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The Other Gardens (2017)

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The other gardens, the abandoned ones
that do not ask for permission to exist
exist there even so
and invite in everything
that lives and that is dead.
Here is a good place to pause a while
for travellers before they journey on.

Here
not much remains of what once was
when it comes to gleaming marshals
and those guests who come here
have other business than the celebration.

Yet they were tended once by human hands
and therefore can be called gardens
though the root system existed before and after
the age of humanity.

If it is morning or evening:
it can resemble another morning
far beyond the old one
it can also resemble an evening
and point towards a long night.

That is no great matter to discuss.

Another night that encloses everything
it tastes of metal, earth, leaves undergoing transformation
deep within it such is being prepared as
words as yet do not dare taste
and which can thus resemble a morning
as yet without written rules.

Vehicles come and vehicles go
the windfalls are not picked up by anyone
the betrayed pass by the betrayers here
and eat beneath the same branches.

Do not ask me who extracted
the greatest happiness from his life
or who was assigned the greatest torment
I, an intermediary, how could I possibly reply
although I am acquainted with cobwebs
the spiders' lives and victims.

In the abandoned gardens
the signs of living seem more distinct
because death's heel
has left its prints in what has been left behind.

Here soul's refugees came passportless one night
and found there a moment's rest

they did not think could be attained
sat down for a while
knew this to be no lasting place to stay
yet tarried until daybreak.

Here those extremely happy come a while
caress each other's bodies
and think they know what life's idea is.
Here the rain falls, that which first obliterates
and then gives back another life.

Here the dead come on their swift passage
through various worlds, take in the smells
pause for a while
taste before hurrying on.

And migrating birds that move at ease through the night
search a while in what is now stripped of leaves
find what they are looking for
in the large recess of the body
at the same place where the dead recently passed
hence the dark gleam in their eyes.

Not until oblivion has come to take its place
and death and life have acquired new meanings
does a different burgeoning begin
the faintly golden that precedes mouldering.

Now
the leaves all interweave
they look at me, at you they look
and ask how it can come about
we happen to be passing here
through the soles of our shoes they whisper
that it is alright to pause here for a while
but that the secrets which they carry never will
will be revealed completely.

Nor do some overripe apples that fall heavily
ask to be picked up
they fall into the abandoned grass
to be there and to grow there into other things
and to remain there quite still - and to wake up
when night and morning together
pass through the milling throng
of all that does not know what rest is
and they open their eyes wide, prick up their ears
for that which once more is drawing near.

Far off it is as if vehicles
as yet still out of sight are on their way
and which not even the gardens know of.

II

The human animal with its quivering lips
the scent of prey

weighs up life, the value of life
bares its teeth
its eyes squint in the way they must.

There is a risk the wind will turn
away from the direction of hope
then it will be hard for us who travel over great waters
or are left behind in the precinct on fire.

Then there is hope for us who sail
over great waters in the direction of the wind and hope
for us who live on the right side
of the precinct when it is on fire.

It is an unclear position for those who are travelling.

The night she died
from the tubes and the increasingly sore changes
the night when the grievors and those who did not grieve
sat round her

was not a hand stretched out from the dark
a lover's hand towards her
surprised she rose up in increasing clarity
and was not around her hand
another hand joined in lust

and those who grieved and did not grieve
knew nothing of this.

The blade of grass!
Look at it close up
when it bends in the wind, still moist
after the night's rain
like a slender swaying scythe
in its unheard-of splendour.

See how it dries in the summer sunshine
on its way to its transparency
ever thinner like old human skin
see how it develops an unheard-of silence
one which can rival that of deserts.

And then when it bends

towards the end of October
its back still gleaming with the late morning
when the mould comes and the frost comes
and the foot that finally tramples it down.

See how in the earth it diminishes
diminishes once more
towards its new, unheard-of splendour.

Did there suddenly lie in the palm of the hand
an invisible letter as yet not slit open
in which everything was related
about the vessel far off without harbours
about the silence of the abandoned houses
about love's conditions
about those who lived a life
and yet did not live
about those with an excess of life on fire
and everything that lies in-between.

But none of us dared open.

Why does the heron stand so securely on poetry's plinth
and the crow so vigilantly
in front of the trap on the rubbish heap?

Because the heron is scent-blue on the wing
and has a flight like kings
after having fished in still waters
the crow more numerous
hacks his way forward among the corpses.

I saw both of them at close quarters
when similarly they jerked their necks and swallowed
the heron more snake-like than the crow
which in its frightened flight often loses its prey.

No doubt both of you have my approval
no doubt we shall enter death together
where the gradations hopefully cease
and poetry finally blows away.

Carnival-like the years let themselves
be overturned even into a celebration
beyond all celebrations.

A man on the square breaks down completely
when he searches for a life philosophy.

The one who now distinguishes
between what is dead and what is living

assumes a knowledge
far beyond the human

and all that which then falls out
of humanity's secret cupboard
forgotten wars
faces that have been dried in the herbaria
and a matchless intimacy in unwritten letters.

Spring rain falls over stones
that breathe with old hatred
and an even older love.

The evenings sway like rocking chairs
old folks fall asleep
and during the night are transformed into dry skeletons
arise already the following day
garlanded for a May morning.

What a din of undiscovered insects
will not then inundate the world!

Already before the dawning of the world
they used to leap there
the packs of expelled wolves
at what we regard as the periphery of the universe
they are looking for food, somewhere to live
or at any rate a real name
so that they can be called something.

But they are accepted nowhere
in either the philosophical or the political systems
or anything else.

Which is why they sometimes howl through our dreams.

The privilege of growing old
that everything frightens yet does not frighten completely.

I imagined I saw so frequently talked-about death as a
flame-green light
just prior to the storm over the water.

The jay, bird of my childhood, appeared today
still wearing the band on its wing.

Slightly less bleeding than before
and not as visible on the surface
but thicker inwards
the mental veins increasingly clotted
the light of the summer day far off.

The days of the surgery scar are past
there now remains a duller time
where no ambulances fail to arrive
because no ambulances are needed here any more
at the abandonment of treatment.

It certainly happens that the shores
still go on enticing with what is theirs
the trees likewise
human hands likewise.

But the bleeding the so sleep-bringing
also continues with what is its
so like the summer night where the faces
slowly merge into a hollowed-out light.

Far off earthquakes can be heard
approaching.

Series of nights pass by
they greet each other
new days and new nights will come
that are nothing like what there is now they say

and the clusters of fruit hanging ripe on the trees
listen throughout the autumn
and when they fall
they meet the nights that are passing.

How heavy the leaves are today
do they also taste of blood today?

Will a beetle or a human
be also crushed against the street today?

Many will be crushed today against the street
and who derives any pleasure from the fact
that the leaves also taste of blood today?

It returns now - the fly
settles as before on the wrist
and tastes with its cold mouth.

If I was younger I would have killed it
but now that there is so little left
it can sit there with her sucker.

Not that I am doing creation any good
by this declamatorily human gesture
perhaps it will be soon be caught in a different trap

and suffer a more painful death.

Year after year we have consorted
in this locked prison
which now gleams once more
in the late-July day.

All the stuffed animals in biological museums
all the carpets of insects above and below the earth

the animal-human
the human-animal

religious doctrines and the absence of doctrines
I try to console myself with the doctrine
of the non-measurable
the bush-cricket's eyes gaze fixedly at me.

This bog is an eye
with the eye's various characteristics
the clear surface which the rain falls over
and keeps clean
the gleaming depths and farthest down the small aquatic creatures
on life's and death's conditions
the lovely salamander.

The bog observes the world and follows the day's happenings
the one seeking consolation here can pause a while
and gaze down into the blackness
sometimes a smile passes over it, a smile
that really has nothing at all to do with a smile.

As a bog-dweller living close to the bog
I imagine I almost understand its characteristics
when it scouts for insects on the surface of the water -
but do not look for too long or too far down in it
for then you can be seized by a longing for death
and other such deceptions.

And just as the eye has a brief life
the bog will not live much longer either
aquatic plants and the natural course of events
will lessen its extent, the sun will dry it out
and like an ash-gall it will then turn in on itself.

But even when this evening comes
it will continue to exist without revealing
anything of what it feels and even less considers
it simply looks at me, looks through me
thereby confirming a life.

The Bohemian waxwings which now at the advent of winter
come from the sunrise far to the east
advance in circles
more swiftly than our eye.

They are borne by the winter
they eat the winter's berries
they bear the silk in their feathers
some survive January.

Whether their life like ours is long or short.

Towards half-dusk the interpreters gather
and in their modest images provide
an explanation of the enigmatic
schist
of the earth
the upper earth and lower earth.

I was there occasionally
thrived, half-thrived in the luke-warmth.

How truer the bats are then
which emerge at this time of the day and night.

How unambiguous and clear
are then their tiny faces
between child and dead man's skull.

Now the days are more compact than before
they demand a yes or a no
but what this yes or no imply
they do not let us know.

Therefore they do not say either
who shall be the executioner or the one executed.
On such days
perjurers and martyrs are born.

We had lived so long in the prisoners' house
that we started to dig the graves of the damned
to which we would all eventually come.

Yet sometimes were alarmed
by strange sounds in the walls
as if something was in the process of giving way.

One day we broke through
or was it the walls that opened up
of their own desire.

Outside the great plains lay free.

III

She stands at the red window
in front of her is the fire
behind her is the fire
in the window is her only room
she is standing high above the street
if she leaps she leaps to her death
she must exist there to be still alive:

she has stood there a thousand years or more
she is still young
still has her teeth despite all hardships.

. . . .

I saw you for the first time in 1939
I was only nine then and the new war was there
you stood at a burning window
I think it was in Poland
it could have been somewhere else
death surrounded you on all sides.

I do not know if you were already dead
when I saw you in the newspaper
if you died in some camp much later
if your death was violent or long-drawn-out.

Time after time I think that I see you
and I shy away from your gaze.

. . . .

She has cast off all designations
all that in some way could lock her in.

She is beyond myths
icons she has abandoned
her crime:
she sought freedom
she sought nothing else.
She only wanted to travel in peace
get the food her body needed
see the landscape through the train windows.

She has had to borrow a lot so as to survive
hands that once lived in order to caress
have turned into claws.

Despite this she gleams

. . . .

Perhaps I saw you recently in a train compartment
your old skin was chapped

and there were hollows in your jaw where teeth should have been
your eyes bored into mine
whether it was sympathy or out of mockery.

We did not know each other
but it seemed as if you knew more about me
than I do myself.

Not that I believe you wished me well in any way
why should you
perhaps you were looking for a final amends
for the fact you still exist.

. . . .

What else do I finally have to say to you
than that I once saw you as a newspaper photograph
I got off lightly whereas you succumbed
for there to be a reasonable conversation between us
is impossible.

Despite this, we meet time after time.

Does even so a place exist
if nothing else as a chance dream
where all the streets and the window at which you stood
finally open out
towards the square which does not yet exist
but which belongs to a different future.

IV

Humans of ashes
sit on benches of ashes
around them the winter is harsh

they are talking about the future.

After their visit to life's brief day
the clouds colour themselves red before the sunset
like rags
still stained with life's sweat
they wish to show themselves
shortly before night comes
takes them away.

The slaughtered animals recently hung up
drained of blood
now rise up on their hind legs
sniff the air
turn their horns towards the sun.

The improbable
in its own great halls.

In the March day the sun dazzles
the tall pine trees
which have stood still for so long
climbs out onto the crusted snow

a skier also glides past
is dissolved against the light.

Just now a gleaming and a shadow fell through the night
then there was nothing more

but the gleaming and the shadow lingered
although they came from nowhere

it was a waiting for an answer that still lingers
and you were awake

a gleaming and a shadow that change everything
though everything seemed to be as it was

but you who were awake that night
have since then had a splinter in your eye.

Skeleton-sharp with hunger the predators emerge
from winter's forests
if they find nothing to eat
the cold winds its death around them.

When the spring and summer are over
the mushroom-pickers shout with delight:
Oh aren't the skeletons beautiful.

Happiness pays a sudden visit
it stays standing in the doorway:
I'm not staying long
and should I return
it will be unpreparedly.

but like a hot breeze in the evening
you will remember me
that time I came close to you
and you believed the impossible.

So much that gathered
and became one
in the sun's setting light
that only lies a few hours from
the sun's rising light

my childhood's chorus was there
December's star
a scythe swished through the grass

heard the rakes among the leaves
and the boats' sirens
when they leave the harbour

a Swedish child
outside the first great war
outside the second great war

a Swedish child in the country
Outside.

Thought there was nothing more to wait for
here farthest out on life's spit
nothing except the last step from terra firma
Then suddenly life turned around
and showed its predator's fangs:

I scratch you, you scratch me

I eat you, you eat me
devoured we caress each other a while
as one does in Paradise.

Did you hear that heart beat
which causes the shores to yield!
Those who drowned will not return
but the dream of a possible return remains.

The sound of an early engine
in the mirage on the horizon a city rises up
then sinks once more
voices draw near.

A wing lifts
it is morning over the Baltic.

It was at the dividing line
one of the many
and I was there, that I can even so say
that I was there.

The flies buzzed in the air
it was the hot season
with the unmistakable smell of ripe grass
and of life abandoned bodies.

To take a decision then
that can also last until late autumn
when the season of deflaking comes
with smells that grow sharper in a different way
and not even the buzzing in the air is heard any longer.

To be able to say then
it was my decision
and it was dubious.

I was there even so.