

## Part 1

Buying things in order to let them go

Astrid spoke already for a few days about a part for a new work she had ordered.

A big package arrived from Kenia. I stood beside her while she carefully opened the box. A hairy skin with beautiful black and white stripes. A tail, ears and mane. A zebra skin. Why on earth would you buy a zebra? That you can buy such a thing, no, that you are allowed to buy such a thing!

I know, Astrid does not believe in ownership. She says: 'You can buy things, but you cannot truly possess them. You can try to keep them around for some time, but things are things and you are you. And you too are actually a thing.'

But now, standing with this zebra in her hands I saw her doubt. Now what?

Not because of the money. Or because it was such a beautiful skin. She felt responsible for this hairy skin. As if the animal that galloped across the Savannah hadn't left it quite yet. And that asked for respect.

I've seen this zebra in many shapes. Roughly folded on a white pedestal in Brussels. With smooth pleats on a black pedestal in Amsterdam. In a cardboard box on top of a closet in her studio. And now on the wooden floor of an attic, somewhere in a village in Limburg, I meet the zebra again. On the left hums a washing machine, boxes with old shoes on the right. Just things. Things you buy, use and leave behind. But the rolled-up skin on the floor is different. 'You can't have me.' the black and white stripes seem to say. 'You can not use me'.

Astrid inserts a plug in a socket. Blue letters illuminate the dark attic.

'BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT'

I read the sentence and unconsciously add a question mark.

Am I worth it? To, as a thing, be the owner of another thing? We can stay close to each other for some time, just things amongst themselves, until we do something else again.

## Part 2

:'(

Finding the right words is difficult. Especially when something bad has happened. Something of which you hope nobody will ever have to experience it. Some say nothing but pat you on your shoulder. They whisper "I am so sorry", or they mumble "That's life". Postcards with well-intentioned poems arrive. And Facebook reads heaps of messages:

Sorry man!  !!!

This can make me angry. Can people not think of anything better to say?

:'(

A stupid yellow little orb with a little tear.

But is a poem really that different? Or a touch on your shoulder. A clumsy gesture, a tool to make clear that your words are not good enough to say what is needed.

Using emoticons and emojis feels superficial. Like choosing the easy road. I still slightly hesitate when I add a ;) to a message.

You are not searching for the right word, a sensible sentence or a comforting remark.

But language can also be silence. Remember that arm around your shoulders, two lovers gazing at each others eyes. They don't need words. Emoticons are the online edition of silence, of body language.

Love can flower in a hieroglyphic code of blushing yellow faces, digital roses and whether or not broken hearts. Are those nights spend behind your screen not real? Less real then the written love letter?

And grief can be shared and healed with Crying Faces and dropped-open mouths. Not because this is the only right thing to say, but to let the other know that you do try. Searching for words you gaze at your screen. Vaguely you see a reflection in the glass, a skeptical head.

Your own head.  
:’(

Joep Vossebeld,  
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