

Wooden Heart by Guillaume Mazel

Listening to Kramies' songs

An old map printed with a spirit duplicator, a map of the world inserted inside a schoolboy's notebook, monochromatic, since the faded black lines didn't count, those black lines that defined familiar places, ready to be forgotten. An old photocopied map that reeked of drunkenness with its washed-out red lines, its crossroads with no beginnings and no ends, and its blue lines, endless rivers, dissipated lifelines in ink on thin blotter. Paper slightly crumpled forgotten in the momentum of the schoolyard on a dark wooden desk, mistreated by dunces, dreamers and lovers. There runs my river, a quiet azure line. On this small, crumpled up A4-sized dominion filled with familiar names of local places, from wherever you are, from wherever I am, my fingers follow the blue line, without deciding where it will emerge, but learning the destination of its current. Peacefully, my finger becomes a stream that, further down in a small delta in the hollow of a crease, plunges innocently in the river, and the red lines soften like washed out blood. The paper gets wet, comes undone and sinks to the murky depths where the material no longer helps, with my fingertip to feel the liquid, to soak up the cold, to expect the journey and finally, my whole body enters the whitewater that runs through my beloved haunts, my lost places, my hidden paths, recessed corners of myself. It was time, I know, we curse the departures for which we used to long; to be elsewhere too long is to sometimes forget our world, these trees that grow with the rhythm of visits when branches played a chiaroscuro on our faces of contented naps, the wise noise of summer clouds that leave a blue space between them where one can sometimes see angels cross over from one sky to another, the freshly cut grass that bleeds its fragrance of chlorophyll and dirt around our thrones, and the faces we kiss with our eyes while stretching out our arms to feel their cheeks, portraits that name the banks of my driftings.

I am, from here on, a body of water, fed by lovely nostalgias, finally rid of plastics that make up the days, a torrent finally tamed, shrouded in mist in the mornings, drunken with light in the nights. A body of water feels no pain anymore, it conquers the immensity drop by drop. A body of water does not know to stay here, next to a bank, near one. A body of water, a cloud of tears that follows the wrinkles of the land. It doesn't know joy, it doesn't know pain, a river, it goes. On me, stumps that believed they were dead are inert no more. On me float small fragments of life and in the heart of me, in my depths, neither darkness nor light bother scaly creatures waiting to create their empire in the heavens. I still hold them back, I hide them, I even, no doubt, love them. The just, the necessary, the humanly possible, they interest me little. They are quick, they are lively, they are self-sufficient, the waste on the waterline, they affect me as much as Charon's coins, visions of the past. The debris of land that navigate my spine are the true emblems of my history, the banners of my battles, the remains of the comings and going, and the roots that scratch me in my erratic waves are mothers searching for their children as they walk away.

My debris are therefore intimate molecules, dead branches that refuse to dust and would rather drift eternally, the bodies along me are my life's genesis, the puzzle pieces of my legend, limbs and roots, my heart is made of wood, my blood of freshwater, my nerves of sly whirlpools. You, who follow my course, parents and lovers, sons and saints and a

few demons too, know the fragility of liquid, the foreign bodies that fall and spread in waves. And these ripples leave me with streaks, wrinkles. My wounds, my path is upset, stems panicked like the shipwrecked, leaves, broken reeds, sink into my flesh and find refuge in cruel dams, and my blood congeals, and my heart dries, dries up and falls asleep, my limbs fight in vain. These ruins borrowed from banks are just as capable to give me life as they are to take it, and the dams of unloved branches where my small fluid body is entangled, where my star is tied, capsize all that I am able to love, the past and places, the blue and red lines, the crumpled papers, but the devil with it! I'm son of the river, behold my tumult. I'm son of the ocean, behold my tempest. I'll make my way through your refuse, my ire is river, your fears sink inside me. Under the alder tree, the weeping willows with their lips of clay, my life seeks out the banks and pushes away walls. Storms fill me, and my waves go forth, always forth. My heart is made of wood, although I am stream. No matter, I'll be mongrel of liquid flesh and stiff organs. At the edge of my waves, I embrace your bodies of carefree swimmers, I take pieces of you as I go, feeding on your experiences, I carry you with me always, your parasites, your beauty. Of you I make familiar passengers, blades of grass, grains of sand, fern leaves, scents of damp trails, forgotten plastic, human waste, that are as much you as the daffodil I ripped from yesterday's shore. Each of you kisses me in your bath, and of your kisses I retain the heat that I lack in my innards, but also your ills that sometimes anger me, my floods, my violence wash your indignities, and that which serves as my heart then becomes a ram capable of spelling out your homes in a thousand syllables. Your garbage will come back to you, but settle down; for now I carry them as I do all else, in my arms. As Corot would paint his red dot, the intimate detail of my insides, the small force that always grows without ever escaping its course, I am a blue line on the notebook of the schoolboy that I was, I am a fresh ink stream, I am the child who follows with his finger each childhood place while putting there the name of his people, the branch that still swims, and again, I am a wooden heart, a wondrous wooden heart.

I am once again human, awakened, the finger on the blue lines pushed too hard in its sleep near a nameless hamlet and almost erased the penciled calligraphy. The childhood that learned is now very far, I believe. I found this notebook, like a time machine, my fingerprints were perhaps ten-years-old, my scribbles betray me. I recognize them the way I recognize myself, these maps were of no interest to me. The ballpoint doodles in the margins were escapes that my imagination magnified in dreams of outside, of games, of eyes. Notebook fed with nostalgia, French History, local geography, the misfortune of growing up capsizes us all. What I wouldn't give today to understand these colored lines on the page, to name each site, find my places again, to unearth under concrete the passing ages, the beautiful shores of villages where I fished with my father, the fields I ran, the woods where I picked mushrooms. I live in this narrow apartment, sitting on the plywood floor. I opened the newly-found notebook, blue with few pages, slightly dog-eared, folded on this simple map, childish and almost silent, hastily completed. At times, I feel between these walls, my heavy heart, that can barely follow the course of the river that is this existence. Sometimes I have this leaden heart, but I still smile, in a corner of my life in those yesterdays, those always, I have a wooden heart. If you want, I'll tell you what my wooden heart is, and the intimate chance to see it float on the stream of life, the small joy to navigate my memories to the beating of this heart of oak, of plane, of birch, of pine, of me.