

PROCNE

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The whole world was still singing. An exceptional incident from the past was now the organic disorder of the world. Since then, the language of metal went through different alloys and stages, becoming mute at intervals. On the table, a stone tried to distract her with ongoing metamorphoses. She purchased it online thinking she was buying a fragment of the latest meteor shower to fall on Mars. The scam didn't bother her, nor did the visual chatter of the metal. She could enjoy a geological micro-event without even getting out of the house. Perhaps she feared that this little piece of matter would carry away the noise, leaving just an absence. They say that nothing disappears, that everything transforms, be it molecular pain or the drops of atmospheric sweat that produce rainbows. She sat in the sugar-foam seat and stuck a greedy finger into the right-hand side. When she was in a good mood, she believed that Procne, the name she had given to the delicate squeaky object, told her secrets from a time long before the past. Like the umpteenth princess suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder during periods of ancient mythological warfare, the creature seemed doomed to chirp forever. In moments of bad moods, when the songs spilled out of tune complaints over her tired ears, she called her Filomela. Objects not only had many lives, but still retained a right to transit and diaspora that she did not. She closed her eyes and forced a smile. Happiness was as slippery as the jelly PVC of the living room furniture given to her by her neighbour Margot, who named her hats after planets so as not to forget the days of the week. For her, elegance was uncomplicated, but she liked to see Margot strutting around in dress carriages. Margot used to confuse her, especially if

on Wednesday she was wearing a hat called Saturn. Lately, though, she was the most puzzled of all. Ever since she was asked to stop her work at the Phantasmagoria Department of the Institute of Matter because of an ordinary combination of megalophobia and Alice in Wonderland syndrome, she spent her days analysing textures with her eyes closed in order to recognise the world with her skin and not only with her eyes. Feigning a concern she did not feel, the head of her research team had proposed a period of holiday hibernation, which she, in turn, had refused, feigning an episode of clinophobia that she did not feel either. Hibernation had its advantages, of course, but it meant prolonging life by subtracting from it. By taking it in turns, hibernation extemporaneously complicated human relations. Going into deep sleep with people you knew was an unlikely bureaucratic kindness. Let alone coming in and out of a lethargy that easily lasted for years together. Last time she spent a five-years period frosted while the mauve daisies that pushed themselves up in her garden entered into a symbiotic relationship with the lavender bushes that protected her clothes against the insatiable gluttony of moths. The violet romance continued, first in the snail shells and then inside the house, staining the wooden polurethane floor. With each new awakening, not only the

people changed. Life changed, sensations changed. With her finger still asleep in the sugar foam, she opened her eyes and witnessed the umpteenth Procne choreography. The helicoidal mollusc zoomed in and out its mutant viscosity with spectral variations between blue and purple. It was not the first time Procne echoed her thoughts.

She plugged herself into the seat with her other index finger and felt it smaller than before. Self-embarrassment mingled with shame at the chance of being caught red-handed in such an absurd posture. Not so long ago, in the lab, she had skipped the ban on eating inside and sneakily gobbled several corn dinosaurs into her mouth to squeeze them against the roof of her mouth. Her experiment on tedium during working hours ended with an unexpectedly effective bite on the tongue thanks to the unfriendly emergence of her boss's face. Entering without knocking was less about politeness than it was about abuse of power. The blood in her teeth confessed what her smile was meant to conceal. She was cordially welcomed into the uncanny valley of human resources to later follow the stream of

feigned cordiality with the corporation's nameless psychologist. She returned home with Alice in Wonderland syndrome. During the diagnosis, in order to fill awkward silences and to get out of the mousetrap as quickly as possible, she allowed herself to be led by the manipulation of the questions and ended up reiterating that now that she mentioned it, she might once have had headaches and dizziness just after the orchid polyurethane tests. Feeling the questioning and patience wearing thin, she also agreed to acknowledge that now that she mentioned it, it was true that there were perhaps times when she felt her hands shrink and some objects become smaller in size. She faked her first episode of megalophobia days later, taking advantage of a programming error in the 3D printers she was working with on a new transgenic garden to be presented at the next floral plastics convention. For weeks she was producing full-scale polylactic acid five-leaf clovers when three of the printers joined forces in a low-frequency singularity mirage to produce several prototypes of something like Arum titan-sized violets. Memories of the rotten fishy smell of those flowers that take ten years to grow and forty-eight hours to die entered her nostrils and made her nauseous. One of the most frequent symptoms of any pathological fear, including that of objects much larger than they should be, was nausea. Contrary to general belief, the scale of things seemed to her to be a personal choice. Appetite whetted her memory and she geolocated the packet of caramelised violet petals under a mountain of white socks upstairs. She stored food in different places in a house where things were rarely in place. Last month she moved her wardrobe into the kitchen for a week on a diet of sweets. Since temptation was not easily fooled either, she had to replace office supplies with kitchen

gadgets. Her sugar addiction granted her a cyborg fantasy with several titanium ceramic implants in the mouth. The oversupply of food not only was giving her unexpected rewards after gruelling hours of laboratory testing, but relaxed her bed-sheet fears of starvation during the next planetary-scale tragedy.

After drowning in sounds, Procne turned into a wrinkled puddle with purple and lilac spots. She ignored it. She was too busy distracting herself from her tactile diet. Peeling herself off the seat, she decided to take revenge on the glazed threads that just candied her trousers. She typed on the foam surface with the same aggressiveness with which the Institute of Matter bureaucrats wrote their reports for the day. Ultimate violence was undoubtedly automatism. She felt the thousands of bacterial corpses floating in the carbon dioxide of the room. Mirta, her former laboratory colleague, had her sound judgement fermented by petroleum ether and was convinced that she came into contact with the unicellular multitudes. For a moment she doubted whether she, too, was gone to her head extracting and analysing plant pigments in the chromatography room. She just wanted to get intimate with matter using one of her favourite forms of violence, unsolicited contact. She quenched her daily dose of schadenfreude with the seat... the choking of foam, the introverted sugar release, the insolent pressure of flesh... She licked her fingers several times. She felt a pain that was not hers in the salivating mouth and also a burst in the garden. Procne was still amusing itself with its experiments in empirical topology, ascending helically without moving from the site.

The corn roses bloomed in the spring interludes. They burst one by one, for days, until winter returned to starch their vital impulse. The last time she went for a walk with Margot, snow-polystyrene flakes were falling. Saturn joined them with its huge withered brim. The dust mites that Procne was able to dodge with every deformation finally found a desired hospitality in the felt of her neighbour's hat. Bad weather was always the perfect excuse for Margot, who liked to had her head in the clouds, to rework her lecture on the evaporation processes of plastic in water. She listened condescendingly. The memory of water was of little interest to her. She was more concerned with catching in her pocket the little pellets falling from the sky to squeeze or later burning them at home. Unlike Margot, she was part of a generation that was not burdened by the unresolved question of origins. The past was a dangerous drug for nostalgic people. She opened the living room window and a stream of lavender rushed to take shelter in the ceiling mouldings, wrinkling the viscosity of one of the poems spun on the wall. Procne fell to the floor. The previous tenant was a grandiloquent strophic versifier

whose continuous panic attacks after a mild episode of aphasia were being treated in hibernation. Human abilities were unreliable. Like the writer's modesty, they often went astray. In the garden roses were bursting by turns and the inside of the house began to scent of butter. Pitifully, Procne returned to her original form with a hermit-like silence. Another spring draft rushed in, this time to slam the door in the hallway. She picked up the stone from the floor, put it in her pocket and went out into the garden. The pee flowers had melted away, passing their prominence to the orchids. Resin always made her petals shin, even on days with grey skies. But she did not like orchids. They could afford to be haughty. They were flowers that were liked even by those who were not particularly fond of flowers. She preferred pee flowers. One of her winter pastimes was to make mounds of purified snow in the garden, section them with a plassiflora-shaped mould she stole from the laboratory during a boring secondary raw materials convention, melt the snow while squatting and pour fresh

silicone into the hollows. Those flowers were her group therapy against the programming routine and plant patterns repetition in a laboratory with no room for serendipity. Many mornings, as she put on her uniform gown, fantasized about opening the door to find her department colleagues completely deranged by an unforeseen singularity event for which they were totally unready. It was precisely the triumph of error over accuracy that had given her flowers their name. It was urine and not silicone what achieved indeterminacy in their shapes. To make them she used a biosilicone that evaporated in spring. She was more interested in making them than in beholding them. A similar impulse was making her stain to clean and mess to tidy. She felt like peeing on the orchids, but foresaw a dizzy spell. She sensed a squeezing noise and then felt her pocket. It wasn't Procne. It was her hunger asking to be answered. After the fourth wake-up call from her stomach, she became nauseous. The urge to vomit and hunger always came together when she exceeded her digestive system's threshold of patience. She had forgotten breakfast, maybe even dinner. She started craving chocolate truffles with pansies and knapweeds. She didn't remember hiding any around the house. Tearing the petal off an orchid, she popped it into her mouth. She would go out and buy several boxes to further augment her apocalyptic sugar stockpile. Procne stretched and shrunk inside her jacket. She took it out of her pocket and popped the jelly bean into her mouth. Then she started to walk towards the street, but the distance between her and the garden gate would always be the same.

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