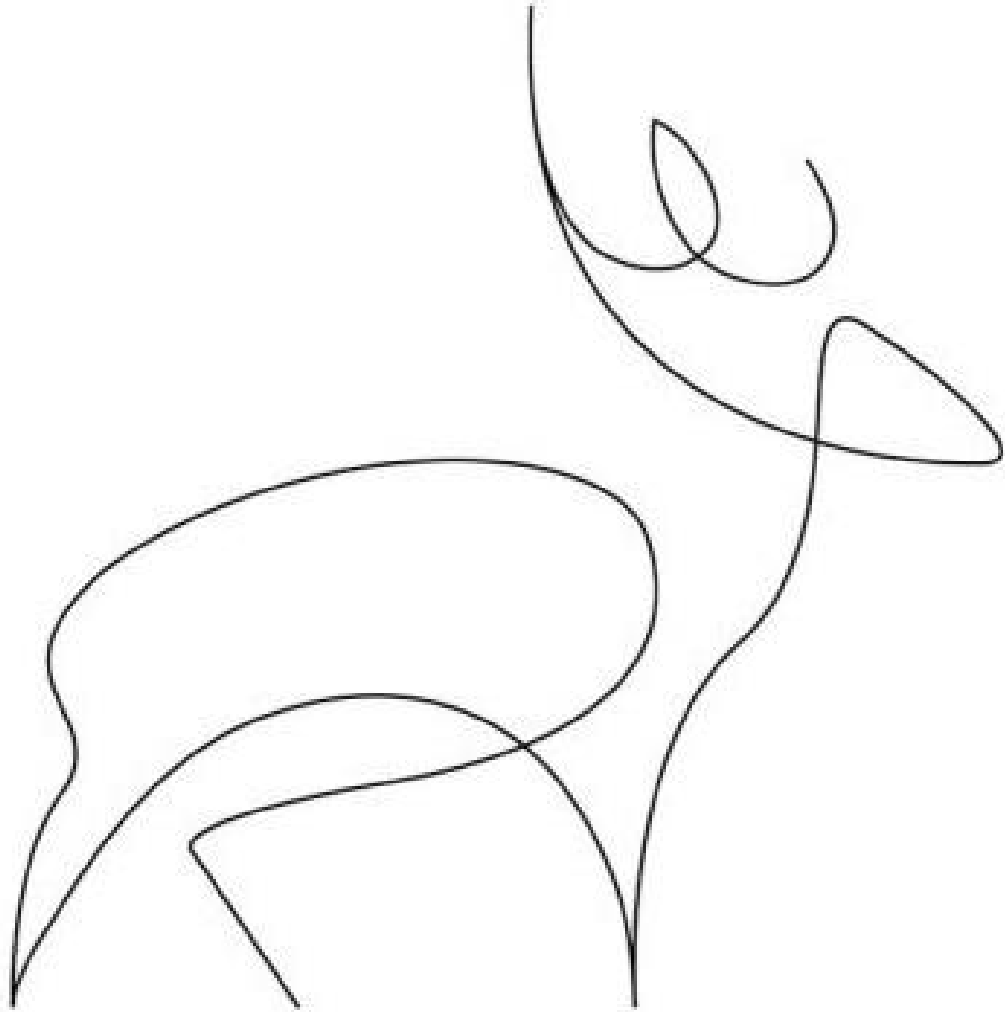


The Deer's Visit



An Excerpt

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The Deer's illustration by Pablo Picasso

The footsteps on the wooden terrace floor sounded like high-heels clicking, I guessed it must be her.

I snuck from the bed into the hall in the dark trying not to make a sound. I went first to the light switch, turned it on, then to the terrace window and quietly pulled open the curtains. There she was, lying on the floor about to fall asleep. She noticed me and raised her head while opening her eyes impatiently. I turned on the hall light where I was standing, rather than the terrace light, but that was already enough to annoy her. She looked at me for a few seconds from behind the ceiling-to-floor terrace windows, before lumbering off into the darkness of the garden.

The deer was peering at me from behind the glass; I was fully illuminated but she's in a dim light that hardly reveals her. I stared at her and she barely opened her sleepy eyes, as if she was dreaming of me.

Sympathetic to the communists

In 2010, 55 % of the population of La tour de peilz, in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland voted to create a passage along the entire shore of Lake Geneva so that its residents and visitors could walk along the shore without having to go around the group of palaces, villas and private facilities located directly on the lake enjoying parts of it as private beaches.

I learned about this in a fleeting chat in the garden of La Becque artists' residency, which has it's portion of the lake as its own shore, similar to the surrounding palaces and villas. I was drinking tea, smiling and mocking myself thinking that this is one of the few moments in which I can feel a little bit of the contradiction between my own interests and a leftist demand. Of course my personal interest here is only temporary - three months

where I enjoy the writing residency, and this beautiful scene of a private piece of the lake shore, quiet and devoid of people, while I wait for something to emerge from the summit of the Alps on the other side, where the clouds sometimes settle under one of the peaks, a bit like the beard of a Greek god staring and waiting for me to write something worthy of his majestic presence.

I smiled again at the dramatic expression, "a slap in the face to voters" which I read in a 2015 report published on Swiss info website, five years after voting for the still-non-existent walkway. Almost everywhere democracy receives a fatal blow or a hard slap from the power that it exalts or that permits its existence. But here we can say that it receives light pats on the cheek asking it to wait and wait for some adjustment from the power above it, which in this case, might be private property.

Despite my great sympathy with the demand for expanding public space in exchange for the benefit of the few, a comment on the report by someone named Schadrack seemed to me sufficiently rational and balanced enough to justify the pragmatic Swiss mood in dealing with the matter, without drama or smacks.

Shadrack questions the rationality of the walkway demand, which will cost a lot and eventually lead to harm for a few rich people, it will cause serious and radical damage to the value of their real estate, after they lose the advantage of a direct view of the lake. This in exchange for an insignificant benefit to a much larger number of people, since they already have a walk across most of the lake shore.

Communism may cause, reductively and in pragmatic terms, a grave harm to a few in exchange for a small - but distinct - benefit for the many.

Almost 15 years ago, my ex-wife's father told me that he used his connections in the security services to find out how dangerous my political activity was, and they told him that my political classification in their files was: sympathetic to communists. I admired their accuracy. I hope they

didn't change it five years later in 2011, after the "revolution". For I and others have become "revolutionaries' ", although most of us are not that radical.

After we all withdrew as defeated revolutionaries, I see the most important thing we have accomplished is that millions in Egypt now define themselves as "with the revolution" regardless of whether they are politically radical or not, leftist, liberal or in between, and regardless of whether or not what happened in Egypt can be called a "revolution", according to historians' assessments. But we are "revolutionaries" regardless, because what happened, what we made, is called "THE" revolution, for us. Our revolution, and we, who are with it, with what happened, with what we made, say this as a confession when accused. New generations that did not participate in our revolution are with what happened as co-confessors in solidarity with the accused, perhaps because they are willing to participate in the next crime.

The most beautiful thing happening is that in our daily chats "so-and-so is with the revolution" has turned into "so-and-so is a revolution" as a political inclination.

A young woman at university, who was still a child at the time of the revolution, might say, " At home, my dad is with the regime and my older brother is with the islamists, but me, Mama and the rest of my brothers are all 'revolution' ". It is dangerous for so many successive generations under a dictatorship to say that they themselves are a "revolution". That may be the reason that they are now being punished for nothing.

The new generations envy us for what happened. We walked a lot through all the streets of Cairo, we walked like a revolution; these streets crowded with cars and narrow sidewalks unprepared for long walks, they were all ours. We walked through the river of streets, leaving the sidewalks as rest stops and paths for the unenthusiastic. Sometimes we even sat or even lay down on the asphalt streets. All of Cairo was a giant living room to sit

where we liked, and in the evening it became one open bedroom filled with tents and shared blankets where we drew warmth from the close enthusiastic bodies. In the middle of the day, Cairo was a common table with what food was available, and the rest of the day it was an open walkway.

I don't walk much anymore since we've left the streets. Perhaps that's why I'm not as enthusiastic about the long walks on the lake shore as the people of La Tour de Peilz who demanded a longer pathway. For days here, I don't even cross the terrace to take just the few steps further in the park that it would take to see the lake up close.

That day I walked to the lake and thought: If the proposed walkway had already been built, there would be a high wall here between the garden and the lake, and the deer would probably not have entered our garden and she would not have come to my terrace at night.

Where did the deer's land go

The deer mostly arrived here via the lake. The deer came out of a garden or a forest, it's presumed abode and may be surprised that the rest of the land was arranged and engineered, every piece of land dedicated to something, or to someone, or to the common people in order to do a certain thing. The lake is also arranged; these waters are subject to the sovereignty of a state, and every part of it is subject to the administration of a canton. Every beach falls under the authority of a city or village; beaches are arranged for specific purposes, whether as ports, public beaches or private beaches. Even public beaches are expected to contain specific creatures like people, dogs, and cats. The presence of a deer is strange even there. But human control over water is virtual, deferred control, instantaneous, and it is not there all the time. Jumping into the lake seems like the logical thing to do to escape the great power of man on Earth.

The deer's name

I was sitting with Laila in a kitchen in Lausanne. I asked her how she got here from Egypt so quickly. She replied curtly: Uber. She asked me why I had decided to rent a room for two days instead of visiting Lausanne and returning to spend the night at La Becque, half an hour by train from there. Before I could answer, a man walked into the kitchen and spoke to us in French. After three minutes of us staring uncomprehendingly at him, he switched English, "I am so sorry about this situation. When I rented you the spare room through the website, it was free, but now my wife is angry. She kicked me out of our bedroom and locked the door. I have to sleep in the spare room now, so I'm afraid I only have the kitchen to rent to you now".

Laila laughed and mocked me in Arabic saying that the kitchen was really nice, but she just hoped the angry wife wouldn't kick me out when she wanted to cook.

She smiled and the man also smiled at Laila and asked her name. He repeated her name with a sleazy smile. Laila turned to me and said in Arabic that we could now guess why his wife was so angry.

Confused because she ignored him and because she spoke to me in Arabic, he tried to force his way into the conversation despite her ignoring him and trying to figure out the nature of our relationship, he turned to me and asked, "Will Laila also stay with you in the kitchen, um...sorry, what's your name again?".

When you are far from your homeland, you repeat your name a lot and explain many things about yourself. Through language you try to find a space for yourself in this new land; you tell them about the private nooks and crannies of your life away from here, what you did there and what you

intend to do here. It's as if you are asking permission to borrow a piece of land in place of the one you left.

The deer has no chance of doing the same if she finds herself far from her land (if we can say that she has one). She should jump into the lake.

Edges of water

Should the deer stand for a moment on the lake shore before she jumps? As people usually do at the edge of waterscapes. They stare at them and at the horizon around them as if they were staring away from their lives. These spaces, which we do not know how to control at every moment, are not entirely ours in a way, which is why the land next to rivers, lakes, and seas are more expensive than others. It is as if you own a land at the edge of ultimate human possession. There's the thrill of jumping into the water to enjoy. It's fun but requires some self-control to float or keep moving regularly. Even the fish in the water must be constantly on the move. Failure to float or move properly, even for fish, means the danger of death.

In the spaces beyond our control, there is pleasure and amazement, perhaps the opportunity to escape, and there is also the danger of death as a possibility. You must keep moving and assess from time to time if you are still able to control yourself as much as you are escaping from the territory of control.

I resist the urge to expound on our "revolution" again, but in short: we jumped, had fun and were amazed, not sure if we were escaping or confronting, but what pains us most is to think that the land there, and even

the water, is pretty much now under control. We no longer have a place in it, like a deer that jumps into the lake and now finds no land to anchor on.

The love of sitting down

At every station on the way to Bern, I was seeing the same person sitting loosening his mask under his chin, smoking a cigarette. His eyes were catching mine through the train window from the moment I saw him until my window crossed his bench.

When I finally got off in Bern, I found him sitting and our eyes met for a long time. As I was leaving the station I saw him out of the corner of my eye, tossing his cigarette as if he's about to leave, but he didn't budge, not even to stub out his cigarette still burning on the ground.

The house of Charles, my Egyptian friend, was not far from the station. I sent him a message that I had arrived and was waiting for him at the front door. Moments later, he emerged in a wheelchair.

At a nearby bar, I pushed away one of the chairs so that Charles' wheelchair could fit at the table. I was about to ask Charles what had happened to his legs that made him need a wheelchair, when the man from the station arrived at our table, also in a wheelchair.

He approached and greeted us in an Egyptian dialect and asked Charles what brand his wheelchair was and how he got it. Charles asked him why. The man frowned and said he was going to buy a new one and he noticed that we spoke in Egyptian Arabic and assumed we could have a friendly chat. Charles replied sharply that this is not an excuse to talk to us. I thought it was, I sided with the man against Charles, but Charles insisted and spoke to him harshly.

The man changed his tone of voice and said he would be direct: he was in charge of following us and reporting on our movements. He asked Charles, somewhat sternly, if his legs had been injured in the revolution: did we do that to you?

Charles answered the man's question and mocked him in the same way and pointed to the man's legs and asked him if they had been injured in the revolution: did we do that to you?

The man laughed and replied, "No, this is an injury in 'my revolution'. When the police withdrew after your "revolution", I went with my family to take over a piece of land owned by heirs who never appeared. I walked along its fence every day on my way to the tiny three room place where I lived with my wife, mother and five children. I decided that my relatives and I should acquire this land and build a large building with spacious apartments for us and our children. In a short battle with the guard, my leg was injured, but we succeeded in capturing him despite his resistance. I locked him in my house with my wife, my mother and my five children as a punishment, and I spent most of my free days and nights sitting or sleeping on the bare ground of this land.

"Congratulations on the land, and did you build your big building?," Charles said.

The man replied, "Unfortunately, when your revolution was defeated and 'we' regained control, I lost my control on the land. My relatives and I had not started construction because we did not have enough money. The heirs submitted a report to the police, and the village police department demanded I return the land for which I fought, to those I fought over it for. Can you believe this happened?"

The man laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. We also laughed and consoled him for losing his land and wished that soon he would be able to find a larger apartment or a promotion to a higher position so that no one could retrieve anything back from him.

The man looked at us as if he was delighted by our sympathy. He apologized for disturbing us, admitting that he usually churns out reports that contain anything without even bothering to follow or talk to anyone. He said he was bored in this country because he couldn't find anyone to talk to, so he decided to talk to us for a while. He reassured us that the report

wouldn't contain anything serious. "I'll say you were hanging around and doing nothing." Charles smiled and said, "That's the truth."

The man walked away, and I remembered to ask Charles what had happened to his legs. Charles said that his legs were fine, but he liked to sit more than anything else, as I already knew. He said that he once woke up from his sleep and thought that if he bought a wheelchair he could sit all day long. He immediately grabbed his phone, ordered it online and did not leave the bed until the chair arrived. He got up to reassure me but his knees sagged a little from excessive sitting, so he leaned on the table and laughed saying, "Oh! My knees have become the knees of a deer."

Claire's knee

Claire texted me asking if I could tell her how she could watch "Claire's Knee" film online. I replied with a laugh that if there really was such a film with that name she should watch right away.

We didn't usually talk, except for brief conversations at our mutual friends' parties where she spends most of the time dancing. She loves dancing more than anything or anyone else. It makes me think that she loves herself very much, her dancing self and I can't blame her. At the end of parties she is not interested in engaging in conversations much. Once the music stops, she picks up her things and leaves as she is running away from the admirers' looks and desires.

I sensed that Claire wasn't really asking about the film, but I still told her that it's the first time I had heard of it, asking if she tried searching 'EgyBest' website.

“Of course I searched there, and didn’t find it,” she said.

I was surprised there was a film that was not pirated by EgyBest. I guessed it was probably not a very popular movie. I looked and found out that it was one of Eric Rohmer's. Laila had once given me copies of Eric Rohmer films and said I would love them. I tried watching ten minutes of one and didn't feel like I would.

I told Claire I had the film on my laptop but I hadn't seen it. She laughed and said that she should travel from Dubai to Cairo to watch it with me, and added that she would indeed be coming to Cairo soon and was looking for a room for a few days.

She wasn't asking about the film and now she wasn't really asking about the room either. I told her I have one bedroom here, she could take it and I would sleep in the kitchen, (she sent me the crying from laughter emoji) or - I continued my message - we could consider her trip to Cairo as an exploratory date, about which I had thought a lot before and it seemed that this was the right time, and then we could stay together in the same room and watch the film together. She laughed (sent the laughing emoji with wide open eyes and mouth, which might have been a sign of disapproving astonishment, or of playful approval), it was the playful approval.

Claire came, and instead of staying a few days she stayed for a year. We were happy most of the time, especially when we went dancing (which she wanted to every night). Although I could only do it once a week or one in two weeks, maybe once a month. I have to admit that watching her dancing raised me above all our little differences. This may not sound as superficial and lustful if I say how she put everything that is beautiful in her body and soul into her dancing. Her knee's flexing when she dances reminded me of how it all started and it made me smile.

Eventually we had a big quarrel due to a small disagreement but it was enough to make us face the truth that we ignored constantly: I wasn't ready to move and live with her in Dubai and she wasn't ready to leave her life in

Dubai to live with me in Cairo. She left. It's been a year and we still haven't seen Claire's Knee film.

I watched it alone and liked it. I watched all of Eric Rohmer's films. I liked most of them and he became one of my favorite directors. Laila said: "I told you."

When I found out that one of option of the writing residency places was a place near Lausanne and saw its pictures, I thought this is probably the location where Eric Rohmer shot Claire's Knee, that's probably the lake, and this is the Alps in the background, also the film was produced by Lausanne Films, and in the film, a writer spends time there by the lake to write a novel.

I don't believe in signs, not in Paulo Coelho's way, but maybe rather in Juan Jose Millas': life is full of vague, misleading signals like those found at Frankfurt Airport confounding travelers and leading them to twist journeys away from their actual destination. And I want events to wind away from their expected path, if one exists.

I chose this spot beside the lake near Lausanne, which was La Becque, and where I watched Claire's Knee again in a greater concentration and knew that the film had been shot next to another lake and another side of the Alps in France, that was two days before the the deer showed up on my terrace.

But why did the deer choose to stop swimming and emerge from water at La Becque specifically?

Claire's Choice

I do not think that a deer swimming in the lake to escape its strangeness among people would have contemplated wisely about where it would climb out back onto land.

Perhaps there were signs that led her to wander out of the water at a certain place. Perhaps from the shore the trees and grass here appear unkept and haphazardly arranged; unlike the gardens of villas and palaces,

this garden is rather wild. The fence between the garden and the lake is low. All these clues led her here, where it most resembled an untamed nature and not private dwellings.

She must have been surprised by the flats here and there, and was perhaps confused when she saw that their planted green roofs melding into the garden. I imagine an aerial photo where the garden would seem divided into different patches, with no concrete surfaces visible. I wonder if that deceives the birds flying high.

The artistic style of the garden is perfectly inviting to a creature straying its way into nature. Art is a suitable space to escape the expected arrangement of reality. Art may be the waterscapes in the middle of reality's landforms, or what we think of it. Most people stand at the border of art, looking at it and peering at its horizon, at times delving consciously or unconsciously into it, their feet wanting to leave land for a while.

If we think again, we will find that all bodies of water are in fact part of the ones that surround dry land in all directions and permeate above and below the surface.

That's why I considered Charles' wheelchair, as well as our revolution, works of art. Also the complicity of the detective, the deer's journey, and of course "Claire's Knee" and Claire's dance, how she chose the film "Claire's Knee" to start a conversation and jump into the life of the only person who was satisfied sending his natural adoring smiles from a distance. He might have been the only one, for the most part, who did not pursue her; she came to his place like a stray deer, remaining there for a moment before she felt the urge to leave back somewhere.

I don't know if all of this might somehow make a story. But I once had the idea: that every story is connected to all other stories. Sometimes the relationship is clear, sometimes not, and when it's not I think how I myself can create that relationship, and that's what this draft is trying to do.