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My Heavenly Favourite by Marieke Lucas Rijnveld

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by

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld

This is the story of a vet and his ‘chosen one’ – a farmer’s daughter, who seek each other out one hot summer. His own motivation is to escape trauma and loneliness, hers is to escape into a fantasy world. During that fateful summer, they develop an obsessive fascination for each other that ultimately crosses boundaries. The haunting confession of *My Heavenly Favourite* is a heart-breaking and at the same time terrifying tale of loss, forbidden love, loneliness and identity. It’s a more than worthy successor to the debut novel *The Discomfort of Evening* with which Marieke Lucas Rijneveld became the first Dutch writer to win the International Booker Prize.

Novel • 368 Pages • First print run 40,000 copies • Sold to Suhrkamp (German), Buchet Chastel (French), Solum Bokvennen (Norwegian) and Temas de Hoy (Spanish World)



Marieke Lucas Rijneveld (b. 1991) is considered one of the greatest new talents in Dutch literature. In 2015, they debuted with the poetry collection *Calf's Caul*, which was awarded the C. Buddingh' Prize for the best poetry debut, and will soon be published in a Spanish translation. Their second collection of poetry *Phantomare* was published in 2019, and won the Ida Gerhardt Poetry Prize. Rijneveld's debut novel *The Discomfort of Evening* (2018) garnered exceptional praise and went on to sell more than 160,000 copies. Translations will appear in 37 countries.

Quotes on *My Heavenly Favourite*

"Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's second novel is another triumph. (...) Pulsating sentences, voices brought together in symbiosis. After reading *Mijn lieve gunsteling* you think: *that's* what love feels like. - [Trouw](#)

"Where should I begin? With Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's fearlessness, the almost heroic way in which they curate the carnival of human cruelty in their literature? With the ambition, the stubbornly executed plan not to fill the pages with whiny twiddle twaddle, but with a dogged angling after humankind's deepest inconsolability? With the style: wild proof of the aesthetics of the Dutch language? With the finding that a writer living in Utrecht who is not yet 30, but has already written a staggeringly strong debut and won the Booker International Prize with its translation, has now written a second novel that is even harder to shake off? (...) After two novels, we know this: a never-ending macabre party is raging inside the head of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld. Rugged people shuffle through the ballroom, not wearing sophisticated jackets and delicate gowns, but overalls and smocks and waders. In dancing with each other, they destroy each other. It's not a nice party, no. But you want to be on the guestlist, otherwise you'll miss great, great literature." - [Humo](#)

"The reader is shaken up plenty in *Mijn lieve gunsteling*. Everything becomes unstable for a time. But the beautiful and terrible things we hear are told in stunning, varied, evocative and penetrating prose. The sincerity, the cunning, and the perversion are intertwined and so well articulated that sometimes you have to turn your head away. Love is scared out of its mind in *Mijn lieve gunsteling*: terrified that it can assume this form." - [Vrij Nederland](#)

"Here is a story told in an idiosyncratic and convincing manner, embedded in world literature with a completely authentic sound. A literary voice of international allure rings out. (...) Wildly meandering sentences, which are poetic and compelling, feel true, are pitch perfect, no metaphor goes awry. That quality is also intoxicating: with his beautiful words, with his explanatory traumatic nightmares (as macabre as Frits van Egters' dreams*), with his apology, the narrator wins you over and makes you believe in love." ●●●●● [5 stars] - [NRC Handelsblad/Nxt](#)

*Frits van Egters is the protagonist in Gerard Reve's classic 1947 novel *The Evenings*.

"Marieke Lucas Rijneveld can do it. She really can. (...) *Mijn lieve gunsteling* is beautifully written. Rijneveld's style and her imaginative use of language, characteristic of *The Discomfort of Evening* (2018) and her poetry collections *Kalfsvlies* (2015) and *Fantoommerrie* (2019), have got even better. The metaphors in *Mijn lieve gunsteling* are sublime (...) The way Rijneveld writes about cows is unparalleled. The Blaarkops play a role on almost every page, and it never grows dull." - [Neerlandistiek.nl](#)

"An achievement that is as daring as it is virtuoso." – Nederlands Dagblad

"This novel is a celebration of language. (...) It is the swirling, obsessive, lyrical style that makes the book soar." - [Het Parool](#)

MIJN LIEVE GUNSTELING/ MY HEAVENLY FAVOURITE

By Marieke Lucas Rijneveld

1

My heavenly favourite, I won't waste words: I should have taken a paring knife and incised you like a sore in a claw horn; I should have created some space in the inter-claw cleft so that manure and dirt would drop out and no one could infect you, or perhaps I should have just peeled and trimmed you with the grinder, cleaned you and rubbed you dry with some sawdust, that hidebound high summer. How on earth could I have forgotten the warnings they gave us in the classes on hoof-trimming and ailments of the coronal suture, on laminitis, on Mortellaro disease (or 'hairy foot warts') when I was training to be a vet; how they repeated ad nauseam to be careful you didn't cut to the quick, *never damage the quick*, they said time and time again, but oh my failing, my flaw! That obstinate summer, you lay like a breached calf in the nursery of my degenerate desires, I was madness's accomplice, I didn't know how not to desire you, you, my darling chosen one, and the more often I squatted down among the steaming bodies of the Blaarkop cows and sensed your compelling presence close by in the grass that had just been mown and had a rockcross border, where you spent hours under the pear tree, bent over the neck of your snow-white guitar, practising a Cranberries number, the more feverishly I hoped for an abomasum displacement or the removal of a tissue mass, so that I could spend more time near you, listening to you start all over again when you struck the wrong note or reached for a high note with that rippling, angelic voice of yours, and then you'd fall silent for a moment and I imagined you, red-cheeked, blowing a lock of hair from

your face, a lock that kept falling back and oh how beautifully you blew, like a child blowing a dandelion clock; you sang about tanks, bombs, guns, about war, and with everything I did, I thought about you, you, I thought about you when I put on a transparent orange shoulder-length glove, covered it in VetGel, in veterinary lubricant, slid it into the vaginal tract of a dual-purpose cow, or when I put one hand around the feet of a slippery, membrane-encased calf, tugging softly to the rhythm of the contractions and rubbed the clammy flank of the dam reassuringly with my other hand, when I talked softly to her, sometimes reciting lines from Beckett that I'm not going to repeat here, no one really appreciates them aside from you and the Blaarkops, and every time I longed even more passionately for you to hover around me as I donned my green vet's coat, buttoned it up and set to work; I hoped then that you'd smile at me the way you smiled so sweetly at the wiry farmhands who sat down at the kitchen at lunchtime behind a wall of piled-up sandwiches, spread with a thick layer of butter and filled with smoked sliced sausage, but they didn't dare make a move, you were the kind of animal they hadn't learned about at college, you didn't have four stomachs, you had just one, which was insatiable, and I'd known you since you were little, I knew you through and through, even though you were too young to be desired by me and, at the same time, too spirited and impatient to be patronized or handled in a fatherly manner, and I could tell from the way you acted that you wanted to break free from parental authority, from the farm you'd grown up on, which bore the name De Hulst, after W.G. van de Hulst, the writer of Christian children's books, the only writer your father had heard of and whose entire works he'd read; he'd read them to you on good days, making you dream you were a sugared bun like in the story, whetting everyone's appetite and making them want to take a bite out of you, so that you had to protect your sugary body the whole time from the king, the sweet-tooths and ants, and perhaps I should have taken your dream seriously I realize now that I write this, even though it was never my intention to write this; I focussed mainly on your demeanour, not on your

dream, on how you were breaking free, not just from the farm but also from the cowsheds next to it, there was asbestos in the roofs that your father refused to have seen to because God decided whether you got cancer or not, not a few old corrugated roofing sheets, and you were also breaking free from Him, you wanted to escape God and at the same time you were afraid of His wrath, of His final judgement, and sometimes in bed you whispered a line from hymn one hundred and eighteen, *Deliver me from all my fears*. But most of all you wanted to free yourself from your father, who was gentle but very strict, moody and capricious; you wanted to turn your back on him and at the same time still cherish him, the way you cherished Bully, the surly bull, whom you could only stroke when he'd just eaten or mated with a cow, and sometimes you leant him to other farmers, you put the stud fee from each coupling in a jampot on the chimney breast in the kitchen and used the money to go on holiday, yes, Bully paid for your holidays to Zeeland, and everything your dad gave you there, from sandwich spread to Donald Duck pocket books, he'd say: *you should thank Bully for it*. And I heard you prying yourself free in the surly, sullen tone of voice you used when your dad wanted to zip up your overalls, not to protect you from the chilly morning mist, but to be able to touch you briefly, his child who was fast outgrowing his rough hands covered in cuts and callouses, and then I'd look at mine that were big and strong enough to clasp yours tightly, I'd held children's hands before, even though that was different, they clutched at mine, and now I wanted to hold yours, weave my fingers through yours; on your middle finger you wore a plastic ring with a ladybird you'd got from the orthodontist after they told you that you'd need headgear braces and you were devastated by this news, they let you pick something from the comfort box and you chose this ring that was slightly too big; I would circle your palm for hours with my thumb, like a ruminant with turning sickness. And I only half listened to your dad's stories during the coffee break, he was like a combination of Mick Jagger and Rutger Hauer when he spoke fervently about his livestock, the drought in the fields and the ditches,

that it would be a poor harvest if the umbellifers were too droopy to be picked and put in a vase, I just nodded along, there wasn't a vase to be seen in the whole farm, and people who never had any flowers or plants in their house were often troubled by worries of poor harvests, even when it was a good, fertile season, and I nodded again when he told me that cattle liked a monotonous diet, that they were creatures of habit just like he was and that he sometimes played classical music to them, Chopin or Vivaldi, which gave the milk in the evening a creamier taste; I creased my face into a smile at the right moment but I would have preferred to have heard everything about you, I wanted to discuss you the way we discussed the cows, their oestrus and their changeable natures, and I looked at the lawn where you and your brother were jumping on the trampoline, playing who could touch heaven first, who would be the first to tickle Jesus, you wanted to tickle him to death and later you'd tell me the Romans used to tickle people as a form of torture, they'd tie them down and let a goat lick the soles of their feet for a long time, and as you jumped on the trampoline, higher and higher, your blond hair danced and shone like cornstalks around your delicate face; I saw how quickly you tired of the game and started staring over the shiny heads of lettuce and leeks in the vegetable plot, eager for the life that lay await beyond Het Dorp, you wanted to get away from here like most of the girls and boys of your age want to leave home, some of them joined the army and became soldiers before returning later, homesick, to the camouflage of Het Dorp, but you were sure you'd never feel nostalgic, everything you owned was inside your head and I couldn't know at the time that you lacked a home, even though you loved De Hulst farm to deep in its beams and the idea alone that you would leave, cycle away along the Prikkebeensedijk, swerving to avoid the loose cobbles, leaving your dad in the lurch, the idea alone caused you to sigh and turn back to the game on the trampoline, yes, you were bad at saying goodbye, *so bad*, you'd say later, and I'd soon realized it from the way on a Saturday morning you'd stand around sulking when the young bulls were picked up to be taken to the

slaughterhouse, you'd keep cuddling them and scratching them behind their ears, whispering inaudible words to them; it was only there that I saw how you carried your loss with you, I wanted to be able to take it away with anti-inflammatories, or better still, by filling the void, even though we never spoke to one another, even though over the years I came by, you often came along to watch me inseminate or examine a cow, you'd bring a bucket of warm water and a saucer with a bar of green soap so that I could wash the blood and shit from my hands and hand me an old checked tea towel but no word passed your beautifully-shaped lips, lips I wanted to palpitate, the way I did with animals suffering from blue tongue, you didn't have blue tongue, you were perfectly healthy and incredibly beguiling and I knew then I'd be the first man in your life to see you the way you wanted to be seen, as a fourteen-year-old adult, all fourteen-year-olds long to be considered more grown up than they are, but you didn't just want that, you behaved that way too, and still beneath those graceful and almost fully-fledged movements I saw the hidden childishness and then I loved you the most, so much that it sometimes made me feel dizzy, as though I'd spent too long breathing in penicillin fumes; that childishness stood out the most when you gadded about the farmyard talking to yourself, when you screamed girlishly when your dad and brother sprayed you with the garden hose on sunny days, or when you walked past giggling with your girlfriends, your tanned legs in oversized waders, and you all acted like the world lay open before you, the way the wasps in the split pears under the tree tuck into the juicy flesh, you were the wasps, you were strong and invincible, but I saw you struggling with the twilight zone between girl and woman, with becoming someone who might never step into the limelight and succeed, with loss hanging like a veil of mist around your narrow shoulders, and I watched you as you walked alone between the tall grass and the rapeseed along the embankment behind the farm when the young bulls had gone and the igloo huts were quiet and deserted, later, dressed in waterproofs, you'd clean them millimetre by millimetre with a pressure hose as a way of cleaning the

bulls' existence from your mind, and then of course I knew you were crying there up on the embankment, I just knew, and I began to watch you closely at the beginning of summer holidays when you were exactly two months and seventeen days past your fourteenth birthday and lay on your back in the hay with a Roald Dahl book above your head, *Danny the Champion of the World*, and I slowly and carefully rinsed a pitchfork under the tap at the side of the cowshed, I knew you felt safe there, that you were in a world in which you were understood, a world you wanted to stay in forever, I heard you laughing from time to time and you stayed lying there on the flattened hay and your imprint remained long after you'd left and I rested my hand on the dried blades of grass that were still slightly warm and I wanted to carry on feeling you forever, really I did, but everything changed when you began to speak to me, on the seventh of July to be precise, it was the same day I started keeping a pencil tally in the meter cupboard to count down the days until I would be able to visit your farm again for the weekly livestock check, and on that particular summer's day when the wind blew predominantly from the south-east, I had boldly hummed along to a song playing on the radio in the milking shed, I never usually hummed along but I was overcome by a kind of lightness and clarity and there was so much wonderfully wrong that day so that I could stay longer, a lot of the cows were limping, had ringworm or calcium deficiencies, and I hadn't even heard you come in; I suddenly heard you say out of nowhere that it wasn't your favourite song, you were leaning against the cooling tank, because favourite songs rarely got played on the radio you said, you had to get hold of them yourself in the record shop in the city on the other side of the water, Lake Woede, but you said the song was good because it was so dramatic and in the clip the singer sang the song in a black Austin taxi at Warwick Avenue station, with smeared mascara, and of course you knew that at that moment she didn't feel the same as the lyrics suggested, that her tears were fake because otherwise they'd choke up her voice, but you got something from it that made you feel less alone, even though you'd never been in a

taxi, and slightly blushing, you went on to say that you pretended to play the number and sing to a packed house with the most important people you knew on the front row, they'd find it amazing, sublime even, you would use tear drops to get the same effect, you couldn't cry on demand, you could if you thought about the people who'd died, but you don't sing and think about dead people, no, that was impossible, only cycling and thinking about the dead was easy, you'd just pedal them into their graves as the tears trickled down your cheeks, and afterwards you'd nonchalantly turned away as though having spoken to me didn't mean a thing, as though I could question whether you'd spoken at all and I hadn't dreamed it, and you slid your hand along the milk tank as though it were a Blaarkop's back; I wished I'd said something back, that I'd been brave enough to say something that afternoon, but I lost my voice like the singer on the radio and smiled at your back, I only heard the presenter saying that it was going to be a tempestuous summer, particularly in the north of the country and the word *tempestuous* would only later gain meaning when I started to wonder whether it was this high season when the crack appeared in my life, that here among the pails of yellowish colostrum-topped milk my crazing longing and desire for you formed, or was it earlier and did the fracture occur somewhere in the childhood memories I will be forced to miserably leaf through one day; in any case when I got home I looked up the lyrics to the song from the radio and devoured the lines of 'Warwick Avenue', I copied the text into a Word document and underlined the words that I felt fit the feelings I had for you, and after that I listened to the music I grew up with, underlining phrases in them, numbers by Patti Smith, The Rolling Stones, Frank Zappa, Lou Reed, yes, mainly Lou Reed after I'd read that 'Walk on the Wild Side' had been boycotted for a while, and later it would feel like that with us, I couldn't listen to the songs without thinking about you, the way you analysed the lyrics, bouncing up and down on your toes, so a month later, when I came by for a heifer with a swollen quarter, probably a sign of summer mastitis, and I spotted you lying in the hay with a book again, this

time the first part of the Harry Potter series, *The Philosopher's Stone*, which you'd typed out word for word in Windows 95 when you were twelve after borrowing it from the library, you liked it too much to take back but didn't want to pay a massive fine either; I gave you a black-edged condolence envelope containing the lyrics, I didn't have anything else at home, these cream-coloured envelopes were for people whose favourite pet I'd had to put down, I usually added the poem 'Joy in Death' by Emily Dickinson, and I didn't say anything to you about the underlined parts, that would come later, I thought to myself, as I sat on the front row glowing with pride, clapping and whistling, and I'd shout something from Beckett anyway, I'd cup my hand to my mouth and shout: *When you're in the shit up to your neck, there's nothing left to do but sing*. Before thinking, there she is, my fiery little fugitive, my splendid creature.

2

Kurt Cobain was dead. He'd died eleven years ago but you'd only just found out an hour ago after hearing 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' for the first time, and you played it again and again on your Discman, insisting that the musician hadn't died of an overdose of drugs or a bullet but an overdose of fame, which makes a person think they can fly until they realize that they don't have any wings and then you suddenly fall from the sky, like a Looney Tunes cartoon character, as soon as they realize they're stuck in the air, they tumble into the depths. And you went on to say that if you ever became famous, really famous, you'd always remember where you came from, you'd never forget the smell of silage, of ammonia, cow shit, or your friends, you really wouldn't, but you already knew you'd lose something essential, that success genuinely would change you and at the same time perpetuate something or maybe even make it worse, namely the endless emptiness already inside you, even though I missed these

symptoms, me who knew exactly when an animal was sick or when it was producing too many stress hormones, I didn't see it because I wanted to believe in your resilience, because I would end up needing you so much, I looked away as I had done four years earlier during the foot-and-mouth outbreak, telling a farmer that it was a virus and would pass, I really didn't want the whole bloody herd to be culled because I'd seen before how some cows, sheep and goats were still alive when they were thrown into the disposal truck, their legs kicking at the sides, and that same week I went to a cattle farm with an outbreak of pleuritis and when I went inside at lunchtime to fetch my peanut-butter sandwiches from my briefcase, knowing I'd hardly manage a bite, and went unsuspecting into the hall, I saw the farmer hanging from the bannister at the top of the stairs, first I saw the soles of his boots with shit and straw still in the tread, then his overalls and only after that did the lifeless whole register, I'd closed my eyes to spare myself and in the hope I could still save him, that I could rewind to the moment I drove my black Fiat van into the farmyard, and that I could talk him round the way Queen Beatrix talked the people round, noticeably using the word *we* a lot, and how that worked, as it turned out to work on you back then, but I didn't yet know what it was like to lose the dearest thing you had, I didn't know that sometimes there were no words that could counter a loss, and still I'd wanted to try to rescue him from the noose, I could have at least pressed him to my chest the way I did with the clay-shitters, the sick calves, looking in their eyes to see how their rumen was developing, yes, I'd hold him like a clay-shitter and maybe whisper something in his ear, something from Leonard Cohen, I think he'd appreciate that: *First of all nothing will happen and a little later nothing will happen again*. I've just come up with this now, even though I know only too well the cattle farmer probably wouldn't have understood anything of the text, or wanted to understand it because when someone has sunk too deep in their own slurry pit all they can smell is the stench and they get sucked into the muck, no, I wouldn't say anything, I'd just hold onto him until the powerlessness drained away out of

him, like the cows' blood, and we'd sit on the edge of the boot of my Fiat, the way I often did with a customer to discuss my findings, I'd light a cigarette and hold it up for him as his chapped lips touched my fingers and I felt how forcefully he took a drag and the cigarette became slightly narrower before filling out again, as though he wanted to fill his lungs with hope, with something other than the death stench of the cull, and maybe I'd close the back of the van and sit with him in the gloomy space, so that we didn't have to hear any of the sounds, the animals collapsing onto the grating, and we'd sit there where much later I'd put a memory foam and cooling gel mattress, when I was so parched and obsessed with you, my sweet darling, and we'd wait until we heard the grabber trucks leave the farm and it became so silent that we both wondered whether it had really happened, if we hadn't imagined the atrocities, the way I sometimes get the idea that I'm fighting myself after watching a war film and that on every street corner there might be a soldier who was going to shoot me down, *bang bang* I'd hear in my head, but he was hanging there and the worst thing was that the men from the disposal service got him down from the bannister in the end, using the same hands that had taken the lives of the farmer's animals, and I couldn't do anything about it, I stood there in the hall, numb, holding the soggy sandwiches and I don't know how but I managed to eat all three of them, including the crusts which I rarely ate and usually left in my lunchbox, which had a faded sticker on its lid with two mating pigs and the text *Makin' Bacon*, I'd chuck away the crusts at home, it was a childish act of protest, a habit I hadn't been able to break, and I watched as they laid a sheet of black agricultural plastic over the farmer that usually covered the corn silage to keep it fresh, two tube sandbags next to his arms so that the plastic wouldn't be moved by the wind that blew in through open garden doors, as though they wanted to be certain that he was dead and not still alive like some of the animals that went into the disposal truck, and after that day I couldn't look at peanut butter without seeing the dark-blue face of the farmer in my mind's eye, his bulging eyes, and I looked away from you too, even though I

only wanted to save myself this time, I wanted to remain part of your illusion and at the same time I hated that, but oh the weakness of my flesh, you were the fire of my loins, how could I put that out without extinguishing myself? I let you chatter on endlessly about how you saw Cobain's number as a cry of despair, and that you'd read his suicide note online and that it was almost too beautiful and too clear for a person who didn't want to live anymore, he'd crossed out sentences and forgotten that a death wish could also be a way of crossing things out, that Teen Spirit was a brand of deodorant in America and that someone who was so distraught often didn't care or cared too much about how they smelled, and how everything was captured in that one line: *I'm worse at what I do best*. At that precise moment you shuddered, though I don't know whether it was because of the lyrics, the sudden disappearance of the newly-discovered musician from your youthful existence or because of the dusk the colour of a hare, rising from behind the cowsheds, that slowly wrapped around us as though the group of gravediggers from Het Dorp had come to stand around us, they wore black in their free time, they could never take time off from death because death never took time off from them, and sometimes I called in the gravediggers if someone was keen to bury their favourite animal under the apple tree instead of leaving it on the side of the road to be collected by Rendac, and they'd dig deep enough for the groundwater to cover their ankles, it often made me think of a passage from Sartre's *Nausea* in which he writes: *At this very moment—it's frightful—if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire: the hatred, the disgust of existing, there are as many ways to make myself exist, to thrust myself into existence*. And there on the edge of the abyss I shivered, yes, I shivered and couldn't help thinking of my own existence, of mortality, I had just reached the biblical age of seven times seven and I knew that the number forty-nine stood for completeness, for liberation; the disciples had to wait forty-nine days for the Holy Spirit to come upon them and it was also an ominous number, like it says in Psalm

Forty-Nine: *This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves: Death herds them like sheep; they disappear down the gullet of the grave.* But I didn't want to hear myself, I only wanted to hear you, my heavenly favourite, and I didn't know which desert I'd eventually venture into, but with you I was fully alive, with you I existed and things were less horrific, suddenly I could stand at the edge of a dug hole, smiling down on the bald crowns of the gravediggers because I was young and boisterous like the apple tree that blossoms again each year even after the dead have been buried beneath it, because of you I continued to branch, I grew! And you said you liked the name Kurt, it sounded like a foreign dish that you'd take small bites of to make it last longer, to savour it more, that one day you hoped to have a boyfriend with that name and then you looked sad all of a sudden, as though you'd realized something, something deeper than the knowledge that there aren't many boys called Kurt, before recovering yourself and leaning against the cowshed door to tell me there were other musicians you'd discovered who turned out to be dead: Jones, Hendrix, Joplin, Morrison, Pfaff, Johnson, Harvey. That maybe they sounded so good, so unique in your head *because* they were dead, as though they saw it coming and poured their last strength, their last breath into their songs and you knew what you were talking about, we both knew what you were talking about but we didn't mention it, just as we didn't mention the dusk that evening that no longer surrounded us but crept inside us, making you speak more and more slowly, about the Twenty-Seven Club, the musicians who'd died at the age of twenty-seven, and whom you were endlessly interested in, you'd read how Jones had drowned in a swimming pool in Hartfield, how Hendrix had choked on his own vomit after taking too many sleeping pills with wine, how Morrison had died of a heart attack, Joplin and Pfaff from a heroin overdose, Johnson after he'd drunk poisoned whisky and you thought the worst death was Les Harvey's, electrocuted during a gig with Stone the Crows when he touched a microphone that wasn't earthed, and that's how it was actually with all

those musicians: they were no longer connected to the earth. Their desire for fame was their downfall, the drive for recognition, and you said that recognition was a child's lullaby, without that melody life would be an endless wandering in search of the affirmative gaze you needed, and now I saw the hare-hewed dusk at the back of your eyes too, I saw you keep glancing swiftly over your shoulder at the farm, the lit-up living area, you had to go, you said, the dark and your homework, and you shrugged and said *bye then* and I hadn't even been able to tell you that I wanted my name to be Kurt for you, please call me Kurt.

Sample translation by Michele Hutchison