

HOTEL PRO FORMA

AMDUAT

AN OXYGEN MACHINE



Amduat. An Oxygen Machine.

Excerpt from Harald Voetmanns
poetry novel.

Manuscript for Hotel Pro Formas
performance

Photographer: Karoline Lieberkind

Prologue

What is my name? the building says

Your name is pulmonary ward

Your name is Gastro Surgical

What is my name? says the room

Your name is room 4

Your name is room 2

What is my name? says the patient

Your name is Unreasonable

A haze of blood vessels wheezing in the bed

What is my name? says the bed

discarded from central stock

What is my name? says the diagnosis

known among the dead

1. hour

Jackal-faced Anubis

your long hand on the oxygen machine

The name of the hour is silence

No wheezing under the mask

The name of the hour is a drawer in a rolling cabinet

The god of the drawer is a set of fake teeth

2. hour

One of the final times I visited dad
in the nursing home, my brother read to him
from the garden log he kept in the 70s.
This and this many kilos of plums did he
harvest, this and this many kilos of various sorts
of apples, cherries, gooseberries, walnuts

They were methodical notes on homemade
fruit wines. One wine especially turned out well.
He called it the Garden Burgundy. Dad was
clearly proud to be told of the things he could
do once, when he wasn't paralyzed, delirious
and distraught. Our garden, the swings, the walnut tree,
the cherry tree.

3. hour

Where are you?
 I'm home
You're not home
 I'm in a room
It's not a room
What is it?
 I'm in the bed
You're not in the bed
 Where am I?
Does it hurt a lot now?

Oh, it's so good you're here.
That was lovely.

The horse is hitched to its solar barge, the god
coughs shallowly from the bow.

Give me something I can drink, I want to live
in that great darkness that once was the world.

4. hour

Did I tell you about the trip in the canoe
we took, my sons and I?

Near the lakeshore
hidden in the tall reeds
stood a white cow roaring with
terror
because we almost rammed into her

Soon she lowered her large head again
drank from the lake

So beautiful
the white cow between the reeds
beautiful and calm

And there between her horns
what is it that thing catching our eye?

It's a serpent. It's rising up
Its beard is golden
Its fangs are flint knives
Its brows are lapis lazuli and its eyes are amethyst
It wants to tell us something, but we can't make out what it is

Why can't we make out what it's saying?
We can only hear it wheeze

And by the serpent's tail
What is that thing hanging there, dangling
by the serpent's tail?

It's your oxygen mask dad,
you have to keep it on

5. hour

On dying among the living. In the time after his death, dad kept rising from the grave. He couldn't comprehend that he was dead and had to stay down. Just as he from time to time hadn't recognized his illness, he now wouldn't recognize his death. We, his sons, had to explain to him each time that he must return to his grave like the other dead. I used harsh and demeaning words to make him listen. The last time he arose, his grave was in a ditch. It was a beautiful patch of tall grass and wildflowers. I yelled at him until he crawled back. Then I cast a glance down. Dad was just a skeleton now and his bones rattled. He lay in the grave huddled up and trembling. Now I knew he'd stay there.

6. hour

On not dying alone

Do you know where you are? I'm home. I'm at Bøgebakken. No dad, you're at Holbæk Hospital. You have a serious pneumonia. And you probably had another stroke. Is that you?

It's so good to see you. Is that your mother walking out there? No, mum has been dead for 25 years now

It's an oxygen mask, it's to help you breathe. No, you have to keep it on, dad.

Hold on to my hand or to the bedrail.

Everybody is here

The nest is full of knives and
the knives are cut with wounds

The wounds are full of boils and
the boils are soft with down

The mask is masking no one
It's spurting oxygen

We're sitting by your side and
your voice has ceased to sound

A cup coughs in the earth.
Is that you?
I'm so proud of you.

A cup sings in the earth.
My heart
My shadow
My name

7. hour

Are you still alive?

8. hour

Hi. We're gonna move you to a different unit
 Oh? That's very lovely.
So we're going for a little ride.
 Are we driving?
Yeah, we'll be spinning the wheels
 I would love to go for a drive with you,
 but I'm afraid I can't. It's because I broke my glasses.
I'll wheel the bed for you.
 No.
No worries, pal
 It's because my glasses went ahead already.
 My glasses broke ahead already.
 My glasses have already broken ahead.
 They've gone ahead, they're already broken ahead of us.

9. hour

A door is a knife
A knife is an hour
A look is a gash
And a gash is a quill

A quill is a kiss
And kisses are crutches
A bed is a boat
And a boat is a word

A knife is a door
A door is an hour
Your life is a stream
And your bed is a boat

You rest in the barge
that will ferry the ancient
Egyptian sun god
from night towards day

10 hour

Time swallows its images
The dying god and his jackal
In a barge of paper through the fire
Through the fire and into the deep
A veil of river fog graciously conceals
the bodies of drowned to the god's eye.
At the banks saunter health personnel
cutting reeds for cataract surgery
Sickles of copper glint in the fog

On living among the dead
I readjusted your mask
Your head had fallen from the pillow
So thin and ruined to look at
Mum showed me we can die young
You showed me how old we can grow
I see your faces in mine
I see my children in yours

On eating among the dead

Dad, would you like some more soup?

No. No. It's becoming quite putrid to me.

A cigarette
a single smoke
would be lovely

11. hour

As long as there's whimpering, wincing, creaking
It sounds like the swing in the walnut tree
In the backyard, when the boys were little
Creak creak all day long. They stretched their legs
leaned back in it, as if they wished to plant an imprint
of their Ecco shoes in the sky. And they yelled to me
as I sat on the terrace with my pipe.

12. hour

To be spoken by those who remove the oxygen mask
Let he who cuts the supply say it
Let's get rid of this thrumming now.

May you wake in peace
The skin of your hand is thin and dry
This hand is golden pale like sheets of papyrus

A scarab claws its way through your cranium
Spins your brain down the corridor of gastro surgical

Epilogue

To say at the twelfth hour:
I'm going to die now
It's not that I want to
But it is happening.

