




Untranslatable

FRAGILE THINGS

WORDS BY KAYLA DEAN



The odd part about fragile things is that they often have no word in English. The Galician language calls the line that sunlight draws on the floor *raxeira*. This profound sense of beauty can't be translated into a single word. *Raxeira* must be explained to be understood. Even then we still can't know the true meaning without being a part of the culture that produced it.

Virginia Woolf once wrote that "the urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low." Woolf's understanding of words as tangible things that can only get so close to the truth makes what we see out the kitchen window or on the drive to work significant. Those liminal spaces between the beauty we all know and the words we have to express make our lives more meaningful.

Like the word *kawaakari*, which is Japanese for the gleam of light on a river's surface at the end of the day. Or *mangara*, Swedish for the path-like reflection of the moon on water. In English, these states of being might simply be light shining upon the ocean, but in other languages the time of day determines how we understand this light. The gleam doesn't just correspond to the numbers on your watch: it's the underlying emotion of the day as it passes.

What about that nostalgia and mourning for a past we can never return to? We understand this as homesickness, but the Welsh language conceives of *hiraeth*, which can't be translated into any language. Portuguese has *saudade*, the longing for someone or something you love that is lost. These words may seem disparate, but they may all be trying to say the same thing. It's hard to know.

Each language has its own individual beauty, but they all have spaces where emotions don't match the words we have to express them. The struggle to find words that perfectly express thought is universal. And sometimes we are at a loss for words. Whether this is through tragedy or the sublime beauty of daily life, the images that make solitary moments so meaningful resist translation.

Maybe there isn't space to incorporate these words into your vocabulary; someone might look at you strange for referring to *dietrologia*, the belief that there are other dimensions that underlie reality, that the truth is more complicated than it seems. But it doesn't matter when you answer the call to embrace the beauty of your life, understanding that the most meaningful moments of living resist paraphrase.

Sometimes it's the fragile things that make life beautiful, like the swath of sunlight that pours through the windows in the morning. In the living room, its distended patches illuminate rungs on the stairwell and extend onto the floor. I know it will be gone soon, but for a single instant the shadow of tree branches wavers on the gray carpet. When the wind shivers their branches, the incandescent patch of sunlight moves, too.

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