

Dear Sir,<sup>1</sup>

I am writing in advance of our meeting so you will know the progress of your shipment, which I had transported from London to France in shipping containers. I travelled in the cab of the second truck, encountering no difficulty at French or British customs.

The first container did not arrive in Paris (I'm sure you saw the headlines). When, in the suburb of Ivry, the second truck broke down, I was able to hire a pick-up to tow it to the Gare du Nord, where we were mobbed by reporters who were, thankfully, unable to pass the ticket barriers.

On the Paris-Munich train the shipment took up two luggage cars. Difficult to load as it was all of a piece, I was alarmed to see porters use crowbars, and a circular saw. I protested but was restrained so was unable to save its container and wheels, though the inner protective layers remained intact.

In Munich there were papers to complete and, due to leakage and noise, fines to pay, delaying me



for two days. I spent as much time as possible waiting on the platform with the shipment, returning to my hotel only to sleep. We drew stares, some comments, and one (thankfully inconclusive) visit from the transport police. After bribing two railway officials, we were allowed to leave the city by train.

By the time we got to Prague I could find no one willing to transport it further. I spent most of Tuesday outside the station where the shipment had been dumped. It came on to rain and I fretted for the waterproofing so, *faute de mieux*, began to drag it through the streets myself. Without wheels its base became dirty, the protective cardboard dissolving into rags. As we crossed the Karlovy Bridge pigeons showered upwards, causing crowds to gather, many of whom thought this was an artistic performance so that, when the shipment became stuck between the posts of the bridge's final tower, no one was willing to lend a hand. One man, seeing me in distress, kindly dislodged it but wanted to accompany me to my



hotel. I was able to put him off only because the shipment occupied most of my suite (I slept between two suitcase stands). Next morning I was able to travel to Budapest by truck, overpaying a driver from out of town who had not yet heard of the shipment, or of me.

It was possible to reach Belgrade by bus, the shipment having deteriorated so much that I was able to fit it into a backpack and two suitcases. On arrival I found myself minus a case (the less important one, thank god). Despite imprecations – tears even – the driver would not, or could not, produce the case. As time was of the essence, and violence promised if I did not leave, I pressed on. On the overnight coach to Sofia, I paid for an extra seat, belted the shipment in beside me, and woke to find it, warm and only slightly damp, resting against my shoulder. It had loosened and swelled in the southern heat, and by noon, in the coach's greenhouse atmosphere it burst its bands, expanding in all directions. I mewled to it, made chirping noises, coaxed it with thumb



and index finger from the floor, the ceiling, chided it into several bags, stuffed the excess into my pockets. While the driver called the police from a service station I said I needed the bathroom and, escaping through a back window, evaded arrest.

Running low on money, we hitchhiked from Sofia to Thessaloniki. Between hitches I walked, and sometimes ran, by the side of the motorway, the larger part of the shipment tied to my back, the rest in two carrier bags. I was grateful for its shade and decreased weight, only occasionally stopping, sweat dripping from the straps that bit my shoulders to wonder, should I go on? 'Do what you like,' you'd have said, as usual. As if I'd any choice. Doesn't everything in the world keep on going?

A labour of love, then, and what better than to be allowed to experience love, whatever its price? At the Greek border I gave a false name.

On the train from Thessaloniki to Athens I cradled the shipment in my lap, wrapped in



my scarf, rocking with the swaying train. We had been through so much together. Fellow passengers mistook it for a baby, or a dog.

I took a bus from Athens station with what remained in a single bag. Alighting at Monasteraki I was the victim of a purse-snatcher. I fought back, losing the bag but retaining more than half its contents.

I reached the hotel with no more than crumbs. There must have been a hole in my pocket. I retraced my steps but the ground was yellow as cake; birds might have taken them. Here's what's left in a hotel ashtray. I will keep watch over it until you join me. My eyes will not leave it for a moment.

I am in the roof bar of the Attalos Hotel awaiting your arrival, and that of your return shipment.

Yours etc, JW <sup>2,3</sup>

## Notes:

1. This letter is a work of fiction, although the author notes that she has 'done the same journey in reverse, but carrying only emotional baggage.' We're not clear how much of the baggage she still had in her possession at journey's end, but don't like to ask.

2. Joanna Walsh is a writer and illustrator. Her work has been published by *Granta*, *Tate*, *The London Review of Books*, *The White Review* and others. Her story collection, *Fractals*, is published by 3:AM Press, and her next book, *Hotel*, will be published by Bloomsbury in 2015. You can correspond with Joanna on Twitter, @badaude, where she has recently spearheaded the #readwomen2014 campaign.

3. The illustrations here are from a map of 'Europe at the Death of Charles The Great, 814', taken from *The Public Schools Historical Atlas* by Charles Colbeck. Longmans, Green; New York; London; Bombay. 1905. We do realise that this map is somewhat anachronistic in the context of Joanna Walsh's letter, but we thought it looked kind of pretty.

Dear  
10 June 2014 Athens, whole Athens.  
I am writing in advance of our meeting so you will know the progress of your packet. Too little to carry on Eurostar, I had it transported to France from London in 2 shipping containers. Travelled in the cab of the 2nd truck, countering no difficulties at French or British customs.  
The first container did not arrive in Paris (I'm sure you saw the headline.) When in suburb of Ivry, the second container truck, which had given in trouble since Calais, really broke down. Omar, of Bodysing, Camosier Quick, had the idea of fitting the shipment with wheels. He used industrial castors & welded, rather than drilled, as not to cause damage. I was able to hire a pick-up to tow it to the Gare du Nord where we were mobbed by reporters who were, fortunately, unable to pass the ticket barrier.  
On the Paris-Munich train, your shipment took up two baggage cars. Difficult to do, as it was all of one piece, I was abashed to see the porters and crewbars & circular saw. I protested but was restrained, so was unable to prevent its haphazard dismantling. The container & wheels were discarded, but the interior reflective layer remained intact.  
In Munich we changed trains without too much difficulty, though there were any papers to fill in and, due to noise & leakage, several bins to pump... as delayed for 2 days by these problems, & also because of difficulties finding a carrier for the next stage of the journey. I spent as much time as possible waiting on the platform with the shipment, returning to my hotel only to sleep the other 5 days, some connect, if one (Humbly, inconclusive) is not from the transport police. After finding two railway officials who were allowed to leave the city by train.  
By the time we got to Prague I could find no one willing to transport it further. I spent 4 of Tuesday on the pavement outside the station where the shipment had been damaged. I came on to train and I fretted for the waterproofing so found the man, began to at through the streets myself. Without wheels it was become dirty, the protection my crowd to gather, many of whom thought this was an artistic performance so that the shipment became stuck between the two parts of the bridge and lower, rough edged, to one was willing to lead a hand. One man, seeing me in such distress, kindly lodged it, but would not accompany me to my hotel. I was able to put the off, as the shipment occupied most of my suite. The principal part took the lead while I slept between two suitcase stands. How could it go on? The next morning I was able to leave by truck, occupying a driver from out of town who had not heard of the shipment, or of me.  
It was possible to reach Bratislava from Budapest only by bus. The rain network the shipment having deteriorated. By now I was able to get it into a backpack & suitcase. I crossed Bratislava by train to the station. Purchasing the train was an, cancelled, I returned my ticket to the coachstop where I found myself man, or slave (the last important one that god!) I waited all night at the train but where spite imprecation teamwork - the drivers would not, or could not, produce the ticket. As time wore of, reverence, and violence provoked of led not being on. On the overnight bus to Sofia I paid for an extra seat, belted it in side me & was to find it warm & now only slightly damp, resting against my side. It had loosed & swelled in the southern heat and gave off a sour smell! Under no more unpleasant, though the passengers moved down the bus. By noon, in coach's greenhouse atmosphere, it burst its bands & expanded in all directions. My Sir! Sorry madam!! I moved to it, made chirping noises, invited it in to several St, stuffed the excess into my pockets. While the driver called the police from once station, I pretended to need the bathroom &, escaping through a wall back down, we decided arrest.  
Running low on money we hitchhiked from Sofia to Thessaloniki. When they saw the 2 campers most obliged refused to pick me up, but one gave me a lift in a van with a cattle truck. Between lurches, I walked & sold from on the back of the motorway, the large part of the shipment tied to my back. He rested 2 net bags. I was grateful for its shade & decreased weight & only occasionally stopped at drying from the storm that bit my shoulders to ash, why me? What gave you right to accord me so heavy a burden? I melted - melted with AT? Fate? God? You? My gave only human. A worst being paid? But never any mobile signal off the line found a pamphlet I'd have called. Do what you say you said as usual. As if I'd my knee!! If I'd given up where would you be? If you, or, where would that leave me? Not here... Why waste my break, having I would of. Doesn't everything in the world keep on going? A lot of love then, it's not better than allowed to experience love & state the price?  
To calm myself I made every effort under my shoulder blades. Instead of angrily, what not exist I folded the garment & continued to walk. Good time to have been a copy to copy. I did! At the Greek border I gave a false name.  
The train from Thessaloniki to Athens I cradled in my lap, wrapped in my scarf. We kept through so much together. Yellow-passenger mistook it for a baby in a dog. Lost the bus from Athens station, what remained of the shipment in a single bag. Getting off almost lost, I was the victim of a pure random but forgot back, sorry the bag but runs more than 1/2 in. I'm better.