ABSTRACT

“WOULDN'T HARM A FLY”: AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
DU MAL À UNE MOUCHE BY ANNE LISE GROBÉTY

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This thesis is an English translation of the Swiss-French novel Du mal à une mouche by Anne-Lise Grobéty. The book is about a woman’s journey into a bureaucratic afterlife, where she is given a list of everything that she has ever killed in her life, from insects, kittens, and everything in between.

My translation finds a balance between what the author intended to say in the native language, as well as a naturalization of the target language, in this case, English. This book has never been translated into English before, and it will hopefully one day be published.
“WOULDN’T HARM A FLY”: AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF

DU MAL À UNE MOUCHE BY ANNE LISE GROBÉTY

BY

ANNA STROZZA
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Thesis Director:
Christopher Nissen
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my friend, Sabie Zenki Baftiri, for having discovered the book *Du mal à une mouche* and bringing it to my attention.

My thesis journey has been quite unique. Unfortunately, the thesis director that I had chosen at the beginning of my thesis was unavailable to assist me over the summer, the time for which I was enrolled in the course and was to begin my drafts. Thankfully, I was working as Dr. Greg Ross’ Graduate Assistant at the time, and Dr. Ross was often able to offer me assistance when it came to deciphering the text, as well as reaching a solution to several translation questions. Without Dr. Ross, the first three drafts of my thesis would have been done completely independently; therefore, I am very grateful for his assistance.

A week before the semester began, I needed to find a new thesis director, and I was, understandably, a bit concerned. I wasted no time in contacting Dr. Nissen, requesting that he be my new thesis director. Although he is an Italian professor at NIU, he also speaks French fluently. Dr. Nissen responded to me immediately, and without hesitation agreed to be my new thesis director. With everything that Dr. Nissen had to do for his classes, his research, and his duties as the Graduate Advisor, he agreed to take the time to help me on this final chapter of my graduate career. I am tremendously grateful that he had agreed to step in as my director, and it’s thanks to him that I have a complete thesis to defend.
Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Merino, who also joined my committee at the last minute. At first, Dr. Nissen was one of my other committee members; therefore, when he moved on to be the director, I had an open spot. I knew that Dr. Merino had quite a bit of experience in translation, but I knew how busy he was with his research. I thought it was a longshot that he would actually agree to be on my committee. To my surprise, he agreed, and I thank him for helping me reach my degree.

The last member of my committee is Dr. Maryline Lukacher. Dr Lukacher has had me as a student since I was a sophomore in college. She has seen me grow from giving a less than thrilling presentation as an undergraduate on Coco Chanel, to a humorous essay on Gustave Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, to a detailed presentation on the life and influence of the artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, as a graduate student. She has been my professor consistently throughout my six years at NIU, and even after retiring as a professor, she has stayed committed to seeing me through to my Master’s Degree. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Lukacher for having reached the point where I am today in terms of my French career, and I am very honored to have had her on my thesis committee.
DEDICATION

With love to my parents, Ralph and Beatrice Strozza,
without whom I would never have gotten this far.
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As a French graduate student at Northern Illinois University, I had two choices for my thesis: either a topic on literature or the translation of a text. Since I had studied mainly French literature for my undergraduate career, it seemed that that was the route I was going to take. Having studied the 19th century in depth, I had originally planned on choosing a literary topic; however, I decided to reevaluate this decision, based on my career choice.

As an undergraduate student, I had received my teacher certification in French, Spanish, and Italian. With my knowledge of French literature derived from the four years as an undergraduate, as well as the additional two that I will have completed after my graduate career, I felt more than equipped to teach various literary figures and movements to my future students. Having never taken a translation course as an undergraduate student, I did not realize how interesting translation truly was. After completing the course Thème et Version, I became fascinated by translation and how it allowed me to manipulate the French language. I found that translation allowed for me to work with grammar in a way that was different than just recognizing what something said. When translating a text, I not only had to figure out what a passage was saying, but then find a balance between what the original author wanted to say, and what sounded natural in the target language. Translation also allowed me to
acquire new vocabulary, not just by looking up its meaning in a dictionary, but exploring the various definitions of one single word, and choosing which one could be best applied.

After discovering my fascination with translation, I realized how useful it would be in teaching French to high school students; it would benefit them greatly to learn how to work with the language in a way that they might never have thought to do previously. Translation had also helped me in understanding novels and other literary works by grasping the fact that words and phrases could not simply be translated directly. It was because of this that I decided to translate a text for my thesis.

In this introduction, I will first present the author of the book I have translated, Anne-Lise Grobéty. I will then present the book, *Du mal à une mouche*, summarizing the plot and analyzing the symbolisms throughout. Next I will discuss the approach I took in order to translate the text, as well as why I chose to go about it the way I did. I will then discuss the issues and solutions I had in translating the text, citing specific examples, and finally, I will end with a note of gratitude to those who have helped me achieve this goal.

Before I introduce the book, *Du mal à une mouche*, I find it to be rather important to introduce the author, Anne-Lise Grobéty. Anne-Lise Grobéty was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds Switzerland in 1949. One of the most respected authors of her generation, Grobéty became enamored with literature at a very young age, so much so, that her first “book” was written at
the age of six. Although this was her first experience with writing, it was not until she was twelve that she began to read about things that would truly open her mind to the world of literature. Fascinated by the “nouveau roman français”, Grobéty would come to read almost everything that concerned itself with this particular genre.

Authors of the *nouveau roman* would steer away from sticking to one particular writing style. Instead, they would apply different writing styles to each new work. Doing this allowed writers to push their limits and step out of their comfort zones. It also allowed readers to have a new experience each time an author came out with a new book. It is clear that this genre of literature had quite an influence on Grobéty. The comparison between her first novel, *Pour mourir en février*, and *Du mal à une mouche*, reveals considerable changes in style. *Pour mourir en février* is much more of a plot-driven book, with the introduction and development of multiple characters. *Du mal à une mouche* has but two characters, and the minimal plot is replete with symbolism and life lessons. Even though she had adopted certain elements from the influence of the *nouveau roman*, the semblances of poeticism seem to be a constant in most of her books. For the description on the back cover of *Pour mourir en février*, S. Corinna Bille describes the novel as “undulant,” and “seeming to be woven from one single phrase.” *Du mal à une mouche* flows in a similar, poetic way.
When asked in a 2007 interview with Alice Mignemi if she considered herself a poet or a novelist, Grobéty responded, “I consider myself as someone who writes, applied in every sense of writing.” It is clear that Grobéty was a master of the pen, someone who did not chain herself to the workings of one sole genre. She was simply enchanted by writing, in all of its forms.

Writing has always been Grobéty’s main focus in life. She states: “I would write a lot. The desire, the need to write was there, without even knowing much of what I was going to do. And after fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, writing became my only concern, my essential concern.”

Her obsession with writing had paid off. At only 19 years old, Grobéty had her first book, *Pour mourir en février* published. Not only was it impressive for such a young woman, to publish a novel, but it had also won Grobéty the Prix Georges-Nicole. It was quite clear that Grobéty was well on her way to becoming one of Switzerland’s most talented writers.

Although Grobéty had an intense passion for writing, she did not consider herself a slave to it. She allowed herself to dive into other interests, such as politics. While taking a break from writing in order to raise her children, Grobéty worked as a députée at the Grand Conseil neuchâtelois.
Throughout the interview with Mignemi, it becomes very clear that Grobéty was not the type of woman who beat around the bush. She answered questions frankly and did not hesitate to express her opinions. When she was asked whether or not her life influenced her novels, Grobéty responded: “I believe that one’s work is always influenced by his or her life. We work through the events of our life, through our own emotions, our own experiences, every image that we come across.”

Her answer to this question should appear intriguing to any reader of *Du mal à une mouche*. Since one of the main lessons of this book is that all beings are created equal and that the lives of seemingly insignificant creatures have intrinsic value, it is interesting to imagine what sparked Grobéty’s interest in such a topic. Unfortunately, Grobéty passed away in 2010; therefore, there is no way in knowing for certain why Grobéty chose this topic, especially since she had never discussed it with anyone publicly. In analyzing this topic and the reasoning behind why it was chosen, it becomes apparent that Grobéty might have been influenced by Jainism, a religion that is mainly practiced in India. This religion focuses on the preservation of all living beings, without considering one more important than any other. Although it appears unlikely that Grobéty was an actual practitioner of the religion, her book might well reveal its influence. Grobéty herself stated that an author’s personal life always influences his or her writing, so it would be safe to think that Grobéty had at least an interest
in Jainism, although religion is not once explicitly mentioned through the course of *Du mal à une mouche*.

Because many of Grobéty’s protagonists reflect perceptions of a woman’s role in society, she did classify herself as a feminist writer, yet not in a very strict sense. She found being a feminist writer very important during her generation, when more and more women writers were trying to make a name for themselves. Literature had been dominated by men for centuries on end, and the women of Grobéty’s generation were following in the footsteps of the greatest women authors of previous generations, such as George Sand and Rachilde. Grobéty states, “It was completely necessary to defend the position of the woman; she needed to be given a voice”. Although not strictly a feminist writer, feminism personally effected Grobéty. For a number of generations, it was men who were writing about women, and she felt that it was her turn, as a woman, to give female characters a voice.

Grobéty was a very meticulous writer. Although her works seem effortless, the detail that went into every phrase, every word she had ever written took quite a bit of thought. She would often work in layers, with a first, second, third, and even fourth draft in order to get across exactly what she wanted to say.

Grobéty’s writing is the type that inspires reflection. The thought that she put into every word or phrase is evident, and a reader might well be inspired to ponder after reading
one of her works. Her books were never written in vain; each word she wrote had a purpose. As I will come to discuss in the following section of my introduction, *Du mal à une mouche* follows the classic Grobéty style, with “the meaning of life” built into it.

*Du mal à une mouche* is the story of a woman’s experience in the afterlife. Although it may sound like many other stories with this same premise, it is far from ordinary. Renée, (or, as the narrator insists, not Renée), narrates the story as she journeys into the beyond. Once she arrives, it is not at all as she expects. There are no family members or friends greeting her; there is no big party once she arrives. All she sees is a peculiar man with a very large ledger, screaming the word, “Next!” It’s hardly welcoming.

The narrator comes to realize that the afterlife is not a peaceful paradise after all; it is a bureaucracy filled with businesspeople buzzing about their daily routines. The narrator soon discovers that she was not as good a person as she thought she was.

As I previously stated, although religion is not mentioned in *Du mal à une mouche*, the fact that the narrator goes into the afterlife is suggestive of some sort of religious connotation. Since Grobéty mentioned that it is normal for authors to insert their personal lives and beliefs into the stories they write, it is likely that she either had religious beliefs, or had strong opinions about religion. It is possible that, by making the afterlife a bureaucracy, Grobéty shows an inclination to treat traditional views of heaven in ironic terms.
The man with the ledger who greets the narrator resembles popular conceptions of the biblical Saint Peter at the Pearly Gates. In Catholicism, Saint Peter is the guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven, and with him is a book with the names of all those allowed to enter. In the case of *Du mal à une mouche*, the ledger that the man holds is filled with an enormous list for every person that comes before him. The narrator soon comes to find that this list includes every single living being that she has ever killed in her entire life.

This list is not particular. It does not matter if the living being was as small as an ant or as big as a whale; if the narrator killed it, it is there, with the precise number of how many of each species she has killed. As the man goes on and on, listing every species imaginable, the narrator’s memory begins to drift in and out. There are many instances where the narrator does not remember killing certain things, and others of which she is perfectly aware.

One of the major “killings” that the narrator remembers is the death by beating of a dozen kittens that she once witnessed. Since she did nothing to stop these murders, she was held accountable by the celestial interviewer.

Other times, however, the narrator has no memory of killing what is stated on the ledger. The biggest example of this is the wolf: “And one wolf, one for madam!” the man states. There is no explanation of how or when the wolf was killed, just that there is no doubt that the narrator killed it.
The wolf proves to be a very significant part of the book. In the end, the narrator discovers that she is to carry around boxes filled with every living being she’s ever killed. Not only is she to carry them, but she is to reassemble their mangled bodies. The narrator accepts this punishment and is ready to spend eternity working to piece together the carcasses of ants, pigeons, and everything that comes before, in between, and after. When the man realizes that the narrator is his the very last soul he will ever interview, after centuries of doing this task, he has mercy on her. He decides that he will dump all of her baggage onto another passenger’s load. Everything, that is, but the wolf.

The wolf becomes symbolic of the narrator’s conscience. He will be her passenger through eternity. He will be a constant reminder of everything she has killed in her life, and she will never be able to let him go. It is interesting that Grobéty chose the wolf, instead of any other animal. The narrator killed kittens, pigeons, and much more, but the wolf is what she decided would be her companion for the afterlife. The wolf symbolizes many things. In the spirit world, it is the most powerful of all the animals, and in this case, it ends up prevailing over all other living beings.

_Du mal à une mouche_ is a book that makes us truly ponder the significance of life. Is our life really more important than the life of any other living being? Grobéty calls attention to the importance of life: is one life really more important than another
I will next explain my translation process. Before I could even consider translating *Du mal à une mouche*, I had to read it about three times. In order to translate a text, it is absolutely essential to know what the author is trying to say in the original language. Although the original language is French, it is Swiss-French, meaning that there are quite a few expressions in the book that are more difficult to understand. I needed to become familiar with these expressions even before I began to translate.

The approach I took in order to complete this translation included the translation software Trados. Trados is used in translation companies that usually translate documents and websites that have many repeated words. Unlike a translation engine, Trados takes the words that the translator decides upon and saves them for future use. If those words happen to come up again in the text, the translator can use the search engine within Trados to find how she translated the word previously. Since my translation was a work of literature, I didn’t have many repeated words that I had difficulty translating. Trados proved beneficial to me in my translation by formatting the text in a way with which it was easy to work. For example, instead of translating entire pages of text, Trados broke the text down for me so that I could translate sentence by sentence. Of course, it is difficult to understand the main idea when dissecting a text by only looking at one sentence at a time; therefore, I also had a hard copy of the original text with me during the translation.
In order to reach a proper final translation, I needed four different drafts, each one focusing on some form of amelioration of the preceding one. The first draft focused only on a very rough translation of the text. I did not look up words I didn’t know and left phrases and expressions alone. The point of the first translation was only to change the text from source to target. If one were to read this translation, it would be completely incomprehensible.

The second draft of my thesis was a fill-in-the-blank of words and expressions that I didn’t know in the first draft. This proved to be quite difficult and time-consuming; in almost every sentence of my first translation, there was something that I needed to look up. Of course, finding the definitions of words was not the difficult part. I needed to figure out what message the author was trying to get across by choosing the best possible definition. Expressions were also difficult, especially the Swiss-French expressions, such as noyer les cochons. In standard French, this expression (which means to beat around the bush) is actually noyer les poissons. Other examples such as madame and mon’sieur are also not standard French. A more obvious “Swissicum” would be the difference of numbers, like septante instead of soixante-dix. Most of the expressions are not found in your common French-English dictionary. I needed to search the Internet, read forums, and consult with a native speaker not only in order to find an adequate equivalent to these expressions, but to verify what I had previously found. I quickly came to learn that (in most cases) the first
definition of a word or expression was not the best one. There was always more research I could do, no matter how insignificant the word.

The point of the third draft of my translation was to render the text in standard, natural English. Although the second draft sounded much better than the first draft, there was still much that needed to be done in order for the text to make sense in the target language, English.

The first three drafts of my translation were not monitored by anyone else. Although I did collaborate from time to time with French speakers, most of the text was evaluated only by me. For the fourth and final draft of my translation, I very much needed someone to look over my work, advising me on what sounded natural, on what made sense, and what didn’t.

My newly appointed thesis director, Dr. Nissen reviewed my third draft and made necessary corrections and suggestions. He also discovered certain things that I had not realized myself. For example, on page 10, the narrator is very adamant about the fact that she wasn’t “Renée”. When translating this section, I didn’t think anything of the fact that the name she wished to avoid was Renée. Dr. Nissen, however, noticed that in French, Grobéty was playing off one of the main themes of the book: rebirth. Renée in French, means reborn, and moreover, has Christian connotations. I found this to be quite interesting and had to keep this in mind when revising my translation.
Dr. Nissen also helped me render the text more natural in English. In many circumstances, I was thinking in “French terms,” and I was missing the natural flow of the English language. For example, on page 13, I translated a sentence thus: “Suddenly his hands and feet turned the color of a candy filled with pink dye”. After Dr. Nissen looked over it, he suggested I change it to “Suddenly, his hands and feet turned pink, suggestive of a candy filled with artificial colors”. The latter not only sounds more natural, but is also less confusing to understand.

Having another English native speaker review my work was very beneficial. From his suggestions, I was able to polish my fourth draft, and prepare for the defense.

There were a number of problems that I came across when translating *Du mal à une mouche*. The first was something that I knew I was going to have to think long and hard about: the alphabetization of the living beings that the narrator killed. In the original text, everything the narrator has killed is listed in alphabetical order. For example, on page 15 of the original text, the celestial interlocutor states, “Ainsi sous lettre A, cela nous donne cent septante-sept abeilles, quatre cent trente-quatre araignées.” Of course, this was a major issue, since, if the alphabetical order was kept, it would translate to, “So under the letter A, we have one hundred and seventy-seven bees and four hundred and thirty-four spiders”. Clearly, *bees* and *spiders* do not fall under the same letter in English, let alone the letter *A*. I truly had to
think about this issue for quite some time in order to find a solution to it. First, I thought that I would alphabetize the entire list in English, and then work on the translation from there. Fortunately, I decided against that, not only because it would have been very time-consuming, but also because there was no way I could rearrange the entire book. Grobéty envisioned it as it was published, so I knew I needed to find another way to reach this solution.

Although I knew this was one of the biggest translation obstacles with which I was faced, I decided to put it off until I had the opinion of my thesis director. After discussing it with him, I decided that the best thing to do would be to omit the alphabetical order all together. I made the decision based on the fact that this would not alter the meaning of the text. Instead of listing everything alphabetically, I decided that just listing things would be sufficient in preserving the same purpose, which was to emphasize the bureaucracy and structure of Grobéty’s afterlife.

As I previously mentioned, the narrator’s name in life was most likely Renée, yet Grobéty was being clever in one of the book’s main themes of rebirth. I had thought about this quite a bit: how was I going to find a name in English that would get the same point across? I decided not to change it. Renée is a common name in English, and it derives directly from French. In French, there was no explanation of this. The reader just had to make the
connection; therefore, I decided that, in English, it would need no explanation either. Astute readers, familiar with the etymology of the name Renée, could draw their own conclusions.

I came across another translation issue on page 15, “Vous êtes tous les mêmes à faire l‘âne pour avoir du foin, j’ai l’habitude, “huhanhuhan…”. The obvious issue in this sentence was how I was going to translate “huhanhuhan”, into English. Originally, I had translated it into just “hahaha”. After Dr. Nissen looked at it, he noticed that it was meant to be regarded as an onomatopoeic reproduction of an animal noise since, earlier in the sentence, the interviewer had mentioned a donkey. He suggested that I translate “huhanhuhan” to the English equivalent of the donkey sound: “he haw, he haw”, and that is what I did.

Another part of the original text that I found difficult to translate was on page 28: “Pas d’hermine et zero héros”. The narrator misunderstands, thinking that the man said, zéro et ro, which means absolutely nothing in French. In the translation, I needed to create the same effect of misunderstanding. On the advice of one of the members of my defense committee, I decided to translate the question, “zero heros”.

Although there were more problems that I ran into while translating Du mal à une mouche, the list could really continue for quite a while. Every page had me stop, think, research various words and phrases, and eventually find a solution. The problems that I have stated were examples with which I had the most difficulty, and with which I feel I found
adequate solutions. Although it is possible that better solutions exist, I chose the solutions that I thought were best. Translating is subjective; there is no right or wrong answer. There is only the translator who tries to strike a balance between remaining faithful to what the author wanted to say, and rendering the text natural in the target language.

I would next like to express my gratitude and acknowledge those who helped me with my thesis. There are a number of people who I would like to especially thank for helping me during the course of this translation. Firstly, I would like to thank Interpro Translation Solutions for donating the translation software Trados. As I stated earlier, Trados broke up *Du mal à une mouche* into sentences so that I could translate it with more ease. It helped me organize how I was going to translate the book, and it was a great help in getting me started.

My thesis journey has been quite unique. Unfortunately, the thesis director that I had chosen at the beginning of my thesis was unavailable to assist me over the summer, the time for which I was enrolled in the course and was to begin my drafts. Thankfully, I was working as Dr. Greg Ross’ Graduate Assistant at the time, and Dr. Ross was often able to offer me assistance when it came to deciphering the text, as well as reaching a solution to several translation questions. Without Dr. Ross, the first three drafts of my thesis would have been done completely independently; therefore, I am very grateful for his assistance.
A week before the semester began, I needed to find a new thesis director, and I was, understandably, a bit concerned. I wasted no time in contacting Dr. Nissen, requesting that he be my new thesis director. Although he is an Italian professor at NIU, he also speaks French fluently. Dr. Nissen responded to me immediately, and without hesitation agreed to be my new thesis director. With everything that Dr. Nissen had to do for his classes, his research, and his duties as the Graduate Advisor, he agreed to take the time to help me on this final chapter of my graduate career. I am tremendously grateful that he had agreed to step in as my director, and it’s thanks to him that I have a complete thesis to defend.

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artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, as a graduate student. She has been my professor consistently throughout my six years at NIU, and even after retiring as a professor, she has stayed committed to seeing me through to my Masters Degree. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Lukacher for having reached the point where I am today in terms of my French career, and I am very honored to have her on my thesis committee.

Before this thesis project, I did not have much experience in translation. Throughout the course of my graduate career, I took one translation course; therefore I am glad I had this experience to learn what it takes to actually translate a work of literature.

It is thanks to a friend, Sabie Zenki Baftiri that I discovered the book Du mal à une mouche. I not only enjoyed translating the book, but I enjoyed the book itself. The storyline was different and gave me something interesting to translate. The most difficult part of the translation was, in certain circumstances, deciphering what the author intended to say. Since the sentences of the text tend to run long, I sometimes found myself unable to understand what Grobéty was actually trying to say. In those situations, I could only translate the text with difficulty, , and once I had figured it out, I needed to find a way to make it sound equally as complex in English. It was not an easy task.

I would love to say that there was an easiest part to translating Du mal à une mouche, but it was quite a complex process. I’m actually very appreciative that the process was more
difficult because I feel that I learned a lot about the art of translation. It takes much more than just looking at a word and choosing its equivalent in the target language. Translating make you work with the language in a way that exercises the mind.

Overall, my experience as a graduate student has ended as it should: with a thesis of which I am proud. Although my experience was different, I feel that my translation skills are stronger because of this. I made mistakes and corrected those mistakes myself, and when it was time for somebody else to step-in with suggestions, I knew exactly what he was talking about and how to accommodate for the changes that needed to be made.

Finally, I am very glad to have discovered Anne-Lise Grobéty. I find her work to be fascinating and her messages empowering. It was an honor to have translated one of her works, and I look forward to the future, when I will eventually translate other books of hers in order to publish my translations and become recognized as an accomplished translator.
WORKS CONSULTED


Translation

Eyelids open or closed, it doesn’t matter anymore.

Anyways, life is over for me from here on out.

My glasses had fallen on the floor next to my right arm, my gold-trimmed slippers at the foot of the bed.

The cat, staring impassively, sitting at the entrance, already knows that I’m no longer there.

Later on, you called for me, you came into my room, you found me lying on the ground; I had neither voice nor presence.

"She's too young to die like this", the people around you say.

"She should have lived well into her hundreds, like her aunt Valentine, if her heart hadn't given out", they complain.

Come on, tell them I lived a good life with you, and that I had already become old.

My skin had long begun to taper into thin wrinkles on my face and body.

But with each new wrinkle, it seemed that I was more filled with tenderness for all who surrounded me, people, pets, children, the colors of the sunset, near the mauve flowers of the spring, the meadows of summer!
And even more filled with tenderness for you, you know well.

My world takes place behind the scenes, from now on. The last leaves of autumn have died out these last few days and tonight it snowed upland for the first time. They're pushing me outside, I feel neither the frigid cold, nor the weight of my body. Something inescapable and soft wraps me up, something takes me away from you too quickly, very far from your grief, from the grief of our sons and daughters, from the grief of the people lamenting around you and our tawny cat.

Disappearing through an opening smaller than the eye of a needle and crossing over a birthing of time, juicy like a slice of watermelon, fresh and healthily pink.

I am no longer wrapped up, I am no longer being taken away.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Those who know this type of waiting would never again dare complain about the hours spent waiting in line at the supermarket the day before Christmas...

My whole body turns into the consistency of cooled wax.
your sky blue blouse and your dark velvet skirt hang in the cloakroom between dawn and twilight, and you this moment naked like a chick leaving its shell in transhumanity reborn for thousands and thousands of years perhaps your hands your feet your nose you'll never have them together again, now you haunt the circle of broken pieces, old and dear child

Old, I had certainly become. But my name is not Renée...My name wasn't Renée before, as far as I know.
"Well, are you coming in? I said next! Next, please."

He seems half slumped against the counter, he has gelatinous contours, his skin is a very dubious color, like meat whose expiration date has passed a good while ago, and his dark felt hat falls to the crease of his neck. The place is swimming in a peculiar bitter almond vapor.

"Name?"

"It's just that I'm not very sure of who I am..."

"Perfect: you don't exist anymore."

"Not Renée, anyway, I promise you that."

"Please tell me, what is it that you think a promise is going to do for you here?" All I'm interested in is your little certificate of matriculation. Everything else is just protocol, provisional and cruel."

Honestly, I was expecting another type of ceremony, or a more grandiose welcome, at least. With the help of his reading glasses, held at the end of his never-ending arm, he decodes from a small wrinkle on my forehead a series of numbers that make me tremble.
"You're right to tremble, Madam, it's checkout time. Generally, it's nothing but a moment of great satisfaction. For life is not only made up of sunbathing, moonlight, baked cinnamon apples, and gold-trimmed slippers. It is also cobbled together with your strike-outs, with your indifferences, your scars and your unworthiness. And something, in the end, that resembles death. So, let's get to your accounts and to your disgraces."

First, he takes an endless swig from a flask that seems like it's been empty for a long time.

Then, he flips through the ledger in front of him, which seems as thick as the trunk of an oak tree. He then cuts from it words and figures one after the other, flying away in shavings around his head.

I catch some in mid-air- batrachians, saurians, arachnids, myriapods... Is he teaching me an accelerated refresher-course on zoology?

"Madam, it troubles me to see that you're not at a good page in your story: you are here in the nonplace, and full of inventory. Concentrate, please." Murmuring like a spinning wheel, he continues his reading, when something tells me that I must at all costs try to interrupt the course of his litany; easier said than done: I have nothing in my throat but a small, reedy voice.
"You seem disturbed, are you dreading what is left of you? Why? Don't tell me that you want to know the details of your inventory? Or worse: get clarifications on it? Know that, as a preamble, any attempts to explain must, at the same time, open up a new interrogation."

Suddenly, his hands and feet turn pink, suggestive of a candy filled with artificial colors, and he gets excited, he squirms like someone enjoying a good joke that he's about to tell to no one in particular.

"Since it's necessary, I'm going to simplify everything for you in lists in order for you to grasp the following, mortifying information that concerns you. But be careful: don't try to be smart with me or beat around the bush, I'm easily angered. Don't interrupt me except for strict necessity."

His body wriggles like an eel, and his whiskers that were sprawled out thinner than pine needles, now seem as thick as an ermine's tail.

I need to be cautious.
Don't tremble, don't blink, remain perfectly still during the hearing.

"So, to begin, we have one hundred and twenty-seven bees, four hundred and thirty-four spiders.

Neither donkey, nor foal, nor asp, to boot. And next, what a blessing: only eighteen ladybugs. Cockroaches or *blatta orientalis*: twelve... no, no, don't interrupt me, I've only just begun. Two toads, what am I saying, twenty-two toads, you're messing me up by getting all agitated, your squirming is messing with my head. Because of you, I’ve even skipped a line. You are all the same, acting like an ass just to get some hay, I’m used to it. "He haw he haw, please sir, what are you getting at?"

“...Well, dear Madam", he drones on, as if he's speaking to a little girl, “right now I'm going to go over one by one the unfortunate list of ex-beings that had the misfortune to come across you, just as alive as them, and who you dismally made pass away, in passing, or, in other words, that you slew, did in, killed."

"Me, kill?"

"You are one of my slowest clients to catch on. At this stage, I have normally suffered through at least five protests and have been insulted on one or two occasions. ‘Me, kill? But I wouldn't harm a fly! I'm sweet and innocent like a lamb who’s only recently stopped nursing
from its mother...’ And I’m supposed to hear these asinine things brayed at me without raising an eyebrow? Of course, I know that half of a fox's cunning is due to a chicken's stupidity; I'm telling you this to show you that you can only be partly to blame, but is it an appeasing circumstance to be only half a killer? Let's look at this as closely as possible, as far as you are concerned. I bet that you're ready to swear on your old, tawny, half-deaf cat's life that you wouldn't harm a fly either, right? This, without further ado, is what we’re going to find out, Madam”.

He again flips through the pages of his heavy notebook, his hat toppling over his forehead, exposing a head as white and smooth as a baby's bottom.

"And here we are: I read flies, midges, and other muscidae, to which we add mosquitoes, to save ourselves a line, that together make a roundish total of thirty-five thousand five hundred and six. Don't give me that dead-fish look, our accountants are trustworthy. What interest would they have in misappropriating sums of crab lice, aphids, or panaxia quadripunctaria? You see, you can't teach an old dog like me new tricks. I've been at this post for thirty light years, of which twenty-five were spent in obscurantism and brutality in DeuTer's office for the worst cases. So, just think, I've seen enough people come through here with crimes more heinous than that of a soldier, I've seen these ferocious beings line up who had cleaned out and plundered and demolished half of a continent and who would the come to prance around
in front of me shaking their behinds, all cute, like young ladies at their first dance, seeming like people whose conscience weighs no more than a dragonfly's wing, and they make your jaw drop by saying that they wouldn't harm a fly."

And all of a sudden, he slumps down against the wall, like a puppet that the puppeteer had completely let go of in mid movement. His hat is on the ground, looking like a pile of horseshit, his face resembles a piece of gum that's been chewed for too long. Only a few pink streaks under the skin on his head impart a bit of color to the scene...
Flash! The last stains of sunset against the flank of summits, flowing like a rosé down the length of paths and ravines, the tones of an indefinable mauve, then an insistent blue as if brought from the heart of darkness. And in the spring, do you remember, among the last patches of snow, great fields of gray grass would open up in the middle of which you were looking for the first groundhogs who hopped on the slopes and you would point them out to the children *here wanting to remember is wearing out too much of her memory, it's like making a hole in a bag of sugar and carrying it on your back, your load will be too quickly lightened*
Just as suddenly as he fell apart, he finds himself back on his feet. “A union-mandated nap,” he mentions. Then he looks at me suspiciously:

"Was I having a conversation with you and rushing through your business as quickly as possible?" "You were talking to me."

"In this case, madam, I was telling you that living is something that is terribly dangerous because it exposes you permanently not only to the risk of dying but, worse, to cause dying, and a thousand times worse even, to let something die without doing or saying anything. It's rare for any being to be allowed the grace to wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night without having become common killers in between."

How does one become a common killer? Easily. I would say most often by absent-mindedness or haste. Or often by simple reflexes, or because of too much zeal, fear, even disgust. All these little, silly movements that are carried out without thinking about it, a thumb that squashes, a slap of a towel against a window, pressing the button on a bottle of insecticide, a flick, a little too much weight on your heel... For the less common killer, this appears to be more complicated and yet it's just as easy. Shoddy plans put in motion, linkages made up of cowardice and servility, cruelty as well, of course, a heart full of rage, bitterness, jealousy, self-hatred, and certainly, for the most serious cases, a perverse appetite for power over others and the insanity to believe that life itself is at our mercy. A stinking cocktail, isn't
it? I shouldn't have to tell you everything, you should already know. Any questions?"  "Yes, I would like..."

"Perfect. What matters isn't the answers that I might give you, but the questions that you have for me.

I might appear to digress, but I'm at your disposal once again. Judging by the meager sum of the spiders either stepped on or suffocated by your vacuum cleaners, I conclude that you were a mediocre housekeeper and that you've often had to put up with the silent disapproval of your guests."

"It's not necessarily through negligence that I spared them. Their webs, I've always gotten rid of them. But the spider..."  He interrupts me: for everything that we have deliberately protected, even saved from a certain death, in the end, we will benefit from a deduction in due form.

“Provided that your final sum is so ridiculously low that it defies beliefs. But you're making me get off track by being too down to earth. Enough of this, let me start again, where was I..."
This next section, truly, is full of lessons.

Under the section Kittens, having protested in good faith, I find myself under joint accusation, that includes precisely the exemplary scenario of newborn kittens beaten to death by two blows of a spade by my regretful yet ruthless companion in the face of the feline overpopulation of our household that was stocked with an abundance of ladycats and tomcats. It is established without a doubt that I didn't raise a finger to stop these premeditated murders. So here I am, with the heavy burden of five kittens randomly sacrificed from their litters on my list...

Arriving at the section Crow, I have no better luck on my side.

Naturally, he renders me liable, regarding the myriads of insects that have been smashed against the windshield of my cars, I'm going to benefit from the grace of an indirect responsibility (he tells me in passing, that some, at this point, try to change this rule in view of the increases in development of motorized traffic); on the other hand, with regard to the aforementioned crow that violently ran into my car door one day in May, I should have stopped and gone to see if it had been killed by the blow or if it was suffering
incomprehensible pain by the side of the road. This serious failure to help the bird in danger
demands a revocation, without appeal of any claim to indirect responsibility.

"I know the extent to which humans are reluctant to help during a being's last convulsions and
hate to verify if all life has truly ceased. It's as if on each occasion they had to contemplate
their own death tenfold. So? It's exactly the perfect moment to get used to the adventure of
profound change. For, dying is always about changing form; and yet, strangely enough, this
abiding truth continues to defy the comprehension of most people.

But here I am, still allowing myself to go on about things that distract us from the orderly
progress of the proceedings. I'm well aware, I no longer have the keen efficiency for these
formalities, I don't put the same amount of effort into them. Anyway, let's get back to it:

...And the twentytwo toads, I haven't forgotten about them, I read them
to you in a loud and intelligible voice right? Good. Under the next section, strangely, nothing
to report. I would have readily imagined you exterminating a colony of potato beetles, of the
chrysomelide family- but, oh well." For a moment, he freezes up, his features motionless, he
just stands there. I don't even dare choke back my embarrassment for fear of making too much
noise swallowing.
And when he regained mobility, after signaling to me that he was taking his union-mandated half-time, he lets me know, by a happenstance of which I wasn’t even aware, that under the next section, I didn't have to accept the death of either an elk or an elephant. What a relief. But, unfortunately, there's the demise of three hundred and forty-two and a half escargots. My attempt to dispute the half escargot ends in a discreet clearing of my throat.

"And I have the painful task of announcing to you 54,538 ants of all kinds. With gregarious insects, it's true that it is very easy to annihilate them in great quantities.

It takes nothing more than a walk on a mountain-path, and in one day you have already reduced dozens of individuals to a pulp under the solid platforms of your shoes, even while paying attention. And I'm not talking about a single squirt of insecticide on a colony peacefully crossing your kitchen in single file, nor is it the placement of capsules containing so much poison you'd be able to exterminate a minmetropolis. What was I saying? All of these little, insignificant gestures make you no more and no less of a miserable murderer. For, ‘what you are capable of doing to the least of you, you are capable of doing to the biggest of you as well...’ or something like that, I don't remember the quote exactly, I need to look in the book up on the shelf. I shouldn't have started with these stories, I'm digressing and it's your fault, because of you, I'm wasting precious time. Let's hurry up, let’s jump to the next section
with two dozen forficula auricularia, otherwise known as earwigs or orthopteran insects-between you and me, they are very good mothers.

And under the next section…let’s see, let’s see, let’s see... Twenty-seven frogs, two hundred and two crickets, grasshoppers, and other grylidae.

"Allow me to..."

"Go on."

"It's just that crickets would belong under a different section, remember?"

"We're looking for any little creature, from what I can see. Does that change anything? Can you tell me? I go on to about three-hundred wasps, one hamster more or less, seven may bugs, from which, in order not to waste more time, I directly deduct the one that you snatched from under the right front paw of your cat Doré, one summer night. One hedgehog. No ermines and zero herons.

"Zero heros?"

"Zero herons, I said herons. “Human”, (and there, he pauses for a second to highlight the gravity of the category): “Nothing. Obviously, because if this section weren't blank you wouldn't be here before me. If you had committed between one and seven murders, you would
already be in the office next door, between eight and nine thousand, DeuTer's office, and for any greater carnage, you would find yourself in the outdoor warehouses.

I know all of this by heart. However, the Jurassic and the Cretaceous, those were the good old days... I’d get a bang for my buck by telling you about that. But I won't elaborate, anyways. Back to you, I read: one wood owl when it was bone-splittingly cold. "I assure you that I did everything I could to avoid it, I hauled the wheel and at the last minute she flew in the wrong direction, I found myself face to face with this poor bird flattened against the glass, I never could forget her eyes, imploring under the shock. I placed her on the seat next to me, talked to her during the whole trip to the bird-catcher, I caressed her feathers saying: "Hold on, I'm going to help you!" It's as if she purposely waited for me, planted like a mile-marker right in the middle of the road, at that time of night."

"Useless to waste my time, don't I know everything? Yes, sometimes life begs for death, there's often no other way to confront one’s true self and return to one’s original appearance. For the rest of the time we're going to spend together, I ask that you to remain as quiet as a mouse, and we'll get along just fine, the two of us." And in exchange for my good behavior, he spares me the enumeration of two hundred insects of all sorts, as well as from the list of them that was established by one of the Latinists of the Service who learned how to write in uncialis in the Middle Ages and wasn't capable of adapting to a more modern form of writing.
"Between us, a cat wouldn’t find her kittens in this jumble of letters," he concludes, half irritated, half amused. I only hope that under *acrididae* my twenty-two unlucky crickets aren't counted again; but I stay quiet, quieter than a mouse.

Next, he lists four lizards, all species mixed together—tree-lizards, wall-lizards, green and viviparous lizards. He seems to get winded as he lists, and then, I swear it’s true, a whitish foam appears at the corner of his lips. I’m afraid that another regulation nap is coming. But it seems he’s impervious to it, he remains solid on his feet, complaining about my sickly behavior regarding slugs.

"Incapable of sharing your lettuce with those uglier than you! A die-hard fan of “Slug-Ex-Kills Slugs Dead”, oh what obtuseness, if you know how much it hurts to have your flesh corroded…the result?" I don't hear anything anymore.

Did I even grow lettuce in my garden? I can't remember anymore.
I do, however, remember that the fox cried down in our field one evening last summer; one of us would die before the end of the year.

That's what happens when a fox cries in your field.

And that's exactly what happened.
Then his eyes glimmer like the sky before a hailstorm:

"And one wolf, one for Madam!" Whatever is left of me is beside itself:

"That's not true. Do I look like someone who would kill a wolf?"

He can no longer contain himself, and twists around so that he almost turns himself inside out, his arms crossed, his teeth making a rattling sound. I suppose he is caught up in an outburst of hysterical laughter.

“Oh, if we only had to rely on the judgment of others! Take for example these heads of state who more or less come off as being modest sheep-herders, for example, and who yet turn out to be nothing more than ferocious carnivores to their peers.”

"In any case, I've never seen a wolf in my life."

"I trust what is written here: one wolf, case and point. I have no reason to second guess my collaborators. Anyhow, entire parts of your life have already been erased from your memory, your forgetfulness is at work. Look, it possibly happened a very long time ago, an old, unsettled dispute that you've been carrying with you for a long time, an undischarged debt of some kind, and that can date back a good hundred years ago. Let it go, there is a statue of limitations. We need to move on or else we'll never finish. I'm back at flies, house flies, etc.,
I'll skip it, I already talked about it. Myriapods, both centipedes, and millipedes: four of which two were terrestrial galley-worms, for your information. Next, we come to one worm...

"But what about the wolf?"

"There you go again. The wolf is starting to get on my nerves. The Dispute Office is not my area, okay? "Birds," he barks, to show me that the conversation is over, "I'm putting everything under one list of species, subspecies, and families: fifteen, of which you perhaps get away with."

“I notice only one or two things. Pigeon: one. And parakeet: one. What? You're not going to protest again? I know what you're going to get at, it was the neighbor's cat who... Know that, even if you snatched it from its claws, put it in a pretty cage, went out especially to buy it a bar of millet with honey, even if your grief was sincere when you heard it fly away to eternity with a grand flapping of its wings in the middle of the night and you buried it in a flowerbed of peonies, crying tears that weren't even crocodile tears, detract from the fact that your assistance to a bird in danger, once again, was late. I can't do anything to change it, you got up from your chair too late to see from where those distraught bird cries were coming from, even though it would have been easy for you to sooner make the comparison between this and the clear parakeet's song that revealed itself, to your great surprise, at the peak of its birch in the middle of the day.
I explode on the inside, in this sort of concentrated energy that I've become; of course I remember the rocking of the branch to the rhythm of the happy, bright yellow parakeet's song.
like an exotic fruit sprouting among the leaves, and the contrast with its fearful cries, two paw-lengths away from the muzzle of my neighbor's black cat, three hours later...

"And I also remember, look here, all of the dead baby foxes on the side of the road, and hedgehogs with their guts in the air, flattened on the pavement, and the howls of pigs in anguish at the threshold of the slaughterhouse, and the fleeting deer in the willows, a long trail of blood from their hooves trailing behind them, and I remember the images of cormorants with their wings glued to oil-heavy nets and I remember everything that broke my heart so much that it could explode..."

"Slow down, scatterbrain! What's bothering you? Am I asking too much of you? Do you see me getting angry? Why are you struggling like this? Do you have something to say in regards to how I'm treating you? Are we forgetting our manners? Did we forget about courtesy?"

"I did my best with the parakeet, but it wasn't good enough. I always tried my best to behave with respect and common sense, but it wasn't enough."

"Who told you that, Madam? It's true that life is remarkably delicate and complicated, a struggle every moment. It is so threatened, in reality, in your old world that the sense of justice, in this regard, is just as intangible as the reflections in water that become agitated
under the effects of the wind. Many people believe it's enough to just properly feed their dog or their canary, to feed bread to the ducks and crumbs to little birdies in the winter to do their duty for living beings. For their own ease, they need to compartmentalize in their head, giving everyone points, like in pinball, so that life is resolutely one and indivisible and without hierarchy of values. I'm saying that everything is an integral being, from the tiniest to the most impressive organism, and that everything—firefly or sumo champion—is alive and is animated by the same fragile principle of life and is worth the same in the end.

It is, therefore, essential to respect in the same way aphid and peacock, tree sparrow, ant, lynx, and child. Delicately saving a caterpillar while you are washing your lettuce is no less important than saving a prisoner of war. For the entire circle of life is held together in an infinite, gracious, and voluntary coherence: in every individual life, one has Life, first and foremost, quite simply, the only thing that's worth fighting for. He who learns to take care of it under its most fragile, most frail appearances, must also be ready to stand his tallest the day when he will have to come to the rescue of humanity. Are you smiling?"

He comes quite near my ear, fearing perhaps that they’re listening in:

"If you're smiling out of happiness, I'm at ease. And if it is doubt that is making you smile, I understand you. One must have the patience of an angel in order not to be discouraged. It took man millions of years for his brain and his muscles to evolve in this way; one can certainly
only hope with all his might that he won't need the same amount of time to finally develop his capacity for love and kindness.

Otherwise, humanity would be right on time... Everything here is just between us: what I just told you hardly fits into my job description. The Heavenly Spheres would be angry if they knew that I am overstepping my boundaries at this point. I have become nothing but a superintendent to this bestiary, after all."

He sighs so heavily that I feel like I'm going to fly away all over again. And he restarts his momentum with a neutral voice:

"Five hundred and fifty-four butterflies. Two goldfish when you were twelve. And under lice, fleas, and aphids..."

Yet again, he proves that I'm the prime example of obstinacy in the delousing of children's hair, pets, and rose bushes: four hundred thirty thousand and thirty-six. Then, I admit that I can only half hear the number of rats, common mice, and field mice that have died because of me. At Earth Worms, I lower my head, defeated; and I would have had the utmost difficulty defending myself, even though, in order to finish his business on a high note, the shopkeeper of the hereafter was accusing me of exterminating, without remorse, an entire herd of monitor lizards and one of Wapiti on the other end of the world at the same time.
I founder.
If I could, just for a moment, see again the faces of the children that I looked after for so many years...

A bit of a smile, a sliver of a glance, a red sandal that lies about, abandoned under a bench in front of the house, a lock of blond hair in a comb.

Farther away, a spring that opens like a big mouth between white lilies and cranberry shrubs, the cool torrent where we would dip our arms, burning from the rush. Rivulets of larch needles on the border of paths when autumn had ripened the valley to perfection.

A bit of gingerbread crumbled into a handkerchief, shared in the dark, from hands that touch and then pull back…the dream of a long-ago kiss behind a barn. are you finally going to let the past ferment in its cask? you're mistreating your memory by provoking it
"That gives us a grand total of...
Well my! That seems like considerable number to me. Not counting the time spent on earth and the measurement of my forfeits against life. I especially become enraged when I think about the fact that the wolf in and of itself takes up as much space as all the rest... I try to console myself by thinking of the quiet tones of disdain with which the official pronounced the sum total of my slaughters; in the end, to him I'm nothing but a little, piece of plunder, of no great interest.

"And your carriage? Do you think, perhaps, that we are going to supply you with transportation, like at a luxury hotel?"

I mutter an excuse, he mumbles that they're all the same, pitifully capable of reading the instructions from the beginning, and he disappears to his back room, boxes clash, drawers open and shut.

He comes back later, pushing in front of him a cart, upon which boxes of different shapes and sizes closely stacked up are being carted around.

"You can sign the receipt right away or first verify that what is on there is exactly what has been told to you."

But before I had the chance to let out a response, he lifted up the cover of the box right under his hand, upon which is written "Insects of all genres and in Latin".
"Won't you come closer? The Review is not always easy, given the state of certain parts and how they’re all jumbled together. But you have the right to go over everything. Needless to say, it would be better if you didn't show too much distrust towards the people of our Service. And personally, I would prefer it if we didn't have to go over this for another ten years."

The insects are thrown together haphazardly, one on top of the other in weird positions, and the impression that you get from the whole is more like a complete disaster, debris of antennas, scattered legs, broken wings, smashed carapaces...

Gluing all of this back together without making a mistake will not be pleasant, you must admit!"

Just by looking at the contortions of his mouth, he really seems to enjoy this idea.

"Here, take this box here, it's easier to check. Is it your pigeon?"

In the box marked in blue chalk with a P, it is unquestionably the same pigeon that I was forced to watch in my rear view mirror on September 3rd, 1971, at 2:42pm (all of this is indicated on the ticket attached to her crushed foot), who seemed more like she was coming from a drinking spree gone wrong, feet facing the sky, neck awry and wings tipsy from the shock, positioned exactly in line with the wheels of my car's starboard. At the thought of being confronted with the beaten kittens, or a bag of rotting snails, I breathe out as hard as I
can in order to indicate that everything is perfectly in order, that I fully trust the Service's judgments, I'm going to sign the receipt immediately.

I am happy to listen to you, Madam, and certify that you've made your case for the wolf. It's true that more or less one wolf to bring with you for eternity, it's not a big deal, those creatures can come off as pleasantly domestic when you know how to treat them nicely. If we were talking about a humpback whale, I would insist perhaps that you stop by the Questioning Office, but for a wolf..."

"Where can I find it?"

"In this big, yellow box, we had trouble fitting in his legs."

"I meant the Questioning Office."

"On your left, then up and across, keeping in mind the opposite direction of the arrow, set precisely at two light years, as long as the wind is at your back and the elevator arrives at the right moment. Assuming that the Office accepts your claim, you will need to get to the Department of Appeals, and it's not right next door."

If your appeal is accepted, you will still need to wait for the results without being sure that you've won and all that time, you will have to hang around between Juno and Pluto, where it's bitterly cold and where all the snack-bars went out of business long ago."
Not a chance. I sign. We don't say another word.

That was the only thing left: the moment where he prepared to hand me the paper signaling my departure, he drops to the ground like a log for his routine nap behind the counter.

He gets up with more obvious difficulty than the last time. "They're right," he groans, bending over, "I am slower". He scratches his skull, that gradually, gets covered with red patches and with little, grainy rings. Then he hits the palm of his hand on the bottom of his wooden ledger.

"And this, is clearly more annoying, what a mistake for someone of my experience, I'm the king of confusion-to-the-max today. You'll need to excuse me, but I've seemed to have forgotten a little appendix under one of the sections."

Cockroach? Screech Owl? In any case, not a chinchilla, I don't even know what those animals look like. He lurches away in order to rummage through his knick-knacks and comes back carrying with him, somewhat cautiously, a small, apple-green suitcase.
"I don’t know how many times I've shown the hierarchy, by internal mail, that it is
unfortunate to see such detached pieces entrusted to our desk, since it's not exactly proper to
talk about either murders or assassinations..."

And when he unlocks the two little silvered locks, and when the suitcase opens on its own, I
feel some very ugly injuries reopen along with it.

"It is, it seems, a question of convenience. Since, love should remain one of the principal
sources of life, from what they say here, those who make the heart a laughing-stock commit
an act that's against nature."

For three of these hearts, I can't deny that I inflicted upon them a good amount of scratches,
and one can even speak frankly about the love bites concerning the young redhead; I only
hope that it's an extenuating circumstance, having been only 15 at the time.

“'Big passions cause deceptions in equal measure’, I should probably tell you at this point in
time.”

He or she who desperately tries to infiltrate someone else's heart in the full bloom of emotion
always risks wilting. Nevertheless, each person alone is the judge of the grief that he has
managed to cause. Don't I philosophize well for someone at my level?"

And that makes him laugh one more time...
But I swear, concerning the fourth heart, that I was completely unaware of his sighing for me.

This time, he cut the discussion short, only showing a little angrily that he has already made me an example of unusual understanding. I’ll no longer be treated so well, though.

"I'm done with my formalities. For the pot roast, pork, veal, fish, foal, lamb, and chicken that you've devoured since you were born, you'll have to go to a different Service, and my colleagues will flag you down in good time. Those who unnecessarily borrow the life of another to assure their own... I was about to get into something that has nothing to do with me."

Then, rudely looking me up and down:

"It's time for you to leave with your luggage. And take good care of all that bestiary that you so foolishly mistreated not so long ago."

“Most importantly, give each element the same amount of attention, from the most imposing to the least significant."

No more hands, no more feet, no more glib voice, I remain petrified in the face of the inconceivable. He seemed to be chewing on some sort of hesitation between his teeth. Then,
becoming more pleasant and resuming his conspirator's voice, he now speaks to me from the bottom of a whisper:

"In the state that you're in, it's worth it if I give you some complimentary instructions, even though I'm not obligated to- quite the contrary: my job description of charges stops exactly at the point we reached a moment ago." First of all, don't open all of your boxes at the same time, that would be a mistake, you would quickly be overwhelmed by what would happen. Secondly, at first it's good enough to just follow the illustrations and carefully read the instructions in order to avoid aberrations. Then, I would say that it's all about motivation, ingenuity, and, let's just say it, dedication. Over time, the biggest inconvenience is, naturally, the abundance of these agitations and these constant vibrations around you..."

"You're saying that everything in these boxes...?"

“Will come back to life? It's possible. Yes, I could say it. That depends on so many things. That would be the point of it all, of course. Maybe you think that the reserves of life are inexhaustible and that it's enough to recklessly waste them? Certainly not: we're not always made of what precedes us and of what comes after. It's a truth. Each person is responsible for the management of their own death looking back toward life, after having been responsible for their life as it inclined death, yes, Madam. But I've told you too much, run off with this junk, please."
As I gather my things to get going with this horror of a cart with warped wheels, heavier than everything that I've had to carry up until now, his voice strangely calm, makes me pause:

"What's wrong, Madam? Aren’t you going to beg me to relieve you of the weight of some of these boxes? Aren’t you going to try to coax me into coming up with some kind of better arrangement, just between the two of us? You're not crying in despair, imploring my pity so that I give you a chance to start again more properly?"

“I have, however, heard these pleas, you cannot imagine how the prospect of spending an eternity in the company of some considerably damaged animals gives one the ability to invent mindless promises, thrown up in the air like handfuls of confetti. And you, bravely try to push your cart without protesting? Like an idiot, I'd be tempted to say if I didn't have a shred of humanity. You even came in here, even when, had you just taken the time to read the instructions, you could have skipped this, just as in certain spaces when playing Monopoly. And, furthermore, you don't hop up and down with fear of the thought of all the things that could crawl on top of you, you don't go crazy at the fact that the creatures can wiggle, fidget, smear their slime, crawl all over you? Sting you, suck your blood, crackle, defecate, move incessantly, lay eggs, bite, and I forget... I forget to tie my shoelaces and I feel the need to talk to myself, to whom I haven't spoken in ages. Do you have any questions?"
Of course, I wanted to ask what happened to the clocks that speak to the ripening night, the sundial, gradually losing its thin touch on the rock, as the light separates from the day, the roar of the torrent under the wooden bridge, my mother's hand that hold mine, the steps of the mule, my little feet in the big woven bag, the heel of my mother's mother on the side of the animal, next to my curly head that the comb ignores every day of the week... see: all you have left are one or two cents worth of memories.
"Well, go on!" he says regretfully in the face of my persistent silence. "Next! Next, I said!"

But as soon as he pronounces these words he turns pale white to the point of no longer having the strength to stay on his feet. He puts all of his weight (if he has any) against the counter and stumbles over his words: "This was it, after all. I had forgotten, it has been worrying me from the beginning: it's that there will never again be a ‘next’. You were my last passenger for all eternity. It might be time to go back to the fires of life, I feel completely used up. Come closer. Closer..."

He holds out his pale hand, apologizing for the bitter almond odor.

"Excuse the odor, I'm stuffed with cyanide, but you don't have to worry about anything at this point, don't be afraid. I tell myself that I need to celebrate this: my last passenger! I have a nice idea, it has its advantages and its perils... I ask you not to comment, just listen: I'll take your charge and I'll discreetly offload it in the middle of the lot of the old military dictator who has just come through the doors of the Deuté. The only problem, is your wolf... The best thing to do would be to take him with you in order to not come across him next time. In exchange, all you have to do is promise me to not let go of his foot during the whole journey, if not he'll get irreparably lost in the night of time. You are his security, you are his hope thanks to the newness of your arrival. Unfortunately, I don't have a choice in your destiny, I'll
have to blindly slip you in the next shipment that's leaving. You might need to fold his spine during landing and watch out for the danger above your head.”

“All of this isn't very kosher, I admit, but it's the truth.”

He takes the cart with the crooked wheels in the back room, I hear lot of commotion and the sound of something drop in the disposal. He comes back, rubbing his hands together with contentment, and cautiously opens the box with the wolf in it.

Then:

"In a matter of nanoseconds, hold on tight, keep your return ticket with you," he whispers to me, and he sends me off with what must have been for him a wave goodbye.

Or a kiss.
I really needed to grab hold of the wolf’s less moth-eaten foot, grabbing hold tightly in order to not have him lose hope in the night of time; as I promised. And the feel of heat coming back to his fur warms hand...

*life is like a sundial, a cloud that passes by seems to make it fall silent, the night reduces it to tranquility, but the light never breaks its thread, light is the influence of inspiration!*
When the explosion of mauve crocuses with vivid yellow pollen will revive our meadows, I will have already forgotten everything about my future, and about our past, a long time ago.