



By Jaakko Pallasvuo



When Spring comes I am the police. I have a mantle of rough hide. I have a baton. I walk around. I patrol. I tell people to move. If they don't follow my orders I hit their calves with the baton.

It's a season of uncertainty. Bad omens, rapid movement in the sky. The birds don't fly across it as expected. There are warning signals in the air itself. I must ensure compliance. We move through the Spring as one.

Summer comes around and people stop taking orders from me. I no longer have a superior. I am not part of a chain of command. The need for order is no longer felt. The absence of order produces a more complex order. I throw my baton into the river. It floats. It is carried away. It was really just a large stick. I drop my mantle. It is saved for later.

I'm unwrapping my feet. Then the soles of my bare feet touch the ground. The whole tonus of my body can change. I walk in a different manner. My summer gait is a prance and a strut. I remember that I am able to dance. I dance with the others. They do as they wish. We are kissing each other.

In the Autumn things get serious again. I am sent out into unknown territory. In the Autumn I am a seeker. I am a pair of eyes and ears. I am the tip of the tongue that tastes the new. I feel free in my mission, but it is a negative freedom. I move through the boundless landscape alone.

At night I am cold. I am very nervous. I try to impress on my mind what I have been able to observe. I am already rehearsing a story to myself: the true story that I must tell to the others upon my return.

I am fishing. I am hunting flightless birds and high-strung rodents. But I am also prey here. In the night a big cat approaches silently. I am half-asleep. The big cat attacks.

As the big cat claws at me, I know the fear of the smaller animal. I am the small animal that knows fear. I escape by crawling into a narrow crevice between two boulders. The big cat cannot follow me there. I am bleeding and the big cat can smell it. I hide for what feels like an eternity. Finally, the big cat gives up on the notion of having me.

I return home, wounded. The reunion is bittersweet. Autumn is turning to Winter. Key parts of me are infected. I won't live to see another Spring. The mantle will be worn by another. They'll be the police. I'll become the river. Before that I will tell them a story of what is also out there.

The one who can see far brings a secret object to my deathbed: the remains of the brain of a forefather, transformed into black glass during a volcanic event. It's not only the sky that is shifting. The ground we act on is in motion. The ground scrapes against another ground and smoke might rise; lava is known to have spilled out from the depths.

I am lying on my deathbed, holding a fragment of glassy, gloss-black brain against my skin. I am kissing the vitrified mind. The brain smells burnt. I am tasting the word vi-tri-fy. For a moment I can see the way the future will unfold.



He is wearing a black polo neck sweater. She's at a debate. She is twenty years old. She has begun her studies at the university. She is at the political science department with other people who were contentious, serious, and mostly tolerated in high school.

Her analytical mind is separating the gestalt into distinct parts. Her mouth forms sentences that cascade into paragraphs, chapters. Her mind will never be as sharp as it is now. She and her university friends sit in their critical circle in the university café. If they smile, the smiles are narrow.

At home she looks for clean clothes in a large, dim heap of textiles scattered on the floor. She has a hard time finding what she is looking for because all her clothes are black. She has read some research on how wearing black is associated with authority, professionalism and emotional control. She wants to be perceived as an authority on something. The black clothes are also part of a kind of mourning she is in. She's mourning her life. Adulthood has been a real disappointment so far.

She has moved in with her partner. They are fixing up the kitchen in their just OK rental flat. They're dropping things, making a lot of mistakes with the work. On the first of May they go to a demonstration. She's holding hands with her partner as they, obviously, walk into a cloud of still-linger-ing tear gas. Then there's coughing, tears and muci flow, and her face is a red balloon, suspended above her black polo neck sweater.

Masses gather in front of the parliament building. Others are chanting slogans, cheering at the turnout. She stands there silently and tries to stare through the granite exterior of the parliament. She wishes to see further, past this temporary projection of power.

Later, she and her partner have a fight. She hones her intelligence on their weak feelings for each other. She dismantles their whole thing. Her partner is awestruck and kind of disgusted by her. She packs a couple of things. She is not in tears. She has to look for some place to stay. But first she goes online and shops for a bright orange bomber jacket.

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The Spring term is coming to an end. She doesn't text her university friends back. The summer break is long and she finds a job. This summer she is working as a ride operator at the amusement park. There are broad vertical stripes in mint and violet on her work uniform. In the changing room mirror she observes her uniform and her newly tanned face. She no longer looks like she's deep in thought.

She's operating a wooden rollercoaster that smells like pine tar. The rollercoaster is on a hill overlooking the rest of the amusement park. She can actually see the whole city from the summit of the ride.

She cannot know that nine hundred years earlier my remains were buried on the hill where the rollercoaster now runs. I did not become the river. I remain under the ground. Anyways, she's not thinking back that far. The rollercoaster itself, fifty years old, looks ancient to her in this accelerated world. The wooden rollercoaster is creaky and slow next to the airbrushed, seamless, flashing amusements of the contemporary moment.

She reads up on how the amusement park came to be. The amusement park is in a neighbourhood where factory workers lived in some of the first modern apartment buildings in the city. Most of the workers ended up in the war. The ones who stayed in the city lived through repeated bombings.

The amusement park could be understood as a gift: peacetime fun in a city that survived, a city that still had its industries and its workers. The city was growing rapidly. The supply chains were not global yet. Trade wasn't free, exactly. Many useful things were being produced or assembled nearby.

The amusement park rides are industrial machines, she thinks. They were built to move the bodies of the workers and their children, to make heads dizzy. There are games where you can't win, games that are just supposed to disorient you. The sense of disorientation is called "fun". It's the situation at hand.

There is something touching about these older rides to her. She perceives them as the eccentric siblings of the rational tools and vessels of modernity. The madness of the rides is not as disguised. The rides are an open-faced excess. They are stars.

The madness of fuel was the madness of the assembly line was the madness of the radio broadcast was the madness of the battlefield was the madness of these amusements – enough to make one's head spin.

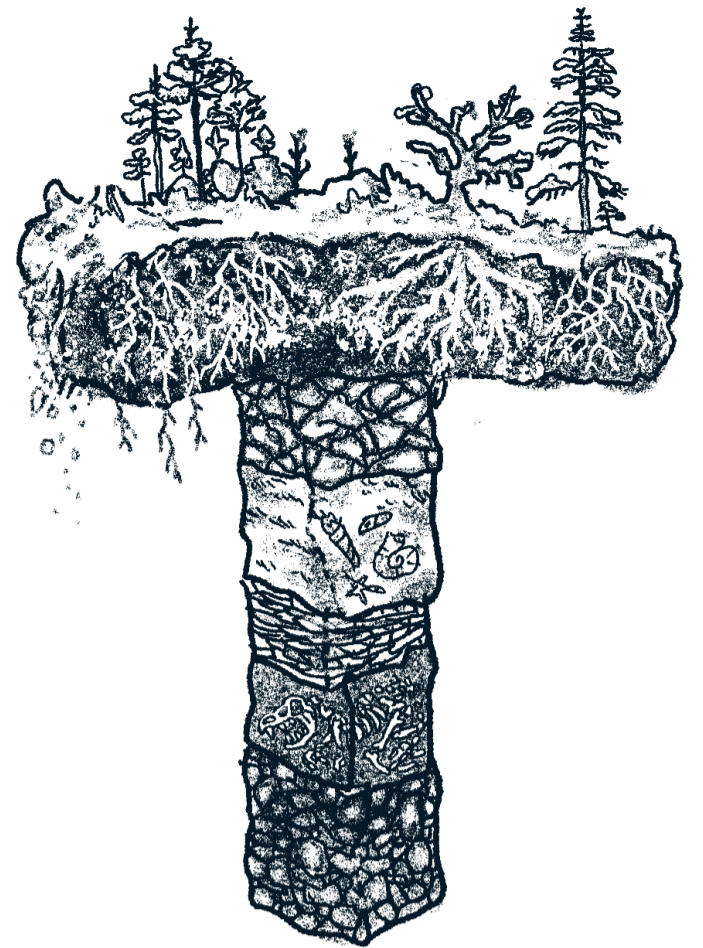
Working at the amusement park does make the magic dispel a little. The ride operator of the old rollercoaster must remain standing in the last car of their train and guide the rollercoaster through its predictably amusing journey over and over and over and over again. By the end of the summer she has back pain resulting from hundreds of repetitions of the same bumpy ride.

Day in, day out she observes the same delight, the same recklessness, the same fear and the same nausea on the faces of her passengers. It's like she works at a factory that produces affects.

She works long hours for a low wage. She works so parents and children can partake in managed feelings of danger. She works for the unsupervised teenagers moving through the amusement park with shoplifted bottles of Malibu liqueur poorly hidden in their oversized clothes, waiting to be thrilled.

Autumn comes, as does the end of her time at the amusement park. She is happy to put her black polo neck sweater back on. Back at the university her intellect is more cutting than ever. She makes her hapless professors cry. She doubts she will ever love again. She slams a large, dusty, leather-bound book shut.

She is smoking a cigarette by the imperial, symmetrical entrance of the university. The wind keeps changing its direction. Dead leaves are dancing on the street. A wet leaf lands on her left cheek in the late afternoon darkness. She feels experienced and wise. She's seen it all by now.



They enter the site in Winter. They uncover these things. They find the skull of the big cat. They find the mantle of the ur-police. They find her bones and some of her later jewelry. I've been dead nine hundred years longer than her, but she's been dead for thousands too. Her black clothes have been consumed by the earth.

They find my remains and pieces of the ceramic vessels that were buried with me. They find nine long nails that did their part in keeping the rollercoaster together. They find the brain vitrified into glass.

An animal is a living being that feeds on organic matter. An animal must eat others that have lived. We are some interesting animals to them. We have much in common with the other animals, and less in common with them. Maybe we could relate to their curiosity: the eager and intrusive way they study the remainders.

They are from the sky. They are celestial bodies. They don't know any ground. They will not return to a ground. They are drawn to these grounds like we were drawn to the stars that glimmered out of reach.

We never got to walk on the surface of a sun, but it is possible for them to descend to us, excavate us, tunnel through the ice, the dirt, any layer of rock. And they can easily reach the molten core we never touched – us dwellers of the surface of the crust of this planet.

They hold fragments of our bodies and the objects we've left behind. They notice the skulls of the beasts. They are not holding these things up to a light source. Their hands are the lights. They touch our remnants with their light-filled extremities. This light is a medium that both emits and absorbs information.

They want to know what it was like to be born from the earth and to drink and to eat and to seek on the earth – to think in a grounded way, to begin operations, to unearth the fuels and burn them up. They want to know more about the way we were amused.

They want to know about the flood, and about this permanent Winter, how there is now one season instead of four. It's cool to them: how we became food and fuel, how we got ourselves compressed back into the demure ground now shrouded by ice.

They hold flower seeds in their light-filled hands and the seeds sprout in their light and grow into flowers and then the flowers wilt and then there are no flowers again. They wonder where the flowers came from, and where they went.



# Time