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N

FREDRIC

KAJSA

GUNVE

G. ERIKSSON

RAIN

THE BEAUTIFUL ENVIRONMENT OF DALSLAND, SWEDEN HAS BEEN TURNED INSIDE OUT AND THE RAIN NEVER CEASES. HERE YOU CAN READ RAIN AS **FORTY-FOUR CARDS** AND A STORY.

THIS IS VRÄNGA=RAIN

CHAPTER 1

WATER

1

The rain poured down. Heavy, thick raindrops hammered hard on pine trees, rooftops, and cars. Drenching moose, deer, strollers, and timber workers. Over dirt paths and concrete roads, the water flowed in newly made rivers. Cars blindly skidded through streams of water from heaven.

2

Basements flooded and filled with water. Lawns were transformed to shallow green pools. Two weeks later the rain calmed down. The day after, it rained persistently again. It rained for one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine weeks ...

The rain never stopped.

3

Seven years later.

The term we use to describe a day like today is “plank”, meaning that today is not a rainy day. Not being a rainy day, I mean that today it rains tittlebat, a soft cloud of microscopic raindrops which falls like mist to the ground. It is relief from the driving angry rain, but plank does not make your clothing or your soul less damp. Nothing makes us less damp, it is something we have learned to live with.

4

The dampness digs holes in the ground; it mixes with sand and soil becoming mud, and moves off. The dampness has caused all ground works to decay and slowly rot, until houses, sheds, playgrounds, and gardens fall to pieces and drown in soft grey clay and muddy water.

5

Some parts of the forest life have adjusted to the new wet resources. A vast amount of aquatic plants and fungi have replaced the trees; and among these new, yet old, plants, you find frogs, fish, lizards and black clouds of insects. The trees that remain standing upright have been decorated by nature, and the circles of mold shine like distinct suns.

6

These are hard times for the lumber and tourism industries, and yet new ideas flourish, prompted by the new weather and changes in nature. Many companies have started to explore the province as an experimental site for development of new materials in new environments. The representatives use hot-shot language and drop trendy phrases such as “Wood-processing industries in catastrophic environments”, “Post apocalyptic design awareness” and “Tourism for a gray brave future”.

7

The roads that cut through forests, wind up and down hills and mountains, have been taken over by water. Over and over again, the local departments of water management must redraw the maps of the rivers and streams. Like dominos falling, the outermost levees and hills continue to be demolished, creating new passages or waterfalls for the rain to roam about.

8

The university has developed new areas of academic interest, and has created a pedagogy for living with rain. “Material and Function in Damp Environments” and “Studies in a Rapidly Developing Ecology” are only two of new courses being taught at the former School of Arts and Crafts.

9

These days you never see any big hair, punk rockers cannot manage to keep their spikes or mohawks erect, and it never comes to pass that fluffy hair brushes your face on the bus. Now, there is only wet hair on your cheek, neck, and forehead. It lies on your skin like a salamander. It is impossible to keep your hair dry for any amount of time. If you do manage to keep your hair out of the rain, you still can't keep it from getting damp.

10

New interpretations have been given to old sayings. The rain continues endlessly until it has inexorably reached every part of the body and soul. A dry dog is a dead dog, it is now said.

CHAPTER 2

THE FAMILY

11

Our house is declared uninhabitable. We have to move.

12

There are a lot of people who sense what is going to happen, but always after it has occurred. I don't know. I never sense things. Mum and dad say its a load of bullshit. That's that kind of things morons say just to avoid taking care of things. They say that all that exists is rain, and everything that counts is rain. Rain, rain and water.

13

Our basement is a freezing indoor pool. Mum laughs and adds that if you are living under our circumstances, you can certainly live without sickening, chlorine filled communal pools. But, no one in the family is taking a dip into our pool, with or without chlorine. I keep the door to the basement carefully shut, who knows what can be hiding down there?

14

Could it be rats? Rats as large as crocodiles? Mum and dad say this is also bullshit.

“Forget about the rats in the cellar. They went south together with the convoy of furniture trucks to the city!”

But we are still here.

15

Halfway up the road you will find our house. Before the rain, we had a garden with several levels. Most of it is gone. The house used to be painted red, now it is painted with black tar to keep the dampness from getting inside. When you get close, it smells like an old harbor.

The walls of the house have been built up with layers to resist the damp and the rain. From a distance, you can see that we have mended and cobbled together layers of tar, wood, and plastic. There are many gutters and rainwater pipes extending a few yards from the roof. We have built a passage under every pipe opening in order for the water to flow away from the house.

16

At the front of the house, is a homemade water gate made out of plastic sheets, followed by steps rising to higher levels. At the entrance, there are three stones serving as a staircase. The front door is made out of a laminated checkered sheet. Behind the metal door, you will find the first space for drying. At the other end of this room, there hangs a large sheet of plastic with a big yellow sun printed on it. It was a shower curtain before we cut it in half. The beams from the sun shine down into a glowing pinkish world at the curtains hem. It is pink mould that is never going to wash out.

17

Mother has made shawls for all of us. They are of plastic bags, yellow and grey wool, and silk. The shawls keep us warm and fairly dry. It is quickest drying garment that I possess. Down in the village, when we run our errands, they call us “the grey shawls”. A school-mate of mine thinks that we are called “the grey jackals”. I think it sounds cool. Jackals don’t give up, and we won’t either.

18

Hanging in the drying room, are all of the outer garments and shoes that have spent time in the first drying space. Not the outer raincoats of course, they have to hang close to the entrance. If they start to get moldy we have to rinse them with chorine, in a snap.

The drying room is filled with different kinds of absorbent materials. The best thing is the small heater which hangs from the ceiling. You can point it towards different areas, if there is anything that you would like to dry a bit quicker, but most of the time, it 's just heating the place. I think of this room as a jungle room, warm and moist, but no lianas or plants of any kind, just loads of clothes, hangers, and hooks.

19

Isn't it raining? I interrupt the encompassing sound of rain. It's an old joke, just to make the conversation run a bit smoother, to show that you are keeping up. My friend from the village can't hear me. It's difficult to actually detect the difference between words, the rustle from the gray shawl, and from the never ending rain.

The world is filled with wet noises.

20

She laughs and tells me that she have found an old box of water colors in the commune back home in the village. Painting outdoors with water colors ... not so easy when it's raining non-stop.

CHAPTER 3

THE VILLAGE

21

Spirits are high at the Community Center. The assembly hall is packed with people, the whole village has gathered and the general meeting is in full swing. A buzz bounces between the walls only interrupted by the ever accompanying hard rain. Every time we meet, our future and our history are created. Together, we are building a new culture.

22

Many years ago, when the village had finally adapted to the pelting from the sky, and had created a new way of life, the villagers came together to discuss the future. Who wished to stay? How should problems be solved? Surprisingly, many made the decision to remain, and implicitly, without discussion, the village became a communal project.

23

Some of the water that flows towards the turbine is directed to the sewage disposal plant. In the beginning, the paradox was how to solve the problem of the overwhelming water supply. Most of the houses had terrible floods, which covered floors and cellars with sewage water. The reek was unbearable. The whole village urgently had to fix the sewage system and separate fresh waters. An elderly man died from the complications of dysentery, but eight others survived. Fresh water was the first thing that united our village.

24

Nowadays, all our discussions deal with questions of energy. We have electricity from the water turbine, and a few wind power stations that work well, if it isn't raining too hard. In the worst case scenario, there are a several rebuilt diesel-driven generators, held in reserve in case the turbine needs to shut down. For the most part, our new village serves our needs.

25

At the general meeting most people are engaged in a discussion around the large water turbine. It needs reinforcement in order to function another year. Last winter, the turbine was ripped apart by a heavy snowy rain. The whole village was embedded in grey slushy banks. A few days later, after the storm, another heavy rain started and the water wheel in the turbine couldn't take the weight from the bursting

masses of water. Two houses went down. Later, it was discovered that several bolts on the turbine had rusted and that an iron beam had been bent by the water. Since then, the discussions in the village have focused on the temporary reinforcements, and if they are strong enough to hold. The assembly hall is a buzz as materials, techniques and inventions are debated.

26

Within arguments, other stories hide. A subtext of social fatigue and conflict resolution tends to surface at our general meetings. In our village, you can't be too scrupulous about who breaks bread with whom, as long as the community stays intact. Friendships and love affairs rise and fall. New types of relationships and alliances flow like the water.

27

The village has an ancestry, we were here before the rain. Prior to the change we already had started a transformation of the place, now we have managed to create our own distinct culture. We merge headstrong aesthetics with practical solutions. The gutters, dry locks, and our clothes are always decorated. For the first few years, different species of lizards, frogs, and fish were represented, but recently abstract forms and geometrical figures have been the most popular.

28

A downpour falls from the sky, eventually calming into a persistent rain with large warm drops. I fantasize about something dry. Wind blowing dry leaves in circles, the sun shining on dry grass and calm fields of wheat, red flowers, hogweed, buttercups, bluebells, wild strawberries, a peacock butterfly. I have forgotten the forget-me-nots. Now, the muddy sand doesn't want to release me and makes a treacherous sucking sound with every step. With my hands, I carefully protect a laminated page from an old grocery store flyer.

29

A warm summer rain falls on our faces, and runs along hair; down shoulders, backs, bellies, and legs. The water runs along our bodies as we work our feet up and down in the mud. We move like flowers in meadows, like the rain and the wind. Our coats, radiating yellowish green leaves and purple flowers, are soaked through.

30

Today is the "Day of Summer Meadow", and all women have gathered at one of the old fields outside the village. This is a day to relive what was, and what can still be. We dance and move in circles. We imitate frogs and make abstract movements. There is no mention that we do it for the children. This is no feast for children. This is how we celebrate midsummer, without children, without men, without a pole.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNIVERSITY

31

Today the rain is Levis Pluvia, a light rain consisting of very tiny raindrops just slightly more compact than fog. This is the type of rain that the local population call plank.

32

The university is situated in the eastern part of the rain area, but nevertheless they never experience a day without rain. A former goal of the history of the university, before the rain, was to expand and be included in a larger international context. The focus was to create an effect of synergy and flexibility. As times goes by, one cannot help but notice that these goals have been fulfilled, in complete measure.

33

Zone rain 1, as the district is called, has an anomaly in the weather pattern, which has, in all probability, been brought on by the ongoing climate change. Yet, there is no succinct scientific explanation to the unique state of the weather in the area. What is known, is that within the air space above the geographical surface of the zone, a constant boundary between two air masses created a static front. Whether the state is going to survive for a couple of years, or a thousand years, is also under discussion.

34

After exiting the last of the university's dry locks, and entering the lobby, warm and dry air caresses your face. It feels like silk. The room is bright, almost sunny, and filled with plants; fuchsia, ponytail palms, aspidistras, bowstring hems, butterfly palms, and weeping figs with braided trunks. It's an indoor jungle with institutional plants, lit by artificial daylight.

35

Most of the rooms in the building have full-spectrum artificial lights, in order for the indoor plants to survive. The intention is to simultaneously prevent depression. Light therapy is recommended for everyone.

Along the outside of the house and water gates', and protruding into the jungle hallway is a long wooden log decorated with different metals. It is a fifteen metres long art work, an aesthetic and educational narrative about a never ending present, and a past now lost. The wood is slowly drying and rotting; the damp is processing one end and drying the other. The metal oxidizes and moves as the wood slowly twists and rots. The grayish brown of the wood meets the black wrought iron, while other parts corrode and fall apart. All along the damp and damaged log, iron and copper in different shades from red to green, flow towards the mud. The section of the log which borders outside and in is festooned with a variety of green mosses and fungi, growing frantically. Mummification and mold-ering collide in a material paradox of preservation and progress; chafing and tearing. The big question facing the university is "To protect, isolate, or evolve?"

In Room 3-55, the new research group has their initial visionary meeting. The participants are introduced to each other and the project begins with an open process. Questions on the agenda not only concern material, art, tradition and weather impacts, but how a university in Zone rain I, will operate in the prevailing situation.

38

One of the participants in the meeting is suffering from jetlag. She traveled from India to Sweden three days ago, and since then has been transported by a multitude of planes, trains, buses, and boats to reach this fringe area. She came from the Indian city Cherrapunji, where she just completed a major study regarding “Rain and its Cultural and Aesthetic impact on Materials in an Artistic Context”.

39

Previously, Cherrapunji held the record as one of the rainiest places on earth. Today, the city has slipped down a few notches, but with an average annual rainfall of 11 430 mm, the city maintains a well deserved second place, and has nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to the level of rainfall.

40

“Hello all, and welcome to this first meeting of the research group: Material and Craft within a Shifting Environmental Context?”. The social buzz quiets down when the vice-chancellor of the university greets everyone. After the speech, the obligatory garments are handed out to the participants. There will be a tour around the studios and the area outside the main building.

At the meeting, they will discuss rain as a force of transformation. How has the rain affected the area and people? Are previous weather patterns just memories,

or has the memory of what was, provided us with insight as to what could be? The group will use a new methodology, in which the participants' memories are activated and compared with their experiences here and now

NOTES FROM THE RAIN MEETING

41

Once, one could turn the face towards the sun and bask in it. In the land of twilight, the sun is not shining.

42

Imagining light and dark as contrasting, is antiquated. Without sun there is no shadow, everything is grey with little tonal variation.

43

The individualism of the past has disappeared. One never knows when the next mass of water could surge; then you need the others to manage. To be alone is a luxury.

44

“A dry dog is a dead dog”
Everything flows, both figuratively and literally.

AFTERWORD

VRÄNGA IS A COLLABORATION AND RUNS BY THE ARTISTS KAJSA G. ERIKSSON AND FREDRIC GUNVE. VRÄNGA=RAIN HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM REALIZED IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2010 AT STENEBY – THE SCHOOL OF CRAFT AND DESIGN, DALSLÅNGED, SWEDEN.

THANK YOU

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