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All That Man Is

人猶如此

CBS4701 Project in Language Studies

Translation Project

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1. Translator's Introduction

The literary flavor and stylistic features are always relevant to the symbolic meaning of literary works. This book, *All That Man Is*, is inspirational as the author explores the meaning of life through the stories. All characters in the book are struggling with what it means to be alive, particularly on male experience of time and aging. One of the chapters (chapter 7) is chosen for this translation project. The enlightenment of this book attracts me, as it tells not only the story, but also the reflection of ourselves as a human, particularly the male experience. This book is therefore selected as the topic of this project.

1.1. Background of the source text

A dynamic approach is adopted in the English fiction *All That Man Is* written by a Canadian-born, British-based writer David Szalay, who was born in 1974 in Montreal, Quebec. He has been named one of The Telegraph's Top 20 British Writers Under 40 and has also made it onto Granta magazine's 2013 list of the Best of Young British Novelists.

All That Man Is is the forth novel of David Szalay, which won the 2016 Gordon Burn Prize shortlisted for the 2016 Man Booker prize. This book consists of nine different stories. They are seemingly different to each other, but they are in fact describing man in different stages of life. The story is about Murray Dundee, a middle-aged Scottish who lived in Croatia. He is a drunken, selfish,

time-wasting yet sympathetic man. His story is a tragedy - estranges from family, meets a friend who falls in love with the woman he is fond of and gets cheated by his business partner. However, it is his pride that keep him moving forward. In the end of the chapter, Murray, who lost everything, saw a couple and a superyacht, but he did not care. His characteristic helps him to get through the difficulties, which gives the silver lining in his tragic life.

There is one sentence said by Murray which I think is the main idea of the book, ‘We all think we’re special— we’re all the fucking same’ (Szalay, 2016, p. 272). It shows how helpless life is. No matter rich or poor, there are stages that everyone must face— birth, aging, sickness and death. The only difference is the way we choose to get through those stages, but we cannot escape from it, and that is why we are all the same. The story portrays the pessimistic view of life, yet it is what life would be— full of failure and sadness, it is life, and life goes on.

In an interview, David Szalay pointed out the intention of writing *All That Man Is*, he said “I wanted to write a book about time, ageing, mortality... We all get older, we all die, we chase our desires, satisfaction is elusive, nothing lasts forever. These are platitudes.” (Rivera, 2016)

2. Analysis of translation problems

With reference to Reiss (2014), the source text consists of both expressive and operative functions. From the perspective of the expressive function, the stories reflect the writer’s view of men’s life, and he describes sharply the psychological perspective of men by using brilliant words and exquisite

writing techniques. From the operative perspective, the stories tell different stages of life of man, so male readers may find similar experience or feelings about being a man and about life in these stories. Every story brings out a message to the readers and inspire them to reflect on their own experience. Therefore, more than one translation approach would be used in the translation. I would explain the difficulties encountered throughout the translation process and details regarding the translation strategies in the following section.

2.1. Difficulty in translating puns

First, the pun in the source text is translated in editorial techniques. In chapter 7, the writer uses pun to describe the psychological states of the main character Murray.

ST: Motherwell. It has been a long time since he was up here. Motherwell? No, actually. She passed away.

In this sentence, the pun ‘Motherwell’ plays upon the two meanings of the word. The first meaning of “Motherwell” is a town in and former burgh in North Lanarkshire, Scotland, South East of Glasgow. The second meaning is a question ‘is mother well?’. In this context, after the death of Murray’s mother, he arrived at Motherwell and Murray thinks of his mother when the name of the place comes across his mind. To translate puns, with reference to Delabastita (1993), there are eight ways to translate puns: 1. pun to pun, 2. pun to non-pun, 3. pun to related rhetorical device, 4. pun to zero, 5. pun source text to pun target text, 6. non-pun to pun, 7. zero to pun and 8. editorial techniques.

In this case, it is difficult to translate from pun to pun because there is no equivalent terms in Chinese, while it is also not possible to omit the pun because it reflects Murray's frigid exterior concealed a warm heart. Therefore, it is therefore better to use footnotes, "In English Motherwell can be interpreted as a place name or a question 'is mother well?'. When Motherwell comes across Murray's mind, he naturally thinks of his mother." to explain the pun as:

TT1: 這裡是馬瑟韋爾(Motherwell)，他已有一段很長的時間沒來過這裡了。母親還好嗎？不，事實她已逝去。”

2.2. Difficulty in translating psychological description

Secondly, the writer uses italic or brackets to express the psychological condition of a character.

In chapter 7, the writer uses a lot of techniques to describe the main character Murray.

ST: He's left home now, is in Australia or somewhere. (What was his name again?)

In this sentence, the writer uses brackets to show the psychological description of Murray. In this scene, Murray stays over in his sister Beckie's house and she lets him live in her son's room, but Murray does not remember her son's name. If this sentence directly translates into Chinese:

TT1: 後來他搬走了，好像是到了澳洲或哪裡似的（他的名字是什麼？）

It would be strange because it is unusual to use brackets to show psychological description in Chinese. Therefore, it would be better to use free translation to make the sentence more coherent:

TT2: 後來他搬走了，好像是到了澳洲或哪裡似的，但梅利已記不起他的名

字。

The second technique the writer uses to show the psychological description is the use of italic words.

ST: *Ewen - that's it.*

In this context, Murray recalls the name of Beckie's son when she mentions his name Ewen. The writer uses italics to show what Murray is thinking in his mind. In Chinese, it is also not common to use italics to indicate the psychological descriptions, so it would be confused to use italicized Chinese characters. In addition, if it is not appropriate to use italics, and directly translation as:

TT1: 伊雲——就是了。

It would not be able for readers to get the meaning of this sentence which is to show how Murray's thinking. Therefore, I use supplementary translation for this sentence,

TT2: 「伊雲，」他心想。「對了，這是他的名字」。

This translation may be different to the original text, but the additional words can help readers understand the context of the sentence.

However, not all the psychological descriptions are handled in this way.

ST: And the he was alone, lying on a wet pavement, wondering if he was in fact
dreaming. *Please, let me be dreaming*

In the source text, the italicized words are the psychological description of Murray. If we use the technique mentioned above:

TT1: 現在只剩下他一人，倒在濕漉漉的小徑，還在疑惑著自己是否在做

夢。「求求你，讓我繼續做夢吧。」梅利心想。

In TT1, it is also appropriate to use the brackets to show the psychological description. However, the context is different to the above example because the pronoun ‘me’ makes this sentence similar to an internal monologue in a drama. Therefore, if the source text is translated as TT1, the narrative perspective would be changed from the first person (the internal monologue) to the third person (the brackets). Therefore, I translate the sentence in bold instead of adding bracket to reserve the dramatic effect of the monologue.

TT2: 現在只剩下他一人，倒在濕漉漉的小徑，還在疑惑著自己是否在做
夢。

求求你，**讓我繼續做夢吧。**

2.3. Difficulty in translating cultural elements (accent, slang and Croatian)

Thirdly, the writer creates new pronunciation in conversations which are difficult to translate. For example, Hans-Pieter, Murray’s friend, speaks with an accent in their conversation:

ST: ‘It’s^h hot,’ Hans-Pieter says. It’s the kind of thing Hans-Pieters will say - the kind of fascinating conversational gambit he comes out with.

TT1: 「這裡很熱，」漢斯彼得說。這是他一貫會說的逗趣開場白。

TT2: 「超…熱，」漢斯彼得說。這是他一貫會說的逗趣開場白。

In the source text, the word ‘it’s^h’ is a colloquial usage, in which ‘sh’ act as an onomatopoeia.

Also, in from the context the word ‘sh’ is pronounced in a funny manner to make Hans-Pieter’s speech fascinating. Therefore, it may not be appropriate to directly translate it into ‘這裡很熱。’. As an improvement of the previous version, free translation is adopted as shown in TT2.

In this translation, I use the word ‘超’ as a substitution of the English version ‘sh’, and use ellipsis to prolong the pronunciation in order to achieve the funny effect.

The similar word can be found in another conversation,

ST: I suppose,’ he says, taking a quick, almost furtive, sip of his lager, ‘it’sh global warming.

TT1: 「我認為，」他快手拿起啤酒，偷偷摸摸地啜了一口說：「是全球暖化。」

TT2: 「我認為，」他快手拿起啤酒，偷偷摸摸地啜了一口說：「『係』全球暖化。」

In this text, ‘sh’ is also used to show the similar funny effect. If it is directly translated into ‘是全球暖化’, the effect of the word ‘sh’ may not be revealed. I therefore use dynamic equivalence and translated into TT2. After considering two types of readers: 1.) people who use Cantonese as their first language and 2.) people who use Mandarin as their first language, I select the word ‘係’ because of two reasons. First, for people who use Cantonese as their first language, the meaning of ‘係’ is similar to ‘是’, and the accent ‘sh’ is difficult to translate, so the word ‘係’ can associate with the word ‘是’ just like ‘it’sh’ and ‘it’s’, and add the quotation marks that indicate the colloquial word ‘係’ is not the exact word the speaker pronounce in this conversation.

As for the people who use Mandarin as their first language, the pronunciation of ‘係’ (xì) is similar to the word ‘是’ (shì), which can reserve the accent ‘it’s’ and ‘it’s’ in the source text. However, they may not be familiar with the word ‘係’ as well as the relationship between ‘係’ and ‘是’. Therefore, they may only interpret the word ‘係’ as the wrong usage in this sentence.

To eliminate the ambiguity of the word ‘係’ for readers, I translate the conversation as below:

ST: Murray, sweating, scoffs. ‘What the fuck you talking about?’

‘Global warming,’ Hans-Pieter says.

TT1: 梅利滴著汗，藐視著他說：「你在說什麼鬼？」

「是全球暖化，」漢斯彼得說。

I use additional translation ‘是全球暖化’ for ‘Global warming,’. It would not affect the meaning of the conversation while the readers would be able to know the word ‘是’ is what Hans-Pieter intends to say. Although it may take some time for readers to understand the usage of ‘係’ in this conversation because of the intertextuality in the dialogue, the translation can reserve most of the meaning of the source text.

Besides, there are also idiomatic expressions which are difficult to translate.

ST: *Fucking space cadet*, Murray thinks.

TT1: 「該死的太空人，」梅利心想。

Murray sees Hans-Pieter in a bar and he thinks that Hans-Pieter is a space cadet. According to Peter Newmark, idiomatic translation “reproduces the ‘message’ of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.”

(Newmark 1988). In this case, if we literally translate space cadet as ‘太空人’ (see TT1), the sentence may not make sense in the context. In this case, the term ‘space cadet’ should have another meaning. Space cadet has two possible meanings, the first meaning is ‘someone who behaves strangely’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), the second meaning is ‘when people are in their own little world, constantly “spaced out” of their current surroundings and positions.’ (Urban dictionary, n.d.). To translate the term, Baker (1992) suggested four strategies: 1) Using an idiom of similar meaning and form, 2) Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form, 3) Translation by paraphrase and 4) Translation by omission. In this text, the first method may not be appropriate because there is no equivalent term in Chinese. Also, the fourth method would not be appropriate because the term ‘space cadet’ is the most important information in the sentence, so it cannot be omitted. The second method is therefore preferred because it can preserve the idiom in the source text. It is therefore, it is more faithful to the text.

TT2: 「做他媽的白日夢。」梅利心想。

The definition from Urban dictionary is adopted in the translated text because Hans-Pieter is staring at one point. It is what people will do when they are spacing out. Thus, the second meaning is more reasonable.

The other difficulty is to translate Croatian. In the story, the main character Murray lives in Croatia, so Croatian is used in some of the names. For example, the hostel Murray lives is named Umorni Putnik and the bar is named Džoker. In Croatian, Umorni Putnik means weary travelers, while Džoker means joker (Croatian-English Dictionary, Glosbe, n.d.). Since they are proper names, both

transliteration and free translation can be adopted. For transliteration, however, the meaning of the proper name will be lost in the translated version ‘鳥莫尼樸狄克旅館’ and ‘作卡酒吧’. Moreover, if transliteration is adopted, the translations of the two proper names will be wordy. Therefore, free translation is adopted to show the highlighted meaning of the proper names ‘累客旅館’ (a hostel for weary travelers), and ‘小丑酒吧’ (joker).

2.4. Difficulty in translating structure of the text

The other difficulty of translating the book is the sentence structure. One of the most commonly used technique the writer uses is fragmented structure. In one scene, the main character Murray was beaten robbed by two men. He was lying on the pavement alone:

ST:

What was that?

Hubcap.

Fuck.

Hubcap of a ...

Toyota Yaris?

Dizzy when he stood up.

And sick. Suddenly he felt very sick.

We can see that there are phrases or short sentences that are fragmented and incomplete. From the

context, the intention of using fragmented structures is to reveal Murray's unconscious to the readers.

The translation of this section should be faithful to the source text in order to reserve the purpose of the text. Therefore, literal translation is adopted in this section.

TT1:

什麼來的？

輪轂蓋。

幹。

那裡來的輪轂蓋...

豐田雅力士？

他站起來時還滿天星斗。

還感到噁心，突如其來的噁心。

However, when the structure of the source text becomes more complicated, different translation approaches should be used. For example, Murray stayed overnight at his sister Beckie's house after the funeral of their mother. The writer uses scattered sentences to describe the surrounding where Murray sees and feels:

ST: The heating turned up too high. The sound of the rain on the window, like someone muttering unpleasant truths. And the photo. In a frame in the upstairs hall. Himself, Murray, at about ten years of age, with Max, the Alsatian they'd had then, that he'd loved so much.

The difficulty of translating this paragraph is that it consists of many short and incomplete

sentences describing different things in and outside the room. Different from the example above, the sentence structure is more complicated. The connection between sentences is also not close to each other – from the heating to the rain, then to the photo.

The interesting point is that the source text is fragmented. Sentence fragment is ‘a phrase or clause written as a sentence but lacking an element, as a subject or verb, that would enable it to function as an independent sentence in normative written English.’ (Dictionary.com, n.d.). For example, ‘And the photo.’ and ‘In a frame in the upstairs hall.’ are separated and they are incomplete. Though we can only speculate the intention of the writer and his use of using incomplete sentences, similar writing techniques can be observed in literature or conversation. Schuster suggests seven rules for making effective sentence fragments, including 1.) to create a dramatic pause for emphasis, use a period instead of some other mark of punctuation (or, more rarely, no punctuation at all), before a sentence-terminating element, 2.) to create intense emphasis and succinctness, delete all but one of the major elements of an independent clause, 3.) to emphasize the individual items in a list or series, use a period rather than a comma between them, 4.) to achieve a more natural, conversational tone as well as economy of expression, express questions in fragmented form, 5.) for naturalness and economy, also express responses to questions in fragmented form, 6.) to give additional emphasis to negatives, isolate them as fragments, and 7.) to make exclamations more terse, use their fragmentary form (2006, p. 80-81). In the context, the purpose of the sentence fragments is more likely separating each item in order to let readers to follow the vision of the character and visualize the description in the room. Similarly, we can also see sentence fragments in Chinese literature. Wu (2008) indicated that the use of sentence

fragment is a breakthrough of the rule of grammar, and it has been widely adopted by contemporary novelists. Using period instead of Chinese back-sloping comma can stress each item and form a harmonious aesthetic effect.

The study shows that it is also acceptable to use sentence fragments in Chinese. Yet, from TT1, we can see that if we try to keep the original form by using literal translation, the linkage between sentences may become stiff and the whole paragraph would be hard to read:

TT1: 暖氣調得過大。雨點敲著窗的聲音，像在呢喃著令人難受的事實。還有那相片。鑲在樓上的大廳。梅利自己大約十歲，與麥斯，一隻他曾經養的德國狼狗，他非常寵愛牠。

I therefore revise the translation by adopting paraphrasing techniques and additional translation:

TT2: 房內調得過大的暖氣。雨點敲著窗的聲音，像在呢喃著令人難受的事實。還有那鑲在樓上大廳的相片。相中的自己大約十歲，還有他當時十分寵愛的德國狼狗麥斯。

Transition is added and the sentences is reconstructed in the revised version. I try to separate the sentence by using period in order to preserve the effect of sentence fragments. Although the disadvantage of the revised version is the loss of the original style, the whole paragraph is more readable.

The flexibility of sentence structure in literature enhances the freedom of translation. Assuredly, it does not mean that the meaning of translation can be distorted.

ST: 'Aye, thanks,' he says, and sees his brother, Alec, emerging into the last day of

September, the falling leaves, the shining wet tarmac.

The difficulty of translating the source text above is the sentence fragment and the noun phrases.

If literal translation is adopted, the component of the sentence will be lost and the sentence will not be readable.

TT1: 「是啊，謝謝你。」他說，然後他看見弟弟亞歷，在九月的最後一天
出現，落葉，潮濕而閃亮的柏油路。

In TT1, since the noun phrases do not attach with verb, the whole sentence will be hard to understand. Supplementary translation is adopted to make the meaning of the sentence more complete.

TT2: 「是啊，謝謝你。」他說，然後他看見弟弟亞歷出現在這九月的最後
一天之中，出現在徐徐落葉之間，出現在潮濕而閃亮的柏油路之上。

In TT2, each noun phrase is attached with the verb ‘出現’, so the meaning of the whole sentence will be clearer. Also, since the sense of rhythm can enhance readability and the aesthetic effect in literature, parallelism is adopted in order to make the sentence more consistent.

2.5. Difficulty in translating the style of the author

Last but not least, the style of the author is one of the most difficult features in translation. Each writer has his/her writing style, which makes literature unique. As a translator, the contradiction is whether we should use our own language in translation or try our best to be faithful to the original. In the translation field, translation style has been a popular topic of discussion. Venuti (1995) purposes

the term ‘invisibility’, in which he suggests that “as a spokesperson for the author of the source text, a translator is expected to show due respect for the authority of the source text and do his utmost to achieve the equivalence between the target and source text, including stylistic equivalence.” (as cited in Hu, 2015, p. 124). On the other hand,

Baker (2000) suggests translator’s style, which refers to “a kind of print that is expressed in a range of linguistic – as well as non-linguistic – features.” (p. 245). Translator may show his/her stylistic features “quite subtle, unobtrusive linguistic habit which are largely beyond the conscious control of the writer and which we, as receivers, register mostly subliminally” (p. 246).

The controversy is still ongoing and poses a dilemma to translator. However, in my opinion, it is impossible to be ‘invisible’ or only use our writing style in translation, especially in translating from English to Chinese because both languages share different grammatical and syntactic system, so the difference between source text and target text would be huge. It is easy to leave behind the ‘thumbprint’ in our translated work.

After finishing my translated work, I think that translators can only try their best to counterpoise translation and creation. The purpose of translation is to serve the author, in which we should understand all the information about the content of the original. The purpose of creation is to serve the reader, in which we should show all the information to them by using a new language and a new written system. A “pure” translation produces a disorganized and incomprehensible work, while a “pure” creation produces a distorted and unfaithful work.

A style of an author consists of many elements, including the genre of the book, the writing habit

of the author, the purpose of the book and so on. In this book, *All that Man Is* is a work that provides food for thought about one's life. The author, as a spectator, constructs a desolate and oppressive story by using the writing skills such as third person perspective, sentence segments and wording that is lack of the author's own emotion.

In the translated text, I try to follow the characteristic of the author and recreate the style of the author. It is almost impossible to fully understand the author's intention of writing because it is closely related to the background of the author. We can therefore only interpret the text and construct the translation through these clues.

With reference to the scholars, the translation difficulties can be solved systematically, while it is noteworthy that the strategies are only the guidelines that show one of the perspectives for translating the source text, so we cannot only rely on the strategies in translation. As a translator, it is more important to use the strategies flexibly and consider the message of the authors and the readability. For translating literature, the most valuable characteristic of a translator is humanity, which helps us to connect with the authors and readers and provide the translation that can stir the heart of people. This is which a good translator should achieve.

2.6. Footnote

Motherwell: In English Motherwell can be interpreted as a place name or a question 'is mother well?'.
When Motherwell comes across Murray's mind, he naturally thinks of his mother.

3. Source Text for Translation

All That Man Is

Chapter 7

1

Pearl Dundee, Murray's mother, died, finally, on Sunday afternoon. The funeral was the following Friday.

Murray himself was late. Heads turned in the pews when he opened the cumbersome door of the crematorium chapel. It was bleak and pale in the chapel. Outside it had started to rain again. The minister, who had been speaking, had been saying something about 'a long, full life', waited for Murray to find a place.

Afterwards, while they stand outside, he explains to his sister Beckie that his flight from London was delayed.

'Well, I told you,' she says, impatient with him, 'you'd've done better to come up last night.'

They are both dressed as if for the office, in dark suits. Murray in a murky tie. He offers her a cigarette and she takes one, and then they accept the condolences of some old lady - a friend of their mother's, he thinks she must be, who Beckie seems to know. Mauve-hatted, the old lady tells him, as he lights his cigarette, that his mother was a 'wonderful woman'.

'Aye, thanks,' he says, and sees his brother, Alec, emerging into the last day of September, the falling leaves, the shining wet tarmac. He has not spoken to Alec yet.

He has not spoken to Alec for years.

It seems he doesn't own a suit, Alec - over his white polyester shirt, his black polyester tie, he is wearing a dark blue Puffa jacket. He's almost unrecognisable, he's lost that much hair since Murray last set eyes on him.

'How's young Alec?' he says to Beckie. He says it with a smile, trying to be nice. 'He's put on a pound or two, anyway.'

'Why don't you ask him?' she suggests.

Murray is still smiling, sort of, as she moves away, to talk to someone else.

Alec is talking to someone else as well, is filling the doorway of the chapel in his Puffa jacket so that the last few people left inside are having to wait. No one seems to want to ask him to move, to step aside to let them leave. It's his mother's funeral, that's probably why.

Smoking hard, Murray turns to the road. The taxis are arriving, to take them to Beckie's house for the drinks.

He shares a taxi with some old people.

One of them, an old man with smelly breath, old man breath, seems to know him.

'So how are you, Murray?' he asks, tightly holding the moulded plastic handle of an aluminium walking stick.

'I'm okay, fine,' Murray tells him. 'Well, you know,' he adds, 'it's a sad day and all.'

'It is,' the old man agrees. 'Pearl,' he says, 'was a lovely creature.'

Murray moves his black leather shoes, and his eyes shift nervously to the sliding streets, the grey

faces of the houses. Motherwell. It has been a long time since he was up here. Motherwell? No, actually. She passed away. The old man asks him something.

‘No, I don’t live in the UK now,’ he says.

‘Croatia,’ he says, in answer to another question from the old man.

‘Yugoslavia, it used to be part of,’ he says, in answer to another.

In his sister’s small house, even with all the people there, he is unable to avoid an encounter with Alec.

He is in the kitchen, tearing open another lager, when Alec is suddenly there - he’s helping out, seeing to it that everyone has a drink, passing round the peanuts. ‘Hello, Murray,’ he says.

‘Alec. Hello...’

‘You still voting Tory?’ Alec wants to know. His face has an upsetting fullness, a middle-aged quality. The shiny pink forehead is huge.

‘Tory?’ Murray says, and slurps from his lager. ‘Nah, those fuckers are too left wing for me now.’

Alec smiles extremely thinly. ‘How are ya anyway?’ he asks, without much interest.

‘I’m okay,’ Murray says. ‘I’m well.’ Then, for want of anything else to say – ‘You still with the union?’

‘I am. What about you?’

‘This and that,’ Murray offers. ‘I’m not based in this country any more.’

‘No, I heard.’

‘Not for a few years.’

‘Some sort of tax exile, are ya?’

Murray smiles, liking the sound of that - liking the sneer in Alec’s voice when he says ‘tax exile’.

He has another slurp of lager. ‘Something like that,’ he tells him.

He spends the night in Beckie’s spare room. It was her son’s. He’s left home now, is in Australia or somewhere. (What was his name again?)

‘Why don’t we try and stay in touch?’ Beckie suggests the next morning, early, as they drink tea in the kitchen and he waits for his taxi to the airport.

‘Definitely,’ he says, trying not to look at her. When he does, he thinks - *Fuck, she looks haggard.*

‘You’re sure you don’t want any breakfast?’ she asks.

‘No.’ *Less than two years older than me, and look at her. She looks like an old lady.*

She says, ‘You look tired.’

‘Do I?’

‘I suppose you didn’t sleep well,’ she says, ‘in Ewen’s room.’

Ewen - that’s it. ‘I slept okay.’ Murray says, thinking greyly of the hours he endured during the night, turning and turning under the Spider-Man duvet in his Y-fronts and vest. The heating turned up too high. The sound of the rain on the window, like someone muttering unpleasant truths. And the photo. In a frame in the upstairs hall. Himself, Murray, at about ten years of age, with Max, the Alsatian they’d had then, that he’d loved so much. Seeing that photo last night, of himself and the dog, had upset him somehow.

‘I slept okay,’ he says again.

‘Lucky you,’ Beckie says. ‘I didn’t’

Milky tea. Too milky. The dregs, not even tepid disgusting him.

‘I couldn’t stop thinking,’ she says.

Murray puts down the mug, and tries to swallow what is in his mouth. He is in his suit again, tie in his pocket.

Beckie is in her dressing gown.

‘I just couldn’t stop thinking,’ she says.

Yesterday, when everyone had left, she told him about their mother’s last days. She hadn’t shed a tear then, telling him the hospital stories – the meetings with doctors, the small-hours vigils, the hopeless dawns. She told him about them in the dry voice she probably uses in her office at the town hall. And he had listened without emotion, without feeling anything.

Now it seems she might break down.

Her mouth wobbles.

Murray, instinctively, looks away.

He looks at the window, straight out through that window with mould in its corners, to the dull morning.

And aye, Beckie is in tears now. Holding a dishcloth over her face.

Where the fuck, Murray thinks, looking at the fake Rolex that hangs too loosely on his sallow wrist, *is that fucking taxi?*

Twenty-four hours later, on Sunday morning, he is on a train to Stansted airport, and he feels very much worse.

Rainey was involved. Once they had worked together in telephone sales, him and Paul Rainey - they had spent years together on sales floors, under the strip lighting. Working the phones. The Pig worked with them for much of that time, and he was with them on Saturday night as well. They started in the Penderel's Oak in the middle of the afternoon. Ended up at the Pig's flat in Whitechapel about twelve hours later. Murray had slept for an hour or two on the floor of the Pig's sitting room, on the sofa cushions, in his suit. Then it was up at six - with an implausible pain in his skull - to make the lonely walk to Liverpool Street, and the train to Stansted.

Fucking obese, Rainey was now. It had been a shock to see him. He and the Pig still worked at Park Lane Publications, the office just off Kingsway. Lunchtime in the Penderel's. Everything the same.

And when they asked Murray what the fuck *he* was doing, he said, 'I'm just taking it easy. Enjoying life.'

'Where you doing that then?' the Pig said.

'Croatian Riviera,' Murray answered. 'I'm semi-retired,' he told them.

'Semi-retired? What's that mean?'

'Means no one'll give him a job,' Rainey quipped, adding an empty to the many on the table and turning his head towards the bar.

Murray tried to smile. 'I've had no end of offers,' he said quietly, as if out of modesty.

‘Bollocks,’ Rainey said.

And Murray felt that his old friend had still not forgiven him for the events involving Eddy Jaw, the things that had happened some years back.

They had worked together again since then, of course. When Murray was sacked by Jaw he had found his way, inevitably, to the taupe glass door of Park Lane Publications, had found Paul Rainey working there again - at the same desk even, as if nothing had happened, lifting the same white handset to his sweating head.

Murray had been sacked from that job too. He seemed to have lost his touch, whatever touch he might once have had. It was then that he had decided to explore other options. In a way, the Pig was his inspiration. The Pig, notoriously, had once spent two years in Thailand, ‘enjoying life’, living off the money he had saved. Though Murray hadn’t saved any money, he did have a small house in Cheam - a sixties bungalow in a place called Tudor Close. He had acquired it in the glory days, around 1990. Twenty years later, the mortgage was negligible. So a tenant was installed and Murray set off to look for somewhere where he would be able to live on that small income.

The Croatian Riviera.

His flight to Zagreb is at ten thirty in the morning.

He is sitting in the departures lounge, with a headache. Outside, planes move silently. Sunlight torments him. He feels sick.

He had not told Rainey and the Pig why he was in the UK, about the funeral. He had not mentioned that at all, or even thought of it himself, as they went from pub to pub, moving east from Holborn.

Now, staring out at the planes through the shell of his hangover, he is surprised by a memory, a memory of a hand on his forehead, feeling for his temperature perhaps.

Sunlight throws shadows on the terminal floor.

Ma, says a small, frightened voice in his head, his own voice.

Ma, where are you now?

And finally, sitting there in the departures lounge, staring at the planes moving in the weak October sunlight, he finds the tears in his eyes.

2

Actually, the ‘Croatian Riviera’, the Adriatic seashore, even its least fashionable stretches, had turned out to be too expensive for Murray. He had ended up some way inland, over the hills and far away, in a town on a fairly arid plain, surrounded by dusty vineyards and fields of sunflowers and maize. The Turks had once been defeated there in fifteen-something, and a monument in the main square memorialised the event. It was the last thing of any importance to happen in the town. In one of the streets leading off the square, there was a youth hostel, the Umorni Putnik, and it was there that Murray had lodged for a while when he arrived.

More than a year ago now.

The first person he had met, on the stairs, that first day, was Hans-Pieter, a Dutchman, and a long-term inmate of the hostel.

Hans-Pieter, Murray had immediately thought, was obviously a total fucking loser.

He was also, these days, his only friend.

The day after Murray's return from the UK, the two of them are passing the afternoon at a pub called Dzoker. They are sitting outside, where there are a few tables under umbrellas advertising a local marque of mineral water - though already October, it is very hot. Murray is wearing white shorts that fall to just below his knees, overhanging his violet-veined and hairless lower legs which in turn taper down to dark office socks and large white trainers. Sweat oozes out of his manly face.

'It'sh hot,' Hans-Pieter says.

It's the kind of thing Hans-Pieters will say - the kind of fascinating conversational gambit he comes out with.

Murray just grunts.

Hans-Pieter is probably about ten years younger than Murray - somewhere in his mid-forties. He is unusually tall, obviously shy.

'I suppose,' he says, taking a quick, almost furtive, sip of his lager, 'it'sh global warming.'

Murray, sweating, scoffs. 'What the fuck you talking about?'

'Global warming,' Hans-Pieter says.

'What - you believe in that?'

Hans-Pieter looks worried, as if he might have made some elementary mistake. Then he says, 'You don't believe it?'

'Do I fuck.' With the hem of his white T-shirt Murray towels his face of freely flowing sweat. 'Don't tell me you believe in that?' he says, resettling his glasses on his nose.

'Well.' Hans-Pieter looks down at his flip-flops, 'I don't know. It'sh October,' he points out.

People are eating ice creams. Pigeons are wetting their wings in the fountain.

Murray is still staring at him. 'And?'

'Well.' Hans-Pieter sounds doubtful. 'Is this normal? This... this weather...?'

'There is no evidence,' Murray tells him, 'for global warming.'

'Well, but I thought...'

'There's no fucking evidence.' Murray takes off his glasses to towel his face again. The front of his T-shirt is sodden.

Hans-Pieter's pale eyelashes flutter humbly. 'I thought there was,' he says, 'some evidence.'

Murray laughs again. 'You've been had.'

Shyly Hans-Pieter says, 'What about the Shtern report?'

Murray makes an exasperated sound.

'It says if there's no action taken on emissions...'

'For fuck's sake!' Murray shouts at him. 'There's other reports, there's reports that say just the opposite.'

'Aren't they paid for by the oil companies?'

Murray sighs. He has heard this shit before, and he won't have it. The fact is, Murray feels a profound sympathy for 'the oil companies'. He feels, somehow, that he and 'the oil companies' are on the same side. That is, they are the successful ones, the winners of this world, and therefore envied no doubt by losers like Hans-Pieter - Hans-Pieter, who still lives in a youth hostel, while Murray, like some fucking oil company, occupies a well-appointed flat in one of the most elegant Habsburg-era

streets of the town. It is his understanding, in fact, that Hans-Pieter is on the Dutch equivalent of the dole, which stretches a lot further here than it does in Amsterdam or wherever he's from.

'Do you not understand,' he says, taking a more indulgent tone with his slow-witted friend, 'that the whole thing's a plot *against* the oil companies? A left-wing plot. Against the market economy. Against individual freedom.'

'You think that?' Hans-Pieter says.

'I know that, pal. They lost the Cold War,' Murray explains. 'This is their next move. It's fucking obvious when you think about it.'

A large drop of sweat falls from the end of his nose.

Hans-Pieter says nothing. He turns his head to the hot square. He has a little earring in his left ear.

'Anudder one?' he asks, noticing Murray's empty glass.

'Go on then,' Murray growls.

Surprisingly, after that one, only their second, Hans-Pieter makes his excuses and leaves Murray there on his own, to have another half-litr of Pan, the local industrial lager, and survey the square in unexpected solitude.

That Hans-Pieter has something else to do is a surprise. The underlying premise of their friendship is that neither of them *ever* has anything else to do. No one else to see. There *is* no one else. That's why they are friends. Take that away, and it's not obvious what would be left.

Actually, it's not quite true that there is no one else. There's Damjan. An acquaintance of Hans-

Pieter, a native. Damjan has a job though - he works at a tyre-fitting shop next to the train tracks. He has a family. He has, in other words, what passes for an ordinary life.

Murray meets him later in the bar of the Umorni Putnik.

Murray is disappointed, arriving there, that Maria isn't around. Inasmuch as Murray has a purpose in his life now, that purpose involves Maria, who serves drinks in the youth hostel. She is not, he feels, out of his league. For one thing, she is not very attractive. She is young and friendly, and her English is excellent - she even understands Murray when he speaks. He has had his eye on her for some time, since last winter. All year he has been planning to make his move.

He was particularly hoping to find her there this evening. He feels down. Outside, it is already dark. The evenings are shortening now. The nights, as they say, are drawing in.

He sees Damjan arrive.

'Damjan, mate,' Murray says, standing eagerly to shake the tyre-fitter's hand.

Damjan is short, muscular, untalkative - the sort of man that Murray instinctively defers to.

Damjan, while still shaking Murray's hand, looks around. 'Hans-Pieter?' he asks.

'Not here,' Murray tells him. 'I dunno where the fuck he is. Lemme get you a drink.'

'So,' Murray says, when they are sitting down. 'What you been up to then?'

'What you been up to?' Murray asks again when Damjan says nothing. 'What you been doing?'

Damjan, perhaps still not understanding, shrugs, shakes his head.

'You're okay, though?' Murray asks.

'Okay, yes.'

This is in fact the first time they have had a drink together without Hans-Pieter being there. It turns out to be surprisingly hard work.

They end up talking about tyres.

‘So what about Pirelli?’ Murray finds himself asking. ‘How do they compare? With Firestone, say.’

Increasingly, there are long silences, during which they separately survey the room, trying to find a woman worth looking at.

Then Murray asks another question about tyres, which Damjan dutifully answers.

They have been talking about tyres for almost an hour.

‘I had Mitchell-in on the Merc,’ Murray says, after a long pause. ‘Top quality.’

Damjan just nods, drinks.

‘D’you think we’re going to see Hans-Pieter tonight?’ Murray asks.

Damjan shrugs.

‘You don’t know where he is?’

Damjan, lifting his drink, shakes his head.

Which, it turns out later, is a sort of lie. He knows more or less where Hans-Pieter is. Hans-Pieter is at Maria’s flat, naked, watching an episode of *Game of Thrones* dubbed into Croatian on Maria’s squat little TV.

3

In the morning, autumn has arrived. The temperature has fallen twenty degrees overnight. Surveying it from his window, in pants and vest, Murray is triumphant. He looks forward to shoving this turbulent

autumn day, full of wet leaves, in Hands-Pieter's face and saying, 'So what about this then? You fancy an ice cream now, ya fucking parasite?' He starts to smile, until an eruption of coughing knobbles him and he turns from the window trying to force out the word *Fuck* as he doubles over and the veins in his temples swell and throb.

'FUCK!'

'Fuck.'

Silence settles on the flat, like dust. He found it, the flat, with Hans-Pieter's help, about a month after arriving in the town. His landlord is a middle-aged man whose mother lived here until she died, and most of her stuff is still in place - vast dark wooden furniture looms in the two rooms. Down at floor level Murray lurks among the old lady's pictures and knick-knacks, her pedal-operated sewing machine, her damp bedding. He had wanted it fully furnished. He uses her old steel knives and forks, her stained plates. There are even, on the walls, some framed photos of people in old-fashioned clothes, strangers with grave sepia faces.

The flat is still full of warm, stale air. The flapping grey scene outside its two grand windows seems disconnected from the tepid silence of the interior. It seems weird, histrionic. Rain comes at the windowpanes like handfuls of pebbles. Murray lights a cigarette. He smokes a local brand now - to that extent he has gone native. He sits in the hot shaft of the bathroom, surrounded by rust-furred piping, discoloured tile-work, a light bulb burning high overhead.

Afterwards, he dresses, and wrestles an umbrella the short distance to the Umorni Putnik.

Hans-Pieter is there, having breakfast at a table in the shadowy bar. A coffee, a buttered bread roll.

He seems to be staring at a point about two feet in front of his eyes. *Fucking space cadet*, Murray thinks.

Without acknowledging his friend, he addresses himself to the bar, where Ester is on duty. Ester - she is out of his league.

She's pals with Maria, though, so it's probably worth keeping in with her: Murray smiles.

He feels the insufficiency of that smile himself, sees its insufficiency for a moment in the deep murky shadows of the mirror behind her. (The price list is written directly onto the mirror - his face peers out from among the numbers.)

'Yes?' Ester says.

'Cappuccino,' Murray's face says, in English.

While she works the machine, he looks at a local newspaper. The words mean nothing to him, his eyes drop from picture to picture. Pictures of local politicians - mean-looking men with terrible haircuts trying to smile, as he has just tried to, and with, for the most part, a similar lack of plausibility.

When he has his cappuccino, he joins Hans-Pieter. 'Morning,' Murray says, mutters, taking a seat opposite his friend.

Hans-Pieter, his mouth full, just nods.

He seems to be force-feeding himself a bread roll.

Murray regards him with distaste for a few moments, 'Where were you last night then?' he asks finally.

Hans-Pieter is swallowing the bread in his mouth. He tries to speak prematurely and the words are

indistinct.

Murray squints at him irritably. 'What was that?'

'Ammarias,' Hans-Pieter says, swallowing.

'What?'

Hans-Pieter swallows properly. 'Maria's. At Maria's flat.'

'What d'you mean?'

Hans-Pieter is unable to hold Murray's stare. 'You know - Maria?'

'Maria,' Murray says, struggling, it seems, to understand who they are talking about, 'who works here?'

'Yes.'

'You were at her flat?'

'Yes'

'Why?' Murray asks, sincerely puzzled.

'Well.' Hans-Pieter laughs shyly. 'You know...'

'No, I don't know.'

'We've...We've got something going,' Hans-Pieter says.

Murray, for a moment, looks totally nonplussed, 'What - you?'

Hans-Pieter nods.

'You and Maria?'

Hans-Pieter looks down. 'Well, yes,' he admits. He seems embarrassed. And it might be that he

misunderstands Murray's perspective. Maria is twenty years younger than Hans-Pieter, more or less. She is overweight and unattractive. Things that are, potentially, sources of embarrassment.

'How did that happen?' Murray says. He has turned quite pale.

Last Friday night, Hans-Pieter tells him, he was there in the Umorni Putnik until it shut, as he usually is, and it was pissing down outside, and she didn't have an umbrella - she was waiting for it to stop, so he suggested she come up to his room and wait there, have a smoke, and she did, and they ended up spending the night together. Since then, he tells Murray, he has twice spent the night at her flat.

'That's it,' Hans-Pieter says.

He starts on his second bread roll.

For some time Murray says nothing.

The little trees in the street outside shake and sway.

At the shadow-draped bar, Ester is talking to someone on her phone, laughing.

And I was at Beckie's place, Murray thinks, trying to sleep. The Spider-Man duvet. And they were.

At that same moment. Last Friday.

He is staring at Hans-Pieter with an expression of shocked loathing. 'What the fuck does she see in you?' he says,

What does she see in Hans-Pieter? The question keeps Murray awake that night. He sits there, in the tall mausoleum-like spaces of his flat, smoking in the darkness. What seems obvious to him is that if

he had only made his own intentions plainer, sooner, he and not Hans-Pieter would have her. That thought torments him for a while. Not that he even particularly wants to have her in any physical sense. There was something limply sentimental, something vague, something almost like pity, about his feelings for Maria. And what she sees in Hans-Pieter is obvious enough - Hans-Pieter is just a lesser version of himself, a poor woman's Murray. A foreigner from somewhere further west, with at least some money. Hans-Pieter even has a car - an old rust-perforated 1.2 litre Volkswagen Polo, leaking oil in a side street. In the context of the Umorni Putnik, that makes him a more or less plausible sugar daddy.

He's welcome to her, Murray decides.

He's welcome to the fat tart.

And the good thing is, this will give him more time to focus on his business interests. Which is what he should be doing anyway, not messing about with floozies. His business interests. Airport transfers. Minibus to Zagreb airport. Blago has the drivers lined up. He has the advertising lined up. The website is ready to go. He just needs the minibuses. He has enough for one, he says, but he needs four to make the business viable. So he offered Murray the opportunity to invest. They talked about it in Džoker, and then over lunch. Put in the money for the minibuses, get a fifty per cent stake, was Blago's proposal. And sitting in an HSBC in Kingston upon Thames last Wednesday, Murray had finalised the loan, against the house in Cheam, and transferred the money to the account of Slavonski Zračne Luke d.o.o., the details of which - IBAN number and so forth - Blago had provided for him. Blago has shown him the minibuses he intends to buy - ex-police vehicles he found online, for sale in Osijek.

Said he'd be going down there to get them just as soon as the money arrives. Murray said he wanted to come with him, to see the vehicles for himself. 'I know a thing or two about that,' he had told Blago. He had insisted on having a veto, if he didn't think they were up to scratch.

He has tried Blago's phone once or twice since he got back from the UK, to find out if the money has arrived.

No answer. That was typical Blago.

*

The most pressing issue, he finds, is the Hans-Pieter-shaped hole in his own days, which he now mostly drifts through alone. They used to meet every morning in the Umorni Putnik. These days, most of the time, Hans-Pieter isn't there. Murray drinks his cappuccino, while pretending to look at the paper. He stays there for more than an hour, sometimes.

Occasionally Hans-Pieter does show up. One morning, when he does, Murray says to him, 'What you up to later then?' Which is what he always used to say - and the answer would always be words to the effect of 'not much', and they would agree to meet at Dzoker 'later', meaning some time fairly soon after lunch.

Today, however Hans-Pieter just shrugs.

When Murray suggests a drink in Dzoker 'later', Hans-Pieter is initially evasive, and then say something about a film he's planning to see.

'Oh?' Murray says, 'What you seeing?'

Iron Man 3, Hans-Pieter tells him.

There is a silence. Then Murray says, 'Mind if I come along?'

Another silence. Hans-Pieter says, not particularly warmly, 'If you want.'

'If it's okay with you,' Murray says.

Hans-Pieter looks down his Adidas trainers. 'It's okay.' 'Where shou' we meet then?' Murray asks.

'Here?' Hans-Pieter suggests, without enthusiasm.

So they meet there, in the middle of the afternoon, Hans-Pieter and Maria arriving together.

Maria does not seem pleased to see him - to see Murray, waiting there in his slacks. He tries to be friendly. She isn't having it. She hardly says a word on the bus out to the edge of town, where there is a tatty shopping mall with a few screens embedded in it.

It is then, strap-hanging, that Murray starts to wonder whether this was really such a good idea. The others seem to be deliberately not looking at him. When his and Maria's eyes meet, he tries to smile at her. She looks away immediately and he asks her about the film. 'So what we going to see then?' he says. 'Is it any good?' She pretends not to hear him.

Most of the other people in the ticket queue are kids – lads with faceted glass earrings and sagging waistbands and shrieking ladesses in tiny skirts or tracksuits, slurping sugary drinks and throwing popcorn at each other. Among these high-spirited youngsters, with Hans-Pieter and Maria sometimes snogging next to him, Murray sits for two hours, watching the noisy action film. It is dubbed in Croatian and he understands fuck-all.

Afterwards, while Maria is in the ladies, Hands-Pieter tells him they're going back to her place, and asks Murray what he's going to do.

‘I dunno,’ Murray says, just standing there in the foyer.

There is a short silence and Murray has the appalling feeling that Hans-Pieter is pitying him – that fucking Hans-Pieter is feeling sorry for him.

Well, fuck that.

‘Don’t you worry,’ he says. ‘I’ve got things to do. You give her one from me, okay?’ And with an unpleasant smile, he nods towards Maria, who is approaching them.

He spends the next few hours in Dzoker, drinking Pan lager and thinking, If the likes of Hans-Pieter can sort himself out with a woman, then I sure as fuck can.

Matteus nods.

Without meaning to, Murray had said it aloud. Matteus, tall and austere, possessor of a monastic vibe, is taking glasses out of the dishwasher and putting them on a shelf under the bar.

It is not even eight o’clock, and Murray is already quite drunk.

In Oaza later, he happens on Damjan.

They are sitting a table together in the kebab shop and Murray is saying, ‘If the likes of Hans-Pieter can sort himself out with a woman, then I sure as fuck can.’ Inelegantly, he is eating a kebab.

Damjan says, ‘Sure.’ He and his friend have already finished, were about to leave when Murray arrived. They talk in Croatian, the two of them – a muttered wry exchange of words, Murray, shoving the last wet mess of the kebab into his mouth, wonders what they are talking about.

‘What you gonna do now?’ he asks, wiping his lips with a paper napkin.

Damjan's friend, it turns out, speaks perfect English. He sounds like an American.

'We're gonna go party,' he says, grinning. 'You wanna come?'

'Fuck, yeah,' Murray says. 'Good man. Let's go.'

As they leave, one of the twins says something to Damjan..

The kebab shop is owned by Albanian twins, identical, of vaguely thuggish appearance. Shaved, spherical heads. Fleshy noses. Strong necks and heavy eyebrows. Murray can never tell them apart. At first he didn't realise there were two of them; then one day he saw them together. They usually sit out on the terrace in front, under the awning where a water-feature tinkles, puffing at a hookah and drinking tea. Other, more desperate-looking men – often with moustaches – hang out with them there, and any number of women, young and old. A souped-up white Honda Accord EX 2.2 litre diesel is frequently parked in front of the shop, which Murray assumes must be owned by one of them.

And he envies the way one of them nods at Damjan as they leave, and offers him a few words of farewell. He wishes, the twins would acknowledge him like that. He has been eating their kebabs for over a year, and he has always felt that he and they share something, something that sets them apart from the other people in this place, a superiority of some sort. And yet they never speak to him, as one of them just spoke to Damjan, or acknowledge him in any way.

On the spur of the moment Murray decides that he will be the first to speak. The twin who spoke to Damjan is standing there, neat the door, slouching against the jamb, and poking about in his mouth with a toothpick.

'Alright,' Murray says to him, forcefully he hopes, as he passes him on the way out.

And the twin just looks slightly surprised – in his collarless shirt, his tan leather jacket – and watches Murray leave.

And how the fuck did that happen?

Safely in his mausoleum, hugging the toilet, Murray weeps. Drops tears onto the filthy floor.

How did that happen?

He has never been so intimate with the root of this toilet, with the rusty bolts that hold it to the old linoleum.

He sits up, after a while, and dries his eyes.

He inspects, in the mirror, his fat lip.

This mirror always gives the impression of fog. His face looms out of it, damaged. He stares at himself with contempt.

There was a woman. Aye, there was a woman. There were lots of women. With Damjan and his friend he had trawled through the nightspots of the town - two or three of them, there were. Nightspots. Full of students, kids. No success there, though he had tried, God knows. He had tried in the noise of the new music to have it off with a few of them. Kids with dyed hair. And Murray leering over them,

trying to make himself understood. Shouting about the S-Class he had once owned. Shouting, 'You been to London?' Shouting, 'I'll show you round, okay?' He had offered her a job, that one. And she was about to give him her number, he thinks, when her friends pulled her away. (Later, seen her being sick in the car park. Was it her?) Damjan's friend disappeared. So just him and Damjan went on to the all-night place. 'I know one place,' Damjan said, speaking more fluently than usual. 'I know one place is open all night.' Taxi. Yes, taxi. And then tumble out into the raw air again. Damjan paying. 'You got any smokes?' Murray asking him. And then the place. The woman, perched up there on her stool. Not a kid, this one. Or maybe he was telling her about the S-Class he had once owned. Asking her, 'You been to London?' She was, what? Forty? Fifty? And no oil painting. Even then, in the state he was in, he knew that. She kept touching him. Hand on his leg. (And where was Damjan?) Hand on his leg. And he said to her, straight out, 'You wanna come back to mine?'

And she just nodded, and moved her hand up his leg.

'Okay then,' he said.

'A minute,' she said, squeezing his leg. 'Wait.'

'Okay then,' he said. And waited, feeling pleased with himself. And then starting to worry about whether he'd be able to do it, the state he was in. And he looked for her and saw her talking to two men near the toilets. And something about the way she was talking to them made him understand. He just wanted out of it then. He slid off the stool, trying to keep his footing, and started to move towards the door. And then she was holding his arm. Holding it hard, 'Okay?' she said, 'we go?' 'Look, I'm tired,' he told her, trying to pull his arm free, 'I'll see you another time.' 'Don't say that,' she said, her

hand on his trousers, feeling for something. 'I'm fucking tired,' he snapped, shoving her away.

Outside, the cold night air. Haloed street lamps. He started to walk quickly, not knowing where he was.

And yes, those were footsteps following him, and as soon as he started to jog, hands seizing him.

Threw him against emerging as an effeminate squawk: 'What d'you want?' There were various issues.

He had, they seemed to be telling him, entered into an agreement. So he owed them money. And he

had hit her, they said. They wanted more money for that. 'I did not hit her'. Everything he had on him,

seemed to be what they wanted. 'I never hit her...' He took a punch to the face. Then, from a position

on the pavement, handed over his wallet, and they emptied it of kuna and threw it on top of him.

And then he was alone, lying on a wet pavement, wondering if he was in fact dreaming. *Please, let me be dreaming*

His mouth seemed to be the wrong shape. Near his eyes, something...What was that?

Hubcap.

Fuck.

Hubcap of a ...

Toyota Yaris?

Dizzy when he stood up.

And sick. Suddenly he felt very sick.

*

Two days later, when his mouth has deflated, he emerges and finds Hans-Pieter in the Umorni Putnik.

'I heard about your night out,' Hans-Pieter says.

‘Yeah, that. It was quite a night.’

‘I heard it,’ Hans-Pieter says.

It is some time in the afternoon. Maria is working, is there.

‘Oh, yeah?’ Murry wants to know, smiling worriedly. ‘What’d you hear?’

‘Damjan said it was a good night.’

Murray’s smile turns less worried. He says, ‘A fucking massive night, actually.’

‘You’ve been recovering,’ Hans-Pieter asks, ‘since then?’

‘That’s right. In the recovery position. If you know what I mean.’ Murray himself isn’t sure what he means. He tastes his lager, the first that has passed his lips since then.

Yesterday he experienced a sort of dark afternoon of the soul. Some hours of terrible negativity. A sense, essentially, that he had wasted his entire life, and now it was over. The sun was shining outside.

As it is now, igniting the yellow of the leaves that still cling to the little trees in front of the hostel.

He sees them through the dusty window.

‘How about you?’ he asks Hans-Pieter. ‘You okay?’

‘I’m okay,’ Hans-Pieter says.

Murray sees one of the leaves detach and drop.

Hans-Pieter says, ‘Damjan says you were sort of on the pull, the other night.’

‘What – I was?’

‘That’s what he said.’

Murray does something with his mouth, something uneasy. ‘Don’t know about that.’

‘Well,’ Hans-Pieter says, ‘I know a very nice lady, you might be interested in.’

‘Who’s that then?’ Murray asks snootily.

‘A very nice lady,’ Hans-Pieter says again. Then he whispers, ‘Maria’s mudder.’

In a savage whisper Murray says, ‘Maria’s mother?’

‘Yes.’

‘No fucking way.’

‘Why not?’

‘Fuck off,’ Murray scoffs.

‘Why not? She’s quite young ...’

‘What’s that mean?’

‘Forty-eight, I tink. And she’s in nice shape,’ Hans-Pieter tell him.

‘You’ve seen her, have you?’

‘Sure.’

Maria, having no one to serve, has ventured out in search of empties. She stops at Hans-Pieter’s shoulders, puts her hands on them. Her substantial hip is smack in Murray’s line of sight.

‘I was just telling Murray,’ Hans-Pieter says to her, half-turning his head, ‘about your mother.’

‘Yeah?’ She smiles. She seems to have forgiven Murray for the way he tagged along to Iron Man 3 with them the other day. It occurs to him, in fact, that the way he tagged along that day might actually have suggested to her the idea of fixing him up with her obviously lonely and desperate mother.

‘Just take her out for a drink,’ Hans-Pieter ... what? Suggests? Orders? Murray is still wondering

what to make of this development – fucking *Hans-Pieter* telling him what to do – when Maria says, ‘She’s really pretty. And much thinner than me.’

‘We won’t hold dat against her,’ Hans-Pieter says, almost suavely.

‘She’s always telling me I should lose weight.’

‘Don’t listen to her.’

‘It’s true – I should.’

‘Absolutely not,’ Hans-Pieter tells her. And then says to Murray, ‘So will you do it? Take her for a drink?’

It’s awkward, saying something like, ‘Not on your life, no fucking way,’ with Maria standing there, still smiling at him, a piece of pink-dyed hair falling over her eye.

‘You got a picture?’ he asks her after a few moments. ‘I mean, on your phone or something?’

‘Maybe,’ she says. ‘Yeah, here.’

Leaning forward over Hans-Pieter’s shoulder, she passes Murray her phone.

He looks.

A woman holding a cat. Not very easy to make out. Thinner than Maria, yes. Okay? Maybe.

‘What about your father?’ he asks, handing back the phone without saying anything about the photo, and smirking. ‘He won’t mind?’

‘He lives in Austria,’ she says. ‘And they’re divorced. Obviously.’

‘Obviously,’ Murray says. It had been a joke. He had assumed that her father wasn’t still on the scene. ‘Okay,’ he says. ‘I’ll give it a go.’

‘Do you want her number then?’ Maria asks.

‘She speaks English, does she?’

‘Of course.’

‘Or why don’t you call her?’ he suggests, suddenly nervous. ‘Set it up.’

Without warning, another leaf detaches itself from one of the trees outside and drops down to the pavement.

On his way home, a few hours later, Murray stops at Oaza to pick up a kebab. The plastic sign – palm tree, smiling camel – is illuminated in the gloom. One of the Albanian twins is standing around near the entrance, keeping an eye on things. He does not acknowledge Murray, and Murray, after a moment’s hesitation, says nothing to him either. Having ordered in English, he just waits there for his kebab, eyeing the slices of baklava as if wondering whether to have one. He wishes more than ever that the twins would offer him some sign, some little sign, that they looked on him as an equal – as an equal, no more than that. Damjan had been honoured with a nod, a few words, had been thereby elevated in Murray’s estimation. He thinks more highly of Damkan now. The baklavas shine, sodden with honey. Yes, Damjan seems in some way superior to him now.

Seemingly unaware of Murray’s presence the twin exchanges a few words, in some language Murray does not know, with the kebabist, who is shoving tongfuls of shredded salad into a pitta. He spoons on the sauces and hands Murray his supper, tightly wrapped in tinfoil, warm to the touch.

‘Thanks,’ Murray says.

The man just nods.

And then, as he leaves, Murray does it. He looks the twin straight in the eye. He says, in a loud firm voice, ‘See ya, then, pal.’

And then he is outside, in the night air.

The twin had said nothing to him. Nothing.

Maybe he was just surprised.

That night Murray has a dream. He is lying on his bed. Outside, rain is falling – falling heavily and steadily. The window is open. He is lying on his bed, listening to the rain. It is like rain he might have listened to somewhere else, long ago. The room is strangely empty. There is nothing in it except the bed on which he is lying with his head at the wrong end, where his feet should be. He lies there listening to the rain and from the darkness of the bathroom, a large dog emerges – an Alsatian. Panting quietly, the dog lies down on the floor next to the bed. As it lies down it knocks over a glass that is there – the sound of the glass falling and then rolling a little way across the floor. With a tiny whimper the dog yawns, and then starts to pant again. The rain is still falling. Without otherwise moving, Murray has stretched out his hand and is stroking the dog’s neck, the deep fur. The dog pants quietly. The rain falls and falls, making a puddle on the floor next to the open window.

On Sunday afternoon he takes Maria’s mother out for a drink.

He was relieved, when they met outside the Irish pub, not to fancy her at all. Not at all. She was a

tallish middle-aged woman, ungainly in a pair of jeans, her short hair dyed a deep purple like the outside of an aubergine.

When they shook hands, her hand felt frozen and knobbly in his.

The Irish pub was just about the poshest place in town, where the top people from the town hall went, and the senior members of the local mafia. A Guinness in there was almost as expensive as it would be in London. The interior was like a transient's pub near a large British mainline station. Very tired and heavily soiled. To that extent, it was authentic. The table service was not.

They sat in a padded booth facing each other and Murray asked the waiter for a half-litre of stout. Maria's mother had a white wine.

Not fancying her at all, Murray was less nervous than he had feared he might be. Her English was excellent, and soon he was telling her about London and telesales and, less forthcomingly, about Scotland. She seemed interested in Scotland, kept asking him questions about it. He didn't much want to talk about that. As darkness fell outside, he was telling her about the Mercedes S-Class he had once had, and the top-of-the-range Michelin tyres he had put on it. 'Top *top* quality,' he told her.

She nodded. She was drinking her second glass of wine.

He was on his third stout. 'Makes a big difference, the tyres,' he told her, encircling the stout with his hands.

'I know,' she said.

'Huge difference.'

She was a schoolteacher, an English teacher. And maybe, he thought, he did fancy her slightly after

all.

She'd seemed as interested in the S-Class as any woman ever had, he'd say that for her. She'd wanted him to explain what an S-Class was, for a start. So he'd walked her through the entire Mercedes range, from the 1.8 litre A-Class through the C- and E-Classes, the various engine options available for those, all the way up to the S 500 L.

It took about half an hour.

Then he said, 'What sort of car do you drive?'

Some Suzuki, she said.

He said he didn't know much about Suzukis.

'Never mind.'

'Happy with it?' he asked.

She nodded, smiled. 'It's fine.'

'What ... What size engine's it got?'

She seemed to find something funny about the question. She laughed anyway. 'I don't know. I'm so happy about Maria and Hans-Pieter,' she said. 'He's such a nice man.'

'Oh, yeah,' Murray agreed vaguely, looking out of the window for a moment. He didn't want to talk about Hans-Pieter, that was for sure.

'I wish Maria would lose some weight,' her mother said earnestly. 'Don't you think she should lose some weight?'

'Definitely.'

‘Will you mention it to her? She doesn’t listen to me.’

‘Me?’ Murray said, not knowing quite what to make of this. ‘Sure. I’ll have a word wi’her. D’you want another drink?’

‘I’m okay. Thank you.’

Starting on his fourth stout he decided that he definitely did fancy her, quite a lot.

He was telling her about his business – the airport transfer thing. He had finally managed to get hold of Blago – ‘my local partner’ was how he described him to Maria’s mother – and Blago had told him that the money had arrived safely. They would drive down to Osijek next week, was the idea, to have a look at the ex-police minibuses. Make a decision on that. It was moving forward. He told her it had the potential to turn into something ‘fairly major’. Looking her intently in the eye, he said, ‘The transport sector’s woefully underdeveloped in this part of Croatia.’

She agreed.

It was then that he tried to take her hand. She quickly withdrew it, but with a little smile that was open to misinterpretation.

So he went to the gents and promised himself to have another try later. He zipped himself up and washed his hands. ‘Death,’ he said to his preened, sickly image in the mirror, ‘or victory.’

*

The Wednesday of the following week.

Maria is working, so Hans-Pieter and Murray are having lunch together. They walk to the Chinese place, Zlatna Rijeka. It’s in a melancholy little square, cobbled, and full of drifting leaves.

Insides, they confront the buffet.

Hans-Pieter chooses a heap of beansprouts and carrot slices bright with MSG.

Murray starts with a plate of dark shred of meat, also very shiny.

They sit in the window and watch the world go by. There is an old bookshop opposite. Some bicycles chained to a metal frame.

It's obvious what Hans-Pieter, shoveling beansprouts into his wide mouth, will want to talk about.

He must already know what happened. He must have heard from Maria. Still, he says, 'How'd it go on Sunday?'

Murray concentrates on his glossy meat mixed with pieces of onion and green pepper. 'You tell me,' he murmurs.

'Well,' Hans-Pieter admits, pursuing the last slippery beansprouts on his plate with the tines of a cheap fork, 'not too good, I heard.'

'I don't know what happened,' Murray protests quietly. 'I don't know how that happened,' he says again.

Hans-Pieter watches him for a moment. 'The police?'

Murray seems very low.

'Maria still not talking to me?' he asks, his eyes down.

Hans-Pieter says, 'She wants an explanation. From you. About what happened. She doesn't understand.'

'About what happened?'

‘Yah.’

‘When we left the pub,’ Murray says, ‘I took her hands. She let me do that.’

Hans-Pieter nods and swigs from his Sprite.

‘She let me do that,’ Murray says again.

‘Yah.’

‘So I thought, Okay. You know...’

Hans-Pieter indicates that he does.

‘So I was holding her hands...’

Her hands were icy, knobbly. He was in a fog of Guinness at the time. She was smiling. He sees it now, that fearful rictus.

‘...and I tried to kiss her,’ Murray says. He meets Hans-Pieter’s pale, blonde-lashed eyes. ‘And then. And then. She sorta scRRReemed.’

‘She screamed?’

‘Aye.’

‘Why did she scream?’ Hans-Pieter asks. He seems to put the question to his Sprite – he is not looking at Murray, anyway.

‘I was just trying to kiss her,’ Murray says.

‘And then what happened?’

‘Then some fucker was holding me down, someone else was phoning the police.’

‘And what was she doing?’

‘What was she doing? I don’t know.’

‘So then the police arrived,’ Hans-Pieter prompts.

‘Aye,’ Murray says. ‘They arrived. And I suppose I musta given one of ’m a shove or something.’

‘Why did you do that?’

‘I don’t know...The way they were treating me...’

‘I understand,’ Hans-Pieter says.

‘So then they took me to the station. With the fucking siren going and everything.’

Hans-Pieter just nods sympathetically.

‘And I spent the night,’ Murray says, ‘in a fucking cell.’

‘They let you go in the morning.’ Hans-Pieter obviously knows the story already.

‘They said Mrs Jevtovic didn’t want to make a case against me. And I thought, *Who the fuck is Mrs Jevtovic?*’

‘That’s Maria’s mudder.’

‘Yeah, I know. I just wasn’t thinking straight that morning.’

That morning. Not nice. One of the very lowest points. Emerging into the daylight...

‘I just tried to kiss her,’ he says, almost tearfully. ‘I didn’t do anything.’

‘Okay.’

‘What does she say I did?’

‘I’m not sure,’ Hans-Pieter says, evasively.

‘I don’t know what to do,’ Murray tells him.

Hans-Pieter says nothing. He has finished his lunch.

Murray picks up his fork and sets about finishing his own, those strings of meat in dark, sticky sauce.

His teeth encounter something. ‘What the fuck,’ he says. He spits the object, small and hard as a shotgun pellet, into a paper napkin.

‘What the fuck is that?’

Hans-Pieter peers down at the wet napkin, the tiny object.

Murray is eating again.

After examining it for a while, Hans-Pieter says, ‘Shit, you know what I think it is?’

‘What?’

‘I think... I mean, I’m not sure... I think it’s one of those microchips.’

‘What microchips?’ Murray says, with his mouth full.

‘They use to identify animals.’

‘Animals?’

‘Yeah, like dogs,’ Hans-Pieter says.

Murray, after a moment, spits out what is in his mouth.

‘What are you saying?’ he pants, distraught. ‘Are you saying I’m eating a fucking dog?’

‘I don’t know,’ Hans-Pieter says, shocked and embarrassed by the shouting, and by the tears that are so unexpectedly now welling out of Murray’s eyes, that are starting on their way down his strong, flushed face.

Preposterously he tries to hide it, his face, with a scrap of paper napkin.

‘I don’t believe it, I don’t believe it,’ he mumbles.

Hans-Pieter looks helplessly at the Chinese woman overseeing the buffet.

With his face in his hands, Murray is sobbing openly now. He says something it’s hard to make out through the sobs, the wet fingers, the fraying paper napkin.

The Chinese woman has made eye contact with Hans-Pieter. She wants him to do something, to stop his friend upsetting her other patrons.

So Hans-Pieter puts a timid hand on Murray’s shoulder and suggests, in a low voice, that they leave.

(End of the source text for translation)

4. Target Text

人猶如此

第七章

1

梅利的母親珍珠·鄧迪，終究也在星期日下午去世了，她的葬禮在接下來的星期五進行。

梅利到達教堂的火葬場時已經遲了。當他打開那道笨重的門，眾人都在席上轉過頭來望向
他。教堂內一片蒼涼黯淡，教堂外亦再次下起雨來。致辭的牧師在說著一些有關「長久、完整
的生命」，此刻在等梅利找個位置坐下。

後來當他們站在教堂外，梅利便向姊姊貝姬解釋在倫敦的回程航班延誤了。

「我不是跟你說了，」她不耐煩地說。「你昨晚就來的話不就好了。」

他們穿著黑西裝，儼如在辦公室上班一般。梅利繫著暗沉的領帶，向貝姬遞上香煙，她拿
了一根。他們之後接受一些老太太的慰問，梅利覺得其中一位老太太一定是母親的朋友，貝姬
也似乎認識她。正當梅利點著香煙，這位帶著淺紫色帽子的老婆婆對梅利說他母親是一位「很
棒的女人」。

「是啊，謝謝你。」他說，然後他看見弟弟亞歷出現在這九月的最後一天之中，出現在徐
徐落葉之間，出現在潮濕而閃亮的柏油路之上。他還沒跟亞歷聊天。

他已多年沒跟亞歷聊天了。

亞歷看來沒有西裝，他一身白色襯衫及黑色領帶都是聚酯纖維製的，還穿著一件深藍色的
羽絨外套。自上一次見面以來他掉了許多頭髮，在場幾乎沒人認得他。

「小亞歷過得怎麼樣？」梅利面帶微笑地問貝姬，他試著表現得友善：「對了，他好像重了一兩磅。」

「你為什麼不自己問他？」她提議。

貝姬走到一旁與其他人聊天，梅利仍然似笑非笑。亞歷也在與其他人聊天，穿著羽絨外套的他堵在教堂門口，令教堂內剩下的最後幾個人不得不待著，但大概是因為珍珠是亞歷的母親，似乎沒人想叫他讓開。

梅利向道路走去，用力抽著香煙。計程車正載著各人前往貝姬家出席聚餐。

梅利與一些老人家同車共坐，其中一位老人家身上散發出臭味——一種老人的氣味，他似乎認識梅利。

「梅利，你好嗎？」他問，他緊緊握著鋁製拐杖上的膠手柄。

「我很好。」梅利對他說。「你懂的，」他補充，「這是悲傷的一天。」。

「確實是。」那老人附和著。「珍珠，」他說，「是個特別可愛的人。」

梅利蹭了蹭他的黑皮鞋，他轉動雙眼，忐忑地望著不住後退的街道還有那些灰暗的房子。這裡是馬瑟韋爾(Motherwell)，他已有一段很長的時間沒來過這裡了。母親還好嗎¹？不，事實她已逝去。

那老人問了他一些問題。

「不，我現在沒住在英國了。」他說。

「克羅地亞，」他回答另一個問題。

¹ In English Motherwell can be interpreted as a place name or a question 'is mother well?'. When Motherwell comes across Murray's mind, he naturally thinks of his mother.

「南斯拉夫，以前那裡是南斯拉夫的一部份。」他又答。

即使所有客人都在他姊姊細小的房子裡，他也無法避免碰上亞歷，正當他在廚房撕開另一盒啤酒的包裝，亞歷突然出現了，他在看誰還沒有飲品，也在幫忙派花生。

「你好梅利，」他說。

「亞歷，你好…」

「你仍在投托瑞嗎？」亞歷想知道。他飽滿的臉上帶著苦惱，有種典型中年人的特質，前額巨大而呈閃亮的粉紅色。

「托瑞？」梅利問。他喝了一口啤酒說：「不，那些混蛋現在對我來說太左派了。」

亞歷牽強地笑了笑。「對了，你最近好嗎？」他沒帶趣地問。

「還好，」梅利說。「我很好。」，他嘗試找個話題：「你還在工會嗎？」

「是啊，你呢？」

「還是這樣。」他說，「我已經沒在這居住了。」

「對，我有聽說過。」

「已好幾年了。」

「為了避稅之類對吧？」

梅利笑了一下，那笑聲彷彿是說亞歷吐出「避稅」二字時在嘲笑他。

他再喝了一口啤酒，「類似吧。」梅利告訴他。

梅利在貝姬家的客房過了一晚，那間房原本是她兒子的，後來他搬走了，好像是到了澳洲或哪

裡似的，但梅利已記不起他的名字。

就在第二天一大早，正當他們在廚房喝茶，而梅利在等待計程車接他到機場時，貝姬建議：「我們何不嘗試保持聯絡？」

「當然可以，」梅利說。他試著不去看她，但當他不經意地瞥了一眼，他不禁想——幹，她看起來很憔悴。

「你確定不吃早餐嗎？」她問。

「不了。」他說。他心想貝姬不過最多比我大兩年，但望望她的樣子，卻像一個老女人。

她說：「你看起來很累。」

「是嗎？」

「你應該睡得不好吧？」她說，「在伊雲的房間。」

「伊雲，」他心想。「對了，這是他的名字」。

「我睡得很好。」他說。他頹然想起昨晚數小時在房間的煎熬——穿著背心及 Y 型短褲，在蜘蛛俠羽絨被下輾轉反側。房內調得過大的暖氣。雨點敲著窗的聲音，像在呢喃著令人難受的事實。還有那鑲在樓上大廳的相片。相中的自己大約十歲，還有他當時十分寵愛的德國狼狗麥斯。昨晚他看著那張自己和愛犬合照，泛起莫名的哀傷。

「我睡得很好。」他重申。

「你真幸運，」貝姬道。「我睡得不好。」

奶茶的奶太多，那些茶渣更連暖也談不上，這讓他感到噁心。

「我無法不想著，」她說。

梅利放下茶杯，嘗試把口裡的東西嚥下。他穿著的再次是西裝，口袋裡則放著領帶。

貝姬穿著晨衣。

「我就是無法不想著，」她說。

昨天當所有人都走了，她跟他說母親最後的日子，她當時還未流過一滴眼淚，然後她跟他說在醫院的事——與醫生的會面、數小時的留夜、絕望的黎明。她用大概是在政府大樓辦公室工作時索然無味的聲線一一訴說著，梅利則沒撩沒亂地聽著，並無一絲感覺。

她現在似乎要崩潰。

她的嘴巴顫抖著。

梅利本能地望向別處，他的視線穿過那扇角落有黴菌的窗，望向陰鬱的早上。

還有，是的，貝姬哭了，她拿起抹布掩蓋著臉。

梅利蒼白的手腕上戴著寬鬆的冒牌勞力士。「那該死的計程車，」他看著錶心想，「在哪個該死的地方？」

*

24 小時後，星期日的早上，他坐在往斯坦斯特機場的火車，但他感覺更糟了。

雷尼加入了。他們曾經一起從事電話銷售員，他和保羅雷尼曾多年在銷售部共事，在白亮的光管下與電話搏鬥。豬頭大部份時間也與他們一起工作，就連星期六的晚上也在一起。那時候他們中午在倫敦的彭迪路橡樹餐廳開始工作，十二個小時後在豬頭白教堂區的家結束。梅利穿著西裝，躺在客廳地上的沙發坐墊睡了一至兩個小時。然後早上六時，他的頭骨傳來一股難以置信的痛楚把他痛醒，他才獨個走到利物浦街，乘上往斯塔斯特的火車。

雷尼現在真他媽的胖。梅利看到他大感震驚。雷尼和豬頭仍在柏嶺出版社工作，辦公室就在金斯威爾旁邊。他們依舊在彭迪路橡樹餐廳吃午飯，一切都像以往一樣。

當他們問梅利現在在搞什麼鬼，他說，「輕輕鬆鬆，享受人生。」

「那你在哪裡過活？」豬頭問。

「克羅地亞里維埃拉，」梅利答道。「我半退休了，」他告訴他們。

「半退休？什麼意思？」

「意思是沒人會給他工作，」雷尼調侃道，他把喝光的酒杯放在已滿是酒杯的桌上，然後轉過頭望向吧台。

梅利試著微笑。「找我工作的人多的是，」他小聲地說，彷彿想顯得謙虛點。

「胡說，」雷尼說。

梅利感到他的老朋友仍為數年前與艾迪祖有關的事而生氣。

當然，他們在那件事之後再次一起工作。那時梅利被艾迪祖解雇後，他無可避免地在柏嶺出版社——那灰褐色的玻璃門後——另闢一片天，他也找來了保羅雷尼再次一起工作。那裡甚至有著跟以前一樣的桌子，彷彿什麼事也沒有發生過，還是把跟以往一樣的白色耳機戴在滴著汗的頭上。

梅利後來也被辭退了。他似乎失去了聯繫，失去了任何曾有過的聯繫。於是他決定探索其它的選擇。某程度來說，是豬頭啟發了他。他的事蹟眾所周知，他曾經在泰國待了兩年「享受人生」，把所有儲蓄都花光了。儘管梅利沒有儲蓄的習慣，他自己在英國奇利一個名為都鐸的地方仍然有間建於六十年代的平房。他在大約 1990 年好市道時買下了它。20 年後，由於抵押貸款太低，所以他把房子出租，然後找個容得下低收入人士的地方繼續生活。

他去了克羅地亞里維埃拉。

飛往薩格勒布的客機在十時三十分開出。

他坐在候機室，頭仍痛著。飛機在外面靜靜地移動，陽光在折磨著他，令他感到噁心。

他沒有跟雷尼和豬頭透露自己到英國的原因是為了出席葬禮。他們從霍本（Holborn）一路向東，沿路到酒吧賣醉，梅利甚至連想也沒再想那場葬禮，更別說提起半點。

現在，他透過宿醉的軀殼凝視著外面的飛機，忽爾一絲記憶驚動了他，記憶中一隻手放在他的前額，像是在感受自己的體溫。

陽光映進客運站，影子灑落一地。

媽，他用微弱而惶恐聲音在腦海喚著。

媽，你現在在哪？

最後，他坐在候機室，凝望著飛機在十月下柔柔的陽光下行走。

他眼眶濕了。

2

事實上，在克羅地亞里維埃拉居住，即使是亞得里亞沿岸最簡陋的地方，對於梅利來說都太貴了。他越過群山，最後在路途遙遠的內陸平原上某個市鎮落腳。那裡相當乾燥，被塵土飛揚的葡萄園、向日葵和玉米田包圍著。主廣場有一座紀念碑，紀念土耳其大約 15 世紀於此戰敗。這件是發生鎮上最後一件重大事件，在通往廣場的其中一條街道有一間青年旅館——累客旅館。梅利剛到埗時就是在這裡寄宿了一段時間。

距今已超過一年了。

他在旅館第一個認識的人是漢斯彼得，一個長住旅館的德國「囚犯」。

一見面到漢斯彼得，梅利即時覺得他顯然是個不折不扣的混蛋失敗者。

他也是梅利在這段日子的唯一朋友。

梅利在英國回來之後的一天，他們在小丑酒吧渡過中午。他們坐在酒吧外，那裡有幾張桌子頂著賣本地礦泉水廣告的太陽傘。儘管已經十月，天氣仍然非常炎熱。梅利穿著及膝的白短褲，露出紫色的靜脈及光禿禿的小腿，再下面則是黑色的辦公襪子及白色大號運動鞋。他陽剛的臉上滲出汗水。

「超...熱，」漢斯彼得說。

這是他一貫會說的逗趣開場白。

梅利只是咕噥著。

漢斯彼得大概四十五歲，比梅利年輕約十年，他高於常人，且帶點腼腆。

「我認為，」他快手拿起啤酒，偷偷摸摸地啜了一口說：「『系』全球暖化。」

梅利滴著汗，藐視著他說：「你在說什麼鬼？」

「是全球暖化，」漢斯彼得說。

「什麼？你相信這些？」

漢斯彼得顯得不安，彷彿是犯了小學生才會犯的錯。然後他說：「你不相信嗎？」

「信他媽的。」梅利用白色 T 恤下擺抹去臉上不住滴下的汗，「別跟我說你相信這些？」

他把眼鏡戴好。

「這個...」漢斯彼得低頭望著自己的拖鞋。「我不知道。現在是十月嘛。」他指出。

人們在吃著冰淇淋，白鴿在噴泉洗著翅膀。

梅利仍在盯著他看，「所以呢？」

「這個...」漢斯彼得猶疑著。「這是正常嗎？這個...這個天氣...？」

「這根本沒有證據，」梅利告訴他，「證明有全球暖化。」

「這個，但我想...」

「根本沒有他媽的證據。」梅利拿下眼鏡，再次用衣服抹去汗水。他 T-恤的前方已經濕透了。

漢斯彼得微微揚起淡淡的眼睫毛，「我以為有，」他說，「一些證據。」

梅利又再笑了笑：「你已經有了。」

漢斯彼得羞怯地說：「那斯特恩報告呢？」

梅利怒嗔了一下。

「報告說如果繼續任由氣體排放的話...」

「媽的！」梅利對他怒吼。「有另一些報告，結果跟你說的完全相反。」

「那些報告不是石油公司付錢給人寫的嗎？」

梅利嘆了口氣。他曾聽過這些屁話，他也不以為然。事實上，梅利極之同情那些「石油公司」。某程度上他覺得自己與那些「石油公司」是同一陣線，因為他們都功成名就，是世界的贏家，所以無疑會招來失敗者的妒忌，例如漢斯彼得——一個仍然寄宿在青年旅館的中年人，而梅利就好像一些該死的石油公司一樣，擁有屬於自己的公寓，不但設備齊全，還座落於城市其中一條最典雅的哈布斯堡時代街道。據梅利的理解，事實上漢斯彼得是在荷蘭領取失業救濟金，比阿姆斯特丹或其他任何他來自的地方都更遠。

「你難道還不明白，」他以更平和的語調對著他那愚鈍的朋友說：「整件事都是為了針對石油公司而出的計謀嗎？一個來自左翼的計謀。針對市場經濟，針對個人自由。」

「你是這麼想的嗎？」漢斯彼得說。

「老朋友，我是知道的。他們在冷戰輸了，」梅利解釋。「這就是他們的下一步棋，當你

想一想就會知道，這他媽的太明顯了。」

豆大的汗珠從他的鼻尖上掉了下來。

漢斯彼得不發一言，轉過頭來對著熾熱的廣場。他的左耳有一枚細小的耳環。

他注意到梅利的空杯，「還要嗎？」他問。

「來吧，」他吼道。

這不過是他們的第二杯酒，但出乎意料地，喝了這杯後漢斯彼得找藉口撇下梅利一人。他再喝了半升本地工業潘啤，在驟然來襲的孤獨下細看廣場。

令人詫異的是漢斯彼得會有別的事情要做。他們的友誼蘊含著一個前提，就是他們從未有過別的事情要做，亦沒其他人可見面，一個也沒有。這就是為什麼他們能成為朋友。前提一旦破壞了，沒人知道這段友誼還能剩下什麼。

其實說沒有其他人也不盡然對，還有達米揚，他是個本地人，與漢斯彼得屬泛泛之交，他在火車軌道旁的輪胎配件店工作，也有個家庭。換句話說，他過著一個普通的生活。

梅利之後在累客旅館的酒吧遇到他。

梅利到達酒吧時看不到瑪莉亞很失望，因為梅利現在有了人生計劃，瑪莉亞也在其中。她在旅館負責提供飲料。他覺得自己有機會追到她，只為一個原因——她不太吸引。但她年輕、友善，英語還非常好，她甚至能聽懂梅利的英語。梅利從去年冬天開始已留意她好一段時間，而他整年都在計劃下一步行動。

這個傍晚，他特別想找瑪莉亞。他感到失落。天色已昏暗。日暮漸短，而黑夜就如人們所

說的那樣漸漸漫長。

他看到達米揚來了。

「達米揚，我的朋友，」他熱情地站著，與這位輪胎鉗工握手。

達米揚長得不高，但滿身肌肉，亦不健談，正正是梅利本能地會尊重的人。

達米揚一邊握著手，一邊東張西望。「漢斯彼得呢？」他問。

「不在，」梅利告訴他。「我不知道他在哪個鬼地方。我幫你拿杯飲料。」

「所以，」他們正在坐下時梅利問。「你最近在忙啥？」

「你最近在忙啥？」他看到達米揚沉默不語後再問。

「你在忙些什麼？」

達米揚大概還未聽懂，他聳聳肩，搖搖頭。

「但你沒事吧？」他問。

「沒事，很好。」

事實上這是他們第一次在沒有漢斯彼得的情況下對飲，最後發現原來聊天都出乎意料的困難。

他們最後談到輪胎。

「那大通的輪胎呢？」梅利自己在問。「要如何比較他們？比方說與凡士通的輪胎？」

談得愈久，他們愈見沉默，他們在靜默中各自望向四周，試圖找個標緻的女人來一飽眼福。

梅利之後再問了有關輪胎的問題，達米揚也盡力解答。

他們已經談了輪胎接近一個小時。

「我的賓士用的是米其林胎，」梅利說。隔了好一會兒，他再道：「高品質的。」

達米揚只是點點頭，喝喝酒。

「你覺得我們會不會看到漢斯彼得？」梅利問。

達米揚聳了聳肩。

「你不知道他在哪嗎？」

達米揚捧著酒杯，搖了搖頭。

但梅利之後發現他說了謊，其實他大概知道漢斯彼得在哪裡——瑪莉亞的房間。漢斯彼得正赤裸著身體，在瑪莉亞家那細小而墩厚的電視前觀看著用克羅地亞語配音的權力遊戲。

3

秋天在早晨降臨，溫度在一夜之間降了二十度。梅利在家中穿著背心和內褲，得意洋洋地觀看著窗外的景象，期待著撩動這個多事之秋，對著滿面濕葉的漢斯彼得說：「這算什麼？你現在愛上冰淇淋嗎，你這該死的寄生蟲？」他開始笑著，直至一個突如其來的咳嗽噴發出來，他在窗前轉過身子並痛苦得彎下腰來，太陽穴的靜脈在膨脹跳動，與此同時，他試著用力罵一聲「幹」。

「幹！」

「幹。」

屋內一片靜默，落定如塵。

這間屋是梅利到達市鎮約一個月後漢斯彼得幫他找的。他的房東是一個中年男人，他的母親死前都住在這裡。她大多數的物品仍在屋內，包括兩個房間內寬大的深色木製家具織布機。在地下一層，梅利鬼祟地遊走於她的照片和小擺設之中，還有那腳踏操作的縫紉機和潮濕的被

褥。梅利曾想過進行全面裝修。他仍在用房東母親留下的鋼刀鋼叉和帶漬的碗碟。牆上甚至鑲起了幾張舊照片，有穿著過時的人，也有陌生人不苟而笑的褐紅色眾生相。

整間屋內死氣沉沉，仍然濃罩著暖氣。灰暗的風景在兩扇大窗外飄動著，彷彿跟室內冷淡的寂靜脫了節。這場面似乎怪誕而做作。雨點像鵝卵石一般落在玻璃窗上。梅利點起香煙。他現在抽的是當地的牌子，在這方面他可是變了本地人。他坐在浴室熱烘烘的井道內，被生鏽的管道和脫色的瓷磚包圍著，頭頂還有一個熾熱的燈泡。

之後，他換了衣服，抓起一把傘走了一段短途往青年旅館。

漢斯彼得在旅館內一間幽暗的酒吧吃著早餐——一杯咖啡和牛油麵包。他好像在凝望著眼前約兩呎的一點。

「做他媽的白日夢。」梅利心想。

他沒跟漢斯彼得打招呼，直接跟在酒吧當值的艾絲特聊天。

雖然艾絲特並不是梅利的那杯茶，但畢竟她是瑪莉亞的好友，所以這個朋友還是值得交的，他微笑著。

他在一瞬間看到艾絲特身後寫著價格單的鏡子，反射出自己深沉而朦朧的陰影，他在一堆數字中隱約看到自己的臉龐，在微笑中感到若有所失。

「要些什麼？」艾絲特說。

「Cappuccino。」梅利用英文說。

正當她弄著咖啡機時，梅利在看本地報章。那些文字對他來說一點意義也沒有，他的眼睛在圖片間遊走，包括有著糟糕的髮型，看起來陰險惡毒、野心勃勃的本地政客嘗試著微笑的照片，就像他剛才嘗試著那般，帶著大多都沒來由的微笑。

他拿過卡布奇諾，走向漢斯彼得。「早，」他低聲說，然後坐在漢斯彼得對面。

漢斯彼得滿嘴食物，只是點了點頭。

他似乎在把麵包灌進自己口裡。

梅利一度覺得他很厭惡，之後終於問：「那你昨晚去了哪兒？」

漢斯彼得吞嚥著口中的麵包，但他太快試著開口令他說話含糊不清。

梅利眯著眼睛，暴躁地望著他說：「你說什麼來著？」

「我...瑪莉亞，」漢斯彼得吞著麵包說。

「什麼？」

漢斯彼得吞下了麵包說：「瑪莉亞，在瑪莉亞的家。」

「什麼意思？」

漢斯彼得受不了梅利的目光。「你知道——瑪莉亞？」

「瑪莉亞，」梅利琢磨著，似乎開始搞懂他們在說的是那一個人，「在這工作的那個？」

「是的。」

「你在她的家裡？」

「是的。」

「為什麼？」梅利絲毫不解地問。

「這個，」漢斯彼得腼腆地笑了一下。「你懂的...」

「不，我不懂。」

「我們...我們之間有一點感覺，」漢斯彼得說。

梅利一時顯得不知所措，「什麼——你？」

漢斯彼得點點頭。

「你跟瑪莉亞？」

漢斯彼得低下頭，「這個，是的，」他坦承。他看起來很尷尬。或許是他誤解了梅利的意思。瑪莉亞大概比漢斯彼得年輕二十歲，她又胖又沒魅力。這些可能是令他尷尬的原因。

「這是什麼一回事？」他問道，臉色已變得甚是蒼白。

漢斯彼得告訴他，上星期五晚他如常在累客旅館直到打烊，外面下著滂沱大雨，但她沒有帶傘——她在等雨停下來，所以他建議到他的房間待著，抽一口煙，她答應了，結果他們整晚都在一起。他對梅利說，就在那時候開始，他有兩次到瑪莉亞的家過夜。

「就是這樣，」漢斯彼得說。

他開始吃第二個麵包。

有好一會兒，梅利一言不發。

外面街道的小樹在搖搖晃晃。

在那幽暗的酒吧，艾絲特大笑著與別人聊電話。

而我就在貝姬家嘗試著入睡，他心想，上星期五，就在同一時間，我蓋著那張蜘蛛俠羽絨被，而他們就在一起。

他憤恨地仇視著漢斯彼得。「媽的，她究竟看上你什麼？」他說。

她究竟看上漢斯彼得什麼？在那晚，這問題縈繞著梅利令他無法入睡。他在高高的如陵墓般的房子內坐著，在漆黑中抽著香煙。顯然，對他來說，如果他能更直白、更早地表明心跡，得到她的會是自己而不是漢斯彼得。這想法折磨了他好一陣子。更甚是他並非只想著佔有她的肉

體，而是有一些柔柔情感、一些難以言喻的、一些接近同情的、對瑪莉亞的感覺。而很明顯，瑪莉亞看上漢斯彼得的理由很充分——他只是個年輕版的自己，一個與梅利相像的贗品。一個從遙遠的西方來的異鄉人，還至少有一些錢。漢斯彼得甚至有自己的車子——在街邊漏著油的一輛殘舊而生鏽穿孔的 1.2 升引擎大眾 Polo 車，這都或多或少令他貌似個「糖心爸爸」。

梅利下了決定，他歡迎她的選擇。

他歡迎這個胖乎乎的騷貨。

這樣決定的好處是他有更多時間專注在自己的生意興趣上。無論如何，這才是他應該做的事，而不是跟那些不三不四的女人混在一起。他的生意興趣：機場接送，小巴往來薩格勒布機場。布拉戈已準備好司機，也準備好廣告。網站已蓄勢待發。他只需小巴就能成事。他說，他只負擔得起一輛小巴的錢，但他需要四輛才行，所以他給梅利一個入股的機會。他們曾在小丑酒吧午餐的時候談論過這事，布拉戈的提議是，梅利買進小巴，他能得五成股份。上星期三，梅利在泰晤士河畔的金斯敦匯豐銀行坐著，他已完成了貸款，把奇姆的房子抵押了，然後把貸款轉到斯拉夫扎格拿盧克有限公司。戶口的細節，如國際銀行帳戶號碼等，都是布拉戈提供給他的。布拉戈已向梅利表明他想購買的小巴——他網上找到的一輛退役警車在奧西耶克(Osijek)出售。他說，只要錢一到，就會到那兒買下它們。梅利說想要跟他一起過去親自看看車子。

「車子我也略懂一二，」他曾這樣告訴布拉戈，他也堅持如果車子沒有達到標準，他要有否決權。

自布拉戈回到英國後，他嘗試打了一兩通電話給他，詢問那筆匯款到了沒有。

此刻音訊全無，這就是布拉戈。

最讓他急切的問題是缺少了漢斯彼得來填補時間，現在他大多都獨自生活。他們習慣每天早上在累客旅館見面，但現在漢斯彼得幾乎都不在，梅利便一邊喝卡布奇諾，一邊假裝看報紙。有時候，他會在那裡逗留超過一小時。

漢斯彼得偶爾都會出現。一天早上他出現時，梅利問他：「那待會有事嗎？」，這是他習慣說的話，然後得到的都總是一句「沒什麼事。」，然後他們約好「稍後」在小丑酒吧見面，意思是午飯後不久的一段時間。

但是，今天漢斯彼得只是聳聳肩。

當梅利提議「稍後」在小丑酒吧喝一杯時，漢斯彼得最初含糊其詞，但之後說關於一部他打算看的電影。

「哦？」梅利說，「你看哪一部？」

鋼鐵人 3，漢斯彼得告訴他。

他們沉默了一會。然後梅利問：「如果我來你介意嗎？」

又是一陣沉默。漢斯彼得淡淡的說：「如果你想來的話。」

「如果你可以的話，」梅利說。

漢斯彼得垂頭望著自己的阿迪達斯運動鞋。「可以呀。」

「那我們在哪兒見面？」梅利問。

「這裡？」漢斯彼得用不帶熱忱的語氣提議。

所以他們中午在那裡見面，漢斯彼得和瑪莉亞一起到達。

瑪莉亞似乎不太喜歡看到他——梅利，他穿著休閒褲等待著。他嘗試表示得友善，但她毫不領情。巴士駛到城邊一個簡陋的購物中心，有幾個屏幕嵌入外牆。直到此刻，她幾乎沒有說

過一句話。

梅利握著扶手，開始懷疑這是否一個好主意。其他人都似乎故意對他不瞅不睬。當他和瑪莉亞的眼神接觸，他嘗試對她微笑，瑪莉亞卻立刻望向別處，然後，他問她關於電影的事。

「所以我們要看什麼電影？」他說。「好看的嗎？」她裝作沒聽見。

在售票處排隊的大多是年輕人——有的人戴著琢面玻璃耳環和繫著下垂的腰帶；有另一群人則穿著短裙或運動服在尖聲叫喊，當中有的在喝著含糖飲料，把爆米花擲向對方。他們就在那群亢奮的年輕人當中，漢斯彼得和瑪莉亞有時在梅利旁邊接吻，而梅利坐了兩個小時，看一齣嘈吵的動作電影。整部電影都以克羅地亞語配音，他明白個屁。

然後，當瑪莉亞去了洗手間，漢斯彼得告訴他，他們要回瑪莉亞的家，並問他接下來打算做什麼。

「我不知道，」梅利站在門廳說。

短暫的沉默過後，梅利感覺糟透了，他感受到漢斯彼得在可憐他——那個該死的漢斯彼得對他感到抱歉。

去他的。

「你不用擔心，」他說。「我還有事情要辦。你代我照顧她，好嗎？」他掛著一個不悅的笑容，向正在走近他們的瑪莉亞點點頭。

之後的幾個小時，他都在小丑酒吧渡過。他喝著潘啤，想著：「如果像漢斯彼得這樣的人能把女人搞定，那我他媽的一定可以。」

馬修點點頭。

梅利沒來由的大聲喊話。馬修身材高挑，性格嚴肅，散發出修士般的氣質。他正在洗碗碟

機內拿出玻璃杯，放到吧台下的架子上。

現在還未到八點，但梅利已喝得醉醺醺了。

之後，他在奧薩碰見達米揚。

他們在卡博店內同桌而坐，只見梅利說著：「如果像漢斯彼得這樣的人能把女人搞定，那我他媽的一定可以。」他不顧儀態地吃著卡博。

達米揚說：「那當然。」他和他的朋友已經吃完了，正準備離開時，梅利便來到了。

他們用克羅地亞語來聊天，其中兩個人在竊竊私語，梅利想知道他們在聊什麼。他吃得一團糟，把最後一口濕漉漉的卡博塞進口裡。

「你們現在有什麼事做？」他用紙巾擦擦嘴。

他發現這個達米揚的朋友像美國人一般說著一口流利的英語。

「我們要去派對。」他咧齒而笑，「你要來嗎？」

「當然了，」梅利說。「太好了，走吧。」

當他們離開時，其中一個雙胞胎跟達米揚說了一些話。

這間卡博店是這對雙胞胎開的，他們是阿爾巴利亞人，長得一模一樣，外貌帶點兇神惡煞。圓乎乎的頭顱、刮得乾淨的臉龐、肥厚飽滿的鼻子、結實強壯的脖子及濃厚稠密的眉毛。梅利從未能分辨出他們兩個。一開始，他甚至沒意識到他們是兩個人，是後來有一天他看到他們在一起才發現的。他們經常坐在店前的陽台的簷蓬下，對著叮叮作響水煙袋一邊吞雲吐霧，一邊喝茶。他們與一群臉帶愁容、經常留八字鬚的男人，以及為數不少、有老有嫩的女人一起。一輛加大了馬力的白色本田雅哥 EX 2.2 升柴油車經常停泊在店前，梅利想這車子應該是他們其中一人的。

他妒忌其中一個雙胞胎在他們離開時對達美揚點頭，也妒忌他向達美揚寒暄了幾句。他希望那對雙胞胎會像對待達美揚一樣對待自己。梅利光顧了卡博店已超過一年，他總是認為自己與他們有著共通點，大概就是有一種優越感令他們不同於別人。但他們從不跟梅利說話，而他們其中一人只跟達美揚說話，或以其他方式接納他。

有那麼一剎那，梅利決定要先開口說話。那個只與達美揚說話的雙胞胎就站在一塵不染的門外，沒精打采地倚著門側的柱子，挑著牙籤，在嘴巴裡左挑右挖。

「好吧，」梅利對他說，就在梅利離開的時候，他經過那個雙胞胎，並熱切地盼望著，穿著無領恤衫，棕色皮衣的他看起來只有一絲訝異，然後目送梅利離開。

這事怎麼會發生的？

梅利安然地在自己的「陵墓」內，緊挨著馬桶，黯然啜泣。湧出的淚水滴在骯髒的地面。

這怎麼會發生的？

他從未與這個馬桶的底座如此親近，生鏽的螺栓把它固定在殘舊的亞麻油地氈上。

過了一會兒，他站起來，拭乾淚痕。

他瞥到鏡中那腫脹的嘴唇。

這塊鏡子總是顯得朦朧不清。在鏡中隱約可見他帶有傷痕的臉龐。他盯著鏡子，蔑視著自

己。

曾經有一個女人。是了，曾經有一個女人。曾經有很多女人，在達米揚和他的朋友陪伴下，他們「搜刮」了城鎮上的夜總會，大概有兩三間。那裡滿是學生和年輕人，儘管他嘗試採取主動，卻一無所獲——天曉得這種事能否成功呢。他嘗試在新式的音樂下撩逗其中幾個染了頭髮的女孩子。梅利嘗試突顯自己的意圖，向她們擠眉弄眼，大肆宣揚著他曾經有過的 S 型號平治車。他大叫著：「有去過倫敦嗎？」，大喊著：「我帶你到處逛逛，好嗎？」，他又給那個女生一份工作，他感覺到她已經想給他聯絡電話了，直到她的朋友把她拉走——那個就是之後在停車場看到病厭厭的女生嗎？

達米揚的朋友不見了，所以只有他倆去了開通宵的夜店。「我知道一家夜店，」達米揚這時說話比平時更流利了，「我知道一家開通宵的夜店。」計程車，對了，計程車。然後他們再次墮進混濁的氛圍當中。達米揚在付錢。「你有煙嗎？」梅利問他。就在那場子，那個女人在座位上歇著，這個不是小女孩。他也許在向她說著曾經有過的 S 型號平治車。他問她：「你有去過倫敦嗎？」她幾歲了呢？四十？五十？而且相貌平平。梅利了解自己的身份地位，但即便如此，這個女人仍不斷觸碰著他，她的手就在他的大腿上，此時達米揚已不知去向。她把手放在他的大腿上，梅利直截了當問她：「你想回到我的懷裡嗎？」

她只是點點頭，再把手往梅利大腿的上方移動，「那好吧，」他說。

「等我一下，」她壓著他的大腿說，「等等。」

「好吧，」他等待著，對自己感到非常滿意。但立即又開始擔心以自己的情況能否做得到。之後他想找那個女人，他看到她正在洗手間旁與兩個男人談話。她談話的方式彷彿令他明白了什麼，讓他只想逃離這個地方。他從座位上溜下來，試著站穩，開始走向門口，她緊緊挽

著他的手臂。「可以了嗎？」她說，「我們走了嗎？」，「聽著，我很累了。」他告訴她，嘗試擺脫她的纏繞，「我下次再來看你。」，「別說這些話。」她說，她的手放在他的褲子上遊走，找尋著什麼。

「我真的累透了。」他厲聲道，然後推開她。

夜店外寒風刺骨，街燈發出的光暈渲染著道路。梅利已然迷失了，不知自己身在何處，他開始加快步履。沒錯，他身後多了一陣腳步聲，就在他打算奔跑的時候，身體已被抓住，只覺腳下一輕，然後被摔在地上。「你們要什麼？」梅利宛如一個怨婦淒聲抗議著。他們似乎告訴梅利，他有許多問題還未解決，於是他們和他談談條件。他們說，梅利欠他們債，又打傷了那個女人，所以他們要更多賠償金。「我沒有打她。」他們似乎想把梅利身上有的都刮得一文不剩。「我從來沒有打過她...」他的臉重重的吃了一拳。最後，他們在小徑一處，梅利交出錢包，只見他們把錢包內的庫納幣搜刮一空，然後拋在他身上。

現在只剩下他一人，倒在濕漉漉的小徑，還在疑惑著自己是否在做夢。

求求你，讓我繼續做夢吧。

他的嘴似乎被打得東歪西斜。他的眼角有些東西...

什麼來的？

輪轂蓋。

幹。

那裡來的輪轂蓋...

豐田雅力士？

他站起來時還滿天星斗。

還感到噁心，突如其來的噁心。

*

過了兩天，梅利的嘴巴仍凹了下去，就在他現身累客旅館時，他見到漢斯彼得。

「我聽說那晚你們夜遊的事。」漢斯彼得說。

「是呀，那晚過得相當不錯。」

「我聽說了。」漢斯彼得說。

此時正值午後，瑪莉亞正在這裡工作。

「噢，是嗎？」梅利憂心忡忡地笑著，他想從漢斯彼得的口中打探更多的事。

「你打聽到什麼？」

「達米揚說那是個很棒的晚上。」

梅利的笑容少了一份憂慮。他說：「確是個令人他媽難忘的晚上。」

「那時開始，」漢斯彼得問，「你都在療傷？」

「沒錯。我在療傷。如果你明白我的意思。」

梅利自己也不肯定他的話是什麼意思。他喝了一口啤酒，這是他受傷後的第一口啤酒。

昨天，他經歷了一個心靈上黯然無光的下午。有數個小時他的態度消極得令人可怕。他有一種痛徹心扉的感覺，感覺自己浪費了整個人生。但現在，事已境遷。外面陽光耀眼，煥然一新。

就像現在的陽光一樣燃燒著宿舍前仍然依附著小樹的黃葉。

梅利透過染滿灰塵的窗戶看到那些小樹。

「你呢？」他問漢斯彼得。「你還好嗎？」

「我還好，」他說。

梅利看到一片樹葉脫落，飄了下來。

漢斯彼得說：「達米揚說你有一個晚上在他們面前泡妞。」

「什麼？我有麼？」

「他是這樣說的。」

梅利的嘴巴蠢蠢欲動，彷彿有難言之隱。「這我就知道了。」

「那麼，」漢斯彼得說，「我認識一個很不錯的女人，你應該有興趣的。」

「是誰來的？」梅利傲慢地問。

「非常棒的女人，」漢斯彼得重申。然後他竊竊地說：「瑪莉亞的母親。」

梅利惱怒地低聲說：「瑪莉亞的母親？」

「是的。」

「絕對不行！」

「為什麼不行？」

「幹，」梅利冷冷地笑著。

「為什麼不行？她還蠻年輕的...」

「什麼意思？」

「我想，她有四十八歲，她身材也很不錯，」漢斯彼得告訴他。

「你有見過她，是嗎？」

「當然。」

瑪莉亞眼看不需要招待客人，於是到處走走，尋回空的酒杯。她停在漢斯彼得肩旁，把雙

手放在他的肩上。她結實的屁股分毫不差地落在梅利的視線下。

「我剛剛在告訴梅利，」漢斯彼得側著頭跟瑪莉亞說，「你母親的事。」

「是嗎？」她微笑著，似乎已經原諒了梅利那天跟隨他們看鋼鐵人 3 的事情。但梅利意識到，事實上那天自己這樣跟著他們，或是成為了瑪莉亞想撮合自己和她那顯然寂寞又絕望的母親的導火線。

「帶她去喝一杯就好。」漢斯彼得...什麼？建議？命令？梅利還在糾纏著事情為什麼會這樣發展的——那該死的漢斯彼得在告訴我要做什麼。此時瑪莉亞說：「她真的很漂亮，而且比我瘦多了。」

「但我們不會恨她的，」漢斯彼得用近乎溫文爾雅的語氣說。

「她老是說我應該減肥。」

「別聽她說。」

「她說得對，我應該減肥的。」

「絕對不用，」漢斯彼得告訴她，然後跟梅利說：「那你可以嗎？帶她去喝一杯？」

瑪莉亞粉紅色的頭髮垂了下來，遮蓋著她一邊的眼睛，站著對梅利微笑，如果要說一些

「休想，絕對不行，」的說話，難免會弄得尷尬。

他隔了一會兒，問瑪莉亞：「你有她的照片嗎？」

「我的意思是，你手機或其它地方有嗎？」

「好像有，」她說。「有了，在這裡。」

她向前傾，將電話在漢斯彼得的肩膀上遞給梅利。

梅利注視著照片。

一個抱著貓咪的女人，看來不太容易應付。

她比瑪莉亞瘦嗎？是的。值得交往嗎？可能吧。

「你父親呢？」他把手機還給瑪莉亞，對照片一字不提，然後傻笑著道：「他不會介意嗎？」

「他住在澳洲，」她說。「他們也離婚了，很明顯。」

「很明顯，」梅利說。這是一個笑話，他已假設了瑪莉亞的父親還不在場。

「好的，」他說。「我會嘗試一下。」

「那你想要她的電話嗎？」瑪莉亞問。

「她講英文的，是嗎？」

「當然。」

「倒不如你打給她？」他忽然緊張起來，然後提議，「約她出來。」

此時，另一塊葉子在毫無預兆下從一株小樹上掉了下來，落在路上。

幾小時後，梅利在歸家途上經過奧薩，他停下來買了一個卡博。塑膠造的棕櫚樹和微笑駱駝標誌在幽暗中發亮。其中一個阿爾巴尼亞籍的雙胞胎站在入口旁，舉目張望。他沒留意到梅利。梅利猶疑了一下，也沒跟他說什麼。他只是用英語下單，然後等著他的卡博，他的目光停留在一片片果仁蜜糖千層酥，仿似在躊躇著要不要買一件。他從未試過這麼渴望那對雙胞胎能給他一些暗示，那怕是小小的暗示，好讓他知道那對雙胞胎是同等對待他，僅此而已。達米揚已經得到他們的一個點頭致意，幾句噓寒問暖，因此他的地位在梅利心中已是高人一等。現在，梅利把達米揚看得更高了。那個蘸上了蜜糖的果仁蜜糖千層酥油亮生光。是的，在某程度上，達

米揚的地位似乎已更勝於他了。

那個雙胞胎好像沒察覺到梅利的存在，他用一些梅利不懂的語言與正在把一絲絲沙拉菜擠進皮塔餅的卡博師傅聊天。他舀起醬汁，然後用錫紙緊緊包著那份發出微溫的晚餐，再遞給梅利。

「謝謝，」梅利說。

那個師傅只是點點頭。

接著，梅利做到了。就在他離開時，他直視著那個雙胞胎，用一把洪亮的聲音說：「再見了，朋友。」

然後他迎著夜空，走了出去。

那個雙胞胎沒對他說什麼，一句也沒有。

或許他只是嚇了一跳。

當晚，梅利做了一個夢。他躺在床上。滂沱大雨不住的落下。窗戶開著，他躺在床上，聽著雨聲，這雨聲彷彿很久以前在哪兒聽過。房間空蕩得很詭異，除了那張他正躺著的床之外便空無一物，他甚至錯把頭向著本該是放腳的床尾。他就躺在這，聽著雨聲，此時一隻大狗在黑暗中出現：一隻德國牧羊犬。牠躺在床邊，平靜地喘著氣。牠趴下時，打翻了玻璃杯，在地上滾了幾圈，發出一陣聲響。牠打了一個呵欠，發出絲絲的嗚咽，然後再次喘氣起來。雨仍下著，梅利一動不動，只伸出手輕撫著那隻狗頸上軟茸茸的毛。牠平靜地喘氣。雨還是不斷的落下，透過開著的窗戶落在地上，積了一攤水。

星期日早上，梅利帶瑪莉亞的母親去喝酒。

當他們在一家愛爾蘭酒吧外見面時，梅利鬆了一口氣。他並沒有迷戀她，一點也沒有。她是個身材高窕的中年女人，穿著一條難看的牛仔褲，染了一把如茄子皮般發紫的頭髮。

他們互相握手的一刻，瑪莉亞的母親觸碰到他那冰冷而長著疙瘩的手。

這家愛爾蘭酒吧是鎮上最高級的，來臨光顧的都是市政大樓的上流人士以及當地的黑手黨。這裡的愛爾蘭啤酒價錢昂貴得可媲美倫敦的酒吧。內部的裝潢像是在英國主幹線站旁的臨時酒吧一般破舊不堪，污染嚴重。就此程度來說，除了餐桌服務，這間酒吧還是靠得住的。

他們面對面坐在沙發卡座上，梅利點了半升黑啤酒，而瑪莉亞的母親則點了杯白酒。

他本來還害怕自己會緊張不已，但梅利並不迷戀她，令他沒想像中那麼不安。她的英語非常好，談了不久，梅利已跟她說有關倫敦及電話銷售員的事，還少等地談及蘇格蘭。瑪莉亞的母親似乎對蘇格蘭很感興趣，不停地問那裡的事情，梅利卻不太想聊這些。夜幕降臨，他向她說著那輛曾有過的 S 級賓士，以及裝嵌在車上的最頂級的米芝蓮輪胎。「那輪胎的質素非常非常高，」他對她說。

她點點頭，品嚐著她的第二杯白酒，梅利也喝著他的第三杯黑啤酒。「輪胎對車子的影響可以很大的，」他對她說，雙手圈著酒杯。

「非常大。」

她是教師，教英文的。梅利覺得自己或許還是有點迷戀她。她似乎跟其他女人一樣對 S 級車都感興趣，至少梅利會這樣認為。一開始的時候，她想讓梅利講解什麼是 S 級車，所以梅利就把梅賽特斯賓士由 1.8 升 A 級，C 級到 E 級；各級車適用的不同引擎，一直講到 500 升的 S 級車。

他講了半個小時。

然後他問：「你用的是那款車？」

「都是鈴木車。」她說。

他說他不太懂鈴木車。

「沒關係。」

「車開得不錯嗎？」他問。

她點點頭，微笑著說：「還好。」

「那引擎有多...多大馬力？」

她笑了出來，好像覺得那問題很可笑。「我不知道。我很替瑪莉亞和漢斯彼得開心，」她說，「他人真的很好。」

「噢，是的，」梅利不置可否，心不在焉地望著窗外好一會兒。可以肯定的是，他不想提及漢斯彼得。

「我希望瑪莉亞可以減肥，」她真誠地說。「你不覺得她應該減肥嗎？」

「當然。」

「你會跟她講嗎？我說的她都不聽。」

「我？」梅利說，他自己也不知道為什麼會變成這樣子。「當然。我會跟她說一說的。你要再喝嗎？」

「我夠了，謝謝。」

就在梅利開始喝第四杯啤酒，他更肯定自己是迷戀她，非常迷戀她。

他在告訴她自己的生意，機場接送的事情。他最終也設法找到了布拉戈。他向瑪莉亞的母

親形容布拉戈為「我在當地的拍檔」。布拉戈也告訴梅利那筆匯款已順利到達。他們計劃在下星期駕車到奧耶西克看看那些老式警用小巴，然後再作決定。整件事進行得如火如荼。梅利告訴她這盤生意有潛力變成「大生意」。他目不轉睛地望著瑪莉亞母親的雙眼說：「很可惜，在交通方面，這一處還未發展得很好。」

她表示認同。

後來他嘗試牽起她的手，她立刻縮開，但嘴角微微一笑，讓人捉摸不透。

所以，當他去到男廁，他向自己承諾要再試一次。他拉好褲鏈，洗淨雙手。「要不死掉，」他對著鏡子蒼白的影像沾沾自喜的說，「要不勝利。」

*

下一個星期三。

因為瑪莉亞要工作，所以梅利和漢斯彼得一起吃午飯。他們走到一個名為金河流的中菜館，那裡在一個鬱悶而細小廣場內，舖滿鵝卵石以及滿滿飄零的落葉。

他們坐在餐廳內，面對著櫃台。

漢斯彼得點了一堆豆芽和灑滿味精閃閃發亮的紅蘿蔔條。

梅利點了滿滿的一盤肉，同樣是油亮油亮的。

他們坐在窗邊，任由時間流逝。

對面有一間舊書店，以及一些鎖著鐵鏈的單車。

漢斯彼得把豆芽掃進自己的大口中，他想說的話題已經很明顯了。

他肯定知道發生了什麼事。他一定從瑪莉亞那裡打聽到一些事。但他仍然說：「星期天過得怎麼樣？」

梅利專心吃著夾雜洋蔥和青椒的耀眼的肉塊。「你告訴我吧，」他咕嚕著說。

「這個，」漢斯彼得承認了，他用一支廉價叉子戳著碟上最後那口濕淋淋的豆芽。「我聽說了，不太好。」

「我不知道發生了什麼事，」梅利低聲抗議著。

「我不知道事情是如何發生的，」他重申。

漢斯彼得看了他一下說：「你是說那些警察？」

梅利看起來很失落。

「瑪莉亞還是不跟我說話嗎？」他眼望著下方問。

漢斯彼得說：「她要一個說法，要你親自解釋，跟她說發生什麼事，她搞不懂。」

「搞不懂發生什麼事？」

「嗯。」

「當我們離開那家酒吧，」梅利說，「我牽她的手，是她允許我這樣做的。」

漢斯彼得點點頭，然後喝了一大口雪碧。

「是她允許我這樣做的，」梅利又說了一遍。

「嗯。」

「所以我就想，好吧。你懂的...」

漢斯彼得表示他懂得。

「那我就牽著她的手...」

她的手冷如冰霜，充滿疙瘩。他當時被黑啤酒的迷霧縈繞著。她微笑著。他現在看清楚了，她那齜牙咧嘴是多麼的可怖。

「...我接著嘗試吻向她，」梅利說。他看見漢斯彼得那蒼白、帶金色睫毛的雙眼。「然後，然後，她叫了起來。」

「她尖叫了起來？」

「是的。」

「她為什麼尖叫？」漢斯彼得問。他好像在問那杯雪碧，因為他沒有看著梅利。

「我只是想吻她，」梅利說。

「之後呢？」

「之後有些混蛋壓著我，有另一個人報警。」

「那她在做什麼？」

「她在做什麼？我不知道。」

「然後警察便到了，」漢斯彼得提醒他。

「是的，」梅利說。「他們到了，我想我一定是推開了他們其中一個人之類的。」

「你為什麼這樣做？」

「我不知道...也許是他們對待我的方式...」

「這我明白，」漢斯彼得說。

「後來他們帶我到車站，那些該死的警笛響個不停，還有這一切的事。」

漢斯彼得只是點點頭以表同情。

「我一整晚，」梅利說，「都在那他媽的牢房。」

「最後他們在早上放你走。」漢斯彼得顯然已知道了下文。

「他們說謝夫托域夫人不想控告我。但我心想，誰是他媽的謝夫托域夫人？」

「她是瑪莉亞的母親。」

「是的，我知道。那個早上我沒想清楚。」

那個早上不太好。梅利人生其中一個最低點在晨曦中逐漸湧現...

「我不過是想吻她，」他的淚水快要湧出來。「我什麼也沒做過。」

「好了。」

「她說我做了什麼？」

「我不肯定，」漢斯彼得閃爍其辭地說。

「我不知道要做什麼，」梅利對他說。

漢斯彼得什麼也沒說。他已吃完他的午餐了。

梅利拿起叉子，準備吃自己那份午餐——幾串蘸上黏糊糊醬汁的黑肉塊。

他咬到一個東西。「搞什麼鬼，」他說。他把那東西吐了出來在紙巾上，是一個細小而堅

硬得有如散彈槍子彈的物體。

「這是什麼鬼？」

漢斯彼得往下望向那張濕了的紙巾，望向那個小小的東西。

梅利再吃起東西來。

漢斯彼得仔細看了那東西好一會兒，然後說：「媽的！你知道這是什麼嗎？」

「什麼？」

「我想...我的意思是，我不確定...但我想這是其中一種晶片。」

「什麼晶片？」梅利滿口食物地說。

「用來識別動物的。」

「動物？」

「是呀，例如狗，」漢斯彼得說。

過了片刻，梅利把嘴裡的東西全都吐了出來。

「你說什麼？」梅利氣喘吁吁、發狂似的喊：「你是在說我在吃一條該死的狗？」

「我不知道，」漢斯彼得說，梅利大叫大嚷把他嚇得驚惶失措，尷尬不已。就在這時，梅利的眼淚在眼眶不自覺地湧出，在他結實而發紅的臉龐上順勢而流。

他很愚蠢的嘗試用一張紙巾的碎屑來掩臉遮醜。

「我不相信...我不相信...」他呢喃著。

漢斯彼得無助地望向那位巡視著餐館的中國女人。

此時，梅利已雙手掩臉，放聲啜泣。他在嗚嗚抽噎之時、滿淚的雙手之間、破爛的紙巾背後，說了一些難以聽懂的話。

那個中國女人與漢斯彼得面面相覷，她想漢斯彼得做點什麼，好讓他的朋友不再騷擾到顧客。

於是，漢斯彼得把一隻手畏怯地放在梅利的肩膀上，然後低聲地建議梅利一起離開。

(End of the target text)

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