

Quarter past five. I'm getting drunk on Chablis and vodka and an expensive schnapps made from regional autumn plums, dressed in a Givenchy velour-leather dress, weighing fifty-four kilos and realizing that my life has become something that experts like to call a "dysfunctional routine". I cannot see any vegetation anymore, no eucalyptus trees and no more ornamental oaks. The highlands I live in are sunk in smog and erased by greyscales, the greenhouses are gone, the Mediterranean feudal villas too. I see fog and a sliver of ocean, and nothing else. This is Los Angeles and I am starting to deal with the topic of "downfall". This kind of thing happens all the time: A company goes bankrupt, somebody is confronted with a neurological disorder which can lead to the irreparable demise of their spine, or drives completely drunk into a used clothing donation bin on Sunset Boulevard in a carsharing car.

On this fog-sunken Californian morning, the predominantly sexual relationship between X and myself developed into something that, for the first time in fifteen years, enabled me to not only think about downfall as such, but that I might even *want* downfall. X is lying in my box-spring bed and is not in a good state. Usually I can hear from the hallway if air is still surpassing the saliva in his throat, but now I have to sit on the edge of the bed to make sure he is still alive. I press two fingers onto his carotid artery, cannot find his pulse, he moves slightly, nevertheless I continue to search. After thirty seconds I localise his pulse. He seems to be transcending from a deep-sleep phase into a condition of moderate brainwave activity and groans in a pitch that differs utterly from his usual speech. His eyelids tremble, he slowly rears into an upright position. First, he opens his left eye, expressionless like a slab of toast, and then sluggishly the right. When X is drunk and has downed an additional benzodiazepine to sleep, from time to time a sleep condition inhibits his motor skills – he speaks, thrashes about or gets up to eat my smoked salmon in the kitchen. The next morning he cannot remember a thing, and laughs. The way he now looks at me no longer has anything to do with the overreaction of cross-tolerant narcotics. He does not look through me; rather he looks aggressively into my eyes. He gets up, pushes me into the opposite corner of the room and says I should crawl back to my "tormenting ancestors", "the unholy ones who quarrel with three meter high spiders about the bitter root of a drought-ridden jungle floor".

And then he pees in my wardrobe and goes back to bed. I am stunned. X's entire being seems to have dissolved in his PCP-tablet-polyamide cocktail. His sanity is a worn-out gramophone record, his true self has become such a shadow that he seemingly ceases to exist. Gin, whiskey, lethargy, guilt and tranquilizers. This is the condition in which men beat their wives to a pulp, and then eat up their raw flesh. Two or three times a year I read in the newspaper about people who slit their throats on drugs, or who jump off of a flagpole into oncoming traffic – I reckon X's destiny will be similar and he will slaughter me. Instead of attempting to flee or call 911, I just shut the bedroom door

behind me and go and sit in front of the TV on the ground floor.

I enjoy it. With great shock, I realize that I enjoy this state, in the same way vile as I would enjoy the process of buying an over-priced, inhumanely produced silk scarf.

I spend too much money, despite growing up in a leftist household, where if anybody even mentioned the word "It-Bag", I would be instructed that I "had not grasped the rules" (*You would have been stoned to death in the 70s for saying that!!!*).

I am alternatively rich and poor, I smoke, I drink, I have no guilty conscience.

From which I extract a seriously inauthentic high of absolute pleasure from this, which is not luxury, it is nothing I need to be ashamed of – no Hermès scarf, no soft spot for Justin Bieber nor well-produced pop music – it is the missing morals of my peers that actually manages to surpass my own moral defunct. Nowadays, not having to question one's own badness is valued higher than never being exposed to imminent danger. There is a documentary on TV right now about South America. The setting sun in Southern Brazil, bloody strips of buffalo meat in Chile, a ramshackle floor improvised with zinc plates and wooden boards from boxes, dirt, jungle and white butterflies painted on motorways to honour the deceased, dog carcasses, carnival, an eight-year-old with three gunshot wounds in a shopping cart, open eyes, tapeworm infections, football and bad sex in cars. One calls that a chain of associations, I guess. A warm feeling of total irresponsibility envelops me. I am surrounded by misery, human failure, organic waste. And on the first floor danger lurks, a capricious factor that puts me in survival mode. I stop fighting against myself. I am the good one. X seems to be awake, I hear how he tears open the door and stampedes down the first floor hallway. Back and forth, after two rounds down the stairs. I turn off the TV and watch him from the sofa. His body is covered in a film of sweat and he is paler than usual, almost yellow. Hunched shoulders, brutishly loud grinding teeth, he moves towards the kitchen island and retrieves a rotting organic chicken wrapped in plastic bands from the refrigerator. I had bought it for a soup two weeks prior and then realized it had not been fully gutted - now it appears Lake wants to marinate it. He breaks three eggs on the sideboard and starts rubbing the chicken in it, back and forth. Once it is covered evenly with the egg mixture, he bites into it and begins to chew. I hear the wishbone crack in his mouth. His eyes bulge, he groans, continues chewing, which interests me deeply. I am stiff with fear. And obviously hope, nevertheless, that he will run towards me with the neck of a broken bottle and try to kill either me or himself. So that I can later reproach him with it. So that I have something against the rest of the world in hand.

Helene Hegemann, *Guilty Pleasures*, April 2016

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*