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Kartofler, kød, noget grønt

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Potatoes, Meat, Something Green

Skrædderen på Nørrebro er invandrer, det er svært for mig at afgøre hvilket land han kommer fra. Iran? Irak? Afghanistan? Hans engelsk er næsten perfekt, accenten ubetydelig, ikke til at bestemme. Han er ulasteligt klædt, slank, nærmest spinkel. Sorte bukser, hvid skjorte. Han er nyklippet, velsoigneret. Håret er blankt, men ikke fedtet af voks. Han lugter mildt, ikke for meget, af aftershave. Smilet er høfligt, tandsættet usædvanlig pænt og regelmæssig.

– Hello, siger han.

– Hej, siger jeg.

Jeg tager frakken op af Magasinposen og lægger den på disken. Forklarer ham, hvordan jeg har tænkt mig den skal sys ind. I taljen især; siger at både jeg og min ægtefælle foretrækker figursyede frakker. Han nikker.

– It's a really nice coat, siger han.

– Thank you, siger jeg.

Da jeg har forklaret ham så godt jeg kan på engelsk, hvordan jeg forestiller mig den skal se ud, er der et øjeblik tavshed mens han står og betragter frakken. Han står lænet opad disken med den ene hånd tænksomt hvilende ved munden, kaster også nogle få blikke på mig, på min overkrop. På ringfingeren glimter hans vielsesring. Eva og jeg blev viet på rådhuset, vi valgte at blive gift uden ringe, vi syntes det ville virke lidt for skolepigeagtigt hvis to voksne kvinder på vores alder gik rundt, hånd i hånd, med den samme ring på. I stedet for at bruge penge på ringe købte vi en jordomrejse til os selv i bryllupsgave.

Efter nogle øjeblikke beder skrædderen mig tage frakken på.

The tailor in Nørrebro is an immigrant; it's difficult for me to determine what country he comes from. Iran? Iraq? Afghanistan? His English is nearly perfect, his accent insignificant and unidentifiable. He is impeccably dressed, slender, almost frail. Black trousers, white shirt. His hair is newly cut; he is well-groomed. His hair is shiny but not greasy from wax. He smells mildly — not too much — of aftershave. His smile is polite; his teeth are unusually white and even.

“Hello,” he says.

“Hi,” I say.

I take the coat out of the bag from Magasin and lay it on the counter. Explain to him how I would like to have it taken in. Particularly at the waist. I explain to him that my spouse and I both prefer tailored coats. He nods.

“It's a really nice coat,” he says.

“Thank you,” I say.

When I have explained to him as well as I can in English how I imagine it should look, there is a moment of silence while he looks at the coat. He leans against the counter with one hand thoughtfully resting near his mouth; he also looks at me a few times, at my torso. On his ring finger, his wedding ring glitters. Eva and I were married at the town hall. We chose to be married without rings; we thought two grown women our age walking around hand in hand wearing the same ring would look a little too much like schoolgirls. Instead of spending money on rings, we bought ourselves a round-the-world trip as a wedding present.

After a few moments, the tailor asks me to put the coat on.

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– Sure, siger jeg.

Og knapper op. Tager min habitjakke af og lægger den på disken. Tager frakken på. Knapper den.

– Is it impossible? spørger jeg.

– Nothing is impossible, svarer han.

Han går hen til mig, lægger en hånd på min arm og peger hen mod en helsepejl bagerst i den lille butik. Jeg går hen og stiller mig foran den og han tager en lille håndfuld nåle fra en skål på disken og stiller sig bag mig. Vi betragter mig begge to i spejlet.

– Like this? spørger han.

Han står bag mig og har hastigt, effektivt, sat knappenåle hele vejen ned ad rygdelen, så min talje er blevet synlig i frakken, hvis form var nærmest firkantet, for et øjeblik siden.

– It's really good, siger jeg.

– Of course, siger han.

Smiler selvsikkert, men stadig høfligt. Så går han om foran mig og knapper frakken op. Han stikker en hånd ind bag foret, strejfer mit ene bryst med sin håndryg. Det går pludselig op for mig, at jeg ikke har bh på. Den tog jeg af, da jeg havde været til yoga. Den var blevet gennemblødt af sved og jeg havde ikke fået en anden med, kun andre trusser. Så nu ligger den kold og fugtig i min taske.

– It's a little too big here, siger han.

Han puffer let til stoffet med håndryggen under foret, for at vise størrelsen på frakkens bryst.

– I know, siger jeg.

Egentlig var det slet ikke meningen at jeg skulle købe en frakke, jeg skulle bare have købt

“Sure,” I say.

And unbutton my suit jacket.
Take it off and lay it on the counter.
Put the coat on. Button it.

“Is it impossible?” I ask.

“Nothing is impossible,” he answers.

He walks over to me, lays a hand on my arm, and points to a full-length mirror at the back of the little shop. I walk back and stand in front of it and he picks up a little handful of pins from a bowl on the counter and stands behind me. The two of us look at me in the mirror.

“Like this?” he asks.

He is standing behind me and has quickly, efficiently, inserted pins all the way down the back so that my waist has become visible beneath the coat, whose shape was practically rectangular a moment before.

“It's really good,” I say.

“Of course,” he says.

His smile is self-assured but still polite. Then he walks around in front of me and unbuttons the coat. He sticks his hand in behind the lining, brushing one of my breasts. I suddenly realize that I'm not wearing a bra. I took it off when I had been to yoga. It was soaked with sweat and I hadn't taken another one with me, only another pair of panties. So now it's in my bag, cold and damp.

“It's a little too big here,” he says.

He nudges the material a little with the back of his hand, beneath the lining, to show the size of the coat's breast.

“I know,” I say.

I hadn't actually meant to buy a coat at all; I had only intended to

ind til aftensmad til Eva og mig selv. Kartoffler, kød, noget grønt. Alligevel tog jeg rulletrappen opad, da jeg gik ind i Magasin, i stedet for ned i underetagen. Op mod dametøjsafdelingen, i stedet for ned mod madvarerne. Det er svært at sige hvorfor. Det er i hvert fald ikke fordi jeg mangler frakker. Eller vi. Vi bruger samme størrelse, Eva og jeg, vi er begge en størrelse 38. Og deler stort set hele vores garderobe. Har stort set samme smag. Det er sjældent vi køber noget den anden ikke kan lide. Som nu denne frakke. Dens krave er i ægte kaninpels hvilket Eva ikke kan udstå. Det ved jeg. Så jeg ved virkelig ikke hvorfor jeg ikke bare lod være med at købe den. Måske var det fordi den var på tilbud, den kostede kun halvdelen af hvad den ellers ville have kostet. Og selvom den var for stor til mig, var jeg overbevidst om at jeg ville spare penge, uanset hvad, selvom det ville koste lidt at få syet den ind hos en skrædder. For hverken Eva eller jeg kan sy.

– I don't have my bra on, siger jeg.

Pludselig. Det kommer bag på mig selv. Hvorfor sagde du nu det, tænker jeg, og fortryder jeg har sagt det. Så jeg siger at jeg vil gå ind i prøverummet og tage bh'en på, tilføjer at det måske vil gøre en forskel i forhold til frakken.

Skrædderen ser på mig med venlige øjne. Dybe, mørke, faktisk meget smukke øjne. Jeg føler mig som en idiot. At have brugt det meste af min månedsløn på den frakke. Som Eva ikke engang vil kunne lide. At stå her, nu. Så tæt på en fremmed mand. Eva ville virkelig ikke bryde sig om det: hans håndtryk mod mit ene bryst.

Jeg tager frakken af, tager min taske og går ind i prøverummet. Da

buy something for supper for Eva and me. Potatoes, meat, something green. Nevertheless, I took the up escalator when I went into Magasin, not the down escalator to the basement. Up toward the ladies' clothing department rather than down toward the food. It's hard to say why. It certainly wasn't because I needed another coat. Or we. We wear the same size, Eva and I; we're both a size 38. And we share more or less our entire wardrobe. Have more or less the same taste. It's not often we buy something the other one wouldn't like. Like this coat now. Its collar is of real rabbit fur, which Eva can't stand. I know that. So I really don't know why I didn't just refrain from buying it. Maybe because it was on sale; it cost only half what it would have cost otherwise. And even though it was too big for me I was convinced I would save money no matter what, even though it would cost a little to have it taken in by a tailor. Because neither Eva nor I can sew.

"I don't have my bra on," I say.

Suddenly. I am surprised myself. Why did I say that now, I think, and regret that I said it. So I say that I'm going to go into the changing room and put my bra on; I add that it might make a difference with regard to the coat.

The tailor looks at me with friendly eyes. Deep, dark, actually very beautiful eyes. I feel like an idiot. Because I spent most of a month's pay on that coat. Which Eva isn't even going to like. And because I'm standing here now. So close to a strange man. Eva really wouldn't like that: the back of his hand against one of my breasts.

I take off the coat, take my bag, and go into one of the changing rooms. When I've pulled the curtain

jeg har trukket forhænget for, finder jeg den fugtige bh i tasken og tager den på under blusen, skynder mig, sørger for at så lidt hud som muligt bliver blottet.

Da jeg trækker gardinet fra igen, står han klar med frakken, hjælper mig den på og sætter nåle i stoffet under armene og omkring brystet.

- Much better, siger han.
- You think so? siger jeg.
- Of course, siger han.

Han stiller sig bag mig igen og lægger hænderne på min talje, løfter mine arme lidt ud til siden og føler efter under armene og langs ribbenene, ned til taljen.

- Perfect, siger han.

Han smiler til mig i spejlet og spørger om længden er som den skal være, og jeg siger at det kommer den til når jeg får mine støvler på. Jeg siger at jeg plejer at gå i støvler med høje hæle og ikke i kondisko, som i dag; det er kun fordi jeg har været til yoga, siger jeg, og føler igen at jeg har sagt for meget.

- Nice coat and nice boots, siger han og tilføjer:
- You will look very sexy.
- You think so? spørger jeg.
- Of course, siger han.

Han minder mig pludselig en lille smule om Chaplin. Den spinkle kropsbygning. Det mørke hår. Det lille overskæg. Smilet. Måden han siger *of course* på. Høfligt. Elskværdigt. Chaplin blev 88 år og fik 10 børn. Eva og jeg er barnløse. Eva har aldrig haft lyst til at få børn. Indimellem kan jeg godt få lyst.

- How much will it cost? spørger jeg.

Jeg tager frakken af og lægger den op på disken.

shut, I find the damp bra in my bag and put it on under my blouse, hurrying, making sure I expose as little skin as possible. When I pull the curtain open again, he is standing there with the coat ready and helps me put it on; he inserts pins in the material under my arms and around my chest.

“Much better,” he says.

“You think so?” I ask.

“Of course,” he says.

He stands behind me again and lays his hands on my waist, lifts my arms out a little to the sides, and feels under my arms and along my ribs, down to my waist.

“Perfect,” he says.

He smiles at me in the mirror and asks whether the length is as it should be, and I say it will be when I get my boots on. I say that I usually wear boots with high heels and not gym shoes like today — that’s only because I’ve been to yoga, I say, and again feel that I’ve said too much.

“Nice coat and nice boots,” he says and adds, “You will look very sexy.”

“You think so?” I ask.

“Of course,” he says.

He suddenly reminds me a little of Chaplin. The frail build. The dark hair. The little mustache. His smile. The way he says “of course.” Politely. Graciously. Chaplin lived to be eighty-eight years old and had ten children. Eva and I have no children. Eva has never wanted to have children. Sometimes I do want to.

“How much will it cost?” I ask.

I take off the coat and lay it on the counter.

“I’ll give you a special price,”

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– I'll give you a special price, siger skrædderen.

Han blinker til mig. Og jeg føler mig pludselig genert som en skolepige jeg ved ikke hvad jeg skal sige, jeg siger ingenting. Står bare foran disken og ser på ham. Han går om bag disken, finder en lommeregner frem og trykker på den med slanke fingre med utrolig velplejede negle. Så ser han på mig og siger, at de justeringer jeg skal have foretaget på frakken normalt ville have kostet omkring syvhundrede kroner, men at han vil gøre det for mig for det halve.

says the tailor.

He winks at me. And I suddenly feel as embarrassed as a schoolgirl; I don't know what to say; I say nothing. Just stand there in front of the counter and look at him. He steps behind the counter, gets out a calculator, and presses its buttons with slender fingers with unbelievably well-groomed nails. Then he he looks at me and says that the adjustments I want made to the coat would normally have cost around seven hundred kroner, but he will do it for me for half that.

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JULIA BUTSCHKOW is a graduate of the Danish school of authors, *Forfatterskolen*, and the author of a number of published works of fiction, including three novels, *Lunatia* (2004), *Apropos Opa* (2009), and *Aber dabei* (2013); a volume of poems, *Lykkekomplex* (1997); a play, *Sidespor* (2001), that has been staged in Copenhagen and Malmö; and a volume of short stories, *Der er ingen bjerge i Danmark* ("There Are No Mountains in Denmark"), in which "Kartofler, kød, noget grønt" appears. She has also written a commissioned work for the National Gallery of Denmark, "Requiem" (2011). She is currently at work on a new novel. Among other distinctions, Butschkow has received the Danish Arts Foundation's three-year working grant (2005) and the Rosinante & Co honor grant (2007). Peter Sean Woltemade's translation of another story from *Der er ingen bjerge i Danmark*, "Jomfru Ane Gade," was published in *The Missing Slate* in May and subsequently nominated for the Pushcart Prize; his translations of two further stories, "Lauge" and "Det ser meget almindeligt ud" ("It Looks Very Ordinary") subsequently appeared in *The Cossack Review* and *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* respectively, and his translation of Butschkow's short story "Hansen" is forthcoming in *Storm Cellar*.

PETER SEAN WOLTEMADE is an American-born literary translator who has been based in Copenhagen since 2004 and has lived in Germany and Sweden for several years respectively. After earning a Bachelor of Arts from Ohio Wesleyan University, he studied at the University of Freiburg and at Uppsala University. He is the recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Graduate Fellowship (Berlin) and a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (Copenhagen) and is the holder of M.A. degrees in Scandinavian and German and a Ph.D. in medieval German literature from the University of California at Berkeley. He taught English and German at Danish gymnasias for several years. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, *Pusteblynde*, *Storm Cellar*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Cossack Review*, and *The Missing Slate*. His translation of Stefanie Ross's novel *Nemesis - Verkaufte Unschuld* (*Nemesis: Innocence Sold*) was published by AmazonCrossing this year. He has translated the manuscript for Kurt Jacobsen's 2015 nonfiction book *Haldor Topsøe – Virksomheden og verden* ("Haldor Topsøe: The Company and the World") into English for publication by Gads Forlag's Historika imprint this year. Last year, Historika published his translation of Peter Kristiansen's nonfiction book *Power, Splendour, and Diamonds* and his translation of Jens Gunni Busck's nonfiction book *Christian IV*; his translations of Jens Gunni Busck's nonfiction books *Frederik III* and *Christian VIII* are forthcoming from Historika. He has worked with translators Shaun Whiteside, Maureen Freely, Sasha Dugdale, and Katy Derbyshire and with author Kristof Magnusson. He tweets at @PeterSWoltemade.