

The Polish Bride by Jibbe Willems, trans. © David McKay with support from the Regeling Nieuwe Projecten en Werkbeurzen Auteurs. For more information, please contact the translator: mckay@openbooktranslation.com.

THE POLISH BRIDE

Jibbe Willems for tgEcho – NNT / May 2019
inspired by the screenplay by Kees van der Hulst

translation by David McKay

SHE

HE

Trigger warning: This play includes scenes of extreme violence towards humans and animals and explicit descriptions of rape and sexual assault.

Translator's Foreword

To understand this play as the author intended, an English-speaking reader needs to know a few things about how it is presented on the page. In the actors' lines, there are many line breaks that take the place of punctuation, a style reminiscent of free-verse poetry. Stage directions (in italics) are in a similar format. These conventions are fairly widespread in Dutch-language playwriting, and English-language readers and actors generally adapt to them quickly. The line breaks do not dictate a required pause for the actor, but can be taken as a starting point for investigating and experimenting with the text.

Perhaps a more challenging aspect of the play for actors and directors is its multilingualism. When the story begins, the two characters hardly have any language in common: one is a Dutch farmer living in Groningen, in the north of the country, and the other is a young Polish woman on the run from sex traffickers. Most of the actors' lines in the play are narration or interior monologue: they tell the story and relate their own thoughts and feelings in the third person, in fluent Dutch in the original and fluent English in the translation. But when the two characters are in dialogue, they must resort to broken German, or else speak Dutch and Polish that the other character often does not understand. Dutch audiences seeing the original production understood the Dutch in the dialogues, of course, and generally knew the meaning of the broken German as well, although the Polish was unfamiliar to most of them.

After trying a few translation strategies, I settled on the version below, which is even more radically multilingual than the original. In this version, the actual dialogues (in red) remain in the original languages. The Dutch farmer speaks broken German and Dutch; the young Polish woman speaks broken German and Polish and gradually learns some Dutch in the course of the play. Indicative English translations are offered for the reader alongside the lines of dialogue, in square brackets. The narration and inner monologue (in black) are in fluent English and provide enough context for the audience to follow the Dutch, Polish, and German dialogues. The required effort reinforces the play's theme of the difficulty and importance of genuine communication and connection.

I am grateful to the Foreign Affairs ensemble in London for helping me to develop this translation through an informal reading and a workshop. Those events made it clear that a rich multilingual texture can make the play even more exciting to both the actors and the audience.

The playwright and I are enthusiastic about this multilingual approach but understand that it poses casting challenges which may seem daunting. Directors and ensembles are welcome to explore alternative approaches. In particular, the Dutch in the dialogues could be rendered as English. I am happy to discuss the possibilities and offer advice and support for productions (David McKay, mckay@openbooktranslation.com, www.openbooktranslation.com). An American English version of the translation is also available.

Finally, a few words about the cultural background. *The Polish Bride* is inspired by Kees van der Hulst's screenplay for the acclaimed 1998 film of the same name, which has remained enduringly popular in the north of the Netherlands. Conversations about migration and gender roles have

moved on and become more sophisticated since then, and Jibbe Willems's new theatrical version of the story reflects that new awareness of the complexities. At the same time, Willems – an experienced translator of Shakespeare's plays into Dutch – replaces the beautiful cinematography of the Groningen landscape with dynamic, poetic language that evokes the same setting today.

Willems's adaptation is informed by the fierce ongoing debate about natural gas extraction in the north of the Netherlands and the earthquakes and other environmental impacts resulting from it. Meanwhile, urgent environmental measures such as nitrogen reduction are placing additional pressure on Dutch agriculture and making life especially difficult for small farmers. Present-day political debates like these form a backdrop to this intimate tale of love, vengeance, and misunderstanding.

1.

morning

HE the sun pulls itself up
just over the horizon
still as low as the mist
still slow
and reluctant
to start the day

this thought runs through his head
and then it's gone

he's standing at the counter
spreading margarine
on a slice of bread
a thick layer
then chocolate sprinkles on top
hagelslag

he folds it double
bolts down the bread
between gulps of coffee

another bite
another gulp
he stands
and stares
past the crack in his kitchen window
at the land outside

the clouds are soggy cotton swabs
heavy and grey
the milky sun
still trapped behind the clouds

the air cold and damp

another bite
another gulp
he stands
and stares
past the crack in his kitchen window
at the land outside

outside are the flat fields of the north
their sustaining soil
their solid ground

a place with nothing
between land and sky
no steel glass concrete

[sprinkles]

just a few trees
rooted in the stubble
of unshaven fields

he shivers
hunches his shoulders
shoves his fists
into his pockets

2.

outside

HER VOICE she doesn't know where she is
 only that she's hurting in places
 that aren't made to hurt

 she doesn't want to think about it

 she hears the blades of windmills
 slashing and slashing
 not catching the wind
 but creating it

 her bare feet hurt
 each time they hit the asphalt

 she's running

 not towards anything
 but away from something

 a car
 is coming after her

 a Mercedes
 she was in the back
 next to the child seat

 colourful stickers on the window
 barnyard animals

 blue horse
 yellow pig
 red hen

 she looks out past the livestock
 a port
 cranes
 cargo ships

 her suitcase in her lap
 and with each kilometre
 a thought cuts deeper into her mind

 there's something wrong here
 there's something wrong here
 there's something wrong here

 she should have jumped out
 she should never have got in
 she should have run

 there's something wrong here

blue horse
yellow pig
red hen

now she's running
away
from the car

at the wheel
don't think about it
sits the fourth man
don't think about it
with his unwashed hands

her thighs are sticky
her thighs are sticky with
with blood and with

don't think about it
don't think
run

she runs

and

3.

kitchen

HE he has three certainties
 and one suspicion

 what he knows for certain
 is that you never reach the horizon
 is that every season is followed by another
 is that life doesn't last forever

 and what he suspects
 is that every night ends
 with a sunrise

 a lot of what he knew for a very long time
 he hasn't known for sure for a very long time now

 ever since the earth swallowed
 generations of footsteps
 and churned up his ancestors
 disturbing their eternal rest
 his certainties have been as shaky
 as the ground beneath his feet

 but he knows it's better
 not to dwell on things
 and he knows it's easier
 to smother your fear by daylight
 than it is by night

 he lays the knife and cup down in the sink
 on the pile of washing-up
 turns the tap
 and hears
 the water heater switching on
 the gas feeding the pilot light
 and igniting

 the dog barks

4.

outside

HER VOICE asphalt becomes earth
footsteps sink deeper and deeper into the sea clay
of the silted fields
yellow sodium light gives way to solid darkness
then to twilight
shapes return to a world
that seems emptier with every step

she stumbles across the crooked ditches
avoiding the farmhouses that stand out like beacons
in the northern landscape
she has no idea which houses hold friends or enemies
behind their high windows
no idea which ones are deserted
no idea where she'll be safe from her predators
she has to run as far as she can now
before she dares think about
giving herself up to fate

the cold is driven away
by an inner heat
sweat burns out of her body
and clings
chilly
clammy
to every inch of skin

naked
nothing but a raincoat

she hears barking

she doesn't know if it's fear
or hope she's feeling
or if there's any difference
they both distort reality
they've both led her
into traps before

she had no choice then
she has no choice now

she hears a dog bark

HE wat is er jongen?

[what's the matter boy?]

HER VOICE the dog barks

5.

HE he puts on his coat
 old, worn out, good for keeping warm
 pulls on his wellies
 and walks over to his dog

wat is er jongen?

[what's the matter boy?]

the dog barks

high above the low mist
a flock of geese fly off

he's heard the fairy tales
of the women in white
thin as air
in skirts of smoke
who hover over graveyards

grey tendrils of fog
transformed into women
by fear or desire
dancing across the fields
and vanishing

and now
here
in these times of statistics not sagas
he sees her
stumbling over his land
a phantom
appearing and disappearing

a ghostly form
drifting through the fog
it solidifies
then disappears

and reappears
now flesh and blood

and drifts away again
in wisps of mist

is this woman real or an apparition?
does one rule out the other?

the dog is silent
the wind is rising
it blows away the ghosts

6.

HER VOICE she sees a man standing
 or thinks she sees a man
 maybe
 it's a beech or a willow
 or
 something with branches
 roots
 it's not moving
 or he's not moving

 she stumbles closer
 knowing
 i need arms to carry me
 i can't get much further on my own
 before i fall

 her raincoat has come open
 he looks at her
 sees breasts
 pubic hair
 bruises

 a body streaked with soil
 and something that looks like blood

 it's on her face too
 blood
 a wisp of hair
 stuck to the red on her cheek

 she stares
 into the distance
 stares at him

 it's a man

 she stretches her arms out in front of her
 doesn't know if she's pushing him away
 or asking for help
 or maybe preserving
 some kind of balance

 she loses her balance
 and sinks to the ground

7.

*the woman comes closer
moving slower and slower
she stretches her hands out in front of her
a gesture that could just as easily
be a cry for help
or defence against danger*

*she is on a long journey
exhausted
determined
at the end of her rope*

*a few yards away from him
she stops
takes one last step
and sinks to the ground*

she lies motionless

in silence

8.

HE the dog sniffs at her
 pressing its nose against her cheek

af jongen

[off boy]

she's stopped moving

af

[off]

he goes up to her
sees flesh and blood
this is no ghost

he picks her up
and feels something in her
try to resist
and then surrender
her body goes limp in his arms

the coat hangs open

he looks at her
sees breasts
pubic hair
bruises

he tries not to look at the long red welts
wraps the fabric around her body again
as well as he can
takes her over his shoulder
and carries her inside

a hurt animal
hurt and soiled

she has to get clean
and warm

*he walks towards her
looks
picks her up
and carries her*

9.

inside

SHE something is carrying her

 or else she's floating
 out of this world
 with an escort of angels

 but no
 she feels herself draped over someone's shoulder
 she feels herself carried upstairs
 she feels herself laid on a cold tile floor

 only then does the cold really hit her
 creeping out of the ground into her body
 she shivers
 and curls into a ball

 he tugs at the thin fabric
 of her raincoat
 last line of defence
 between the world and her body
 trying to remove it

 she tries
 with powerless hands
 to keep the raincoat shut
 but she's too weak

 and half unconscious

 he pulls her arms out of the sleeves
 she lets them drop to her sides

 fine
 if it has to be this way
 she thinks
 if another piece of meat
 is going to be shoved into my body
 without my consent
 then I'm better off unconscious

 let this, she thinks,
 let this be only a bad dream

HE he turns the tap
 the water sputters at first
 then comes streaming out of the showerhead
 soon the cold bathroom is full of steam

he rinses the soil off her
the blood
and other dirt

she's no longer trembling

SHE she's sitting motionless
in the warm shower

HE with his bare hands he washes
the clay from her feet

SHE the waters flooded the earth for forty days

HE he wipes her face
gently
washing off the blood

SHE even the highest mountains were covered

HE he washes her hair
with shower gel

SHE every living thing on earth perished

HE he turns down the pressure

SHE everything that lived and breathed on land was wiped out

HE he runs the water
gently
over the bruises
that cover her skin

SHE for one hundred and fifty days the earth
was completely covered with water

HE and then she's clean

SHE he turns off the tap
wraps a big towel around her
and starts to dry her off

HE the way you dry off a calf
after a delivery

SHE the way you dry off a child

HE he lays her in bed

SHE she falls asleep

10.

HE she's sleeping

SHE she's dreaming

HE restless dreams

SHE when you dream
you relive your day
she would have preferred
a deep and dreamless sleep
sunk in oblivion
as long as it lasts

HE he picks up the dirty raincoat
to see if there's anything in the pockets

SHE sleep should be a safe warm nest
not a torture chamber

HE hair grips
a wet tissue
condoms

SHE the condoms aren't hers

HE a wad of banknotes
he smooths them out
three hundred euros

SHE not hers

HE a wallet

SHE hers

HE he puts the wallet into his back pocket

SHE why?

HE he doesn't know why

he turns around
switches off the light
closes the door

and lets her sleep

11.

flashback / dream

SHE

Mercedes
barnyard animals

blue horse
yellow pig
red hen

the engine's running

get in
someone waves her over
she doesn't know him

where's Andrei?

get in

she gets in the back
next to a child seat
the upholstery smells like a cigarette

she could do with a fag
strange
she hasn't smoked
since she was pregnant

gut gut alles gut *[fine, fine, everything's fine]*
vertraue mir *[trust me]*
'trust me'

she wishes he hadn't said that
a person you can trust
doesn't have to say that

she trusted Andrei

the driver lights a cigarette
she can feel his eyes in the rear-view mirror
she can see him rub his crotch

12.

HE he had never expected a woman
 to be lying in bed in his house
 ever again

 it makes his head spin

 she's lying in the double bed
 he stopped using long ago

 now that he's on his own
 he sleeps in the guest room

 in a single bed

 a farmer learns to live with the unexpected
 and life goes on

13.

flashback / dream

SHE

she felt the difference
when the car crossed the border
and thought to herself
a country that takes better care of its motorways
than mine does of its people
can't be a bad country
can it?

of course she'd heard the stories
and knew about the dark side
but the things that happened to other people
didn't have to happen to her

half her village
did seasonal work in the west
planting asparagus
plastering walls
picking orders at distribution centres
or housecleaning

the benefits of the European Union
why shouldn't she get her share?

you can't complain of bad luck
if you never take a chance

and she trusted Andrei

trouble always starts
with a woman trusting a man

14.

on the telephone

HE they've put him on hold again

ja *[yes]*
met Woldring *[Woldring speaking]*
Henk Woldring

ja
ja nee *[yeah no]*
ik bel voor de heer Lamberts *[I'm calling for Mr Lamberts]*

nee ik zou de heer Lamberts persoonlijk willen spreken
[no I'd like to speak to Mr Lamberts himself please]

when he calls the bank to speak to Mr Lamberts
the man he wants to speak to is Mr Lamberts
and it's urgent!

het is dringend *[it's urgent]*
nee dat gaat niet *[no that's not possible]*
goed *[ok]*
goed dan bel ik morgen weer *[ok i'll call again tomorrow then]*
ja dat snap ik *[yes I understand]*
ook goedendag *[you have a good day too]*

and now he can do the same thing all over again tomorrow

15.

flashback / dream

SHE

they drive past endless rows of windmills
chimney pipes flaring off gas at industrial sites
dark black voids – pastures or bottomless pits
and at the end of the world
where the land falls into the water
they stop

she gets out

ship fuel
exhaust fumes
wet dog
rotting waste

a door - open
inside she still smells exhaust fumes
and cigarette ashes
spilled drinks
and another smell
a sharp smell
sperm
the place reeks of old sex

two men drinking coffee
the driver sits down next to them
the plastic cups crunch in their hands

posprzątać? tutaj? *[clean up? here?]*

the men don't speak Polish
only Dutch

harsh
rough
cold

this landscape
these men
the language

full of guttural sounds
that start in your stomach
and come gagging out of your gullet

it's not talking
it's throwing up

Polish is an ice cold mountain stream
Dutch is an open sewer

a fourth man comes out of the toilet
without washing his hands

arbeiten hier? saubermachen? *[work here? clean up?]*

the men laugh

ja ja, saubermachen *[sure, sure, clean up]*

a man blocks the door
the second pulls her arms behind her back
the third tears open her skirt

and the fourth man takes –

with his unwashed hands, he –

they change places
and start all over

why isn't she biting
why isn't she scratching
why isn't she kicking

and when they're done
and she grabs her coat
to cover herself
the fourth man stuffs money into the pocket

arbeiten hier *[work here]*

he shoves her into a little room
with a dirty mattress
and a cracked sink
the door is locked

but not the window

16.

evening

HE he's at her bedside
 with a bowl of soup
 she has to eat doesn't she?

 she's still sleeping
 restless
 talking in her sleep

SHE *posprzątać? tutaj?* *[clean up? here?]*

HE he doesn't know what she's saying
 where does she come from?
 some eastern-bloc place?

 she moans
 shakes her head

SHE *nie* *[no]*
 nie

HE it's the kind of sleep
 where you get no rest
 he knows all about it
 the panic invades your dreams
 and you wake up knackered

 he sets the bowl of soup on the nightstand
 and lays his hand on her bare shoulder

SHE *nie*
 nie

HE he pulls back his hand
 turns out the light
 and leaves the room

17.

night

*she's still tossing and turning
more like fighting than sleeping*

*and he can't sleep either
he stares at the ceiling
until first light*

18.

morning

HE he's drinking coffee
 standing up
 at the counter

 storm in the distance
 a cloud spilling out grey darkness
 over the land

 all night he could hear her tossing and turning
 and groaning words
 in that foreign language

 she didn't calm down until morning
 he got out of bed

 there's not much in the wallet
 a few coins with an eagle
 zloty
 and a photo of two smiling faces

 a little girl
 and the woman in bed upstairs
 in his house

 nothing else
 no cards
 no ID
 no name

 he puts down the photo
 and drinks his coffee

19.

morning

SHE she wakes up in a room she doesn't recognize
stares at the crack in the ceiling
and tries to remember
where she is

every part of her body hurts

that's good
pain means life
life means future

she sits up
groans
wonders what and where and how
then pushes it away

on the nightstand there's a bowl of cold soup
she takes the bowl
and drinks the cold soup in great glugs

she hears voices
men's voices
she freezes

listening

HE *on the telephone*
ja

[yeah]

SHE not voices

HE *on the telephone*
ja met Henk

[yes this is Henk]

SHE a voice

HE *on the telephone*
Woldring

SHE one voice

HE *on the telephone*
ja goed ik wacht wel

[yeah sure i can wait]

SHE his voice
and then his silence

she sits on the edge of the bed
takes a deep breath
and stands up

pain

HE he hears creaking
 upstairs
 something else comes to mind
 and then he realizes:
 footsteps

 he hasn't heard footsteps in this house
 for a very long time

SHE she tries not to make a sound
 to make every step weightless

 it's raining outside
 she can hear the raindrops
 hitting the fields

HE he'll have to check the barn this morning
 see if the roof's still leaking

SHE she finds clothes in the wardrobe
 men's clothes
 she gets dressed
 rolls up the legs and the sleeves
 puts on a pair of coarse thick socks

 she shuffles to the door

HE he hears the creaking

SHE she hesitates
 opens the door
 listens

HE *on the telephone*
ja hallo *[yes hello]*
zesentwintigduizend *[twenty-six thousand]*
ja dat zal wel moeten *[yes it's the only way]*

SHE who's he calling?

HE *on the telephone*
o
en wanneer hoor ik dan... *[so when will i hear...]*
volgende week? *[next week?]*
kunt u niet... *[can't you...]*
goed *[OK]*
dan wacht ik een week *[then I'll wait a week]*

SHE he sighs

HE he sighs because everything takes time
 time he doesn't have
 because time is money
 money he doesn't have

SHE she goes out into the corridor
down the stairs
hesitates
hides behind a doorjamb
peers into the kitchen

he's standing at the counter
with his back to her
the sink is full of dirty cups
there's an unwashed pan on the filthy cooker

he takes a bite of his bread

HE bread with *hagelslag* [sprinkles]

SHE takes a gulp of coffee with his mouth full

HE washing down the food

SHE she sees her wallet on the counter
the photo beside it
the woman she was
smiles up at her
her daughter smiles up at her

a knot in her stomach

oh

HE he hears her
turns around

SHE she stares at the floor

HE he takes a cup out of the sink
rinses it off
and fills it with coffee

koffie? [coffee?]

SHE *dziękuję* [thank you]

HE *wat zeg je?* [beg your pardon?]

SHE *dziękuję* [thank you]

HE *ja* [yes]
van jou [it's yours]

SHE he returns the wallet

HE he found it in her coat

SHE *dziękuję* [thank you]
danke [thank you]

HE she presses the photo to her chest

SHE he picks up a slice of bread
pale, limp bread
and spreads margarine on it

HE kaas [cheese]
of hagelslag? [or sprinkles?]

SHE that language
like getting something stuck in your throat
as if the words stick to your palate
and won't come out

she imitates the guttural Dutch g sounds in hagelslag
ga gel ga

HE hagelslag

SHE he pours something gritty and brown
from a cardboard box
onto the bread

HE she wets her finger
dips it in the sprinkles
and tastes

SHE czekolada [chocolate]

HE chocolade
ja
hagelslag

SHE chocolate on bread
she's not a child

HE she mumbles something

SHE thank you for our daily bread

HE crosses herself
and starts to eat

SHE ha-gel-slag

HE ja

*they eat breakfast
drink coffee
standing at the counter
it's awkward*

SHE ich... ich bin Anna... [I... I am Anna...]
Anna Kryżanowska. [Anna Kryżanowska.]

long silence

- HE Woldring.
 Henk Woldring.
- SHE Wol-dring...
- HE mm-hm
- long silence*
it's awkward
- SHE ich... aus Polska... [*I... from Poland...*]
 Chorzów
- HE Polen? [*Poland?*]
- SHE tak [*yes*]
- HE wat moet je dan hier? [*then what are you doing here?*]
- SHE *repeating the sounds of the question*
 wat-moetje...?
- HE hier [*here*]
 waarom ben je hier [*why are you here*]
- SHE warum bin ich hier? [*why am I here?*]
- HE hm?
- SHE jesrem bezrobotna [*I am unemployed*]
 kein arbeit, kein geld [*no work, no money*]
 kein essen genug für mein kind [*not enough food for my child*]
 und mein mutter und mich [*and my mother and I*]
 aber dann in zeitung [*but then in the newspaper*]
 pokojówka gefragt [*maids wanted*]
 zimmermädchen [*chambermaids*]
 für hotel in Holandia [*for a hotel in Holland*]
 viel geld [*lots of money*]
- silence*
- SHE aber kein hotel [*but no hotel*]
- HE kein hotel
 it wasn't a hotel
 it wasn't a cleaning job
 now he understands
- long silence*
- HE ik zal je naar de politie brengen [*i'll bring you to the police*]
- SHE policja? [*police?*]
- HE ja

SHE nein [no]
 nicht [not]
 bitte nicht policja [please not police]
 nicht policja [not police]

HE ik zal je geld geven [i will give you money]
 dan kan je terug naar huis [so you can go home]

SHE *she repeats the sounds*
 trug naruis?

HE huis [home]
 hause [home]
 ik geef je geld [i'll give you money]
 geld [money]
 voor de reis naar hause [for the journey home]

he pulls out his wallet
takes a few banknotes
and holds them out to her
she pushes away his hand
and shakes her head

HE well what do you want from me then

SHE she needs to work
 she needs the money
 ich arbeiten hier [i'll work here]
 für geld [for money]
 ist gut? [is that ok?]

he puts away his money
puts his wallet back in his pocket

HE he can't offer her work
 he can't offer her money
 ik heb geen werk voor je [i have no job for you]

he leaves the house

SHE ja [yes]
 ist gut [it's ok]

she picks up a scrubbing brush
turns on the tap
and starts washing up

20.

*he's working
outside
repairs
trying to fix the leak in the roof*

*she's working too
inside the house
washing up
tidying up
sweeping the floor
getting the house clean*

*when he comes inside
for a cup of coffee and a sandwich
he sees her cleaning*

silence

they stare at each other

21.

inside

SHE she can't go back now
with nothing to offer
but defeat and humiliation

she came to work
to feed her daughter
to give her a future

going home empty-handed
would only make everything worse

there's just one way to glue together
her shattered promise
and that's by staying

HE he is hurled back through time
years and years
when he sees her scrubbing the floor

SHE every eight months
human cells replace themselves

HE same motions
different woman

SHE and every twenty-eight days
your skin is replaced

HE it scares him
and touches him

SHE it's only a matter of time
until your body's no longer a body
that someone damaged

HE he pushes away
both feelings

and stares at her
in silence

SHE as long as he doesn't hit her
everything will be fine

ich arbeiten hier
putzfrau

[i work here]
[cleaning woman]

HE she wrings out the cloth
the water is black
the part she scrubbed
is so much lighter than the rest

SHE	putzfrau ist gut?	<i>[cleaning woman] [is OK?]</i>
HE	he walks past her into the kitchen pours a cup of coffee grabs a slice of bread and lays it on the counter	
SHE	she goes to the counter stands beside him takes a clean plate from the cupboard puts the plate on the counter and the bread on the plate ist gut?	<i>[is OK?]</i>
HE	he sighs he nods	
SHE	danke	<i>[thank you]</i>
HE	he pours her some coffee they drink in silence	

22.

later, evening

HE dusk is creeping into the kitchen
he switches on a lamp
and drives it away

SHE he did the cooking

HE nothing special
meatballs
potatoes
green beans

SHE a man who cooks
where she comes from
that's something special

HE he takes his fork
and mashes his potatoes

eet smakelijk

[bon appetit]

she folds her hands

SHE thank you lord for this meal

HE she's praying

SHE bless the man who made this food

HE enough of that
it's just meat potatoes and veg

SHE and bless this house that shelters us

HE waxy potatoes

SHE he's not praying

HE he saw god walk out on him years ago
away across the fields
towards the bloodstained horizon

his boots squelched
in the soil
with every step

god never once looked back

SHE maybe he should have called out to god

HE he won't ask anyone to stay
god can suit himself

SHE why does she still believe in god?
 she isn't sure
 maybe it's harder
 not to believe in anything

 if you really believe there's no fire in the world
 to give you warmth and light
 then why would you go on
 stumbling in the dark

HE if there is a god
 then he's a dick
 god is een lul!

[god is a dick!]

SHE **amen**

HE **ja**
 amen

*they eat – he only uses a fork, with one arm around the plate, shovelling it in
she eats neatly, with a knife and fork and good table manners
after dinner she clears off the table
he gets out two bowls and two spoons
a carton of vanilla custard
and hagelslag
they have their pudding*

23.

they eat their pudding

SHE outside
 the dog
 is barking

HE there must be a car
 coming up the drive

SHE barking

HE a car at this time of night

SHE she wants him to stay in his chair

HE that's strange

SHE she doesn't want anything to exist
 except him
 and her
 and two bowls of custard

HE he gets up
 goes to the window
 pulls open the curtain

SHE two headlights
 cutting through the dark
 his shadow flickers onto the kitchen wall

HE what's that car doing here
 this is a private road

SHE only trouble comes unannounced
 the dog barks

HE **rustig jongen** *[easy boy]*

SHE the car rolls to a stop
 she can hear the engine running
 a muffled animal growl

HE he puts on his boots
 and looks outside

SHE she knows she should stay where she is
 but she stands up
 goes to the window
 hooks her index finger around the curtain
 and peeks outside

HE there's a grey Mercedes
 much too close
 to the front door

SHE blue horse
 yellow pig
 red hen

HE at the wheel
 there's a guy smoking

SHE the fourth man

HE he sees the door open

SHE with his unwashed hands

HE and steps out of the car

SHE fear crawls into her stomach
 ice-cold claws squeeze her intestines
 she needs to use the toilet

HE whenever a stranger comes onto my land
 the dog barks

rustig jongen

[easy boy]

the man stands too close to us
too close

SHE they talk
 what are they talking about
 they're talking about her
 they must be talking about her

HE this man doesn't sound
 like he comes from around here
 there's something cold in his voice
 much colder than these parts

SHE the telephone call
 he betrayed her
 they've come to get her

trouble always starts
with a woman trusting a man

HE have you seen a Polish girl
 the man says
 tobacco on his breath
 doesn't speak any Dutch

SHE she shuffles away from the window
 creeps under the kitchen table

and curls up into a ball
and small as she can get

like a child who thinks she's invisible
if she keeps her eyes shut

or a mouse trying to hide from a cat
in its own shadow

HE Anna is her name
the man says
she's a little confused
he grins
the dog barks

rustig jongen

[easy boy]

SHE maybe she should resign herself
to a life like an open sewer
if it means she can send money home
then at least she'll have got what she came for

she won't be the first woman
to sacrifice herself for her offspring
as long as her body
is still worth something
maybe she should cash in

she feels the food rising
swallows bile
still needs to use the toilet

HE the man is trying to see inside the house
he flicks his cigarette at the chicken coop
and gets into the Mercedes

he says fine
we'll see

and drives off

SHE she hears the car growling
and fading away
until there's only silence
she's still under the table
shaking
paralysed

she hears footsteps
two boots coming into the house
tracking mud on the floor

HE hij is weg

[he's gone]

SHE she gets up
waits for the shaking to stop
and then clears the dirty bowls
and spoons from the table

HE *laat maar staan* *[just leave them]*

SHE she turns on the hot water
squeezes detergent into the sink
takes the brush and whips up the foam

HE does she have to do that now?
dat kan morgen wel *[that can wait until tomorrow]*

SHE she starts washing up

HE he sighs
and walks out of the kitchen
into the living room

*she washes up
as if cleaning can calm her down
and the household routine can make her safe again*

24.

SHE this country is not like home
 the landscape goes on and on here
 you can see to the horizon

 the better you can see the world outside
 the better you can see inside yourself

 where she comes from
 a person can't see beyond
 the first concrete block
 the first red stoplight
 the first car that catches you in its headlights

 no more freedom than a hen
 in a factory farm

HE here there's nothing
 between soil and sky
 no steel concrete glass
 just a few trees here and there

SHE (but she likes to see
 their crooked fingers
 squeezing the clouds
 and the clouds
 full and moist
 welcoming their touch)

HE and sometimes a clump of humanity
 alone, boots in the mud
 arms in the air
 reaching for something
 that doesn't want to be caught

SHE that doesn't want to be caught

 days form a chain
 and what was new
 grows more familiar

 she likes the world
 when it holds still like this
 just waiting for the next thing
 in the heartbeat when the danger
 may still be waiting
 but for now the fear has been forgotten

25.

HE another trip to the bank
why should it help this time?
ik ga even naar de stad

[i'm popping into town]

he exits

she cleans the house, slowly and thoroughly

SHE she enjoys this job
the life of a hotel cleaner:
each day the same routine
aimed at wiping away every possible trace
of human presence
she feels like an archaeologist here
recovering a human civilization
that was lost under centuries and centuries of rubbish

it's rewarding work
sweeping years of dust out of corners and crannies
scrubbing crusts of dirt off tiles
and reclaiming the house from the soil
that walks in on footsoles

this is not cleaning
this is a sacred ritual
of cleansing
and purification

*wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin*

hoovering is grace

she caresses the mantelpiece clean
kisses the staircase
and wrings the black water out of the rag
four times

from inside a frame a young woman in black and white
smiles at her
she dusts her off

she digs the house
out of its past

there's a wardrobe filled with colours
with clothes
women's clothes

the cloth bag on top
tied shut with a white ribbon

lost all its fragrance years ago

she closes the door
this is still too fragile
to expose to the present

and she doesn't dare clean his desk either
folders bulging with papers
letters sticking out
printed in red ink
mountains of figures
and desperate calculations in chicken scratch
what if there's some kind of system in this chaos
and her cleaning hand
disturbs the delicate balance

she picks up a form
full of words crossed out
with angry lines
and tries to see through them
to the despair pressed into the paper
so hard that it tore

she knows bureaucracy
it's burned into in her DNA
figures are more important than human lives
a lesson passed down
from generation to generation

she had thought that this country was different
but even here forms can grind up grown men
in their jaws

and ink is not so different from blood

HE she doesn't hear him enter the room

SHE she doesn't hear him enter the room
or notice him watching her
until he turns off the vacuum cleaner with his foot

przepraszam

[sorry]

sorry
she says
it's none of my business

HE she looks at him like a scared animal

SHE he thrusts a bag into her hands

HE **voor jou** *[for you]*

SHE there’s a new toothbrush in it
toothpaste
soap shampoo
and a little book

dziękuję *[thank you]*

*he points at the book
it’s a Polish-Dutch dictionary*

she leafs through it

SHE **dank u wel** *[thank you]*

HE **hm**

26.

he's in the barn

working on a tractor engine

she's leafing through the book in the kitchen

trying out sentences

SHE koedemiddak meneer *[good afternoon, sir]*
 hoe ghaat het ermaej *[how are you]*
 voelt oe theej ghoeveel souker *[would you like some tea how much sugar]*

this language fights back
it feels like her tongue's made of clay
speaking words of iron

like ploughing a field

koedemiddak meneer

he enters the room

HE goedemiddag
SHE hoe ghaat het ermaej?
HE hm?
SHE hoe ghaat het ermaej?
HE oh
 hoe gaat 't ermee
 hoe gaat 't ermee
SHE *slight improvement*
 hoe gaat 't ermaej
HE ja
SHE voelt oe threej?
HE thee
 ja
SHE thee

she pours the tea

SHE ghoeveel souker?
HE hoeveel suiker
 twee klontjes *[two lumps]*
SHE twee klontjes?
HE twee klontjes

he holds up two fingers

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HE twee

she adds the sugar

they drink the tea

27.

later

he's doing paperwork

she's practicing

(the first four lines, up to 'prima en met oe', can be delivered simultaneously)

- HE his filing system is a nightmare
folders falling to pieces
pages stamped with misery
- SHE *ghoe ghaat ghet ermaej* [how are you]
hoe ghaat het ermaej
ghoe gaat het ermaej
prima en met oe [fine how are you]
- HE it's never been easy
he's always worked hard
no rest but sleep
no peace but work
still at least it was a fair fight
and sometimes you could win
- SHE *prima en met oe*
u
outstekent [outstanding]
outstekent
tot zziens [see you later]
vvelteroesten [sleep tight]
- HE this country could use a good famine
maybe then these morons
would learn the meaning of gratitude
misschien krijgen ze dan [maybe that would put]
wat dankbaarheid in hun donder [some gratitude into their thick heads]
- SHE *donder?*
- HE instead of eating like human beings
they feed like animals
processed imitation food from impoverished countries
not food, but fodder
just the same when they shovel it in
as it is coming out
geen voedsel, maar stront [not food, but shit]
stront! [shit!]
- SHE *stront?*
- HE *stront!*

silence – he gets up

HE ik ga naar bed *[i'm going to bed]*
 weltrusten *[sleep tight]*

SHE vvelteroesten

28.

night

SHE at night the danger
 slips into her dreams

 she feels fingers fists flesh
 force their way inside her

 she's just as powerless
 as the first time

 the fourth man slams
 his fist into her face

 while he rapes her

 it makes him laugh

HE her nights are restless
 filled with violence
 he can hear her tossing and turning
 groaning

 sometimes a scream

 he is powerless against the demons
 that torment her in her dreams

SHE sometimes she sees her daughter
 and remembers what's waiting for her
 at the end of this journey

 all her sacrifices are worth it
 as long as she can give her child a chance
 she never had herself

 and sometimes the darkness opens its jaws
 and she sees the fourth man
 and other men queued up behind him
 waiting their turn to enter her

 they're not good nights
 they're not sweet dreams
 they take their toll

HE he takes a glass of water
 and sits down beside her

SHE *nie, nie... nie, proszę...* *[no, no... no, please]*
 proszę... nein, nicht... *[please... no, don't...]*
 bitte nicht.. nie, nie... *[please don't... no, no...]*

HE he lays his hand on her shoulder

SHE she's not startled

HE she drinks
taking tiny sips
and touches his hand

SHE **dank oe wel** *[thank you]*

29.

morning

HE time to feed the chickens

SHE *mag ik oe hel-pen?* *[may i help you?]*

HE she walks with him
to the end of the farmyard
where the chickens are scratching

SHE *kurczak* *[chicken]*
eh?

HE *kip* *[chicken]*

SHE he takes a handful of grain from the bucket
and shows it to her

HE *twee handjes* *[two handfuls]*

SHE *twee hand-jes*
he nods
and passes her the bucket

HE *roep maar* *[just call out to them]*
kip-kip-kip-kip-kip

SHE *kip-kip-kip-kip-kip*

HE the chickens run over
she scatters two handfuls of feed

SHE it's good
to give food
to living things

HE she smiles

30.

later

SHE he doesn't talk much

HE he doesn't talk much

SHE but that's all right
most things aren't worth
the trouble of saying

HE what has to be said, he says
the rest speaks for itself
and what speaks for itself
can remain unspoken
because that's – everything else is –
that's just making things complicated

that's how he sees it, there's no storm
behind his eyelids, no
desire he doesn't dare express
in words, no reason
to bite his tongue until it bleeds,
no shield, no armour,
no hidden agenda

there's the soil
and there's work to be done

and there's not a lot more to be said about that

SHE does he think she's pretty?

HE he doesn't think
in terms of pretty or ugly

SHE he's a man

HE sure
he's a man

SHE he grabs her breast

HE by accident
she falls
she's cleaning the window

SHE she takes a wrong step
loses her balance

HE he grabs her

SHE he grabs her breast

HE he catches her

SHE he must feel something

HE the way animals feel something

 but he's a man

 he can control himself

SHE push it away

HE and she

SHE she's startled

 the touch of his hand there

 brings an image

 a memory

 a bad one

HE he suspected as much

SHE they won't talk about it

HE the less said the better

SHE he lets go of her

 every twenty-eight days

 your skin is replaced

 in four weeks

 his fingerprints

 will have disappeared

 from her body

31.

later

SHE she wonders if she could take root here
if she would start to sprout
form buds and blossoms
can a person transplant her roots
halfway across a continent
and flourish?

HE this land belonged to his parents
his grandfather
his forefathers

this is where he was born
and where he will die

he can't survive in any other soil

SHE birds take to the air
they look at him
he stares out over the fields

HE a few setbacks
a little hard luck
doesn't trouble a farmer

rain or wind or drought
can't be predicted
it's just a risk
he has to live with

but leave the farm
never

you don't ask a fish
why it goes on swimming

there's soil in his veins
there's no other place he can breathe
he's all tangled up with this business
cut him loose
and both will die
the farm and the farmer
heart pain love soul flesh

he's not a farmer
he's the stuff of this farm
he's in everything you see here
from horizon to horizon
take that away from him
and there's nothing left

a skinful of air
nobody inside
no more than a husk
ready for the grave

SHE the dog barks

HE *rustig jongen* *[easy boy]*

SHE a man in uniform cycles into the farmyard

HE the postman

SHE he gives her a strange look
there's a gleam in his eyes
a look she's seen before
in the eyes of men

HE nothing good ever arrives in the post

SHE the man gets off his bicycle
comes closer
envelope and papers in his hand

HE 'has to be signed for'
he says
still staring at her

SHE the postman keeps staring at her
and rubbing his trousers

HE the envelope's thinner than he'd expected
or hoped
it's a letter from the bank

SHE the man lifts his hand
gets on his bicycle
and leaves

32.

on the telephone

HE ja hallo *[yes hello]*
 u spreekt met Henk Woldring *[this is Henk Woldring]*
 mag ik de heer Lamberts van u? *[may i speak to Mr Lamberts?]*

 wat *[what]*
 nee *[no]*
 hij weet waar het over gaat *[he knows what it's about]*

 of course mr Lamberts knows what it's about
 it's about a loan
 to tide him over until the harvest

 morgen? *[tomorrow?]*

 ik wil weten hoe het zit met mijn overbruggingskrediet
 [i want to know what's going on with my bridge loan]

 maar mag ik dan de heer Lamberts van u *[but may I speak to Mr Lamberts]*
 alstublieft? *[please?]*

SHE he rubs his neck
 wrinkles crease his forehead
 his voice sounds different
 as if there's
 sand in it

HE ja maar ik wacht nu al... *[yeah but i've already been waiting for –]*
 dat heeft er toch niets mee... *[what does that have to do with any –]*

SHE sand mud gravel
 she's hearing a man being ground down
 by forces greater than the individual

 it's the sound of her country's history

HE he knows the bank is not the Easter Bunny
 that's stating the bloody obvious isn't it
 and he's not asking for chocolate eggs now is he?

 daar kan ik toch niks aan doen *[but what can i do about that]*
 ik kan daar niks aan doen *[there's nothing I can do –]*
 ja *[yes]*
 ja *[yes]*
 ze hebben gezegd dat het snel geregeld zou worden

 [they told me it would all be sorted soon]

 omdat dat niet snel genoeg is! *[because that's not soon enough]*

 ja *[yes]*
 en wanneer is meneer Lamberts er? *[and when will Mr Lamberts be in?]*

goed

[all right]

he hangs up

another trip to the bank tomorrow

33.

later – he’s working on his tractor

SHE he’s working in the barn again

HE that fucking thing keeps wheezing and rattling

no tractor no plough
no plough and the soil is stubborn
and stubborn soil
yields a poor crop

SHE his hands are black with grease
his shirt sticky with sweat
he smells of diesel

that’s how her father looked
he had concrete in his blood
asphalt for skin
and he talked with his fists

a man from another life
another world
another time

sometimes she thinks she misses him

HE when the ape stopped eating seeds
and put them in the ground instead
looked beyond the short term
and grew crops in the fields
he became human
that’s how civilization began
it began with farmers

when the farmers go
so will civilization

SHE was it swords that were beaten into ploughshares
or ploughshares into swords

she’s not sure anymore

HE the tractor won’t start

SHE she brings him tea

alstoeblijft meneer

[there you are sir]

HE *de trekker start niet*

[the tractor won’t start]

SHE *as if she understands*
ah

HE *laat maar*

[forget it]

SHE	thee	[tea]
HE	ja laat maar	[yeah] [just leave it]

silence

he tinkers with the tractor

trying to transform his emotions into physical strength

HE what do they know about it

 to those bankers in their paper world
 a farmer is nothing more than a few figures
 with plus or minus signs in front of them

 one signature makes the difference
 between surviving and going under

 but what do they know?

 city folk who have only seen the country in children's books
 who run from a cow
 because they think it's a bull

 they think grain comes from a factory
 and they're scared of animals
 that aren't in cages

 they couldn't care less
 about passing things down
 from generation to generation
 and they think you can toss away history
 like waste paper
 into the recycling bin

 they pull up roots without a second thought
 and don't understand this landscape
 is my legacy

 they stare at computer screens from nine to five
 the rest of the time they stare at the TV

 to feel your body on the land
 and the land in your body
 and the soil in your veins

 they don't know what that means

 the farmer stands in his field,
 rain or shine, with his feet in the clay,
 the same clay where his father
 and his father's father stood

 and he's bloody well going to stay there!

silence

SHE thee

HE ja

silence

they drink tea

he goes back to work on the tractor

she looks at the tractor

then at the plough

touches one of the ploughshares

HE kijk uit [*be careful*]
 scherp [*sharp*]

 is een ploeg [*it's a plough*]

SHE ploeg [*plough*]

HE een vierschaar-wentelploeg [*a four-furrow reversible plough*]

SHE vier-schaar-wentel-ploeg [*four-furrow reversible plough*]

he climbs into the tractor

and turns the key

the tractor starts

34.

later
evening

SHE she's standing at the counter
 four pots on the stove
 a woman doing the cooking
 old-fashioned maybe
 but in this house
 it feels like she's restoring some kind of balance

HE it smells
 strange

SHE he washes his hands

HE she's set the table

SHE that's important
 food is not an afterthought
 you have to give food
 your time and attention

HE he sits down at the table

SHE so does she
 she closes her eyes
 and prays

HE all that praying
 why thank someone
 who chased you out of your house
 out of your country, over the border
 to an unknown world
 where you're at the mercy
 of unknown men

SHE she prays because after she fell
 she was given the chance to stand up again
 she doesn't pray because of what happened before that
 but because she hopes
 that now that she's standing again
 she can take a step
 and who knows maybe another

HE *impatiently*
 ja ja
 amen

SHE *emphatically*
 ja
 amen

HE she brings the foreign food to the table

SHE placki ziemniaczane [potato pancakes]
pierogi [dumplings]

HE ja

silence

SHE is Poolse eten [it's Polish food]

HE she serves the food

SHE is lekker [tastes good]

HE we'll see about that

SHE he picks up his fork
pulls the plate to the edge of the table
and starts to eat
shovelling it into his mouth

eet sma-kelijk [bon appetit]

HE ja [yes]
lekker [tastes good]

they eat

35.

a little later

HE he makes coffee
 she does the washing-up

 very carefully

SHE the movements she makes seem to have some importance
 beyond just removing
 scraps of food
 she turns the washing-up
 into a ritual
 a sacred act

 there's something beautiful
 about paying attention to things

36.

HE the evening becomes a ritual too

SHE when the cold and darkness come
and the wind pulls at the house
and the beams creak in the roof

HE she sits in the armchair by the hearth

SHE practicing that foreign language
forcing the words out of her throat

HE he sits at a desk
staring down at piles of bank statements
objections calculations
figures that cut off his air supply
figures with teeth
that go straight for the throat

SHE *cheerfully*
wat ies het hier gezellig *[how cosy it is, the two of us here]*

silence

HE *ik ga slapen* *[i'm going to bed]*

37.

morning

SHE the black suitcase
 lies open on the table

HE he puts his folders in it

SHE full of calculations
 full of bloodthirsty numbers
 that dig their nails into his hands
 when he pushes the suitcase shut

 she can see the fear
 behind the determined look on his face
 the fear of the mouse
 when it faces the cat

HE another trip to the bank

ik ga even naar de stad

[i'm popping into town]

SHE he steps into his shoes and leaves
 she watches him through the window
 he gets into his blue Volvo
 – no stickers – and leaves

 she opens the windows
 the spring rushes in
 – chirping birds blossoms pollen –
 and fills the house

 she can feel the life
 returning to the land

 she can feel life
 small
 and fragile
 like a bird
 fluttering its wings
 in her chest

 she straightens up
 cleans
 and hovers

*wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin*

 hoovering is grace

 she caresses the mantelpiece clean
 kisses the staircase

and wrings the black water out of the rag
four times

from inside a frame a young black-and-white woman
smiles at her
she dusts her off

she hesitates in front of the wardrobe
the one filled with colours
with clothes
women's clothes

she runs the dustcloth carefully
along the edges of the panelled door
along the top of the wardrobe
along the doorknobs

she opens the wardrobe

picks up the cloth bag
tied shut with a white ribbon
and inhales the lost fragrance

lavender

she takes a dress
and tries it on

it suits her

38.

HE she doesn't hear him come in
still holding his suitcase
he comes upstairs
he hears her singing

she sings a cheerful Polish song

HE his yesterdays glide like a veil
over his todays
he has to blink
to persuade himself
he's in the present
and not some distant past
a past that was different
that still had a different future
a future that felt as deceptive as love
but was smashed to smithereens
by sheer indifference

SHE she didn't hear him come in
she sees him in the mirror
the way he looks at her

HE he looks at her
but not at *her*
but at
it doesn't matter anyway

SHE **przepraszam**
sorry
she says
about the dress
she hopes he doesn't mind

HE he doesn't know whether he minds

SHE she asks with a gesture
should i take it off

HE leave it on
he gestures back

SHE how do you like it
she asks
she gestures

HE he walks out of the room

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SHE still it feels good
 to slide into another person's life
 to be someone else for a while

she goes on singing

39.

SHE through the window she sees him
 ploughing the field

HE nice even rows

SHE the gleaming ploughshares
 turn over the dark soil

HE weeds are buried underground
 the earth can breathe again
 the field will soon be ready for planting

SHE white cotton balls drift through the blue
 screeching gulls land in the fresh furrows

 gulls?

HE they come from the sea

SHE she's never seen the sea

HE just beyond the horizon the sea is churning
 eating away at the land
 making islands wander

SHE these are glorious days

 the way every day should be
 the farmer in his field
 the plough turning over
 the field as flat as a billiard table

HE she cleans the house
 splashes the windows with hot water
 washes off the layer of dust
 scrubs at the mould between the bathroom tiles

SHE he pays her

 her first wages

HE what do you pay a person?
 he has no idea

SHE it's more than she expected

HE a hundred-euro note
 two fifties
 and three twenties

SHE foreign money
 the money she came for
 money she can send home

- HE he hopes it's enough
 hopes he's not insulting her
 or treating her like a servant
 or a slave
- SHE *dank oe wel meneer* *[thank you sir]*
- HE later that day while she's writing a letter
 – the money's already in the envelope –
 he can't concentrate on his bookkeeping
- SHE she's still wearing that dress
- HE she puts the letter in with the money
 licks the flap
 and shuts the envelope
- SHE these are their days
 he ploughs
 she cleans
- HE the low bank of clouds on the horizon
 looks like a snowcapped mountain
- SHE there are no mountains in Holandia
- HE this country never goes uphill
 only down
- SHE he ploughs
 she brings him food
 tea
 an apple
- HE these are their days
 and these are good days
- SHE they don't talk much
- HE when the days are good
 you don't need a lot of words
- SHE and these are good days
- HE until the postman comes round again
- SHE not good?
- HE nothing good ever arrives in the post

40.

slams down the telephone

HE maybe maybe
 what does that mean maybe

 you looked me straight in the eyes
 Mr Lamberts
 straight in the eyes

 and no you may not give me some advice

 no I'm not going anywhere
 the only place I'm going is right here

 because I'd never dream of leaving
 or selling or moving
 or letting anything drive me out
 not floods or earthquakes
 not government officials
 and not a bunch of bank clerks

 no not even under these regrettable circumstances

 I'm not leaving this farm until I'm dead

pause

sighs

another trip to the bank next week

SHE

eten is klaar

[dinner's ready]

SHE **bidden**

HE **nee**

SHE **zdrowaś maryjo, łaski pełna, pan z tobą**
błogostawionaś ty między niewiastami
[Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you,
blessed art thou among women]

he tries to take his plate back
but her grip is too tight

SHE **i błogostawiony owoc żywota twój, jesus**
[and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus]

HE **jesus!**

SHE **święta maryjo, matko boza**
[Holy Mary, Mother of God]

HE **onze vader die in de hemel zijt**
uw naam worde geheiligd uw rijk come
uw wil geschiede opaardezoals in de hemel
geef ons heden ons dagelijks brood
en vergeef ons onze schulden zo ook wij vergeven
aan onze schuldenaren en breng ons niet in de beproeving
maar verlos ons van het kwade
amen
[our father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive
those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil
amen]

SHE **amen**

HE **stomme trut** *[stupid cow]*

he starts eating
big bites
soon his plate is almost empty
he burps

SHE **he still looks like something's bothering him**
maar *[but]*
is niks *[it's nothing]*
dus? *[right?]*

HE **niks** *[nothing]*

SHE **oh dan ies goed** *[oh, then it's ok]*

silence – they eat

SHE *wat ies het hier gezellig* *[how cosy, the two of us here together]*

they both burst out laughing

ik weet niet
dat is zoals het is

[i dunno]
[that's how it is]

SHE zoals het is

HE ja

SHE 'just how it is'?
she doesn't understand
dat snap ik niet

[i don't understand]

HE shrugs

SHE jij slechte man?

[are you a bad man?]

HE is he a bad man?
he's a very bad man
heel slecht

[very bad]

silence

he growls

she laughs

he howls like a wolf

they both laugh

he grabs her – like a wolf

they wrestle

their eyes meet...

will he kiss her?

... they shyly look away

SHE welterusten

[sleep tight]

HE ja

she exits

he whimpers like a wolf

43.

he dreams

HE last day
SHE last day?
HE of ploughing
 the earth has been turned over
 woken up
 it's ready to bear fruit
SHE you're kissing the earth awake
HE hm
 yeah
SHE it's warm outside

silence

HE won't be long now before the hawthorn blooms,
 the briar rose
 the elderberry trees
 the blackthorn and the willow
 it's so beautiful here
SHE yes it's beautiful here
HE the world seems so far away
 from here
 sometimes i feel completely cut off from humanity
 like on an island
 and when the wheat comes bursting out of the ground
 and the tall ears are waving like gold
 from horizon to horizon, then
 then everything is all right
SHE everything is all right
HE yes
SHE everything will be all right
HE everything will be all right

44.

a little later

HE the tractor made it through the season
the ploughshares are dark with clay

SHE he hoses them down
with a high-pressure cleaner

HE she washes the cabin windows
makes the tractor shine

SHE the dog barks

HE **rustig jongen** *[easy boy]*

SHE the sound of an engine
high and grating

HE she stands half behind him
keeping close
using him as a shield

SHE behind the line of trees
a dot appears in the distance
approaching fast

HE the postman
he has a new moped

SHE the postman
fear turns into relief
relief into hope

HE the postman rides up to the house
and gropes in his bag for a letter

SHE a letter

HE 'a letter'
the postman says
'from Poland'

SHE **Polen?**

HE 'is she from Poland?'
the postman asks

SHE **een brief uit Polen?** *[a letter from Poland?]*

HE 'is this your Polish bride?'

SHE **voor mij?** *[for me?]*

HE 'is your name Anna?'

SHE ja

HE ‘Anna Kree-zuh-now-skuh?’

SHE Kryżanowska
 ja

HE ‘then it’s for you
 yes’

SHE she snatches the letter out of his hands
 when she sees who sent it
 her heart leaps
 and
 she laughs
 and runs inside

HE the postman follows her with his eyes
 ‘well well’ he says
 ‘and *i* have a new moped’
 after the silence
 he starts it up
 and rides away

45.

a little later

the kettle on the stove starts to whistle

he turns off the gas

she's not in the kitchen

or in the living room

she's upstairs

she's lying on her bed

she's crying

HE o
 je huilt *[you're crying]*

SHE ja

silence

SHE brief van Krystina *[letter from Krystina]*

HE slecht nieuws? *[bad news?]*

SHE slecht...? *[bad?]*

 nee *[no]*

 waarom? *[why?]*

 why would it be bad news?

HE nou, tranen *[well, tears]*

SHE goede tranen *[good tears]*

HE oh
 he didn't know there was any such thing as good tears

SHE it's not sadness she feels
 not only sadness
 more than that

she gives him a drawing

HE wat is dit *[what's this?]*

SHE van Krystina *[from Krystina]*

HE mooi *[very nice]*

 he sees chickens

 and a dog

 and is that her?

 ben jij dit? *[is that you?]*

SHE ja

HE en dit?

SHE *een boer* *[a farmer]*

HE *ah*
ja
natuurlijk *[of course]*
the farmer of course

SHE *ben jij* *[it's you]*

HE *ik?* *[me]*

silence

he takes a closer look

HE he's never been in a drawing before

he smiles

he gives back the drawing

46.

evening

they're sitting by the hearth

it's pouring outside, but inside it's warm and cosy

he's staring into the flames

she's looking at the framed black-and-white photograph of the young woman

he sees her looking

HE *dat is mijn moeder* *[that's my mother]*

SHE *zij is dood?* *[she's dead?]*

HE *ja*
his mother died almost twenty years ago

SHE *een jouw vader* *[and your father]*

HE *ja mijn vader ook* *[yes my father too]*

his father died fifteen years ago
that's when he took over the place

the last in a long line

it's not what you hope for
after all those generations
to be the last one
the one who turns out the lights

but

it's not that everything was better in the old days
farmers died faster, younger,
and the pain cut deeper into their bodies,
but at least the whole thing was real

and they were free, independent,
in charge of our lives

no one could tell a farmer what to do
his own master, no one's servant
a farmer took orders from nothing
but the land

and no one
but god
could judge him

alleen god! *[only god!]*

SHE *god?*

HE ja
 god
 he's moved on now too
 everything's moved on
 the baker
 the butcher
 the grocer
 no shops left around here

 no children left
 in the school where he went to school
 no children left at all

 only old men

SHE he's not an old man

HE and they disappear too

silence

then she starts to sing

a Polish song

wistful

their eyes meet

but they're too afraid to touch

when the song is done – silence

silence

47.

morning

HE all night
 the wind tugged at the house

SHE now the sun's shining through the clouds

 making a halo
 in the old days
 they said it was proof that god exists

 some people still feel him
 in the light
 and the heat
 they feel him in the hope
 of a life where gravity
 doesn't weigh so heavy on their shoulders
 that their feet plough furrows in the earth with every step

 but hope is treacherous
 you put away your shield
 strip off your armour
 stand naked before the world and life

 hope drowns out the alarm signals

 the dog barks

HE *rustig jongen* *[easy boy]*

SHE the dog keeps barking

HE *rustig* *[easy]*

SHE a beast
 comes growling up the drive

HE a car

SHE blue horse
 yellow pig
 red hen

HE a grey Mercedes

SHE he goes out the front door
 into the farmyard
 as if he's the knight
 who can stop the Apocalypse single-handed

HE an unwanted guest

SHE the fourth man

HE he'll shoo him off the farmyard

SHE the dog barks

HE **rustig jongen**

SHE she moves away from the window

HE the Mercedes rolls right up to his feet
still growling
as the stranger from before
swings the car door open

'good morning' he says

the dog whimpers

'here i am again'

ja
daar ben je weer

SHE 'there you are again'

HE through the open front door
the man tries to look inside

'you have something of mine'

o?

'i'm the employer
of Miss Anna Kryżanowska'

wat wil je van me

SHE 'what do you want from me'

HE 'a man of business, i like that
it's very simple
we've lost revenue
because of you
but we'll work it out
as soon as you reimburse us
say 25,000

we'll have nothing left to discuss'

SHE she wants to vomit up her fear
but all that trickles out of her is hope

the fear's still inside her
a hard bitter ball in her belly

HE 'so'
says the man
'do we have a deal?'

SHE the dog barks

HE *nee*

SHE the dog barks

HE ‘you can’t or you won’t?’

SHE the fourth man says nothing

HE ‘then we’ll be needing the woman back’

SHE the dog barks

HE *nee*

SHE ‘no’

HE *en nou van mijn erf af
oprotten*

SHE ‘and now get the fuck off my property’

SHE the dog barks

HE ‘i’m afraid’
the man says
‘that you don’t understand’

SHE the dog barks

HE ‘let me explain one more time’

SHE the dog barks

HE the man pulls a pistol out of his pocket
pretty small
smaller than you would think
but how big does a bullet have to be
to do its damage?

SHE the dog barks

HE the man shoots

SHE the dog howls

HE ‘all right’
the man says
‘why don’t you sleep on it’
he gets back in the Mercedes
and drives away

SHE another wave
of vomit
nothing left but bile

she keeps throwing up
like her innards are trying to come out

HE he kneels beside the dog
its body
still warm
bleeding out
he wraps his arms around the dog
embraces it
feels the final spasms

SHE she pulls herself up off the floor
goes outside
and kneels down next to him

HE his face is covered with blood

SHE she flings her arms around him
clutches him
buries herself in him

HE **komt goed**
Anna
komt goed
everything will be all right

SHE neither one of them believes it

48.

a little later – on the telephone

HE	ja meneer Lamberts	<i>[yes Mr Lamberts]</i>
	ja met	<i>[yes this is]</i>
	precies	<i>[exactly]</i>
	ja	<i>[yes]</i>
	nee	<i>[no]</i>
	dus ik krijg het niet	<i>[so i won't get it]</i>
	nee	<i>[no]</i>
	je meneer Lamberts	<i>[yes Mr Lamberts]</i>
	dat is jammer ja	<i>[that's unfortunate yes]</i>
	nee	
	nee	
	het is zoals het is	<i>[that's just how it is]</i>
	niks aan te doen	<i>[nothing to be done]</i>
SHE	he stands for a while the receiver in his hand	
HE	that's just how it is nothing to be done	

49.

later – night

HE that night the storm returns

SHE as if it had paused for breath
a breath of fresh air amid all the destruction
to keep the mortals guessing
to lull them into a false sense of security
until it strikes again harder than ever

HE torrential rain pounds the roof
one lightning bolt follows another so fast
that the darkness of night is wiped out
by fire from the sky

SHE they buried the dog

HE dug a hole for him in the soil
with his bare hands

SHE and gave him back to the earth

HE the mud

SHE the wind is howling

HE like a hundred dogs

SHE she can't sleep

HE who can

SHE she gets out of bed
and before she can think
she's in his room

HE he throws back the sheets
and makes room

SHE she lies down next to him
back to back

HE like animals
searching for a hiding place
they are a hiding place
for each other

SHE she doesn't move

HE neither does he

SHE they listen to the howling outside

50.

the next day

SHE when she wakes up her back is cold
 he's already up
 she's lying in bed alone

HE he's sitting outside
 waiting for a grey dot
 on the horizon

SHE when she's about to go outside
 she hears
 the growling of the beast

HE the grey Mercedes

SHE the fourth man

HE his destiny is in that car
 driving into the farmyard

 he stands there awaiting his destiny
 with his father's rifle
 in his uncertain hands
 uncertain but determined

SHE the man gets out
 grinning
 he knows violence works
 he enjoys it

HE the man gets out
 a loaded pistol in his hands
 but the man is too slow

SHE two shots
 one right after the other
 the fourth man's left shoulder
 swings back
 he's injured but still coming
 he shoots back

HE misses

SHE chips fly from the stone wall
 where the bullet hits
 the fourth man aims again

HE he runs for it
 into the barn
 to give himself time to reload
 for a second try

SHE the fourth man looks up
 at the window where she stands
 they look at each other
 she and the fourth man
 she
 feels a punch in the stomach
 a stabbing between her legs
 he grins

HE in the barn he hides
 behind the plough
 reloading the gun
 pointing it at the shadows

SHE the man doesn't let his injury stop him
 he seems to wonder
 which target to go after first
 but then
 with his gun at the ready
 he creeps past the baled hay
 into the barn from the back

 she counts heartbeats
 breaths
 and gets moving

HE in the silence he tries
 to aim at the right shadow
 but hunting was never his strong point

 he'd rather use his hands
 to pull life from the ground
 crops from the fertile soil
 than to kill a living creature

 but this
 he realises
 is a weakness
 now that he's here in the black depths
 waiting for his target

 more mouse than cat

 he squats down
 and looks underneath the machines
 certain he's made some mistake
 it's too late to fix
 when behind him
 he hears something breathing

SHE the beast

HE chuckling

SHE the fourth beast

HE he can already feel the back of his head bursting open
a bullet that shatters his skull
like white-hot rage
and comes out of his left eye

SHE the way he's sitting there
squatting
kneeling
he looks like he's praying

HE but the bullet never comes

SHE she's grabbed
a small hatchet
from the workbench
and now sinks it
blade first
into the soft flesh
between the neck and shoulder

 the fourth beast turns around
as he does she pulls
the metal out of him
feels a tendon snap
and warm blood spurt out

 and before the fourth beast
can fend off the attack
she takes another swing

 it goes smashing into his jaw

 the fourth beast topples
onto one knee
and she brings the axe –
she likes the heft of the tool –
crashing down on his head

 when she pulls the metal out of his skull
she sees a flabby pudding
of greyish-pink brain

 the fourth beast is no longer grinning

 now she's transforming him
into a landscape
of wounds

HE she's crying

SHE these are tears of joy

HE there's no joy in vengeance

SHE tears of relief then

HE *softly*
hou op *[stop it]*

SHE the beast has stopped moving

HE *softly*
hou op *[stop it]*

SHE she doesn't know what she's doing anymore
but she chops and keeps chopping
chops until between his legs
there's nothing but a pulp

HE *je kan ophouden* *[you can stop now]*
hij is dood *[he's dead]*

SHE he's dead

HE she throws her arms around him
and clutches him tight
buries herself in him

and he clutches back

SHE like animals
searching for a hiding place
they search for a hiding place
in each other

HE they find a hiding place
in each other

51.

later

SHE they wake up

HE in his bed

SHE her thoughts have no language
her words are stuck in her throat
if she said them out loud
they would lose their meaning

sometimes sound spoils the words

sometimes silence is better

HE he can still feel her
around him
feel her body under his
how it thrashed
and moaned

SHE words only make promises
and promise
is another word for lie

HE they buried the body
scrubbed away the blood
there's no trace of it left

SHE it looks as if
nothing
at all
happened here

HE did nothing happen here?

SHE you touch
maybe just for a moment
and then let go

HE the sky is grey cotton swabs
the milky blind sun
still trapped behind them

SHE she feeds grain to the chickens

HE he watches

SHE two handfuls
no more
or they'll get too fat

HE she has a suitcase

SHE chick-chick-chick-chick-chick

HE she's leaving

SHE he's not sure why

HE maybe he knows exactly why

SHE but he's against it

HE maybe
 but what does it matter
 it's the same way she arrived
 he has no say in it

SHE he doesn't want her to go

HE maybe not
 but what difference does that make

SHE all the difference

HE does it?

SHE all he has to do is run after her

HE to Poland?

SHE all he has to do is call out to her

HE he won't ask anyone to stay
 stay or go
 it's your own decision

SHE to tell the truth
 she doesn't know
 if she would have turned around

HE who knows
 not me

SHE not me

silence – she leaves

52.

HE then it's spring
 then summer
 then autumn
 then winter

HER VOICE time passes

HE he eats standing up
 at the counter again

HER VOICE no knife and fork

HE he tried for a while
 but who was he doing it for?

HER VOICE who for?

HE one morning leads to another
 he stands at the counter
 eating his breakfast

HER VOICE he hears something

HE what

HER VOICE he hears a child laugh

HE he's just imagining it

HER VOICE no it's real

HE it's real?

HER VOICE he thinks he hears a child laughing

HE he goes to the window
 he looks outside

HER VOICE he sees a child

HE really?

HER VOICE the child smiles

HE she smiles

HER VOICE he sees her standing there

HE she smiles

HER VOICE he smiles

HE really?

HER VOICE he longs for it to be true

53.

HE so let him have his happy ending
 some last-minute compensation
 so he can save the farm
 bring in the harvest
 reinforce the foundations
 repair the cracks
 silence the rumbling earth

 let her return
 with her daughter
 and her smile
 and that same smile
 on her daughter's face

 skipping and dancing
 through the golden harvest
 through the stalks
 in the autumn sun
 into his embrace

 let them live happily ever after
 on an unshakeable plot of land
 that will tower above the floodline
 even if everything else goes under

 let all the old fears vanish
 and all the desires
 caged in his chest for so long
 fly free

 let waking be sleeping
 and dreaming be waking
 and

 let it be real

SHE *silence*

HE so let it be real

the end