translated by Shane Anderson

IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE

In my father’s house are many

mansions. I don’t want to see any

from the inside. On the ground floor,

marzipan goes up to your ankles.

You sense that this was a home

for bones for the longest time. You’ll keep

going with feet that have broken off.

The carpet on the stairs feels—

it’s difficult to say:

like a soaped-up Labrador,

a hip fracture with guinea pigs

after work. Something

grabs your crotch on the second floor.

Nothing visible—a

drop in temperature, ever so slight.

At the end of the hall, Sylvia Plath

makes a move on a young, pale

Nazi every day at lunch. There’s only

bunk beds and light sand on the third. Even

more bunk beds. Seashells.

Flint. The boys’ choir sings a

canon, day and night. Behind

the wall. Behind the wall. Behind

the wall. Halfway up the stairs there’s a

shed, a dental laboratory. Stored there

are the teeth of chain smokers, deceptively

real. In the fourth, there’s the vacated

strip mall, the biggest in

the town. Still in use is the

car wash for my father’s

car, the small Benz that

Yoko Ono died in. The two of them

had just fallen in love.

In the attic, a snap trap with

prizes every child sticks

out their right hand for—seashells,

bones, teeth, Benz, Labradors,

bunk beds, guinea pigs

out of marzipan. In my

father’s house are many mansions.

MODEL

I’ve sat for Damien Hirst

a good deal, I was a shark

long before bony fish existed,

I was a very ordinary one,

a middle-aged man masked

with mint. I was the lamb

complete with its broad white

frame, I came as a cow head

and left as an ancestor. Like I’ve

already said, I’ve sat for

Lucian Freud a good deal

with my English, with my

glassy, with my rain-wet

skin, a landscape of heather.

Hour after hour I have

feasted on the cold light as well

as on the air in the studio, I’ve

had pigment in my navel,

solvent flows through my

veins, and I’ve seen

everything that he has also

seen. I know every one of my

colors, every scratch, no one

can blackmail me with naked

photos. Disguised as

a burglar, I was a part

of your world too, until one night

the painter awoke from his sleep

with a start, a whiff of mint

blew in from the window,

a whiff of mint drops, with

which to conceal fear,

so that someone sleeping can smell

it—until he stuck out

his hand and took the spade

that’s always standing next to his bed

just in case he needs it. It’s me.

The skin that’s floating in the pale

solution. I

am the heather. I am the shark.

THE BLACKBIRD POPE

I saw the blackbird pope, you couldn’t

really miss him, I

spoke a hurried prayer, but it was

too late for me. I

saw the blackbird pope at the window,

he seemed to be bowing

very quietly to the day. The

deep breaths, the blackbird legs,

which no human is allowed to feel,

hear or see, violently pulled me in.

The blackbird: a morning robe. The

blackbird’s voice: a nakedness.

In my eyes sleep. I saw the

blackbird pope, he appeared to be

a tired, an overbearing, spent

morning catcher, he spoke with

someone I didn’t know, with

his neighbor, his

enemy, with his servant, his

master, with his cold larder cook

or then finally with me, his

course-skinned governess.

I saw the blackbird pope, I was lying

in bed like I was stuffed and behind

glass, what was I supposed to

do, quite frankly I didn’t have

the countenance. And the sun stood

askew, and from the windowsill

he was peering at leftovers, and there

was a light in his back like

in the industry of raw footage.

His plumage lay flat on his body

that was as big as a fist. He didn’t

move. The moon went down

in the west like in some dreary

landscape photography. I looked,

he slept. He got carried away.

I saw the blackbird pope.

The morning kept getting longer. Now

it practically lasts a full day.

LETTERS

Tell me what letters are.

The trees gape incessantly

through the window. An ash. An

oak. A yew. Don’t write

anything down. Stay out of everything.

Don’t send any dispatches. Call

the mortician twice a week.

At night, it gets lighter. You

can beat people to death just as easily

with wood as with plastic. Tell me

what letters are. You need

a place to stay. Wait

for the detective. Society is a sign

of weakness. Wait

for the being that rummages through your

drawer. Get worried.

Why do you need a spade. You

have two healthy hands

for digging. Even fruit you do

not need. You’re not a chanteuse.

Wait and see. Wait until tomorrow. Let

the trees out there gape

at you. They’ll see.

Don’t write. Just tell me

what letters are. It might be that a

tree beats another one

to death. Clear the field. Leave the

garbage where it is. Leave the coastal wind. Leave

your brittle bones. Persevere. The

son is the father, the father

a ghost. Don’t taste of the ash,

the oak, the yew, but tell me

what letters are. Break free from

your templates. Speak faster.

No one here needs to understand

what you’re saying. Who here would

get you a gun. Don’t ask whether you

are welcome. What’s singing

within you is nobody’s business.

The letters are gaping. Stay.

ONE DAY

One day, I’m going to get up

really early, earlier than ever before

and earlier than all of you, and for me

it will be like I were a visitor in

some distant place, for I feel no

pain, and I have work to do,

and I will walk back and forth for

a short while, as if I needed to

decide between sleeping and

waking. For I hear

the young sparrows calling me,

and I will split walnut kernels

into pieces, and I will feed the

titmice earlier than ever before. I’m

sitting here on the third floor at

the kitchen table, knowing that soon

I will be travelling to the other end

of the courtyard. In my head I can

cook and bake and read and

write. I won’t wait for anyone

because you’re all asleep, because

everyone’s asleep, and I will

scratch here at the kitchen table, and

I will split the table with a light hand

underneath the nearby calls of the

sparrows, underneath the far off

calls of the titmice, and I will

face this life

at the other end of the courtyard. One day,

I’m going to get up really early,

earlier than ever before, I will look

at the stove as if I needed to

decide between warmth and

cold, I will rise in the

morning sunlight, I

will praise you, and I will

envy you, I will eat you up

like tiny cut-up nuts,

and I will mourn for you at

the other end of the courtyard.

HÖLDERLIN DAYS

A light mist up above,

beautiful scattered light too.

I’m reading a book of the

nights. A book of the day.

My left hand’s already heading

to hell again. It

doesn’t like my monologues,

on the edge of the chair,

always tilting, incessantly

snipping, clipping

everything, hoarse and

mute. My right hand

leaves me alone. My

right hand goes on

a journey, into this stony

Greece that’s everywhere

around us, where we bite

into the laurel.

With its mean spirited, with

its revolting,

its awesome scent.

The shallots are blooming

this year for themselves alone. For

them, there’s nothing to it.

You too need to pay attention to it.

Say it. And don’t turn

around. These are the

Hölderlin days. Your nerves

are shot. Everyone marches

to their own drum. You want to know

where the vineyard slope

where the eternal rainy slope

is. But I’m wondering

what should we do

right now with flamingo piss

in a German poem.

A light mist up above,

beautiful scattered light too.

I’m reading in the book of the

networks, in the book of the day.

MY VOICE OF INK

You have to wash your hands

with ink, you have to gurgle

with ink. The lips

are black, are purple,

are blue. The teeth behind

the writing. I dip

my tongue deep into the inkwell,

I dip my hands

into my mouth. I throw the

snippets down my own

throat. There’s still space

behind the writing, behind

the writing there’s still some

space. In the pouch

of my cheek, ink is

collecting, collecting is

the quivering, the foaming

black writing is

collecting. I need to open

this space, otherwise the

paper scraps will stick

to my cheeks again

like old swill, as if chewed

up and thrown on top and

chewed up again. Once again,

I’ve just barely

gurgled past the old

inkwell, you know

it, at the ink swill. Writing

and iron, writing and

cuckoo flower foam. My gums

are turning blue

from all the writing.

And you, stop it,

stop it, writing, snippets,

throat, rust and

tooth and leaves. Let the tongue

be a tongue. My

voice of ink aims below,

it aims with precision.