

# Lethologica

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One thing we have to forgive our family for is that we age. They remember what we used to look like. Those photos where we had more hair and less fat. Sometimes I'm ashamed to let them look. Over decades we get to know how fragile and vulnerable an organism humans are. Teeth are just naked bones in our mouths. Skin is a tablet for every mark. We are tissues and nerves wired together in an arrangement that is temporary by design. No wonder, then, when scanned by drones and satellites, toxins flood our bloodstream, viruses enter the network, and we are conditioned to act contrary to our nature.

We are trained to just take their hatred, and, worse, to inflict it on ourselves, eating the candy bar the general hands us before committing genocide. "No panic, please," Mladic said to a Bosnian refugee child, in a clip later broadcast around the world. "Don't be afraid. No one will harm you." Turns out the only thing policing us was fear. Once you look into the dead-eyed stare of human cruelty while your city burns around you, your chemistry is changed. Chauvin's knee on a man's neck. Every American agrees we should be able to go to the grocery store, do something as simple as walking and eating, without being killed. Do you think the complicit are haunted too? "Perhaps," I said. "But perhaps not." And added, "That's the horror.

The real horror.” Bearing witness, Vienna-born Henry Kreisel in *The Betrayal* traces the shadow of the Holocaust’s attenuated fingers reaching like a scene from F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* into the snowfields of Alberta.

With most of our lives behind us, we have to envision the end of things. A search for the origin of regret turns up results of 3:33 a.m., where the memory of fumbled ambitions and laughable fantasies lives. Our stories overflow their molds. We have words in the blood. A search for the origin of language takes us to the ruined city of Pompeii, where graffiti dating back to the first century scrawls out an ampersand, the character for “and.” Hair and nails don’t grow after death, so we’d better get working on our goodbyes. We procrastinate in order to keep on living, like lethologica, the attempt to retrieve a word from memory, that feeling of, let me give this just one more try.

