I Just Wanted to Dance by Greta García

Sample translation by Tim Gutteridge

Mindreading is exhausting. I mean, I can't do it or anything but just imagining someone listening to all the stuff rattling around inside my skull does my head in. My own system wears me down, a mind reader gets inside my box and they're dead, a millisecond of this paranoia and they'd short-circuit, straight off, boom, six feet under, for being too clever for their own good, for reading other people's thoughts. Keep your big nose out of my private business. I suffer from verbal diarrhoea, chronic serious incurable, a mental condition. It's like those people with a buzzing noise stuck in their ears and it won't go away, like there's a mosquito trapped in there. Wheeeeeeeeeeeeee. Maybe the mosquito thing is worse. Shit. What if I get it too, just for thinking about it? Shit shit shit, now I've got the word SHIT in capital letters in here wrapped around my brain like a turban. If they sawed my head open and cut the top of my skull clean off above my eyes and my ears to reveal my brain they'd be staring at a neon strip-club sign flashing the words SHIT ARSE MORON FUCK CUNT MONGOL. I mean, it's not right to say mongol because there are people from Mongolia and it's not right to say the Mongols are mongols but that's what I am, a fucking mongol, a great big lump of shit. I wish there were other words in my lexicon but you can't control that just like you can't control having been born. I was born and here I am with a toothbrush jammed up my jacksie, trying not to think. Whoever said I think therefore I am was a dipstick like Amparo says. Domingo was always banging on about how thinking is a lie, how we don't think, how the voices we hear don't exist, how that voice, the ego the id, whispering away inside, is just a big ball of memories that the brain stores like a hard drive and remixes like some coked-up deejay at an everlasting rave. Domingo's another dipstick or worse, a shitstick a shithead a shit-for-brains. My cerebellum's bursting with all these words, all this shit, and I've got to go along with it or my eye will start twitching. If the doctor was a witch and had the power to read what's hidden in my skull without dying of a toxical-lexical overdose on the spot, she'd be face to face with a twig jammed up my filthy skanky dirty bitch arse, in out in out shake it all about. I'd sell my soul to the devil for a bigger repertoire but when you've got a stick up your arse fuck me the words come out despite yourself. It scares the shit out of me, like a vampire-slayer but an arsehole-hunter who arrives and without warning rams a big fat wooden stake up you leaving splinters along the way and kills you for ever and ever and ever and fucks you up and you're done. I don't know what's worse a red-hot metal rod or a cockroach or a whole swarm of cockroaches, they go everywhere and they love shit, up they go like a load of tourists off for a swim at the beach in August. Rats too, a rat up your rectum. There's so much stuff you can stick up

your arse. A foot, a Barbie, a bundle of banknotes, anything goes. A friend who knows a nurse told me about this guy who turned up with a remote control up his arse and he couldn't get it out and he said he sat on it by accident and it got stuck. I heard an interview with a mother talking about her son and she saw his trousers were stained with blood so she asked him what had happened and the kid told her, I sat on a bike that didn't have a saddle, and she said, are you an idiot or what? And she slapped him but the kid was six years old and he'd been raped by a priest. All I've stuck up myself is a toothbrush, no priests involved, the brush is plastic with a thin handle, thinner than a finger. But I stuck it too far up and my rectum made a vacuum like it was a packet of frankfurters and I couldn't get it out and Manuela couldn't either and I had to shout, help help, and that squint-eyed bitch the Mole took me to the doctor and it hurts and Doctor Pina is looking at me and I love that she's looking at me but also, it hurts and I'm starting to worry, like really worry.

The doctor raises her eyebrows, waiting for my explanation.

I STUCK A TOOTHBRUSH UP MY ARSE AND NOW I CAN'T GET IT OUT

YOU INSERTED A TOOTHBRUSH INTO YOUR ANUS?

UH-HUH

CHRIST

Don't judge me doctor. You tell me something better to do than shoving things up your arse when you're stuck in a room that you can't leave. I'm pretty sure you'd do it too, we could do it together, tea for two and two for tea, me for you and you for me, again and again, as many times as you want. I mean, there's always the option of banging your head against the wall or tearing your hair out or peeling your skin off nice and slow but I'm not always in the mood for that. So the toothbrush was just to give myself a bit of a thrill, a little thrill if you will.

I KNOW, I'M AN IDIOT

DON'T SAY THAT

SO WHAT AM I?

YOU'VE BEEN A BIT CARELESS

OKAY I'M CARELESS

LET'S HAVE A LOOK. DROP YOUR TROUSERS AND BEND OVER

Jeezus, when was the last time somebody asked me to do that? I mean, I'm exaggerating obviously, sometimes they ask us to do that, they make us do it let's be honest, to check if we've got drugs up

there or who knows what, a coded message or a miniature bomb. But like that, in that tone… What a difference a nice tone can make. And Doctor Pina's tone is like cold peach juice on a summer's day. Hailmaryfullofgrace a jolt pulses through my clitoris. What if she runs her finger down my spine? Another jolt. Shit. She must have noticed. Maybe this is what she wants, maybe this turns her on. Me here with my knickers round my ankles in a greyhound stance with a toothbrush peeping out of my arse like a cockle, that's some people's biggest fantasy. And I've got a good rear-end, spotty but a good arse, each of my buttocks is a two-hander. And it's not soft. I mean, on the outside there's a layer that covers the muscle, but underneath, the actual muscle, that's hard. Juicy but firm that's what they always say. You've got a good arse Pili. It's the only thing they compliment me about, the only thing that turns them on. A good arse, end of story. It's so white so pale it's pitiful. But there's a birthmark in the shape of a bat that gives it a bit of character. And what about her? You can't tell with those coats they have, that's why doctors wear them, to hide the curves, like nuns like wizards like Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat. But I've got a good eye for an arse and I can tell hers is one of those pear-shaped ones. You know the kind, comfortable relaxed like a smile after a good fuck. Like her. Doctor, if you touch me where you need to touch me I'm going to come all the way down to the tips of my toes. Clean me out like a cuttlefish, Pina! No. I can't come here. Not now. No no no shit Christ.

> YOU NEED TO RELAX YOUR RECTUM, PILI, YOU'RE VERY TENSE. TAKE A BREATH, THIS IS GOING TO COME OUT NICE AND EASY

She called me Pili. We're getting intimate. She's slipped on her latex gloves and a kilo of lubricant. Jesusmaryandjoseph those hands can go anywhere they want. If she could read my thoughts. If she only knew. I'm glad she can't, not just now. On top of my unorthodox approach to dental hygiene she'd think I'm a pervert. Although what's wrong with admitting it, I'm a slut I'm horny so what? Will she notice that my perineum is slick? Perineum. I love that word, it stuck in my head when I was diagnosed with papilloma. I can't believe I hadn't looked at my perineum with a mirror until the gynaecologist told me. I didn't even know the word. But no perineum no party like they say, no perineum and it all just goes to pot. You tense your perineum and your lower stomach tucks in and your pelvis is in the right place and with your pelvis in the right place and your coccyx nice and snug your diaphragm opens and then you're perfectly set to dance to mop to walk to eat or just to wait until something happens. But it's embarrassing when I think I'm so flexible I could have inspected it whenever I wanted. I was too tight-arsed to look at my own cunt. It's pathetic that until I was sixteen I didn't know one end of my perineum from the other. The shitty thing about papilloma is that you

catch it from someone but the warts don't appear until your defences are down. Your defences go off on holiday and the virus pops up and says, how you doing? and you don't have a clue what it is or why it's here and you just hope it'll disappear if you don't pay it any attention but it doesn't disappear and it keeps growing and it becomes part of you and now you don't know what's human and what's not. I had warts and fungal growths that looked like beautiful coral, adorning my inner and outer labia with new shapes and textures that I explored with the mirror in my hand. I was happy to get rid of the itch but I was sorry to destroy my new additions, it seems unfair to kill off funguses and viruses when we let bacteria scamper all over the place. Sometimes that's how I see myself, like a huge bacteria that just occupies space, a great big amoeba that contributes absolutely nothing. When you accept what you are, that you're nothing more than a mass of micro-organisms, you lose the sense of responsibility, of guilt and you just laugh.

Otherwise you get depressed, like when the gynaecologist appeared between my legs and rested his cold hand on my bony knee and said, you've got papillomavirus. The bastard caught me completely unawares. The gynaecologist and my snatch have the same brown curly hair, and when he popped up between my legs I imagined my snatch with a face like his but in miniature and the two of them yapping away at each other like a pair of poodles:

WOOF WOOF

WOOF

WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF

WOOF!

GRRRR

AUAUAUAUUUU

I went to the poodle gynaecologist because that was the one my mum went to because the previous one had grabbed her knickers and waved them around like a flag while singing "Que viva España!" and my mum's patriotic but she's got her limits so she chose a gynaecologist who barked at her instead. I went to show him my coral reef and he told me it could have spread and that if I had warts on my cervix than I might be fucked. He asked me questions like he was talking to a little girl and I answered everything like a little girl and on the way out he offered me a sweet and I took two.

ALL DONE. OUT IT GOES

The metal waste bin squeals when she presses the pedal.

WHAT? ALL DONE? JUST LIKE THAT? NOTHING LEFT INSIDE RIGHT? THE HEAD OR SOMETHING?

It's nice talking like this, with your arse agape.

NO, I GOT IT ALL. CLEAN YOURSELF UP WITH THIS AND PROMISE NOT TO PUT ANYTHING ELSE UP YOUR RECTUM

GUIDE'S HONOUR

I smile. She smiles back. Doctor, are we on the same wavelength? You've seen inside my soul. And you used a ton of lube. Did you like it? Does gel turn you on? Jeezus, it's like alien gloop. The waste bin squeals again.

POOR THING'S HAD ENOUGH

WHAT? WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

THE BIN'S KNACKERED. LISTEN. I tread on the pedal again. *IT WANTS OUT OF HERE, IT'S BEGGING FOR A HOLIDAY*

She laughs. I like it when she laughs, I love her laugh, like an angel's. Not like mine, although it's been ages since I laughed at anything. But before, when I laughed, I laughed inwardly and I suffocated. I laughed like a suicidal donkey. I never enjoyed it because I was afraid I was going to choke to death. That's why I hate being tickled. Strangled more like. But this laugh, the doctor's laugh, ay ay ay, the way she throws her head back. I wish I could make her laugh a bit more. When I get going it's hard to stop me but that killjoy the Mole has already grabbed my arm to drag me back to my cell my pad my cave my lair my battlefield. I call her the Mole because I don't know what else to call her. The bitch gets more and more squint-eyed every day. But it's not because of her squint that she doesn't look us in the eye, it's because she doesn't want to. I know people who glance at you sideways with one eye and you can tell, when they look at you with one eye you sense it. The Mole never tells us anything personal. Some of the screws relax and start chatting, they tell you about who's in and who's out or they complain that the uniform's too hot because there's no summer version and I sympathize with them. But the Mole? Not a peep, she's more of a bruiser than a talker. She can give you orders, call you by your name, smack you about, and look at Barcelona and Ulan Bator at the same time.

WHAT'S UP, MOLE?

She responds with total silence, like she's behind the window at a job centre.

I'M GOING TO NEED A NEW TOOTHBRUSH

Nothing. She's a barrel of laughs today. A real joker.

I MEAN, I KNOW YOU'RE NOT MUCH OF A TALKER BUT… NOT SO MUCH AS A GLANCE?

Here it comes. She tenses up, holds her breath, knows the million-dollar question is coming:

IS IT BECAUSE OF YOUR SQUINT OR HAVE YOU JUST NOT GOT THE BALLS?

She closes my cell door and says goodbye as she walks away. Goodbye? No beating? She must be dying for a shit or something and she's in a hurry. Well, it's been pretty good, a class day. I spent fifteen minutes with the doctor, she called me Pili, the way I like, and she smiled at me. Right? She likes me a bit, for sure, and she's seen my arse. What can I come up with tomorrow? Suddenly going blind won't swing it or going deaf either, that's my favourite excuse but I'll never get away with that. Maybe I can say my appendix is killing me. An attack of appendicitis. If that happens they have to whip it out right away. If you're going around the world on a boat you get it taken out before you set off. It's not as if I need it for anything. That's good, fuck my appendix. Pina will have to look after me and I'll have time to make more jokes and she'll laugh and we'll get to know each other, tell each other secrets, she'll have to touch me to check I'm okay and maybe one time our hands will touch by accident, then we'll touch a bit more but on purpose, we'll bring our noses together without knowing quite where to look and we'll catch our breath and then we'll kiss. Gentle at first but then hard and we'll grab each other's necks and stroke each other's faces as if we were afraid of losing each other forever. Maybe that's what will happen. That would be beautiful and I could do with some beauty. Pina Pina Pina. Does she know she has the same name as the choreographer? One of the greats. Anorexic like they all were but she's not like the rest. She smoked and drank wine and gave orders like a depressed artist with her arse clenched, and she invented a way of dancing with long dresses and long hair in the wind that everyone else has imitated but nobody does as well as her. Her thing was all about how for each word there's a movement like the deaf but adding legs and a torso. And she had that trick of repeating an action, which always looks good and takes up lots of

time when you don't know what to do. Falling once is not the same as falling a hundred times. Repetition makes a big impression at first, then people get bored then they laugh and in the end it hits them and they go wild. Lots of choreographers like that and for dancers it's tiring but it's easy too because you don't have to learn so much and it's true that you go into a kind of trance and it feels like you're not going to be able to keep going but in the end you keep going and it's magic. My favourite dance of Pina's is the one where a load of guys are touching this woman who doesn't move for ages, they stick a finger up her nose pull her ear stroke her knee, loads of hands doing things while she looks straight ahead, very still. She's been dead for a while but she still has a theatre named after her, people still dance her dances all over the places and there are even grants with her name. If it makes money it makes money, that's how it goes. Pina Bausch is a brand just like Schindler's Lifts although Christ knows why they named an elevator manufacturer after a movie about the Holocaust. I have to tell that one to the doctor, see if I can make her laugh again. I mean, maybe Pina isn't her first name and she's called Dolores and Pina's her surname. Dolores Pina. I like it. I could ask her but it feels weird now after what we've been through. Best not to ask her anything. I'll tell her about the choreographer, that's all. I can show her some of the dances. I do a perfect imitation of Café Muller, that'll make her laugh, the girl wandering about in a white nightie like a zombie, she has to see that, she'd love seeing me crashing into the walls and the chairs. I bet she'd laugh like an angel. I just need a decent excuse to see her again. I wish it was as easy as it was at the conservatory, they swallowed anything there. We made up all kinds of crap to get out of wearing our pointe shoes. When the teacher appeared at the window with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other and signalled to us to start class, we would start playing at Jurassic Park and we turned into velociraptors and tyrannosaurs and we grabbed hold of the bar with our tiny arms or bashed our foreheads against the piano. Or when she said, put your shoes on! and we all milled around in the middle of the studio and chorused back, get a move on! I remember the shooting pain in the bones of my metatarsus. The bummer with my feet is that my toes are really long like the fingers of a little hand, like eetee. The more contact surface the more pain, if I didn't have any toes they wouldn't hurt, you can't argue with that. My first pointe shoes were like the Spanish Inquisition for my feet. I went to buy them with my mum, and my mum like any good mother decided to buy them on the large side so I could grow into them and they would last longer. When I entered the room the teacher burst out laughing.

WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO, PILI, WITH THOSE CANOES ON YOUR FEET?

All the girls pissed themselves and I pretended I was laughing too but truth is I didn't think it was at

all fucking funny. I made an effort not to blush but the more I tried to hide it the worse it got. I mean, I'd been dying to put them on, dreaming about the day I would dance with my pointe shoes on and I'd be the perfect flying ballerina. But it's exactly like when you fuck for the first time and you think it's going to be amazing and it's shit, a total washout. They were pissing themselves and to save myself from more humiliation I pretended it didn't hurt, I smiled and pretended like it didn't, like it didn't hurt each time I went up into relevay and down into posay, I love it, I don't know why you're all laughing at my pointe shoes they're super-comfy, brilliant, I don't feel like I'm being dragged with bare feet up a stony slope not at all, I love doing relevay real slow and then posay real slow in my canoes, the best in the world. Relevay posay relevay posay the whole time to break the shoes in. All in French when none of the girls has a fucking clue about the language. I don't even know how to write all those words I've been repeating again and again since I was seven. The language of ballet is an oral tradition. Kwazay onfass tandoo pleeay granpleeay coodoopyay retiray passay jettay fondoo frappay rondayan grandbatman poordebra kambray sooplay sottay glissa assamblay ballotay, the odd padaysha and into your tombay padayburray glissa granjettay. Always with the stress at the end, like they were angry or surprised. The language of ballet is a weird hotchpotch of every teacher's personal onomatopoeia. Surlepong davinyon lonnydansa tootonrond. And to end, debulay debulay debulay. We all know what a debulay is, a half turn in relevay, which means you're up on your tiptoes. Half point if it's with a flat shoe, or on your tips and in first position with your legs ondayor, sticking out. In ballet you spend the whole time ondayor and with your pointe shoes nice and tight, not like mine which are fit for a trip up the Amazon. Your point shoes have to be nice and tight. Not like lotus feet so they fit in your husband's mouth but tight enough so there's no shifting about inside. And you have to cut your nails short, a badly cut nail can kill you. Some of the girls used silicon guards but that's cheating, you have to get a callous like in the old days, good old-fashioned bunions. That's why I used a rolled up stocking and put a piece of raw beef on the exposed flesh. I liked that, cold cow against the open wound. Sometimes it wasn't enough and the blood showed through the pink shiny cloth like a period that comes on all of a sudden and makes you beg for enough painkillers for a pachyderm. I know because Manuela's periods are like she's being sawn in half by some two-bit stage magician. I don't get my period, it seems like all that ballet dancing and not eating broke my menstrual cycle. I can't believe how little I've eaten for so long and how alive I am. Like drunks who live on the street drinking wine from a carton and more wine from a carton and they live longer than my grandpa Enrique, may he rest in peace. Like those guys that puff themselves up with egg-white milkshakes and lift a ton of weights every day to fill their body with new muscles and inject themselves with horse hormones and they end up with a tiny dick and a flat brain and they can't remember the seven times table. How much can a body put

up with? In here I've had to learn to appreciate food again because there's nothing better to do at mealtimes when everyone is chewing and savouring and swallowing. Even if it's mashed potato with mashed potato and a bit more mashed potato because you can never have too much mashed potato. I used to find the act of eating disgusting, now I just get bored like I do with taking a piss or having a shower. Each bite used to make me feel terrible, each mouthful pursued me like the moon pursues the earth and the earth pursues the sun. I weighed myself after I peed, after I shat, every morning, afternoon and evening, I even weighed myself in my dreams. Sometimes the scale wouldn't go down but just because it was dodgy, so I'd tap it with my foot and bam the arrow would go down, the grammes would go down, my sacrifice was confirmed and I was happy. All to dance the ballet. All for something intangible. All to land a good role in a shitty end of year show. It makes me cringe now but when you're an adolescent and things start happening to your body that you don't understand and your teacher explains that cellulitis is caused by fatty deposits and that cheese is fat, well you stop eating cheese. When the skinniest one gets chosen for the lead role, you want to be the skinniest. And when they say a bit of anorexia never did anyone any harm, you think a bit of anorexia never did anyone any harm. My tummy rumbling was a good sign. My own cells devouring my fat. I always had an arse though. That's where my body accumulates everything it can't sweat out or shit out. In my arms too. My chicken wings could feed a fair few people. Grabbing the flesh on my arm is the closest to grabbing a tit because there's nothing where my tits should be. That's good for dancing, it makes it all cheaper, you don't have to flatten anything, don't have to buy special bras that cost a fortune, bosoms are an expensive business like my granny Maruja used to say, may she rest in peace. My legs are rotated in the way a bit, even though I've done all kinds of exercises to improve my rotation the other way, and my shoulders are a bit slouchy and sad. I don't have any deltoids, what I'd give for a nice pair of deltoids. Not like ballerinas have, I don't know why when I've done every ballet move there is. I've flapped my arms around like a crow and I've held second position until I had the shakes. But I've got a good trapezius and I've got good collarbones too, prominent as if I'd swallowed a clothes hanger, people like that. And my sternocleidomastoid is nice and visible, classy. In the end most of this crap is genetic, that's why some of them have surgery, they get a prosthesis in their instep or have their labia reduced so their fannies don't look so chubby when they have to dance in their knickers. It's all the fault of that Descartes or whatever he was called with that stuff about the body as a machine and the mind as something else and people swallowed it, and then they invented shame and started pissing with the door locked and bolted. What a pity. When everyone could have pissed or shat in the town square. I like to think about those women in the middle ages with their black crowded teeth, their thighs smeared with lard, a moustache on their upper lip, a good bush between their legs, and burning rosemary to ward off evil

and attract good, living among rows of fish and sheep, with newborn babies under the table, how they pulled the babies out with one hand while they sold tomatoes with the other, peering at the beans with their eyes all screwed up because they didn't have glasses and they cleaned their hands with lemon and rinsed their muffs out with beer so they wouldn't get infected and at night they went to the pools to rest their arses in mud and they'd fall asleep in the hot water that's full of sulphur and smells like shit but is good for you. Wise slovenly women. I should be like that, a pig grunting all the time. Instead of all these words doing my head in, just grunting and nothing else. Or a robot, better, a robot. Because pigs have a shit life. Robots live like kings. I'd be a spectacular robot, no gender or any of that, solar-powered, communicating with ultrasound, killing people with a laser stare and having orgasms on demand. Here I'm surrounded by people with a chicken fillet between the legs, that queer stuff doesn't count in here. In prison they check to see if you've got a cunt or a cock and depending on what it says on the menu they put you in one building or the other. And if they can't label you Adam or Eve then an endless debate begins and you're screwed. They sent me to the prison at Alcalá de Guadaira, near home, near where it all began. Supposedly I was lucky, most people get sent to the middle of nowhere and their relatives can't visit them. They could have done that to me, that way I'd have an excuse, a reason to grab onto, to understand why the fuck nobody comes to see me. I've already forgotten the ones who were my friends. What's the point of a friend if she doesn't accept you in the dark? That's what Kurt Cobain used to say, poor bastard. But what about my parents? Mum, dad. Have you really forgotten me? Don't you ask yourself if I'm eating okay, if I'm sleeping, if I have friends, if I'm being bullied or if I've seen the light and I'm preaching the word of the Lord in the corridors? On visiting days when nobody visits me and I'm stuck alone in my room I recreate the scene of the reunion.