

KATHARINA LUDWIG

*I'm always happy to see you the next
Day
To be sure we didn't die*

I wrote these lines sitting on the floor, listening to you read at Kotti on your 50th birthday. I wrote them as part of a new poem. Perhaps a beginning. A fragment to be extended. This never happened. Instead things ended.

You asked me to make a chocolate cake for your birthday. A moist chocolate cake, because dry chocolate cakes “are the worst.” The page of my notebook, with these three lines, is still stained with cake. I put it away, full of empty pages, after November of that year.

I don't know how much time has passed. I stopped keeping track. I've aged and there are new holes in my shoes. My bones hurt. You said these aches and pains are to be expected. In retrospect—everything seems retrospective on these futureless mornings, when the sun refuses to come up—the time we spent together was shorter than the time that's passed since you left. A reversal I refuse to accept.

I was thinking for a long time about what kind of memorial we could build. I caught myself forgetting to remember. So I set out to track lost memories, to numb current ones. I decided that given my means, your memorial shouldn't be heavy or made of expensive material. Also it should be hidden so that it can't be found by our enemies. Instead of building I started walking around town, through

the streets between our neighbourhoods. I realised I was building an invisible monument by doing so. The worst city is the best place for it.

I scream at the wind. I stare holes into the sky. I fold our pamphlets to make stars. Black stars of white paper, shadow stars to be planted in the sky, into the holes, next to a pale and powerless sun.

I push open heavy doors, climb the stairs in narrow hallways. Flickering lights, broken bulbs, asbestos-panelled ceilings, smells of food and piss, of excreta and exhaustion. I nod to the man who descends the stairs empty bottle-filled plastic bag in hand. I arrive on the roof. From here I try to listen to the sound of the dead and their voices. There are no echos. The obstacles between the living and the dead have been worn down. Nothing can be reflected. I listen to silence and wonder why we look up when we think of our dead buried in the ground, why we think of hell below or heaven above. I begin to whisper to you in a middle voice into the space between up and down.

I try to trap time (more of it) in empty husks of seeds and nutshells, then give them to the birds to carry. I throw them into the air and the birds catch them in mid-flight. My friends are blackbirds, wrote Gogou and we both agree, I know. They carry them between former Kreuzberg, old Exarchia, ex Hackney. They will be dropped and will open and spill.

I'm sending you messages. I write words, one for each day on slips of paper. Today's word is *brine*. Yesterday's word was *rage*. You'll know

what they mean. I slide the notes between the pages of borrowed books, returned to libraries and the streets.

I scratch the words of an invented language into walls and surfaces. Into mirrors of public toilets, walls of buildings, windows of real estate agencies, asphalt. An attempt to convey halting alphabets and chewed-up syllables to be assembled into a new vocabulary in which to sing old songs and learn to speak again. In between I write swear words and curses in the redundant language we all know how to speak and read. A language lost to our enemies, scraped out and hollowed by neo-liberal usage, become fascist. Let them read these. In shops and libraries I arrange books so that the letters on their spines spell anagrams. Spells for the departed, the lost and the dead.

At the bridge I roll pieces of sticky white bread into little balls; inside I try to enclose our fears and anxieties, our debts, doubts and hunger. I feed the bread balls to the swans. They chew them up and digest them. They won't poison them. Swans are resilient and helpful.

Further down the canal I toss a handful of pebbles, each stone a word, into the water. Each pebble an emotion solidified into a philosophy—of anger, of hate, of scorn, of defeat, of despair, of loneliness. The water throws back at me glistening ripples.

I teach my heart, one of the three I have, to harden. The heart is a lame metaphor, you once said, so I teach it to turn to stone. This way at least I obtain a weapon. Something to throw.

At the underground station I give away what's in my pockets, to those who ask me. Mainly small change, cigarettes and lighters. Sometimes

other small objects. The hole in the lining I have to keep. I refuse to read the news these days.

The fucking job centre. I will be angry just for its sake. The neon sign of a bank mirrored, red, in frozen puddles. A brief flash of blue from the new police van passing and I compose new curses and spells of protection. I think about setting all police vans on fire. Instead I light a cigarette. I don't smile back at the cop passing by. Instead I push a stray shopping cart into the middle of the road. A useless barricade. My mourning demands un-usefulness, pathetic gestures of resistance and wasted gestures of excess. When you left the whole city shut down. And when it reopened, it was less habitable than before.