Espi Tomičić

Your Love is King

I

the bed is big enough for two people

she and someone else

a table

two books

she and someone else

i cannot understand anyone

i brought a dictionary (german croatian)

and two big milka

chocolate bars for lunch dinner and over night

that is how i was remembering our shared life

before this the two of us exchanged 73 messages

each word a message

enter like inhale

73 more than over the last ten years

more than ever before

a missed call

a german phone number

a whatsapp message

i am calling you for support and cheer i am in the hospital

she quipped about the dinamo soccer team and cheering fans

so far only medical tests

enter like exhale

i did not call

because i am selfish

because i wanted us to be writing

to have the messages to remember

to mull over later

i brought a dictionary (german croatian)

to read the test results

there is room in the bed for two

i cannot write from her perspective

i cannot know how she feels

i cannot write the character of the woman who is speaking to me

i cannot create her motivation

complexity

to build a character for this text

i cannot write her

without knowing her

but i can write about her

about what she told me

about us

how i got to know her again now that i am a man

and squeezed my eyes tight shut

i try to remember when we last

slept together when i was a girl

there is room in the bed for two

let them chop off whatever they like

she said

but i thought of all the texts i have been reading about the

representation of women

i disgust myself

my own mother is writing me about her disease

but my thoughts are on literature

who are you to write about that

on the promenade in split

crammed into a cafe where they pile

books by each table

books that have assumed the color of coffee

because nobody has ever opened them

i imagined taking a glass and throwing it at

the wall of the hipster cafe

the whatsapp message

magnetic procedure infusion up down ct then

magnetic on a full stomach then antibiotic

a big wound

i wanted to throw a glass at the wall

but all i did was respond to my cell phone

calmest in the world

and asked have you eaten so what is the food like

that seemed logical

because concern for another is manifested through

feeding

as if i have any idea what she likes

besides chocolate

two big milkas

for lunch dinner and over night

i eat pudding

she listed the flavors for me

strawberry

chocolate

vanilla

banana

she described the way the food is served in the most minute

detail

everything that a person who cannot eat

observes

because she knows that silence over the phone has

special weight

let them chop off whatever they like

she said

she laughed

i said

german hospitals are better than ours

i do not know why

i have never been to germany

i know nothing about their hospitals

but i wanted her to feel safe

i said that and what i wanted to say was

everything will be fine

they have modern equipment and what matters is

you decided to go to the hospital

though i know this is not the case

and my brother made her go

although i know she knew what was happening for months

you talk to me about dinamo and cheering you on

and i stand there with beers and peanuts and tightly

squeeze my eyes shut

i try to remember when we last

slept together when i was a girl

i hate languages

and german

and hospitals that are far away

and i would prefer you being right here at vinogradska hospital

so we could go out in front of the building

and talk about the crappy equipment

about how somewhere else would be better

and getting to know each other in the city where we both

lived when i was a girl

where later i wandered as a man by night through the streets

and you stood at home by the phone

in the city where you had a child

and i had a mother

there is room in the bed for two

i am not at all sure you are telling the truth

i know that sounds terrible

how dare you talk with her like that

she is ill

she gave birth to you

be by her side

these are the toughest moments

the struggle is only beginning

this is not merely a physical thing

everything ends

this information is difficult to take in

be by her side

i imagine how it eats away at you

how your organs fail

how i hugged you as a child

and how your skin was soft

that part i invented

you have been a smoker for 40 years

never has your skin been soft

i cannot remember when i last hugged you

but i picture your body falling apart

and i break out in a sweat

i am scared

wait

do not rush

take it easy

i always had a thousand questions

this drove you crazy

when you drove 2000 kilometers

to another country

to father in jail

i could never sleep

a thousand questions

this drove you crazy

the 73 whatsapp messages

enter inhale

do not ask

wait

even i do not know everything yet

we will see

it is a tumor

they need to consult with a plastic surgeon

stop patience

enter exhale

i always panic about everything

but this has already happened to so many people

there is nothing so awful about it

i spoke with the world's calmest voice

but i wanted to throw a glass at the wall

mama

do you have any family history of cancer

i asked you

because at home there was never mention of it

you said they asked you that too but only after everything

your grandmother died of colon cancer

silence

colon cancer?

yes

you said yes

but what you meant to say was

yes grandma had cancer

and we lied to you children that it was a ruptured

appendix

so you two would not worry or think about it

i did not say anything

your grandmother died of cancer

reverberated in my head

i remembered every no i circled

every consent in the transition process

every form

i have no family history of cancer

and this is why i shoot up testosterone

and why i am confident when the lady psychologist

says

cancer it is often a congenital disease

and if it does not appear in your family history

that is good news for a hypochondriac

i am scared for myself

i am obsessed with palpating my breasts

i asked you

do they remove the whole breast

and i wanted to ask

mama

has it spread

how big is it

i wanted to hear

they only remove that part

but you said you do not know

and added

let them chop off what they like and laughed

luckily you have breasts like grandma had

and besides i only wear a size one

i imagined you saying to me

what do you know about that

and about the flint of a cigarette lighter

on the sixth floor of a hospital in germany

the feeling when i go out alone onto the balcony for smokers

and how i felt while i was carrying you in my

belly

and when we conceived you 2000 kilometers away

during an open visit to a prison in the netherlands

how could you know anything at all about how i feel

from that armchair of yours

and empty word processor

and how you turn our shared grief into

material for writing

what do you know about that

when we exchanged the 73 messages over

whatsapp

73 more than over the last ten years

i imagine you telling me all that

but all you do is pretend nothing is happening

and talk to me about food

because that is what i asked you

the other day i was still appalled about the drama of a

woman

(a prominent italian woman writer)

who wrote about migrants

from her armchair

in her sparsely designed home

and here am i

my very own mother has cancer

that is consuming her organs

and i am drinking beer

in another country

in another city

and writing about imminent death

or healing

holy shit

once a person told me about their

experience

in the context of me being transgendered

and having my breasts reduced

she told me she is thinking about doing it

though she is not trans

because her grandmother and mother died of breast cancer

how candid she is

and brave

i thought

i thought long and hard about those lives

and about her feeling this every day

fears for her own life

i thought long and hard

about how she says to herself

breathe in

slowly

do not rush

wait

and then it happened to you

and i ask you about the food

because concern for another is manifested through

food

because i actually wanted you to be in the city where

we were together when i was a girl

where i had a mother

and you had a child

breathe out

message

pick up

holy shit

what is happening

hi bro

hey

is everything okay

he is crying

my brother never cries

is everything okay

no it is not where you are

in split what happened

it has spread

embolism to both lungs

her liver

pointless to operate

listen i think that

listen i think that

long pause

dunno

they will prolong her life for as long as they can

i say nothing

are you still there he asks

i am

sorry

i tell him sorry

as if you are not my mother too

i tell him sorry

because you truly were that for him

because you two are bonded in ways i cannot even imagine

i wanted to tell him everything would be fine

i did not say that to him

we do not talk that way

we know life is never fine

sorry

i repeat once more

love you bro

call

i am here

right?

i go back to the table as if nothing has happened

pay for the coffee

walk

i do not know where i am

panic attacks

an everyday thing

nothing new

cut the melodrama

i repeat to myself

you have no right to make yourself the victim

i told my brother i love him

i had not said that to him for 10 years

poor me while i stand in the breeze by the sea and

wait for the bus

because split is a foreign city

because i am nauseous

because i need my bed

diazepams

and my bathtub

because i need to be a grown up and pack my suitcase

on the bus for eight hours i imagined

a place you two have been existing for years

a place i have never been

in your room i see the blanket you covered yourself with

the blanket under which i tucked my hand so often

took the remote and switched off the tv when you were already

fast asleep

and i came in high from being out

the blanket full of burn holes because you fell asleep

a hundred times with a cigarette in your hand

the blanket i used to cover my mouth when i

vomited in the room from drugs

so i would be quieter

so you would not hear me

i remember we had the blanket when we lived

together back when i was a girl

we all had it

brother

you

and me

that blanket is the only familiar thing i can

connect to you

i do not know you

i do not even know your favorite song

ever since i heard that you are dying

i have been calling you mama

mama

mama