

Marie SILKEBERG

From *Till Damaskus* (2014)

Your Memory is My Freedom

if only the grief would go away. not turn up again. again. the thoughts empty out. the seagulls. the wooden bridge. red thread. thin. long. over the knees. like red spider webs. on the bench. red puddles of water. liquid. it entangles. the thread. in his hands first. then in hers. abstraction. repetition. automat. machine. so it must hurt her shoulders. naked feet. a weave. or the opposite. something repeated. the labor. the body's hard work. suddenly one is caught up in the machine. the colony of punishment. the slavery. part of the whole. to become a part. a citizen of the state. a state. the irregular. the tiredness in the shoulders. or another striving. another discipline. lack of discipline. her face smiles. sometimes on the verge of tears. loose wrist. a sort of music. string. bow. unwinding. nothing. no materia. image, textile. body membranes. fluids. angles, width. range. radius. against the hand. the wind in the thread. a name. the needlework. the hundred days. the wall. the wandering. something invisible and unaccommodating. a content. internal. two scenes. without words. complete. trust. to walk across a square. in agrophobia. or. to see him come. across the square. broken story. the black and white square. snow. it was after that I got the pain in my neck she says. it was then the problems started. the day after I had stood outside the wall in the cold. something I couldn't remember. the moment. to be able to come back. have a reason. if anything. a complicated figure. the black and white pattern. of forgetfulness, covering up. different body. the thread falls over his feet. her bare legs ever more covered. the one. left. what is that wants to be told. together with him. close to him. he has a lash with the hand that exceeds the mechanical. when he lets go of the thread. as if the freedom existed. opened itself. was the possibility of the body. she makes variations. text. not context. the scratches. the scars in the weave. in contact with them. wherever in the weave. the text. he sits still now. pulls the thread. tries to make contact with her. she continues. until the thread is finished. they pull the red thread things over each others heads. to cease. be untangled. in the weave. if they even can see. through the red. back to back. thin threads around the legs. one of theirs. the other one. hybrid. interval. the space in between. he turns around. walks toward her. she stands completely at the edge. he places all of his body close. slowly. transformation. potential. it might as well come from outside. from someone else. the other. the impossible situation. the impossible position. furthest out on the edge. jump jump they shouted. in the silence in life. in another sequence. the other inside. death inside. what was she doing there. on the edge. some original rejection. on the side of the defeated. the risk. the time of the now. the little movement. the extreme

to everything. good, new. the day sees. the night feeds. phoenix park. fenix. the place of resurrection. a park on ireland. the ache in the back. thin pencil marks over vast depths. a tinnitus tone. woke me. kept me awake. his or my. scream. the disk. the gap. the scream in between. whose. where from. tumbling. reversed. the birth. again. vein. again. yesterday. today. is another day. already. monster birth. or rest. new years night. margarita's. or the master's. night. en route pour la joie. his. hers. dissonance. that detaches. in the time flows. in the night. when. if not the night before new years eve. the time of questions. sleep wasn't what I searched for. a ton etoile. the night. to be able to inhabit the night again. travel. through. your difficult countries. stars. to exchange. the written with the lived. sleeping. without crying. a formidable pretense. the moment of truth. where you're broken to pieces. a greater wholeness. to begin with. from the beginning. a truth that pours through you. to escape it. create something else. when the stories are emptied out. the big silence. will we. be there. and hear something different. create something different. from the dissonances. in careful details. le vent nous portera. maybe. hopefully. the order of hope. its conditions. next to a sleeping body. to not want to move from the spot. to dip the pen in the ink. in the white spot. and move from there. in another writing. next to. close to. to survive. noir désir. the destructiveness. i once again had the time to think of. as word at least. the fear. that they should be eliminated. the thin pencil marks shouldn't hold. but what do i know. maybe they have an effect i don't understand. to draw the depths like this. not binding anything. no demon. not even one's own intentions. to know nothing about oneself. increasingly less. clear cut. there is no clear cut. it sounded very sober. rien ne bouge. to admit the gap. maybe. what do i know. what will i know. the stars keep silent. but shines. in the new year's night. the brown. light. which maybe will fade. has faded already. i would like to leave. so that the day never reaches. touches this state. disappear into the night. the indescribable. along its language barrier. through fire and water. nothing entices sleep. the tension so excerpted. so elusive. the aztecs say it's the year of apocalypse l says. crossroad. is the night cold. would the coldness come. two degrees below zero. how could. new year's morning. i not have seen. weak sun behind the roofs. april. i opened the window. april. you coming. the nicotine in the body. and now. the ache in the back. your rain. someone. april. walks across the floor. what if. in the apartment above. what if. someone. in the apartment. i drown. next to me. i drown. what exactly

I lost an opening sentence

About love. The insight. The moment. When something is definitely changed

Got drunk at the reception. Electrified. By the champagne. The light from the paintings. The hanging of them

Dialogue. Conflict. Competition

He continued painting until the last minute before the opening, I hear someone say

The Turner light. Didn't know it was so strongly bright

He sees faces in the painting. Small children's faces. The morning after the deluge

And the bridge. Deep inside the color. More bridges

We guess about the seasons. Spring or summer. A completely white light. The red

Spring, he says

It looks like that, he says. The spring in Damaskus. It's white light

When the light returns. The red. The flowers, he says. When they open in the spring

But they don't do that here

I was quite sure it was summer

That it was the summer

The flowers. They do that only later here. When summer arrives. The red

The music in the hands

Night's scripture. Light's scripture

When something changes

Close to the pictures

Tea, he replied

Gave me four cigarettes. Write the poem, he said

Lock the door

To open yourself to the roar

When the language rises

The big wave over three frames over the whole wall

The entry ticket

The photo flash

Couldn't remember if it was Tranströmer or Peter Cornell I saw at the bus stop at Kungsträdgården

Maybe it was both. But at different times

He had read his poem about the fireflies

When he sat crouched in a corner. And the body went straight

The wild square. The roads of paradise

now the killing will start, he says. when i ask him about the veto. about what will happen now. looks at the clock. only five. he shows me his passport. they see it here, he says, and points at nationality stateless. i look at his palestinian passport, a photo of him as much younger. can hardly recognize him. so long ago i say, is it a long ago. see that it's almost six. we must go i say. will you accompany me to the bus. no. he replies. will you help me with the suitcase. no he replies. takes it from me. moves towards the bus. an experience of violence. an insight into it. to bear the memory of it. nakba sadness. he says they call it. that the men died from it. that nobody could explain why. no sickness in the body. like the africans, the native americans. the people in australia. i read in lindqvists book. but not the parallel. the similarity. they floated. were floating. in the library. the leaves that swirled. their presence. light. reflection. clear lucid colors. running water. long before the frozen. to reflect oneself in the foreign. find one's picture. some picture. skin. to take the world in through. opening the eyes. turning the head. the signal. the siren. an emergency. a need. what would the next step be. some words out of the night. or giving the word to the night. or taking it. risking the word. i saw my hand when I tried to imagine my face in the mirror. the devastation. to be broken down. into parts. to let the parts speak. or. or. I couldn't pronounce his name. without feeling it was an abyss I moved over. when the languages fell silent. the foreign ones. the shared. a reaching out. in so many directions. if the massacre in hama 1982. if the world had condemned in time. not kept silent. it wouldn't be repeated now. maybe. if the west was the eastern state dissident's hope. what then was the hope in Syria? did one hope anything? where did the impulse come from? the demand for justice, freedom? one generation to forget. the killing. the outrageous. grief. loss. silencing. the disappeared in prisons. the hope that they were still alive. would come back. they who managed to leave the country. how long the pressure remains. the fear. we weren't allowed to say that the bread was bad, nothing. each morning we were forced to rattle off a homage to the president. the truth a function of the power. of the economy. I thought about the whisper in the child's ear. when it is born. to have the dream still. make reality of it when possible. if it becomes possible. live for it. to whisper in the child's ear. that god is great, greater. to be put in touch with the relatives. the generations. the father's names in a long row, far back in history. to be in revolt against the world. is that a universal truth, that revolt. a deeply human movement. deep inside. dark wedding. homelessness. don't laugh he said. I'm not laughing. the language of exile. of poetry. maybe. to accept. bare it. know. to see. to have seen. that skin. the hand mark against the inner wall

Translated from the Swedish by Agneta Falk-Hirschman

The Seventh Gate, the Wave

saw the boats. the sea. between the houses. the black sea. war museum. sleep. fell asleep. woke in mountain country. fell asleep again. wake to. the sea's link. the signs. greek. cyrillic. the similarities. the clothes. the shabbiness. poverty. the beggars. the fog over the sea this morning. woke the cats on the stairs. the harbour. intense disquiet. like a susurrantion in the body. with the other. the sound of heels. in silence. crossroads. cross. not the sun of odessa. freedom maybe. true description. or false. the cities and the signs. the graffiti. crying eyes. in several places. house walls. tragedy. greek. cavafy's. the barbarians. waiting for. already here. the poverty. november. the empty restaurants. the fog. how they emptied. from august to november. not a neutral place. the telephone book. the name she looked up. rang. said she had found. a survivor. but from what history. long wandering. diaspora over generations. losses. almost the entire war. racism. the junta. the partisans. radical difference. in accent. skin colour. identity papers. passport. or not. to cross the border. or not. with a ticket. without. cash. lie. silence. waiting. took in the smell of sea. along the sea. the fishing boats. the fishermen looked at me suspiciously. wanted to walk out onto the mole. but saw the sign restricted area. zone 1. the women's side. they kissed the icons. the priest was singing. a cantor on either side. understood anthropos. nothing more. left when the singing got louder. the woman cleaning the icons stood before me. small. stooping. sprayed water. polished. bowed her head when the priest started singing. beggars outside the church. when I went in. at the other open door when I went out. monotone chant from a peddler. the rich buildings between the ones in ruin. the well-dressed people in the church. the eastern city of the roman empire. the sea. the connection. the sephardics from granada. opening. fog on the horizon. the islands silhouetted. lovesick cats starting up. a black cat crosses my path. waves on the beach. a fit of rage. I could neither understand nor stop. the freshness in the air. gulls. sounds from cars. building sites. major road. grey light. rain last night again. occurrence. process. to repeat the declaration. to release. be released. to open. be opened. you occur in me he said. sun. in abundance. the rocks. the cats' garden on the other side of the wall. deadlock. the cities or the streets. golden dawn. unemployment. mercenaries to protect parliament if the riots become more violent. islands. archipelago. in silence. breathing. inside the body. the movement of the water. eddies. in unexpected directions. in the pitiless white light. crossing. downfall. the glittering over the sea. white mist on the horizon. waiting for the barbarians. or a new revivalism. the cross with a thousand tiny electric bulbs shining above the hillside at night. kraniau. topos. the place of a skull. 23.33. in the layers of history. coordinates. wisdom. skullplace. frozen tears I thought. while the tears were flowing

whirled while dancing. between the tables. a full turn. a path that forks. multiplying the images. the basic forms. de-centred. willingly. necessarily. the evening lights. the lamps. the sea in darkness. movement. the icon of mary. the dark face. the sign of the cross towards the ground. to be enclosed in a culmination. word and deed. the quickness of desire. to kill, love. in the intoxication. the dance. the order of the body. the female body. watched the face of the older woman in the night. among the others. worn. once the young had left the city. the country. emerging so clearly to me at the table. her look at us. the hint of a smile. the deep wrinkles. the dance that is like the one he dances so happily. the elderly bodies. slowly. dignified. the kisses on her hand. the silver. the improper grief. in order to be among the living. slowly. mediterranean. a journey on which he arrived. sometimes. sometimes not. debarked. stayed outside the city. the white. crispy. empty. the white desert. scentless. to see from a different angle. the crying in the night. the unwritten layers. a larger image. the abyss of night. of the nights. searching and searching. to repeat the truth of the skin. the hunger. multiplying what is single. wonderful dreams. the icy cold. the way it hits your eyes. walk to the very edge of the rocks in the early morning. the morning light. thassos can't be seen in the mist. see the eye-graffiti. in different versions. on the walls of different buildings. buildings with elevated corridors running between them. a dark alley. children on their way to school. darkness in the allies. the children march round the school playground while martial music is piped from the speakers. in military squadrons. girls. boys. formations. cats. ill at ease about their number. in groups. on steps. stealing over the ruins of houses. unfinished buildings. under cars. see a man with a cat's body in his hand. he is walking quickly. the tail. the body hangs straight down. try to follow him with my eyes as I turn the corner. but he is already gone. a delicate dove lands on the terrace. three sounds. photographs. quickly faded. wave motions. to change the direction. deeper history. the many roads. across the mountains. on land. my words are not chained. mariners. the circling. the writing of darkness. in the light. the meteorology. something more encompassing. I die like a country he wrote. forty years ago. corruption. feudal structures. ottoman. riches. exploitation. after the military junta. the generals. the little girl in the harbour. with the flock of children. the excluded. in the mountain country. macedonia. on the truckbed. velocity. the freedom. in her eyes. in the landscape. as if there were no difference

watch the cat looking at me while it purrs on his arm. his sleeping face. the silence of the world. in the heat of august. a whole life. the temperature. he says and caresses my shoulders. the same. straight roads. canals. four rivers. five bridges. bathed my feet in the canal. his feet were covered in rust. opened my eyes. to see his face. dreamt. amber tears. from the amber eyes. the short while I dropped into sleep. white painting. the red bridge. the blue. the light from the river. 2017 he says. the next wave. the centenary. it's going to be violent he says. the one. the last. figure. white mountain. to whisper to the mountain. the thousand voices. the mountain, the angel. the mountain of the dead. new dreams. chainless. field of mars. as if the years were welling over. like rubbish. unwanted matter. through the halls. emptied. the empty places. one morning. in sunshine. heat. the music throughout the night. from the neighbours below. enlarged face. in sleep. touch and touch me not. the first day. fractally. the first day. over the days. I lost my sense. it was people. not the death-machine. people who hit. denounced. tortured. for a flat for instance. the grid of streets. always the flats on the corners he says. a cross. the streets. revolutionary youth. community. non-violence. raskol. split. through the layers. a few moments of clarity he says. in the park. before the murder. to open the wrong door. piles of corpses. the blue colour. to pronounce the nature of the crime. the guilt. the gulls. from the neva. across the neva. he wept. an opening between the worlds. in the kitchen. the dream. transversal. major rebuilding of the square. where a church was blown up long ago to build the metro entrance. the new. deep. seven minutes. ten. to get down to the platform. a whole naked line. the hipbone. the sex. it will be violent. the wave. continue he says on the stairs. felt the vibrations as the heavy lorries drove over the highest point. where the bridge opens. at night. the feline. the third day. wake up. and want nothing else. than to be close. the pronoun of night. looked for the edge of the buildings against the sky. silhouette. intersection. the low one. long one. horizon. the line of the horizon. nuclear submarines. docks. just a drop of water. the inaccessible opening. to the sea. transparent sleep. the shadows on the pavement. how they are drawn. the sun's rays. the bodies. the light image. hunger. heat. towards evening. the market. piles of dill. coriander. huge radishes. chilli. milk products. the kitchen. the cat. white. oriental. couches in my lap. they look at one another. outside the market. the coolness of shade. pravdi ulitsa. the mild wind. from nowhere. the wind that sweeps. from the coolness in august. the voice. the park. do you remember. the ground. I feel. the name of the fishes. eddies of particles in the light. the dense treetops. the bridge railing. the nocturnal streets. a motorboat at high speed. breaking the reflections. the orange reflections. love is an ocean she sings. a mystery. how old is the girl. a whole life. it is burning L writes. kidding. the second later. desire he says. as no one else. aleppo. the destruction. reflected in his eyes. the images from the market. the old town. the ruins. the rubble. through the day. the dream. the scent. airplane dashes are drawn above the cathedral. they'll have time to ring aleppo he says. from damascus. when they see the missiles. they've got eight minutes. seven signals. the dose

Snow

to persist in the attempt. the strata giving way. the negative. the illumination. longer. heavier. darker. funeral in red light. to forget the name and remember only the word. nuclear fission. rejection. detachment. the fortified borders. rearmament. if the nerve gas falls into rebel hands. the announcement. the reaction. a filament of pain across the abdominal skin. the hand movements as he describes how they filled a truck full of rockets that failed to explode on impact. how steering remotely they drove the car straight into the camp of the government's army. images of snow. a grill in snow with skewers of snow. a collection of snow figures to mourn the dead. the dead man. in snow. the mourners. in snow. the ground covered. while the refugee camps are filled with freezing people. the tents bulge under the snow. esperanza. the boat. in the hell of hope. turbulence. the book in the river. in the aftermath. 23.15. oceanic time. the capital of pain. strait. movements. nicht. nacht. hush. echoland. the rations. the scales. what does it mean to give and take? he asks. and answers himself. sleep. and keeps repeating the question throughout the night. what does it mean to give and take. he hears the dying man through his sleep. his last words. what does it mean to give and take

wake up and see faces. t's. j's. wake up and look out into the winter night. the snow over the fields. the forest. to pass through the pain and know it

if he screams brother. or his name. in the film. is laid bare. listener she says. street cleaner. ten days later the attacks began. my legs trembled. the body. we laughed at all the jokes about solutions. all night the bombs fell. ceasefire. as it is breaking out. in the ringing of the phones. the conversations. a closed door. an open face. straight movement. the city between the bridges. not the bridge. suddenly flaring up. then sleep. long. Winter Way. Northern Lights Street. sonar. or the abolition of hunger. the white roofs. the whirling snow. the enigma in the language. no turning back. who says that. who lit this flame in us. what is this flame. the human difference. the difference. human actions. every night. each night. I will lie unsleeping and ask myself this question. zones of clarity. moments. my bare hands. wrists. a few points of contact. some similarity. woken by it. fell back to sleep. the inner figure. the flame. conscience. tenderness. living or dead eyes. at some point during our conversation I watch his eyes coming alive. some sounds he emits. physically. from within his body. when the eyes deepen. I feel it in the movement between us. that it is opening. feel the terror. the revulsion. a cold wind. the methods. the torture of the female prisoners. books are burnt in order to write other ones. the journey is dissolving. the boat on the river. the gaze out into the white light. what kind of creeping madness took over our town? I hear the voice on the radio. he is breathing as though he has fallen asleep. I look at him. walk over the bridge. save the book. do you want to smoke he asks

oblique light. oblique ray of light. wet snow

touch l's fingertips on the other side of the table. stretch them forward

you are my emerald he says

you mine

third body. the core of the relation. to say his name. forget. provoke. what the morning did not contain. or had enclosed inside itself. what vanity I laughed. no it's not vanity he struck me on the arm and said. not vanity. to be able to speak eleven languages. to walk in darkness. with both hands. stroking. across the scar. treason. the scar. its opposite. a wave motion across the letters. in the letters. I fell asleep for a microsecond. screamed he is here

he is not here. I did not betray him. was freezing the whole time. a pain in the body. to enter the skin. a moment. a few days. a rotation. of balances. cancelled out. sought for. independent and interdependent. the flow of money. the abrupt emergency brake. the riots in Europe. the poverty. the evictions. the demonstrations. the police brutality. prohibitions against taking photographs. recording. arrests of those who do. bruises on the hands. the legs. the boy's. the woman leant against a man I could not see. her half-closed eyes. slow speech. something flowing across the face. in the midst of. a distance. a worn jacket. maybe there is an opening. une communauté. a whirlwind. inner. wholly internal. the first snow. the white roofs. an Asiatic woman leans her head against the rail in the bus. as though completely overcome by exhaustion. while her two children. one in the pram. the other beside her. are completely still

Translated from the Swedish by Frank Perry
