

Neva Lukić

The Endless Endings

Translated from Croatian by Jeremy White

### *The Ground*

At first, the ground of the Earth was level and flattened. Breath barely fit in it; it merely smouldered, wrenched within the thin strands of its body. The Earth was a straight line, although nothing more than a round path within the universe. It spread across the world endlessly, all the way to where a few horizons met. No one and nothing disturbed it on that path – the path was its alone, and everything alone was the path. Completely polished, without holes or indentations, it merely reflected the Sun, and the sun reflects by moving ever closer to you, into your throat and your bones, your mind and your thoughts; its reflection sinks into your body. Rays of sun, pieces of crumbling boulders, broke invisibly yet heavily against the flawlessly smooth surface. The line almost shimmered; it was so stalwart and unbroken, so uncompromised. It was almost the unified reflection of all potential, uncreated reflections. The ground stretched on, raced towards itself to unseen lands. The camera recorded it from above as it went further and further, and all was ever the same. Only the camera's moving glances proved that something was changing, that the place was some other place. The ground thought: "Of course everything on me is the same, that's why I'm called by one name. Otherwise I would have more than a hundred names. This way, I'm simply "the Ground", and that's all there is to it." So it continued along the same path, in all directions simultaneously. The story might have ended here meditatively. However, a whole host of strange circumstances unfolded that the Ground couldn't absorb, and had it had a head, it certainly wouldn't have remained level. All at once, plants began to grow in the ground, animals began to run across it, and with their tiny feet, people began to stand on it. All these minuscule creations were walking on the Ground or standing in it, but the Ground neither understood what they were, nor why it wasn't one of them. It wanted to communicate with them, but its breath got caught in the stems and trunks of various plants. A thought could barely cross its mind without some new tree sprouting out of one of its pores! Roots branched through the polished plain of the ground, aggressively piercing their way out, and however much pain the Ground might have felt, it still found the feeling pleasant. And the most pleasant – just to its liking – was the sprouting of flowers. It was like true acupuncture! But not a moment had passed before animals began to run on it and people began to walk on it, and the Ground could no longer concentrate from being unexpectedly bombarded with exclusively living information! So much was happening to the Ground, it was

living so much life, and yet it couldn't catch anything, grasp anything, comprehend anything. Just imagine that endless shock, the unceasing motion that was happening to the Ground and to all of existence (as it had been), to the meditateness of the ground itself! It was connected with the centre of its very self, and then the world, the world, the world, began to rush about it, the world after which it had named itself. For the Ground truly was the world. Except that it had had time to think until now, it had managed – it had managed to contemplate. But now, so much was happening; motion was simply marching and marching over it, as if it wanted to destroy the ground's stability, the steadfastness of its own pedestal. So much was happening! Animals, people, trees, plants, houses and birdhouses, and soon chairs and chairs, and windows and roofs, and doves in Venice, and then skyscrapers, yes, the Ground wondered: "Now everything on me is different, but I'm still known by one name. I'm still 'the Ground', as if nothing has happened." The Ground comforted itself a bit with the steadfastness of its name, and won back some of its former stability. But that wasn't enough for the Ground, because something was constantly sprouting from it – bees, hives, and little teapots, and bracelets for thin wrists, and birds rising into the air, partly close to the Ground, its complementary pairs – all this made it confused and unsure. The Ground didn't understand anything on it, and yet it felt responsible for all those incomprehensible, unusual beings. It was the last step, there was nothing that could cut the ground out beneath its feet! Chills ran across its body, now thicker, at the very thought. It was the final degree, the last stair just before the bottom... At that moment, the Ground noticed all those different shapes, composed of the same things, wandering about it; all those outlines whose flatness reflected all other standing, brimful shapes. The Ground found external unity and harmony in the chaos of living and non-living information upon its surface. It had seen what united everything, which meant the Ground no longer had to bother with schizophrenic differences, and yet could still dream of its steadfast flatness undisturbed by various verticalities. The ground felt shadows, shadows of all different things tickling it, cleaning it like great brooms, or simply existing steadfast upon it beneath the Sun, just like fish exist in water! It had finally found a world that truly belonged to it. The Ground thought: "Shadows are also all different, and yet they are called by one name. They are all 'shadows.'"... The stone fell from its heart, or rather all the beating hearts of various creatures fell from a stone to the ground; the Ground found unity in the eclectic reality on it and around it. Instead of observing people and

wars, hospital rooms and births, or perhaps cheetahs scratching at trees with their claws, it observed shadows in which birth was equated to murder, shadows in which the inanimate melted with the animate, and even when the entire world lay together “in one single shadow,” the Ground didn’t get involved. The shadows respected it, belonged to it entirely, merged with it completely except when the façade of a building falsely presented itself as the Ground for a moment... But this affair would be brief, and the shadow would belong to it once again. And however restless some of them might have been, roaming, as if they wanted to run away from the Ground forever to attain revelation somewhere in the dark of space, they could never leave. The Ground would always stop their flying bodies with its steadfastness. Somewhere in that pairing between the Ground and shadow, a balancing of time, motion, and stillness took place... All other things, living and meaty, pressed at the Ground with their weight, and it was the verticality of this very weight that always yearned to take them somewhere far from the Earth. But the limitedness of their own bodies always brought them back, chastened, until they finally broke apart in the Ground, losing their shadow forever. The shadows, however, were different. They ceaselessly appeared and disappeared, died and were born, and every day, when a body would cast a shadow again, it would be a new shadow, never the one from the day before. And so countless shadows died every day, regardless of whether the bodies that had cast them were alive or not. It didn’t matter to the shadows. They were always new, playful, monotone fairies, birds constantly showing the Big Bang on the façades, the explosion of everything, the melding of everything, the creation of the world. Vanishing while staying. Staying while vanishing. Stay-vanish – that is what the shadows did. And everything else on Earth, all those different colours, were more inclined to depart, but then their own shadows would pull them back down to Earth, it seemed, to the flatness of the Ground. At that point, the Ground suddenly realised why the shadows clung so close to it, why they belonged to it so truly. Only the Ground itself had no shadow! The final degree, the last step! The camera continued sweeping along that straight line, and now everything was full of shadows, but nowhere was there a shadow of the Ground. The Ground thought: “All the shadows are upon me now, but I’m still known by the same name, although I have no shadow. Shouldn’t my name, then, belong to the world of shadow, and not to the world of breath like other names?” Nothing had changed, and yet the Ground became unhappy once again. How to stay stable in such a situation? So lonely. From whatever perspective it looked at the

world – the world that contained it, which was the world itself – the Ground was different from everything on it. For it was not ON, it simply was. At that moment, the Ground felt a sudden need to also become ON. It drew up all the energy from its depths – all those dead people, animals, and their shadows, never to exist again – and cracked a few humps into its flatness. This is how the first volcano ON earth came about, and the first mountain, which immediately cast a sharp, tall shadow on the ground, a shadow of the Ground’s very own matter that, like all other shadows, resembled all other shadows. Finally, the Ground belonged to the world, but it didn’t even suspect that it had just given up its own immortality. Had it remained nothing more than a flat line, a bare, polished trail, the final step with no shadow, the line never would have disappeared. This way, the Earth joined all other mortals ON it. The mountains and volcanoes nullified the last steps. Everything became dust.

## *Non-event*

The beauty lay in our unspoken agreement to always succeed in not running into each other on the street. In freedom of movement within movable borders. In the gaps in space directed by the choreography of our bodies... Unknowingly, we became as dynamic as a flock of birds while we marvelled at the flocks above us. Out of our own self-directedness, our own etched trajectories of the day, we respected the laws of choreography that we had been subjected to. The reality, larger than ever, lay in the very fact that we truly kept from running into each other day after day! It lay in this non-event – one that, again, could have happened so easily. Did daydreaming about its nullification

– about the gentle collision of bodies on some large street somewhere in the world – solidify the reality of its reality even further, or did this very fact transform it into an un-reality? There were no lofty goals at hand here, only the countless possibilities of such an easily movable motion, one that lay dormant within our bodies. Just like the motion of a word we could so easily say to someone, but cannot, because it catches on the tips of our tongues. We are heavy boxes filled with endless unrealised possibilities of motion. We are everything that did not happen today, nor will happen! That which exists, but remains unseen by our eyes. A hidden, dark side – a shadow of ourselves that swallows up what we were just thinking about... Somewhere between the world of those firmly embedded, obtrusive things that constantly force us to move them or avoid them, and the world of birds, which casts each movement of ours into the endless, free space above us – there we lie, creatures of thought, creatures of shadow. We balance on the border of a kind of repressed motion, damned to walk on the surface and willingly stop, and then move, stop, move... And, out of the very fact that we are condemned to motion and freedom of immobility, this thought of ours seems to spring forth. Every day, we walk down the street and we do not run into each other. All of us, each day after we get home, can dream about tomorrow's collision of bodies on the street, about a space that breaks. About cracking. About something, it seems, so easily transpirable. It might seem to us that this is how the Sun survives – through energy created by motions that shouldn't have happened. We are free to decide, tomorrow morning when we head somewhere, that we will all collide on the street! Softly, gently... But, when the morning comes, everything will be the same again, and in the evening, we will think about the same thing. And so endlessly on and

around... We are programmed like even the best of satellites, whose trajectories are, nonetheless – curved.

## *Weiwei*

Weiwei sits at the table and eats. She eats bite by bite, and there is always a space between each bite. Weiwei is generally full of spaces, spaces, like the Japanese are, maybe. “Ma,” as Shakiro used to say, “Ma.” A silence of words. Weiwei says it too, although she isn’t from Japan... I could never be like Weiwei. I watch her. It’s as if she thinks about every bite she slowly brings to her mouth, imperceptibly, as if the emptiness of her mouth naturally continues into the air through which her hand and the fork she holds in it are passing, as if there is no bodily barrier between them. Her face pulls into an unconscious, negligible grimace, and remains tense, frozen in the moment. Who knows what she’s thinking, it doesn’t matter what she’s thinking. It’s nice to watch her eat. As she eats, she says: “I read something today that I wrote when I was twenty. I asked myself, wow, who is that girl? It was, rather good. You know, the energy of youth.” Weiwei often stretches out the syllables at the ends of her sentences, or adds a “yeah” in a low-falling tone. She then begins to laugh loudly, from the heart, perhaps even with a dose of childish innocence. I don’t know much about Weiwei. I know she only socialises at dinnertime. I usually see her in the kitchen and I’m never sure if she feels like talking, so I don’t want to keep her for too long. She usually takes the food she makes into her room, and when I cross the terrace I see her through the window eating at her computer. I find it strange, people usually don’t like eating alone – perhaps she enjoys it because she’s thinking about each bite? She seems to have some kind of different relationship towards food. But one thing remains a fact, and that is that she can’t make food in her room, although she would certainly like to, and so I interrogate her a bit as she bangs frying pans about the cooker. I discover that she lived in London for three years, that she published a novel the title of which is unfamiliar to me, and that she is currently “happy with her life”. Soon, the meal is done, and Weiwei leaves the kitchen. After that, I don’t see Weiwei for two days. I imagine her sitting on the bed in her room which consists only of a table and a bed, looking at the space in front of her with her black eyes. And so on for hours, until she goes to the kitchen to put water on for tea. I’m sure Weiwei can stare at the space in front of herself for hours. And so I think of Weiwei, I think in motion as I ride my bicycle through the uncut grass. It’s nice to think of Weiwei while moving. The birds are loud and discordant, and the cotton of dandelions flies through the air. The day hatches in all its fullness, not

a single part remains hidden beneath the earth or the clouds. Today is separated from death by the greatest number of light years.

The next day, I meet Weiwei again as she's eating dinner. She's eating slowly again, although she does wolf down a few bites, and it's impossible to imagine how so much food can fit in such a small, narrow body. Again, I consider that it might be because Weiwei thinks as she eats. Her thoughts burn calories during each bite. It's a bit like you wrote me once, that sticky words cling to the squares and facades; we people and things age because of a patina of words... And so perhaps Weiwei is disappearing rapidly, just like the narrator in her story, who her character Ouyang thinks is going to disappear... Eating, this time, Weiwei informs us that her family is coming to visit her. I imagine her parents arriving, thin and buried in luggage... She says - calmly, because it's implied - that her husband and son are coming. I would never have said that she had a husband and son, but there it is - Weiwei has suddenly become a mother. Just a sentence or two after the one in which she used to live in London and was happy with her life. And then she emits two, three long 'ma's, filled with the rustling of willow branches beside a bridge on a green river. The willows now stand before a rain that will never come. It is dusk, the sky is purplish-blue, the sight demands many words. A trip to the epicentre, a pairing. Weiwei isn't on the terrace, nor is she in her room. She's gone, she's off in the woods somewhere listening to a long-forgotten human tongue similar to the sighing of those long stalks growing out of the tree's scalp. Her rare words are finally equivalent to the wind, like the emptiness of her mouth with all the air in the universe around it. Language and wind finally become a single, unitary rushing of air... We others head back to the warm house, close the door, and pour red wine in the silence of a room in which each word is heavy furniture we clumsily move from place to place to make ourselves feel "cosy". Just for a moment, the words connect in the gaps between themselves, we forget where we are, and the conversation is light. Maybe this happens only when we talk about language itself, only then does language pull us into itself completely. Like the forest pulled Weiwei in.

I cross the terrace the next day again, and she truly still isn't there. She isn't in her room, nor is she making breakfast in the kitchen. I see her walking past a row of white cows, all staring in her direction, and I see her lying on a field full of tiny, yellow flowers. The others tell me she's gone sightseeing with her family. She's coming back in a day or two. Now she's carrying her tiny child on



her shoulders, a child that laughs just like his mother. Her child is her best friend, I think. Soon his arm will grow thicker than his mother.

Two days later, Weiwei is back at dinner. She sits across from me like every day. Silence reigns around her, except for the bell-like laughter that often comes out of the emptiness of her mouth, similar to the rustling of the trees, the ambiguity of an archaic language balancing on the edge of metamorphosis. Dusk, says Weiwei. Dusk. I wanted a child very much, but it's difficult having a child, you don't have time for anything at the start... She continues eating as if each bite is an entire world in time. We had known each other only briefly and I decided to get pregnant. I see her large stomach outgrowing her entirely, her arms and legs become tiny and imperceptible in it. Her stomach carries her off into the sky, a stomach different from all other stomachs, as light as a balloon. Then I see her, thin and without a stomach, sitting and reading a book, and her whole pregnancy is taking place in the fingers she is using to hold the book. Before him, I was in a relationship for eight years, with a woman, she says. Until I met him, I was only with women. But, actually, it's the same to be with a woman and with a man. She begins laughing again, that loud laugh that exposes a bit of her gums, which seems to represent everything light for her being, the outside world in which she sometimes decides to open herself, open herself with her child, and then withdraw again into her room like a snail and stare at the empty space in front of her for hours.

After dinner, we walk through the woods. The trail is wide and white, it seems like the last remnant of the day amidst the falling dark. At the end of this curve, in the distance, I see a dark tree, an entrance into a mystical tunnel that will encompass us entirely. Along the path, Weiwei avoids the bare, convoluted slugs, snails freed of their shells. She is afraid of stepping on their brilliant, black bodies, and so she screams every once in a while. I tell her that I went walking here one day after the rain, and that the slugs reminded me of art. I stopped above each small body and observed them for a few moments. Maybe those slugs were to me like the bites she brings to her mouth so slowly that the very act of her eating is completely invisible... We walk on. We hear loud movement in the tall grass beside the path. We can't see what it is, we can only hear it moving. Out of the waves of grass whose colour has been sucked up by the dusk, a stag, a man, a wild boar might appear. But the blades simply continue rustling... That archaic language again. A language portending an image. A language of uncertainty... The French have an expression for dusk. *Entre chien*

*et loup*. Between the dog and the wolf. Before the wolf attacks the farm at night. Before the wolfhound turns back into a wolf... Yes, she just used that phrase today in a story she's writing. To Weiwei, this expression is Mandarin, not French. Dusk is always more sorrowful in coastal towns, although we're not sure why. We slowly begin heading home, the sky above the bridge shows the last iota of purple. The contours of the green fence dwindle into the night. I'm inspired, says Weiwei. I'm inspired, I say. Perhaps it isn't youth, that energy, Weiwei. Maybe it's when we get caught up in someone's spirit, then we can write like that. We enter the kitchen to the hooting of owls and close the door to the room. Weiwei puts a kettle on for tea. Weiwei is always drinking tea, I've noticed. We take a few sips together.

## *Ying and Yang*

Ying and Yang were next-door neighbours. Ying was still renting his house, even though he was over sixty, while Yang had long paid his off, even though he was only thirty-three. Ying had never wanted, let alone tried to buy the house, because the very act of renting represented a kind of freedom to him. It meant he could leave whenever he wanted, and that he didn't know where he would meet his death. Maybe his next house is only now being built... Or maybe a forest still stands in its place... Lovely – first the forest, then a building! An entire civilisational jump, an entire history of the human race in two steps. Things like that were still happening to him without his knowledge, and so he probably wouldn't be like Yang, he thought. Yang was only thirty-three, and he already knew where he was going to live and die! Oh, silly Yang, thought Ying. But he actually didn't bother too much with Yang. He was alright, that boy who sent satellites into space. A “cool” job, thought Ying slangily. To be above everything in the universe, only to spy slyly on the Earth! Hmph, a bit prosaic, but “cool,” definitely “cool,” as if it were important why the satellites were up there in the first place – all that mattered is that they were. Yang had explained that his mini-satellite was shaped like a square because it was easier to build that way, and Ying found this unusual. A square satellite, hmm... It immediately reminded him of a mausoleum, and so he didn't want to hear anything else about the satellite, the black coffin floating lonely around outer space. Brrrrr, it gave him chills. Was that really all...? No, that wasn't all. Yang explained that he was wrong – the satellite was alive! There is a special orbit called a *graveyard orbit*, and only in that limbo do satellites await their disappearance, which may or may not come... They continue orbiting on that trajectory 36,049km from Earth, an extra 321km above Earth's furthest active satellite... Ying truly pitied their cruel fate, the programmed fate of satellites let off the leash into the depths of space, but which still have to move along a given trajectory, which they navigate while they await their assigned death! They lose the ground beneath their feet, and they feel as if they are walking on asphalt, because even the air in space is inscribed with the word, with orders from Earth! Yang told him he was talking nonsense. What, did he want satellites and the Earth to wander around together in a drunken stupor? In that case, neither we nor anything else would exist. He smiled at him – he found the old man's naïveté charming. Ying only wrinkled his nose at his comment, saying that Yang couldn't understand anything further than the end of his nose, like some

kind of programmed robot! But he wasn't truly angry. Instead, inspired, he went home to write an epitaph to the satellites, the human creations above everything human. They meet for coffee with the Earth, wrought by entirely different hands. They feel envy for its variety in their polished, empty surfaces

- in their walls, which don't divide them from other walls, because the streets are so far away. As are the people at the windows. As are Ying and Yang, two neighbours who, regardless of the almighty providence of satellites, were about to get caught up in typical human problems. Oh yes, Ying liked satellites, but Yang didn't like his small, earthly dog! He couldn't stand him. He got the daily urge to punt him into space so that he could keep his satellites company, bark at them a bit, and finally leave him alone! Why was he always digging around in his yard? He had no business there! On the other hand, Ying couldn't stand anyone who didn't like his little dog, who went everywhere with him, on the tram and to lunch, all in the aim of helping Ying abandon his greatest vice - smoking. He decided to buy a dog so he could finally do something useful with his hands. To pet a lovely being, who certainly deserved it more than any filthy human! So he had to take the pup with him everywhere to prevent any potential cravings! Eventually, instead of cigarettes, he became addicted to the little animal! And woe to him who didn't like his little barking ball of fur. It happened one Sunday afternoon, when Yang callously kicked little Satellite (Ying had decided to name him this for a number of reasons: because the dog followed him like a little satellite, and because he had taken a liking to satellites thanks to his crazy neighbour) right before Ying's eyes. Ying was left speechless

- a giant boulder fell out of his gaze and landed across Yang's entire body. He simply picked the dog up and went home, ending his walk. He tossed and turned all night, unable to think of the appropriate revenge. What he wanted to do was impossible: kick Yang's satellites so hard that they flew out of their orbit, that they disrupted the entire universe of satellites, that all satellites collided into each other, that chaos ensued and everything grew out of it again, some new universe that no one would ever dream had come about in such a banal way! Unfortunately, he didn't have such power, but he still wanted to at least hurl a pile of rocks into the sky! But even they wouldn't reach the satellite

- instead they would simply return violently to him and cost him his head! He was absolutely powerless... And so he gave up on all that, and decided to stick to a tried-and-true method: he would put all his rocks in a row and build a wall. He would put his hated neighbour behind his property line, and neither he nor his dog would have to see him anymore! Within a few days, the wall had risen.

A high wall that even surpassed the tops of their houses, because Ying didn't even want to see the chimney of that awful house – he could barely stomach the cloud that hung cold-bloodedly in the blue sky above it. Now the only place Ying and Yang could run into each other was on the street, and streets – thank God – only serve for leaving, so there were no serious problems there. Life continued peacefully. The dog could scratch at the wall to his heart's content – the insulation was extraordinary! However, after some time, seeing as life loves to take place outside of walls, the little dog somehow managed to wander into Yang's garden. As if the devil himself had lured him there! And Yang was apparently a man of rules, and couldn't handle those idiots who, even in the depths of space, crossed the trajectories of their satellites with his and collided! Don't people understand that crossed paths mean oblivion?! Boom, crash, all gone! Dead particles floating in space. He preferred those who spoke romantically about couples: "Their paths crossed, fate wove them together...!" What fools! And now, this bloody dog was coming onto his property again. He could never understand it! Why did one's property always have to border someone else's?! He wanted to be unhindered along his trajectory... So, this time, he singed little Satellite's little tail, and sent him home with a message around his neck:

*Dear Neighbour Ying,*

*The presence of your dog in my garden is unacceptable. I have already explained a few times that I do not like dogs, because they are always wandering around somewhere. And however much they might dislike cats, they are very similar. So, this time, I have decided to resort to somewhat harsher methods and burn your dog's tail, much like street people do to cats. I am sorry, but I must teach you a lesson now to prevent it from happening again, and to prevent me from being forced to do something much worse.*

*I wish you a pleasant day.*

*Regards,*

*Your Neighbour Yang*

When Ying saw his puppy with his burned tail at his door, he burst into tears. He couldn't understand it – why did that man who sends satellites into space constantly get caught up in "worldly things"? Why, he himself, Ying, dealt more with his satellite than that idiot Yang! He broke down. He simply couldn't take anymore. Why couldn't his crazy neighbour leave him and his dog alone?

What had they ever done to anyone? A little dog from Spain and an eccentric old pensioner? It came to him to call on God, to whom satellites represent nothing more than Earth's ground floor, and pray that he crush them all! He, no more than a poor old man, was powerless against the scourge of satellites. He didn't understand technology or GPS, nor could he turn it off! And yet his dog could be kicked as if it were no more than base garbage! His sadness and rage drove him mad. He cried all night and smoked twenty cigarettes for the first time in five years. He would have forgotten about the dog had it not whimpered all night along with him... In the morning, he sat at the table, read Yang's letter one more time, and wrote the following:

*Dear Mr Yang,*

*After a tearful night, I will now answer your brusque letter, in which all your words are lined up in phalanxes; not a single word has broken rank – I shan't say – "as sprightly as a bird." Your letter, Mr Yang, shows that you are a cruel idiot who is missing out on all the life in between. Perhaps you've been spending too much time with your satellite, which has obviously spoiled you. It always goes wherever you tell it to, it answers every question you ask of it. Well, Mr Yang, that isn't life... So, for the very reason that I'm not a robot like you and your satellite, I won't pretend not to be hurt. For I am so hurt that I intend to cancel my lease and move somewhere else. I can no longer bear your presence in my life, not even behind a wall. Walls have holes, and not only people can walk through them – ghosts can as well. This is obviously no fairy tale. It's apparent that I can walk through walls, because I can't even bear your presence with a wall between us! Thank God I'm only renting this house, and am free to leave... I've always known I was smart for doing so! Had I been an idiot like you, the two of us would have had to suffer each other much longer, because it isn't easy to sell a house these days, as you know. And we would probably have fought about which of us would leave and which would stay. You should count yourself lucky I'm not a fool like you are, Mr Yang! Also, I'm not sure if you're aware of this fact, but there are organisms in the sea called tunicates. While they are still in their larval stage, they lead a free-floating life. They have a developed notochord (a skeleton), and they have a kind of nerve cord and a balance organ. When they find a suitable rock, they cement themselves in place. So, they pass from a nomadic lifestyle into a sedentary lifestyle, and at that moment, they begin a very interesting transformation! Because of the sedentary lifestyle they begin to lead, their bodies begin to simplify, making these organisms a brilliant example of devolution! Until they decide to settle, because of the presence of a notochord, they belong to the phylum of chordates, as does man. But adult, sedentary individuals lose their notochord, and so they can barely be considered chordates! Also, these*

*intelligent “adults” digest their own nerve cord, which once controlled their movement, analogous to the human brain. It is often said that tunicates eat their own brain, because they no longer need it – they can then “zen out” in peace! I’m not sure if you’ve understood my metaphor, Mr Yang, in fact I’m sure you haven’t, but I had to write it anyway. The homeless and the spineless can’t live together, not even with the help of walls! This is the last time you’ll hear from me. My dog and I won’t be bothering you anymore.*

*Respectfully Yours,*

*Your Former Neighbour Ying*

*P.S. I wish you a great deal of success shooting your satellites into space, because that’s all you know how to do. But still, I must tell you that I strongly hope that, one day, your system crashes and a satellite falls right on your head, you cold-blooded, sedentary shithead with nothing better to do than set people’s dogs’ tails on fire! You impotent moron!*

Here is where the letter finally stopped. Ying was quite satisfied, tee hee! He had really shot his mouth off, even though that young, robotic monster wouldn’t get any of it, nor would he be able to see his face when he read the letter. But he didn’t give a hoot! The only thing that mattered was that he felt better. He walked over to his neighbour’s front door and shoved the letter under it. Now all he had to do was pack, and in a few days he would no longer be anywhere near that revolting creature... But within a few days, in the part of the globe where Ying and Yang lived, a war broke out. Both Ying and Yang had known the situation was bad, but war hadn’t even been in the back of their minds. Now wasn’t the time for Ying to leave, unless he wanted to join the refugees, and it was still too early for that. Ying stayed in his rented house, and in place of a satellite, which he hoped would one day would fall on Yang’s head, a bomb fell on Yang’s wall instead. But it wasn’t only Yang’s wall, it was Ying’s wall too, as the wall had belonged to both of them. Yes – they actually shared what had divided them. Nothing else was destroyed except for the wall. The bomb had broken the barrier, and the houses again gazed lovingly at each other! Ying was as mad as a dog, and Yang was as mad as a dog. In perfect harmony, they barked at each other while satellites floated somewhere far above it all, and bombs fell about the Earth.

## *The Endless Ending*

One morning, people in the northern hemisphere were waking up, while people in the southern hemisphere were just finishing their evening's work. Even though the light above all earthly people was completely different, even though completely different words came out of their oral cavities and moved into the empty sky, the people in both hemispheres noticed that there was no water in their taps. That day, the northerners didn't manage to shower before work, and that same night, the southerners went to bed dirty. None of this would have worried them too much had the same situation not repeated the following day. Soon, a rumour spread round the Earth – there was no more water, and not just in Africa! Panic took hold; people began licking the dry corners of their mouths. Never before on Earth had so many slimy human tongues come out of their mouths at the same time, like worms before the rain. But not even the raindrops that rang out on the gutters in rhythm with the clinking of glasses in the nearby restaurant – not even those raindrops were there anymore! The rivers had disappeared without a trace, the seas had flown off on the backs of snowflakes to some unearthly place. 'Drop' nearly disappeared from the dictionary. As if they had just awoken from some foggy dream, only when they began listing madly through dictionaries of all manner of language, only when under A, B, C, D, they failed to find the word "drop" – only then did they realise they were still alive, that their mouths weren't too dry, and that the planet wasn't even overly hot. A cry of happiness rung out across the world in unison: Woohoo! Yeah! Aaaaaaa! Some even began running various marathons the world over, just to prove that they wouldn't get the least bit sweaty! Everything was somehow easier – they no longer had to carry the weight of water in their guts, and they burned calories with unbelievable speed. Everyone began eating much more and feeling lighter and thinner. Even though all food now tasted like dry biscuits, they continued living as if water had never existed, as if every day were their last. But after some time, they realised that no day had been anyone's last! At least so far. All those people, all of us – and it happened two hundred forty-seven years ago according to the old system of measuring time – we're all still alive! We age, we all look like Methuselah, but we're not dying. We all dig through the Old Testament to find proof that the world was without water for any significant period of biblical time, because if the book is to be trusted, many of the prophets lived for centuries. If we could prove this, we would know that it is possible to bring



water back to Earth. Gabriel Garcia Marquez is here with us; many people knock on his door thinking he might know something, because it rained for years in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But he just shrugs and continues writing a novel in which the entire plot unfolds under the sea... He points us to Adam and Eve, because if we assume there was no water on Earth until their time, who else could we blame for it coming back? This is all entirely logical, but how to prove it? And how to bring the water back to Earth once you have... It's hard to find the reason why it disappeared, but even harder to call it back, at least until enough time has passed and we've gained enough experience. This is a completely new situation for humankind. We don't know what might happen, or if we'll even survive. Because not a single child, not a single girl, not a single middle-aged man looks with us to the sky. A million hale and hearty old folk look to the sky with sad eyes... We can't come to terms with the idea that we might be the only ones left, that we might even be immortal; there is no more birth, no youth, no hateful old folks' homes. We have to take care of this world, because it's the only thing that keeps us going, but we'd all rather jump into the sea that is no longer there, vanish into its depths. All of us, just like Marquez, have been shrugging impotently for years. Only one philosopher thinks he knows the answer, but let's hope to god he's not right. If he is, it means we're all stuck in eternal limbo. That means that this is hell, a punishment. An endless ending. But a true ending, unfortunately, can only be endless, because all endings were once open-ended, and were followed by beginnings, except in films, which force signed and sealed endings. True endings didn't exist before! If this changeless state continues for centuries to come, then we'll be able to say we've reached the "era of the endless ending", claims the pessimistic philosopher. How to prove this, we all ask ourselves... By forcing every old man and old woman on the planet to think back to the morning or night two hundred and forty-seven years ago, just before they were to discover that there was no water in their taps, and remember if they were happy and satisfied. If all the old folk on Earth answer yes (and there will be no lying - we have very precise lie detectors today!), then his theory is proven. Scientists can continue studying the Old Testament, trying to prove that Eve brought water back to Earth, but according to him, the debate ends here. In the moment when everyone on Earth became satisfied, desire disappeared... All those rains, all those seas, all those rivers - they were all the desire of unborn beings to appear on Earth in solid form. All those waterfalls - perhaps they best illustrate the claim - are the screams of beings who had just felt their first desire to come to

life, who were balanced on the cusp of life and non-existence. Every time a child, a cat, a lizard, a rose grew, somewhere in the world, a drop of water would evaporate as if someone had drunk it up. But we living organisms were never satisfied, we always lusted after one another, or after something else, and so the water would always fall back to Earth in the form of rain. This cycle continued for years until we reached an advanced state of development and lost our thirst, exactly two hundred and forty-seven years ago. We can only hopelessly hope, says the pessimistic philosopher, that one morning, we in the northern hemisphere will wake up from our night's sleep, and those in the southern hemisphere from their afternoon nap, and feel an immeasurable thirst. Still half asleep, we'll rush to our taps and drink, drink ourselves to death.