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Lifting The Virgin

Richard Gwyn

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LIFTING THE VIRGIN

Her job is to keep the church clean, arrange the flowers, change the candles. At midday she cooks a meal for the priest. But her main concern is the well-being of the alabaster statues, especially the virgin. Last week, she tells me, they had to lift the statue of the virgin, move her awhile. "You can't imagine how much she weighed," she smiles, as though discussing a defiant but beloved child. The wind has stopped. Everything is quiet. I walk with the priest to the village bar. Afterwards, in the square, the children gather round, playing and chatting, as though they had known me all their lives. I am a stranger, who has walked into this tiny place and soon will wander on. The woman in the church, the priest, the sky, the children, the little square with its tree and two swings. A conspiracy of nouns. But the effect is of a flow between one thing and the next, on a journey that has lost all points of reference and offers only the salvation of continuity. Lifting this life-size model of the virgin stands out like a challenge to all that is unchanging in a village on a plain. She was so heavy. You can't imagine.