



Source: Anthony Shadid and Alia Ibrahim, 'Lebanese military has no deadline', *Washington Post online*, 06/06/07.

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Day 6: Every word she writes betrays someone. So you'd better get used to it. She's warned you, time and again. Time and again. *Il faut s'habituer à ça, mes cheries, mes petites pousses. Ça fait partie du lieu.* After all these years she still keeps her accent, she translates in her head.

*'Tu le trouve beau? Ah bon? Moi, je veux déménager. Je veux trouver un nouveau, un appartement de 2/3 pièces moderne, tout équipé, nouveau.'* She exhales a cloud of smoke, wild-haired and wreathed gypsyish, a Persian fur ball with a squashed almost-human face, curled at her feet. Pale grey eyes in a slow blink, in the dusk.

Day 1: The kitchen clock wears Dali's crazed gaze at head-height, eyes goggled, its lone arm pointing northwest, the other broken off. So it seems perpetually ten minutes to twelve in her kitchen. This, and the six following mornings, she gives him back the eye, spooning mouthfuls of cardboard rice crackers soaked in soy milk, chewing with abstract concentration, as a cow might. She's too direct, here, even after all these years. She eavesdrops, forces her way into adjacent conversations. She stares. She talks as if she's kept in contact all these years.

*'Ne me regarde pas comme ça, tu n'a plus le droit.'* Yet she doesn't look away.

Day 2: Dali stares back from a blaze of brilliant purple in the cramped but otherwise dull kitchen. Half a step forward grazes her thighs against a chopping-board-sized table, a step back sits her arse on the edge of the dishwasher stacked with teapot, cups and ashtrays, a toaster, cat food stored in a metal steamer. Yesterday's bread.

Next to the dishwasher is the self-cleaning radiant stove where a kettle belches steam, then sizzles condensation dripping off the cupboards above. The fridge hums left of the stove, its hinge profoundly interesting to Chimère, who ponders it with the usual intensity, horns and wings erect, poking out his tongue. He's more worn and cobwebbed than his gargoyle brethren, sheathed in *bouquiniste* plastic ten minutes away *au pied*.

Day 3: There are traces of India all over her apartment, India, Thailand, Cambodia, bead necklaces spilling from wall hooks, little bronze statues tranquil in tortured poses, lovely cloths draped over armchairs, photos of children amidst monkeys and elephants. She is here, yet elsewhere. She says so. She makes a note of it, every several pages. She can't bear it, here and elsewhere. Her children have grown up and left, but all kinds of presences remain. Pale night shapes, the graze of a lace curtain against her arm. She can't bear it, she wants to move. Time is irrelevant here, the days dragging one into another.

Day 4: The apartment is missing its western corner. She can hardly stand it anymore, the living room like a narrow slice of cake radiating from the entrance. No corridor, no interruption between the outside and the inside, no place

for a hall mirror; somewhere to hang your keys, fix your lipstick, press down a tangle of hair. The traffic is continuous, and at night a band of *clochards* drape their legs onto the pavement. She has to weave her way around them, around the throngs of maps flapping on the same corners, around bollards that don't deter cyclists, that mark some street corners but not others, their tops painted white, golf balls floating in the night.

Day 5: Her heart is hardening, its cells, tissues and muscle walls, its venous and arterial vessels growing rigid with time. It's been happening for a while now. She has a hardening heart. Those words—that she repeats from time to time—give her a double-image: of her heart as an object, three-dimensional, solid. Yet attended by its ghosts, layered over and around it, drifting away, returning. Attached.

When she describes it, you can't see it any other way. You see her heart, not metaphorically heart-shaped or cartoonish, but the muscular human heart, pericardium lifted like a skirt to expose its pendular mass, its striations of veins and tendons, thick pulmonary and venous tubes projecting upwards, the translucent silver casing of an auricle cupping each of its sides. Sagging potbellies of fat silted to its lower half, its irregular lattice of veins. You imagine this fleshy object, that one might see in a market, strewn on a blood-stained slab, or hanging with a bunch of others from a hook over the boucher's head—giant grisly grapes—and hers is smaller, of course, to scale, but like them it hardens with time and exposure, imperceptibly, a kind of natural toughening in the face of atmospheric corrosion. Except that hers, interior, hardening in privacy, takes its task more seriously. Perhaps without distractions, becomes meticulous, functionary, uniform. Necessarily slow, *bien sur*. But without leaving a single bit out.

Day 7: And yet.

And yet, in the metro, he leans down towards her, a hulk of a man in a stretchy tracksuit, muscles delineated, feet planted. He looks like a boxer, withstands the carriage's lurches without moving an inch. People flow around him like water. And she watches his face, stubbled dark even though closely shaven, and the curve of his body leaning towards her, his body forming a cavern, throwing his shadow around her, creating a space of intimate shadow between his body and hers, and she, every part of her body covered in flowing cloths, soft polyester over long-sleeved cotton, feet encased in socks and sandals, with only her face exposed, plump and smooth as a baby's, that shines upwards into his shadow, spotlight, no, not that, but her own source of light. She is as round and tasty as a dumpling, and he has his large hands around her face now, leaning towards her.

As though he would eat her there and then.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Beth Yahp.*