

VERSOPOLIS FIVE

The Machine Girl's Testament  
*Maskinflickans Testamente*

Ida Linde

Translated from the Swedish by Irene Ömark Hall

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*It gives emerging European poets  
the chance to reach an audience beyond  
the boundaries of the language they write in  
by translating and publishing their poems  
and inviting them to perform at festivals.*

## The Loneliness of the Penalty Taker

The year was 1998, or perhaps 1999? And the location was a small theatre in a northern Swedish coastal-town. Four to five girls, and maybe a fuzzy guy as well, read their own poems with fear in their voices. The exception was Ida. Ida Linde read with a sure voice, making contact with the 10-15 listeners. I don't remember a single line from this occasion, but I remember why I went. The contrast with the culture of motors and sports in my small-town hole was deafening and beautiful. There and then I realised that poetry could be something you worked with, were forced to relate to.

With time, the people who read poetry on that stage became artists, teachers, and published poets. It began, as everyone predicted, with Ida Linde's debut. I read it when it came out in 2006 — and understood nothing. The collection *Maskinflickans Testamente* (*The Machine Girl's Testament*) seemed to be about motors and sports; more specifically, about motorbikes and football. Were these subjects for poetry too?

Much later, I heard about Ida Linde's footballing history and the metal parts that she had had, after many injuries, surgically inserted into her knee. Perhaps it's from here that the poetic 'I', alias 'the machine girl', should be understood?

On the book's cover, a deserted football field is drenched in spotlights. And in the background, a lush deciduous tree with a wide trunk. None of the birch trees mentioned in the poems, but instead an obviously southern-Swedish tree. The parables from the world of football are, however, confidently deployed.

Linde uses them to untangle the great incomprehensibility of life. No one is ever so lonely and vulnerable as when taking a penalty kick. 'one will never experience / as many World Cups / as one thinks during one's lifetime.' And further: 'The final's ninety minutes plus extra time / is nothing other than waiting for death.'

The father of the poetic 'I' is someone who always runs around with red cards, reminding players that they only play on sufferance.

One day he dies, and the machine girl, who harboured a desire to die first, is overcome with grief. She becomes gloomy and begins to imagine the home help who will eventually find her lifeless. The book's opening poem is a kind of motto, which covers all this melancholy and original desire.

Today, Ida Linde teaches at one of Sweden's most prestigious writing schools. Behind her is a series of critically acclaimed works. But long before that, in her youth, she lived like me in the city of Umeå. Opposite her old apartment lies an easily undersized gravelled area, squeezed between the low tenements. This is the place itself: Ida Linde's original football field.

'Others have been added to it, been layered over it: Gamliavallen, Malmö Stadion, Camp Nou, but when I write, it's always that one I see,' she's said.

Behind one of the goals are two birch trees. They look harmonious. The atmosphere in Ida Linde's opening poem doesn't come automatically. To get to the loneliness of the penalty taker, you have to take a run from the penalty spot, close your eyes, and read the opening lines of *Maskinflickans testamente* with a sure voice.

Only then will you understand how this little area of gravel can be a stage for one person's sorrows, hopes and ambitions, all of them.

*The Loneliness of the Penalty Taker*

A birch  
just sloughed its bark:  
White and vulnerable.  
I give it to the home help.  
  
And I am the Machine Girl.  
We are all going to die but I will die first.

Erik Jonsson

Det är jag som är Maskinflickan.  
Alla ska dö men jag ska dö först.

Min bror Sören går på stadens alla fotbollsmatcher  
och samlar pantburkar.  
Han åkte till Stockholm en gång  
även om ingen i efterhand kan förstå hur det gick till.  
”Det var en bra match den där gången i Stockholm”  
brukar Sören säga.



Sörens röst är svår att höra  
som att det alltid faller snö mellan honom  
och hans omgivning.

När tränare Stig går längs sidlinjen  
ropar Sören efter honom  
”Stig! Stigge! Stickan!”

Sören säger till kvinnan bredvid att  
”Stig, det är en bra kille han”  
och fortsätter att leta.

En dag ska Sören panta alla burkar och bli rik.  
Då ska han köpa en present till Stig  
eftersom Stig gör ett sådant bra jobb.

It is me who is the Machine Girl.  
We are all going to die but I will die first.

Sören my brother goes to all the city's football matches  
and collects empty cans for the deposit.  
He went to Stockholm once  
even if no one afterwards can understand how he did it.  
'It was a good match that time in Stockholm'  
Sören would say.



Sören's voice is difficult to hear  
as if it is always snowing between him  
and his surroundings.

When Coach Stig walks down the sideline  
Sören cries out after him:  
'Stig! Stigge! Stickan!'

Sören tells the woman next to him that  
'Stig, he's a good guy'  
and carries on with searching.

One day Sören will get the deposit back on all the cans and be rich.  
Then he will buy a present for Stig  
because Stig does such a good job.

Det är jag som är Maskinflickan.  
Alla ska dö men jag ska dö först.

Jag kan baka bröd. Jag läser fort. Jag har en tatuering.  
Jag har två frågor:

1. Vad kommer ni att göra med min smutsvätt?  
Kommer någon plocka upp mina trosor,  
trycka dem mot näsan och säga  
”Gud vad jag saknar Maskinflickan”?

2. Vad kommer ni att göra med mina färskvaror?  
Kan man dricka en död kvinnas mjölk?



Det var far som ordnade arbete åt Sören.  
Sören skulle ignorera den skylt han alltid noga  
respekterat:

”Gräsmattan får ej beträdas  
beivras med utestängning från allsvenska matcher”

Sören skulle lägga ut de vita vackra linjerna,  
begränsa spelarna och han tittade rakt på mig och sa  
att det är som snö  
och att det fyller samma funktion.



It is me who is the Machine Girl.  
We are all going to die but I will die first.

I can bake bread. I read fast. I have a tattoo.  
I have two questions:

1. What will you do with my dirty laundry?  
Will someone pick up my knickers,  
press them to their nose and say  
'God how I miss the Machine Girl'?

2. What will you do with my perishables?  
Can one drink a dead woman's milk?



It was father who got Sören his job.  
Sören would ignore the sign he had always  
so carefully obeyed:

'Keep off the pitch. Trespassers will be prohibited  
from attending national matches'

Sören would paint the beautiful white lines  
confining the players and he looked at me straight and said  
it is like snow  
and they have the same function.

Det var första gången han gick över en fotbollsplan.

Huvudet sökte sig bort från gräset  
mot det välbekanta järnet.

Tinningen mötte maskinen.  
Far sa att blodet snabbt flöt ut över sidlinjen.  
Inga fotbollsplaner har rosa streck.



När kistan blir buren längs åkrarna  
ligger jorden med ansiktet vänt uppåt.

På begravningen sa far  
”Den Gud älskar dör ung”

It was the first time he walked across a football field.

His head sought out the well-known iron  
away from the grass.

The temple bone met the machine.  
Father said the blood quickly poured over the sideline.  
No football fields have pink lines.



When the coffin is carried alongside the fields  
the earth is lying face up.

At the funeral father said  
'Those who God loves die young'

Jag tog burkarna. I sju dagar stod jag på Konsum  
och pantade.

För pengarna köpte jag en present  
som tränare Stig inte ville ha.

Stig ville knulla Maskinflickan  
”För att se hur döden ser ut”  
och jag tänkte att döden ser ut som min bror Sören.

I utbyte mot samlag spelar alla spelare i sorgeband  
för min bror.  
Hemmalaget vinner med fyra mål mot ett  
i säsongens sista match.



Jag är tvungen att berätta för far om tatueringen  
eftersom han ska identifiera mig på bårhuset.

”Nej, det där är inte min dotter  
ty hon har inga tatueringar”

och jag ska ligga ensam under stenen.

Tatueringen föreställer två träd  
och en människa som vänder träden ryggen.

I took the cans. For seven days I returned  
the cans for their deposit.  
For the money I bought a present  
that Coach Stig did not want.

Stig wanted to screw the Machine Girl  
'To see what Death looks like'  
and I thought death looked like my brother Sören.

In exchange for intercourse all the players wear mourning bands  
for my brother.  
The home team wins with four goals to one  
in the last match of the season.



I have to tell father about my tattoo  
because he will be the one identifying me at the morgue.

'No, that is not my daughter  
because she has no tattoos'

and I will lie alone under the headstone.

The tattoo is of two trees  
and a person whose back is turned towards them.

Min far är fotbollsdomaren  
som alltid springer runt  
med det röda kortet i handen.

En ständig påminnelse till spelarna  
att de bara spelar på nåder.

När jag ska sova ramsar jag ord i huvudet,  
detta har jag och min far gemensamt.  
Men när jag ber honom tala om träden  
är han tyst,  
och jag talar om björken utanför mitt fönster,  
att den är högre än själva huset  
och att när jag sitter vid köksbordet virar  
testamentet sig runt stammen.



Jag har sagt till min far  
att man aldrig får uppleva  
så många världsmästerskap  
som man tror under en livstid.

Finalens nittio minuter plus tillägg  
är inget annat än väntan på döden.

My father is the football ref  
who is always running around  
with the red card in his hand.

A constant reminder to the players  
that they are only playing by his grace.

When I am going to sleep I jingle words in my head  
I have this in common with my father.  
But when I ask him to tell about the trees  
he is silent,  
and I talk about the birch outside my window,  
say it's taller than the house itself  
and that when I sit at the kitchen table the testament  
winds its way around the trunk.



I have told my father  
that one will never experience  
as many world cups  
as one thinks during one's life time.

The final's ninety minutes plus extra time  
is nothing other than waiting for death.

Min far talar ofta om Gary Lineker.  
En hel karriär utan att någonsin få sitt namn noterat  
på varken rött eller gult kort.  
Jag frågar vad Gary Lineker var så rädd för  
men far vill inte svara.

Den enda sonen är död och ansiktet blir ett annat,  
det som väntat bakom träder fram.  
Jag ser en ny åder på min fars kropp, från halsen  
och vidare ut  
som ett floddelta över bröstet.  
Blodet försöker finna en väg förbi sorgen.



Han dör en söndag.  
Ett träd faller, till synes utan anledning, över honom.  
Stadens fotbollsdomare är död  
och ingen spelare vill kommentera dödsfallet i tidningen.  
Alla vet att det är Gud som gjort det.  
Min far har bara levt på nåder.



My father often talks about Gary Lineker.  
A whole career without ever having had his name  
on a red or yellow card.  
I ask what Gary Lineker was so afraid of  
but father won't answer.

His only son is dead and his face becomes another,  
what has been waiting behind comes forward.  
I see a new vein on my father's body  
spread from the neck down  
like a river delta across his chest.  
The blood tries to find a way past the sorrow.



He dies on a Sunday.  
A tree falls over him for no apparent reason.  
The football ref is dead  
and no player wants to comment on his death in the paper.  
Everyone knows that God did it.  
My father only lived by his grace.

Åren lägger sig som extra ringar runt iris  
och sorgerna ändrar skärpan i pupillen.

På kyrkogården står stenarna resta i givakt  
för dem som levde med ansiktet uppåt.



Det röda längst in  
spricker ibland ut över ögat.  
Allt eftersom lägger träden nya ringar  
runt stammarna, jorden eroderar  
och ännu en bonde säljer sin mark.

”Tiden går fort när folk dör”  
säger hemsamariten innan hon går ut i köket.

Det är jag som är Maskinflickan.

The years settle themselves like extra rings around the iris  
and the sorrows alter the acuity of the pupil.

At the cemetery the headstones stand to attention  
for those who lived facing the sky.



The red epicentre  
sometimes bursts across the eye.  
Eventually the trees grow new rings around their trunks,  
the earth erodes  
and yet another farmer sells his land.

‘Times move quickly when people die’  
says the Samaritan home help before she goes out to the kitchen.

It is me who is the Machine Girl.

Jag ligger i sängen  
och hör hur hon stuvar om mjölken i kylskåpet.  
Vi talar sällan med varandra.

Jag borde säga till hemsamariten  
att vi aldrig blir så rädda för döden  
att vi inte dör.



Hemsamariten kommer en gång i veckan.  
Vi vet båda att det är hon  
som kommer att hitta mig  
och att det är hennes arbete.

Jag skulle kunna ha tagit arbete i skogen.

Jag som överlevde alla  
kommer ihåg att jag föddes som motorcykel,  
att jag var odödlig  
men att min olja byttes ut mot blod.

I lie in bed  
hear her arranging the milk in the refrigerator.  
We seldom talk to one another.

I should tell the home help  
that we are never so afraid of death  
that we won't die.



The home help comes once a week.  
We both know that she is the one  
who will find me  
and that this is her job.

I could have got a job in the forest.

I who survived everyone  
remember that I was born a motorbike,  
that I was immortal  
but that my oil was replaced with blood.

Hör ni hur barnen försöker lära sig maskinsånger  
på skolgården?

Här ligger alla papper i ordning.  
Kylvarornas bäst-före-datum sträcker sig  
genom en vecka i tiden.  
Kläderna ska till frälsningsarmén.  
Mina smutsiga trosor har jag knölat ihop,  
jag lägger dom här vid fotändan. Släng dom.

Jag kommer att ställa mig upp igen  
när kugghjulen satts på plats.



Jag är Maskinen.  
Och Gud med sina stora lysande och oljiga fingrar  
plockar isär mig. Bit för bit.  
Tvättar varje skruv och mutter.  
Lägger de alla på ett vitt lakan.

Do you hear the children trying to learn machine songs  
in the school yard?

Here all the papers are in order.  
The best-by-date of the perishables extends  
a week ahead.  
The clothes will go to the Salvation Army.  
I have bundled my dirty knickers,  
I put them here by the foot of my bed. Throw them away.

I will rise again  
when the cog wheels are put in place.



I am the Machine.  
And God with his big fingers glowing with oil  
picks me apart. Bit by bit.  
Cleans every nut and bolt.  
Places them all on a white sheet.

