

ANNE PANNING

UNTRANSLATABLE

aware [a-wa-reh] Japanese

“that bittersweet vaguely poetic feeling you get around dusk,
on a long train journey, looking out at the driving rain”

like the day, driving home from Greece Ridge Mall (where
you bought twenty bags of Halloween candy, so afraid to run out,
so afraid) the sky is skim milk and laps you up and when you pass
the Friendly Motel there’s a hand painted sign—Rooms For Rent
—you see peoples’ beat-up charcoal grills and lawn chairs out
front and someone has even stabbed a spinning daisy pinwheel
into a crack in the cement and the wind whips it mercilessly—

“roughly translated as ‘enjoying the sadness of life’”

suddenly a school bus stops in front of you, flashing its lights,
and a small boy jumps out with a gigantic camouflage backpack
nearly crushing him and you wait, biting the inside of your mouth
(until it bleeds) as the boy trudges home to his motel-cum-
apartment (you remember the trailer court; you know shame in
all its ugly gray) but then out pops the boy’s father who’s scrawny,
wears nothing but jeans and tank top in the bitter cold and he
raises a fist in the sky (“Yes! his boy is home!”) and the boy
gallops into his arms, the school bus chugs away and you crane
to see them but nose forward in your station wagon and watch as
the russet red leaves spin off the trees, their last chance at beauty,
the road quiet, the car warm—up ahead you pass the turkey farm
that always makes you sad, fattening up all those white hens for
Thanksgiving—though they stand like stout little women, sturdy
and strong



razlubit [raz-lyoo-beet] Russian

“melancholic, bittersweet word used to describe falling out of love”

like the day you discover your ex-boyfriend, J, the man you thought you would marry, has a new baby, Carmina Louise, with his girlfriend, Haruko (who is not Japanese despite the name, and makes you feel the plainness of your own name, *Anne, Anne, Annie*, so friendly and Minnesotan and reliable), and you discover all of this on Facebook of all places because J has “friended” you (a verb you have mixed feelings about for its buddy-like yet aggressive connotations) and so you study the baby’s smooth red cheeks and brush of dark hair and in the photo of J holding the baby’s hands in his big ones (you see J still wears the silver bracelet from Madagascar) something pecks at your heart and it’s hard to swallow your coffee—

“specifically, losing a feeling for someone once loved”

a big bulldozer digs up all kinds of *almost* and *not quite* and *ghost life never lived* and you dream that night that you’re lying with your head on J’s lap and he’s caressing your hair softly, like a baby’s, and *razlibut* is all over you the next morning but it’s complicated as you pour your kids Cinnamon Toast Crunch and milk and kiss your husband goodbye outside and sigh, *oh*

talkin [tahlk-in] Indonesian

“refers to whispering instructions in the ear of the dying”

because the ICU nurse says “hearing is the last thing to go” but you can think of no instructions to offer your mother, you who have just returned from six months in Vietnam and so many other places in Asia that have always led you away from her (not

deliberately but not accidentally either) so instead you sing her “Down in the Valley” and “Sunrise, Sunset” and “Puff the Magic Dragon” but it’s very hard to keep a steady voice as you rest your head against the pillow next to her and smell her waxy skin, run your fingers through her limp, thin hair (in need of a dye job, she would lament)

“what can be said to the dying person to help make the experience a positive one”

only your mother isn’t conscious and there’s nothing positive here since you will never again see her dark brown eyes sparkle at you with pure love or hear her little exasperated laugh when you do something that makes her nervous (like going to Vietnam or the Philippines or Mexico) and you will never again get to sit on the couch beside her in her big cozy Victorian as she stitches your old childhood clothes into beautiful quilts or sews pajamas for your daughter Lily (soft blue flannel with yellow ducks) or knits you and Mark matching checkerboard slippers (green & tan with boodles) but you do manage to tell her, “you have given me a good heart,” and when her heart finally stops beating what’s surprising is how surprising it is, though you were told, “prepare yourselves” (how do you?)