

Waters of remembrance

by Esther Dischereit

Every time I go back to New York, I want to write something about the sirens. Police cars drive through Manhattan making continuously high blasts of sound. I haven't written about this yet. So I will have to return.

I've gone back several times to Bleecker Street, staying there as a guest of my neighbor's family. I went to the Memorial. When I came back, we talked about it and looked at it from that height, just as the woman had seen it at the time with her child. I looked over there, she says, and saw black points flying through the air. The child saw them, too. Then I understood they were people. She had picked up her child from school when the time came. My jacket and the child's anorak were dusty. Very dusty, she says, as we were coming back. Then she sings a song to me. Someone had a bicycle accident. A man collided with a deer. The man almost died.

When I first got to know Karen Shasha, she was working with photographs and sculptures made out of sugar. Her street installation, "Repentance Café," was erected later on 8th Street. I had been back in Berlin a long time then. *Buch und Schokolade*. The story was translated, and my postcard hung in the exhibit on 8th street.

I also haven't written anything about my women friends. On September 11th they began to collect tools for the firemen. They set aside a floor where people could get away from the street and be treated: acupuncture, breathing exercises, yoga, anything that could help. My friends didn't ask to see any documents, no one had to sign anything. For many days, weeks, and months they helped everyone without asking to be paid. So I have many reasons to go back.

The last time I was there, we were coming out of a play, *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*. The man who had sat next to me said he couldn't bear it when someone screamed. And so he had a hard time with the piece. After the last curtain call, we went out into the street. Cardboard boxes stacked up on the pavement were on fire, and flames were spurting out. The flames were approaching the wall of the house. I seized the bucket of a man who was mopping up a store and started to put the fire out. My friend stood in the entrance to a house and called the police. She didn't take the next bucket, just stood where she was. I went back with the empty bucket, hauled out another one. A man came out of a stairwell on the other side of the street carrying full buckets. Other people came too. My friend didn't move. The man succeeded in putting out the fire.

She can't look at fire, not even at the beach when children are holding out marshmallows skewered on wooden sticks to melt them. She can't do it, she just can't. Not since that time.

The waters of remembrance
are flowing and do not stop, never
the sky was gray
as if speckled pieces were flying about
in the air
the child says: no one would do such a thing
on purpose, would they?
Sssh, sssh, says the mother come
quick we have to go – home?
Years later I'm sitting in my house
and someone lights a fire in the fireplace
it should be warm
I get up, I go outside
where the biting cold winter is waiting

come in say those inside
I do not come
I see a small point
up above like a dark spot
in my **restless** eye
I'm watching the flying spot
The child **holds** onto my hand
the child points to the sky

I don't say anything
no one does such a thing on purpose
the child says, and I say, we're going to--
the waters of remembrance
are standing still now and flow
not never

After a conversation with Karen Shasha, New York, March 2017

trs. from the German by Linda Frazee Baker

Esther Dischereit lives in Berlin. She has published fiction and poetry and writes for radio and the stage. Dischereit has received many prizes and honors for her work, including the Erich Fried Prize in 2009 and the Moses Mendelssohn Centre for European and Jewish Studies Fellowship at the University of Potsdam. She was professor of language arts at the University of the Applied Arts in Potsdam. She was professor of language arts at the University of the Applied Arts in Vienna, Max Kade German Writer in Residence at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 2013, Visiting Max Kade Professor at the University of Virginia in 2017, and Resident at the University of Iowa International Writing Program in 2017. She is currently DAAD Chair for Contemporary Poetics at New York University.

Her recent publication *Blumen für Otello, Über die Verbrechen von Jena* [*Flowers for Otello: On the Crimes that came out of Jena*] concerns a series of killings of immigrants, primarily from Turkey, by the National Socialist Underground. Her poem *Lamentations* concerns the same subject and was published in *World Literature Today*. "This all has to do in one or the other way with this being connected and staying connected to questions which deal with the post-Holocaust era in Germany," Dischereit has said. "It's not something where you could say, No, it's over."

Linda Frazee Baker is a writer and literary translator living in New York. Her fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Sakura Review*, and *Folio*. Her translations of German literature have been published in *The Guardian*, *Web Conjunctions*, *Asymptote*, *Metamorphoses*, *InTranslation*, and the *Brooklyn Rail*. She holds a Master's in Writing from Johns Hopkins.