

whistling

for owls

max ferguson

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a story in two parts

max ferguson

‘I answer that I try to write true stories but that at a given point the story becomes unbearable because of its very truth, and then I have to change it. I tell her that I try to tell my story but all of a sudden I can’t – I don’t have the courage, it hurts too much...’

†











Each morning during
those long months I worked
through the same rituals.





I first met the birdwatcher as she climbed over a stile somewhere from the house we were staying at. She seemed startled to see me – as if I shouldn't have been there.

Maybe I shouldn't have.

I wished her good morning and was about to walk on when I noticed her binoculars. I asked her if she had been looking for birds. She said that she had, but that normally you watched birds and didn't look for them. I thought this was a strange response but kept quiet.

She was probably only a few years older than me but the difference seemed much more. Her slightly greying hair was tucked into the corduroy collar of a leathery brown jacket. It was very old and the pockets were bulging and seemed to be weighing down the entire thing.

I began to wonder what was in them.







daydreaming

looking for snakes

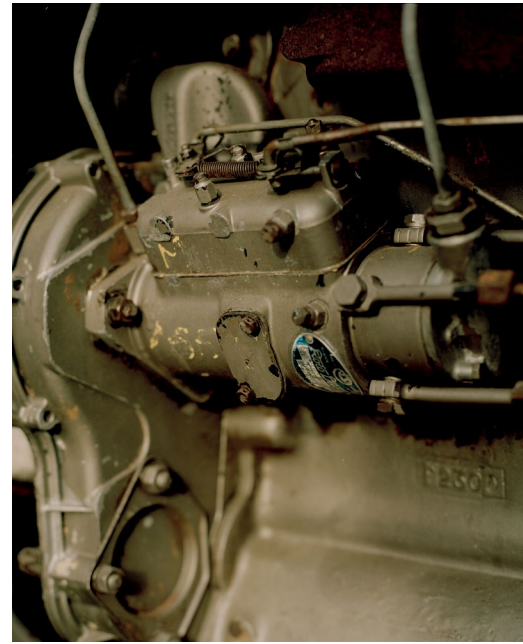






glasses of water
plant pots overturned
dead butterflies









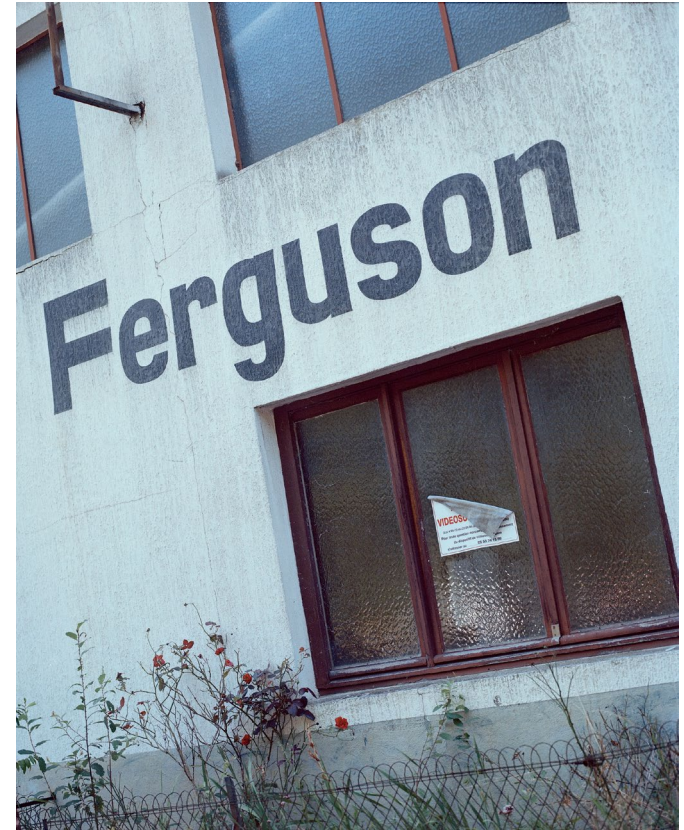




It wasn't even the best bit, I said, that was seeing the corner of the house peeking out from behind the trees. Being away from it had made me realise how much I missed it. But, speaking now to this woman, who I had only recently met, I was close to tears. We were standing on the front deck of a small ferry, smoking cigarettes and waiting for the boat to get the all-clear. It was not being far from home, she told me, that was difficult, but being close. The proximity of what you love makes you so lonely.









Yesterday there was a page in a
book that made me think of you.

A poet and a printer in nineteenth-century provincial
France is explaining to his fiancé about how paper has
been made until that moment.









whispering in my ear she said that our paper wings
will dampen when the weather finally closes in





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I told her if it's all the same

I would rather just listen







‘... And so I embellish everything and describe things not as they happened but the way I wish they had happened.’

†

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† From Ágota Kristóf's 'The Third Lie' 1991

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