

Dead by Barbara Comyns?

MP: OH MY GOD I LOVE THAT BOOK! I was just thinking about that one!

KS: I had a feeling.

KS: Who are some other UK writers who you feel like you're in some kind of literary conversation with?

MP: I really love Rebecca West—*The Fountain Overflows*, that whole series. Sylvia Townsend Warner, who wrote *Lolly Willowses*. Kate Atkinson. And Richard Hughes, who wrote *A High Wind in Jamaica*, about children getting kidnapped by pirates.

KS: When you were away this past year—excellent year to skip America, by the way—did you miss it?

MP: Not at all. I missed people, and my kids, but otherwise I really loved being gone. It was a huge relief. Part of what I loved was being this totally anonymous person who made no difference in the world. I could just wander around Berlin being nobody. No one cared, I was like a ghost. I just felt euphoric about that. I couldn't speak the language, I had no idea what anyone was saying. I was just an observer. And Germans have this intense sense of privacy so they don't smile at you on the street, they don't try to interact. It was amazing.

KS: You grew up on the commune and then lived in all these small communities, and then when you were provost you lived right on campus, basically next to the Kresge dorms. Did you feel paranoid, like you couldn't pick your nose or walk around in your underwear?

MP: Totally! The Provost House was built in the sixties and it's basically a fishbowl, it's entirely surrounded by glass windows. Everyone can see in, it was completely porous and I would often come downstairs and have no idea whom I might find hanging out. There were just always people—

KS: Sometimes it was me!

MP: Yes, just people hanging out in the house all the time. When I was a little girl, after we left the commune, I decided I wanted to be the director of a space station. I wrote to Carl Sagan and told him that, and he wrote back and said, "Well, you're going to have to major in math," and I said, Okay, well, I'm not going to be the director of a space station then. But I've always felt like being the provost of Kresge was always like being the director of a space station anyway, so I got my wish!

KS: Wait, Carl Sagan wrote back?!

MP: Yeah!

KS: You've been working on these stories for so long, some are fifteen years old, but some are brand-new—the 2016 election is in it! Does it feel like relief that these stories have a home all together now?

MP: It feels like a gift. All of them [except one] have been published in different forms, so now they get to have a new life.

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## ASHLEY YEO

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