

Saint-Ouen | Stalingrad

Marie Silkeberg

Translated from Swedish by Kelsi Vanada

Rashomon. The Demon's Gate you say.
I understood that it had opened.
Only a few more seconds. And it would be opened wide.
Time would stratify.
It snowed. The first snow fell.

On the metro you sit next to a man and a woman.
The woman starts talking.
You don't hear the beginning.
Whether it was about her daughter.
Or someone else.
The man answers her.

Society will never help you.
So be happy you married me. Because I'm outside society.
She looks down.
As if he'd just hit her.
You get up when the metro stops and walk out the doors.

You win he calls to say.
You win nothing.

You took the elevator down into the cavern.
Seventy meters underground.
Your phone had no signal.
You saw the white chairs.
The hole in the middle of the room.
Where the reactor was removed.

The walls were covered in numbers written in chalk.
It looked like a tomb.
The white chairs.
Fugue state.
The chalky writing.
When a woman freed herself from the crowd you followed her.
Took the elevator up.
Went out onto the snow-filled street.

I need help he said.
With what you asked.
You see he said.
I need help.

The only thing you wanted was to sleep for a whole night.

You heard the birds.
Walked in the early morning.
Saw the gray sky.
The dry streets.
As far as the eye can reach you thought.

Armed soldiers outside the school.

It will happen again he says.

You go by a school. See the lit-up classrooms.
Empty so late in the afternoon.

Camps that are built and torn down.
People being moved he says.

A man says bonsoir to you on the street when you go by him.
He stood at a gate.
Bonsoir you whispered back.
Looked down at the cobblestones.
You didn't want to turn the light on when you came in.
So he would know where you lived.
You moved in darkness.
Fell asleep in the question.
Who to call if something happened.

do you see the man sitting in that car he asks
and points toward a fenced-in area under the bridge
he sits there the whole day guarding the empty place

You went to Porte de Clignancourt.
Got lost on your way from the metro.

you watch a man pack stuff up at closing time
take off a mannequin's clothes
loosen its legs
in the setting sun
now they run toward it from it you think

They don't even see them he says.
You're not allowed to talk about racism.
It doesn't exist.
No statistics.
Fifty-seven people sleep here on the street he says.
After being thrown out of a house to be renovated.
Half of them have no papers.
They're just lying right outside on the street.
Go to work in the morning.
Come back in the evening.

a state of emergency
they can arrest people for ninety-six hours

he says next to nothing on the phone
we're all tapped he says

An area. A border.
The ring road.

it's totally irrelevant what you say
he says
everyone has to become poor
no one should be integrated
I'm against development

if they want to get out of poverty wouldn't you respect that you ask
you've also benefited from white privilege your entire life

You walked the whole way to the river.
In the daylight.

why didn't you call he asks
it was late you say
you were far away
the globe is small he says
I was awake

The claustrophobic scenography. The drowned child.
The first stone image.
Scene image.
A child sliding down a staircase that looks like wooden sticks.
Vanishes between them. In dim blue light. The child in the aquarium.
The singing woman. The screaming one.
The stage. The aquarium. Fill with water.
A large shape.

Death anxiety invades you.
During the performance.
Fear that death will be cold.
A slow deterioration.
Wounds and water.

you have many things I don't have you say
like what?
the Arabic language for example

I can teach you
'*ana*
I am
'*anti*
you are

You remember that in wintertime you watched a TV series with no resolution.
Only a waking of the dead. Who wanted to take revenge. On the living.

Their attempts at life.

You wait in the middle of the middle row for the play to finish.

So you can get out again.

What do you find in poverty you ask.

Rage he answers.

You moved from somewhere in the 3rd arrondissement.

Through the city.

Out of it. Past Gare du Nord.

You went under a low bridge together.

Past a box that was sealed shut.

White cardboard.

About half a meter high.

Inside someone lay sleeping.

What kind of sleep you thought.
How is it to be in such a sleep.

just two degrees tonight
it hailed
snowed

You came to a camp under another bridge.
A man sat by a fire.
He stretched out his hand. Greeting.
The man took it.
Drunk.

You walk by the place where the big camp once was situated.
Under a bridge by the ring road.
It was blocked with concrete pillars when it was emptied.

The people were chased away.
Inside the tunnel the concrete pillars now lay crushed and scattered.

they say that the police will evacuate it soon he says
we have to do it tonight
more and more keep coming
there are over five-hundred people in the camp now

He gives coins to a man.
People are crazy he says.
Refuses to sit down under the gas lamps.
The heat from the infrared heater and the gas lamps.
How can they sit outside in t-shirts in the middle of winter he says.
Everyone lives like it's the last days.

you go to the Somali restaurant to eat
where everyone from the camp seems to be charging their phones
a net of cords lay over the narrow table

The slowly changing camera angles.
From above. Below. Rotations in the air.
Film with no main characters.
Extras.

we were fighting every ten minutes in the camp he says

As if it were describing the feeling exactly you think.
The border.
The road.
The landscape filled with pain.
As seen from the olive trees.

I saw your brothers
your compatriots you think

*I am happy if you are
you are lying but I appreciate the intention*

You thought about hybrid cities.
The violent wall.
Walls.

It's not illegal to occupy he says
ten percent of all the buildings in Paris stand empty

then why are they kept back you ask
to hold down those who are here already

Low tents stood behind the line of people.
A camp.

Smoke.
From the food in the cold.
The breath of the waiting people.
From the north of Africa.
Or further south.
Françafrique.
The colonies.
In what can no longer be called a city.

don't you expose them to danger you ask
don't you think they seem exposed to danger
already

Because cities are always uncontrolled growths he says.
Uncontrollable encounters.
Hazy transitions between life and death.

how long did you live in the camp you ask from inside the occupied building
too long

Maybe it doesn't exist any longer in the cities.
The wealthy cities.

what kind of country is this that lets us sleep on the streets
doesn't even give us blankets
in the winter cold

Only the denial. The masking. The economic expansion.
The police force's.
The tearing down of the Roma's camps.
The patience with which they are built just a few kilometers further away.
So the children don't have to change schools.

I abandoned you he says
and inhales
sorry

You looked out at the trees in the yard.
White houses.
Street sweepers cleaning the streets.

looks hot he writes
big meeting at Stalingrad
we might move tonight

She shows you a book whose images open like doors.
Further and further into the prison.
Which previously was a monastery.
Tells you about three trials.
The objects.
Of the prisoners and the judges.

What is your main concern you ask.
The crime or the justice.
Justice she answers.

