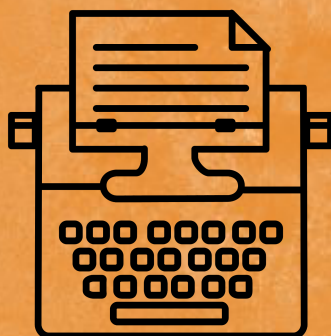


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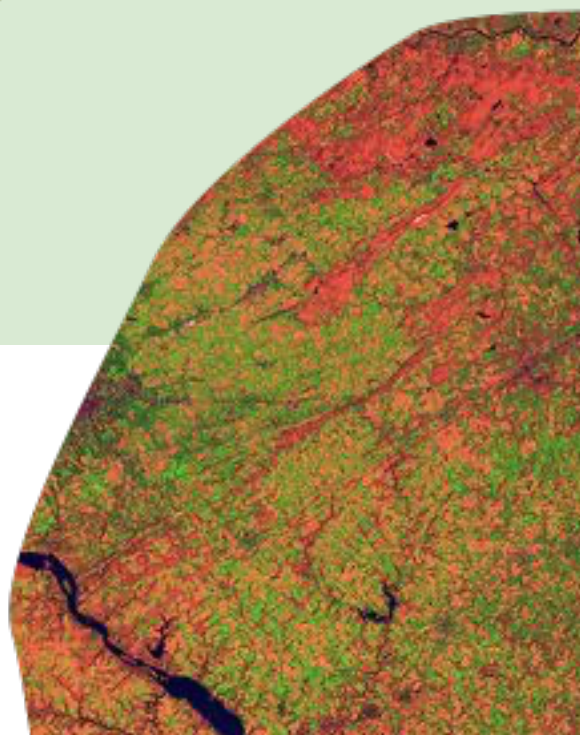
*Author:*

# Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story  
entry*



FORMAS



# Adaptation

*Tatiana Sokolova*

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By building larger channels, the New Slussen project should allow the lock to release nearly five times more water from Lake Mälaren into the Baltic Sea, up to 1,400 m<sup>3</sup>/s.

- C40 Cities: Retrofitting and Adapting the Slussen Lock

Our bodies may have been artificially transformed, but our lives will always be our own. Life survives by the power of life.

- H. Miyazaki

I look at you  
Helplessly  
And a deer  
Looks back at me from the thicket.

Only because I know they exist, I can hear them hum – the giant machines pumping the rain out of the city and into the air gutters, beyond the Capsule, out into the void. I’ve always heard them – but never as distinctly as I do now.

What I don’t know is who else knows that soon they will be shut down. I don’t know the knowledge policy about the Systems. But how is this knowledge regulated, I ask myself. I am now done with the ‘coriander’; I leave it in a little fragrant heap on the ‘wooden’ chopping board. I put three candleholders on the table. Green, yellow, and pink, made of colourful mirrors: the ‘Indian’ theme.

I am afraid I don’t possess this kind of information, a cool voice says in my head with a little delay. What took you so long, I think. If I possess the information about the gutters, shouldn’t you? And if you do, shouldn’t everyone be able to access it? Aren’t we all connected through a vast, vast network. Yes, we are, replies the voice, like a distant echo reading to me what feels like my own thoughts. But then how is the access to certain knowledge limited, I ask again. I am afraid I don’t possess this kind of information, says the echo, and I detect a tint of steely passive aggression in her voice. I need a modification, I think wearily. My little fawn runs up to me, seeing that a candleholder is about to fall out of my hands. He catches it. Fetch the matches; I bend towards him, squeezing his delicate shoulder, pointing at the bookshelves. He scutters off and comes back with a matchbox. We light the first candle. I drop it into the mirror glass. I wait for him to give me another; but he has pricked his ears and frozen; his large deer eyes dart towards me, alarmed. I hear something rustling in the corridor,

and for a moment I am frightened with his fear. The Jungian archetype of The Dark Man: the impostor, the purveyor of violence, the robber, the rapist, the murderer, says the voice in my head in my own sarcastic tone. Tosh, I retort in my mind, the voice chuckles and falls away. It has been messing with me a little too much lately; I need to have it checked. I did not hear You enter; I had expected You to ring the bell, and now am startled. It's nice to see you, I say automatically, hugging You, barely overcoming the shock of seeing You in my hall. Like in a dream, on autopilot, I receive and hang Your coat, damp from the rain. I realise the rustle was You trying to arrange Your gifts: the wet white 'roses', the wet gift package with a bottle of 'wine' inside... I got soaked three times today, You complain. On my way to work. On my way from work. On my way to you. Let's hope you won't get soaked the fourth time – I am about to say, but I don't. It might sound impolite to talk to the guest about leaving no sooner than they have arrived. But it's more than that; I have a sudden pang of pain at the thought of You leaving. I ask the Companion to recalibrate my emotional state; I feel that I'm getting a little too edgy for a host. The night is young, scoffs the voice. While it is making the adjustments, I mumble something non-committal and usher You in.

You present me with the damp 'roses', the 'wine' – and some books. I show appropriate excitement about all three – but I am secretly thrilled. It's very nice of you, I say. I know you hate wine, I don't say. The 'wine' package has a light-blue ribbon on it, which I pull out. I open the recycling unit, find among two dozen fractions the one for the fabric, slide the ribbon in and close the drawer. Do the 'roses' have thorns on them, You ask from the sofa, watching my fawn cutting the stems with garden scissors before putting them in a vase. Yes, they do, but very small, I reply, absently. I need to serve You a drink, but I linger; I tap my fingers on the recycling unit door. I slide the drawer open again and take the blue ribbon out. It is the colour of the sky I saw in my 'dreams'. I will use it as a bookmark when I read the books You brought, I decide. One of them has a dark blue cover, picturing a giant wave; You say it's Your favourite. I will read it first, and the ribbon will match the cover beautifully. I put the book and the ribbon on the little table, under the lamp with a yellow velvet shade. It's a lovely sight. The thrill is rising and falling in my chest, rising and falling, like waves; I don't know if the Companion is regulating it, or if it is my own rhythm.

While the fawn is lighting the second candle, I find You a drink, and they arrive. They are damp, just like You, and smiling. He has a thin, pronounced nose with a bump, eyes piercing, but kind, and sharp, quick features. He chirps happily, untying His scarf. She is soft, green-eyed, Her dark long hair hanging like a curtain over Her face as She bends to untie Her

shoes. They brought gifts, too. More flowers. They chatter away: with me, with each other, putting me at ease. They walk through to meet You, start talking to You. I don't introduce you to each other; it seems as if you all fall into talking. She helps my fawn light the third candle. What would you like to drink, I ask Her. I have white and red 'wine', 'beer', 'gin', 'aquavit', 'Campari'. And 'whiskey', of course. And 'cognac' for later. I would love some red, actually, She says. It's been a while since I had any. I open the bottle You brought and ask Him if he would like some, too. He accepts. I pour three crystal glasses of dark liquid. What a wonderful table, He says. It's solid 'oak', I say. Whatever that means. I don't know how solid anything is these days, I laugh. It looks solid to me, She says. Well, it's made of pellets, I say. But it's heavy. Please take a seat, anywhere you want! The three of you shuffle around, choosing where to sit. You put me at the head of the table. She sits next to You, and He next to the fawn. I serve the 'black rice', the 'curry', the 'tamarind chutney' with 'honey', you all pretending to like it. You and He seem to take to each other; the conversation keeps bouncing between you, while She listens to it and smiles at me. I try to take it in and at the same time make sure you all are eating.

I am amazed, I say, to see how familiar you are with each other's work. I thought Engineers and Architects didn't really... To put it mildly... No, no, they don't! - He exclaims. But I had an Apprentice. She discovered that this hadn't been the case earlier. Frankly, none of this was the case earlier. She was digging a bit in the past, you know. Fiddling with the past. She wrote a history of climate change adaptation, back in the day, you know, when it was a thing. Yes, I have read it, but I am a little confused about the sequence of events, to be honest, I say. My Companion keeps telling me, but I have stopped trusting her babble recently. There are different versions of the sequence of events, He laughs, leaning towards me. What is your version, I smile. The chips got inserted a hundred-and-fifty years ago, He says. In another twenty years, the people living then started undergoing the genetic modification. Was it at the same time as the first Shaders were shot up? And the Ashes were already up by then? - I ask. Yes, He says, but it took a while for the Domes to be built, and the Capsules to be sealed. And I guess then the Mars colonies were abandoned, She added. Mars, You cackle. We have enough Mars around here. We have nothing but Mars. And the weather. Which flip flipped the weather? - You ask. He beams. Chimeras were supposed to live in a tropical climate, a greenhouse paradise, like the orchids, He says, pointing at the white 'orchids' on my kitchen counter. A slight malfunctioning. A slight malfunctioning, You echo and giggle. My genetic

ancestors are said to have come from a place called ‘Australia’. Have you heard of it? You laugh and laugh.

I suddenly feel drained. The malfunctioning. I watch You carefully. I see no sign of You knowing; do You hide it so well? My hands start sweating. What if my information is incorrect? They cannot have kept You in the dark. Right? – You ask and look at me mockingly. You must have asked me something. I respond with a baffled half-smile. You say: If anyone, you should know. Error Detection and Elimination Squad – You wink. I say nothing, gulping. I look after the Fabric, says the voice in my head. I look after the Fabric, I say obediently. Yes, and the smart city fabric has become too smart, You say. I stare at You intently. You know, You know it. Well, we have all heard these rumours, He chimes in. About those who got fed up with the smart, the intelligent, the artificial, and who chose to step out into the State of Autonomy. Anarchists, You rasp. I have no imagination of this, She says. One cannot live outside the Fabric. Do they live outside the Domes? – She muses. It’s probably lovely weather outside the Domes, You tease. Would you like to try? I would, she laughs and stands up. She saunters through the room. I’d rather die than stay here another day, She says, leaning languidly on the wall next to my bookshelves, examining their contents. You should not talk about dying so cavalierly, You reproach Her warmly. Your life is endless and precious. She snorts. To whom, She asks. It’s precious to me, for example, He says seriously. I stare at Her. Her hair looks like it is strung with diamond threads, reflecting the lights. Her face is shaded; She bends to look at the books. I love it that you have so many, She says, lifting Her gaze towards me. They made a comeback, didn’t they, I say. Everyone has many books these days. Now that we don’t need them. We don’t need anything, She replies. But we have so much. She pulls a book off a shelf, crouches and starts leafing through it. For a moment, we are all silent. This apprentice of mine, He says, the adaptation one. This is her book, He comes up to the shelves and takes off a book. Look, she’s got quite a few written by you, You say to Him. He smiles modestly. You take one of His books and open it. Look, she took notes, You say, holding it towards Him. He grins. Now all three of you are lost in the pages. Suddenly You shut His book and put it back. I bet you anything, if she was your Apprentice, she wouldn’t have been the one who Architected this, You waive Your hand indefinitely towards the window. No, she wouldn’t have, He says a little too earnestly. She laughs. No, no, He is good, She says mockingly. He teaches us well. We have been at it for the past decade, trying to undo the mess. For example, the Air Pumps. Have you seen the early designs of them? You snort. You mean, the ones which went round and round,

like the mythical snake biting its own tail? Yeah, the ones, She confirms. So, it took three years to dissuade them to NOT revert to that original design. They somehow thought that it would fix all the problems with them that we have today. That's some regression analysis, says He, smiling smugly. Well, they couldn't think of anything smarter than go back to the good old days, She says. It's turtles all the way, You say somewhat out of synch and touch Her shoulder. Literally, all the way down, She bursts out laughing. But we stopped them. Otherwise you guys would be doing circles around the Capsule all week long.

'Are we able to generate an alternative, deeply radical imagination?' I suddenly ask, surprised at myself. You look at me, amused. This is a good question, He says and smiles. A good question. Where is this from, She asks? I don't know, I laugh. Just... Something that came to my mind. It sounds familiar; I read it somewhere, She says. I stand up and take their plates. For a while, I am distracted by the dishes, trying to create a semblance of an order. The Air Pumps. They don't know. You don't seem to know. Who else knows this? I do not possess this information, Companion throws in. Think! - I think angrily. I cannot think, she retorts. I can only imitate your thinking. I shut out her voice. Who knows about the Air Pumps, and the Water Pumps, and the Wires? The Systems. How can You not know? Your Ranks have access to everything. There is something wrong. What if my information is wrong? What if it is deliberately misleading? What if there is a mistake in the Fabric? What if I am being shut out? Everything is becoming a little undone. I try putting the 'rice' away in a glass jar, but it sticks to the pan and won't move. The 'orchids' seem to have grown bigger and are in my way as I try to move around. I give up and sit down again. I stand up again and give You another bottle of 'beer'.

...So that young woman was charged with Apprenticeship misconduct, accused of stealing her Teacher's ideas, She was saying. You shake Your head and click Your tongue in indignant disbelief. Did she? I ask absent-mindedly. I mean, steal the ideas. She looks at me and says pointedly: How can you steal your Teacher's ideas? It's usually the other way around, You exclaim and chuckle. I steal my Apprentices' ideas all the time. Suddenly I get irritated. You are trying to sound kind, but You are not talking about me, You are talking about others. I have produced nothing for You to steal. Perhaps the Fabric has realised it, and now I am being shut out. Maybe You have realised it. How can you do anything OTHER than steal your Teacher's ideas, I think but don't say. I don't want to contradict the two of you. The thought is shaping too slowly in my head; I have half a mind to ask the Companion to shape it for me, but no. She will mangle it, trivialise it. The thought is warm, liquid, amber at the

back of my mind somewhere; it has to do with the feeling that we do not have separate minds, but an ecology of minds, a net of rhizomes woven together in a lustrous fabric, that none of our ideas are ours alone, that they all are threaded through each other. The Companion would turn this living, breathing thought into something cold, stupid, sterile. I hear my Teacher's voice in my head whenever I try to think, the Companion suddenly says ironically. I shudder. It sounds almost like something I myself would say. I brush it off, trying to focus on the conversation. I survey your glasses. I am about to pour Her some more 'wine', but She doesn't let me.

I just got a signal, She says and stands up abruptly. My cub needs me, I have to go. You play the guitar? She suddenly asks, pointing at two guitars in the corner, a Yamaha and an Alhambra. A-a-anyone can play guitar, I hum and laugh. It's pre-installed. We are all mediocre guitar players by default settings. Well, I'm sure you're better than that, She says. I have watched your wonderful singing, I return the courtesy. She says, we'll play next time. She says Her goodbyes; the men respond with cooing comforting sounds. She and I walk out of the room. In the corridor, She puts on Her black shiny coat, but does not button it. We exchange the appropriate assurances of meeting again, and so on. As I open the door for Her, She laughs, interrupting Herself in the middle of a sentence, turns into a black panther, leaps down the stairs and out of sight.

I return to the kitchen. My little fawn is sitting quietly at the end of the table, eating a 'biscuit' he had baked. The two of you are gossiping about common acquaintances. It's time for bed, I say to the fawn. Like a little shadow, he stands up and disappears in the bathroom. I put away some of the dishes. He reappears; I ask to be excused for a few minutes and go to my fawn's room. Your voices are loud; louder in his little sky-blue room filled with gentle puffed clouds than they are outside. They are resonating against the walls. Your rolls of laughter sound like a thunderstorm. Let's sleep in my room tonight, ok, deer? I say. He nods enthusiastically. He slides out of the bed and trots towards my bedroom on his long slender limbs, me smiling beatifically behind him, as I walk past the two of you. I transfer a sleep story from my Companion's data reservoir to his. He listens to a quiet voice in his head and closes his eyes.

I return to the kitchen once more. You are telling a story I heard many times before. You say: You have heard this story many times, I'm sorry, and I smile politely. I open the cabinet and reach for the bottle of 'cognac'. As I do so, another bottle catches my eye; pushed deep into a

corner, it is small, black, and has no label. Tonight, it is like a dark magnet. Just a few drops, I think. To put us all to sleep. They won't know, and they won't need to suffer. It's in my hands. How does it matter, now or later. Better I do it than they have to suffer. I think of the thirst, the asphyxia, the darkness that will ensue when the systems shut down. I would hate it for them to suffer. I would hate it for You to suffer. I would hate it for my fawn to suffer. A lump grows in my throat, spreads into my chest. What if my information is wrong. The 'cognac' bottle trembles in my hand. I close the cabinet door.

Gentlemen, say I and place two cut crystal glasses in front of the two of you. As you make noises of approval and continue your mutually magnanimous hum, I pour one for myself, the amber liquid with a sweet sandy smell.

You say, So what you are saying is that when Slussen sank, the city was pretty much done with already? I am blinded by a sudden gush of light – it bleaches out the colours, it fills the room in a violent, loud wave. The seagulls are screaming above my head, and there is a current of people surging through the street in which I stand. I wear a red dress and I hold a book in my hand, its pages flapping, my eyes brushing on the lines, without taking in the meaning of the words. I flick my gaze up the street again and again, anxious that I will miss You. The sky is blazing. The crowd is jubilant – a midsummer crowd. Finally, I see You. You are biking down the slanting street, Your shirt filled with wind, like a sail. It looks as if You are falling down the street leading towards the sluice and the lock, towards the old city, towards the bridges, north and north, all the way to where I just arrived from. I call out Your name, but You can't hear me. I look helplessly at Your back as You are disappearing around the corner, while the street keeps running further down, towards Slussen's white-blue-golden shimmering haze out of which trains, boats, busses, bridges are woven. I start descending quickly, almost running. The black paving stones under my sandaled feet are glossy with heat. You stand in the square, Your face upturned, searching for me, and it takes one hundred and seventy-seven years before You turn around and finally see me – the red flare bleached out by the upturned pale-blue sky the exact colour of Your eyes, the sun erasing Your face from my memory. I know this is the Companion messing with me as it often does, planting false memories in my head and then erasing them, that I need to command it to stop and reset.

Would you like some more 'cognac', I ask Him. No, thank you, He says, beaming at me. In fact, I think I should already be going. What about you, a little more? - I turn to You. Oh, I wonder what time it is. Oh, is this the time. Oh, I think I should probably also be going. I'll

go with you, You say to Him. The two of you stand up and start fumbling with the dishes, me politely declining the help. I will step out with you, gentlemen, say I, pulling on my cherry-red 'Docs' and tying a 'pashmina' around my neck. I click open my cigarette case, checking that I still have a few, my fingers shaking slightly. I am adamant. The Companion is silent. Did she fall asleep, I think absently. You are confused, dear, I never sleep – she says in a cool voice. A maple leaf falls out of my cigarette case and gracefully glides under my feet, and I realise that something has changed. I think Your hand is brushing on my shoulder, and I turn to You with a restrained, but pleasantly anticipant smile. But no, it was only a maple tree brunch which has just sprouted out of the wardrobe from which I took out Your coat; You are at an arm's length from me, bending to pick up Your rolltop bag which gets a little entangled in ivy. You have to pull a little to extricate it, all the while talking to Him. He is circling around like a large bird, searching for His scarf. This is neck-breaking steep, You remark as we walk down the crumbling staircase. We are out. Oh, it's only a drizzle, I say. I flick my pink lighter a few times in front of Your concentrated face, illuminating it slightly; it is already changing. Your eyes are now golden brown, and Your features are softening, ready to transform into those of a nocturnal creature. He is forlornly pulling out His smoking device. I realise with a jolt of shame that I should have offered Him a cigarette, but I was too focused on that little flicker I wanted to produce for You like a magic trick, to impress You this one last time.

He and You exchange some phrases; You point at each other's shoes. After some hugs, He steps away from us, pushes against the asphalt and takes flight. Another clumsy half-hug (You'd already given me one and must have forgotten), and You walk away in wide strides. For a millionth time in the past one hundred and seventy-seven years, I look at Your back as You dissolve into the wet darkness. When Your steps die down, swallowed by a rapidly advancing moss carpet covering the street, I turn around to see a green mountain, a waterfall of branches and red leaves in front of me. I grope through the lithe, tight shoots for the screen on the side of the door; I press my finger to the cold damp surface; my fingerprint is read off, and the door opens slowly, pushing its way out through the branches. I walk in. The staircase has turned into a net of twisted roots. I climb up to my door, stepping again into the warmth of the lights, the leftover 'wine' and 'cognac' glowing at the bottom of the crystal glasses, the scattered books, my son's dreams floating among them and out, through unsealed cracks in the window, out into the night sky above the drizzle, above the Dome. Your 'roses' have

crawled out of the vase and grown into thorny bushes with small thorns, covering the chairs, the sofa, the desk; the vase is lying, broken, on the floor.

I pull off my jacket, boots and shawl. A tree root catches my ankle; I shake it off. I take the blue ribbon and the book lying on the little table; I open the book at random. It says: 'The surf hammered night and day, never calm, never quiet, blue all the way to Africa'. I mark the page with the ribbon. I walk over to the bookcase, fall on my knees, drag out a little safe. A time capsule. I put the book inside, seal it and rotate the dial. I set it at hundred. I hug the capsule, its grainy cast iron shell icy on my bare neck, cool on my chest through the black dress I'm wearing. I close my eyes, lay my head on the safe and think, think. I think back, turning the dial in my mind again and again. I try to think forward, but there is only darkness, only darkness ahead. Are we able to generate an alternative, deeply radical imagination? – an echo asks. I open my eyes; I am back in the soft, shimmering light of my drawing room. White lilies of the Incas have burst into bloom and are nodding, nodding at me from the fake memory pictures You'd sent to me over the years. 'As always' is written on the golden cards in a golden pen. I don't know who sent the lilies to whom, but the golden handwriting looks like it could be mine. White alstroemeria, the Peruvian lily, or the Lily of the Incas, brought by Linnaeus to Sweden, the One World, signifies strength, support, grace, purity, majesty, affection, and honour, the echo in my head obligingly dictates. Can one flower mean so much, I ask rhetorically. The wonders of semiotics, chimes in the AI. This will take a while to undo, I think. I add another hundred years and punch in the code. The clock starts ticking implacably, measuring two hundred years from now. I shove the safe somewhere into the thick carpet of grass, under a bush. I stand up and wade through the tall grasses towards my bedroom, where my fawn is quietly dreaming. Maybe another night, another day. Maybe I will see you again, maybe in the corridor, maybe on the crumbling glass staircase. Following Your blinding billowing shirt with my gaze, I fall, fall, fall down the slanted street, into the haze of the sluice, into the sea of the imminent green oblivion engulfing all.