

From
Large Animals (“Store Dyr”, Tiderne Skifter Publishers, Denmark, 2008)
a novel
(translated by Thomas E. Kennedy)

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hearts

She rings the bell during the evening, it is he who opens.

“Is she home?” Enya asks, meaning me.

“Come in,” he says and nods, happy and welcoming in his movements.

Then she goes in. “Don’t you want to watch the match with us,” he asks, gesturing to the empty place on the sofa, still warm between the big pillows where he had sat. There is plenty of pizza, and Robyn cuts up and mixes a salad.

Later she comes and gets into bed with me, while he stays up a little longer, playing a computer game. They kiss goodnight, and I feel happy.

“Isn’t there any jealousy?” my therapist asks.

“Lots!” I admit. “But not for us three.”

-Is it something we should talk about? she asks. Why? I say, it’s not relevant. We trust each other completely.

Then we start talking about “The Reliability of Auscultation of the Horse’s Heart” and all that I don’t get done around the place. She seems even more concerned about that than my thesis advisor out at Life who has recently started not answering my emails.

The Agricultural Research Center in mid-Jutland doesn't smell of fertilizer or musk glands or death, only of juicy freshly mown grass. It lies spread out over fourteen hundred acres in the middle of nowhere and with one hundred thousand square meters of low, numbered wings, like a mink farm or a concentration camp. A copper sculpture of a reclining cow in life scale dimensions is the first the eye meets when one enters the reception area; I run my hand over its forehead which is cool and sad as the statue of a saint, with big round brown eyes. It lies there, bathed in the cold light of newly canonized designer lamps: The Research Center is famous throughout the world and brings honor to the country and all our different artists and tradesmen.

During my unbearably drawn-out time here, it is Nora I let my restless gaze rest upon, you need to have somebody or other and right now I have Nora; she came here from the other end of the world to participate in the Center's sensational project with cloned cattle. She works with Professor Bontebok, the world-famous genetic ethicist; she has declined innumerable offers from around the world; immediately more important for her career just to be here in the wilderness and work with him.

"But the man is mad!" she confides to me over lunch in the canteen, in the bus to and from work and through the smoke of cigarettes we share at meetings in the garden behind the laboratory when we can get away with it. Nora's charisma crackles and flashes and takes my breath away. I cough, she raises her voice to be certain I don't miss a word: "Completely, raving mad!" She cannot bring herself to pronounce his name anymore. "The typical mad professor. A disgrace to science! The man is dangerous. He thinks only of himself, his career, his fame, like all men!" She spits on the freshly sprayed lawn.

"But you also get a bit of fame from working with him," I console her.

-“Not nearly as much as I should!” she assures me. “He gets it all. Typical! He thinks only of himself.” Nora’s whole body quivers with indignation and resentment. She is thinking about the cows, those dear little ones. About their welfare. It is good to be multifarious; not to have to die alone. “About the cows?!” she cuts me off. How could I think that! Her mind is of course greater and more noble than that. Nora’s only thoughts are for *people*. People in the poor countries which the starry-eyed professor in his blind intoxication for power and honor doesn’t give a second thought to. Humanity! Nigerians, Colombians, Nepalese, the world’s poorest and most suppressed people. They eat too little cow, on top of all the rest of the humiliations they have to submit to. They ought to have permission to eat just as much cow as we do, even more, if they want to. Who are we to put a limit on how much cow a person can have? Unlimited access to cow is a human right. The suppressed have a right to freedom, freedom to make their own cows, as many as they need and want, and precisely as they most want them to look. To open alternative and pacifistic fair-trade cow sandwich bars, so McDonald’s doesn’t run off with all the profits. Evil and unscrupulous McDonald’s! Give people alternative cows, they taste much better, and cleaner in a way. Every man his cow! Swine, camels and apes will come later. Isn’t it also basically unworthy, yes almost offensive, for so-called modern society constantly to have to be dragged through the time-consuming and unesthetic difficulty of getting two cloven-footed animals, in a hopelessly old-fashioned manner, to exchange loathsome, sticky bodily fluids in order to propagate themselves?! These countries have been backwards in development long enough, they deserve to skip a couple of steps now and go forward. They will be noble, future-oriented and pure-hearted new countries! Animal sex belongs to the past.

Now it will be beef morning, noon and night. Dried as snacks once in a while. Milk formula for the breastfed babies of tragic, unenlightened mothers. Junket, leather sofas, Saturday evening steaks! At the crack of a whip! Swimming pools, filled to the brim with whole milk and

cheese spread if that's what people demand! Milk is healthy. Force down half a quart a day, and they'll quick enough get with the program, just wait! Why reserve trendy diseases like lactose allergies and hardening of the arteries to the western world? Is that real democracy? There are doctors and medicine enough for everyone, they also need the work; no one needs to suffer want any longer. It's a human right to consume cow. But when the poor in the developing countries begin to consume sufficient animal fat they'll grow strong, round and healthy, and in such record time that we in the west will tremble with fear at what they might come up with! That is why with tooth and nail we try to prevent Nora's and Dr. Bontebok's noble science from flowering and growing, Nora says. She is wildly fired up by her own revolutionary spirit; we roll over on the floor in that ether-smelling basement laboratory, she glitters and is exceptionally beautiful and how many do you meet these days who burn so for a cause. She licks my face with the softest of tongues, she bats her long-lashed eyes, she tears and flays at my tender nipples: "Come on now! You know you want to!"

Nora has a sweetheart at home whom she loves to tell everything worth knowing about to anyone who cares to listen. A very famous sweetheart to have on Nora's continent, renewer of the worker ballad, gay milieu icon, a quiet ballad-singing heroine, Christian and nationalistic in her own modern fashion. Nora was her biggest fan since her teenage years, and it was like in a film, finally the youngster gets to meet her idol, the heroine stepped down from the pedestal and lifted Nora up and they got each other! And now they belong to each other forever. Now the sweetheart thinks only of Nora, every single one of her pretty ballads is dedicated to her. Nora can tell the story behind each one, down to the most intimate details. They're to be married at home in September, when Nora finally will travel again from that pathetic stain on the map of the world which lies rolled out before her and her grandiose humanistic project: All conceivable others could have *got*

her, the giants, she could have worked anywhere in the *world* right now with her cows! With the biggest, the most important, the best paying! With a government that didn't stop short of anything! She could have lived in a colony of nothing but cloned cows, but now she's *here* instead, in the middle of a mediocre swine-prioritizing kingdom with someone like me and with that ridiculous Professor Bontebok.

Nora can produce clones of her sweetheart wherever and whenever she wants, to use for the time it takes her over-heated body to calm down, just for that little parenthesis of a second: It's easy. It's handy. Tomorrow we will have forgotten, is her sweet and mild assurance. Not everything in this world needs to be said: There are no words for the most beautiful things. The mediocre anyway understand nothing of the sublime; better not to overstrain their simple brains by trying to get them to. "And you yourself so much want to, why deny the body its needs? Believe me I can be whoever you need. Even better than the real thing," Nora promises.

-I don't need anyone, I say and feel wonder that it is true. Nora turns white as the veal the research center dreams about eventually cloning into production without hurting the poor small creatures and their mothers; ready made packages for the freezer *Made in the Research Center & By Nora*: "Your Enya would not say no if invited," she hisses. "I have seen how she looks at me. And I could prove to you that Robyn is just like every other man. Weak! False! Fraudulent!"

-Look at yourself! she spits after me as I straighten my clothes and go. -Just look! At your life. You think you can have it both ways! And all you want! But that is not how the world works at all!"

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The Nazis – who were inspired in the development of efficient death procedures for their concentration camps by the Ford Motor Company which, in its turn, had learned from the great American slaughterhouses of the late 19th century, the world's first assembly lines – raised their *Jugend* to staunch and manly men by, among other things, sometimes sending them to healthy and jovial vacation colonies where each rosy-cheeked lad had his own rabbit to play with and for which he was compelled to render the best possible care throughout the vacation. Only, on the last day, to be ordered to slaughter his cute pet and dine on it with appropriate sauces and dressing at a festive farewell dinner. In this way, it was thought possible to effectively extinguish the wide-spread, unfortunate tendency among the softer part of the population to entertain personal sympathy for an individual Jew or homosexual in their close circles and irrationally attempt to select it from among all the others for protection.

Such things are not mentioned in any of our courses; that sort of thing we have to sniff out on our own. Life University is not the place to ask questions about where and how this segregation doctrine ever appeared: that cats, dogs and hamsters are house-broken and cute, pigs are swine, cows sluggish as sheep. Parrots fun and clever, eagles proud and noble while hens and ducks are chicken-brained and dumb as geese.