

There's a new continent at your doorstep, William.
Arthur Miller

The storms out there are no place for men. If one were to approach from afar, there would be darkness and more darkness, the waves would swallow the rain, swallow the lightning, it would smell of metal and salt, but no one is there to smell anything. There are no eyes. There would only be sea, piling up and up. There would be no North or South. The water would swallow even the cries of the storm, which no ear would hear. A darkness, planes layering upon each other, waves that break in utter darkness, and somewhat farther, farther on, is a flickering of distant light, swallowed by waves, just a moment, a light.

Cantarell

They followed the long lines in the asphalt, Mátyás walked on, and the wind from the rotor blades pressed their clothes to their bodies as if there were no weariness and no doubt, just the drone of the machine, and far away, beyond the airfield, he saw the white point of a mole, against which the waves beat and, way off in the distance, broke in a great roaring light.

The clouds had thickened that morning, a storm front from the Faroes had stopped over the Atlantic off the coast of Morocco, where the air had been heating up for days and weeks, and they lay tired on the long benches in the heliport and knew nothing of it, the light of the Coke machine shimmered over the linoleum, and they had a long wait for the helicopter.

It was the first time they'd seen the heliport of Sidi Ifni in anything other than the grey five-o'clock light in which they'd left the other times. Before it was even light the waiting room was full of men shoving their bags in front of them through security, the smell of coffee hung in the air and no one said much, some had only landed in Rabat that night and then continued on South, and when they arrived the ocean was still grey and wide and the wind so strong that they happily went back in the little room to smoke, as if they were already on deck in the closed container, where the table and benches were screwed tight to the floor.

Mátyás was kneeling on the floor next to Waclaw, looking for something in his bag, when the first helicopter finally landed and men and more men came through the glass door, which silently opened and closed, its edges giving off a bluish gleam, like a very precise blade.

The men carried their bags on their shoulders, some wore sunglasses, and their steps were heavy and cold in the glaring light of the waiting room. Waclaw knew only a few of them. They'd been drilling for two months, the Atlantic raging past them toward the North African continental shelf, they'd drilled through sandstone and basalt, eighty miles from the coast, for nothing but mud and stones. The oil—if there was any—would lie very deep, they'd been told at the beginning. But until something was found in at least one of these shitholes, the mood remained tense, the work seemed more laborious, it wasn't like in Mexico, in the Bay of Campeche, where all they'd had to do was stick more straws into the bulging bubble of oil, Cantarell, to drink for a few years, like wasps feeding on the last rotting fruits of autumn.

This was not Mexico, and the men were tired and overstrung when they got to land, a piece of luggage came flying through the air, a bag, big as a porpoise or a stuffed boar, hey Budapest, Mátyás was just able to raise his arms, and the bag crashed on the floor in front of him, his curls bounced. For a moment they looked at each other, hey Texas, before the huge mountain of flesh came to him and wrapped him in an embrace.

It's a bitch out there, Trevor said, not something you want to be sailing in, that's for sure, they'll close the harbors if it keeps up.

He chewed a piece of jerky, his English was rough, like someone unloading a ton of rocks.

How's the new guy? Mátyás asked, and Roy joined them, suddenly a circle was formed of those arriving and those leaving, of weariness and the smell of sweat and the tension that overcame them all before things started up. Waclaw sometimes thought of the starting gates of big races, the nervous trembling of the horses, led by three trainers while the jockey just sat crouched on top, or the steel bars the crowds hid behind as the bulls ran by, the smell of sweating livestock.

He's a pussy, Roy cried, or have you ever seen anybody out there in a tie? Not in thirty years. He looks like he needs—he raised his eyebrows and snapped his fingers a few times. The men laughed and a few clapped, shoulders were slapped, but Roy remained serious. I mean, what are we supposed to do with him, he said, when we really need him, what is he going to do for us, some calculations? Then he'd spoken softly, and his eyes had wandered to Waclaw. They're young, he said, they don't know what that means.

They stood together a moment, then the glass door closed behind those who were still there, waiting.

Chapter 1

Westerly

The sea at night is the darkest thing there is. Behind heavy storm clouds the moon was invisible, and the horizon hard to distinguish from the blackness where the waves piled up, drawing breath again and again as the wind whipped all it could muster of froth and spray over the crests. Far below, the platform swayed on its long steel mooring lines, tugged at the meter-thick piles sunk deep in the ocean floor, threw its bright light in a compact radius on the churning brown.

It was the eighth hour of the shift. On the narrow catwalk, he braced himself against a girder, holding onto the bars of the derrick with both arms. The salty moisture surrounded him like an all-embracing undertow, and for a while he'd been expecting the signal that meant work was over. Pippo would have called

them in long ago, but the new rig manager didn't seem to care, he'd sooner let them drown than interrupt the drilling. Waclaw felt the blows against the jacket legs—back then they would have evacuated the platform, he thought, but not now, now they'll just wait—while the rain drove near-horizontally across the floodlights, and the sea tugged at the welded joints, dashed against the platform like some crazy herd, the waves fled the storm, everything coming toward them. Far below on the rotary table he saw the men, they were calling something, he saw how their mouths moved, but the only call was the storm, the spray, the futile flapping of a seagull, the light undersides of its wings flashing a few times.

It was almost half an hour before the signal sounded and work ended. He had simply held out, braced himself on his narrow monkeyboard and waited. The other rig hands went in, someone opened the heavy door to the cabins, he saw the strip of light, the first men entered. There was only coldness in every one of his limbs, and he moved his feet in single movements, stiffly, his legs knew the space between steps, every single wet rung. The water had long-since crept under his oilskin, and Waclaw was chilled to the bone and kept on gripping the bars once he finally came to stand on the floor of the platform.

Inside, the light was glaring, the warmth friendly, even in the little room where they put their boots on the rack and hung their overalls to dry. He felt almost cheerful now, coming into the warmth with the others. It was a new team and there were only a few, like Albert, who was in charge down on the rotary table, whom he'd known for a long time. The storm had made his mood even worse. Silently Waclaw stuck his feet into flip-flops and walked down the hallway to their cabin. The light was on, but Mátyás' bed was empty. Their blankets lay on the lower bunk, and for a moment he thought perhaps Mátyás was under them, but there was no one there. The headphones dangled toward the floor, the Walkman was next to the pillow. He wound the cord around his hand. Mátyás? he said. Without waiting for an answer, he opened the door to the bathroom. It was four in the morning. He turned on the hot water.

Barefoot and still wet through, he stood in front of their bunks. He pulled both blankets over himself, over his still-damp skin, and suddenly the storm seemed very far away. He waited. The warmth made him sleepy, and he'd not eaten anything since evening. This was new too, for the drill foreman to put them on different shifts.

As always, his skin looked strangely pale under the parallel lines of the neon tubes. As he entered the mess hall, the men who sat at the table in front of the counter fell silent. He felt their gaze behind the sticky plastic sauce bottles, shadowing his movements as he looked around. Next to them, off to the side, sat Francis, pale and somewhat absent. A sick seabird, fluffing his feathers for a few last days. He sat erect, ignoring the jibes that the crane driver was bellowing from the next table like a fat pig. Shane showed off for the new guys, barking at the floorhands to put more chemicals in the drilling fluid, to bring him water, or to hose down the deck again and again. Only when they sat weak and exhausted next to him, enduring his crude jokes, did his face taken on the air of absence that for him signaled satisfaction. Then he could sit there as if his eyes were made of glass. But when the door swung open his face had brightened, and Waclaw heard a scornful, beckoning whistle. Hey hey, Shane mocked, who might we be looking for. His voice sounded dull and deep, like that of a very fat man, but he

was scraggy, with a hawknose which had followed their every step since they'd met him for the first time two years ago. His arms, all of him, were still coated with a greasy film. Outside on deck he wore yellow work gloves that made his hands look like claws. It was the usual talk. Waclaw never paid any mind when people stared after them.

Francis sat next to them, silently drinking two glasses amidst their noise. Waclaw was annoyed that Mátyás wasn't there. He filled up with two ladlesful from the warming pot, dunked in some nearly transparent toast, and ate. Here as well the light was too glaring. The soup too brown, skin too pale. Gradually, the mess began to fill. After work ended, they either came here to eat or lay down in their cabins to sleep.

In the hallway the storm seemed nearly silent, the swaying, everything felt as if it were some ways away. He heard voices from the movie room, and his own steps, growing quicker, saw doors with aluminum knobs and bright plastic coverings. He went down the long hall to the last door, the room was dark save a small electric candle in the corner that flickered no matter the weather. They'd met here sometimes: a few rugs turned toward Mecca, hardly anyone came to pray. Mátyás? Would he have been surprised to see him leaning against the wall, laughing his soft laugh? A stream of light fell into the darkness with the opening of the door. The room was silent. Only an unreal quiet and the rugs. He went back to their cabin. Through a cracked door he saw Andrej lying on his bunk, phone on his shoulder like a little bird—and then just his paunch peeking out and his pale, threadbare pants. The song he was listening to sounded like re-shushshickshur-roo, and he would be listening to it all night long.

The smell of socks and sweaty tank tops, the thin walls. Five thirty, maybe, at night, normally he'd still have nearly three hours out on the iron bars of the derrick, and it should have been Mátyás' last hours of sleep before his shift. Perhaps he'd felt sick. The night was still as dark as it was possible to be, not a streak of light. One time the door to the deck hadn't closed properly and the water had flowed nearly to their cabins. That was long before he'd known Mátyás, before the weeks out here had taken on a certain temperature, almost like a color, which he recognized in the way their things formed a kind of disorder that was familiar to him.

He climbed over their bags into his bed and stretched out on his back. He left the light on for him and tried to close his eyes. The platform was dependable, you could trust that it would float, that it was high enough, twelve meters above sea level, that the water couldn't simply wash over it, but what could you really trust. It was steel that was floating, the Ocean Monarch had spent years in the North Sea before it had been towed down south, a semi-submersible, a colossus that was getting on in years, the wall above Waclaw's bed shone with the greasy headprints of other workers. Countless nights, way out. Mátyás analyzed the drill cuttings, he knew about the rock chips and traces of sediment, he could tell what kinds of forests grew on the seafloor in prehistoric times. He'd never seen someone laugh so much, an almost child-like way of dealing with the weeks at sea. From the first day, his expression had reminded Waclaw of old playing cards, a joker in yellow garb. While the instructor in the big halls where they were trained laid his American R under every sentence like the base of an island, waxing lyrical about the nearly unbounded freedom of the oceans and the company's oilfields, Mátyás just stared off through his curls and held his tongue. His father was Hungarian, some uprising or other had led the family out of the heart of Budapest

and into the countryside, where he had been supposed to become a blacksmith on a large farm: hooves, steam, young mares and whites of eyes, endless drives through the countryside and the smell in his uncle's car that made him sick. For six years they'd shared a cabin, it had been one since they'd left the Gulf of Mexico. What raged outside now, the booming spectacle of a night, was none other than the Atlantic itself, and here, near the continental shelf, off the coast of Morocco, it felt furious and open. He reached into his bag and pulled out a sweater, he was suddenly cold. He thought of Pippo, their old drill foreman, confined to bed for weeks on end by vicious bouts of malaria. Some said it wouldn't be long before it got to him, made him not quite normal. It was the platforms near the coast, the Niger Delta and the mosquitos that flew out from the swampy banks, the lack of wind and the heat, the fact that no one could long stand taking the tablets that could prevent an infection. How long had Pippo been out? He knew Mátyás liked him. But when they had gotten back to the platform there was only Anderson, who didn't even bother to introduce himself, and the glow of the few days they'd spent on the coast was blown out.

He must have dreamt, but when the alarm shrilled he remembered only shreds, trees in a landscape, some hills. It was Mátyás' alarm, only a few minutes left before his shift. The light was still on, the air stuffy and damp, he'd forgotten to close the bathroom door.

Mátyás wasn't there. Wind pressed against the cabin wall, it was quiet in the hall. They'd keep work suspended for a few more hours. He turned on his side and stared at their things, all was unchanged, even his pack with the soapstone that he always carried—it lay where it always lay.

Waclaw pulled the blanket tighter and thought he had just closed his eyes when something startled him awake, dull, very distant, not the clatter of steps on the walkway, something other than the piercing signal for work to continue. The unease was unexpected and strong, it seemed to emanate from the bright wall, where the sudden daylight traced a clear line. His warm fleece still hung in the closet.

So he brought him the sweater. The morning was clear, heavy clouds moved across the early blue as if in a hurry, in the distance a silvery shimmer still lingered. He carried the fleece for Mátyás, and he carried it like a plea, while the running of the machines suddenly struck him as utterly unreal. Here we are, Petrov said as he came around the light blue tank, behind which they extracted the drill cuttings.

He saw the familiar pans with the sludge, the stones and muddy earth, saw all the things that were familiar to him, the vibration screens, the monitors and hoses, saw Petrov with his good-natured smile, but he did not see Mátyás. Where's your friend this morning? Petrov took off his safety goggles and looked at Waclaw in just the same way Waclaw was looking at him.

He had wanted to wait until Mátyás came by himself, work had gotten to a slow start after that night. Waclaw didn't have to remind him of the darkness of the sea. They looked. It only occurred to him later, after they had searched every room, the whole deck, every corner and step all the way down to the landing docks, the gym, the mess several times and several times their own cabins, after announcements were made, after the drill foreman subjected the workers to a standardized round of questioning, the sky broke into a practically radiant noon,

while nothing of the day and none of the seabirds that flew over the water could possibly be real, radio messages went out, someone brought him a hot drink and he scanned every jacket leg with his eyes, the water's surface with its crazy shimmer, after they tried to drag him in and finally left him to sit between the tanks and an even, round sun sank into the water, only then did he notice that his fist was closed around something, which only then, in the evening and before the even horizon, turned into something that had once been Mátyás' fleece.

On this evening the moon seemed scarce, hovering as it did above the swaying of the sea. In his bed, Waclaw still wore his boots, a few feathers escaped from the pillow. Some huge being had ripped everything away, everything that had been, only yesterday. He stood in the cabin and regretted winding up Mátyás' headphones. He thought it, about the fact that he'd picked them up, that he couldn't hold any of it off, that it was now evening, and the storm was over and it had grown dark, as it always did. He heard steps in the hall, the men ambled into the mess in their sweaty T-shirts, they were hungry, the food smelled, he couldn't stay in the cabin. He went out. The sea was almost calm. Now and then they sent someone to come and check on him, once Petrov came and offered him cigarettes, and Waclaw watched as he sat next to him, wordlessly smoking.

They could cost you your job, Waclaw said, and Petrov laughed softly and took one more drag and looked straight out at the sea.

They'll be asking you too, he said.

They're not going to send anyone out to look for him, are they?

No, Petrov said. They most certainly won't.

They were silent a while. Gas was still being flared, a seagull flew past through the floodlight, sometimes they came over from the tankers.

What will you do now? Petrov asked. Where will you go?

They looked down at the water, as it grew dim and a light sheen rode the swells.

Back, Waclaw said.

Where is that?

He thought he saw a smile in Petrov's eyes.

What about you? Waclaw asked finally.

Wife and kid, Petrov said. Fucking hell. They think it's good money out here.

That's what they all think.

The last light came from far away and fell on the grey stubble of his chin.

Drops fell, echoing behind them on the empty tank, the wind picked up, rubbing against the bars and cables. Petrov put up his hood.

I can't let you stay out here, Wenzel. Come on in.

He put his arm around Waclaw. It was an arm that knew that the next days too would taste of rain, of rain and clouds, and of their passing. He couldn't stand to be in the cabin, he told Petrov *dobranoc* and went to the mess, fat Lúkacs stood behind the counter, clutching his chef's hat between his hands when he saw Waclaw, as if he saw a shadow beside him. And he heard how they lowered their voices. Mikael and Ray and Steve, someone pushed back a chair.

Wenzel, do you want to join us?

Thanks, but I won't be long.

But then he sat anyway, a long line, with an instant lemon tea, lukewarm in its paper cup. Enough silence to make their forearms stick to the tabletop. Have you guys seen these T-shirts? Bright red and green, Ray was wearing a washed-out sweatshirt with a manga print. A princess and a sword. A scant meter separated

his table from theirs. He noticed how they looked at him, how their eyes wandered surreptitiously over, as if it was his fault that no one was getting out the cards and they couldn't yell across the mess to Lúkacs, who absently wiped at the glass as if he'd only just noticed the thin film of grease on the divider before the shimmering meatballs.

He wasn't sure it was the same room. He told Lúkacs to fry him up a couple of eggs, and ate them with some cold potatoes. Suddenly he was hungry. He was careful not to scratch the plate with his fork. It was no longer their mess, but it was the same room. At some point a new decade had begun, and they'd sat here and played, with all the strength of extinguished firecrackers, Mátyás, young enough, lively, never before had Waclaw spent a night at these tables, never had he loved the sudden distance that surrounded them more.

The smell of cabbage and fryer grease hung in the air.

The door opened and Eugen stuck his head in.

Waclaw, they're looking for you, they're going to send a Super Puma for you, first thing in the morning, it's coming over from the mainland. Just for you. A Puma! He heard the voices rise and knew they'd start talking about helicopters now, weighing the pros and cons of particular models, among which the Puma's superiority was unchallenged. He sat there and listened, Lúkacs was shoveling down some kind of food, then his gaze fell on the clock over the door: XI, what did that mean, eleven at night it must be, he looked at the face of the clock and felt something rising in him, he could still hear their voices, made it to the hall and into the cabin, to the metal toilet bowl where he vomited, and it was night, simply night, and he sat there and saw his hands shaking as if they were someone else's, like this night, in which he didn't belong.

Everything that followed seemed too clear and yet somehow blurry, frayed images, their edges ungraspable. After an hour-long conversation, Anderson the generous rig manager had given him the last four days of his shift off. While he spoke, Waclaw thought of the birds that imitate rain to lure worms out of the soil.

He didn't have strength to ask him. Through the window of Anderson's office Waclaw saw the men continuing to work, saw the rotary table, the colored overalls and glaring white helmets, the water had grown still, lay there, flat, and no one came and threw a wreath in the water, a speech, anything. There was no place in his brain for a farewell without dark restaurants and brown sauce. He thought of the steel mills of the Ruhr, what he'd been told as a child about men who disappeared in the middle of the day, a white-hot heat after years spent between Carnival and grain alcohol, after the misery of the war came the silence of oak sideboards, the cramped miner's housing, lives turned to less than ash in the boiling steel of the blast furnaces. As a child, he'd kept the image of locker rooms, street shoes never worn again. He saw the choir at St. Cyriakus, widows lined up in their heavy suits. A parish hall filled with pies, fruit from infinite allotment gardens, black shoes smooth as washed plates. Children singing songs in Polish and German, collars starched. The waves had died down. Not even the colors were right: T-shirts, colorful helmets, hairy calves, the sea bright all around them.

Anderson asked several times if he wanted to go home. Several times Waclaw told him that the address the company had as his emergency contact no longer existed.

Anderson said it would be good if he went back to land soon, and didn't hesitate in reporting the loss to headquarters. He held the phone to his ear. He said Mátyás' name between sentences that sounded like lists of things that were no longer needed. Perhaps he didn't understand what he was saying, perhaps he was trying to stay professional and matter-of-fact. From the wall gleamed a photo of some unknown crew taken with flash, the reflectors on the arms and legs of their red overalls shone more clearly than any face. Waclaw tried to guess how old Anderson was, surely fifteen years younger than he, mid-thirties, maybe. Anderson's checked shirt slid back a bit and revealed a light, almost fatty hand. Everything about him was pale and hairless, and his voice had the energy of a stick stirring up a lukewarm puddle.

He didn't know the tears Alexej had shed, missing the birth and short life of his son, he knew nothing of the languages in which each dreamed his private dreams. He spoke evenly, nodded a few times, then hung up. He reached for a yellow leather case, pulled out a fountain pen, wrote a few words, and looked at Waclaw as if he'd done something important.

He would do his best to make sure that Waclaw was transferred to another platform after the weeks on land, Anderson said.

That would be a relief for you, surely?

His smile.

What about him? Waclaw said.

Anderson looked at him in astonishment.

What about him?

He shook his head slowly and then pointed to the chart on the wall.

Mr. Groszak. You do know what these shadings mean?

For a moment they both stared at the topographical map where the test drillings and the platform were marked.

Yes, he said, absently.

Either the waves pushed him against one of the steel pontoons, he balled the fingers of his right hand briefly into a fist, or the undertow under deck swept him away.

Anderson looked out. His mouth too was soft and he avoided Waclaw's eyes.

Waclaw missed Pippo. He wondered what he would have done. Pippo had hairy hands, and they could smoke together when something was wrong. Pippo knew his people. When the others laughed loudly, only a faint smile would cross his face, but his voice could get hard as the spiny fin of a perch, you could hurt yourself on him. He would never have talked with this secretary like a little puppy dog.

Anderson nodded toward the door.

The men will let me know if they see anything unusual outside.

He leaned back in his chair.

We'll be in touch. Your shuttle will be here around three.

And it was only this sudden rage that made him stand up. There was the curve of his seatback, his thumbs boring into it, and the fact that Anderson fell silent when he saw him standing like that, yes, frightened, but more the way one is frightened by a bug or by an unexpected noise, as if he might suddenly jump at him. Waclaw just stood there and looked at him.

Don't be stupid, Anderson said softly, biting his lip. I mean it.

On the way to the cabin he suddenly felt heavy, as if he hadn't slept for weeks. He tore open their closets and threw their things together, stuffed them into bags, then carried them out, both bags, on deck, into the sudden sea air.

He climbed up to the helideck, the drilling continued, they pumped more drilling fluid into the depths to keep up the pressure, the Puma wasn't there yet, the bags were heavy. Only Petrov accompanied him to the landing deck, he stood bent like an oak and spoke little.

Waclaw leaned against a wall, saw the others continuing to work, the crane swung around, the wind was still cold, his face felt hot, his eyes welled up. Behind him he heard steps on the stairs, saw Francis, still filthy in his overalls.

Wenzel, he said, taking a breath. What did they say, where are you going?

Francis took off his gloves and let them fall next to him like two dead fish. Waclaw could see the line of his boots under his pant leg. Everything seemed too big, the clothes, the helmet, Francis reminded him of an animal whose fur had gotten wet, making it look suddenly pitiful and sick.

What are they going to do now? he asked. What will they do with—he faltered, as if he didn't dare to continue.

With Mátyás, that's still his name, Waclaw said softly.

It felt wrong to play this role. As he talked, he listened almost curiously to his own voice, which sounded unusually firm.

They'll do nothing.

He could see Francis pursing his lips, his skin shone greasily, as if he hadn't washed in days. Do you remember that boat a couple years ago? Off Mehdyá?

They were almost to land. Three of them were never found. And divers—
Waclaw waved him off.

Are you coming back? Francis asked quickly.

He was nervous. The shift was about to continue and he had to get back. Even after so much time he had the feeling that he couldn't afford to put a foot wrong in front of the others.

Of course. Waclaw clapped him on the shoulder. Sure.

Then he watched him climb back down to the deck and cross the bridge to the drill floor. It gave him a pang to see him like that, already back with the others.

The Puma didn't come till evening.

This isn't Mexico.

The sentence crossed his mind several times, but he didn't know what to make of it. This wasn't Mexico, and the ocean was calm, but Mátyás wasn't there.

What remained that evening of the platform was a small light on the waters, a dark horizon that stretched and stretched. He leaned against the glass with double hearing protection, a sweaty survival suit, the motor vibrating above him, he saw the bright spots, the gas flares and illuminated structures far below, growing ever blurrier.

And as he looked at the bright spots, he had to think of his father, of the garret and the oval window. The tremor of his dust-eaten lungs as Waclaw sat with him, a fear in his eyes that couldn't be reconciled with the hand that stroked his arm comfortingly. He asked Waclaw to tell him of another ocean, one that was nothing like the Baltic with its dim cutters and cabins. He let Waclaw tell him of the sand

that the Saharan winds carried over the water, which crunched in between their teeth during the days, and Waclaw named coastlines, dunes of the finest sand right on the ocean. They spoke of traveling, to places where no one would follow them. I tam, dok d nikt nie idzie za tob , his father whispered, and Waclaw nodded. Go where no one will follow you. He tried to be strong, as he'd always been strong, and then they sat for a long time in the half-light of the room, which was so small that lying in bed he could touch the far wall. A few times his father drifted into a light sleep, then opened his eyes and said Waclaw's name. The helicopter lurched through this sky, the helicopter would find a coast and land where a boat would bring him to the nocturnal harbor of Tangier.

The crouched running under the rotor blades with two duffel bags. They sat next to each other on the backseat of the taxi as they drove off in the direction of the cutter. A light rain ran in red streams through the dust of the windshield. They drove. Low barracks with wire fences, now and then he saw the barred windows of workshops with car lifts behind them bathed in cold nocturnal light, a few well-locked warehouses. It was one of those industrial areas near the coast that looked like they were only used for scrap metal and car dealerships. He was tired. Next to him, the driver was chewing something, and he heard the sound of the windshield wipers. They drew streaks across the glass. And there were raindrops that lit up in these foreign streets, they got wiped away, and no one noticed. New ones would follow.

Translation: **Anne Posten**

Anne Posten translates poetry and prose from German. Her work has appeared in *FIELD*, *Stonecutter*, *n+1*, and *VICE*, et al. Her most recent book, *Carl Seelig's Walks with Walser*, was published by New Directions. She lives in Brooklyn and Berlin.

Anja Kampmann is a German poet and author of fiction. She was awarded the MDR- Literaturpreis as well as the Wolfgang-Weyrauch-Förderpreis. Her work has appeared in *Akzente*, *Neue Rundschau*, *words without borders*, et al. Her first collection of poetry „Samples of Stone and Light” was published by Carl Hanser Verlag, 2016. „High as the waters rise“ was nominated for the Leipzig Book Fair Prize, the German Book Prize and the Aspekte- Literature Prize for the best debut novel written in German.

Anja Kampmann's (b. 1983, Hamburg) poems address on the first level sensual experience: of landscapes and images, as is suggested by the title of her first poetry collection, “Samples of Stone and Light” (*Proben von Stein und Licht*, Carl Hanser Verlag, 2016). Yet even this simple title gives a hint into the layered use of language that gives her work both depth and playfulness. Proben are samples, but the word also suggests rehearsal, attempt—an approach to images and themes that remains open rather than definitive. In Kampmann's poems musicality is paramount. The poems are personal in the sense that they are derived from lived experience of place, yet Kampmann uses precise language and relies on rhythm to lend her images power, thereby distancing herself from the text and allowing structure and sound to be the primary carriers of meaning. Nor are the landscapes in these poems simply sites of natural beauty; rather, they are often occasions to reflect on history and concrete contemporary issues.

The tension between precision and openness, and the emphasis on sound, make these poems a challenge, but also a great joy to translate. I worked closely with the author to find rhythms and sounds that held a similar power in English, even if they differed from those in the original. Also particularly important in the translation was the preservation of the multiplicity of relationships between words: Kampmann's poems are often sparsely punctuated, allowing for various syntactical readings and a pace that drives forward while also stretching back, drawing the reader into the poem's own space and time.

