

## *Sleeping Men and a shy Turtle*

I arrive at the airport at four in the afternoon. While driving around the X93 towards an address I've written down in my notebook, I remembered looking at the mountains by the highway last time I visited. I had forgotten how many decrepit houses there are alongside this road.

The grips on the bus are pre-formed for human hands. A conceptual finesse that I find moving

as the presence of humans is anticipated in their form.

Still,

what makes me nervous is imagining the bacteria of those human grips.

I won't touch them.

When we get off at the Omonia stop later I can't remember the streets.

I don't own a smartphone. Still, I have a good memory of places.

But whenever someone takes their phone out I get lost,

unable to compete with the technology.

I do remember "Frappé" a Nescafé-Drink looking all summer served cold with lots of sugar.

I recognize its depiction when reading the menu.

The phone in your hand, I feel even more lost the moment we start walking. My body remembers looking away, and my eyes are nervously trying not to focus.

I don't want to see the junkies in the streets, the beggars, the dealers, the poverty.

But without looking my body remembers.

My heartbeat speeds up.

The feeling of twilight.

Lonely men sitting on the pavement. Barely any women.

I remember that when you cut off the fingertip of your ring finger I was too afraid to look at the wound. Until you came out of the ambulance I was convinced the entire upper half of your finger was missing.

Do I exaggerate events in my mind in order to feel relief later?

When we arrive at the café up the hill shortly after noon I notice how the chairs changed since last time I sat there two years ago.

Your fingertip still there.

I draw everything I was afraid of on a paper tablecloth. A huge apocalyptic mind map.

We drank espresso, water, and later beer.

I tried to think of all the possible interrelations. Even though you were there I felt lonely and got sunburned.

Later I took a photo of the map that is now hanging between my windows in the apartment you moved into last December.

When I look at it, I immediately recognize your naked knee. Later I realize your knee is hidden under the table.

I hear M. saying how men over thirty shouldn't wear short pants. You were twenty-seven at the time. When I took that photograph, I knew it was meant to function as external memory, but also as a way to turn things around.

To look at that situation differently.

To remember but also to isolate. To hold it at a distance.

To strip my memory of autonomy.

In the café on the hill I noticed a man with dark hair and ice-blue-eyes looking my way. His eyes mirrored the colour of my eyeliner. I imagine his apartment, the way he looks naked, but I cannot picture the place we would have sex at. When I pass him on my way to the restroom his stare grew aggressive. I felt a sudden panic, thinking he might attack me.

When I return to the table, I finish my frappé while he's smoking.

I catch a last glimpse of his eyes.

The café is next to a basketball court and close to a small park.

Girls dressed up as princesses, with magic wands.

A dog that scared me.

A man sleeping peacefully in the middle of a deserted square.

The park feels empty, still there are always voices in the air.

The longer we stay

the more sleeping men we encounter.

A turtle remains undecided on the path when we enter her district.

While you take your smartphone out

she silently vanishes into the copse.

In the subway I notice women over fifty that look very nifty as if having way more exciting evening plans than I do.

They're elegant compared to the crowd pushing and trigger an image of Benoît Magimel making out with Isabelle Huppert in the restroom at an opera in Vienna in the film "The Pianist" by Michael Haneke.

Magimel on his knees and Huppert in the peep show later.

Then a paparazzo shot of Magimel and Juliette Binoche in a cinema.

Happiness like a transfer picture.

And still the smile of Binoche is stronger than fake, burning through the skepticism of the voyeur.

When cleaning our teeth, the night prior to my departure, I say:

before falling asleep let's think about the ocean the way we looked at it this afternoon. Let's try to stick with this image as long as possible.

A languet on each side, the screeching girls. A group of motionless men standing close to them, their arms at a forty-five degree angle with their hands awkwardly resting on the water.

What is the difference between memory and recollection?

Memory as a complex and recollection as a fragment?

Memory as active, recollection as passive.

Body-Memory. Childhood recollection.

– Isabel Mehl, 2019