment that always used to be there had vanished from his face.

A few years had passed since they had moved and he was still not able to understand. What did they even need money for? He didn’t need it, anyways. He used to be happy looking after the animals on the farm and spending his time outside. In the woods that spread out all the way down to the valley, like a thick carpet of dark green cloth. In the mountain meadows that used to change their colour throughout the year and held that exceptional magic at any time. Where the glistening white of the snow would yield to a dull brown after the thaw, until the first flowers made their way up through the soil and finally brought colour to the world again. In summer, the grass would stand high and many-coloured flowers commingled with the verdant green grass. He used to lie there, amidst the high grass, in a bed of mountain fragrances. Feeling the sunrays warm on his cheeks and listening to the chiming of the bells that he and his grandpa had put around the sheep’s necks. Once the days got shorter and the nights cooler, the meadows would be covered in white hoarfrost in the mornings. Then the first rays of the autumn sun caressed the ground and the ice crystals began to glitter like a carpet made of a thousand diamonds until the sun slowly melted them away and the hoar frost gave way to one of the last warm autumn days. At this time, the meadows were drenched in deep reds, warm yellows and rich gleaming bronzes, unmistakable manifestations of autumn and, at the same time, heralds of winter.

He had loved it there, whatever the season. Couldn't have imagined a better place to live. He loved the vastness of the mountains, all the long days he spent outside, exploring something new each time. Every sunrise he used to observe together with his grandpa from the top of a mountain, was different to the once he'd seen before. They were never the same and it was never getting boring. He missed his grandpa just as much as on the day after they had moved away. He missed the farm and the animals. Missed lying in the mountain meadows and exploring one peak after the other. Time will make it easier his parents had said, and all the people around him kept saying. But it didn't. And it wouldn't. That, he did know, even at his young age.

“You love those quartzes, don't you? There's a shop just beside the café. They sell stones, too. You can choose one to take home with you if you want.” She was trying hard. He knew that and he was grateful for it. His mum was trying to do everything in her power to make him feel comfortable, to help him settle in and get accustomed to the new life in the city. But she couldn't change things as they were. He knew that she didn't have a chance to improve the situation. He was trying hard, too. He really was. But neither of them could change that stupid system. Everyone here seemed to follow it without once giving it a thought, without questioning it. They would go to school, all those years, complete with distinction, just to be able to go to university afterwards. Then they would study something which they did not support with all their heart, just to get a well-paid job afterwards. Then they would be stuck in that job for the rest of their lives, which would not make them happy, just to bring in enough money for the family and enough money to afford a decent life during retirement. That's what it was all about, life was all money-oriented. He couldn't understand why people didn't question this at all. Why they didn't try to determine what was really important to them in their lives and what their lives were actually meant for. There had to be something more important than earning enough money to be able to live a decent life, of that he was sure. He had the feeling that he just didn't fit into that system that was shaped by the human desire to accomplish always more and that was guided by materialistic values. He wanted his life to be oriented to other things. He wanted to really live it and feel it, with all his heart and soul.

He went to school everyday because he had to, he was trying hard to do what was expected of him, trying hard to fit into that system. But still it didn't make him happy, didn't bring that feeling of inner satisfaction and peace to him. Life must be more than just living according to societal demands. He was trapped in a system that he could not understand, and he did not see a chance of breaking out of.

Five weeks after he had taken home the mountain crystal from the mineral exhibition, their old car was fighting its way up the steep road. As soon as they arrived, he jumped out of the car and began to run. Up, towards the chiming of the sheep's bells. Up, towards the wooden cross on the summit. Up, towards the sun that stood high on a radiant blue sky. Up, until he could see his grandpa's grey old felt hat in the distance. Finally, he was lying there on the ground, panting, breathless, his heart beating rapidly. He could feel a thistle pricking at his right shoulder blade. He could smell the mountain fragrances. He could see the birds gliding with the wind. He could hear his grandpa laugh in the distance. For the first time since they had moved, he felt home again. He finally felt complete and felt a deep, inner satisfaction. Now, he was able to let go of all that burdened him. He could lose himself in the vastness of nature. Feel completely loose out there. His heart and his soul got lost in the open.

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## left behind

by stefanie kilga

Life was so different back then. Dani was so young and innocent. Thinking back fills my heart and soul with tremendous and howling pain. He would only leave due to business, he said, but never returned, no word, no contact, no communication. On a daily basis, his child insists on knowing what happened to his daddy and I tell lies, even though I long to know the truth myself. Why no single word, I query the unknowing self of mine. Left alone in this world, adjusting to the pace of its velocity, and still bearing responsibility for Dani and myself to keep going.

Life was so different back then. I should never have entered this place, since my suspicious feeling told me that something was amiss. And then, when being dragged into this van, beaten up brutally, I knew my life would change drastically. Nevertheless, I had not had a whiff of an idea how this could possibly continue or end. While telling them insistently that they had mistaken me for someone else, ignorance dominated their actions. My only desire was to talk to wife and son, to tell them that I was still alive. Day after day passed, isolated with no one to talk to, I lost the sense of time and the only memory which kept me alive, was our family trip to Austria. I recall Dani enjoying the view, staring into the distance for hours. Cathryn and I did not do much, on the contrary, we just sat there and talked to each other. Talked for hours, just the two of us. We had not had time for explaining, rendering and exposing our inner feelings and states of mind for ages; therefore, we drowned in one another's eyes. How I long for those communications. The importance of an event only becomes visible and obvious after it is gone. Left isolated in the dark, hope is a rare feeling and almost vanished. Two years have passed without any sign. I hope she is alright; I hope they are alright.

I decided to take Dani to the same place in Austria, again. After those years, Richard would want me to relive happiness and positivity; I wished to see Dani as joyful and blessed as he was back then. In Europe, it was not the same; things had changed, I had changed. I sat at the same



spot, remembered his penetrative words and how they overwhelmed me. Imagining his face staring at me, brings tears to my eyes and while watching Dani, some glimpse of hope was reaching from the bottom of my soul to the surface and filled my mind with the assurance that he still had to be out there. Hope which, then, was destroyed immediately by rational and hopeless thoughts. Suddenly, Dani ran exhausted and jaded towards me, crying intensely, opening his arms, signaling that he demanded love, devotion and gratuity. No words were needed to explain what he felt and why tears overcome him so acutely. We took our things and left.

How can someone be punished for just being in the wrong place, at the wrong time? Ripped apart from everything you love, everyone who means everything to you, waiting in silence, in faith. Every time I heard their steps coming closer, my heart trembled, and my breath stagnated. The more they approached, the louder and identifiable their voices got, and I knew that the torture would continue. The same questions were posed on me again and again without accepting the answer: the truth. Money; It is always about money and where I have hidden millions of dollars, allegedly. If I had known where it was, I would have told them two years ago. At least, they did not discover that I had a family far away, otherwise they would probably be dead by now. The last time was different. They placed a cloth on my face and when I woke up again, I found myself in the middle of a dark and deserted alley. Lying there like a straying, wounded dog unable to move, I bestirred myself to get up. My clothes smelled like pee and every possible part of my whole body hurt ineffably. Phone. I need to talk to my family. I would take them to Austria again, for sure. The voice of Cathryn and the picture I saved in my memory of Dani standing in front of this mountain chain, forced me to keep walking and searching for something I could use to communicate my existence and love.

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## counting

by nina moretti

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, plop. That's the time it takes a stone to plunge into the water. Exactly seven - like the days of the week, the seven sins or the seven-branched candlestick. I look down from the observation platform. As every afternoon, I spend several hours on the deck which is only half a mile away from my home. It is my favourite place because of the stunning view of the bleak mountain range on the horizon. What always attracts my attention is the dramatic waterfall dropping off the awe-inspiring valley wall into the shimmery turquoise water reservoir.

Taking a glance at my watch, I notice that it is already past 7 p.m. I should have already been home, that's why I start running. Soaked with sweat, I arrive at the garden gate. I cross the arcade of roses, my dad's Japanese Zen garden and the luxurious arbour. As I reach the grand veranda, my nanny Paula welcomes me with a hug which I don't like at all. As always, I stiffen and do not respond to her warmth. Since my mother's death, I cannot stand the proximity of other females. Especially not the cuddles from Paula who are meant to substitute my mother's. To be honest, I don't need anyone.

I walk up the broad marble staircase, pass the dining room with the shiny chandelier and the elaborately decorated living room from where I can hear glasses clink, unfamiliar female voices, and the scent of flowery perfumes mixed with champagne. I hate champagne. I hate all the wealth. I hate tipsy women and I hate it when they are at our villa. Unfortunately, they are here very often. Sometimes even seven days a week. Yes, my father is a rich banker but I don't think he is particularly attractive. What annoys me most is his whiskey breath and the scent of cold smoke when he is in my vicinity. That's why I avoid him.

If my father spent time with me, maybe I would get to know other facets of him. If my father played with me, maybe I would think of him differently. If my father didn't work that much, maybe I could talk to him at times. If my father wasn't always that aggressive, maybe I would

like him. I would like my mother if she was still there. Though, I personally believe that my destiny is different. Not all of us can live a life in peace and harmony. Some have to suffer and pay the price so that others can enjoy their childhood in a loving and caring environment. I think that nothing is really happening by chance, your life is predetermined at birth; and so is mine. Damn my luck!

Finally, I reach my room. It is a dark room because black is my favourite colour. However, I can also live with sanguine red or dark grey. I love being alone with my stuffed toys. There are exactly seven arranged next to me in bed. All of them are black; black as coal. The only difference is that coal is on fire longer than stuffed toys. Looking at my left forearm, I can tell that embers burn your skin and leave marks; deep burns which are dark red and have a flesh pink ring around, even after summer.

As every evening, I lie on my bed and read a book. Suddenly, I hear my nanny screaming on the main floor. Then, I notice my father's drunken voice. Unfortunately, I know this too well and the situation almost bores me. After several years, I don't care anymore. Still, I go downstairs to peek through the keyhole and see how my dad slaps Paula in the face. Sometimes there is blood but not today. Tedious! I wait languidly until my father grabs her breasts roughly and she groans fearfully. Then, I watch the same procedure as almost every day. He presses her against the wall, lifts her skirt, rips open his belt buckle and penetrates her violently. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and everything is done. I could count it even without looking due to Paula's cries. Instead of enduring my nanny's whining and my dad drinking whiskey afterwards, I go to bed.

Obviously, I don't have much time to enjoy the tranquillity with my stuffed toys. Owing to the shuffling gait from having too much alcohol, I can hear that my father approaches. In the past, my pulse quickened, my nervousness increased and I thought of my beloved mother; but not anymore. You get used to situations and circumstances. He forces his way into my room and spanks my bottom. I know the drill; the louder I yell, the more punches I receive. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and a groan escapes my throat. Crap! When he hits me hard like this time, I cannot keep my mouth shut. Dad laughs derisively and keeps on slapping me. At some point I can't count anymore because I lose track.

Bravely, I persevere and try to escape to my observation deck. First, I imagine the stunning scenery combined with its profound silence and utter satisfaction. Then, I try to feel the freedom and calm peace of my soul when I am at my favourite place. Finally, I dream of the edgy peak giving birth to the crystalline water that runs into the reservoir. I dream of throwing stones into the waters and counting the seconds until they dip in. I dream of how I pushed my mother down the platform back in the days. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, plop.

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## what is home?

by elisa paulmichl

Since we had to pack all our belongings and flee from home, I have often asked myself the question: What is home?

Nine months ago, the answer to this question was always clear to me – Syria is my home. But what if one day you find your home lying in ruins? What if all the favourite places you loved going to, suddenly do not exist anymore? What if your surroundings suddenly stand still because of war?

I remember the bombs. The sound of the bombs. The weapons. The rockets. It was horrible. And loud. Horribly loud. The loudness threatened me evermore and at some point I had to leave everything behind and go. Go and find a new home with my parents. A new and better home. That was our goal.

So we started walking. It was muddy, cold and it was constantly raining. We knew that we had no other choice but to take the long journey to Europe. We went from Turkey to Greece by boat. By rubber boat. It took us five hours. We were so scared. But also full of hope. And based on this hope, we managed to reach Austria.

Arriving in Austria finally enabled us to find some rest, to settle down and to re-establish ourselves. We escaped the loudness and managed to live in safety again and to dream about our future again. About a future that was given back to us.

Today we live in Innsbruck in a small flat. My parents often call it our “new home”. But although I like Innsbruck and the people I have met so far, I still struggle with the question – what is home? Is Innsbruck my home now?

The first weeks in Austria were difficult for me. My days were often accompanied by loneliness, as I had no acquaintance but my parents, who frequently had to rush from one place to another to sort out some bureaucratic matters.

Living in Austria was truly weird for me at the beginning. People here greet each other by shaking hands and kissing each other's cheeks. They eat yoghurt with fruits for breakfast and call their dogs their best friend. They are obsessed with skiing in winter and hiking in summer. They dress up in funny costumes for the carnival and love having little lights in every corner during Christmas time. During Christmas time, some of them even dress up as a Christmas demon, named "Krampus", laden with bells and chains, intimidating onlookers or whipping them with bundles of sticks – a tradition I have never heard of before.

But the main reason why I truly felt like a stranger at the beginning was because of the language. I didn't understand a word. People here speak German and expect you to do so, too. I had great difficulty in communicating with my classmates, as I only had some basic knowledge of English and didn't speak German at all. Nevertheless, I was educated alongside Austrian pupils right from the start, as the Austrian education policy rejects the idea of segregation. My classmates asked me a lot of questions about Syria and the war. I didn't mind explaining them what my life was like in Syria. I told them a lot about my hometown Aleppo, about my everyday life and the Syrian culture. With some extra German classes, the language barrier soon vanished and I found some new friends in my class.

And yet, I miss all my friends in Syria. And I miss Syria. But the reality of our life back in war-torn Syria cannot be forgotten. The sound of the bombs. The weapons. The rockets. In my mind, the loudness often comes back. To overcome this loudness in my head, I take a walk to my favourite viewing platform and spend some time watching the valley and its surrounding mountains. While starring at the mountains and the busy life down in the valley, I manage to find silence again. I manage to feel home again.

Until today, I was not able to find an appropriate definition of what I consider as being "home". The only thing I have learnt and I am sure to say is that there is nothing more important than a good, safe and secure home.

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# untitled

by isabell steger

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

Mountains. Alps. Peaks.  
That is what I am looking at with my rosy cheeks.  
Freedom and silence, I thought.  
And I find my body and my mind caught.  
Caught in the memories that appear,  
When I hear the audience giving a great cheer.  
Thinking about all the positive things I have done,  
Which were almost always so much fun.  
Also regrets are coming to my mind,  
That simply shows how my memories are intertwined.

I look up and stop writing. Why am I reminiscing about the past? Why can't I simply live in here and now? Although I am gazing in awe at those mountains in front of me, I cannot absorb the feeling of freedom. I read through the lines of my poem again. In the following, I should describe the magnificent view rather than experiences in the past. I cross out the whole paragraph. Actually, it is the system of our society that shapes people's attitudes. Especially in today's fast-paced time the system supports the modern developments. This does not only include technical advances, such as cell phones and tablets, but also spiritual development, for instance through meditations. Despite the fact that everybody believes to have their own mindset, they are influenced by various factors – without even noticing. Especially because of the fact that we can easily have recourse to past situations through our automatically saved chat history, for example. That is probably the most common reason why we stick to the past and do not enjoy our present well-being. I recognize tiny silhouettes in the valley. They are probably all walking blindly through the streets – only because they are staring at their technical devices, their smartphones.

Honestly, when was the last time you went for a walk without looking at your phone? Without listening to music or a podcast? I, for myself, have to admit that I cannot really think of a single day, sadly. Except for today. This day, I deliberately “forgot” my phone. Isn’t it shocking that one needs to do something like this and probably has to explain oneself after a few hours why one hasn’t picked up the phone or why one hasn’t liked the new profile picture of the best friend yet? On the one hand, it is relieving to know that those are the only problems some people have. On the other hand, however, we definitely need to try to make an effort to change our perspectives. To change our focus. What is really important in life? Is it our cell phone, or is it rather our health? Is it our brand-new IT piece, or is it rather our bedtime-talk with our beloved ones? Well, I guess everybody has to answer those vital questions for oneself. Some people might come up with their own meaning of life, while others might google answers in advance. Whatever. I pick up my fountain pen again. All of a sudden, I find myself writing the same beginning as before:

Mountains. Alps. Peaks.  
That is what I am looking at with my rosy cheeks.  
Freedom and silence, I thought.

I look up and stop writing; rethinking about the previously written paragraph. I shake my head as continuing this poem would have always been so easy. Just have a look in front of one’s eyes rather than make something up in the mind or even reminisce about the past. The future lies ahead of us – it lies in our hands to make something out of it. I pick up my fountain pen again and continue my poem:

This state of feeling is something that needs to be taught.  
With your body and soul, try to be at ease,  
So you can inhale the fresh and satisfying breeze.  
Try to stop for a moment and simply smile,  
Which would be a change from the daily dial.

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# can't communicate

by annalena weger

How are you?

**I am good, I am perfectly fine.**

I don't know how often I said those words in my life. Meaningless words, and most often a lie. But I don't forget to smile knowing that otherwise they would probably uncover my lie, or probably not! I'm the invisible guy. Part of a group, but still left out. I'm barely swimming with the tide. I'm the one-phrase-conversation-how-are-you guy. They know as much about me as I know of them. No, I know them better. I am aware of them, but they don't recognise me. I analyse them, I try to be right; I try to adapt and I try to be alike.

It's difficult. Don't know why. Want to know why. WHY?  
What could I try?

I feel like on top of a mountain staring at the world. I'm puzzled, and I overthink a lot. Maybe that's the problem. I'm not spontaneous, I'm too cautious. If only I were different. I love the mountains. I feel safe. I can't get lost, they show me the way. They are familiar and always the same. Constant, changeless, consistent. They give me strength, with their silence, calm and peace.

There's this deciduous tree. On his left-hand side conifers. On his right-hand side conifers. Conifers, conifers, conifers. They are everywhere. That's what they are: conifers and I am the deciduous tree. Although I'm different, I'm also the same.

THE SAME, if that were so, things would be very different.

I'm on the outside looking in. They don't know how that feels, can't understand. I have family, but do I have friends? Real friends. NO. I'm anonymous, or at least that's how I feel.



On top of this mountain I can see them. Why can't they see me? Why can't they hear me? - The real me. I am feeling left out and, nevertheless, caught. Caught within the familiar and homely narrowness of the mountains surrounding me, and incapable of experiencing the feeling of freedom and wideness on top of the peaks. But I love my mountains, I really do. They give me strength. Strength in trying to be happy and strong and free. But I most often feel lost in anonymity.

I'm standing here having a conversation with me. ME. Just me.

I like this place. It reflects how I feel. The concrete, my differences, separating me from the mountains, the society around me. Though I'm surrounded by loved ones, they just don't know how I really feel. Lost and alone.

I would like some company. I have company, but I want a different company. Maybe, someone I can relate to, someone who knows me. Someone who understands the way that I feel, and someone I can understand when they speak. I would like to have another deciduous tree just right beside me, to fight the world and the anonymity with.

I know how I feel. I know what is wrong, but they just don't care. Do they want to know? Maybe I am the problem, and that's why I actually don't feel good and perfectly fine.

Am I choosing to have meaningless conversations instead of showing how I am? Am I afraid of what they would say? Probably yes, but I don't really know. Now I'm confused by my own thoughts. What do I really want?

I don't know what I want, but I know how I am. I'm feeling lonely, small and all on my own. I would have to tell them, but instead, I don't know what to say.

I see the world differently, but I just...

**can't communicate.**

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## sky above, earth below, peace within

by **sabrina weißenbach**

picture: violet stathopoulou-vais

picture: violet stathopoulou-vais

It's a usual Friday afternoon, I am sitting in my car driving westwards. Driving westwards is usually a good thing because it means leaving behind the city, and with every meter, I diverge from the city, my body gets lighter and I feel happiness coming back slowly into my cells. Accompanied by a relaxing acoustic playlist, the drive through the scenic landscape of the Tyrolean Alps goes by fast. Driving westwards also means leaving behind the stress and negative emotions that are pervasive among the people in the city - it means going to the place where my soul finds its way back into the body it belongs to.

Over the last kilometers before I reach my destination, the numbness, which I felt back in the city, gives way to the overflow of endorphins and the fire in my soul is burning bright once again. It is the second house of a lovely little village where I pull over and my two-hour drive ends. Before getting out of the car, I take a moment to look around and realize that I am back to the place where I belong. After unpacking, I put on my hiking boots and wander off northwards with my destination lying majestically before my eyes. Soon, I reach the forest. Forests offer many wondrous sights for those who wander through them with sharpened senses. I hear a wild cat slinking away, observe a squirrel collecting pine cones, and listen to the songs of the jays on my way through the woods. After hiking for one hour, I reach the tree line, from there, it is not far to the mountaintop. I follow the small path that leads to the rock face. Red and white markings lead my way through the rocks. Half an hour later, I have reached my destination.

At 47° 16' 54" N, 10° 21' 32" E lies the place my heart was longing for since the last time I left it. And now, as I am standing up here, directions are no longer of importance. Up here, life seems easy and the problems that were omnipresent over the past days are no longer relevant. Up here, you can allow your mind to wander off wherever it needs to go. You can find solutions to problems that seemed intractable. You are able to sort out all the emotions you have lived through since you last sat up here. You can try to communicate with souls that have left our planet a long time ago. Up here, you can look down on the world and get a new

perspective on life. And when you have not found peace by the time the last sun rays of the day caress your skin, you stay a little longer, because the howling winds of the night tell different stories than the soft winds of the day. You just need to take enough time to soak up the tranquility of this place because, with a little patience, mountain air heals everything.

Only when you are at peace with yourself, when you feel most alive, you are ready to pack up your things and make your way back down to the valley. On your way down, try to memorize this feeling of peace and freedom and enclose it in the depths of your heart. Then, you are ready to sit back in your car, drive eastwards again, and face the hustle and bustle of the city. When life gets too complicated again, you should remember that sometimes all you need is a little adventure to cleanse the bitter taste of life from your soul.

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## truth coming out of her well

picture: violet stathopoulou-vais

by angelika klement

picture: violet stathopoulou-vais

They both broke into laughter at this statement. Ben almost fell off his chair by laughing so hard – it could have been the beer, though.

“You know,” he said wiping the tears from his eyes, “this could have been me.”

He couldn’t remember the last time he had laughed like this. Especially not since that day. The day she told him.

But he didn’t want to think about it now. About her. That’s why he came here: to forget.

“Can I get you anything else?” They both stared at the waitress as if they had forgotten where they actually are.

It was not a typical bar situation anyways. They were sitting at a table outside in a picturesque scenery with a roof over their heads. Maybe that was the reason for it being so crowded. Their table was actually the last one that was left, being the reason they ended up together.

Jamie was the first to find his words again. “Maybe we’ll just have some water for the moment.” The waitress took his childish grin as a form of flirting with her and blushed a little. “All righty,” she answered, giving him a smile that laid out her entire heart for him – but he didn’t notice.

“Water?” Ben feigned a shocked expression.

Jamie tried not to start laughing again. “I guess it won’t do us any harm,” he chuckled.

Ben took the last, stale sip from his beer and silently agreed with Jamie. When he put down his empty glass, he glimpsed at Jamie, who was thoughtfully drawing invisible circles with his glass. He had his head bent down, looking into the glass as if he were seeing a different world through it. This was the first time that Ben noticed Jamie’s light orange hair and he wondered why he hadn’t noticed before.

This was when it hit him. He had spent the last few hours with this man, laughing and talking as if they were old friends. But he didn't know anything about him. He thought about asking for his name but then decided not to. It didn't matter much anyway.

Suddenly, he felt a vibration in the pocket of his jacket. He took out his phone and saw her name on the screen. He stared at her picture, spread out over the entire screen.

Her eyes are closed and part of her hand reaching for him is visible on the bottom right side of the screen. A strand of her curly, dark hair softly touches her nose and her overwhelming smile reveals the contrast of her white teeth and light rose lips.

He remembered the day in the park when he took the photo. She was teasing him about the pictures he had taken, saying that each and every one was tilted to the side. He said it was her fault, because she was always standing lopsided, which made all the pictures look crooked. She started laughing and tried to take his phone from him.

And at that moment he took the shot.

Now he was staring at her joyful face which used to touch him in so many ways, now only leaving him hurting.

“Don't you want to get it?”

He looked up and saw Jamie's questioning face.

“Nope.”

“It's her, isn't it?”

“Hm.”

Jamie opened his lips as if to say something, but he knew it was not his call. He actually didn't know anything about it.

The image of the devastated guy he had met a few hours ago popped up in his mind. *Is this seat taken?*, he had asked, pointing at the chair opposite of the stranger. Nope. The guy didn't even look up at him when giving his answer. *She's not coming anyways.*

And that was it.

Jamie didn't ask. Ben didn't tell. Still, they both knew.

The vibrating had stopped, and Ben turned off his phone. He couldn't bear to see the picture again.

“I'm sorry.” Jamie felt as if he had to say something. Anything.

Ben still hasn't raised his head. “It's not your fault.”

*It's not your fault.*

Jamie's eyes started to fill with tears. *It's not your fault.* Those were the last words she had said to him. He knew it wasn't his fault. It wasn't his fault from the start.

But it wasn't hers either. She was torn. And she made a decision. But it was not her fault.

*“It's all his fault.”*

Jamie stared at Ben. Did he read his mind?

He tried to envision this stranger in a happy relationship, but he couldn't see it. Jamie couldn't imagine what kind of woman would be happy with this kind of man. But then, what did he know.

He thought of Anna. What kind of man would she be happy with? Obviously, it wasn't himself. Although he had tried. He had tried so hard. But it wasn't him.

And then – it seemed like a vision to Jamie – Anna appeared.

She was walking down the stairs to the terrace they were sitting on, scanning the place as if she were looking for someone. Could she be looking for him? How did she know he would come here?

He tried not to let her out of sight, even though many people were pushing past her to get up or down the stairs.

Then their eyes met.

She seemed surprised to see him, which cut him to the quick. Still, he raised his hand as a form of greeting her.

Ben finally looked up when he noticed the movement of the stranger.

“Oh, I didn't know you were expecting someone.” He started to collect his belongings, showing that he would leave his seat for the newcomer.

“Actually, I wasn't.” Jamie didn't take his eyes off Anna. “Maybe it's destiny.”

Ben stared at him in surprise. The look on Jamie's face engraved itself into his memory. Another mural for the collection in his head. He would call it *True Love*.

Anna came closer and Jamie raised from his chair in order to greet her. But then she stopped.

She stood like a statue only some feet away from their table. Jamie liked this picture, but he didn't understand. What was wrong?

Ben was still gathering his belongings, not taking notice of the scene right in front of him. And then Jamie saw it. Her look. Or rather it's direction. He stared at Ben and his mind went blank.

“It was nice meeting you.” Ben stretched out his arm for Jamie to take his hand, but Jamie couldn't move. “What's wrong?”

“Ben?”

His heart jumped and then hit the ground – really hard. It couldn't break, though. Not again.

He turned around, but he already knew it was her.

“Anna.”

## closely separated

by kathrin renner

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiss

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiss

Now you are sitting opposite me. We are looking each other in the eyes and do not know what to say. Although there are not any words uttered, so much communication is going on between us. I get the feeling of having spent my whole life with you even though this is not the case. We have talked about so many superficial issues such as the weather and the difficulty in finding a parking space on a Saturday evening in the town center. The bottles and glasses on the table in front of us are empty now.

If we want to leave this bar with some answers, we should finally start to ask these burning questions which we have posed ourselves in numerous sleepless nights. You clear your throat, but all you can say then is, "It was a difficult time back then." I think you are right, but at the same time I perceive this as a meaningless phrase. We both received an excellent education at top-notch institutions. You raised a family and started your own business. I have a partner as well, but we never married and have no children. So far, the right moment, if that exists at all, has not come for us to settle down to family life. My partner and I love our jobs and spend a lot of time working for different projects around the world. We do not see each other every day, but this is fine for us since we both need our personal space. You accept my life style even though it is totally different from yours. When you are on a business trip, you regularly call your family to ask them how they are doing and what is going on at home.

It is half past nine in the evening. It is dark outside, however, every now and then a car's headlights break through the darkness. The other guests in the bar have gathered at the counter to watch the football game on the big screen on the wall. From time to time they comment it with their sights and cheers. They do not acknowledge that in the back corner two adult people are sitting feeling awkward about honestly talking to each other, albeit being closely related.

The years between now and the last time we saw each other have turned us nearly into strangers. We have avoided the topic which had originally been the reason why we decided to

meet. It was not easy for me to make the decision on this meeting. I was wondering how both of us would react when we see each other again. All these past years were characterized by a feeling of incompleteness.

I cannot do this anymore. I want to stop this beating about the bush and address what happened back then. Although this may reopen old wounds, for me this is the only way to come to terms with the past and stop maintaining the illusion of a close-knit family. I say, “I know this is not easy for both of us. I have missed you all these years and have often wondered where you were and with whom you may have shared your secrets.” You raise your eyes and I can see you feel relieved that one of us has finally dared to speak. You reply that you often thought of me after you had left. The new life that began for you was full of joy, but nevertheless you had the feeling that something was missing to complete it and to name it a fulfilled one. You got to know other people that eventually became your friends. When you finished school, you moved to another town to start studying law at university. For a couple of years, you owned a law office together with one of your former fellow students. You pleaded men’s and women’s cases who filed for divorce and tried to work out with them suitable solutions to continue sharing responsibility for their children in the future. You have also experienced cases in which custody was awarded to a single parent. As you are a sensitive and empathetic person, some cases of broken up families have affected you deeply. Sometimes you could connect to their feelings due to your own story.

After the first step was made, the words start to burst from our mouths. This night we are among the last guests who leave the bar. There is so much we need to account for the past. Together we look back on so many shared situations and reappraise them. This meeting helps us to approach each other and we both know that we need to take our time to feel that closeness that once had connected us. When I drive home this evening, I know it was the right decision to meet my twin brother who grew up with me in an orphanage until he was adopted by a childless couple.

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## why brother?

by christa rieser

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaia

In the beginning, all I had was a name. Robert Easton. Did I really care to meet him? No. Not at all. Based on the little information I had on my father, I was by far not his only child. I had never lived with the belief that I was. There were more than just the two of us wandering around the world carrying his genes inside our bodies. It wasn't as if I felt an obligation to meet him just because he was a sibling. Most likely, there were many of us, and frankly, I didn't consider them to be any more connected to me than virtually any other stranger. Regardless of their number, they were just a few among seven billion other strangers.

What was our father like? I have never known much about him. All the information I had on him I gained from my mother, who understandably didn't speak highly of the man who was not only a father to me, but to various children, most of them illegitimate. Selfish and hedonistic he was, not bothering to stay after my mother had informed him. He was handsome and, according to what my mother told me about him, there was something about him, a certain charm, that no woman was immune to. Until today, the best photograph I have of him has a thick seam in the middle, from being ripped apart by her at some point, then mended with tape. I've always wondered why she bothered to fix it. I assume she partly did it so that I would have a halfway decent picture of him.

Robert then. Probably needs a kidney, I thought. Or a bone marrow donation. I didn't reply for five weeks. Then, one morning, out of the blue, I told my wife that my *alleged* half-brother had written to me. To this day, I don't know why I told her. I hadn't planned to do so. I had known what her reaction would be. That she'd badger me for weeks and months and years into making me write him back. Into arranging a meeting. One moment before I said the words that admittedly I would regret for weeks, I had no idea I would say them. I had thus not foreseen my action of letting my wife know. Her reaction, in turn, did meet my expectations. "You sprouted from the same tree," she would say. Frankly, I didn't care for that old tree and I didn't care for all the other sprouts, and I didn't care for her metaphors. Sometimes directly as this,

more often though subtly, she would try to convince me that *I* was actually the one that wanted to meet him, not that she had sown the wish inside of me, nurtured it for weeks, nourished it and cherished it. After 35 years of marriage I knew her well enough not to fall into her trap.

Then she did what in all of our fights and discussions and fall-outs and sometimes week-long marital wars we had always refrained from. She used illicit means. She got our children involved. At least my son didn't even bother to pass on the message subliminally. He didn't say anything artificially constructed like "Oh, I wish I had an uncle that I could talk to every now and then." Heaven forbid. He was too lazy for that when he was that age, too lazy to make up his mind to manipulate me and actually trick me into doing something. He just walked straight up to me and told me that his mother had told him that my half-brother had written to me and expressed his wish to get to meet me. I glared at my wife for a second. I took a deep breath to tell my son that I had no intention of ever meeting that person, and that I considered it a "foul" on the part of his mother that she had dragged him into this. But I had underestimated his willpower. Up to that point in time, I had never noticed my 17-year-old even possessed anything like that. Agency was none of the attributes that I would have mentioned in the same breath with his name. He wouldn't even let me speak. He informed me he considered it his responsibility (at that point, I frowned. *Responsibility? My son?*) to make sure we would meet, and he had thus already arranged for us to meet. I couldn't believe what I heard. Saturday, 2 p.m., at a café downtown.

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## beer time

by arianit dodaj

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiz

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiz

Beer time is enjoyable if one has a friend to drink along. Good beer can be easily obtained in the store but not a good friend. A good friend is hard to come by and it's something that doesn't come for free. There, sitting at the table are two good friends who have engaged in debate, immensely. It seems that these guys haven't seen each other for a while. The last time they met was probably a couple of years ago. Much had happened in their lives and they had a lot of things to confess to each other. In front of them, on the table, they have some beer bottles and a water jug that is rather empty.

The friend sitting on the right side, whose name is John, seems to be quite retracted from the talk and apparently he is more into listening. Meanwhile, the friend sitting on the left side of the table, whose name is Mark, is telling something to John and by chance he seems to be counting or emphasizing a quantity. Probably, he is counting how much beer they had had. Deep into the horizon, there is no landscape to be considered. It seems that they are sitting in a restaurant or pub that is located on an elevated platform. It could be on a mountain slope or in a tall building. Apparently, they have been sitting there and talking for many hours if we take into account the empty bottles on the table. It is impossible to realize that time has passed by when you have a good friend to share thoughts, ideas or problems. Beer can be considered as a stimulant for debate, besides it is not a coincidence that beer is the main beverage in parties or different gatherings.

Although rarely engaging in the debate, John appears to be quite sharp. He is really focused into observing what Mark has been narrating so far. Have a look at Mark, he rose his fingers up as he was counting something. Actually, he rose 6 fingers to enumerate the hefty job opportunities that he had recently got. Indeed, he told John that he had received six job offers within a year. Taking into consideration this miracle, he feels lucky. Note the face of Mark, he seems to be enchanted by the latest occurrences.

Indeed, John seems to be really impressed by his friend and happy for his successful career. As a matter of fact he is impressed by his reputation, and decides to buy another round of beer to celebrate the immense success of his best friend. They call the waiter and they get ready to order beer but this will soon turn out into deception.

As soon as the waiter approaches the table where the friends are sitting, he tells them that the bar of the restaurant ran out of beer. Frankly, this was the moment when these two good friends realized that they had been drinking quite a lot, almost a “sea of beer”. Pleased by their meeting and rather disappointed by the waiter, they leave the restaurant peacefully and continue their talk on the way back home.

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## brother and sister

by victoria czerwenka

People always used to tell me: “You should be glad to have a bigger brother. He’s always there for you, he’ll protect you from people trying to hurt you. Besides having a big brother is having someone to look up to, someone who always stays by your side.” Well, this might apply to other siblings, but definitely not to my brother. Our relationship has never been based on affection, care for one another, compassion or empathy, but rather on competition, envy and mutual animosity.

I’ve always wished I had a bigger brother as the people used to describe him to me; I envied those who were in possession of this special relationship. Although I did and still do understand that even these relationships were far from perfect as well. They also – on a regular basis – were at each other’s throats, over the most preposterous of reasons; they screamed at each other at the top of their lungs and they even played nasty tricks on their brother or sister, just for the sake of it. In contrast to the relationship my brother and I had, those other siblings quite quickly reconciled their differences (most probably by hugging) and in the end were glad to have one another.

This never really applied to our relationship. My brother and I used to hiss at each other, though mostly, our “bond” was marked by sheer indifference. I must confess, neither he nor I really cared about the other person, we just went our own way, without our paths ever crossing. This must also be one of the many reasons why we never really talked, and we still sometimes don’t.

Nonetheless, I have tried several times to find some sort of connection between us; I have attempted to create mutual rapport. For instance, when my brother used to bicker with my father for a completely stupid and irresponsible thing the former did, I, as altruistic as I was, took sides with my brother. However, this did absolutely not turn out the way I had planned it to. In my fairly naive head, I imagined the situation to pan out like this: my father and my

brother would stop fighting, both of them would apologise for the vis-à-vis, and we would all give each other a big hug. The real situation, though, would resolve in a slightly different way: after having tried to calm down both of them (which I usually did by yelling at my father and standing in front of my brother) at least one of them (sometimes both) used to turn against me. Well, one might already guess how the whole situation quietened down. Most of the times, it ended up with me crying in my room, while – thanks to my intervention – my brother and my father probably watched TV together in the living room, having resolved their differences.

Over time, our relationship neither deteriorated, nor ameliorated, it just basically floated along the current of indifference, which might also explain why we never talked, shared our feelings, wishes or greatest fears. If I had to describe the relationship with my brother in two words, it would be apathetical coexistence. I thought, or even hoped, that maybe when we grew older, things would change, and we'd get a little closer. I must admit at least the disputes got fewer and fewer, but this piercing languidness persisted and is still around nowadays. We hardly ever talk, we barely write to each other, and me living far apart from my family doesn't contribute to the whole issue in a positive way. Maybe when we get older, we might find some things that we have in common over which we may bond, but that's exactly what I said to myself 10 years ago...

But something has changed between us; finally, a silver lining for our relationship. One year ago, we found the one rare thing we have in common and that is playing tennis. When I am back in my home town, my brother and I usually meet up once a week. The short breaks between practice enable us to engage in small talk (I often make sure not to exhaust the pauses for too long), and after a few minutes we go back to playing tennis. Slowly but steadily we have formed a bond through sports by encouraging one another and giving some advice on how to properly hit the sweet spot, to improve footwork or to find the right tactics. Even if sometimes we compete with each other, my brother and I see this as an opportunity to ameliorate and not to expose the opponent. Maybe tennis will finally enable us to grow a bond more profound and meaningful which might aid us to catch up on the lost years. In my opinion, this is the most beautiful aspect of human relations; no matter how long people have not got along, it is never too late to rekindle a relationship and to start afresh.

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## just the three of us

picture: violet stathopoulou-vas

by sophia reitspies

picture: violet stathopoulou-vas

This picture was taken on our holidays in Portugal. We had a great time together. Two weeks full of joy, fun, beach, and just the three of us. It was nice and relaxing, even when parents often say that holidays with children are no holidays. But I didn't have this feeling. It was just perfect. It was a perfect goodbye. Sometimes I feel sad when I look at the picture; sometimes I feel happy; sometimes I feel like crying. Crying because I can't believe what has happened since then. When I took the picture I didn't know that a week later my whole life would be destroyed. It's still devastated now, three years and five months later, but at least it does no longer hurt so much. I can now write about it; about the inconceivable. So that's what I'm going to do now.

It was a nice day, when I took the picture. The last day of our holidays. We'd been there for two weeks and all of us were enjoying it so much. The children had told me that they liked the time when it's just the three of us, without their father. They said that David, their father, can sometimes be strange and that he tells them odd good-night-stories. I know, I said, but the court had decided that David was reliable and can take care of them. Personally, I know that he's unreliable and can become really dangerous and mischievous, but back then I didn't want to tell this to Chiara and Finn as I didn't want to frighten them. I said to myself that I've got to talk to the woman from the custody care again. When the trial was finished, she said that there would be a possibility to keep David away from us. I hadn't had the nerve to do this before our holidays, but I told her I'd call her as soon as we are back. When I took the picture, I thought that I should have phoned her before the holidays. But now it's too late.

We came back on a Monday evening. I remember telling David that I could bring the children to his house on Tuesday, as they'll be very exhausted and tired on Monday. I mean, it was his week, but he fortunately agreed. Normally, he's very strict with the weeks, because he's afraid he could get too little time with his children. It's one week with him and then one week with me. We usually swap Chiara and Finn on Sunday, but that week was an exception. When I

brought the kids to his house, I even felt a bit relieved, because there was so much to do in the house after the holidays and I also wanted to phone the woman from the custody care as soon as possible. In the car, the two complained about going to their dad. They wanted to stay with me and I promised them to see if I could do something so that they don't have to see their father every other week. Retrospectively, I shouldn't have told them.

When we arrived at his house, he was already awaiting us in front of the door. He smiled and seemed happy to see Chiara and Finn. We exchanged some words and I said goodbye to them. I gave the children a big hug and promised to pick them up on Sunday. They seemed happy about it and went into the house.

It was a Friday night when I suddenly woke up. It was my phone that woke me up. I'd received a message. I thought that it was strange to receive a message at this time of the night. I changed my position and tried to sleep again, but it didn't work. I stood up and went to the table where my phone was. I typed in my password and clicked on the unread message. When I read it was from David, it sent shivers down my spine. It said: "If I shouldn't have them, you shouldn't have them either". I sat down, rubbed my eyes, and read again. "If I shouldn't have them, you shouldn't have them either". I'd a strange feeling and my heart started to beat faster and faster. I clicked on his number and phoned him. No answer. Then I decided to get dressed and drive to his house. The drive felt longer than normally. I didn't know what was going on. My thoughts were messed up, I couldn't think.

When I got closer at his house, I could already see the blinking lights of the police and the ambulance. I couldn't even get out of the car properly. A woman approached and helped me. She asked if I was the mother. I nodded. She advised me to sit down. I did so. Then she said that something terrible had happened. They'd received a call from a neighbour, because he'd heard screams during the night. When they'd arrived, David had opened the door. In his hand he'd had a knife, covered with blood. He gave the knife to the police and said "I've murdered my two children". I couldn't breathe, nor think. My life was shattered. Everything was falling apart.

Now, three years and five months later, I am proud that I can write about it. I am proud that my hysterical and helpless paroxysms are over. This gives me strength and the will to continue my life. My therapist says I've made a grand progress and that I shouldn't stop talking to my children. I can really feel them when I go into their rooms. I can smell them vividly and I can talk to them frankly. We are close, very close, just the three of us.

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## Christmas spirit

by **anna-lisa scharnagl**

*Dear Ben,*

*I know it's been forever since you heard from me and you're probably wondering why I would pick up the pen to write you an old-school letter when I haven't reached out to you in years. Well, to be completely honest with you, I haven't really thought about you in a long time. But today, I unexpectedly came across something that brought back memories I had kept well-hidden in a tightly shut secret compartment, buried inside the depths of my brain.*

*It wouldn't have happened if I hadn't decided to travel home to celebrate Christmas with my parents this year. If I had stayed in New York, instead, and spent the holidays in my tiny office space working my butt off, it wouldn't have happened. But, you know, my parents are getting older and they sent me a sentimental text along the lines of "Maybe this will be the last Christmas we're able to celebrate on this Earth" (OK, maybe it wasn't that dramatic) and so I found myself feeling guilty about not ever visiting them and I spontaneously booked a flight to surprise them. Which, by the way, was the first mistake I made (not referring to my act of kindness, but the being spontaneous part). Remember how you always made fun of me for planning every little detail of my life and never "allowing myself to go with the flow?" Today, I finally followed your advice and did something without planning and what did it result in? A catastrophe.*

*First, my plane got stuck in a blizzard and we had to crash-land two hundred miles away from Nashville Airport. No taxis were able to drive through the heavy snowstorm, so I was stuck in the middle of nowhere. Back in the day, a situation like this wouldn't have distressed me. I would have calmly dialed your number and you would have picked me up with your tire-chained truck, grinning from ear to ear, like it was no big deal. That thought didn't cross my mind while I was sitting on top of my suitcase, tightly wrapped inside my heavy coats like a miserable burrito.*

*Anyway, I am going off at a tangent. Precisely three hours and forty-six minutes passed until I was finally able to convince a driver to get me out of this no-man's land by offering him more money than I had spent on my parents' Christmas presents combined. The only thought that kept me going was the upcoming image of mom and dad opening the door to find their only (and therefore favorite) daughter standing in front of them. I was therefore smiling rather ridiculously when we arrived at home and I was welcomed by the heavily decorated exterior of my childhood house. After expressing my thanks to the driver for the millionth time, I enthusiastically ran to the door just to have one of my high heels break and land on the icy ground. It must've looked quite spectacular, actually, me slipping unflatteringly and my luggage, the presents and the coat I had taken off in the heated taxi all landing on top of me. I know, very funny. Ha ha. If that hadn't been enough to sour my mood, my parents weren't even at home when I arrived. After I let myself in with the hidden key inside the bird house, I checked their calendar. For the 24th of December it says: "Dinner with Frank and Sandra. 19:00: church" – Which brings me to the present moment.*

*I am currently wearing my pajamas from 9th grade (yes, they surprisingly still fit me and yes, my parents keep everything I have ever owned), nestled in a fuzzy blanket and sipping a hot chocolate (which would taste exceedingly better if mom had made it). Well, I was sipping a hot chocolate. By now, it's probably cold and nasty because I haven't touched it since opening the box. Yes, THE box. YOUR box. The box that says BEN BROWNING. When I rummaged in my old closet in search of comfy clothes, my fingertips touched the hard material of the cardboard. I froze. My mind was running away, my thoughts were spiraling, my stomach cramped. All of my instincts told me NOT to take that box out, but I couldn't help myself. It was almost as if a different person had taken control over me, grabbed the box and brought it down to the living room.*

*Remember the well-hidden, tightly-shut secret compartment in my brain that I was telling you about in the beginning of this letter? Well, that burst open as soon as I opened the lid of the box. The first thing that hit my eyes was the black and white photograph your parents took of us at the beach when we were little. You were already in love with me back then. At least, that's what you were telling me. Oh Ben. The reason I am writing this letter is not to rant to you about my miserable day or to tell you – once again – how wrong you were by telling me to be more spontaneous. It is, because I miss you. There, I said it. I. Miss. You.*

*I have missed you for years but I was too scared to voice it. But now that I'm looking at this photo, the dam that has suppressed my feelings for you is being crashed and with it, all of our memories are flooding my body, so much so that it feels like I'm drowning. I know it's stupid of me to write a letter to a dead person. But, right now, you're the only person I want to talk to. And even if you can't hear my words, it feels good to act like you're still there, listening to me.*

*Anyways, I think my parents will arrive soon. Mom is definitely going to cry and dad's going to laugh and open a precious bottle of Chardonnay. Ben, it was good talking to you.*

*See you soon,*

*Amy*

*PS: I'm sorry I broke your favorite toy in middle school. Yes, it was me. But it was an accident. I swear.*

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## D-minor

by vera flatz

Grey cement, blinking lights, hooting cabs, people in a hurry, waste on the streets; stress and pressure are almost noticeable in the air. Walking down the streets of New York City I can feel my feet accelerating to keep pace with the other people. Blending in has been my priority for a little over 10 years now. Ten years of learning and mastering the English language whose letters' look like hard and cold signs. My letters look like little paintings, a book page gives the allusion of an artistic masterpiece. Ten years of learning everything about English history while the history of my own country is dealt with in one lesson which is about failed states. Ten years of eating bland, overcooked unhealthy American food while intensely missing the multidimensional flavours, colours and aromas of my grandmother's Palaw.

The squeaking brakes of a car bring me back to the streets of New York. I have been thinking about the past too often lately. I have been lamenting about missed chances, missed people and a missed life. I take a few steps until I reach an inconspicuous alley and admonish myself to focus on the present and forget about the past. Just as I have taken that decision a simple tune reaches my ear, forcefully catapulting me into my childhood days.

Colourful little wooden houses, hooting cabs, people in a hurry, waste on the streets, joy and playful lightness are almost noticeable in the air. The mixture of different smells is so overwhelming that only regular customers can bear it. The voices of hundreds of people create a thunder that makes you want to cover your ears. The thousand shades of vibrant colours blind the eyes. For me it is the most marvellous place in my limited universe. The market is full of busy people hurrying back home to cook for big and happy families. I had to come with my mother to help her carry the heavy bags.

When we cross the door threshold, I hear that my brother has learned a new song and is playing it on his harmonica. For any child the instrument would look ancient, decayed and not worth playing on. Yet, for my brother it is the most valuable thing he possesses. Neither of our family members remembered where the harmonica came from, but one day it just existed and

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiz

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basically grew together with my brother. The little song he played is an Arabic folk song, full of melancholy depth and vibratos, written in a minor key. I have heard the traditional melody numerous times but this time it felt like hearing it for the first time in my life. Sadness and desperation blend together with the individual notes, creating a moment of sheer awe. The last tone is still audible when the bomb explodes.

In New York the song ends as well and my body almost prepares for the shock wave of a bomb, for the short moment of blissful confusion before the screaming begins. It prepares for the sight of body parts scattered around the room, for lifeless eyes. However, my body does not have to prepare itself for the feeling of utter loneliness, as it has got accustomed to that feeling during the last ten years.

My wandering mind has a hard time coming back to the present. I recall the ten years I have spent in America; ten years of trying to blend in. Ten years of a lack of understanding when I wanted to pray the Muslim prayer Salah in school even though the teacher forced all students to pray the Lord's Prayer before the beginning of the lesson. Ten years of anti-Muslim insults when I wore my hijab on the streets on the way to the mosque for Friday prayers. Blending in was my highest goal and my first priority, but I was not allowed to. The American melting pot has rejected me fiercely and without any doubt. My skin colour is different, my headwear is different, my mind is different. It is full of vibrant oriental colours, of Persian words, of delicious smells and of beautiful Arabic melodies. Still, it is also full of bomb explosions, of death, of fleeing, of life in a refugee camp, of rejection and of a devouring hatred for the people responsible for the death of my family.

Putting one foot after the other helps me focus on the task which lies in front of me. I rapidly access the ordinary apartment I have entered regularly for the past few months. The plans are ready, so is the equipment. The melody of my life might be composed in minor, but it will end in a thundering symphony that no listener will ever be able to forget.

أغاني التراث العربي على العود  
طلوا حبابنا

غناء: وديع الصافي

1. Fine



## an outsider looking in

by samantha albanese

picture: tassos venetsanopoulos

digital: petros neouphoropoulos

## an outsider looking in

I am me. You are me. This is an inner monologue.

I am lonely. You don't exist. This is a mental illness.

This is a coping mechanism. To stop me from ending it all.

I wonder how long that is going to keep working.

But in the end, I'm just an outsider looking in.

Here one second, gone the next.

It's a cloudy November day.

One of many. The whole month has been covered in grey. Rain, fog and icy temperatures have been a constant. Winter is here, the snow yet to come. The absence of sunlight and the death of nature, without its romantic counterpart, snow, paint the atmosphere accordingly: it is as depressing as it sounds.

Bundled in layers, shadows cross the city fast-paced, with a fixed destination in mind, and the aim of reaching it in the shortest amount of time possible. In a hurry, everyone is in a hurry. No one wants to stay where they are, right here. Right here where I stand.

Where I stand. I do not have a destination in mind, not a physical one at least. And I'm not sure if I have a mental one either. I'm just... here. I don't know why, or well, I guess there is a reason. Or multiple, all connected. Like you're here because it's the shortest way to your destination, it's the longest way to your destination, it's not anywhere near your destination. You're lost, you see?

It doesn't make a lot of sense, does it? Not really, right? No. It really does not make sense.

You were at the right time in the right place. You were at the wrong time in the wrong place. Fate, is what they call it. I don't like fate. Or the picture it paints. There was nothing to be done, it was fate, you see. Planned, unavoidable fate. That is the reason, that's why. But that doesn't answer anything. Why is it me that is standing here? Why ME? Why HERE?

Fate. That's why. Tsk, what a load of bullshit. See, I told you I don't like fate. You've been warned.

Anyway, we've established that I'm standing here. And that it doesn't make much sense. That there may or may not be a reason for it. But that all does not matter. Because I am moving away as I speak. The reason for that? Sick of standing, simple as that.

It's too cold to be outside without a purpose, a destination. Especially since it seems I am the only one lacking them. As it begins to drizzle, some passing silhouettes open umbrellas, most move faster to take cover, even more disappear underground. I follow.

Entering the metro is like crossing the threshold to another place. It's like falling down the rabbit hole and finding oneself without a clear direction in this network of interconnected tunnels. Time and space work differently here, in this mole-burrow-like place. It reminds me of the underworld. Thousands of souls are passing through, going at different speeds and in different directions, bumping into each other only to separate again, following their original path, travelling who knows where. But not a single one comes out the way they came in, and no one is here to stay.

Neither am I.

Walking along grey-white corridors adorned with the occasional advertisement, I am being guided by the masses. I have no idea where I'm going, where I'm being led to. It doesn't matter. I go with the flow. I find myself in a less used tunnel branch the next moment, standing there and standing out to the occasional busy passer-by. I move forward, along it, only one direction to go: do not look back.

It is just another bleak and dirty passage, nothing special there. It is quite cold too, not very homely. Which is why it makes sense to see people clutch their coats tighter around themselves and hurry along. Which is why it does not make sense to see that a homeless guy has set up his

temporary lodgings exactly here, in this harsh location. Covered more or less in bundles of worn-out coats, threadbare rags and moth-eaten blankets, the man – an astute guess based on the beard – seems to be asleep as I get closer. The next moment, a passing leashed dog spots the over-sized *Findus* advertisement (old white man, trident, fish stick – ring a bell?) behind the sleeping body and starts barking up a storm, waking the latter in the process. Coming to himself with a start, it becomes clear that the man is drunk and has still not sobered up much in his sleep, since he starts to scream with a broken voice in a slurred manner: “Whaaaah... a three, a three... head monster!... three-headed MONSTER!”, as he backs away sideways, shaking, coats raised for protection and red-veined eyes never leaving the excited puppy. The custodian of the said pup (its name is Creo, by the way, in case you were wondering, which I know you were) moves on, never sparing a glance, pulling the dog with them, and they are gone the next moment. The drunk breathes harshly for a few moments, in a daze, before he falls abruptly to the side and resumes to sleep off his rush. I pass him by and move on.

At the end of the tunnel, I find myself once again in the midst of a hectic river of people, pushing me, pulling me down yet another way, down another path. Personal space does not exist here, one’s personal bubble a myth. Squeezed simultaneously and alternately from all sides, you are being touched, constantly, roughly, without being the target of another’s hate, or affection. You are in the way, simple as that. So move on!

How can I still feel loneliness when surrounded, touched by so many? I wonder, and move.

The push and pull of the crowd evens out; I find myself in a dead-end called “Larissa Station”. The only way out of here is by taking the next train, going in one direction only, or turning around and fighting a losing battle against the flow of never-ending bodies which has brought one here. You do not stand a chance; no one can swim against the tide. I have no idea where it is I have come from, nor do I care: The train it is.

The digital destination board estimates its arrival: ten minutes from now. It does not matter to me. I have plenty of time, one might say too much. I look around myself and see without being seen. Not a lot of travellers are here yet, while those that are do not appear to be aware of their surroundings. Staring at the same old mobile device, everyone seems keen on communicating with someone who is not here, and not with those that are. Most are likely reaching out to their friends and families, or at least trying to. How they manage to get a connection this deep underground is a mystery to me.

The train is here. Everyone gets on, me included. It travels at the speed of a four-horse drawn chariot. I sit down on a free seat and continue to observe the passengers around me. Everyone is still captured by a device of their choice, though now next to objects of communication there are some for the sake of information and pleasure as well. Again, not one cares to look for any of those in the fellow travellers around them. The train rocks and sways from side to side, and the passengers with it, as it continues along its predetermined path. At the different stops some people get on, while others get off. A new constellation forms, before it breaks up again, never to be repeated.

I do not know how long I sit there, watching without being watched. One moment everything stands still, like static, lost in continuum; at the next breath, the light in the cabin turns off. The train, still moving, is swallowed by a black hole. (The hitchhiker’s guide to the galaxy could prove to be helpful, but there is no copy around.) The darkness is only pierced by a number of artificial screen lights; the displays of the various objects paint dancing shadows on their users’ faces, highlighting their bones, curves and edges. Like on camping trips, when one is telling a

scary story at night, holding the flashlight beneath their face to look frightening. Skeleton-like. Not that it ever works. It does not work now either. The train of the undead travels on. I've seen worse.

Some are finally looking up and around, but there is nothing to see now. Soon their attention is back to where it was all along. Captured yet again. An announcement - a voice coming from all directions at once, impossible to place -: "The station's outer cable network was hit by lightning - bzzzzz- three times in a row, causing the fallout. It will come on again shortly -bzzzzz- apologise for any inconvenience. Thank you for traveling with -bzzzzz-". True to their word, the lights start working again. Out of the black hole, we have arrived at the next stop.

The cabin empties out as most get off. Only three grumpy-looking, old men, a beautiful, young lady and I remain. What a combination. I have seen it before. A reflection of light catches my eye; near my feet I find a bundle of keys. Some poor fool must have lost them. I pick them up and put them into the pocket of my coat. That someone will not be getting home tonight.

Neither will I.

I travel on. I go wherever my journey, my duty, leads me. Day turns into night, turns into day again. One cannot tell this deep underground where no sunlight ever reaches. Time is of no importance. There is always another train waiting. A next one to board. And a next one. And one after that. Ad infinitum.

After all, the constellations never repeat themselves.

In the end, I'm just an outsider looking in. Passing and being passed, looking without being looked at. Here one second, gone the next.

It will be a while until I surface again.

### **Post scriptum**

In ancient Greek religion and myth, Hades is the God of the Dead and the King of the Underworld. He and his brothers, Zeus and Poseidon, defeated their father's generation of gods, the Titans, and claimed rulership over the cosmos. Hades received the underworld, Zeus the sky, and Poseidon the sea, with the earth available to all three. Each brother had a tripartite insignia: Hades' three-headed hound Cerberus, Zeus' three-forked thunderbolt, and Poseidon's three-pronged trident.

The origin of Hades' name is uncertain, but its meaning has since antiquity been "the unseen one". Ancient sources suggest that he possessed the *Cap of Invisibility*, or the *Helm of Darkness*. He owns a chariot drawn by four black horses, and other attributes that have been related to him include the narcissus and cypress plants, snakes, a sceptre, cornucopia, and a key. The key of Hades represented both his control over the underworld and acted as a reminder that the gates to his realm were always locked, so that no souls could leave. Even if the doors were open, Cerberus, his three-headed guard dog, ensured that while all souls were allowed to enter the underworld freely, none could ever escape. One derivation of Cerberus' name is from the Greek word *creoboros*, meaning "flesh-devouring".

Despite modern connotations of death as evil, Hades was actually more altruistically inclined in mythology. He was often portrayed as passive rather than evil; his role was often maintaining relative balance. Nevertheless, he was also depicted as cold and stern, and he held all of his subjects equally accountable to his laws.

He abducted his wife and queen, Persephone. She spends one third of the year with her husband down in the underworld, during which time winter falls upon the earth. In older Greek myths, the realm of Hades is the misty and gloomy abode of the dead. In the forecourt of the palace of Hades and Persephone sit the three demigod judges of the underworld: Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus. They judge whether a soul is virtuous, evil, or neither, with different consequences, and final destinations, awaiting each.





## modern communication

picture: tassios venetsanopoulos

by carina thaler

digital: jessica neuhaeubler

He was tired after a long day at work. His eyes kept on closing and he needed to focus on his steps when entering the dark and stifling station. After taking the last sip from his coffee to-go, he threw the cup into the dirty waste container and pulled his old and washed out cap further down over his exhausted face. He sat down and closed his eyes for a moment. As the subway station was crowded at this time of the day, he felt relieved to be sitting alone. Deep in thought he was waiting for the subway to arrive and take him home. No one would be there to greet him, but at least he would not have to be among strangers anymore. All he wanted was peace and quiet.

Suddenly his phone rang. It was her. Again! Just one message.

He looked at the screen and was blinded by the bright blue light. Maddie thought about him! Automatically a slight grin spread on his face and brightened up his weary expression. Suddenly pulled out of his thoughts about his depressing everyday life, his thoughts now centred on Maddie. Even though he initially felt excitement and joy when seeing her notification, he was also annoyed by her constant messages. Then, a subway entered the station with reduced speed and stopped in the station full of unbearable air. The crowd of people waiting to get home began to move. He sat still and just stared at his phone. Maddie and her adventures!

Lately he always felt irritated when she contacted him, even though nothing had really changed. It was just too much for him to engage with her after a long and exhausting day at work. Feeling worn out and tired, he certainly didn't feel like hanging out with her right now. Still, he responded with "yes" to her invitation.

It was more the feeling of loneliness and solitude that wore him out than the hard work he did, he thought. They say 'solitude is bliss' but that is not true if it is solitude forever.

So off he went, not even thinking about the subway he had just missed or the next that he would miss, too. Suddenly, he did not at all care how long he would be away or where he needed to go. All he wanted was to be gone from this dark station.

He thought about a quotation he had just recently read on an advertisement and smiled. Travel broadens the mind. Well, his mind really needed to be broadened. “And anyway, why not?”, he thought to himself. “Nobody is waiting at home.”

Maddie welcomed him happily and asked him a lot of questions. None of them were of relevance to him, but it was nice to communicate with someone. She seemed interested and that was more than anything he had received from anyone else lately. Maddie also showed him quite a few new things and suggested thrilling activities they could do together.

He, too, was happy to be back since there were always a lot of fun and extraordinary things to do with Maddie and she took him to the most exciting places. This time, they went to an old castle that was apparently haunted. Maddie showed him around as if she had spent her whole life there and told him the most incredible stories about everything he encountered. However, he didn't doubt one thing. He was just glad to see and learn new things, no matter if they were true or not. For him, it was only about escaping everyday life, the life that was so monotonous and pointless to him. Maddie and her adventurous world provided an opportunity to live a different, an unusual, life.

And even though he knew it was not real, he only returned to reality when a security guard asked him to leave the subway station. Without looking up to the person in front of him, he closed the app on his phone, put it into his pocket, stood up and entered the next subway in silence.

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## apple market

by charline fehr

A daughter always venerates her mother. This is the sentence my grandmother used to repeat over and over again. In my case, I followed my grandmother's advice. My mother was no fancy secretary who always got to wear the nicest little ladies' suits, in which she would parade, combined with her red-soled designer high heels. My mum was an ordinary market vendor who would sell the jewellery she made on our red living-room table at the loveliest market of the city: the Apple Market.

I grew up spending every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at my mother's booth helping her sell her bracelets and necklaces or simply chatting with the other vendors. To the left of mother's booth was Grace, a middle-aged Asian lady, who sold the best apples in town. Especially the red ones were unbelievably dainty. I remember that when I was younger, I struggled to understand her as she had a strong accent and did not really seem to take great pains to speak more accurately. But after a while, I got used to it. On the right was Mr Tom. When I first met Mr Tom, I remember finding it peculiar that no one knew his first name. So, I made it my mission to find it out. I asked every single vendor, browsed through every existing list concerning the market, but the only information I found on Mr Tom was that his birthday was on 11th March 1931. No further information, no address, no place of birth, nothing. My mother begged me to let it go which, eventually, I did.

When I was 18, my mother fell ill. The look on the doctor's face when we entered his surgery already gave it away: metastatic breast cancer, stage 4. There was no cure, so all he could offer us was to improve my mother's quality of life. At the beginning, I started to deputize for my mother at her stall on Thursdays and helped her on Tuesdays. But eventually, due to the chemotherapy she was undergoing at the time, she felt too weak to even leave the house. Hence, it was me who took over her stall at the Apple Market. I only did it for my mother as I never wanted to let her down. We always called this a temporary state which would only last

until she would be back on her feet again. Both of us began to notice only short afterwards that it was not temporary at all. Just months later, my mother passed away.

At first, I kept selling her jewellery at the market because I knew that that was what she would have wanted. So, I did it. One Tuesday morning, an old lady bought the last piece of my mother's work. I teared up while putting her five pound note into my mother's red petty cash box. This would be the last time I would sell something at this stall. Grace, the Asian lady from the stand to the left, handed me a handkerchief and simply nodded. She seemed as if she was lost for words. I was glad I did not have to talk to anyone. Mr Tom, whose stall was on the right, stared at me. I forgot to mention that, by that time, it was no longer Mr Tom himself who sold all kinds of folderol next to me, but it was his son – Mr Tom Junior. Mr Tom Senior had passed away two days before my mother.

I went over to his stall and looked at his colourful items, laid widespread on an oak table. Suddenly, I noticed a picture of my mother, her parents and her brothers on a tallboy right next to Mr Tom Junior. I realised that my mother was pictured with her three brothers but there was also an older-looking boy standing right next to her who looked familiar. It turned out that my grandfather, whose name was Tom, had taken in Mr Tom when he was 14 years old. His parents wanted to offer their son a better life in England as their home town was entirely destroyed by the war. Therefore, Mr Tom's parents asked a friend to take their son, who went by the name of Julian Müller as I found out from his son, all the way up to England. Julian managed to travel unscathed to Birmingham, where he spent several months in an orphanage, before my grandparents accommodated him. Months later, he told his new family that he wanted his last name Müller to be changed to Tom, after my grandfather, and as he behaved like an adult after all that he had been through during the war, my mother's family started to call him Mr Tom.

Mr Tom Junior recounts that my mother has always treated his father like one of her brothers. She was the one who constantly looked out for him, helped him with English, his homework and also to find a job. In return, he always protected her and never wanted to leave her side. Even if that meant to sell knickknacks at an Apple Market just to be near his sister.

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## miscommunication

by mina-theresia kaiser

Run Hailey, run. These were the only words that came to my mind. Run Hailey, run. And so I did. I was not sure where to go, but I knew I had to run. And so I did until I saw three paintings at the market - beautiful they were and love they symbolized.

Thinking back to this situation, it does not seem as running away was the only possibility I had, but back then it felt as it was. It was one day in September, to be precise, Saturday, the 3rd of September 2017 when my husband came home from his morning run and found my pregnancy test in the waste bin in our bathroom. Of course he came quickly downstairs and encountered me lying on the couch. I can remember his questioning words as if I heard them yesterday: “Hailey? Is this what I think? Are we becoming parents?”

“Phil”, I said with a guilty sounding voice. -Silence-

“Hailey? Talk to me, I have asked you something”, Phil said with a worried voice.

And there I sat on the couch, not knowing what to say and how to communicate with the love of my life. The only thing I knew was that I had to escape this horrible situation.

Now you can ask yourself why this situation seemed horrible to me. Well, let me tell you something. Phil and I had been married for two years back then and had a discussion about having children a few days before the incident, which I have just described, happened. I had already had a feeling, a kind of inner intuition that I may be pregnant. It may seem strange, but a mother knows when the heart of her child starts to beat inside her. So, I wanted to talk to my husband. When we lay in bed I started, full of enthusiasm, a conversation about children and how sweet and adorable they are and how much I am looking forward to the moment when we two become parents. However, Phil wasn't as enthusiastic as I was. To cut a long story short, he said, sounding a little bit annoyed, to me: “I am not ready for children yet. Let us talk about this ‘issue’ in two to three years’ time. Hell, I am glad that we have no children yet”. Silence.

My world broke into thousand little fragments. I was emotionally shattered. One conversation changed everything. My thoughts were no longer concerned with rompers, but with the question of how to raise a child on my own.

After some time lying in the dark bedroom I said to myself: “Maybe your inner intuition has played a trick on you. Maybe you are not pregnant. Maybe you do not have anything to worry about”. And so I was able to calm myself down and tried to sleep. Nevertheless, I needed to be certain the next morning and set out to buy a pregnancy test. The result not only brought a thousand questions back on my mind, but also tears to my eyes.

So imagine being me. Lying on the couch. Having a thousand threatening thoughts on my mind, but not having any fitting words for my husband, who stood in front of me with this questioning face. The man whom I love from the bottom of my heart since 2005. The man who told me to discuss the ‘issue’ of children another day. The man who asked me: “Are we becoming parents?”. As I saw my world falling apart, at this very moment, I just I decided to run away from this situation. I ran to the door and out into the city. I just ran for the sake of being alone. However, I wasn’t alone at all.

When I came to myself again I was in the middle of a market in Gordan Street. My head was still full of a thousand thoughts. Will Phil leave me? Will he be able to love a child that was not planned?

And so I stood there, when I encountered three paintings - beautiful they were and love they symbolized. Immediately, I was thinking back to the moment when I saw Phil for the first time. Back then I knew he was the right one and from the very first moment I could tell him everything. But when did this change? Why did I ran away just to escape my questioning husband, although it was something beautiful I had to tell him?

And so I stood there with the three paintings in front of me –beautiful they were and love they symbolized - when I felt two warming hands clasping my belly from behind. Normally such a situation would frighten one; however, I felt safe. I felt the same feeling that I felt when Phil touched me for the very first time. It felt like home. I turned around hoping to see the father of my child. And so I did.

“Are we becoming parents?”, he asked once again, but now in a very enthusiastic tone. “Yes”, I answered hesitantly, and was relieved when I saw his sparkling eyes and felt his soft lips on mine.

Then he said: “Honey, I really regret what I said to you about children the other day. I did not mean it the way you perceived it. That was miscommunication. I am so sorry.”

At that moment I knew that sometimes one communicates something to the other half without really meaning it that way.

And so WE stood at the market - beautiful we were and love we symbolized.

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## rush hour

by christina knapp

picture: violet stathopoulou-vaiz

text: violet stathopoulou-vaiz

It is just a day as any other. The streets are buzzing, drivers are shouting and people are rushing through the crowds at the Apple Market towards the tube station just underneath.

That day he got up early, as usual. He drank a cup of hot, black coffee before repeatedly tightening the grey tie around his neck – so tight he could barely breathe, could barely inhale the swirling of exhaust fumes, smoke and mist in the air of London. The tube ride did not clear his mind but allowed him to doze off among all these familiar strangers – these human replicas of himself standing in line to be belched out by the train as soon as its doors opened. Following the stream of people he headed towards Covent Garden in order to use the Apple Market as a shortcut to his office. He had been working for this firm near Covent Garden for around a decade then and was used to travel this exact route over and over again. In a way he was aware of all the people around him – people in black suits holding meaningless black suitcases, heading towards office buildings around Covent Garden just as he was – but somehow he could not focus on anything in particular, could barely take anything or anyone in.

He always rushed by the stalls at the market early in the morning and came back late in the evening. She recognised him by the tight grey tie he wore around his neck and the vacant expression on his face. It seemed as if he was wearing blinkers and could only see what was right in front of him, unless he would turn his head – turn his head towards her. Her, standing behind that stall at the Apple Market as she did from early Tuesday morning until late Sunday afternoon. Her, hovering over customers and trying to sell her carefully selected second-hand records from early Tuesday morning until late Sunday afternoon. Her, whose mind was isolated and whose eye was usually only caught by the stranger with the grey tie who always rushed by and the exceptional ties the vendor next to her presented. They appeared in all sets of colours: red and orange, blue and green, black and white and every other combination one can think of. Like every other vendor at the market he desperately tried to sell them by shouting the horrendous amount of money he charged for his ties and other hand-made crafts. And every

other visitor decided to shout back. It seemed like they could not communicate without shouting. They always stared at each other, they bargained for some kind of special price, they seemed completely immersed in their small, insignificant battles. The market hall was full of these battles – one battle next to the other – one failed attempt of communication next to the other. She was one of them, caged in her stall at the market, unable to fully live, unable to approach the stranger with the grey tie. She was one of them - from early Tuesday morning until late Sunday afternoon.

He entered Apple Market slightly later than usual that day. The tube was delayed due to maintenance work and when he hurried to get off the train his tight grey tie got caught in the closing doors. The end was wrinkled and a tiny bit of fabric was gone forever. When crossing Apple Market he glanced at her as he always did when passing the table that displayed records from the last decades. Looking at her from a distance and thinking about their possible life together every morning and every evening became his silver lining at the beginning and end of every monotonous day. This time he was distracted by the bright green of a tie flying through the air, held by the vendor next to her. The vendor moved the tie back and forth and shouted something inaudible to him. With every movement of the bright green tie he was more intrigued. For a brief moment he simply wanted to stand still. Stand still and absorb the green, comprehend the full intensity of the colour. He was desperate of simply breathing in, holding his breath, loosening his tie and finally breathing out. Finally letting go and heading towards the vendor, buying that tie and wearing it around his neck – not too tight, not too soft – just right. Wearing that green tie and ultimately abandoning the blinkers. Looking at her, talking to her, taking her in - for a brief moment he simply wanted to stand still and be with her.

For a brief moment she saw him hesitate this morning. She perceived how he glanced towards the tie which the vendor next to her waved back and forth in the air. She realised how something in his stern expression changed. To her it seemed like something had wholeheartedly revived his body and mind for the first time in what seemed forever. She truly sensed that he was eager to turn his head – to turn his head towards her. She imagined him getting hold of this green tie, buying it and simultaneously looking at her, being with her, talking to her. She imagined all the possibilities. For a brief moment she was on the edge of conquering the walls of her cage, to tear them down, grab that green tie and finally look him in the eye.

But he could not stand still – not even for a brief moment. She could not escape her self-made trap behind that stall and they could only return to their homes in solitude - shattered and isolated.

When he is now desolately sitting at the window in his room, awaiting nurse Maria to come to wash him and bring him down to the common area to have breakfast with all the others, he looks at his reflection in the window - the reflection of an old man with a tight grey tie around his neck. And it is just a day as any other. The streets are buzzing, drivers are shouting and people are still rushing through the crowds at the Apple Market towards the tube station just underneath.

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## temptations

by martina rohrer

Apple market is a work of the devil, even though for most people it appears to be heaven on earth. Countless market stalls are heavily laden with sweet temptations and if you do not pay attention you are at high risk to fall prey to them. Like any other evening, the market is crowded and laughter fills up the hall, which seems to be buzzing with life. Everyone appears to be light-hearted, but I can tell you, appearances are deceptive.

Can you see the woman over there, who wears a fig-leaf green coat? At a first glance, she appears to be just like the others, but only I can see her heavy heart, weighed down with guilt. Whereas people share kisses, hugs and interests in the same books and paintings, she does not dare touch anyone or anything. She only takes pictures. She stays at a distance, because she had been too close. Over and over again, she raises her eyes and brushes some strands of hair out of her face and tries to focus on a positive aspect. But what you cannot see, is that tears well in her eyes and blur her vision.

Some weeks ago, life tasted unbelievably sweet and rich for her. She was new in town, knew nobody and had just started to work. But right from the start, all of her co-workers loved her for her honest and unspoiled nature and immediately welcomed her in their community. Even her boss felt attracted and started to send her secret signs of affection. Having never experienced such emotions before in her young life, she felt an overwhelming desire to be close to him. With increasing frequency, their accidental gentle touches changed into intended ones. At the beginning, the two only shared a sweet-smelling coffee in the company's kitchen. But as the time passed, the cups of coffee in the mornings turned into glasses of wine in the evenings. No one else knew about their mutual affection, but for her it seemed so real. I remember watching her dancing for joy in her small apartment, when she came home from their countless passionate secret rendezvous. Life felt light as a feather. No comparison to what she has to go through now.

She wanted to tell the whole world about her bliss of love, but he contradicted. She had always been honest about her feelings for him, but he had not. Now that she had quit her job to be with him, he lost interest in her and abandoned her. Right from the start, he did not want her on her behalf. He had never shared her dream of a shared future. He had only wanted her, because it seemed to be a forbidden, but tempting offer. Such an A ... dam! Never had she imagined such a bitter ending to the first great love of her life. The only positive thing was a positive test in her hands. You cannot imagine how devastated she was. Not only had she lost her job and had her innocent heart broken, but she had also lost her dignity. At least, this is what she thought.

“Eve, come home”, I tell her, “take off your fig-leaf green coat, for you do not have to be ashamed. You could not resist temptation, but you do not have to go through hell now. Your life shall taste unbelievably sweet and rich once again. In my garden, there is a place for the two of you.” As if she has heard me, she suddenly feels a weight lift from her heart and a warmth filling up her body from bottom to top. She tenderly touches what lies directly under her heart. And I see that it is good.

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## hidden gem

by kaylee sharon welles

It was one of those typical Mondays. I was sitting in my empty store, which I had inherited from my grandma, who sadly passed away 3 years ago. Ever since, I hadn't made a final decision on what to do with this store. There are so many options, but nothing seems perfect. Grandma used to tell me to go to vintage shops and markets to get inspired, as there are so many different people with the best stories, but I've never been the kind of girl who likes being around random people and old stuff. Of course, I like originals, such as first editions of books or hardly used vintage clothes, but I'm very choosy. However, on this particular Monday morning, on my day off my temporary job, I decided to go to this one little market in our neighbourhood. I had never been there before, but my grandma used to go there every single week. It was raining cats and dogs and the streets were empty.

It only took me five minutes to go there and my mood was getting worse and worse as I was absolutely soaked through. The good thing though, is that this small market called 'Literature, Legumes & Laughs' was inside an old building, so at least I had a chance to get dry while looking around. Once inside the building, I was pleasantly surprised. There were stalls with fresh vegetables, fruit, coffee beans and even homemade cakes. They had some seats in the corner, so that people had a chance to chat with each other, there even was this hot chocolate stall. The other side of the building was used to sell books, scarfs and mugs. I immediately walked towards the book stalls, which was no surprise since I had studied literature at university. I honestly cannot believe I waited all those years to finally go to this little market. I somehow felt as if this place wouldn't be useful to me, as if it was just another place with old trash, but this right here is pure magic. The atmosphere, the people, the history of the building, it could all be felt. Right here, right now, I feel at home.

I chose one book which looked very old, but not dirty. It looked as if it was treasured by its previous owner and had not been in the hands of many people. "Pearl". I had never heard of this book, but I somehow felt the need to buy it, to read it right away. I sat down on one of the

corner chairs and opened the book. ‘To Mary, the love of my life, the person I will never forget’, said the first page of this book. The book was set in the early 1930s, just between both wars and was about this young, wealthy girl, who fell in love with their stableman, but wasn’t allowed to marry him as he was out of her league. Without me realising, four hours had gone by and I had read most of the book. I somehow felt as if I knew this woman, as if I had known her myself. I also felt sympathy for James, the stableman who eventually moved to London but never got married, as his love for Mary was stronger than anything else in the world. As I’m just about to start the last chapter, an old man walks up to me and says ‘Mary, you haven’t changed a bit, I always knew you would come looking for me one day so we can open our bookstore together’. I was confused, I had never seen this man before. ‘I’m sorry sir, I’m not the person you’re looking for, my name is Hannah’. A woman showed up behind him and said ‘Excuse me miss, James has Alzheimer and isn’t fully aware of his surroundings, I think you look very much like Mary, the woman he never stopped loving, even though he hasn’t seen her in over 70 years’. I was surprised, did she just say James and Mary? Is this the man of my story? And why did he call me Mary? After James and his caretaker had left, I was so confused that I decided to head back to my empty store as it was just around the corner and, anyway, I had been at this market long enough by now.

Once I got to the store, all puzzle pieces fell into place. This Mary, whom James was looking for, was my grandma. We look very much alike. But how could she have never mentioned James, or this book, or even this bookstore he was talking about. Then it just dawned on me, this store was always meant to become their bookstore, that was the original plan. That was why she wanted me to go to markets, she wanted me to find it! She wanted me to find out the true story and decide on my own what to do with her store.

I started crying whilst laughing out loud, if my grandma’s biggest dream was opening a bookstore, then that was exactly what I was going to do. It even comes in very handy that I had my Bachelors in English Literature. I got very excited and immediately left the store again, this time to start planning this dream of Mary, which had only been revealed to me by this hidden gem of a book market.

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## second-hand love

by eva zürcher

It was a lovely afternoon in October. Though the year had already progressed that far, it was still mild outside, especially when the sun was shining. The maple trees seemed to wear red capes made of leaves, but the birch trees were yellow and had by then been forsaken by most of their leaves. Most of the songbirds had left the town by then. Only some were very persistent and still twittered their songs delightfully. In the middle of all this enchantment, Grace was strolling through the vast area of the annual ‘Apple’ flea market. The atmosphere at the market was very special, as many stores that were normally empty, were revived. The whole market was located in a rather deserted but extensive industrial-looking park. The individual shops were like tiny fairy tale houses with many glass windows and some stalls to display their goods in front of them. Grace had already had a look at the little store that sold china and had bought a lovely white teacup with a blue flower pattern. Searching through old, antique goods was one of her great hobbies. She enjoyed looking at old postcards, paintings, and newspapers but books were her favourite items. Every year, some additional shops were part of the flea market, whereas some others vanished. So, there was always something new to explore.

Grace was a good-natured woman in her thirties. She was of medium height, had a slender figure and shoulder-length, blond hair. Her green eyes conveyed the impression that she was an intelligent but cautious young woman who was rather introverted but delighted in the small joys of life. Though she knew what she wanted, she was not at all the pushing kind. After she had been to most of her favourite stores, she discovered a new bookstore right across the old bakery. It said ‘Treasures’ in big, old gold letters above the entrance. She had to smile, as the name was very fitting in her eyes. She went over to the shop and started browsing the book boxes. They were arranged by genre and within the genre organised by publishing dates. As Grace was reading the blurb of a detective novel, she raised her eyes and saw a sign that said: ‘Two books – Two pounds’. That was an extraordinarily good deal and she resolved not to let that opportunity slip through her fingers. Grace had already decided to take the crime novel

with her, when she saw *The Rose and the Yew Tree* by Mary Westmacott right in front of her. She reached for it and faintly smirked as it seemed unbelievable to her that she should find exactly the book she had been looking for for some time now in that tiny little store.

As she flipped through the pages, she realised a shadow was cast in her book. Grace looked up and found herself drowning in two warm, tender-looking brown eyes. ‘That’s a great book you have there and, also, rather rare,’ the man said and smiled. He carried about ten books with him which he had just realised were wrongly sorted. ‘Oh, yes I...I have been looking for this for a while, and I am very happy I found it at your store. I am Grace, by the way,’ she responded. ‘Very nice to meet you Grace. I am Daniel. Are these the kinds of books you are usually reading?’ ‘Actually, I’d read about anything, except thrillers. It is often the book cover that attracts me,’ Grace said with a guilty smile. ‘Now that’s an extraordinary way of choosing one’s reads,’ Daniel laughed. The two carried on their light-footed conversation until they landed at the cash desk. ‘Would you like to have anything else? Maybe dinner with me?’ Daniel asked smiling shyly. ‘Oh, yes I’d love to,’ Grace beamed, and they exchanged mobile phone numbers. On her way home, Grace smiled again and again to herself and felt great. Not only did she have two new books, but also a date.

When she came home, she called her best friend, Stacey, and told her all about her afternoon. Stacey was very happy and excited for her and wanted to know everything about Daniel. ‘Well, I cannot really tell you that much. I mean, he was good-looking, tall, and he wore glasses. But I did not really notice much more,’ Grace giggled. ‘Could be a description of Clark Kent,’ her friend chuckled.

After the phone call she prepared her dinner and, later, sat down in her armchair to start reading her book-prey of the afternoon. When she opened the book by Westmacott, she found that some lines were highlighted on the first page. She had not seen those notes when she had browsed through the book a few hours ago. Curious if there were more things underlined, she turned the pages and saw many more such marks. Grace liked this about second-hand books very much, as it felt like somebody before her had given away a part of himself with the book. When she arrived at the first highlighted passage, she inspected it closely. ‘I told you she wasn’t a saint – not with a mouth like that,’ she murmured. She looked again at the underlined sentence and was surprised and fascinated at the same time. The content was so true, she felt. One could learn a lot about people by looking at their mouths. It’s even a well-known saying that people with small lips are thrifty. The line was not stable but somehow seemed to have been drawn by a rocky hand. Grace felt an instant liking for the former owner of the book. She was curious what other strong sentences would be highlighted in this book.

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