

Heinz Helle

The Reassuring Sound of Exploding Kerosene

A Novel

2014

Clothbound, 160 pages

Sample translation © 2013 by Kári Driscoll

Pages 9-16, 34-43, 53-55, 65-66, 72-76, 114-116

He is still just a boy

You ask yourself what it's all about, and then you remember: the preservation of the species. The pitch is small, the grass dry and patchy, the lines are paths not chalk and beyond them just a single row of benches. The pitch is somewhere out in the suburbs, the corner flags are yellow, they're yellow everywhere, and beside the entrance to the clubhouse hangs the insignia of some unknown brewery. They're coming out, they're running up the basement steps in their blue-and-yellow and their green-and-white jerseys, the boys, they're eight or nine years old, and you watch them because you like it when members of a species have got something that matters to them, when there is something in their lives that they fight for, without weapons or violence. You're standing near the midfield line, right where they will run onto the field, and you clap your hands and are happy. One of them gives you a smile.

He is still just a boy. He is in goal. It's the first time he has been in goal, and he is thinking, all right, if you want me to be in goal I'll be in goal, I don't mind. At first nothing happens. And when at some point that green-and-white striker comes running towards him, alone with the ball, he thinks nothing of it, and the green-and-white striker doesn't shoot, he gets closer and closer, and then suddenly he thinks, shit, I've got to make the save, and he thinks, I will make this save, because I'm doing all right, my parents are here as well, they've come just to see me play, and we even went and got 20 Chicken McNuggets at McDonald's beforehand, which I'll get at half time, with sweet-and-sour sauce, but why have they put me in goal today, I'm really a defender, and a good defender at that, but probably I'm a good goalie too, but how would they know that, I've never been in goal in my entire life, not even in training, I always get shouted at for ducking underneath the crosses, but this time I'm not scared, this time I won't duck, there comes that green-and-white jersey, calm as you like, dude, take the shot will you, I'm not scared, so come on, show me what you've got. And suddenly he thinks that maybe he only thinks he's not scared, that he only thinks he'll make the save, that he only thinks he's a good goalie, and at that moment the green-and-white striker casually shoots the ball into the far corner, and the boy hurls himself after it even though he hasn't got the merest hint of a chance of reaching the ball, but he doesn't want it to look like he's chicken. The match ends eight-nil.

Is that something you can help me with?

Over everything the reassuring sound of exploding kerosene. Greenland is grey. How much orange juice can you fit in an Airbus A310? The air hostesses' attractiveness must be proportionate to the distance from the earth at which they serve. To the suppressed proximity of death. Air and laughter made of plastic.

When we said goodbye, a warm breeze was blowing out of the tunnel. I pull the plastic film off the plastic chicken. It'll all work out, she said. And something else, but I only saw her mouth open, behind her the subway train thundered into the light, and then she closed her mouth again. Doors opened, people streamed past us, and I knew that she was not going to repeat it. As the aeroplane turned onto the runway, I asked myself why I'm leaving. I asked myself why I'm leaving when the engines began to roar and I was pressed into my seat and it took every ounce of will not to imagine a giant fireball and smouldering bodies and rescue personnel staring at blackened faces with no noses and exposed black teeth, in silence, in the snow. I know exactly why I'm leaving. It's getting dark. A beer would be nice.

Perhaps one day they will figure out what it means to be *here* and to see *this* and feel *that*. What it means to be 'me'. They will discover a specific neuronal pattern that is so unique in its complexity and frequency, so divine, so incredibly beautiful, that the explication of its structure will automatically explain its content. Then they will say: we know what consciousness is. And then they will be able to synthesise it. They will finally have gained control over the 'I'. Then I will go to them and say: I mustn't ever stop loving her, ever. Is that something you can help me with?

The hot cloth on my face is already almost cold. I return my tray table and seat back to their full upright positions; I begin my descent into New York. The mendacious calm during controlled falling. I know that nothing really explodes in a jet engine. Then lights outside windows that I'm not sitting at, and waiting and falling and waiting and falling and a loud, salvific thud. I have absolutely no fear of flying, I think, as we roll along the runway. I remain seated with my seat belt fastened until we are parked at the gate. Outside my window, well lit, empty stretches of tarmac. Maybe it was a mistake to leave. But this is the only brain I've got.

I try not to think about her

So I am going. I am making my way out of an airport building, I am carrying a suitcase, the suitcase is heavy, out of a black sky fall dots of white. In front of me taxis, behind me an arrivals hall, inside which wet-gleaming linoleum floors in lighter shades of grey, upon which people, luggage, red, yellow, black or brown vending machines and metallic seating with imitation leather upholstery, automatic glass doors, automatic glass doors opening, people arriving, people picking up, customs, the baggage carousel, many more baggage carousels, passport control, the queue for passport control, corridors, banners, information and prohibition signs, escalators, stairs, a corridor, a corridor inside an arm between the airport and the plane, an arm they call the jet bridge, an aeroplane, the Atlantic Ocean, and her.

I fall into the soft upholstery of a taxi's back seat, I tell the driver the address, I try not to notice that his skin is a different colour than mine, try, having produced the agreed-upon 60 dollars, not to put my wallet away as quickly as possible just because the driver's skin is a different colour than mine. On the radio voices speaking English and music that I know but that still sounds strange, at this particular moment, in this particular place. The white dots falling out of the black sky grow larger and more numerous, the lights more yellow and irregular, the asphalt in the cone of the headlights grows lighter and broader, receding faster and faster underneath me. It goes up, down, up, viaducts, entry ramps, exit ramps, the lines are yellow and dotted, tyres thud in the cracks between slabs of concrete, and at some point the blackness of the sky is overlaid with a different blackness, shadows, even though there is no sun, of buildings, larger and more or them than I have ever seen

before, and then we crash onto one of those famous bridges and into a tangle of steel, light and cars, and the lights are red blue and green and I think I really ought to be overwhelmed by these first incredible impressions of this incredible city and I think probably this is what it feels like to be overwhelmed by the first incredible impressions of this incredible city and so I get my phone out of my bag and type a message to her that says: incredible.

I arrive at an old industrial building, this is the address I told the driver, I give him money, get out of the taxi, under the doormat there's a key, the elevator smells like hydraulic fluid, I get out on the fifth floor. The apartment is small and unheated, I put my suitcase down, rummage around in it for warm textiles that I can wear over the ones I'm already wearing, then I leave the apartment, the elevator, the building, walk along broad sidewalks past dark, deserted warehouses until I am walking past dark, shuttered display windows, until at an intersection one is illuminated and I squeeze underneath the half-closed shutter past the tightly spaced shelves filled with oversized packaging, get bread, crisps, beer and a newspaper. I pay and leave the deli, which even now is not closing, I leave behind two loud voices at the check-out, the owner and two customers are having an argument, I'm not sure if it's between them or with the world, with suppliers, tax inspectors or wives, I think they're speaking Polish.

I return to the former industrial building, I lie down in the short bed under the thin sheets, I drape not much thicker articles of clothing over them, I eat the bread and the crisps and drink the beer and stare at the letters printed on the newspaper and I lie awake for a long time, maybe because in the place where I woke up this morning it's already light. I don't know if

I can't sleep because it's so early or because it's so cold, it's dark enough, and every now and then I look through the small window across the flat roofs between my building and the river toward the towers of light on the other side, and somewhere over there is where I'll go tomorrow and see where I'll be working and I don't feel annoyed or upset or whatever, I have no opinion about my inability to sleep, and I ask myself whether I shouldn't have an opinion about it or if not about that then at least I should have an opinion about something else, and if so then what, and then I ask myself what she would do in this situation and of course that doesn't make it any better, and so I try not to think about her which of course makes me think even more about her, dammit, and then thank God it's maybe not exactly day, but the sky is growing lighter, and I get out of bed and out of the room and out of the building, walk with dulled steps as if on plastic sheeting to the subway station through my steaming breath. The cars are frosted over.

[...]

What's your problem

I think my language centre is more robust than my sense of balance, I place the shot glass with my right hand on the bar, which I'm no longer simply leaning on with my left hand, but rather clinging to, another please. Music. To my left the loud, popular professor from New Jersey, from that university no one's heard of, to my right the farmer's son from Alabama who wanted to become a priest and remained a student. We chat a little about our problems, not because we lose sleep over them but because it is our job to have problems. We're all in the same job, which is why it's OK for us to be imbibing nerve toxins together like this, who else would one do that with, other than with friends maybe.

I can see the big mouth of the professor from that university in New Jersey that no one has heard of, it is opening and closing, opening and closing, his cheeks tremble when he laughs, because he thinks he is right or has had a good idea. I like the fact that he feels the need to talk to me about my problems, that he believes that he is interested in what I have to tell him, I like the fact that he is so completely convinced of the need to have an opinion about me and about everything that anyone might say that he doesn't even notice that he's got an opinion, he just does.

He quotes, illuminates new aspects, analyses, interprets, questions, criticises, and I want to say shut up you asshole I love you another please.

What?

Another, please.

The farmer's son is on board for the next round of shots, for the illuminating, questioning, understanding, maybe this is

what you meant, is that not what you meant, that wouldn't be a bad idea.

You think that would be a good idea?

Yes.

Yes.

Then probably that's what I meant.

My unwillingness to hide my own opportunism provokes an awkward silence, or maybe it's the shots, or maybe it's not an awkward silence but rather understanding, sympathy for my honesty perhaps, or compassion for my despair or that feeling you sometimes get when you're drinking with people you don't know at all, the feeling of knowing how they're feeling because you yourself feel so and so, and feelings really are a complicated matter, and truth and all that, and you know what I mean?

Yes.

Yes.

I can't tell if their smiles are genuine, it's too dark, I can't tell if mine is genuine, too much alcohol, but the three of us are the best friends in the whole world, our backs bent over the bar at similar angles, parallel lines on the path to infinity, we hearseethink and drink here side by side.

And love, of course, and what the hell does that asshole think he's looking at? I clutch my glass more tightly, if I need to smash it in his face the part I'm holding onto should remain intact, and the music goes bam bam.

After a while we're discussing the question of whether or not we'll ever be able to find answers, whether it's possible, not to prove a system on the basis of itself, that's impossible as we know, as such and such has already, but whether it's possible to perceive it, recognise it, love it, the music goes bam bam, and that asshole is still looking at us, and we return to the things we were talking about before, they use words I can't define,

and I answer with words I can't define, but apparently don't use entirely incorrectly. They look to see if I have something more to say or if I've already said everything, I look to see if that asshole is still looking, he is looking, I squeeze my glass, it's empty, says the loud professor from the university in New Jersey that no one's heard of, another please.

Yes.

Yes.

I ask myself whether I would be able to define the word Yes, and what there really is to say about Yes apart from when to use it in a sentence, and even that is hard enough.

Do you like New York?

Yes.

We drink, and at some point I reach that moment, it happens, something changes, something inside seeps out, goes away, and the one who's left behind says what he says, stands the way he stands, and moves the leg that's resting on the metal rod underneath the bar tentatively in time. It is good. The things around me have stopped screaming out their names, what there is just is, just like that. The bar's smooth, shiny wood, the professor's pot belly, the ladies' clothes, the thin band of dark yellow light over the black floor and the white wall, the dancers' arms in the air above them, their smell, their laughter, a bam, another bam and the asshole who is still staring, what's your problem?

My problem is the question of why we experience anything. My problem is the question of why our bodies, with their intricate perception and processing apparatus, in addition to all that perception and processing, also produce something like an oh, so this is what it's like to be me and here and now and doing this specific thing, or not. My problem is the question of what a scientific theory to explain our consciousness would

have to look like. My problem is the fact that it sounds cool to say I'm a philosopher so I study philosophy. My problem is that I'm drunk, I want to fuck, but I'm a philosopher and so really problems like consciousness and experience should be more important to me than women. My problem is that I love a woman but I think that I will at some point stop loving her and I renounce a world in which that is possible. My problem is that I am a philosopher and I work on consciousness, i.e. what we used to call the soul, and I am sometimes afraid that the others who say that consciousness is nothing but an illusion might be right, because if they are then when we die we just die. My problem is that I'm a philosopher and so I sometimes think that if p is any given phenomenal truth and q is the conjunction of all physical facts, then p cannot be deduced from q .

I don't have a problem, I say to the asshole, who right at that moment is not staring any more, and there is no more hatred in his eyes, no interest, no anger, he's just not staring any more, never was staring at me, just at the spot where I happen to be standing, because he's staring where he's staring and he doesn't care who or what may be occupying that space, his gaze is not the kind one can move into or out of, his gaze falls out of him and on the world, and he alone steers it, and to him I don't even exist. I let go of my glass.

She who is not her

I have no idea what time it is. Someone is lying beside me. It's not her. My head is not my head. She who is not her is actually quite pretty. I'm still drunk. She who is not her is still here. I pull away the covers. She who is not her is still quite pretty. A furrow on her brow, a deep, uncompromising sleep that is forcing the alcohol out of the bloodstream and the last traces of laughter out of her face. I look at her breasts. My hand reaches between her legs and I don't find it strange or disgusting or arousing, I don't find anything, but that wall back there, I've seen that before, I know the guy who lives here, and I didn't think he was the type of guy who did this type of thing. She who is not her is badly shaved, and still I've got a hard-on. She who is not her is scratchier than my chin. She who is not her does not wake and as I slip on the condom I am reminded of a picture I saw at a restaurant once of Indians with buffalo heads sneaking up on a grazing herd. She who is not her does not wake. He who really doesn't do this sort of thing carries on. Really it's already too light for this sort of thing. I close my eyes.

I see myself when it's still dark, it's about midnight, and at first my head is not my head. Let's play a game, says a she who is also not her. We'll each come up with a false identity and then we'll each go talk to five strangers and afterwards we'll tell each other what happened. It's perfect for parties where you don't know anyway, says she who is also not her.

After all we don't know each other.

Which is why we're having this strange conversation about this strange game played by two idiots who don't know anyone. Who both end up standing around on their own and eventually find one another. Like in gym class at school when you're the

last to be picked. For the moment I am still telling myself that I could strike up a conversation with anyone else at this party at any time if I wanted to. But I don't want to. Why did she who is also not her decide to speak to me anyway? She's got short hair. She's actually got quite a pretty face.

Or soap bubbles?

What?

It would be fun to blow soap bubbles, says she who is also not her, shooting a glance at the packet of cigarettes I have just taken out of my pocket.

I don't smoke, you see, says she who is also not her, which is a shame. If you smoke you can go outside and be outside and talk outside, but if you don't smoke you just stand around outside without anything to do, which is why it would be fun to blow soap bubbles, says she who is also not her.

I put the cigarettes back in my pocket and take a sip of gin. Does she who is also not her take my silence as a sign of agreement or of indifference? Would agreement be off-putting or encouraging, or would she who is also not her try even harder the more indifferent I were? She really does have quite a pretty face, but that short hair.

What are you doing in New York?

I'm a visiting scholar at the City University.

What department?

Philosophy.

Really? You teach philosophy?

No, I'm working on a paper, I say, and I don't think my tone of voice has changed and yet she who is also not her takes a step closer to me and says, with a serious look on her face: I won't ask you what it's about.

Thanks, I say, and for the first time in our conversation I laugh. Very kind of you, I say, and she who is also not her begins to laugh as well and this would be the beginning of something

that could have come to a relaxed, conciliatory end for two egos and at least my libido in my bed or in hers if only she who is also not her didn't have such short hair.

I see myself when it's a little darker still, probably around three, and I see myself walking into an apartment in the financial district with someone who is likewise not her and who has spectacular cleavage and long blonde hair and suddenly begins to cry uncontrollably because she who likewise is not her apparently has acne—I can't see that clearly by this point—and while she who is likewise not her is in the bathroom blowing her nose and drying her eyes I realise that I am only here to see past her acne and to prove to her that it is possible for someone to find you beautiful and to prove to myself that someone wants to be found beautiful by me. Otherwise there is no reason for my presence here. And so I take off the T-shirt with the amusing cartoon figure on it that she who is likewise not her has given me to sleep in and leave the apartment. In the hallway I look briefly out the window, I've never been so high up in New York before. The doorman does not seem surprised when I go past him for the second time in the space of twenty minutes.

I see myself when it's so dark that I can't quite see who is sitting next to me, I assume it's the person lying next to me right now, and the taxi driver taking us to Brooklyn asks me if I'm from Germany and talks to me at first about the Autobahn, then about Porsche, then about the Jews, and I'm relieved when we get out, and I freely accept his business card, call me and I'll send you a picture of my Mustang, he says, because he's got a Mustang, wouldn't that be something, him and his Mustang on the German Autobahn.

Through my closed eyelids I sense light. In my stomach something falls over. Hurriedly I get up and stumble into the bathroom. As my knees hit the tiles on either side of the toilet bowl I hear the front door close. I have no idea where she who is not her came from. But I know: it wasn't her. Before the gag reflex sets in, the saliva pools in my mouth.

[...]

She comes and stands next to me

I am standing by the window. Condensation collects at the bottom edge of the window frame. I see the river, see buildings where people live, doing things I can't see but which I can with some justification assume that they are doing, after all I too live in a building and do things such as for example standing at the window. I don't see anyone standing at any of the windows I can see, the sky is reflected in some of them, in others the concrete façade of an adjacent building, in others other windows. I am looking out the window at a city that means everything to some people, a lot to many, nothing to none. I see a city, it's the city I currently live in, and the desires, motives and actions of the other people whose existence in my field of vision I can only infer are as abstract and distant as the forces keeping Jupiter's third moon in orbit. Like the condensation at the bottom of my window frame people gather in specific places for various reasons, clothed in differently tailored textiles, with differently shaped pieces of rubber or leather to create a minimal distance between them and the celestial body they call home. All these people are surrounded by more or less the same mixture of gases, their skin receiving similar information about temperature and wind, in their stomachs similar substances are being dissolved, organic vegetable and animal matter. Many of them are feeling something, perhaps contentment, perhaps the hope of professional or personal success, of a fatty dinner, or sexual intercourse.

Then she comes and stands next to me and looks out the window with me, and her smell and the smell of the cup of coffee in her hand are more real than the planet I am standing on, and her hand gently touches my hip and I feel the warmth and softness and plasticity of her body, as close to me as the

laws of physics allow, and the buildings and windows and the sky out there, the river, the streets, the bridges, the clouds, the helicopters, the people flying them, the subway trains beneath the earth's surface and the ones on the bridges, the neighbourhood directly opposite, and the one left of that, and the one on the right, the one behind me on the other side of the drywall and the hallway and the apartment opposite and the people in it and their furniture, clothes, hobbies and political convictions, everything I can think while looking at the things around me suddenly acquires infinite mass and breaks loose of its moorings in the abstract and begins to fall, fast, faster, along the invisible and inexplicable line we call reference, it falls out of my head and back into the world when she says: nice town. We are standing at the window.

[...]

We are happy

We have sex. At first several times a day, then several times a week, then several times at the weekend, then once a week. We both enjoy it, we assure each other, we're just having less of it, there's a lot to do, we're stressed out, you've got to see your friends every once in a while.

We are beautiful. We are doing well. We like our bodies, our own and each other's, others think we're a good-looking couple. We are happy. We are what people call happy. We are what everyone we know calls happy. We have got what everyone wants, do what everyone does. We have a total of €53,374.43 in the bank and could make a down payment on an apartment, a small one, and then pay off the mortgage, slowly, once we had both got secure, permanent positions; they would need to be permanent for the credit rating, they would be secure because of our education, our friendly, reliable demeanour and our experience. We could take maternity leave, Germany is a civilised country that makes it possible for young parents to be young parents without too significant financial repercussions, at least to begin with, not so much later on, having a family is significantly more expensive than starting one, and after maternity leave your career is generally over, but you don't tell them that, not the children, because they wouldn't understand, and not the young parents, because they don't care about that at the moment. To them you say: wonderful.

[...]

We're watching football

I wake up. So does she. I throw the covers off. So does she. I get up. So does she. I take a shower, brush my teeth, get dressed, so does she. I drink a cup of coffee, I eat a pot of hazelnut yoghurt. So does she. I leave the house, walk down the street to the station, take the U-Bahn to Sendlinger Tor, change trains, got off at Implerstraße, walk up the steps and along Lindwurmstraße until I get to a large building with a sign that says Stemmerhof. So does she. I walk up the steps. So does she.

We're watching football. She's there too. We're watching football, and she's there too, because the We that is watching football is a different We than she and I. We are mostly guys. We're watching football and she's there too, and the guys watching with me are various heights and ages, and variously close to me, and they've known me longer, know me differently and better than she will ever know me, but this knowledge and this being known has no consequences except for the one, single consequence that we have always drawn from it, which is that we are here, all of us together, just as we always were, but still at some point we will all be alone, I think, and then no-one will be here except for her.

We are standing in an artist's studio, it's a big studio, there are lots of us, fifty, sixty people, the canvases, paint cans and balls of paper have been cleared away, in their place there are old armchairs and cushions and cases of beer and us. We are wearing the colours of the team that we want to see win, they are our national colours, and we wear them with more conviction than the seriousness of the situation would call for: it's a game. We are shouting. It's not a game.

We are shouting and the others walk onto the pitch, which is to say the wall of the studio, and they are wearing different colours and have different faces and shoulders and backs and calves, we don't know their bodies as well as we know our players' bodies, their faces, their names, their voices, their gait, we know them better than she will ever know me, they don't know that, and she doesn't know it either, will never know, that's what makes her her after all.

We hear the whistle, and we see the movements of the players we know, the movements and the players, we recognise them even when they haven't got the ball, and when they've got the ball we shout. And they run, we shout, they stumble, we shout, they fall, we shout, and then they get back up again. We shout, the ball flies through the air, we shout, and they run and move the ball upfield, closer and closer to the other team's goal, onward, onward, and then suddenly the ball is in the very net where we always wanted it to be, will always want it to be, and we shout and jump and they jump and shout and embrace, pat each other on the back and on the shoulder and on the chest and rub their heads and slap themselves for joy, fury, pride and hatred of their common enemy, and I give her a kiss on the cheek.

We shout *Deutschland*. So does she. We clink our thick brown beer bottles together as hard as we can without breaking them, so does she. We thrust our fists in the air. So does she. We chant na na na na hey hey hey goodbye. So does she. We sing Olé olé-olé-olé. So does she. We watch our players run, we watch as they tackle the other players, and we watch how one of the other players writhes in pain, and then we shout drama queen. She takes a sip from her bottle. She doesn't really like beer. And then we watch as the others lose the ball and we

roar, our roar rises up like a wall opposite the wall with the flickering images, and then our players run with the ball deep into the others' territory and then the ball is at the back of the net again, and we're shouting, slapping, jumping and crying, as is she. And then we hear the whistle, Sweden have lost two-nil and everyone is running onto the field and we're jumping and falling and piling on top of each other and then we rush out of the studio and head for the U-Bahn station, decked out in all our colours, as is she, with flags a-waving and we stand and drink and laugh and the beer bottles clink and then the train arrives and in it are two people wearing Swedish colours and we see them and we chant at the top of our lungs: na na na na hey hey hey goodbye. She's singing as well. We take the train to Schwabing, and then we pour out onto Leopoldstraße, dissolve into it, and suddenly all the others are gone and at the same time they're everywhere, the others are everyone, the colours and flags and bottles and shouts, and then I take off my jersey and stuff one end of it into the front of my trousers and I stuff one end of my black-red-and-gold flag down the back, and then I climb onto a traffic light and then I'm sitting on a traffic light high above the intersection and holding on to the sun-warmed metal with both hands, and from my arse hangs the flag of the Federal Republic of Germany and underneath me is a sea of the exact same colours as the ones hanging out of my trousers and then I shout *Deutschland*. I don't shout it quite as loudly as I could have because I know she's down there somewhere and she's looking up at me and thinking now he's sitting on a traffic light and shouting *Deutschland*.

[...]

The world without us

We're at a club, the music is going bam bam and we're fighting our way to the bar, she's pushing aside hips and I'm pushing aside shoulders and then we're leaning on the bar with the crowd at our backs and at some point I shout gin and tonic and hold two fingers in the air, and shortly thereafter a man puts the glasses in front of us, we pay, and suddenly it's mission accomplished. One at a time we're washed away from the bar where we were a unit that had fought its way through strange smells past strange bodies and clothes and the eyes that looked away seemed to us like they were giving up, as if they were sliding off the indissoluble block that was us when we wanted the same thing, a gin and tonic. Now they're no longer interested in us. We're no longer interested in us either.

I find it hard to take, want to say something, so I say I'm sorry.
What?

The music goes bam bam.

I'm sorry.

I heard you. Sorry about what?

Everything.

A-ha.

I drink and look away again, and I'm a little disappointed because I had the feeling I was making a fairly fundamental confession right here and now and somehow I would have expected some kind of reaction, I don't know what, but in any case more than an a-ha, the music goes bam bam, and she tenses up, perhaps she's seen something in my face, in any case she gently squeezes my arm and says it's OK and tries to smile.
So do I.

Then we each turn our heads towards the dance floor and I can see in her eyes that as soon as our gazes have separated we will see different things, forever, and then our gazes separate and

we look straight ahead and I see shards, shoes, tits and arses and I have no idea what she's seeing, it's not us who are seeing what's in front of us anymore, I see something, she sees something, and I think, so that was that then.

We're in the taxi and I'm thinking so that was that then and I say the world is fucked up. She says that's too easy, I say the world is too complex, she says that's too imprecise, I say that's exactly what I mean, and she says what exactly do you mean by that?

I mean the future. The past. The missed opportunities. The possibilities. It's all too much.

Yes.

Every car coming from the other direction could smash into us.

So?

So then we'd be dead. Instantaneously. Just like that.

So? Then we'd be dead.

No. You don't understand what that means. Being alive. It means exactly that. It means being somewhere. And at some point you won't be there anymore. That's it. The world will still be there without us.

I'm saying I know all that, and I think that we can't know, that we will never know what will be there after we die.

She says nothing more that evening.