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## **I too have lived in Arcadia**

By Ingeborg Bachmann

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I too have lived in Arcadia, but one day my time was up, and I took my leave. It was late autumn. Rotting berries fell from the bushes, and the sheep came down from the hills, freezing and hungry. Overnight the wind had scoured the grass out of the pastures and cast it on the rocky banks. On silvery tracks—two last rays of the sun—the train bore me away. It was night when I reached the border. The customs officers confiscated my luggage, and when I went to change my money, they told me they used a different currency. Unfortunately, there was no treaty between my homeland and other countries that set an exchange rate, so my money was worthless.

But I didn't lose heart. In the very first city I got to know many friendly people. They helped me where they could, and I soon found work in a factory. Later I moved on to a road construction company. It was spring, and the first road I saw was a wonderful road that carried the heaviest vehicles, a huge, magnificent road on which you could drive to the sea. But the sea was far away, and there were many stops on the way, small cities and big ones, even a great metropolis. Some historians

of the city thought that it had been founded on the ruins of ancient Babylon, but to me this official history paled next to its present.

The city wouldn't let me go. Everything I did—whether I gambled on the stock exchange, built machines, or tried to increase the yield of the plantations—was so remarkably successful that it exceeded all my expectations. When my name first appeared in the newspapers, I was happier than I had ever been in my life, and I decided to stay. I could have driven to the sea anytime, but it never happened.

Always I had new promises to keep, new things to finish that I had taken on to prove myself in a new way now that others had approved of me.

Many evenings when I was very tired, I would drive as far as the arterial highway, which led to the sea. From my **profound** exhaustion and **devotion**, I would retrieve the image of the unknown sea and sink, half-sleeping, with my face towards the distance where the infinite sky and the sea encircled the world. As soon as the drowsiness wore off, I would go back, sobered, and tell myself that this journey would always be there and that at this point it could not bring me anything I did not already have.

Years came and went; people came and went. And time and people were kind to me, and I had found my place in the sun.

For some days now, in moments in which I do not have time to pay attention, the sound of a flute reaches me, a melody broken by the wind, a cry muted by the great distance from which it comes. It seems to me as if it comes from the autumn hills that border the blue of a cloudless morning sky. Or is it the sound of bells on the white lambs that touch the bushes as they go down into the valley? Or does it come from the buzzing of the silver tracks, those rays that lead to the huts by the brook and from there straight out to the ball of the sun, which like a huge disappearing train station brings all the trains home to heaven?

Here I am sometimes asked the secret of my success, and I could tell you that I would succeed in reaching the sea and putting my name on all the roads and the oceans of the world if I retained the hope of returning home at the end of my days to see that the astonished shepherds, the hills, and the brooks of my homeland understood and marveled at the possessions I have acquired. But the currency here and the currency there are still not the same, and if I went back, I would have come home no richer than when I left, only a little older and more tired. And then too I might not have the heart any more to be modest and humble.

But now a melody strengthened by the wind reaches me again, a cry not to be ignored, terrible and near. And it seems to me as if it came from my own heart beating over me, as if the autumn hills laid on my trembling breast, and as if the cloudless sky were moving into me, to kill me. Or is it the sound of a bell that I wear

when my desire touches a bush to harvest the red, ripe fruits of the last year? Or do these sounds come from the drone of the tracks making sparks fly in the brilliance of the evening, the tracks that are taking me back to the huts by the brook and from there straightaway to the melting ball of the sun that like an enormous disappearing train station brings all the wanderers home to heaven?

Contributor's Notes:

Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-73). Born the daughter of a schoolmaster in Klagenfurt, Austria, Ingeborg Bachmann was a renowned post-war lyric poet who viewed the post-war period as a continuation of fascism by other means. She held a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Vienna, worked in radio, and wrote opera libretti. She had relationships with Paul Celan and Max Frisch. For the last 20 years of her life, she lived in Rome, where she died in a fire caused by a lit cigarette in her apartment. After her death, she became a feminist icon for her fiction, much of which deals with the power dynamics in relationships.

Linda Frazee Baker (1946-) holds an M.A. in fiction from the Johns Hopkins University and a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of California at Berkeley. She has taught literary translation at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster, and her translation of Bachmann was selected for inclusion at the New York University 2012 Literary Arts Festival.

