

MASS BLOOM by Ida Marie Hede

I was a child, or perhaps I had just become a tween, when I first discovered the explosive desire for procreation that was all around, and the equally wild desire to eat and shit. To eat your own substance and void yourself again. I am a child, then a tween, then a teenager, I crawl into the cave in the shrubbery and gulp down a handful of stolen wine gums, shit in a hole in the ground and wipe myself with two large leaves. I invent invisible playmates whom I treat tenderly and with care, I imagine myself splitting asunder to form two new children. I sit in the cave, whistling at a stray cat, a spider, and I wonder at how small they are, but I have grown since last summer, I'm overtaking the animals, it makes me sad, I don't want to outgrow them, I suddenly don't know who will die first, me or them? My small body is surrounded by a desire for order. The artfully laid dinner tables, the *almost-alive* noodles on the plates. The front gardens with their six different trashcans, the compost heaps, eight–sixteen–twenty-four cars, the water heater and the radiator. The tidiness of the gardens. The snails in the slushy wet leaves, resin and sticky splotches of snot on the rope that lets you climb up to my treehouse in the oak tree. Crushed snail's shells underneath my wet sandal. I look grown-up. It's my stature. But I am not a large, full human being. I ought to be many, not just the cells, the connective tissue and the billions of intestinal bacteria keeping my organism going. I wish for small versions of snails, sloths and elephants, lorries and fork-lift trucks that can tumble from my mouth to clear away landfills and get rid of nuclear waste instantly, the moment that I or the rest of the world needs help. But I'm just one person, I don't make much of myself. I live at my small farm alongside 600,000 mealworms, withdrawn from the world and all its buzz. There's not a lot of room here, but I'm careful and nimble. I won't trip up. I have knobby knees. I used to think of myself as a clumsy person, but here at the farm I am incredibly accurate in everything I do. So accurate that I sometimes feel ashamed, my cheeks flare up with clown-like red patches. All of you who are watching can tell that I'm passionate when I stand there with my arms full of plastic ghosts: I turn my foot vertically, using it as a shovel, scraping together a heap of worm manure so that the floor is exposed and I can finally step down. Slowly. And then down on my knees. Rolling over. Licking a foam cone. You can see me in here if you want. Come to me. My farm. My luxurious farm. My refuge. My work. In here I have so many fantasies. There is much to do. I cannot let up, take things easy. I am almost always immobile, yet active, I have

stopped in my tracks with my shoulders pulled up, I stand there like a squat Lego figurine, a static silver lady like the ones you see in city squares, a Paris boulevard mime, elbows drifting pointedly in the air, strings holding me aloft. I quietly count to 100, flex a muscle, it takes me twenty-five minutes to take a step to the right without harming the mealworms. These hungry little creatures that I tend and feed polystyrene; sleep with, shit with, eat with and hang out with, my comrades and BFFs. As a mammal, a vertebrate, I move upright, I have a spine: a kind of measure of my humanity. The mealworms are spineless, meaning that they are non-human, underdogs here in the realm of mammals, and yet they are champions of the world and I admire them: they compost the plastic of our planet; I liken them to the mammals that outlasted the dinosaurs. I have no way of knowing whether the mealworms understand my tender feelings for them. I don't know what goes on in their minds. Tiny dollhouse bodies, crafty, yet innocent. The miniature eyes of the mealworms spy on me, or perhaps I need to use the term 'spy' in order to create suspense, to cast the worms and myself in certain roles, as in a creepy-crawly film noir. I find it difficult to yield to a total acceptance of the fact that I have no idea what it means to be a mealworm: is it like being a dog? I have no idea what it means to be a dog. That brown-eyed furry animal is as alien as the mealworm, regardless of whether the dog is called Rex or Sussi, no matter if it charms me with its cosy tail and triggers all my man-made fantasies about affinity and newspaper-in-mouth. The body of the mealworm is small, unpleasant, scrumptious, ridged. It twists around my finger. It looks like my finger does when I scratch my bum and pull out my finger. Around and around and around. I know that we're in this together, the worms and I. Faithfully in each other's arses. The tiny eyes inside the soft, black-brown flesh. The quivering mouths, I know what they want: gobble double, destroy, transmute, make noise, spit, smell. They love to lick chicken bones all clean and then wind themselves around the chicken bones, I eat fried chicken take-out, I suck the skin from the wings, I am slimy and greasy and glistening. The shed skins of the larvae are everywhere, looking like crusts or chicken skin. If I did not feed the mealworms they would eat their siblings, swallow up their twins whole, just as I once swallowed up my invisible playmates like a gust of wind, the worms and I are both horrid, violent organisms. Once, in a different landscape, shortly after I had taken my leave of the somnolent suburban streets, I travelled with such eagerness; it was such a pleasure to just drift along, I was young and industrious, and at the same time there was no purpose to anything, I travelled from the moors to the desert to the swamp to the city to the suburbs to the

provinces to the metropolis to the fields to the rivers to the rainforest to the gutter to the plastic islands in the Pacific to the Styrofoam factory *Styro* in Dubai and *The Hot Wire Foam Factory* in California to the restaurant *Archipelago* in London where mealworms in a garnish is this evening's special. I often tripped. I slid and skidded in mud and filthy plastic bags. Growths everywhere. Shit imprints of slow chaos. I lived in Ottawa, Bremen or Osaka, discovering whether I was a growing body or a waning body or a body that needed to turn itself inside out. In a gothic graveyard in northern London I pressed my arse against a series of moss-covered gravestones. Without cutting myself, but also without it being pleasant. Moss are symbiotic assemblages of many different species: brown algae, photosynthetic algae, cyanobacteria. I love all these words! The moss is a landscape, possibly immortal, the moss that clung to my arse at that moment would only die if it sustained any damage, otherwise it would spread in ferocious networks. It would survive a puny human body like mine, me, blinded by my own physical strength. Through the years the moss would feel hundreds of arses pressed against it, crawl across hundreds of gravestones. I was pleased with the ghost moss. It crossed time and space in a manner that I felt humanity needed to understand. There were all these layers of the past all around me: a tomato grew in a discarded car tyre. A radioactive fingerprint on a piece of paper. Extinct algae in a lake. At times I got the feeling that I could feel them dance or edge their way around each other in a way that made me stop everything I was doing, drop the dishwashing brush, scrap a thought and come up with an entirely different one, wonder about whether what I was doing was taking me in the right direction, whether it had to push me ahead, whether it could push me backwards instead, around in circles, obliquely upwards, inwards, down, into a cocoon and out of a shed skin, whether I could spend a thousand years on a single movement. I scraped the moss off my buttocks. I placed a tiny piece on my tongue. My body was like cement. My ample arse dragged me down to earth: I could feel the processes of putrefaction below me, crumbling old pelvic bones, beetles sleeping in shards of pottery, the rattling of oil. I could feel the machines in the process of extracting oil, a shaking caused by the processes transforming the oil into diesel and plastic. It's long ago now. Or perhaps it just happened. At any rate I'm at my small farm now. I've spent the last hour trying to put a mealworm on my tongue. In here, being busy means that I move. It means attention. For example, it might mean suddenly stopping to look at my beautiful, awkward furniture: my polystyrene figurines. When I and my species have eventually gone from this earth, my worm-eaten furniture will be left like

haunted sculptures in damp, slimy, lush or barren landscapes. Future creatures will crawl on the archaeological objects. In the future I will either be extinct, everything buzzing along, or I will have done an evolutionary quantum leap in order to adapt to the dying planet, I will have sacrificed a plethora of species as I overtake them; lost peacocks, zebras and storks. I practise moving the foam monuments without disturbing the worms. I drive a pencil into the white foam, I make holes and form words from the holes: machine, cup, shovel, bed. I write: luxurious, enchanted, hard, soft, wild, old, strange, dusty, easy, cold. Before I came to live at the farm, back when I was a teenager and had growing pains and my bones ached, I was hungry a lot, I would open my mother's fridge and eat the stomach of a cow. I would eat the thigh of a chicken. My soft belly is haunted by the pork fat I've gobbled down. I eat a cow, a pig, a chicken, and a thousand mealworms solemnly croak in the service of plastic eradication, they live a maximum of six months, then they've done their duty. What kind of murderous animal body is his body of mine? I orient myself by the smell of foam balls digested and shat out as faeces and foam balls eaten and digested and shat out as faeces and once again eaten and once again shat out as faeces, having by now passed twice through the inner machinery of the worm, about to pass through the worm machine for the fourth time, growing even darker. A bone ahead. A pelvis to the right. Here at my tiny farm I'd wish that there was a skull on top of a pile of shit, a classic skull of the kind seen in Western oil paintings, a homo sapiens, that its eye sockets were filled by worms in insane flocks, hungrily and wrigglingly gnawing at the strands of flesh inside. I'd look at the skull and be soothed as a human being, perhaps a soft, moralising voice would chant to me, informing me that death awaits. In front of me is no skull, only my own, hidden beneath flesh and nerves, and I cannot just lie down and die, I need to tend to my farm, and even if I laid down to die in order to give way to the titillating choreography of *eyes-through-eye-sockets* my consciousness would be gone, wherever it had gone off to, and my greedy eyes transformed into living purple and brown orbs. Instead of feeling excitement at one morbid scenario, one that's well known to a Western, white and relatively aware consciousness like mine, I need to relearn countless types of curiosity. That's how I survive. The worms are infinitely kind to me. I am kind to them. They move behind me. Embrace my feet from behind. Nibble at me. I do not claim to know them. I do not try to make them mine. I do not say 'dear' or 'darling'. I say larva, pupa, adult, larva, pupa, adult, it becomes a rhythm, a song of togetherness. Mealworms love to snack on polystyrene, which is transformed into a trillion plastic cups every day;

polyethylene and polypropylene and airy plastic bags flutter in the air above the gravel pits of the earth, a trillion yellow, blue, red and transparent plastic birds fluttering like garbage. Back to the suburban roads or apartment buildings, back to childhood: I was maybe five, maybe seven or ten. Styrofoam surrounded the toys in the large cardboard boxes inside the large, sparkling presents underneath the Christmas tree, I ripped the toys out of their boxes, scattering tiny white grains in every direction, snow, foam, oh, a Barbie car, a garbage truck, a trumpet. My mum or my dad or my aunt carried out the white plastic, where did it go? The white complacency of suburban streets. The fences. Those fences that can also be blamed for much. I am angry with them. I am angry with them because they hide the consumption that destroys nature, which is oh, so beautiful, even though I am now struggling to identify these oh so beautiful traits exactly; where is it, precisely, in the rotting leaves, in the worms' shit-feast, in my intestines? Who are the middle-of-the-road citizens defending the fences? Am I the middle-of-the-road citizen defending the fences? I am full of self-loathing, but I don't give up. The inhabitants of the suburban streets or apartment buildings dream of going on vacation, let us travel, let us go! No, not out into nature, let's not go out into nature, let's go to the city. No, a cruise. No, a tropical island. No, a plastic island. Lie down. On your back, darling. Down into the micro-particles. Your body makes an imprint on the plastic bed. Back to the reason why I'm at my little farm instead of sleeping an enchanted sleep on an island of micro-plastics. A wild and lazy variant of progress. We don't recognise the idea of constant development, everything moves in a dreadfully clumsy manner in every transformation, has the pace been made slower or the drama abolished; might we try to imagine a different kind of undramatic drama? I imagine my spine melting. Wax, rubber, spinal fluid. I imagine pushing myself forward across the floor, the worms helping me by pushing at my arse, skating down my arms. I take a knife; it's blunt. The blade touches the palm of my hand. If I were to cut off all my fingers at this moment, if the ends of my cut-off fingers were to heal, the finger stumps wriggling confidently among my toes, a pulpa at either end, their soft touch would only be one of hundreds of strange stimulants and actions that the mealworms' crawly presence reminds me of. There is no environment here in the farm landscape. I have no name for this space. Underneath the body of a single mealworm there is no vacuum. Underneath the body is brown, black, hard faeces. The worms have eaten their own shit countless times; now the shit is blacker than ebony. There is no space here that isn't filled with air and with shit. There are only the things that are. The creatures. As

a child, I wanted so dearly to transform. I had portals. I had a brother, a sister, many brothers and many sisters, growths, ghosts, and we went through the portals. We instantly transformed, taking on new skin, we glittered and inspected each other and upgraded our games. A centaur is half man, half bull, I say. A unicorn is half horse and half ivory, says my little brother. A cyanastard is one-quarter cyanide and one-eighth bastard, says my little sister. An anphanteetle is one-third ant, one-third elephant, one-third beetle, says a puddle of water on the wooden floor. Pass through the portals again and again, says a voice, and you'll be made up of so many organisms that no-one can keep track of you anymore. First you shed one skin, then another. The floor of the pantry was strewn with me and my siblings' dressing-up outfits, the juicy lace skirts, the corsets, the masks, the chainmail and the superhero costumes. Our thin, androgynous bodies came into being behind those outfits. On the floor of my farm's small human house lies one adult human skin, greyish, thin and transparent, plastic, dry and bland. What an anti-climax, what a disappointment, but so wondrous. I let my fingers slide down my arms. I feel the ridges and the juicy bits. I poke my fingers into my eye sockets, I feel that the eyes sit far back, and even though I cannot see my face in a mirror, for there are no mirrors here, and I have no idea what a mirror is anyway, I am convinced that my eyes are black and yellow. I have no eyebrows, I am hungry, I see a snowman before me, three white orbs stacked on top of each other, I don't think I have teeth, but I am wet, absolutely sloshing wet. If you decide to step in here and spend time with me, you will be – like me – in a state of bloom exploration, bloom gravity, bloom mass, unruly lushness. Bloom-loop, my blooming bloom in the bone marrow and in the movement of the bones, they bend and twist, calcium rising in clouds of dust. One particular day in some random graveyard the moss was interested in how my body had no time in it, the mealworms acted more than they were interested, they surrendered.

The fierce presence of the worms, I love them because they rewind everything, still into a future, they turn me inside out in a bloomexploration. Bloom me up. In a kind of crooked, curved, sideways turn my fraying arms grab a steel grip, begin to muck out, to shovel the worms' sticky mass of shit aside, let us scrape all of the dried-up shit off the floor, let us arrange, let us order, let us sow, let us plough, let us pick, let us take the tiny pupae and hold them up against the light and see the ridged skin sway, they burst. The question is what form my body has assumed now, whether my body did it itself, or whether all this stretching and pulling and expansion and contraction and elongation of my limbs, my torso, my head, was imposed upon me from outside. I am

a glossy, glistening knot. I am an old-fashioned mirror ball from a child's room. I am a kind of muscle or pale pump that draws in rhythms. I am a new ritual for the community. I am sufficiently alive to tend to the mealworms. I relish being their slave, to be the one subjecting myself to the many. Just like spiders, which could, if they got organised, eat every human being on earth in very little time, the mealworms – my darlings, my partners – might one day eat me. They have this duality: a threat to humanity + a thousand tiny saviours. I am entirely limp and resistant. Telling them that 'I am transforming! I consider myself one of you!' does no good. But then I don't consider myself to be one of them! I am both guilty and innocent, I am the standard bearer of suburbia, defender of the Styrofoam box, eternal observer of CO2 emissions, implicated in my own death and the death of everyone, aware and unaware of the role I play. I am simultaneously the evil usurper and the pious ascetic, I am a spine and a friend, a bone fighting against gravity, I am a sensation of work and I am backwards growth. Now I open my worm-like mouth and tell you, in my alien worm-language, about my tiny farm.

Translation by Rene Lauritsen