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Ida Hegazi Høyer – Norway

Unnskyld (2014)

Forgive Me

Publishing House **Tiden Norsk Forlag**

Biography

Ida Hegazi Høyer, born in 1981, is a Norwegian citizen with Danish-Egyptian ancestors. Her roots are in Lofoten in the north of Norway, but she grew up in Oslo. Høyer has studied sociology and worked in a clothing store, and she now writes and lives in Oslomarka – the woodlands surrounding Oslo. She is the author of three novels: her debut, *Under the World*, was published in autumn 2012, followed by *Out* in 2013 and *Forgive Me* in 2014. In August 2014

Synopsis

Forgive Me (2014) is an intense novel about love, self-deception and dangerous secrets.

In Ida Hegazi Høyer's third book, a young woman meets a young man, and it's love at first sight. He is a student of philosophy who impresses her deeply with his intellectual talk of individualism and his free spirit – he seems like the perfect man. They move into a small apartment, and in the days and weeks and months to come they become completely engulfed by one another. But it does not take long before she starts harbouring feelings of unease. Small signs, small oddities suggesting that he might not be what he appears to be.

Forgive Me explores the darker sides of everyday life, in a realism that borders onto the dream-like and absurd, with a language that entices and surprises the reader, and through the use of black comedy.

Det sto en seng på fortauet. Helt fra krysset i enden av gata kunne man se at det sto en seng foran oppgangen vår, noen som flytta inn, noen som flytta ut, noe som var i veien. Men ikke før jeg var helt nære, ikke før jeg skulle til å gå inn, så jeg det, at det var vår seng, vår dyne, våre puter, at det hele ligna en installasjon der ute på gata, plutselig, kanskje endelig, i riktig lys.

Det var fridag, nesten sommer nå, jeg kom hjem, og senga vår sto ute. Du hadde redd opp. Dyna var pent bretta, putene uten hodemerker, og sengeteppet, som vi aldri egentlig brukte, hang over gavlen. Et eviglukket avbrutt nattsnitt. Antagelig pausa jeg, kjente et vent eller et stopp, ikke gå opp. Og det var varmt, midt på dagen, det brant under himmelen.

Den ene etasjen opp. Ti trinn, to skritt, så resten av trappa. Du hadde ikke latt døra stå åpen. Du hadde låst. Og dette kom jeg aldri til å glemme – du visste jeg var den eneste med nøkkel.

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Hunden løp ut. Med det samme jeg låste meg inn kom hun farende forbi meg. Og jeg så. Og jeg innså. Bildene dine, bildene våre, de hang ikke oppe lenger. Skyskraperne sto på gulvet, ryggen ut, to hvite rammer.

Sånn så det ut, rommet: Vinduet vårt var igjen og per-siennene var nede. Skapdørene var lukket, lampene var av, og midt på gulvet, der senga hadde stått, lå en kjøkkenstol. Det fantes ingen lyder, ingen luft som lot seg puste. Klokka var tolv på dagen.

Jeg gikk ikke bort til deg. Men jeg gikk inn i rommet.

Jeg gikk rundt deg, langs veggene, til vinduet, til dagen. Jeg dro opp persiennene, åpna vinduet, og jeg kunne ha hoppa; det ville gått bra, for der nede sto jo senga vår, rett under meg, nøyaktig plassert for fall. Men jeg hoppa ikke, jeg brakk meg, det var alt jeg fikk til, en bitte liten galledråpe som landa nederst i fotenden vår, og så pusta jeg, hardt, én gang, før jeg løp ut, det var siste gang jeg så deg, løp forbi deg, du lukta ingenting, og da jeg kom ned, da jeg kom ut, var gata en annen og himmelen forandra og husene skjeve og takene på vei nedover og trærne galopperende og bilene fra en annen verden og menneskene, alle menneskene, ingen av dem menneskelige lenger.

Jeg hadde ingen steder å dra. Jeg la meg under dyna vår, lå der og kjente på det som var igjen av deg, og av oss. Jeg la meg under dyna vår, i senga på gata under den etende himmelen, og visste, allerede da, at jeg alltid ville se det rommet annerledes.

Det andre rommet: Vinduet er åpent, nattlyset er på. Jeg kommer hjem et halvt døgn tidligere. Klokka er tolv på natta. Du ligger og sover. Eller du ligger og skal sove. Eller du står på badet og pusser tenner. Eller du sitter i stua og ser på tv. Eller du drømmer. Du er varm. Du har en varme. Du ligger og sover. Jeg legger meg inntil deg.

Første gang jeg så deg – jeg kom til å kle av meg alt. Vi var ved havet, det var sommer eller forsommer. Det var to år tidligere og seint på ettermiddagen, lyset strakk seg. Jeg husker ikke hvem jeg hadde vært der med, men jeg var alene nå, gikk langs vannet, og det var andre mennesker der, piknikfolk, folk som sang om kapp med måkene, og jeg gikk langs vannet i den synkende sanda, hadde sola foran meg, ti tusen piler ned i glittersjøen. Da jeg så deg forsvant alt sammen.

Du var også alene. Du satt lenger inn, lenger bort fra vannkanten. Jeg så ikke hva du drev med, om du leste, om du tegna, om du skrev, men siden ville du fortelle at du tenkte, at det var det du holdt på med, du hadde dratt til havet for å filosofere, og så kom jeg, og dette ble vår historie, den eneste begynnelsen.

Jeg så deg og kledde av meg alt. Jeg så deg, og la det være sagt, jeg så deg først. Lenge så jeg på deg. Jeg sto med vannet opp til midt på leggen, det var kaldt, og du så ut som en varmere verden. Ikke fordi du var utenomjordisk pen eller faretruende rolig eller forstyrrende flørtende, du var ikke noe sånt i det hele tatt. Men du turte å være til stede uten å skulle ha noe som helst å gjøre med noen som helst annen. Du var så alene, du var det vakreste jeg hadde sett. Og da du så på meg, da du så meg, må du ha sett meg like svart som hellig, som om du tok til deg og kasta vekk i ett og samme blikk. Imellom oss var alle menneskene. Imellom oss var skrik og sand og stein og stemmer. Og jeg tenkte ikke, hadde ikke en eneste tanke i hodet, så ikke alle øynene foran meg, jeg kledde bare av meg. For deg. Jeg reiv ut hårstrikken, dro av meg klærne, og jeg stilte meg opp, rett imot deg, mot denne herreløse verdenen imellom oss, og du reiste deg, kom imot meg, det var applaus i bølgene.

Du kom imot meg og jeg sto i vannet og du vek ikke med blikket og jeg vek ikke med blikket og du var høy og mager og jeg var lav og naken og du var femogtjue og jeg var tjue og du kom ned til vannet og du tråkka på klærne mine og du bøyde deg ned og du løfta en stein og jeg sto helt stille i det funklande lyset. Jeg kom aldri til å se noe sånt igjen.

Du løfta den største steinen du kunne finne. Den lå halvveis nedi vannet, rett ved føttene mine, må ha veid like mye som en halv voksen mann. Men du fikk den opp, helt opp til brystet, selv om det dirra i armene dine, og du så på meg idet du gikk forbi, langt nedover meg, og så nære var du, jeg kunne lukte saltet av deg, at det kom fra noe rent. Du lukta helt riktig og du hadde på deg olabukser, og du gikk utover, langsomt med den store steinen, mens vannet trakk seg stadig lenger inn, lenger opp, lenger igjennom. Det kom ingen lyder fra land. Det var stille nå, blant massene. Og du stoppa da vannet rakk deg til hofta, du sto med havet inntil livet og venta på meg, og da jeg kom var armene dine røde. Vi sto i havet. Vi sto i lyset. Du var høy og mager, jeg var lav og naken, og du kasta verdens største stein. For meg. Den gikk ikke langt, men det var ikke poenget.

Etterpå satt vi i gresset og frøys, sa ikke stort. Det fløt søppel i vannkanten, de fleste hadde dratt, og du la en arm rundt meg og sa, jeg er realist, smilende, og jeg hadde ikke noe å si til det. Jeg jobber i barnehage, sa jeg, og så vendte vi tilbake til stillheten. Du fikla med en fisketråd, jeg lot som jeg ikke fulgte med. Hvor store hendene dine var. Hvor lange øyevipper du hadde. Hvordan munnen din åpna seg hver gang du så utover havet, som om du lengta, som om du fant på noe. Vi satt helt inntil hverandre. Huden har også et språk.

Da vi gikk på siste buss var vi kjærester. Da vi gikk av bussen ga du meg ringen. Nå finnes det ikke noe deg og meg lenger, sa du, og jeg var helt sikker på at jeg skjønnte hva du mente. Du hadde fletta fisketråden til en liten sirkel som du tredde på meg. Venstre ringfinger, vena amoris, herfra går det rett til hjertet, hviska du til meg. Det var en ring av gjennomsiktig fiskesnøre, hardt fletta og skarp i kantene, og etter at du hadde tredd den på, stramma du den til og lagde en knute. Fiskeline er det sterkeste som finnes, sa du, og så beit du av tråden over knuta. Du hadde hele hånda mi i munnen din. Sola var på vei til å forsvinne og saltet i huden hadde begynt å klø. Jeg kjente med det samme at det var en ubehagelig ring, en ring som kom til å gnage, men du sa jo den var sterk, sterkere enn gull, sterkere enn blod, at det ikke lenger fantes noe deg eller meg. Denne ringen kommer aldri til å ryke, det var dine ord, og du fikk rett. Vi forlova oss sånn, med fisketråd. Og jeg husker denne dagen. Hvordan vi gjorde hverandre større. Hvordan vi insisterte på ikke å være en tilfeldig-het. Den første natta. De første orda etterpå. Hvordan ingenting virka tilfeldig lenger.

Forgive Me

Ida Hegazi Høyer

Translated from the Norwegian by Diane Oatley

There was a bed on the pavement. All the way from the end of the street you could see that there was a bed in front of our entrance – someone was moving in, someone was moving out, something was wrong. But it wasn't until I came up close and was about to go inside, that I saw that it was our bed, our duvet, our pillows. It all looked like an installation out there on the street.

It was a Sunday, nearly summer now, I came home and our bed was outside. You had made it, the duvet neatly folded, the pillows without head hollows, and the bedspread, which we never actually used, hung over the frame. An eternally closed night-time segment. Probably I paused, sensing a stop or a warning, don't go upstairs. And it was hot, the middle of the day, burning light beneath the sky.

The one flight up. Ten steps, two steps, then ten steps more. You hadn't left the door open. You had locked it. And this I would never forget – you knew I was the only one with a key.

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The dog ran out. The minute I let myself in, she came running past me. And I saw. And I understood. Your pictures, our pictures, they were no longer hanging on the walls. The skyscrapers were on the floor, face-down, two empty frames of white.

Our window was closed and the blinds were down. The closet doors were shut, the lights were out, and in the middle of the floor, where the bed had been, lay a kitchen chair. Not a sound to be heard, no air to be breathed. Twelve noon.

I did not go over to you. But I went into the room.

I walked around you, along the walls, to the window, to the day. I pulled up the blinds, opened the window, and I could have jumped; it would have been fine, because right there beneath me, positioned precisely for falling, was our bed. But I did not jump, I retched, that was all I managed, a tiny drop of bile that landed at the foot of our bed, and then I inhaled, hard, once, before I ran out, that was the last time I saw you, ran past you, you smelled of nothing, and when I came downstairs, when I came out, the street was a different street and the sky had changed and the houses were crooked and the rooftops were coming down and the trees were galloping and the cars were from another world and the people, all of the people, none of them were human any longer.

I had nowhere to go. I crawled into our bed, lay there lost in what was left of you, and I knew, even then, on a bed in a street in a town under a corrosive sky, that I would always see that room differently.

The other room. The window is open, the night light is on. I come home half a day earlier. Twelve midnight. You are sleeping. You are about to fall asleep. You are in the bathroom brushing your teeth. You are in the living room waiting. You are dreaming. You are warm. You have a warmth. You are sleeping. I lie down next to you.

The first time I saw you – I would end up revealing everything. We were by the sea, it was summer or late spring. It was two years ago and late in the afternoon, the light was stretching. I don't remember who I'd been there with, but I was alone now, walking along the water, and there were other people, picnickers, people who were singing over screaming seagulls, and I walked along the shore in the sinking sand, the sun in front of me, 10,000 arrows of descending light. When I saw you, it all disappeared.

You too were alone. You sat further in, further away from the water's edge. I didn't see what you were doing, if you were reading, or drawing, or writing, but later you'd tell me you were thinking, that you had gone to the sea to philosophise, and then I came along, and this became our story, the only beginning.

I saw you, and I revealed everything. I saw you, and let it be said, I saw you first. I watched you for a long time. I had water halfway up my shins, it was cold, and you looked like a warmer world. Not because you were supernaturally attractive or dangerously calm or disturbingly flirtatious, you were none of those things. But you dared to be present without the need to have anything to do with anyone else. You were so alone, you were the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. And when you looked at me, when you saw me, you must have seen me as being just as damned and sacred, as if you absorbed and discarded all in that single glance. Between us were all of the people. Between us were the screams and dreams and shouts and voices. And I didn't think, didn't have a single thought in my head, didn't see all the eyes in front of me, I just undressed. For you. I tore the elastic out of my hair, pulled off my clothes, and I stood there, directly facing you,

facing this vagrant world between us, and you stood up, came towards me, and there was applause beneath the waves.

You came towards me and I stood in the water and your gaze did not waver and my gaze did not waver and you were tall and skinny and I was small and naked and you were 25 and I was 20 and you came down to the sea and you stepped on my clothes and you bent over and you lifted a rock and I stood completely still in the light. I would never again see anything like it.

You lifted the biggest rock you could find. It was half-submerged in the water, right by my feet, must have weighed as much as a half-grown man. But you managed to lift it, all the way up to your chest, and you looked at me as you walked past, down the full length of me, so close I could smell the salt on you, that it came from something clean. You smelled exactly right and you were wearing blue jeans, and you walked out, slowly, with the big rock, while the water drew further and further in, further up, further through. There were no sounds from land. It was quiet now, among the masses. And you stopped when the water came up to your hips, you stood with the sea around your waist and waited for me, and when I reached you, your arms were trembling. We stood in the sea. We stood in the light. You were tall and skinny, I was small and naked, and you threw the largest stone. For me. Not very far, but that wasn't the point.

Afterwards we sat in the grass shivering, not saying much. There was trash floating on the water's edge, almost everyone had left, and you put an arm around me and said, I am a realist, smiling, and I had nothing to say to that. I work in a kindergarten, I said, and then we returned to the silence. You were fiddling with a fishing line, I pretended not to notice.

How big your hands seemed. How long your eyelashes were. How your mouth opened every time you looked out across the sea, as if you were yearning, as if you were making something up. We nestled against each other. The skin too, has its language.

When we got on the last bus, we were girlfriend and boyfriend. When we got off the bus, you gave me the ring. Now there is no you and I any longer, you said, and I was sure I knew what you meant. You had braided the fishing line into a ring that you slid onto my hand. The left ring finger, *vena amoris*, from here it goes straight to the heart, you whispered to me. It was a ring of transparent fishing line, braided snugly and sharp at the edges, and after you had slipped it on, you tightened it and tied a knot. Fishing line is the strongest there is, you said, and then you bit the line off above the knot. You had my whole hand in your mouth. The sun was about to slip away and the salt on my skin was starting to itch. I immediately felt that it was an uncomfortable ring, a ring that would chafe, but you did say it was strong, stronger than gold, stronger than blood, that there was no longer any you or I. This ring will never break, those were your words, and you were right. This was how we got engaged, with fishing line. And I remember this day. How we made each other larger. How we insisted on not being a fluke. The first night. The first words afterwards. How nothing seemed random any longer.



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