

# LITERASEA

The EUF Literary Journal



Issue 1: Human Behaviour

06/24



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# PREFACE

## Editing & Publishing Team

Dear readers,

we are delighted to present to you the very first issue of our literary journal *Literasea* – a literary magazine that hopefully will serve as a platform for creative experimentation for students and staff of EUF in the future.

Our Editing & Publishing team consists of students from the Kultur-Sprache-Medien degree program. Our diverse degree program offers us plenty of opportunities to work on different projects, which is how this journal came about. Over the past few months, we have worked hard to not only hold the first printed edition of *Literasea* in our hands but also to have a website filled with literary content.

For most team members, this is the first project of its kind. It involves many hours of joint work, accompanied not only by laughter, but also by occasional discussions and many brainstorming sessions. There were many decisions to be made to end up with a cohesive journal.

We now hold the first issue of *Literasea* in our hands and couldn't be prouder to present to you the German and English texts of numerous authors and artists.

We hope you enjoy reading and discovering *Literasea*!

Your Editing & Publishing Team

# PREFACE

## Creative Writing Team

Most of the writers in this first issue of *Literasea* are part of my Creative Writing class. This semester, the class was almost exclusively a workshop. That means the sole purview of our weekly meetings was to share our responses to a fellow writer's work. A workshop's job is to provide feedback and guidance which, in turn, supports the writer in their next writing phase of the project. Workshops can be a daunting, difficult, but always a dynamic place, as all writers learn to give and receive feedback. The writer at the centre must learn to be workshopped as much as the writers sitting in the weekly circle must learn to workshop.

The issue's theme strikes me as particularly perfect given large swathes of our workshops this semester were spent discussing characters. Possible backstories were sketched, motivations excavated and debated, the hunt for the *why* a fervent, ongoing one. When you read the stories, I like to think you might see both the roots and fruits of these conversations and excavations. And then there are the poems, a whole sea of them, words strung together so carefully, stitched so deliberately with full stops and commas or allowed to crest enjambment's wave. Words swimming perfectly in synchronisation, words I promise you will return to, time and time again, and each time, see something new in.

I am inordinately proud of the work that has gone into creating this first issue. Please, enjoy it.

Liv Hambrett, May 2024.



# ATLANTIC

a poem by Lukas Bartsch

Drag me under the surface.  
Keep me there in waters deep.  
Flooding me with your conscience  
crashing down on me in waves  
drown me in all that you are  
till my heart turns to amber.  
Then as the moon calls the tide,  
spit me out back to the shore.



*Illustration by Jehan Ammar*

# DEBT

a poem by Lukas Bartsch

I

Deep in the mid of darkest night  
appeared to me a spectre bright.  
Floating there suspended up high  
mouth ajar in lone mournful cry:  
*Ah! Be damned you, too cold – too cold  
is thy plane for us Spirits old.*

II

Then rightly frightened did I deem,  
this vision can't be naught but dream.  
Merely a nightly delusion  
could explain this strange intrusion.  
Steady, steady! I told my heart,  
ere thundering you rip apart!

III

Yet the apparition remained.  
Thus, my fear returned and chained  
me anew to my wooden bed  
draped now in icecold creeping dread.  
And through the shutter coldly shone  
moonlight on floating rags and bone.

IV

As suddenly the shutters shut  
a cackling laughter froze my blood.  
Emanating from rotten head,  
its bluish hue now crimson red.  
Summoning then from whence it dwells –  
the lapping flames of fiery hells.

V

*Mortal! I have risen to claim  
the embers of thy lonely flame  
which you had promised in return  
for thy love avoiding her urn.  
Ah! So now down – down we shall go.  
Come freely or I make it so!*

VI

Unholy demon, ghastly son of hell,  
hear me now! Never did I tell  
the devil he may claim my soul!  
Never shall I offer this toll!  
For I prayed to the angels above.  
That they may in their mercy save my love.

VII

*Pray – pray you did but not to God.  
Did you, fool, never deem it odd  
that the answer came from below?  
For the angel that heard thy woe  
was my father, fair King of Fire,  
The Lord of Flies, Archangel, Sire!*



# DURIAN

a short story by Luc Salinger

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

Cathy had disheveled hair. Her cotton clothing was riddled with little holes and patches. She was greasy and she smelled like a dirty damp rag left to simmer outside in the heat of a summer's day. I didn't exactly hate her, but she wasn't a person I would want to hang out with or be close to in any way. Foul odor aside, being near Cathy would tank your reputation immediately. As if she had a disease that you could contract just by opening your mouth when standing near her.

'See that girl over there? You have to make her invite you to her place.'  
Maddie was pointing at Cathy.

We were leaning against the concrete wall of the school building, our eyes darting over to the old wooden bench where a girl sat by herself. Immediately, I felt as if bile was just waiting to come out. Like most games, truth or dare perverts the longer it goes on. The desire to pay someone back for what they made you do and the need, almost in a moral sense, to go through with demands because you have inflicted so much pain and shame on the other person; that was what kept the game going. I had made Maddie drink a bottle filled with toilet water from the boy's restroom, so it sort of put the onus on me to do whatever she wanted, even if, arguably, Cathy is more disgusting than the dirtiest toilet there has ever been.

'A dare is a dare. Don't be a wuss. And tomorrow, tell me what kind of disgusting rat hole she lives in,' she said.

So off I went, taking one last deep breath of fresh air before I got into the vicinity of the garbage girl. She saw me approaching and I slowly waved at her.

I actually had no idea how to make her invite me to her house. Maddie must have thought Cathy was so desperate for any social contact, it would be just a matter of asking her and she would say an emphatic, yes! Maddie really knows how some people tick.

Cathy and I went to Pinecrest, a neighbourhood which my parents had always talked badly about, saying every house there was dilapidated. Not just them. It made headlines in newspapers and there had even been a documentary about it on TV once. Living conditions there were "inhumane" and "criminal" it said. The multi-story buildings there had issues with bursting pipes, mouldy ceilings, water outages, all the stuff that would make you want to move out, but people in those apartments just couldn't, for whatever reason. Maybe they were too stupid to realize what kind of shithole they live in or they didn't have the money to look for something better. When we went to the neighbourhood, walking past the uncut lawns and the trash bags scattered in front of the houses, I hoped that Cathy would at least exceed my expectations insofar as that she wouldn't live in one of the notorious apartments. Then again, maybe they just looked bad, ugly and not cared for on the outside. Honestly? I desperately hoped so,

because they really did look disgusting and stepping inside of them seemed like something I really didn't want to do.

'I have to warn you, my place isn't exactly in good condition right now,' Cathy said as she turned her keys to open the door.

We were on the seventh floor of the building and the staircase had a musky, pungent odour to it, like urine, that made me almost puke. I hoped that at least inside her apartment it would smell better, but once she opened her door, it was worse. I don't think I could attempt to describe it, because every scent description would need to refer to something else to get across how it smells. It just smelled uniquely bad, horrific, awful.

It was dark. A lightbulb that hung on a string dangled in the air, shining light on a kitchen island. The counter was scattered with plastic wrappers, dirty plates and a thin layer of grease that made the light reflect in a nice way. Cathy entered the apartment and, as she stepped foot inside, her feet were scooting away glass bottles that laid on the ground. They made a wave of sharp tinkling sounds, as one bottle smacked against the other.

'Sorry, my mom is a drunk,' Cathy said as we both walked towards the kitchen.

My eyes darted around the sea of empty bottles on the floor, trying to take the situation in. An idea was niggling.

She opened a cupboard. 'You want something to drink?'

I tried to play it as casually as I could. 'Oh, you must have wine here then or something, right? What does your mom drink?'

She looked at me incredulously. ‘Um... I think I have some vodka here somewhere.’

I had never drunk hard alcohol before. I wasn’t allowed to, so the prospect seemed too enticing.

‘That would be nice!’ I said as I waited for her to reach for the bottle of vodka that was stashed underneath the kitchen sink and two glasses from a cabinet where the bottom hinge was completely ripped off, making it dangle in the air. Cathy filled the two glasses to the brim with vodka and set one of the glasses in front of me on the counter.

‘Just straight vodka?’

She gave me a weird look, as if I said something stupid. ‘Do you want to add something to it?’ She took her own glass and quickly drained it, as if it was a cold glass of water.

Hesitantly, I took the glass she had prepared for me and tried to drink it, but my face immediately scrunched up by the horrific taste. It tasted like poison. She looked my way and began to cackle.

‘What’s wrong? You don’t like it?’

‘It tastes terrible!’

She reached for the bottle and poured herself another glass. ‘P-Pussy...’ she slurred with a sly smile.

Now mad, I gritted my teeth and emptied my own glass. A strange warmth was filling my lungs, and I felt a burning taste that went further than my mouth. I coughed, which prompted her to laugh at me again.

'Fuck you.' I grunted, trying to act tough, but I couldn't stop myself from beaming a little.

She laughed even harder. 'F-Fuck you too!' She said it mockingly, grinning from ear to ear and then pressing her lips on the rim of her glass again.

After we had emptied the bottle, she got another one and we just began laughing together. I didn't even notice anymore how bad the apartment smelled or how it looked. I just had fun as we were cracking jokes. She brought out a packet of cookies, too, which we occasionally dipped inside our glasses and laughed about how bad it tasted.

'You know what, you are more fun to be around than I thought.'

Her face was red. 'Th- thank you so much!' She took another sip of her glass. 'You are the first real friend I have ever had. I am so happy right now.'

I just laughed. 'You see me as a friend?' I sipped from my glass again.

By that point, she was completely wasted. She put her glass down.

'Of course!' Then she looked at me and her eyes were glistening. 'Why wouldn't I? Nobody has ever been so nice to me.'

She got closer to me and I could smell her vodka breath as she wrapped her arms around me.

I stood in shock, my arms dangling to my sides. 'Nice to you? What did I do?'

She hugged me tighter. 'Just everything. You are nice to me. You don't make fun of me. You don't make fun of the place I live in. You don't make fun of my clothes...' She continued to melt into me as I felt an incredible sense of disgust wash over me. Not just because Cathy was now hugging me

and she seemed not to have washed herself in a week. No, it was disgust with myself.

‘Yeah... sure...’ I murmured and gently wrapped my arms around her too.

‘I just wish you would’ve approached me sooner.’

I didn’t have the heart to tell her about the dare or anything, about how disgusting I had always thought she was or how much shit I talked behind her back. Even while being completely drunk, I wasn’t brave enough to do so. I just stood there, letting her hug me until she let go. She looked at my slightly parted lips with a completely flushed face.

‘Can I kiss you?’

The next day at school was horrible. I didn’t know a hangover could hurt my head this much. Cathy didn’t come to school at that day, and I totally understood why. I got annoyed by every tiny thing. Even Maddie’s enthusiasm as she kept on teasing me, trying to make me tell her about Cathy and what I did.

‘Honestly, I can’t remember.’ I told her as I kept my hands on my head like a wise monkey.

‘You’re kidding right? Not even a tiny detail?’ She gave me a look of suspicion. ‘Are you sure you even did the dare like I asked you?’

‘I did.’

‘Got any proof?’

My mind wandered, trying to find anything. ‘Nope, no proof.’

‘Geez, I should have told you to take a picture or something. You could just lie to me right now. Don’t you think it’s unfair? You saw me drink the toilet water right in front of you and you won’t even give me anything to laugh at now? You’re such a terrible friend.’

‘Pick a better dare next time,’ I said. My head felt like it was being stung by hundreds of hornets.

‘No, no. This one was perfect. You just messed it up. You have to do it again.’

‘Fine, whatever,’ I slurred as I lay my head on my school table, taking a deep breath of air.

I felt sick.

# PROLOGUE I

an extract from a novel project by Myra Sophia Dedekind

The day evil died, screams filled the air. Cries of defeat and destruction. Shouts of happiness and victory. The menace hovering over earth had been defeated. No more lives would be sucked away. No more creatures had to quiver in fear of being suddenly torn from their world. Their children could dream and awaken once again.

Yes, screams filled the air and with them spread power. The nightmare's soul had been released from its body. It disappeared to the place where all conscious must one day end their voyage. As evil as the soul had been in the eyes of the living, after death it would be sucked away as any other, ceasing to exist, leaving nothing but the pure spirit, the energy of life. It would spread through the world becoming the fuel for the newly born that would always continue to appear. Earth was a planet full of spirit. Not all could sense it. But it blessed each and every living thing.

However, the spirit balance had been disrupted. The cause was now defeated. Their sacrifices had been great. But little did they know it was just beginning. As the nightmare stole spirit from where it belonged, the balance of life fell into disarray. With its death the stolen force was finally unshackled, exploding into the atmosphere, racing to fill the voids its theft had once created. Masses of spirit washed over the earth. But instead of giving life, it had now turned fatal. As cheers of celebration echoed through the world, the lives of countless new and unborn were sapped. Only the



strongest could survive. Only a born spirit wielder had a chance to withstand this force.

And so the next generation was born. The smallest in history. The greatest in history. For power was the gift of all who survived.

### **Author's note**

A few years ago, the question came to my mind of what happens after the main villain dies. Would it be simply a happy ending? What would the fallout be? In my novel *Beyond Zero* (working title) I began to, and continue to, explore this question. Prologue I describes the day on which the main villain threatening the story's people died and the immense casualties that immediately followed. It sets the background from which the story and its society is built and gives the first insight into the trauma that any and all characters have experienced or inherited.

The novel explores the first 20 years following day zero and will likely span over three books. Its genre is Sci-Fi.

# THE BREAKING OF A SOUL

a poem by Myra Sophia Dedekind

I see her lips move. The sound doesn't reach me. I don't want to hear. Not now. Not ever.

'Gerel.'

What a strange name. I'm sure it's not mine.  
You named me the moon. You gave me my shine.

'Gerel.'

I refuse, shut my eyes, my ears, all my senses drowned out.  
All that stays is darkness. My light has gone out.

'Gerel, listen to me!'

Nothing is here, nothing is real. This a dream. There is nothing to fear.

'Gerel, you have to stop.'

My sun is at home, she is safe and sound.  
And when I return, my light will be found.

'Gerel.'

You wouldn't leave me. I won't let you go.  
Think of the baby, your upcoming show.

'Gerel, she's gone!'

The words sink in and I lose my hold.  
Why?

## PROLOGUE: LUCY'S EULOGY

an extract from a novel project by Jule Heyen

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

If this were a movie, I think, it would be raining.

In the movies Lucy and I had watched together the weather always matched the proceedings of the moment: sunshine for seemingly never-ending happy days, storms coincidentally breaking just as the big fight is resolved, and rain for every funeral. Not here, however, and thus I make my way along the lonely path over the graveyard with the bright sun shining and no rain to wash away my tears.

I twist my shoulders self-consciously, aware of how constrained they are in my dress, resisting the urge to swash away my veil. There are other groups of mourners here, too close for me to forget about them, but not so close that I could take comfort in being part of their group. If I stumble now, I think, would they run over and catch me, or would they simply watch me fall from afar?

*'Long black dress, veil... Don't you think that's all a bit... over the top?' I had asked Lucy once. 'What's next, mascara tears?'*

*'Come on, you only get to go to my funeral once, at least try to look appropriately dramatic!' She paused for a moment. 'Mascara tears aren't a bad idea actually.'*

Flower petals fall as I continue my progression. I make my way from the gate to the very back of the graveyard to the lonely coffin waiting for me, waiting to be buried, waiting. I grip the single peony in my hand tighter, like it's the lifeline that could pull me out of this moment.

*'It's going to stand right here and you will walk down the path slowly with music playing... Do you know how to play the violin?'*

*'Uhm, no.'*

*'Are you willing to learn?'*

*'What? Absolutely not!'*

*'We'll have to hire someone or get a recording. I know just the right guy...'*

We had picked the flowers together too. Before. Not Lucy's favourite – she'd always preferred sunflowers, marigolds, lilies... everything yellow and bright and happy. Too happy for her funeral, Lucy had said. She wanted something more dramatic, a flower that would lose its petals so that they'd swirl around the mourners like in a movie. We'd picked the rosy white colour to match the dress Lucy was going to wear.

I don't know if she is wearing that dress now, with the coffin closed already. I hold my breath, quietly thanking the gods Lucy didn't believe in that it was.

*'I want to invite the whole city and have a gigantic funeral progression! I can see it before me, just filling up the entire graveyard!'*

*'Do you even know that many people here?'*

*'Well, not really, but we'll just post it in the newspaper saying there'll be free food, someone is bound to show up. They don't need to actually know me.'* She paused with a giggle. *'Actually, I think I prefer it if they don't. Let them make their theories. They couldn't guess the truth even if they tried.'*

*'You're incorrigible.'*

*'Oh, you love me, really.'*

No one came, of course. I'd never posted the ad. I couldn't stand the idea of anyone else here with me today, particularly strangers. Even the other mourners here, far away as they may be, seem to trap me. I can almost feel their breath on the back of my neck and their staring eyes on me, judging me silently.

For a few long moments, the only sound I can hear is that of the wind and the birds. I want to scream at them to keep quiet, to understand the gravitas of the moment, to behave like in the movies. But they have no concept of my pain, no incentive to pause their singing on such a pretty day, and I am left to quietly envy them instead.

Okay then, I think, just as Lucy told me. I raise my head and throw back the veil. We'd practised that when we finished sewing it. It dramatically catches in the wind, almost being pulled off my head completely. I feel the mascara tears I had so carefully painted on like lines of ice on my face. With one last heavy breath, I start with Lucy's eulogy, written for no one's ears but my own:

‘Lately, many people have expressed their sympathies about my loss and I never quite know what to say to them. Everyone is sorry, everyone feels my pain, everyone is there for me, should I need them. But no one ever finds the right words.’

*‘You’ll need to memorise the speech, obviously. You can’t just stand there with a piece of paper in your hand.’*

*‘You just like giving me extra work.’*

*‘It’s my funeral, the least you can do is put in some effort!’*

*I smiled at the offended look Lucy gave me. ‘Okay then. Let’s write you the prettiest eulogy ever. You’ll have to help me, though, I’ve never actually been to a funeral before.’*

*‘Well, neither have I, but it can’t be that hard. Just say something like “I brightened up every room” and call me your sunshine or something.’*

*‘Of course, you would say that I say that about you!’*

*‘Just because I know it’s true, darling,’ Lucy said with a wink. At that, I just rolled my eyes.*

*‘That’s exactly my point.’*

‘Lucy and I met only three years ago, through good friends of ours. I would love to tell you long stories about a will they / won’t they romance, but truth be told, it was pretty much love at first sight, at least on my part. When I, against all odds – and in some friendly competition – managed to win her favour and her love, it made me the happiest person on earth.’

‘What are you talking about? Not one word of that is true.’

‘Well, no one needs to know that, do they?’

‘Anytime someone you love passes away, there is a strong temptation to remember them perhaps a little too well. Misdeeds are forgotten, offences forgiven. Only the most shining characteristics make it into the version of them that we keep with us when they’re gone. But despite knowing how memory embellishes character, I just can’t seem to...’

*‘That’s when the practised bit stops and you start saying what your heart tells you to.’ Lucy placed her hands over her heart.*

*‘But we are still writing that down, right?’*

*‘Of course we are, but that’s the story you have to convey. It’s like... directions on how to act. It’ll really move people if they think you prepared a speech but then went off script, so overcome with emotions you just couldn’t keep up the façade...’ At that, Lucy had flopped down onto my bed, dramatically closing her eyes and placing the back of her hand on her forehead.*

*‘You really are serious about this, aren’t you?’*

*‘Of course I am!’ She sat up quickly to look at me. ‘Frankly, you should be taking this a lot more seriously. I’ll only get one funeral. It needs to be perfect.’ Her smile didn’t quite reach her eyes.*

My voice breaks – I had practised that sound for weeks to perfect it – and I pause to reach my hand towards my eyes; facing the coffin, facing Lucy. If anyone were here with me, if anyone were watching... they would



only be able to see my hands, hear my voice, and assume I'm crying, gathering my thoughts, finding the will to keep going. They wouldn't assume I practised. Who would?

*'Do you think we should put in a moment where I say "is" and then stop and switch to "was"?'*

*'Aww, I knew you care.'*

*'Oh, stop it, I'm just trying to brainstorm!'*

'She brightened up every room she walked into. Where there was chaos and uncertainty, she brought order. She made every house a home and always made everyone feel welcome, wherever and whoever they were. She could make the whole room laugh with just a look or gesture and told the most amazing stories. She is... was what my heart always needed, my sunshine on a gloomy day.'

More mascara flows down my cheeks. We'd bought the least waterproof one we could find. I couldn't quite tell if those were the tears we'd practised or the ones belonging to me, sneaking out when they should stay hidden. I pause to look around the graveyard, beyond her grave, beyond her.

'I guess it just hasn't really sunk in that she isn't here... isn't with us anymore.' It has, I think. After all, I have been preparing for it for months now.

*'Isn't all of this very... impersonal? I mean, don't get me wrong, it's pretty, for sure, but it isn't really about you, is it?'*

*'It doesn't need to be. That's easier, don't you think? For you? To just say all these phrases without any meaning? Then I'll have my*

*pretty funeral and you can keep your composure. I'll know what you actually mean, anyway.'*

*'It doesn't have to be easy on me, it's your funeral!' At that, I pause for a second, caught up on my own words, before continuing more slowly. 'I don't think it could be, really, no matter how well we plan.'*

There's the sound of birds, still singing, of children screaming joyfully, of the wind gently rustling the leaves. There's that wind moving my veil and hair and the sun shining down on me. There are people on the other side of the street, beyond the graveyard's fence, just going about their lives as if nothing happened at all, as if it is a day like any other because to them it is. There are other people in the graveyard, not actually watching me at all, too consumed by their own grief to pay attention to me. For a brief second, I can almost feel Lucy, still by my side. But the moment passes and I am all alone again.

'I am grateful for every moment I was able to spend in her company — and although it was many less than I had selfishly hoped for, I still treasure every memory. This is how I want to remember her. Lucy... may you rest peacefully. You'll always have a place in my heart.'

I place the peony on the coffin and step back.

*'And then everyone else will place their flowers, it'll be a gigantic pile on top of my coffin!'*

*'Why not just bury you in flowers, then?'*

*'Do you think we can do that?'*

No one else is there to step forward to place their peonies on top of the coffin, of course. No one else is there. We've taken so much effort in planning exactly how this would go, that I'm almost surprised to see things diverting from our plan. We'd even gone to the market to ask the woman selling flowers which ones lose their petals easily so that they'd all get blown away by the wind. Lucy did always love a bit of drama. Now, there is only one flower, and it isn't losing its petals, no matter the wind. We timed everything, right down to the music – pre-recorded – so I just stand there, waiting, until the music tells me I can leave.

I can't help but remember the day Lucy showed up at my door, crying, and just fell into my arms. We sat there on the doorstep for what felt like hours, no one saying a single word. What was there to say? She would die, nothing to be done, no stopping it.

*'If there's no stopping it, there's no point in being sad.'*

*'I don't think that's how feelings work, Lucy.'*

*'We just have to keep busy, then it'll be over in no time.'*

*'Over for you. And what about me? What am I supposed to do without you? I need you!' I had screamed the last words, immediately feeling regret. But suddenly, as if some gate had broken, there was no stopping the tears I'd been holding back for days.*

*We had made dinner in silence that night and never spoke of it until the day Lucy showed up at my door again, this time with a bright yellow folder titled "My Funeral".*

I listen, quietly, to the song Lucy picked. It's one I've always hated.

*'It's easy, we'll just plan it all now. I know I'm dying, so there's really no point in waiting and leaving all the work to you alone. I've already chosen dresses for us. We can plan your speech, the invitations, the flowers... All you'll need to do is show up.'*

*'Why... what? What are you talking about?'*

*'My funeral, silly. We'll have it all ready by the time I die. I got a heads up on dying, so I might as well have some say in how my funeral goes!'*

The wind is picking up even more now, finally ripping the petals from the flower as we had planned. Lucy would've liked that. She wouldn't be watching though. She'd been adamant about that after I had mentioned that she could at least watch from heaven.

Slowly, the music starts to fade out. I missed my cue to leave, and it's too late to leave now. There's the sound of birds, still singing, of children, still screaming, of the wind still blowing through the trees, all seemingly from far away. The world is moving on, I think. And yet, here I stand, a single lonely figure, surrounded by flower petals falling.

**Author's note**

This is the prologue of a romance novel I am currently writing. It's the story of Lucy and Sophie, childhood friends who fall in love in 1920s Germany. Lucy dies, of course – you just read about her funeral. But a lot happens before and after. The two girls find and lose each other over and over again while trying to realise who they are and how they fit into the world they live in. Much later, in contemporary times, a group of university students finds Sophie's diary. With only the diary to guide them, they begin to dive deeper into the story of Sophie and Lucy.

# THE DAY AT THE LAKE

an early chapter from the same novel project by Jule Heyen

‘Days in summer are apt to linger.’ I remember that line. Oscar Wilde, as I learned much later. There were quite a few days that fit that description. Me and my sister as children playing, unbothered by the changing times around us; not knowing or caring about any problems more pressing than what we’d have for dinner. Laughing with my parents, in one of the rare moments they weren’t fighting. Back then, before my father started working more and more, until we barely saw him anymore. And Lucy, again and again. Swimming in the lake, sneaking out at night to watch the stars, riding our bikes through the forest. Lying on the grass in the garden, just talking and talking for hours, without a care in the world. Most of my happy memories were moments with Lucy. It made looking back quite painful after she left. It seemed as if she’d taken a big part of my childhood and teenage years with her. There was now a gaping hole where she and her smiles and her secrets used to live.

One particular day always came back to me. Although the season had turned to autumn, the memories of warmer days were still close enough that we missed it every day. For me, it didn’t really matter that much. Summer or winter, sunny or rainy, warm and pleasant or cold and harsh. What I missed was how vibrant Lucy seemed in the sun, how she seemed to come alive when the wind was warm and the fields green. Lucy was never as happy as on endless summer days, the sun competing with her smile for

who could shine brighter. Something always seemed to pull her outside, to run around as if we were still children, laughing under the endless blue sky. Once the days turned shorter, you could almost see her withering, like a flower without water. She always took longer than most to let summer go and prepare for autumn.

‘Let’s go outside.’

‘What?’

‘Let’s go outside. To the lake.’ I smiled up at Lucy sitting on my bed from where I was sitting on the floor. ‘It’s much too nice a day to sit inside and stitch.’

‘What are you talking about? It’s raining cats and dogs.’ She cast a miserable glance at the window, where it was, indeed, raining.

‘Exactly. Just lovely, isn’t it?’

‘Sometimes you confuse me.’

‘We can be confused outside,’ I responded. She smiled at me at that, and although we didn’t go outside, I felt like I had reached my goal. It *was* a mad idea, I suppose. Even though autumn had barely begun, the air was already colder and the wind freezing. But my mother had gone to one of her friend’s houses for tea, and my father never came home from work before it was dark. Even the maid had left to go to the market. Lucy and I were all alone, and that always brought out a kind of restlessness in me. A recklessness, almost, though it was hard to tell the difference in the

moment. And yet, we silently continued with our embroidery until Lucy interrupted the silence.

‘Why do you always insist we go out in the rain?’

‘Always?’

‘Yes, every time. Summer is over and it’s all dark and grey and cold and ugly...’ She stopped herself. ‘And you want to go out in the rain.’ She sounded almost accusing.

‘I guess I...’ I didn’t really have a response to that. ‘I guess I just don’t want summer to end.’

‘You don’t even like summer all that much. Not more than any other season at least.’ *But you do, I wanted to respond.*

‘No particular reason,’ I quickly said instead and broke eye contact. I desperately tried to focus on my stitches. Lucy, being Lucy, didn’t relent and kept looking at me. After a while she laid down on her belly and took my embroidery hoop, ripping the needle right out of my hand.

‘Hey!’

‘You can have it back after answering my question.’

‘Lucy!’ I climbed onto the bed and tried to get my materials back. Lucy just turned onto her stomach, hiding them under her body.

‘You’ll stab yourself with the needle if you aren’t careful!’

‘Then you better tell me, before I do and bleed out.’ She started weeping dramatically. ‘It’d be your fault, yours alone.’

I couldn’t stay serious with the sound of her over-exaggerated crying in my ears and fell on top of her, laughing. In just that moment, she turned



onto her back to look at me. We both froze at the same time, suddenly realising how close we were. Just looking at each other, as if time had stopped for a moment.

‘Sophie...’ I could feel her breath on my face as she said my name, our noses almost touching. I didn’t dare move, afraid of what exactly I would do if I did. Many seconds passed like that, Lucy, too, seemingly trapped in the same trance that had overcome me.

‘Do you...’ Lucy finally broke the silence. She didn’t finish her sentence. If I moved, just a little, I could... As if waking up from a dream I abruptly moved back and off the bed, retreating to a safe distance on the carpet. Lucy sat up, too, my embroidery still in her hand. For once, she seemed to be out of words to say.

‘If you don’t give it back, we’ll just have to go to the lake.’ I tried to change the subject, make her laugh, anything. It sounded forced even to my own ears. Nevertheless, she handed me my hoop, looking to catch my eye. I desperately tried to avoid hers, instead focusing on detangling the tablecloth that got wrapped around itself in our scuffle.

‘Maybe if it stops raining,’ she responded finally, ‘if it’s meant to happen, it will.’ She looked out the window, where the raindrops were still racing down the glass. The atmosphere felt charged. Something had changed, and we could both tell, even though I, at least, couldn’t quite put into words what exactly it was.

We kept up with our embroidery after that – or at least I did; Lucy kept looking out of the window, unusually quiet – and I soon finished my second

flower. Lucy was still on her first, so I started up another one. I had almost convinced myself that it was just because that would mean an earlier lunch for both of us and not because I'd do anything to help Lucy.

'It's okay, you know. Whatever you want to tell me.' Lucy was still staring out of the window. She bit her lip as if deeply lost in thought. My breath suddenly came irregularly, my thoughts swirling in my head so quickly I felt dizzy. But before I could think of something to say, she continued.

'I mean, I also don't tell you everything, even if I want to. I think we might...' She shook her head, breaking out of the strange mood that had overcome her and quickly turned towards me with a laugh.

'Oh, never mind. It's also okay if you don't. Tell me, that is.'

I wanted to say something, anything, but at the same time, I was glad she seemed to move on. Putting this – putting everything – into words felt almost dangerous. Like standing on a cliff, knowing that the ground under my feet would fall away at any second. Expecting the drop, not knowing if something would catch me or whether I would keep falling forever. I let out a deep breath. After a while, Lucy went back to her embroidery, but she barely got two stitches in before her thread ripped. She groaned and threw her hoop away.

'I don't know how you stand this.'

Relieved everything seemed to be back to normal, I looked up at her.

'It's calming.'

‘Infuriating, that’s what it is. I wish your mother would finally arrive in the twentieth century...’ She glanced at the window again, before quickly turning towards me with a smile.

‘Well, would you look at that? Maybe it’ll be a lovely day after all.’ In a stroke of luck – or fate, Lucy always believed in fate – it had stopped raining. We packed the remaining biscuits and our stitching – no matter how unlikely it was that we’d actually finish it today – into a picnic basket, packed a blanket, and snuck out of the backdoor. We didn’t really need to sneak – no one was home after all – but at this point, it was second nature for us to watch our every step. The sky was still grey and we spent the way to the lake in almost complete silence. Lucy seemed once again lost in her thoughts.

‘What’s up with the sombre mood?’ I asked her, glancing at her from the corner of my eye.

Lucy just rolled her eyes at me. ‘Just thinking.’

‘About what?’

She turned to me, the usual glint returning to her eyes. ‘How I could convince you to go for a swim with me.’

‘Oh dear, you’ve completely lost it now.’ She laughed and I wanted to drown in the sound. ‘Completely gone. Fallen to her madness, may she rest in peace.’ As she glared at me again, I couldn’t keep serious anymore and started giggling.

‘Hey!’ She bumped her shoulder into mine in mock offence. ‘You were the one who wanted to go out in the rain! Are you suddenly afraid of water?’

She bumped into me again and again, still laughing, until I fell off the path and had to cling to her to avoid slipping down into the muddy trench. Like that – pushing each other, clinging together, giggling – we finally arrived at the lake. We spread out our blanket on the still wet grass, taking off our shoes to avoid getting mud all over it. Despite how grey the sky had been all day, a few rays of sun had broken through the clouds. I sat and took out the tablecloth to continue embroidering it, but before I could even start, Lucy once again stole my needle.

‘Hey!’

She just laughed.

‘Come on, my mother will be angry if we don’t get it done.’

‘That’s not true. Your mother has never been angry at anyone except your father.’

I tilted my head to the side, admitting she had a point. She grinned.

‘She’ll be disappointed,’ I said, ‘which is worse.’

‘Lighten up a little, would you? She’s not going to kill us for enjoying a nice afternoon outside. Going for a swim...’ She looked at me out of the corner of her eye, a wicked smile on her lips.

‘Have you met her? She absolutely will. It’s not *proper*.’ I rolled my eyes at the last word.

We did finish the flowers we started after that, albeit, at least on my side, quite a bit less orderly than I would have usually done it. We had our picnic after that, just talking and laughing, the weird mood of the morning long forgotten. I always lost track of time with Lucy, but this afternoon especially I couldn't tell whether it had been minutes or hours. I was so lost in the conversation that my heart almost jumped out of my chest when the first drop of rain hit me. Then Lucy stripped off her dress and my heart stopped beating entirely instead.

'What are you doing?' My voice sounded unnatural even to my own ears, higher than usual, breathless.

'What does it look like? I'm going for a swim, obviously. Join me if you want.'

Then, with that same wicked smile from earlier on her lips and only wearing her underwear, she turned around and ran off towards the pier. And without a second thought, I, too, stripped and ran after her. When I caught up to her, she was already standing on the edge of the pier, looking out at the gently rippling water of the lake. She turned around with a dazzling smile so bright it took my breath away for a moment. I stood there, shivering when I felt it again. Something I couldn't – or didn't dare – put into words. The same charged feeling from this morning returned and I found myself back on that same cliff, looking out into the endless drop below me.

'What's stopping you? We're already wet, might as well go for a swim.'

There was no choice there, of course, and she knew it. If she jumped, I would follow.

As she took my hand and pulled me over the edge, I thought to myself that I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Jumping into the cold water, I felt at peace for the first time in months. We stayed in the water for what felt like hours, even though it could only have been minutes until the sound of thunder scared us out. We just about managed to collect our clothes before they were completely muddy and ran for shelter among the nearby trees.

'See, we shouldn't have bothered to do it after all', Lucy said, holding up the soaked table cloth, 'it's ruined anyway.' We looked at each other for a few long seconds and burst out laughing. When we finally fell quiet, my stomach hurt from all the laughter, but my heart was beating more than it had in a long time. I grinned at her. We spread out the blanket again, sitting on half of it and pulling the other half over our heads to protect us from the rain. Lucy had opened her braid and her long curls, now hanging over her shoulders, dripped water onto her skin. I stared, transfixed by the way the raindrops drew patterns on her dark skin. She pulled the blanket further over us. The brown plaid pattern turned the dark grey light into something softer, warmer.

'We will probably have a cold tomorrow.'

'I think that's worth it.' She grinned at me. 'And it was your idea, anyway.'

Her eyes were a deep brown, almost black at first glance. I knew I was still staring, but I couldn't find the strength to look away. *Days in summer are apt to linger...* I breathed in, and out. She did, too. I felt it on my skin. There, under the protection of the blanket, hidden from the world, I somehow found the courage to move closer. Her breath hitched.

'What did you mean this morning? What might we both...?' I asked her.

'I think you know.'

'Do I?'

She kept looking at me. I moved even closer.

I said her name, my voice barely more than a whisper, my eyes closing. Lucy moved and finally closed the gap between our lips. When she kissed me, I forgot how to breathe. The last coherent thought I had was that her lips tasted like the lemon filling of the biscuits we had eaten earlier. After one impossibly long, impossibly short second she pulled back. When I came back to myself, she was already looking at me with a strange look in her eyes. I glanced at her lips. She took my cheek in her hand and all I had been holding back came out at once, a tidal wave of suppressed feelings and late-night thoughts, and we were kissing again. I was no longer standing on that cliff. Instead, I was flying.

Maybe, I thought later, it wasn't that I didn't know how to put my feelings into words. Maybe I knew exactly what it was, and was afraid that there was no way back, that this whole façade I had so carefully kept up would break apart and leave me drowning in the chaos of the aftermath.

*ISSUE 1*

But all I thought at that moment was that even if I'd never remember how to breathe, I didn't need to. I only needed her.



# HAIKUS

a collection by Philipp Neumann

## **Office**

Numbers, Excel sheets  
Same work, but different day  
What a deep boredom

\*\*\*

## **Friendship**

*Good tea and a friend  
Conversations in the sun  
Great pleasure, indeed*

\*\*\*

## **Sherlock**

Not a mystery  
If we combine evidence  
Pure logic Watson!

\*\*\*

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### **Filler**

Nothing new no change  
Oh, I guess it must be a  
filler episode

\*\*\*

### **Talk less**

Words and Words and Words  
Why talk so much when a few  
A few do the trick

\*\*\*

### **Clock ticking**

It has been some time  
Clock was ticking rapidly  
Deep black turned to gray

\*\*\*

\*\*\*

***Spring***

*A sea of yellow*

*A lightning bolt flies nearby*

*Crazy for a bee*

\*\*\*

**Open Sea**

Sea breeze, waves crashing

UFOs above us all

Oh no, Larry's gone

# WHO?

a short story by Paula Solterbeck

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

The gallery on my phone doesn't get any more interesting as I scroll through it for the third time. The café doesn't have wifi and this way I look somewhat busy, while sitting alone at the table, waiting. Putting my lips to the brim of my cup, I realize it's still too hot for me to drink and I wonder if the other people are looking as I put it back down. I think about deleting the pictures I took with my friends on my last night out, which was months ago, and then my mother's number lights up the top half of the screen. I tap the green icon and start to whisper into my phone, feeling the anxiety and anger start crawling up inside of me.

'Where are you? It's been fifteen minutes,' I manage to whisper into the speaker in a calm voice.

'I'm so sorry, sweetie. Something came up at work, I can't make it today. Could we maybe do this another time?'

I don't respond, partly because I don't know what to say, partly because I don't want to make a scene in front of these strangers.

'I would love to see you, we miss you, honey, I am truly sorry. You know how it is, the ER doesn't clock off. They still need me here. Tell me how I can make it up to you.'

I lift the phone off my ear and my finger presses the red circle, as if moving on its own. I should have known better than to agree to this. He told me not to meet her, that she was trying to get into my head and get me to go back to them. The blood starts boiling in my veins, but first and foremost I am angry at myself. What would he say?

I choose not to think about it and focus on something else, as I fear I might cry. A fly lands on my saucer and I try to shoo it away, when a woman around my age enters the backroom of the café. Aside from clocking that there are two — now three — other people in the room with me, I hadn't really had a look at the place. For the first time, I really take it in; the walls are painted in several earthy tones of green and brown, the tables and chairs don't fit together and the dark colour someone once put on the hardwood floor is chipping off in the places most people walk or the chairs are always being pulled back. My mother chose the place; it suits her.

In the meantime, the new woman has found who she was looking for and hugs the other woman, who was already seated at the table beside mine. They exchange the common small talk and I figure that they are friends. Is the man behind me also waiting for company? I was stood up and they know, they're probably secretly making fun of me or, at the very least, pity me.

I should have listened to him, he always knows best and it's so embarrassing to be here alone. They probably think that I don't have any friends, which is true, technically.

The women talk to each other in lowered voices, show each other things on their phones and laugh in between. They look like copies of one another and the way they talk doesn't make them unique either. I wonder who copies whom and if they talk shit and spread rumours about the other with different friends. As that thought crosses my mind, I pull my phone back out and start deleting the pictures. The people I called friends back then, whose pictures were taken that night, dropped me when I got engaged. They tried to turn me against him and claimed he was unfaithful.

The damn fly again.

The waitress comes up the steps to the backroom with a single coffee and passes me.

'The Latte Macchiato with oat milk?' she exclaims in a shrill tone, to which the man at the table behind me replies by thanking her.

Though I can't see him, I still get second-hand embarrassed. Oat milk was something I drank too, when I was younger, due to my inability to digest the real thing, but now I've realized how embarrassing it truly is. My fiancée told me early on that he wouldn't go out with me if I ordered it — as a joke obviously — but still, people could think I was vegan and we hate vegans.

The man must be embarrassed too: the stupid waitress let everyone know about the milk and we also know that he's here alone, probably not by choice either. Who would be? Alone, that is. In public!

I have to get out of here. The guests, the waitress and this damn fly have cost me my last nerve, they take up all the air in this place and I can feel

my chest tighten. I decide that I will not suffocate in this place, so I throw the rest of the bitter fluid down my throat and put enough money next to the cup. It would have paid for my mother's drink as well. Good thing I didn't tell him about the amount of money I keep for myself for these kinds of affairs. Affairs indeed, because I feel like I am betraying him. He doesn't deserve this; it makes me sick to think about how disappointed he would be in me, if he knew that I was sneaking around. Maybe he would even be ashamed to be with a woman like that, which would be fair; shame is what I feel right now. Good thing he doesn't know I meant to meet my mother. I am out for groceries, that is what I am doing.

As I stand up the waitress comes in and collects the tip. She thanks me with a smile that makes me want to punch her. I wonder what it is she is compensating for.

On my way out of the café I see the first leaves falling from the trees out front. On the bus I feel like crying. On the stairs to my apartment, I try to shut everything out and get excited about seeing him. I hope his day was okay, so I get to talk about mine.

When I unlock the door, I see a pair of shoes and a jacket on the ground. Both women's, both not mine. I hear shushing from the bedroom and my stomach drops. Holding my purse with both hands, I am stuck in motion. He is going to twist this. I am overreacting, as always. He will have an explanation. I open the door and it turns out he doesn't.

His eyes look up and meet my gaze, as do hers.

# BBQ

a short story by Lea Köster

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

Everything is glowing bright in the setting afternoon sun, the light covering the world in a million shades of red. Smoke is hanging thick in the air, making the heat of the disappearing day even more unbearable for those that bother to notice.

Bowls of salad, fruit, bread and other delicious looking and smelling things are passed along the tables, losing something with every hand that touches them. The sound of meat sizzling on the grill mixes with laughter and light conversation. Everyone is enjoying themselves. On the second floor of the house, behind a window, paper birds seem to fly effortlessly through the air.

‘Hey Carol, where’s Mallory?’ In the wind, her ocean blue dress, moves like waves, as she approaches her childhood friend who is dressed in black.

‘Hi dear, you look lovely.’ Carol’s voice is smooth and calm, as always. Her eyes take in every little detail, even those that shouldn’t be seen, like the necklace that is hanging around her friend’s neck which Carol had seen being bought by one of her friend’s students. ‘How is the party? I feel like I’m just running around. I haven’t even said hello to everyone yet.’ A smile covers Carol’s lips, amusement and exhaustion her eyes. She holds out a plate of burgers, stuffed with meat from the grill, that she was about to



take over to a table in the shade of the house. The woman in blue gratefully takes one and praises the cook, Carol's husband, for his excellent work at the barbecue.

'Everyone is wondering what kind of meat this is, it's so good.' But before she can get an answer, the woman in the black dress is called by her husband and she turns, swiftly, leaving her friend standing there.

The moment Carol places the plate of burgers on a nearby table, two of the neighbourhood boys take one, thanking her. As she walks up to her husband, she watches the people - her neighbours and friends - who seem to not have a care in the world.

'Could you get more meat? I ran out.' Her husband whispers in her ear. His breath is cold in the heat of the day. With knife and plate in hand she goes through the kitchen, into the living room, down the hallway and opens the door to the basement. The air goes cold and damp, the laughter inaudible, as she descends the cold concrete steps, with the sharp stone walls, into the cellar. The door behind her, now closed, doesn't let in any light. Her nose involuntarily twitches in disgust as the light bulb on the ceiling stops flickering.

Kneeling down on the floor she takes the knife and cuts parts of the meat into smaller pieces. With caution she places a few slices onto the plate. The meat is still fresh. The bones white. She is about to leave the room, but before she does, she takes a last look, but there is nothing the person in black hasn't seen before. The floor is covered in dried blood. The flesh is cold. Chopped off parts lay around. Letters written with the last breath

and blood read I'm sorry... followed by something illegible on the white tiled floor. Eyes, still filled with fear, seem to look at her, asking for help they will never receive.

Her daughter was a disappointment, a disgrace, like her sister before her. Weak.

Maybe the next one will be better, Carol thinks and places a hand on her not-yet-showing belly, before ascending the stairs without another look back.

# PURGATORY

a poem by Myra Sophia Dedekind

Cheeks like molten silver  
Eyes as clear as glass  
Her wings eternally folded  
Calling the children to mass

Beckoned by the choir  
The glorious ancient tunes  
The Lady and her squire  
Start crawling from their tombs

And the feather falling heavy  
Hearts on scales, weighing the levy  
Little bad man quivers in fear  
The day of reckoning is here

# NOT MY TRAGEDY

a poem by Jule Heyen

History seems far away  
Long lost in time, my enemy  
'Those days are over', is what they say  
Long lost in time and memory

So close, so far, almost my own  
Free and bound and all alone  
The heartbeat coursing through my chest  
Stagnant, dormant, much too fast

It doesn't seem to vanish  
More and more and never less  
Full of gold and jewels, so lavish  
Yet a twisting, turning mess

The golden echo of troubled times  
Who will pay for all their crimes?  
The shadows dancing in my mind  
Still feel like they've been left behind

Guilt inherited from my mother's mother  
Shaking, twisting, turning in my chest  
Locked away with chains that smother  
that untamed, unaided unrest

This is not my tragedy  
A torrid tale, men's apathy  
Still I'm trapped here, pray, do tell  
What does it take to leave this hell?

Because I feel its ghosts on me  
Always pulling at my chains  
Counting one and two and three  
Now open up, see what remains

The rhythm never hurt my heart  
Yet it's always been a part  
Of history's clever coiling song  
Why does it all just seem so wrong?

I don't get to leave this grief  
Behind me on my way alone  
No break, no pardon, no reprieve  
So much for which I must atone.

# HOW LOVELY

a short story by Liv Hambrett

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

The baby, and she was a baby, no more than eight or nine months old, was sitting on a towel, eating sand. She was a beautiful little thing, the first curls coming in, her tiny feet resting sole to sole. A few metres to her left, a girl who must have been her sister was squatting, digging judiciously, the hole big enough for her to hop in and out of as she dug. She was completely focussed on her work, salt-water matted hair dried in strings across her freckly forehead. Occasionally, a wave would sidle up the shore and threaten to fill her hole with water and she would quicken her digging, heaping wet sand onto the dam wall she had built.

Penny watched. She was sitting quite close to them, very close to them actually, almost sharing their big picnic blanket. She didn't know why, she was simply there. On a chair, at least, which was going to make getting up easier. The thought was fleeting, a willow's bend, a wisp, before Penny looked at the picnic blanket again and wondered where she was. She looked at her feet, tucked into the warm sand, and thought they looked very strange. She looked at the children again and wondered whose they were. One thought after the other, willows, wisps. The children were very pretty. Lovely curly hair. Penny looked at her feet again and wondered why they were covered in sand. Always wondering, Penny muttered to herself, and

the words slipped and slid around her face with the briney air. She must have said the words out loud, because a baby was looking at her. A baby, Penny thought, how lovely. What was it doing there, sitting on a blanket all alone. But there was another child, Penny saw, a little girl digging a big hole in the sand, big enough for her to hop in and out of. How fun.

Penny had children. She knew that. She knew a lot of things and all of these things she knew, the words and names and ideas, they fluttered and flapped, tiny moths with their dusty wings, hiding in the dark, in the corners, the recesses, slippery dippery little things. They had been disrupted, the moths, or were they more like bees, buzzing and furious and sucked from their hives at some point, sucked into vacuums and voids, where nothing had structure, where gravity did not exist to allow for knowledge to be laid down like slabs and built upon, so it became immovable, known. Sometimes the moths, or were they bees, sat still in plain sight, quiet and calm, and Penny would reach out a hand, try to touch them. But they were never still for long. The wings fluttered, the walls slid, Penny watched. Children. Children, Penny, she said out loud, watching the baby's sandy fist. She had children. She closed her eyes, fished in the gloom, found his face. Within reach, always. A big old tree, a shitty old motorcycle, she could still see that too, that stupid thing, clapped out and rickety. A knock at the door at 3 o'clock in the morning, John's unbearable fury. (Where was John?) He had been lovely, tall, skinny, a silly little beard, just beginning to grow into himself, a sapling, a willow's bend.

After him, clots and clumps and ideas, those moths always sat still. John – where was John, actually, he loved the beach – would find her in bed, crying, but he had told her it was all normal, his patients had miscarriages all the time, it was just the body getting itself in order. Penny hated those words: miscarriage, the body, order. The next one, he had said, the next one will take. The next one didn't take, nor the one after that. John – where was he? He loved the beach. – stayed positive. After the fifth one – Penny counted them by scratching a little tally on the pantry wall – they stopped trying. The pantry wall was somewhere nearby, it must have been. Just around the corner perhaps, four strokes and a slash down the middle for five, not far from the shelf with flour and the baking powder which the shop down the road never had enough of, although it always had mangos, big trays of them and they smelt like heaven. John always said, it's okay, we have... Penny frowned. We have... but there was a wall there, now, and Penny couldn't get past it. She had someone, they had someone, a silhouette, a shape-shifter, could be anywhere, could be anyone. But a mango, Penny thought, a smooth mango with its soft flesh, how you could press their golden rumps right up to your nose and inhale. Penny smiled.

A cry, carried on the air, as a seagull wheeled down to land on the shoreline. The girl glanced at it. The baby watched it. There was a clump of seaweed the sea was relentlessly trying to reclaim with each wave and the seagull poked its redcurrant beak in amongst the slimy, salty innards. Penny watched. Hello, she said, and the seagull's beady eyes flashed in the sun. Don't feed the gulls and it was her father's voice, out of nowhere. She



looked around the cavern of her skull, which contained everything she had ever known, this big, black nothingness with its wings and walls and wisps. She did know a great deal of her life lay beyond the walls. But she was used to them now. There were so many of them, moving and sliding, stopping Penny from getting anywhere. Some faces stayed within the walls, resolute. Her mother's face, her father's. Her son's. John's face. But all of the other faces, she saw them, but they never came into the room. They never stayed. They were too late. She looked at them, she tried to hold them, but they refused to stay with her. Like woodpeckers on concrete, they couldn't imprint and they would get so frustrated, so tetchy. How dare you not remember me? They didn't know that sometimes, not even Penny herself stayed.

Movement caught her eye and she glanced up. A dog and a surfer were walking towards them. The baby watched them, fistfuls of sand momentarily forgotten. The surfer looked at the baby, then at the little girl in her hole, then at Penny. He smiled at Penny and Penny smiled back. The dog moved towards the baby but the man called him back. They kept walking. The baby watched them go. Penny had a dog, he was a lovely thing. She looked around for him but he must have gone home. Red. His name was Red. She smiled warmly at the moth that had sat still. Where's my dog? She asked the baby, but the baby was impassive. You'd like Red, she said, he won't bite. He only bites snakes, Mum says one day he'll lose a fight but he hasn't yet. She said these words out loud, she knew that because she could hear them on the air, they sound different to when they're just in her skull,

shooting between the canals and cavities. And the baby was watching her, gimlet-eyed. After much consternation, the baby made a very loud sound and Penny smiled.

Penny looked out at the water, flashes of light, soft sighs. She liked water. She had always liked water, even when that kid around the headland had drowned and her mother forbade her from swimming for an entire summer. Mum. Mum, she said. I'm here. I'm right here. Come and find me. Her house must be near here, she suddenly thought. This was her beach, of course it was, there was the pine tree, there was the pier. In a rush, she knew where she was. She looked at her feet again, then her legs. She hoped she wasn't late for dinner, her mother always worried. Where was her mother? Her mother had probably asked her to watch this baby. Penny sighed. She was always being asked to watch babies. One day, her mother always said, you'll have some of your own. Penny wasn't sure if she even wanted babies.

The baby had rocked herself forward onto all fours and was wobbling a little, to and fro, her nappy barely contained by the hot pink lycra of her swimming costume. An awful colour, Penny thought, so brash. Who had chosen that awful colour. So brash. The baby lurched forward suddenly, a little uncertain on the sand, but finding her rhythm as she moved. She crawled a few metres and stopped, sliding her feet under her bottom so she could sit back up and continue eating sand. Then she did again: lurched forward, crawled, slid her feet under her bottom and sat. The process gained her a metre or two every time. From her hole, the older girl suddenly looked up, eyeing off the baby.

‘Stay.’ She said, loudly, as if the baby were a dog. The baby smiled at this and tipped forward onto all fours again. A game. She took off again, but the older girl wasn’t watching anymore. She was crouched down, moving handfuls of sand, eyeing off both the waves that had become a little louder as a wind had picked up, and the seagull that had been joined by a friend.

Strawberry jam, Penny thought suddenly. Would the young girl like a sandwich, perhaps. Penny loved strawberry jam. Her mother’s, in particular. She was sure she had packed some sandwiches, she always packed sandwiches for the beach. She looked around to ask her mother, but couldn’t see her anywhere. Her mother didn’t really like the beach, she reminded herself, remember your birthday by the sea, your ninth birthday it was, when Dad nearly drowned and cousin Judy got stung by a bluebottle? Penny smiled. Ah yes, she said, out loud perhaps, I remember that. Her mother never went back to the beach after that day. It’s always taking people, Penny. Her mother’s voice.

Penny looked out at the water. The sun had passed its highest point and was now sitting low and fat in the sky, bouncing lazily off the water. But the wind was making the water short-tempered. Penny shielded her eyes. Where was she, anyway? Why was she on a beach? Penny frowned. Her mother must have let her come down alone, but where was John? He loved the beach. Did her Mum know John? Yes, they must have met, John must have come around for cake. Where were they, then? And then, the panic, quick and cold, wet. Where was she? Where was she? This can’t be all of her, surely, this wisp, this fragment on a chair, on a picnic blanket, on a

beach, the wind whistling. She had come apart, somewhere, there had been a split, there must have been a split. She turned to a young girl who was digging a hole, not too far from where she sat, on a picnic blanket, on a chair, on a beach.

‘Where’s the rest of me?’

The girl paused in her digging and looked up. ‘Huh?’

‘Pardon, not huh,’ Penny murmured. The girl returned to her digging.

There was a shout. Penny turned to see a woman running across the sand. As she got closer, Penny could see her terror on her face.

‘Lily,’ she was screaming, ‘Lily, your sister!’

Lily. The name got sucked into the vacuum. Penny cast about for it, but it was gone.

Penny watched as the woman ran past the girl in the hole – why was she in a hole? – towards a baby who was, by now, sitting right where the waves whooshed up to shore, their frothy white hems breaking over her chubby knees. Why was a baby sitting so close to the water, Penny wondered. Oh dear. Her father could swim very well, he should have come over and helped. She looked around for her father, but couldn’t see him. Perhaps he didn’t know where she was. But she had told him, hadn’t she? Perhaps this woman could help her find him and then she could tell him where she was.

The woman looked at Penny and there was a hint of exasperation in her eyes, around her taut mouth. That was familiar, Penny suddenly thought, that look, that pull of skin. The baby was annoyed at being stopped and flapped her arms, squawking like a bird, but the woman clasped the baby

to her hip, her side, hoisted her away from the whispering sea. After a moment, the woman exhaled slowly, closed her eyes, then opened them and smiled. She looked Penny in the eye and Penny wondered if she knew her. Probably from school. Penny was a primary school teacher, she knew that. Husband John, dead son, primary school teacher, house by the beach. Mangos, strawberry jam, Mum hated the beach. Penny knew all of those things, sometimes all at once, sometimes not at all.

Eventually, the woman reached out and touched Penny's arm, and said, 'Okay Mum, come on, let's get the kids home.'

Oh, thought Penny. Yes. Of course. Perhaps she would know, then. 'Where's John?'

The same blink, the same smile. 'Dad's dead, Mum, he died ten years ago. You're at the beach with me, Bec. And my kids. They're your grandkids.'

The list of facts, ticked off, one after the other. She had said them a thousand times before. Penny was sorry. She knew she couldn't remember. John, the pantry, the clapped-out motorbike, strawberry jam, mangos, the cavern of her mind. She knew it all even when she didn't, even when she came apart.

'Oh,' Penny said, and she followed her daughter, her feet in the warm sand. She watched her feet until they reached the road and then she looked up. A woman was standing at a car, looking at her. Penny knew the look, expectant, hopeful, terribly, terribly sad. So she knew this woman, then. She smiled politely as she got closer to the woman, motioned at the two children, the baby on her hip, the young girl with the sun-streaked hair.

‘Are they yours? They’re lovely. Aren’t you lucky.’

The woman closed her eyes, briefly, then opened them and smiled. When she spoke, her voice was bright and patient. ‘Mum, it’s me, Bec. I’m your daughter. These are your grandchildren. Let’s get in the car and get you back home, okay?’

As they drove away, Penny saw her house out the window. She tapped the window. ‘But that’s my house. Can you take me home? My parents will be waiting for me.’

Somewhere, a baby began to cry. A baby, Penny thought, how lovely.

# CAT

a poem by Lukas Bartsch

I adore  
her soft ears more  
than the claws  
on her paws.  
Her joyful purr  
and fluffy fur  
ease my strife  
improve my life.  
While she enjoys  
mice-shaped toys  
a warm lap  
a peaceful nap.  
And she loves  
watching the doves  
hoping to catch  
herself a batch.  
She fills with cheer  
my apartment here.



*Illustrations by Jehan Ammar*

# ACTS OF DESPERATION

an extract from a novel project by Carolin Hansen

Margaret woke up to the dim light of dawn slowly creeping through the cracks of the worn-down shed. She shivered. The shelter barely kept out the cold, and she didn't know how they would survive the winter months ahead. Margaret glanced around the shed. It was a cramped space, barely big enough to fit them all. The few belongings that Margaret could gather in their frantic rush to flee were stacked neatly in one corner: a few blankets, some worn-out clothes, a couple of cooking utensils, and a cherished family photo. Beside her, Rosie and Doris huddled together for warmth. Their small bodies were frail and thin, their faces pale from weeks of being on the move and little to no food. Doris had Erika in her arms, protecting her from the world around them. Since the night they left home, Doris had been a constant source of comfort for Erika, holding her close during the most frightening moments. Margaret watched them for a moment, before pushing the blanket back and sliding, quietly, out of bed. It was time to get up. The day's work would begin soon, and lateness was frowned upon. They were working on the harvest for the Heinrichs, the family that had taken her and her children in. With a heavy sigh, she stood up, feeling the familiar gnaw of hunger in her stomach; she had given most of last night's food to her children, as she had done the previous nights. Though Margaret was grateful for the roof over their head, the price she had to pay was steep.



Outside in the middle of the vast, muddy field, Margaret knelt down, shivering as a cold blast of wind cut through her like a knife. She looked up at the sky, the thick, grey, low-hanging clouds stretching endlessly over the landscape. She looked down at her knees and winced. The ground was uneven, and the clumps of hardened soil and rocks were digging into her flesh with every movement. The repetitive chore of digging into the soil and pulling out the potatoes was exhausting. While she worked, she would reminisce about the time before the war, when everything was still alright. She thought about the candlelit evenings with her husband and children, the sound of their laughter, now a rare memory, echoing in her mind, reminding her of the joy she once knew.

As she dug her hands into the cold earth, Margaret's fingers brushed against a particularly large potato. She paused; her children's cries from the night before echoed in her head, their thin faces marked with pain. The rations that the Heinrichs provided were barely enough to survive, let alone keep them healthy. She quickly looked around the field, ensuring no one was watching. The other workers were busy on the opposite side of the field, their voices faint in the distance. Margaret's heart pounded as she hesitated, the potato still half-buried in the soil. *Why had it come to this?* She thought, her hands trembling as they dug into the soil. With a quick, decisive move, she slipped the potato into the deep pocket of her apron. Her heart began to race and she quickly continued working, her hands moving mechanically, while her mind was racing with doubt and anxiety.

*Am I doing the right thing?* The question gnawed at her, but she pushed it aside. *This isn't theft*, Margaret told herself. *I'm not a thief, I'm just trying to keep my children alive.* Her thoughts raced, and she recalled the tales of Robin Hood from her childhood. *He stole from the rich to give to the poor. Wasn't she doing the same thing?*

*But what would happen if she got caught? Would they lose the shed? Where would they go?* The thought of her girls not having a roof over their heads made her stomach turn. Then she remembered the stories about how Mr. Heinrich liked his belt. *Would he raise his hands against her children?* Her heart stopped for a second, and a cold wave of fear washed over her, making her hands tremble. *Was he really capable of that?* The thought of his belt cracking through the air haunted her, her pulse quickening as she fought to keep working.

Suddenly the sharp voice of Mr. Heinrich echoed over the fields. Margaret's jaw tightened as she listened to his commanding voice.

'You have to finish this field in the next half hour, so hurry up!'

Margaret paused to wipe the sweat from her brow, looking out over the field with a mixture of bittersweet relief. *Another potato won't hurt*, she thought to herself, emboldened, and quickly slipped another potato into the pocket of her apron.

That evening, after bedtime, she boiled the stolen potatoes over a small fire.

'Mama, why are we eating again?' Doris asked.

‘This is a secret and special meal just for us. You cannot tell the other children about this, you both have to promise,’ Margaret said.

‘I promise,’ Doris said.

‘Me too,’ Rosie said.

Margaret mashed the potatoes with a little water, stretching them as far as it would go. Her children’s eyes were brightening. Margaret sat on the wooden floor, cradling Erika in her arms and feeding her with a small spoon of mashed potatoes.

For the first time in weeks that night, they fell asleep without crying.

### **Author’s note**

This excerpt is taken from a longer piece of work, a historical fiction novel set towards the end of, and in the aftermath of, WWII. The story follows Margaret and her three children and the immense hardships they endure and, in doing so, also concerns itself more broadly with the struggles of women in this period of history. In this extract, we see Margaret’s resilience and determination to provide for her children.

# HAIKUS

a collection by Alicia Albers

## *Confession*

*Someone so afraid.  
The need to tell one the truth,  
How much I like you.*

\*\*\*

## **Change**

It's time for a change.  
Flat, hobbies, lifestyle and looks;  
Everything be new.

\*\*\*

## *Summer*

*Time outside with friends.  
The most loveable season,  
You make me happy.*

# ENTWICKLUNGSBERICHT DER SPEZIES „MENSCH“ AUF DEM PLANE- TEN „ERDE“, VERFASST VON XLUPTR-03342

a short story by Jule Kaben

Sie sprechen in fremdartigen Zungen auf meiner Sprache zu mir, sie nutzen Wörter wie „Heuristik“ und „Transzendenz“. Sie zwingen sich in unbequeme Anzüge und Kostüme, Schuhe, die sie offensichtlich unangenehm finden. Sie verstopfen sich die Poren mit hormondurchtränkten Kosmetika, welche teilweise zu (Erd-)Mondpreisen über den Tresen gehen. Schlimmer noch: Sie motivieren persönlich oder im Internet andere Menschen dazu, dieses kuriose Körperpflegeritual selbst zu vollziehen. Im Internet sehen sie sich stundenlang Inhalte an, die sie offensichtlich unglücklich machen, hören allerdings nicht auf. Diese Menschen im Internet erzählen anderen Menschen, sie würden sich hauptsächlich von Hafer-schleim mit Beeren ernähren, Hausputz sei ihr Hobby und um fünf Uhr morgens aufzustehen die große Offenbarung. Der moderne Mensch glaubt nur noch an einen Gott, dieser ist viereckig und muss alle paar Jahre in der Religionsstätte für ein kleines Vermögen neu erworben werden. Zu diesem Gott beten sie sehr häufig mehrere Stunden am Tag ohne Unterbrechung, hierbei ist es erstaunlich, dass junge Menschen der Religion noch fanatischer anhängen als die älteren, welche dieser allerdings auch völlig verfallen

sind. Den Geschlechtsakt vollziehen sie nur zögerlich, denn sie haben in ihrem religiösen Portal gesehen, wie andere Menschen es schon viel besser und ästhetischer als sie selbst gemacht haben.

Damit der Mensch in seiner eigenen, zerstörerischen Genialität die Welt nicht in einem unüberschaubaren Tempo unterwirft, haben sie die Bürokratie erfunden. Grundsätzlich gilt: Je weniger Humor der jeweilige Volkstamm besitzt, desto mehr Bürokratie hat er sich auferlegt. Es gibt Regeln für das Aufstellen von Regeln und Regeln für die Regeln, für das Aufstellen von Regeln und Regeln und Regeln für die Regeln der Regeln der Regeln. Während gestern noch die Menschen völlig ohne Papierkrieg ihre Lehmhütte aufstellen konnten, behindern sie sich nun selbst im Bau einer Behausung. Verletzt man einen Menschen emotional, so tut dieser alles, um emotional möglichst unverletzt zu wirken. Lehnt man die Avancen eines romantisch-interessierten Menschenwesens ab, reagiert dieses mit „Ich wollte dich sowieso nicht. Eigentlich finde ich dich zutiefst abstoßend und mein Interesse basiert auf Mitleid“. Möchte ein erwachsener Mensch weinen, unterdrückt er diesen Impuls, bis er die Sicherheit seiner spärlichen Behausung oder einen stinkenden Abort gefunden hat. Wenn Menschen doch einen begrenzten Zugang zu ihrem unterentwickelten Emotionsleben erlangen wollen, trinken sie in größeren Mengen einen schädlichen Saft aus gegorenen Früchten und teilen sich hemmungslos mit, bis nur noch ihre letzte Mahlzeit ihren Mund durchdringt. Dabei besteht die Kunst darin, diese Situation für alle Beteiligten, auch das Individuum im Nachhinein, möglichst beschämend zu machen. Dazu läuft üblicherweise Musik, die zu

jung ist, um als geschmackvolles Überbleibsel einer besseren Zeit zu gelten, jedoch auch zu alt, um als frischer Wind aus den Lautsprechern empfunden zu werden. Wichtig sind hierbei sich wiederholende Strophen mit hohem Nervfaktor und Songtexte, deren geniale Philosophie man erst nachvollziehen kann, wenn man ein paar Gläser von dem Saft hatte. Der Schlager ist im Prinzip das Wackelbild zwischen Nüchternheit und Rausch, weshalb die Meinung des jeweiligen Menschen in einer engen Beziehung zum jeweiligen Promillewert steht. Dazu genießen mittelmäßige Menschen die Beobachtung von fragwürdigen Individuen, um sich für einige Stunden von der Enttäuschung über die Sinnlosigkeit ihres eigenen Lebens hinwegzutragen. Basierend auf der Pigmentmenge ihrer Epidermis bestimmen Menschen den Wert des Individuums, in der Regel sind wenige Pigmente gut und viele schlecht, wobei auch an dieser Stelle viele Streitigkeiten herrschen.

Ansonsten wird Brutpflege und Stammeserhaltung nicht als basale Praxis der Arterhaltung, sondern eher als nebensächliche Gefälligkeit angesehen. Der Mensch hat es sich zum Ziel gemacht, kleine digitale Zahlen bis in die Unendlichkeit zu erhöhen. Das Problem dieser digitalen Zahlen besteht darin, dass sobald alle hohe digitale kleine Zahlen haben, niemand mehr hohe digitale kleine Zahlen hat. Trotzdem sitzen viele dem irrigen Schluss auf, die kleinen Zahlen könnten sich bis ins Unendliche erhöhen. Dazu wurden sogar komplexe Theorien und Systeme entwickelt, die dazu genutzt werden, nichts ahnende Opfer auf Cocktailpartys zu langweilen und die eigene Überlegenheit zu demonstrieren, welche die grassierende

soziale Ungerechtigkeit rechtfertigen soll. Ansonsten ist das aktuell höchste Produkt der menschlichen Innovation die 5-Minuten-Terrine, denn sie bereitet exquisite Nudelgerichte ohne weiteres Zutun innerhalb von fünf Minuten preisgünstig zu und verkürzt durch ihre fragwürdigen Inhaltsstoffe das trostlose Leben der Menschenwesen auf ihrem sterbenden Planeten. Die beste Spezies auf dem Planeten ist die Gans, denn sie ist wie ein Schwan, nur kürzer und mit einem höheren Aggressionspotenzial. Die schönste Stadt der Erde ist Neumünster, denn nur an diesem Ort wird das Vermögen des menschlichen Auges an die fünfzig unterschiedlichen Schattierungen von Grau zu erkennen, richtig ausgekostet.

Abschließend lässt sich sagen, dass die Erde aufgrund ihres hohen Unterhaltungspotenzials in der interstellaren Tourismusbranche einen festen Platz hat, für die Entwicklung unserer Spezies jedoch nicht von höherem Interesse ist. Man erlaube mir dieses persönliche Urteil: Die Menschheit war um einiges charmanter und schneidiger, als wir sie beim Bau der Pyramiden unterstützt haben. Wir, die wir erkannt haben, dass der Bau von Hochleistungsraumschiffen nur funktionieren kann, indem man nach der eigenen Intuition einfach ein Bauteil ins andere steckt, haben den wahren Kern des Seins bereits erkannt, während der Mensch sich weiterhin durch absurde mentale Konstrukte und sinnfreie Bedenken behindert. Man kann nur hoffen, dass mit dem statistisch bewiesenen Absinken des menschlichen Intelligenzquotienten die Menschheit doch noch ihren Weg zur Erleuchtung finden wird. Um diesen Zustand zu unterstützen, leisten wir



Entwicklungshilfe in Form von Gammastrahlung und wertlosen TV-Formaten im Abendprogramm der privaten Fernsehsender.

Unterm Strich gebe ich der Menschheit auf dem Planeten Erde  $\frac{3}{5}$  Milchkühen.

# ESCAPE

a prequel to *BBQ* by Lea Köster

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

Everything is glowing bright in the setting afternoon sun, the light covering the world in a million shades of red. Smoke is hanging thick in the air, making the heat of the disappearing day even more unbearable.

The neighbours all around are bidding the summer farewell with a last barbecue. I can hear the children laugh, and play, and cry. I can hear the grownups laugh, and talk, and shout. I can hear dogs and cats and cars. I can hear sounds all around. I can hear sounds everywhere, except in our house.

Our house is empty and quiet. No one has said a word, acknowledged the other one's presence or tried to make oneself heard. I have tried. I have tried a hundred times. The other times I pleased my mother and stayed quiet, showed everyone the perfect daughter. She tells me then that she is proud of me, that she loves me, that I am all she ever wished for.

I love her. She made me the person I am today. She gave me the strength to leave and never come back. I love her. And that's why I haven't told her yet, that's why I haven't told anyone. It will destroy her. Losing both her children exactly one year apart.

My bag is packed, stored under my bed. I will get it out when everyone is asleep. I am not sure I should have packed it, not last night. But it's too late for these kinds of thoughts now – I made up my mind.

The grandmother clock in the foyer chimes six. The sound moves through the whole house, through every part of my body and I close my eyes for a moment.

'I hate that fucking thing!' I hear her voice as if it were yesterday, but it wasn't yesterday, it's been exactly one year. My sister was the smarter one, she was braver and prettier too, she was... is... everything my mum loves about me. Will I find her on my travels in my new life?

The sound fades and shortly after, like clockwork, I can hear my mother working in the kitchen. I can't hear her, just the pots, and pans, and bowls clanging together. My father will be in the living room, in the big worn armchair facing the garden, reading the newspaper.

At seven we dine. Not a word is exchanged. No need for those. I said my goodbyes - with pen and paper, to be delivered two days from now. My mother never speaks if it isn't absolutely necessary, and my father is a naturally quiet person. Everything is as it always was. And nothing will change when I am gone.

It's seven twenty-three as I glance at the clock, and seven thirty-five as we finished dinner and I make my way up the stairs. Just a few hours left until I am finally free.

In my room I finish up a homework and then fold some paper birds out of colourful paper to pass the time. As I am hanging them up by the window

and watch how they dance in the breeze it knocks at my door. My mum is standing in the doorway, wearing her apron.

‘Your dad and I decided to have a barbeque tomorrow. Could you help me get the meat out of the freezer?’

‘Sure,’ I respond and jump down from the window seat I had been standing on to pin the paper birds to the ceiling.

I follow my mum, down the hallway and down the stairs, contemplating if she is aware that we had a barbeque last year, too, after my sister left.

We continue along the hallway of the ground floor towards the door to the basement. She opens it and lets me descend the steep steps first. I let my fingers brush past the rough stone walls. I always loved the feeling: cold, somewhat sandy, close to painful but never hurting me. Today they prick my finger and a drop of blood appears. To not get any stains on my clothes I put the finger in my mouth. I hope my mum doesn’t see.

‘I hope you didn’t get any of that blood anywhere near your clothes. Let me see!’

Shit. I turn around at the bottom of the stairs, holding out my finger for my mum to see.

The next thing I know, I am crouching on the ground, the white tiles splattered with red dots. My head is hurting terribly and something is dripping down the side of my face.

‘Look at me!’ Her voice doesn’t leave any room for protest, so I do. She is looking down on me from three steps up. Her hair is perfectly arranged in a neat bun at the back of her head, her dress showing wrinkles under the

apron, her make-up smeared at her eye. Did she cry? She isn't looking her usual self. Did something happen?

'Mum, are you okay? Were you crying?' I ask in a weak voice. My eyes are heavy, my head hurts and my body tells me to stay down - getting up would be a bad idea. It is then that I see the hammer in my mother's hand, dangling on her side, her knuckles white, drops of blood falling to the concrete steps.

'Mum, what is going on?' My voice quivers now and I try to get up, try to create more distance between us, but my legs give out under me, and I fall, once again, to the floor.

'You slipped and fell. But that's okay, we all make mistakes. Let me help you,' she says, her voice sweet now. But she doesn't move.

'Mum?' I plead as the edges of my vision become darker. I raise a hand to my head and realise that it is blood that's running down my face and shoulder, onto my clothes and the floor. Is that bone I feel? How am I still awake, conscious?

'Mum?' I whimper again. Why is she just standing there?

'You glanced at the clock, twice.'

'What?' I voice my confusion, not knowing if she heard it, my strength declining by the second.

'You really thought you could outwit me and just run away?' She leaves a short pause. 'You are just like your sister.'

She just stands there watching me as I slowly sink further to the ground, soaking my clothes with the blood that has been oozing onto the floor. My

eyes are so heavy and all I want to do is sleep. In the daze that is trying to pull me under, I hear the basement door open.

‘Dad?’ I whisper, knowing that he can’t hear me. There are no shouts, no pushing, no steps, no words from him or anything that would indicate that he is going to help me. What I hear instead is my mum speaking calmly and quietly to him, using her everyday voice as though nothing is wrong.

‘She was like her sister.’

My father’s response is tired, heavy, almost bored, as if he has been through all of this before and knows that he can’t change a thing, and still he asks, wants to know. ‘Carol, honey, was that really necessary? She was our daughter.’

‘She was a disappointment, a disgrace, weak, like her sister before her. She is no daughter of mine. Now go upstairs and send the invitations!’

I can feel my eyes closing, there is no use fighting it anymore and still, I feel sorry. I am... What am I? Sorry, free, happy, dying, surviving, fighting, loved? A few tears roll down my cheeks and I am suddenly certain that I will see my sister sooner than I had planned and hoped and with a smile on my lips everything goes dark.

# GEMEINSAM EINSAM

an artwork by Alvina Girke



# UNINTENTIONAL FEELINGS

a Shakespearean sonnet by Alicia Albers

*My dear friends!*

Just want to let you know:

*I hope it never ends,*

*instead it shall grow.*

*What is meant?*

You may ask.

*Our friendship; this given present!*

Although sometimes I feel like wearing a mask.

Sometimes I feel left out,

Knowing it is not on purpose.

I just want to shout:

Feelings, stop making me think I am worthless!

It is not anybody's "fault".

But I want this to change, it should not go untold.



# PASSED ON

an extract from a novel project by Lina Ketelsen

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

Monica's mother had been staring at the wall for about an hour now, whilst Monica was staring at her. She wondered if her mother even registered her gaze, if she even noticed the desperation hiding behind it. Monica was holding a cup of tea in her hands, the print of a white kitten sitting in front of a pink window peeking out between her fingers. It was her favourite cup; her mother had gotten it for her when she was only eight. The tea had gone cold. She had only drunk half of it.

*I wish you would still care about me. I care so much about you.* She kept her thoughts to herself, as she did often these days. The only person she ever shared them with was her husband. He'd always listen and she felt as though he would never judge her for thoughts she herself would deem as cruel coming from a daughter about a mother. She didn't want to be cruel about her mother, but there was only so much a person could handle, even if that person was a daughter.

Monica was staring a hole in the back of her mother's head, completely lost in thought. She grabbed her red, clothbound journal and a pen out of her bag and started writing.

\*\*\*

When did everything get this bad? You haven't left the house in weeks and I can barely get you to eat anything. I wish I could go back and pinpoint where it all went wrong. I guess no one's to blame, really. Could I have stopped your depression from getting this bad if I had just gotten you help earlier? I was just a kid and back then there was barely any help available, and I didn't even really know what was wrong with you. But still. I wish I could go back to the days of me and you sitting in your bed, with you telling me stories about your childhood, while we cuddled until dad came back home. Everything was better then. I barely see him anymore. I guess it's just too much for him to handle, too. You know, sometimes I blame him for your sadness. And sometimes, if I look closely, I see the same sadness in his eyes. I wonder if Rob will ever look into my eyes and find it in them too. The terror I feel at such a thought. I would never want to do that to him. He deserves to live a life full of happiness and laughter and I will make sure to give him just that. Not just for him, but also for me. I promised myself I will get help as soon as I start to notice the same signs you had shown once everything began. I still remember how you used to take care of me, Mom. You took me to get birth control when I was only thirteen because my cramps were so bad I could barely get out of bed. Everyone in our neighbourhood judged you for it but you never cared. Now I'm not sure you care about anything at all. I wonder what you will say when I tell you about the baby. The baby that I will give birth to because I forgot to bring that birth control on my honeymoon. Rob just said that whatever happens happens and if we do conceive a child it must simply be meant to be. I hope you'll

love your grandchild. I'm sure deep down you will, even though you might not be able to show it. I promise to make sure that my child will know how much you love it. Mom, I am so scared of becoming a mother. I am so scared of becoming you.

\*\*\*

She put the pen down and got up to make her mother dinner she probably wouldn't eat.

A week later, Monica had an appointment at her gynaecologist to check up on the baby. Rob had taken a day off from his job at the bank to come with her. Aside from some nausea, the pregnancy was going very well, and everything had been fine at her other appointments, yet Monica was overcome with anxiety every single time.

As she lay down on the bed, Rob sat down on the chair next to it. He squeezed her hand, looking at her with his warm brown eyes and giving her a small smile. It was the same smile Monica fell in love with the night they met in that Jazz Club, and she still got that same warm feeling inside of her chest whenever she saw it. His leg bounced up and down quickly, but his thumb drew comforting circles on the back of Monica's hand.

Her nurse walked in, greeted them, and began the examination. Monica sighed in relief as soon as she found out that the baby was fine and everything looked exactly as it should.

She thanked God in her head and flashed her husband a wide smile who promptly reciprocated it.

Then, the nurse asked, ‘Do you want to know the gender of the baby?’

‘Yes.’ Monica and Rob replied in union. They had talked about it beforehand and had decided on satiating their curiosity instead of waiting until the baby’s birth. Now, with the answer to the question being so near, Monica felt her heartbeat quicken and her grip on Rob’s hand tightened.

‘Congratulations, you’re having a girl!’

Monica had gotten a little quiet on the car ride home, while Rob did his best to console her worries. He had calmed her racing thoughts down a bit by talking about all the options for the nursery they had been working on and the dresser he was planning on building for their baby girl. As soon as they arrived, she told her husband she needed some time for herself and sat down on their terrace. She closed her eyes and took a moment to feel how the sun tickled her skin and, as she breathed in, she smelt the scent of freshly cut grass. Rob must have mown the lawn earlier this morning while she was paying her mother her daily visit. Monica remembered her journal entry that she wrote a week ago and decided to return to it, overwhelmed with emotions and desperate to make some sense of them.

\*\*\*

How is it possible to feel so happy yet so scared at the same time? I’m so glad that my baby is fine, but I am also a little scared. A mother is more likely to pass her depression onto her daughter than her son. Will I lay this burden upon her that has been throwing shadows over my life ever since I was a little girl? Is it my fault if she will be haunted by the same fate as my mother? If I know that it cannot truly be my fault, then why do I still feel

guilty somehow? Sometimes, I feel myself waiting for the day when it's my turn and I start to feel my mother's depression creep up on me. I'm scared of it. But all I know is that I cannot pass the fear onto my daughter, I cannot, and I will not make her experience the things I have had to go through with my mother. I will do anything I can to show my baby that the world is a beautiful place and that she is unconditionally loved by her parents, just like any child deserves. Just like I deserved it, too. I cannot wait to give birth to her, I'm sure the sight of my girl will clear my worries, at least for some time.

\*\*\*

Monica closed her journal, took a deep breath, and put her hand on her round belly. Just then, Rob walked out on the terrace holding a tray with tea and cookies, smiling at the sight of his wife. She smiled back at him and felt that everything would be alright as long as they had each other.

### **Author's note**

This piece is going to be a part of a coming-of-age novel spanning the sixties through to the early 2000s. It centres around the issues of womanhood, mental illness, motherhood, and love. It follows the protagonist Monica, whose story is based on my own family's history, as she grows into womanhood, finds love, and navigates life with a depressed mother while becoming a mother herself.

## **BIRDS ON PAGES**

a haiku by Lukas Bartsch

A quiet evening  
I read by the open window  
the words fly away.

## **TRANQUILLITY**

a haiku by Lukas Bartsch

A tall Gingko tree  
has spread its yellow leaves far  
out over my soul.

# MEMORIES KEEPING ME AWAKE AT 3 AM

a collection by Jehan Ammar

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

## **Mondays, Am I right?!**

It's 7:50 am on a Monday. My eyes feel tired as I stare at my phone again, waiting for the bus to arrive. I look up, taking in the sun as I see a grey Smart pass me by. I worry about my seminar and how my group is so far behind. They better show up or else I got out of bed at 6:30 for nothing. I did not know at the time that they were still peacefully sleeping in their beds, dreaming and snoring. The Smart passes me again. The man looks confused. I remember when I first moved here, getting lost in the narrow streets and being too shy to ask for directions. He looks fifty, bald, possibly without family. That much I can tell from the car. I take a step forward, hoping to provide help. I can see the fast movement of his arm, and then something pink. It is his dick. In his hand. He looks at me and continues. I step back.

\*\*\*

## Goodbye

My mother next to me smiles. I feel unsure about this and stare at the camera lens and my reflection within, black ruffled blouse matching my hat in color. My father's face is telling me to smile as well, which I find weird and strangely out of place. Almost the whole family is here, only one member missing. What a chance to capture this moment. I shift in my seat and look at my mother. I hate being here and I hate my father for taking pictures now, even though I don't really hate him. I argue and argue and never quite smile. The camera shutters. We leave the restaurant and make our way to the funeral.

\*\*\*

## The good, the bad and the medium

I remember your death more than I remember your life.

But when I do, I think of mostly the good.

How the thriller we were writing had so many twists that, by the end, not even we knew who the killer was. Maybe we never did. Maybe it was never about the ending anyway.

But I also remember the bad.

Sometimes.

The moment when you came out as queer. I told you I'd support but never told you how seen I felt in that moment. How that moment mattered. But it mattered only to me because you declared it a joke an hour later. But



you were perfect and beautiful and as long as you looked at me, no joke could take away words unspoken.

I also think of the medium occasionally. The moments when you felt on top of the world while climbing a tree, happy and carefree while I stood chained to its roots in worry. We were 13. How we were both failing math at 14 but you didn't care at all while I cared too much. Now you're eternally 15 and I'm 22 but a part of me isn't. I wonder if it's a piece of me you took to the grave or a piece of you, I keep carrying every day in the depths of my heart.

Your birthday is coming up. We barely knew each other, just a fleeting moment passing by, long gone. I miss you. Sometimes. In the good, the bad and the medium.

# HIDDEN AWAY

a short story by Paula Solterbeck

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

By the time I first saw her, I had stopped counting the days. I remember how little she fit in my world then, with her hair still all shiny and this weird look she gave me, almost a grin. In contrast to the dark, colourless barn, where it stank of horses you never saw nor heard. The dryness of the south, and the dust that reached every corner of any lung. Surrounded and trapped by all the wood, wood that offered splinters when pushed up against. No, Anya didn't belong here.

He sat, no, rather pushed her down into my little coop and clicked the newly-bought handcuffs around her wrists. Then he said something about her being my new friend or something. At the time I thought that was some sick joke, but ironically, he would be right about it in a way. No, I'm actually not going to think about him. I want to think about her. Anya. My Anya.

Anya wasn't the first, obviously, but neither was I. Now that I think about it, I don't know who it was. I had kind of always assumed that it was Holly, but she was merely the first I knew about. I honestly don't really remember how I got here, when it was still her place, Holly's place, or how many days I was unconscious; that's how drugged up I was and to be fair... that wasn't all him. I know my way around those kinds of things. Drugs.

Anyway, when I woke up all those nights ago, Holly was there. Watched me in my misery of the withdrawal. This sweet girl I went to middle school with, all dirty and broken, you could see that from miles away. I knew then and there, as soon as my senses started to clear, that she was not the same girl I met as a child. That girl with the thoroughly-combed blonde hair, straight As, and all the talk of future husbands and shit - that girl would never come back home. That was what I first thought, after I had recognized her under all the dirt.

She didn't really talk, other than trying to soothe me, the first few days, just prayed. Perfect girl. It is kind of an awkward reunion, right? At least, that's what Anya said about it later and she wasn't wrong. When Holly finally talked to me, she mainly repeated that they would find us soon. Probably more for her own sake than mine.

Now, I didn't know who they were supposed to be, with almost everyone in town thinking she ran away, after some bad breakup with her fiancé or boyfriend or whatever. Apparently, she had also become some kind of theater kid in high school, at least her friends said something about her dreaming of Hollywood, I guess they hoped that was where she went. Maybe that was wishful thinking. I was unsure about her parents, but with her Christianity and her perfect-ness, I guessed that they were still looking. But, still, no one has found me and the others, even after he took Holly away from the barn and didn't bring her back. Instead, he replaced her. Twice. And we remain hidden away. Maybe they stopped because they found her body or something, but wouldn't they start looking for that asshole then?

Although, no one out there would be looking for me, I don't have to be delusional about that. I had been away for weeks at a time, high on some shit a friend of a friend of a stranger had sold me. The folks were used to it and I didn't really have any friends before I met Anya. Oh yes, Anya.

After she arrived, she had nervously laughed sometimes, and I thought the psycho had caught himself one of his kind and hoped they might kill each other. Honestly, I get it; while crying would have been the more appropriate choice, I, too, sometimes laugh in absurd situations. Though I have never been in a situation this absurd before. That was something we joked about too, because she seemed so collected (aside from the laughing). She didn't really need my advice, didn't let me be her teacher. I guess that's why we felt like equals, except that she still smelled better than me back then.

'I've never seen you around town, where are you from?' I had asked, while cleaning the wounds he had given her and her eyes had widened a little. When she answered, I understood why.

'Which state are we in?' she had asked in her silly West Coast accent. San Francisco was where she caught it, she told me later. The sad expression on her face didn't look right. Unnatural. Not fitting in that beautiful face. I wanted to cheer her up - after all we would be here for a while.

'Sweet, sweet Louisiana, honey.' I leaned into the accent with this one and to my surprise, she actually laughed about it. That was when I knew she wasn't like my other companions. 'Why would a Cali girl come down here? Family matters?'

‘Passing through,’ she had answered and her expression told me to leave it alone. In hindsight it feels like fate, right? Had he never brought her, we would never have met. Of course, I wish she didn’t have to endure the things he did to us, but selfishly I’m glad that she is the one here with me. For the sake of our moments together, not his. Maybe I’ll share these moments one day, but for now, they belong to us and us only.

In the time with her, my face hurt in a way that I can’t easily describe. The muscles meant for the happy kind of expressions which hadn’t been in use for a while, and the intensity of the soreness, made it clear that I was here for longer than I had imagined. She made me smile so much, she even made me laugh sometimes. Occasionally, I even thought I was happy to be here. After all, this was the place I fell in love.

# MEIN HERZ IST EINE LEINWAND

a poem by Myra Sophia Dedekind

Mein Herz ist eine Leinwand und du malst sie an  
Rosa das Interesse, die Hoffnung, ein Anfang  
Orange die Panik, das beengende Gefühl,  
dass ich plötzlich meine Leinwand an jemand anderen verlier'  
Gelb die Freude, die du mir täglich machst,  
Lila die Blumen, welche du mir zuerst brachst  
Blau die Tränen, das Gefühl, wenn einer geht  
Grau die Angst, die in mir lebt  
Grün die Zukunft, Hoffnung, Träume  
Rot die Wut, welche nie aufschäumte  
Wein die Abende, die wir gemeinsam verbringen  
Schwarz die Sicherheit, dass wir alles bezwingen  
Braun die Ruhe, Sicherheit, Frieden  
Bedacht lässt du meine Leinwand wiegen  
In wechselnden Höhen, Intensitäten  
Bemalst du  
Mein Herz

# COMPOUND EYES

a short story by Luc Salinger

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

Jessica and Mark were sitting on a bench in the park. The weather was scorching hot. A perfect summer's day. Besides them, the park was completely empty, as if they were the only people who were aware of how great the weather was. A couple of bees were there, occupied with burying their heads in flowers. Birds were ploughing the ground for worms and occasionally, a mosquito tried to test its luck with the couple, gently flying to their exposed legs to ram its snout into their flesh.

Jessica's breath was irregular. She was panting, and tripped over her words, clearly excited about something she had in mind. Her friend Mark stared at her, patiently, expectantly.

'There is something I want to pitch to you,' she said, her breath shaky, her eyes glistening with excitement.

Mark smiled at her. Knowing her, it was probably something stupid. Last time she started a conversation like that, she told of crossbreeding pigs and ducks to develop a special bacon that stays crisp and doesn't get soggy once she heard that ducks, even when spending time in water, don't get wet. As she got older, getting her own apartment and her own responsibilities, she developed the habit of completely obsessing over things that only Mark was

willing to put up with. She knew that Mark was the only one who listened to her, so she was always excited to talk with him about her ideas.

‘What’s the pitch?’

‘You know...’ She stared into his eyes. ‘You know, how we have all sorts of pictures at school for things like the solar systems, atoms or those sliced up bacteria cells?’ She waited for him to nod.

‘Yes?’

‘Nobody took those pictures. Those are just concept pictures! You know that?’

Mark tried not to laugh. ‘Course I do. They aren’t photographs. They are illustrations. Everyone knows that.’ He put on a look of suspicion. ‘Is that all?’

‘That is not all!’ She put her finger up. ‘Consider this now...’ She leaned a bit closer forward. ‘All those illustrations have been made with the sole intention of helping humans understand the universe.’

Mark still had no idea what Jessica was rambling on about, but her tone was building up to something. He remembers her bacon pitch, too, being like that. Picture this, she had said, you’re swimming in a pool and crave a crispy slice of bacon, but oops, it falls into the pool and now it’s not enjoyable anymore. Reason for that is the hydrophilic nature of the bacon strip itself! It had been hard for him to visualize the scenario at all, but she had a way of gripping Mark as if the things she was saying were really sound. Even if she was completely delusional.



Mark nodded now and she continued. 'I ask you this now: have you ever seen such a visualisation for any other species?'

'I guess not. No. Those pictures are for humans because they are the only species that studies the universe in such a way.' His eyes trailed off from Jessica.

He thought Jessica looked really cute when she was getting riled up by her ideas, even if they felt like she was just sharing her shower thoughts with him, as opposed to really interesting concepts worthy of discussion. She had little bags under her eyes whenever she pitched him an idea, as if she mulled over it for the entire night beforehand. It drew attention to her eyes. Those eyes, with their verdant tinge. So tired. So beautiful. He smiled.

Jessica put her hands on her thighs and looked at him smugly. 'I don't think that's quite fair now, is it? For example, you have those colourful pictures of DNA. That would be so useless for a dog because they don't see the colours that well. We are in the position that we know better. And gate-keeping our knowledge is just plain cruel. Don't you think?'

Mark thought back to the time Jessica was at his place. Back when he still had his dog. She'd seemed so gleeful and giddy at that moment. His big mastiff tongue had caressed her cheek like it was vanilla ice cream on a hot summer's day. Back then, she'd never told him of ideas in her head. She seemed so close, but also not as talkative as she was now. He couldn't help but shake his preference for the old version of her, back when he still had his dog.

'I don't think dogs would care.'

‘Some might,’ she quickly responded and a daring smile crept on her face, as she looked into his eyes. ‘But my idea doesn’t pertain to dogs. I need to start somewhere else. How do you think a fly sees the world?’

‘With compound eyes?’

Jessica jumped up from the bench, putting her palms in the air as if she was balancing an invisible cheerleader on top of her. ‘A huge tapestry of eyes. Like a kaleidoscope. And if that fly would see a picture of the solar system, it would see hundreds of thousands of planets in its view.’ She adjusted her glasses. ‘And that’s not scientifically correct.’

Mark remembered the time when she hadn’t worn glasses. She broke them. It was in the summer, must be seven years ago, back when it took her parents over a year to replace them because they had to spend a lot of money on some stupid stone, as Jessica had put it, for their son. So many emotions inside her, she didn’t know what she was saying. Back then, she was upset that she was so dependent on others. She saw everything blurry. It was the only time that Jessica had said to Mark that he looked beautiful. He knew it was meant as a joke, but he remembered it.

‘I don’t think flies care about the accuracy of their conception of the universe.’ Mark said, now. He stared too much. He shouldn’t look at her this intensely. He should break eye contact once in a while, he thought.

‘You can be such a hater sometimes.’ She nudged him a bit with her shoulder as she sat down on the bench next to him again.

Mark smiled. ‘I’m not a hater. I just don’t think your idea is feasible. I can’t even begin to understand how you would conceive a picture, where

a fly, with its hundreds of little eyes, could see a single image as we do. If you turn the solar system into a kaleidoscope, then it would just see the kaleidoscope in its own eyes, multiplied again.'

Jessica rubbed her chin. 'My hypothesis was that two negatives make a positive and the kaleidoscope and the compound eyes would cancel each other out.' She looked at him. 'Did you know that flies can see UV light? Maybe that's the key.'

He began to yawn. If only Jessica could see how annoying she was being. Back when they were still at school together, it wasn't draining, talking to her. Ever since that one summer, when his dog was diagnosed with cancer and Jessica's brother Dylan had drowned in their swimming pool when she was supposed to be watching over him, their relationship changed. Jessica used to talk about real things during that summer. Not crispy water-bacon or fly-friendly pictures. Things felt more real.

'Is something wrong?' Jessica asked him. 'You tired?' she added with a teasing undertone.

'Yeah, the weather is getting to me. I think I should go.' He stood up from the bench. They used to hug each other when departing but this time, Mark didn't feel like it. He waved to her and left, leaving Jessica wondering why.

When Jessica went to her apartment, the idea she had just talked about with Mark was still in the forefront of her mind. She felt excitement coursing through her and immediately got to her working station. When she sat down in her chair, an army of fruit flies flew from the partly empty yoghurt

cups on her desk. The entire working station smelled like rotting cheese or spoiled milk, depending on which yogurt cup was closest and able to overpower the others.

She opened up her photoshop app and worked throughout the day. The smell of the yogurt served a practical use of ruining her appetite whenever she took a breath, so she never felt the need to eat as she diligently worked. Hit the Save-as button, printer on and out came a kaleidoscope, where every little hexagon was a small image of the solar system. It filled the entire page and with pride she held it up in the air.

Jessica rushed towards the kitchen, paper in hand. Once she opened the door. Her ears were filled with buzzing noises. On the kitchen counter, the flies living with her couldn't have been happier with the accidental hospitality of the hostess. Opened cans of fruits, black bananas, fish bones, half a pack of minced meat that had turned completely brown and served as a maggot kindergarten.

Whenever she stepped into her kitchen, it was a stark reminder to her just how hard living alone was. She hadn't seen her parents even once since she was kicked out, at eighteen. They hated her guts for letting her brother die. They never used the pool after that. Not even on the hottest of summers. Careless. She didn't care about anything, her father had said. It stung, and he was wrong. She did care. She put the paper she designed on her kitchen table.

After a couple of seconds. A lonely fly landed on the image and it was the first time a fly got an accurate representation of the solar system. It

tapped its trunk on the paper, still warm from the printer. Rubbed its tiny little hands and flew away.

# BURNING

a poem by Lea Köster

It's the future we cannot escape that we dread.

It's the past we cannot change that we fear to repeat.

It's the present we cannot enjoy that we wish to be something else.

It's life we forget to live because we think we have time.

It is us, us, that we lose in in the process of trying to fit in.

It is myself that I am trying to find in this world that is burning to ash.

It is a fight, I fear, will never end.

A fight we cannot escape.

An end

An inevitable end

Of burning ash.

# ICARUS

a poem by Lukas Bartsch

I wander in phosphorescence,  
not quite capturing its essence,  
Tumbling falling through the aether,  
high above yet still beneath her.  
Ethereal realms thundering, colliding,  
the heavens pondering still deciding.  
Deep within the earth ascending,  
in metamorphosis transcending,  
the shining knight falls on the sword –  
growing wings, becomes a lord.  
In the light beyond the shades  
freedom turns my fears to blades.  
Roses drowning in the fog,  
wallowing my mind does block  
the comprehension of the form,  
the wings the scales, the horn.  
Hence, I'm trapped in waking hell,  
my body but a tolling bell.



*Illustration by Jehan Ammar*

# FIEBERTRAUM

a poem by Jeremias Winckler

In klirrender Kälte, so eisig und schwer,  
wird's dunkel um mich, ich spüre nichts mehr.  
Ein Warteraum voll, das Klappern von Schuh'n,  
Krankenhausbetten, die rauschend vorbeizieh'n.

Ich taumle zum Tresen, kann kaum noch steh'n,  
meine Beine wie Gummi, ich lasse mich geh'n.  
Wände verzerrt, mein Blick wird trüb,  
ich stürze hinab, nur Dunkelheit blieb.

Folge dem Pfad, der sich ruhig erstreckt,  
vorbei an den Felsen, die der Himmel bedeckt.  
Auf unendlich Metern, mein Atem wird schwer,  
meine Freunde umarmen mich, ich kann nicht mehr.

Dampfende Kessel, Chilischoten fliegen,  
ein Mann wird gefasst, die Sicherheit: Hiebe!  
Ein rotes Auge wacht, der Wahnsinn lacht,  
ein Schlüssel im Schloss, flüchte ich sacht.



Morgentau, ein Reh, ein Pfad entlang,  
folge ich dem Nomaden, ohne Gesang.  
Auf meinem Pferd durch die Steppe so weit,  
bis die Stille mich fängt in ihrer Ewigkeit.

Fiebernd im Bett, die Stimme so leise,  
suche ich Trost in der fremden Weite.  
Die Lok dampft, der Abschied ist nah,  
ein letzter Kuss, dann ist sie da.

Ein Brief, ein Beamter, ein Raum so kahl,  
ein Rückzug, ein Sturz, das Ende der Qual.  
Doch die Heilung kommt, das Licht wird klar,  
ein neuer Tag, bald bin ich wieder da.

# GEDANKENKARUSSELL

an extract from a novel by Jeremias Winckler

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

*Hamburg, Deutschland, 22.10.2017*

Ein weiterer Tag geht zu Ende. Ich schließe meine Augen und tauche ab in ein schwarzes Meer. Die Dunkelheit umhüllt mich. Hier liege ich nun also. Alleine mit meinen Gedanken. Die sich drehen. Immer weiter. In nie endenden Kreisen. Ohne Anfang. Und ohne Ende. Der Schlaf will nicht kommen. Das Kissen ist unbequem. Ich rücke es zurecht. Es ist ein wenig klamm und zu warm. Viel zu warm. Vielleicht drehe ich es lieber um. So ist es besser. Bevor ich einschlafe, sollte ich noch mal auf die Toilette gehen, auch wenn ich eigentlich gar nicht muss. Ich öffne meine Augen, drehe mich auf meine Seite und gehe zum Bad. Krankenhaus riecht unausstehlich, so steril. Insbesondere das Bad. Nachdem ich für einige Minuten untätig auf der Toilette gesessen habe, gehe ich zurück zu Bett und decke mich zu. Eine Krankenwagensirene ertönt, gedämpft. In Wirklichkeit ist der Krankenwagen ganz in der Nähe. Doch das merkt man nicht. Die Fenster sind schallisoliert. Der Raum fühlt sich beengend an. Mein Zelt war mir lieber. Da konnte ich nachts die Geräusche des Waldes hören. Das Rascheln der Blätter. Das Schnaufen und Stampfen. Doch jetzt ist alles still. Ich versuche, mich auf meine Atmung zu konzentrieren. Das soll beim Einschlafen helfen, glaube ich. Vielleicht lenkt es mich ab. Von den Gedanken. Langsam

fülle ich meine Lungen mit Luft. Sekunde für Sekunde. Und leere sie wieder. Mein Körper fühlt sich schwer an. Vielleicht schlafe ich endlich ein. Wenn ich viel schlafe, geht die Zeit schneller vorbei. Hoffentlich. Denn ich bin es leid. Wann kann ich endlich das Krankenhaus verlassen? Wann wird es mir endlich besser gehen? Wann wache ich aus diesem Albtraum auf? Ich kneife meine Augen zusammen. Tränen laufen mir übers Gesicht. Ich spüre, wie die salzigen Tropfen über meine Wangen laufen. Langsam. Konzentriere dich lieber auf deine Atmung. Das ist weniger schmerzhaft. Weniger beengend. Als der Gedanke. Der Gedanke des vergehenden Lebens. So dramatisch ist es gar nicht. Ich bin kein akuter Notfall. Ich habe ja nur Fieber. Mein Körper funktioniert und bekämpft das, was auch immer es ist, was ich in mir trage. Bald schon wird es mir besser gehen. Ich atme wieder aus. Langsam und kontrolliert. Dann streiche ich mir die Tränen von den Wangen. Dabei drücke ich etwas zu fest zu. Kleine weiße Punkte erscheinen in der Dunkelheit. Wie farblose Mandalas. Sich drehende Lichter in der Dunkelheit. Fluoreszierendes Gedankengut. Das mich umgibt, während ich falle. Immer weiter. Hinab in die Dunkelheit. Wie ein Stein unter Wasser, der dem Abgrund entgegentrudelt. Oben sehe ich das Lichtspiel der Sonne. Strahlen piercen die Oberfläche und erhellen das Nichts, bevor sie sich in der Endlosigkeit verlieren. Immer weiter. Immer tiefer. Schwerelos. Lautlos. Angezogen von der Finsternis in mir.

# KEIN ENDE IN SICHT

an extract from the same novel by Jeremias Winckler

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

*51.524453 Nord, 100.073991 Ost, Mongolei, 8.9.2017*

Durch die einen Spalt breit geöffnete Zeltplane scheinen mir die ersten Sonnenstrahlen des Tages entgegen. Sie vertreiben die morgendliche Frische wie der Frühling den Winter. Unzählige wässrige Kügelchen, die sich an den Spitzen der Grashalme festhalten, rollen wie funkelnde Perlen daran hinunter. Es ist ein Spektakel der Natur und ich bin der einzige Zuschauer.

Ich reibe mir den Schlaf aus dem Gesicht. Die Rauheit meiner Hände kratzt an der feinen Haut der Augenlider. Mein Nacken ist steif. Wegen der Wurzeln und Steine, die unter dem Zelt liegen, habe ich in einer unnatürlichen Position geschlafen. Unter den Fingernägeln, an den Füßen und in meinen Haaren, überall hat sich Dreck angesammelt. Obwohl ich es selbst kaum noch rieche, umgibt mich der Geruch tierischer Verwilderung. Meine Klamotten sind durchgeschwitzt. Nur meine Unterwäsche wasche ich in den Bergbächen entlang des Weges. Mich plagt der Hunger, doch ich unterlasse es, nach Essen in der Satteltasche zu suchen. Vor zwei Tagen habe ich das letzte Stück Brot verzehrt und die Überbleibsel der Karotten abgenagt. Mein Proviant ist erschöpft. Ich stehe auf. Mir wird schwarz vor Augen und ich breite die Arme aus, um nicht zu stürzen. Seit gestern

verspüre ich gelegentlich einen Anflug von Schwindel. So stehe ich da, schwankend, stinkend, hungrig und trotzdem auf eine sonderbare Art glücklich.

Es ist Zeit, das Lager abzubauen. Alles packe ich ordentlich zusammen. Die Gegenstände und Klamotten, die ich erst zum Abend wieder brauche, werden zuerst verstaut. Das Messer und mein Kompass klappern in der Hosentasche. Ghostbuster zupft an einzelnen Grashalmen. Ich nähere mich ihm. Er hebt den Kopf. Seine tiefschwarzen Augen folgen meinem Gang. Ich löse den Knoten, mit dem ich ihn an einen Baum gebunden habe. Da Ghostbuster von eher stürmischer Natur ist und sich leicht in Rage versetzen lässt, mache ich mich auf Gegenwehr gefasst. Ich ziehe den Hengst mit einem Ruck zu mir heran. Ohne den Kopf zur Seite zu reißen, wie er es die letzten Tage versucht hat, gehorcht er mir. Ich schmeiße die dicken Filzdecken über seinen Rücken. Der Sattel folgt. Inzwischen halte ich die Leine nur noch lose in der Hand. Er steht wie angewurzelt. Ich bücke mich und atme tief ein, greife entschlossen unter dem Bauch des Tieres hindurch, schnappe mir die auf der anderen Seite herunterhängenden Lederriemen und ziehe sie durch die metallenen Schnallen. Die Unberechenbarkeit tierischen Eigensinns bereitet mir immer noch einen ungemeinen Respekt. Was wäre, wenn mein Pferd sich erschreckt? Würde es sich aufbäumen und mich zur Seite schmeißen? Ich könnte unter die Hufe geraten. Ich ziehe die Riemen fest, Ghostbuster stöhnt auf, ein lang gezogener Furz entfährt ihm. Ich befestige die Satteltaschen und das Zelt auf seinem Rücken. Danach drücke ich Ghostbuster das Mundstück ins Maul. Alles ist bereit.

Ich schwinde mich mit einer fließenden Bewegung auf ihn und rufe: „Cho!“ Ohne zurückzuschauen, reite ich los. Unter den Hufen brechen Sträucher und Äste. Der Wind bläst mir durch das Haar. An den Waden spüre ich das rhythmische Pochen meines Begleiters Herz. Seine Muskeln spannen sich im Takt und mit jedem Steigen hebt sich mein Körper und landet im nächsten Moment sanft auf dem sich senkenden Sattel. Die frische Morgenluft durchdringt mich, als wäre ich ein Teil von ihr. Ich fliege durch die Ausläufer des Waldes, getragen von Gezwitscher und meinem trommelnden Puls. Ghostbuster will nach links und nach rechts ausbrechen, doch mit sicherer Hand halte ich uns auf Kurs. Ich visiere die noch schneebedeckten Kuppen Russlands an. Die Grenze liegt nördlich vom Kovsgol-See. Seit Wochen reise ich immer weiter in Richtung Norden. In nur wenigen Tagen werde ich die russische Grenze sehen.

Aus der Böschung trabend, dem Geäst entweichend, öffnet sich vor mir eine weite Steppe. Das satte Grün der Wiesen und der Geruch von Wildblüten entlocken mir ein Lächeln, das sogleich zu einem Lachen wird. Wie eine gigantische Schlange windet sich ein reißender Bach durch die Mitte der offenen Fläche. Die Wellen tänzeln in weißen Gewändern zwischen den Steinen. Wir nähern uns dem Wasser, Ghostbuster senkt den Kopf und trinkt. Ich steige ab und fülle meine Wasserflasche. Eine Herde Wildpferde hat auf der anderen Seite Rast gemacht. Auch sie trinken. Einige Fohlen tapsen unbeholfen im Bach herum. Nachdem Ghostbuster seinen dringlichsten Durst gestillt hat, wird er auf die freien Pferde aufmerksam. Er wiehert und reckt den Kopf. Ich will ihm und mir die Freude der

Herdengemeinschaft nicht verweigern und drücke meine Hacken in die Flanken des Hengstes, um den Fluss zu durchqueren.

Unter den Hufen wackeln die Steine und die Strömung reißt an den Beinen meines Gefährten, doch wir leisten Widerstand. Mit sicheren Schritten, als wüsste er um die Beschaffenheit des Untergrundes, durchwaten er das Gewässer. Die Herde hat uns nicht aus den Augen gelassen und ist vom Fluss zurückgewichen. Ihr Wiehern hallt von den Felshängen wider. Die Neugier steigt in mir auf und ich will ihr Raum verschaffen. Wir nähern uns der Herde. Das Wiehern wird lauter und Ghostbuster reißt an den Zügeln. Ich muss ihn mit aller Kraft zurückhalten, damit er nicht vorschnellt. Ich wende mich zur Seite, betrachte eines der Fohlen, da entgleiten mir die Zügel. Mir rutscht das Herz in die Hose. Von Freiheit und Freude erfüllt, schießt Ghostbuster vorwärts. Ich klammere mich an den Eisenbügel des Sattels. Mein Körper holpert auf und ab. Ich finde den Rhythmus des Tieres nicht. Verzweifelt drücke ich meine Waden gegen die Flanken. Von der Hektik aufgescheucht, setzt sich die Herde in Bewegung. Wir hetzen auf den Wald zu. Die Äste schlagen mir ins Gesicht. Ich schmecke Blut. Das muss ein Ende haben!

An der Seite hängen die Zügel hinunter. Wir werden immer schneller. Die Kiefernadeln peitschen auf mich ein. Ich versuche, nach den Zügeln zu greifen, doch ich kriege sie nicht zu fassen. Mich zur Seite lehnd, komme ich ihnen näher. Mein Körper fliegt auf und ab. Die Oberschenkel schmerzen. Noch ein kleines Stück. Ich beuge mich vorwärts. Ein Zucken. Plötzlich: Schwerelosigkeit. Meine Füße fliegen aus den Steigbügeln. Meine

Hände schließen sich um die Zügel und ich halte mich mit Leibeskräften an ihnen fest. Ein Aufprall. Ich kann weder hören noch sehen. Ich werde über den Boden geschleift. Gerade will ich aufgeben, da bleibt die Welt stehen. Stille. Ich atme aus, krieche zu einem neben mir aufragenden Baumstumpf und schlage die Zügel darum. Es pocht in meinen Ohren und alles schmerzt. Ich schaue an mir hinunter. Unter der zerrissenen Hose sehe ich Blut. Ich betaste die Stelle vorsichtig. Für einige Minuten rühre ich mich nicht. Mein Pferd schaut sehnsüchtig der zwischen den Bäumen verschwindenden Herde nach.

Unter normalen Umständen hätte ich eine Pause gemacht und mein Lager an Ort und Stelle aufgeschlagen, aber mir fehlt es an Proviant. Ich weiß, dass ich weiter muss. Die nächsten Nomaden können nicht mehr weit sein. Sobald wir den Wald verlassen, werden wir welche finden. Wir müssen welche finden. Irgendwen. Von diesem Gedanken angespornt, stehe ich auf und ziehe Ghostbuster zu mir heran. Ich rücke die Satteltaschen zurecht, straffe den Gurt und steige auf. Jeder Meter des Weges schmerzt. Die schweißnassen Klamotten reiben an meiner wunden Haut. Mein Körper ist mit Blutblasen und Schürfwunden überzogen. Ich kann nicht mehr. Ich bin erschöpft. Aber ich muss weiter, solange ich noch die Kraft habe, mich im Sattel zu halten.



# KÄLTE UND EINSAMKEIT

an extract from the same novel by Jeremias Winckler

*Südlich vom Munku Sardyk, Mongolei, 9.9.2017*

Im schwachen Licht der Sterne sehe ich die enormen Weiten der Steppe. Wäre mir nicht so kalt, würde ich mich am liebsten auf die Wiese legen, um mich in der Unendlichkeit des Universums zu verlieren. Doch ans Faulenzen ist nicht zu denken. Ich muss mich um Wasser kümmern. Das sanfte Rauschen eines Baches durchbricht die Stille der Nacht. Ich kann die Entfernung nur schwer einschätzen, denn die Finsternis verschlingt Farben und Konturen der Umgebung. Ich folge dem wohlvertrauten plätschernden Geräusch. Bald erreiche ich den Bach. Ich tauche meine Flasche unter Wasser. Meine Hände sind wie betäubt. Sobald das Gefäß halb voll ist, nehme ich ein paar gierige Schlucke zu mir. Das Wasser benetzt meine Lippen und kühlt meinen spröden und kaputten Mund. Ich mache mich auf den Rückweg zum Lager.

Um mich vor der Kälte zu schützen, ziehe ich jeden Abend einen Großteil der Klamotten an. Genauer gesagt: zwei Sets Skiunterwäsche, zwei Paar Socken, vier T-Shirts, drei Pullis und zwei Hosen. Dann lege ich mich in den Schlafsack und decke mich mit den Jacken zu. Es hilft alles nichts, die Kälte kriecht ins Zelt und arbeitet sich Schicht für Schicht zu mir durch. Ich schließe den Zelteingang und stülpe mir die Kapuze des Schlafsacks über den Kopf. Meine Hände und Füße spüre ich kaum noch, und immer wieder überkommen mich Zitteranfälle. Die Nacht schreitet voran. Der

Bach plätschert. Mein Pferd trottet schnaubend umher. Und ich reibe die Hände aneinander und versuche, mich ganz tief in den Schlafsack zu verkriechen. Schließlich, nach mehreren Stunden der Kälte, gleite ich in einen unruhigen Schlaf.

Ich erwache zitternd. Der Reißverschluss des Schlafsackes hat sich in der Nacht ein wenig geöffnet. Ich will ihn schließen, aber meine Finger sind taub und ich kriege den Zipper nicht zu fassen. Um besser sehen zu können, krame ich nach der Kopflampe. Licht flutet das Innere des Zelt. Ich erschrecke furchtbar: Meine Hände sind blau. Ich halte sie unter meine Achseln. Das Gefühl will nicht zurückkehren. Angst überfällt mich. Wie viel Kälte kann ich ertragen? Alles verschlingende Einsamkeit überkommt mich. Wie schön es wäre, einen vertrauten Körper an der Seite zu haben, die Wärme des anderen zu reflektieren. Ich mache mich klein, presse die Hände an den Körper und atme in den Schlafsack. Jetzt nur nicht einschlafen. Die restlichen Stunden der Nacht sind pures Elend. Nach einer gefühlten Ewigkeit spüre ich, wie die Durchblutung in den Händen wieder einsetzt. Ein stechender, pulsierender Schmerz. Meine Finger schwellen auf die doppelte Dicke an. Es tut so weh. Ich beiße die Zähne aufeinander und heule in mein Kissen.

Die Sonne ist noch nicht ganz am Horizont erschienen, als ich das Zelt verlasse, um mich auf den Tag vorzubereiten. Eine dünne Eisschicht bedeckt die Pfütze am Zelteingang, und die Wiesen sind mit Morgentau überzogen, in dessen kristallener Oberfläche sich die ersten Sonnenstrahlen widerspiegeln. Im schwachen Morgenlicht scheinen mir die sich verziehenden

Nebelschwaden wie Geister, die dem anbrechenden Tag entfliehen. Erst nach Erlöschen der letzten Strahlen werden sie wieder ihr Unwesen treiben. Es sind meine Geister und sie machen mir Angst.

# THE TRAVEL BUG

a poem by Jeremias Winckler

Like gusts that herald storms,  
You wake from Your life, the curtains call.  
Wanderlust within, the suit too wide,  
Too staid for the youth inside that yearns to ride.  
The job could never hold, nor praise confine,  
You ache to venture forth, create a new design.

Untethered from the known, from home You stray,  
No plan at hand, just endless roads parlayed.  
Paths less travelled by, adventure packed,  
No boundaries set, freedom's wind at back.  
Through forests, over hills, by dawning light,  
The whole wide world within reach, in sight.

Sun kissed skin, wind ruffled hair,  
Strange languages, places so rare.  
A journey turned verse, moments turned song,  
Off the beaten track, there You belong.

No road is too long, no river too wide,  
No cliff too steep, nor too wild the ride,  
No night too dark—for the stars shine bright,  
Nor can You get lost— You'll be guided by light.

Reinvent, live, dare, explore,  
Feel it all, and then feel some more.  
Your darkest hours, like shadows, will recede,  
Healed by the smiles of those who intercede.  
Blisters, bruises—it will matter not,  
The journey's call compels, and You shall be caught.

To live this madness, oh, but isn't it grand?  
To the unknown! Oh, traveller's spell, greatest of plans!  
To finally go, You want to take flight!  
To lands anew, each morning's light.  
The Travel Bug, a fever fierce and deep,  
Once bitten, stirs from every dreamy sleep.

With one foot poised 'twixt grave and daring deed,  
New colours burst forth—none can impede.  
Onward You'll dance, by cliff and by crest,  
Free and unfettered in Your undying quest.  
Fever, fatigue—it matters not.

You are released, travel! You ought!  
But dreams are dreams, from reality far apart,  
Romantic notions, longings, learned by heart.  
Now, quickly, up, to work You must attend,  
The alarm rings forth, it's time, my friend.

But as You head to work, think, 'Maybe today?'  
When the bug bites: exmatriculate!  
Tired of the grind? Why not deviate,  
Skip work, start to drive, for once change Your fate.

Follow new paths, throw it all to the wind,  
Crash Your car, Your fuel will soon end,  
Hell yeah, light it all up before You are pinned,  
Your past goes up in flames, oh, what a beautiful blend.

Keep walking, don't You dare turn around,  
Break from life, in new rhythms found.  
Hear the blast, Your old world's gone,  
Fuck it! Leave it! Move on, move on!

But how do I start? Step out, embrace the world!  
And when? Now, or perhaps You never will.  
And then? There is no end, no final goal.  
What of my friends? New ones will join the thrill.  
And my past life? It's past, just as You've told.  
But is it all worth it? Hard to say, though still—  
Then, why should I go? Because You must, be bold!  
And what about You? I've already had my fill.  
What happened? Well, I've become weary and old.

# THE DAY WE PLAY

a poem by Philipp Neumann

I asked a dear friend  
*My dear, would you like to play?*  
The answer was silent  
It seemed like, it didn't swing his way.  
And the days pass  
And we still didn't play,  
Although it might  
Never come, that day.  
I asked once,  
I asked twice,  
But unfortunately for me,  
I can ask a lot of times  
As the answer won't change,  
Quite the opposite,  
It will always stay the same.  
It is neither his fault,  
Nor is it mine,  
To be honest though,  
It is because said friend  
was actually a crow



# „HURRA, DIE SCHULE BRENNT!“ (ODER: EIN GANZ NORMALER TAG IN DER GRUNDSCHULE)

a short story by García Kaletta

*Die Namen der Schüler\*innen und Lehrkräfte sind fiktiv.*

Es ist Mittwochvormittag und Religion in der G2 steht auf dem Plan. Zwei Stunden Mathe in der G3 und G4 sind schon hinter mir und ich bin bereits ziemlich geschafft. Schleppe seit einigen Tagen eine nette kleine Erkältung umher und die Halsschmerzen machen meiner Stimme zu schaffen. Aber das Selbstmitleid muss warten. Betrete den Klassenraum und werde von schreienden Kindern begrüßt, es herrscht Chaos. Irgendwie habe ich plötzlich nicht mehr so Lust auf die Stunde. Überlege zu gehen, doch irgendwas hält mich ab. Ach richtig. Bin ja der Lehrer. Mist. Dann sieht mich das erste Kind. Ein ohrenbetäubendes „Herr Kaletta ist daaaaaa!“ besiegelt mein Schicksal. Kein Zurück also.

Cassandra hat Geburtstag, wie sie mir stolz erzählt. Wobei sie es mir eigentlich eher ins Ohr schreit, während sie vor mir auf und ab hüpfte. Der Rest der Klasse ist total aufgeregt, ist ja klar, Cassandra hat ja auch Süßigkeiten zum Verteilen mitgebracht. Für diesen einen Tag ist sie also das beliebteste Mädchen der Klasse. So einfach ist das Leben auch nur in der Grundschule. Leider hat sie bereits mit dem Verteilen angefangen. Wobei Verteilen das Durcheinander nicht ganz trifft, was sich vor mir abspielt.

Sie hat zwei ihrer drei Tüten an ihrem Platz geöffnet, weshalb sich eine gewisse Meute um sie gebildet hat. Es kommt, wie es kommen muss: Die beiden Tüten sind leer, vereinzelte Kinder haben die Hände voll mit Bonbons, der Großteil hat noch gar nichts. Jerome hat so viele ergattert, dass ich besorgt überlege, ob ich für neu entstehende Diabeteserkrankungen rechtlich belangt werden kann. Unruhe kommt in der Klasse auf und die ersten Kinder werden nervös. Ob da wohl noch genug für sie übrig bleibt? Jannik und Lisa haben noch nichts und fühlen sich ungerecht behandelt, wie sie mich lautstark wissen lassen. Na dann, räuspern, Stimme erheben, Stimme bricht, ach ja, die Halsschmerzen, nochmal räuspern, Stimme erheben, ich muss den Mob auflösen. Irgendwie gelingt es mir. Ich bitte Cassandra beim nächsten Mal doch bitte rumzugehen beim Verteilen, damit auch alle etwas bekommen. Na ja, zum Glück hat sie ja noch eine Tüte für den Rest. Erste Katastrophe abgewendet.

Würde jetzt gerne loslegen mit dem Stoff. Aber huch, was ist das? Ein neues Gesicht in der Klasse. Na toll. Kann mir jetzt schon nicht die ganzen Namen der kleinen Racker merken, da brauch ich nicht noch Zuwachs. Hilft aber nichts, dann wohl mal die neue Schülerin begrüßen, das Mädchen hat ihre Stofftierkatze dabei. Shana heißt sie, so sagt sie, also nicht das Stofftier, sondern das Mädchen, aber vielleicht auch nicht, vielleicht heißen sie auch beide so, oder vielleicht auch keine, sondern das Mädchen neben ihr. Kann dem Redeschwall nur begrenzt folgen, muss nebenbei nämlich noch Jan-Malte davon abhalten, sich beim Kippeln mit dem Stuhl das Genick zu brechen. Weise Jan-Malte zurecht und dreh mich wieder zu

Shana, die währenddessen unbekümmert weitergesprochen hatte. Na ja, immerhin ist sie nicht auf den Mund gefallen. Nettes Kind.

Jetzt aber mal loslegen. Ich erkläre den Arbeitsauftrag, wiederhole ihn sicherheitshalber, dann noch ein drittes Mal, nochmal in langsam und dann ein letztes Mal für die ganz großen Spezialisten. Die Kinder fangen an zu arbeiten, wie schön. Ein Junge mit kurzen blonden Haaren kommt nach vorne. Jackson heißt er, wenn mich nicht alles täuscht: „Herr Kalettaaaaa...?“ Ich schaue ihn lange an und bereite mich mental auf eine Frage zum Arbeitsauftrag vor: „Jaaaaa...?“ Ich freue mich richtig, als er nur erklärt, dass ihm schlecht sei und er abgeholt werden will. Ärgere mich, dass diese Idee nicht mir gekommen ist. Schicke ihn zum Sekretariat und einen Jungen namens Elias gleichmal als Unterstützung mit, zack, der Lärmpegel fällt um wichtige, hörschädigende Dezibel. Wie angenehm. Überlege Sabine, Markus und Mira gleich mitzuschicken. Ein schöner Gedanke. Dann meldet sich Jerome, er hat Bauchschmerzen. Ich versuche gar nicht erst die leeren Bonbonverpackungen auf seinem Tisch zu zählen. Schlage ihm vor, doch einfach noch einen zu essen, um den Magen zu beruhigen. Er sieht nicht überzeugt aus, erwägt die Option jedoch, ich kann es in seinen Augen sehen. Nehme ihm sicherheitshalber die verbleibenden Bonbons weg.

Jackson und Elias befinden sich schon wieder in der Klasse. Die waren doch gerade erst runtergelaufen...? Hmm. Versuche, sie zu ignorieren. Vielleicht verschwinden sie dann ja einfach von alleine. Nein, schon stehen sie an meinem Pult: „Herr Kalettaaaaa...?“ „Jaaaaa...?“ „Die Türen des Foyers sind zu, man kommt da nicht rein. Außerdem ist da ganz viel Rauch im

Foyer.“ Rauch? Das klingt nicht gut. Obwohl da waren doch vorhin noch Handwerker zugange. Wird also wohl vom Bohren sein oder so. Nichts, worüber ich mir Gedanken machen muss, denke ich mir. Dann geht der Feueralarm los. Innerlich läuft eine Träne über meine Wange. Rein gar nichts, worüber ich mir Gedanken machen mu... Shit. Jackson ruft: „Cool, Feueralarm, bei uns brennt’s!“ Sage ihm, er soll die Klappe halten.

Mira und Sabine geben gleich ihr Bestes, mit dem ohrenbetäubenden, schrillen Heulen der Sirene mitzuhalten. Mia lässt sich davon anstecken. 20 Sekunden Feueralarm, bereits drei weinende Kinder. Bin begeistert. „Keine Panik!“, hör ich mich rufen. Ob zu den Kindern oder zu mir weiß ich selbst nicht so genau. Fordere die Kinder auf, sich in Ruhe in einer Reihe aufzustellen, während ich versuche, sie zu überzeugen, dass das nur eine Übung ist. Die Handwerker haben wohl einfach ein bisschen Rauch beim Bohren verursacht. Das scheint halbwegs zu wirken. Schau in den Flur, die dritten und vierten Klassen sind schon weg. Es ist meine zweite Woche an der Schule, von einem Feuerprotokoll habe ich nicht den Hauch einer Ahnung. Verfluche meine Unwissenheit. Wer, wie und vor allem wohin? Egal, erstmal raus. Sehe Frau Maser ihre erste Klasse rausführen, also nichts wie hinterher. Die wird schon wissen, wo’s hingehen soll. Also die Treppen runter, am Foyer vorbei, welches abgeriegelt und komplett voller Rauch ist. Riecht zudem auch ziemlich verbrannt. Hoppala. So viel zum Thema Übung. Draußen auf dem Platz kontrolliere ich die Anwesenheit. Gut, dass ich das Klassenbuch mitgenommen hab. An meinen Laptop habe ich wiederum nicht gedacht. Man soll ja schließlich nichts mitnehmen, wie ich den

Kindern vor wenigen Minuten noch erklärt hatte. Die sich nun in der rauchenden Schule befindenden ungesicherten drei Semester Uniarbeit lösen allerdings etwas Unbehagen bei mir aus. Wann war nochmal das letzte Back-up? Mir wird schlecht. Ich rufe das letzte Kind auf und mir fällt ein Stein vom Herzen, als alle Kinder da sind. Frau Maser fragt mich, ob ich wissen würde, wo wir jetzt mit den Klassen hingehen sollen. Wie bitte? Ich? „Na ja“, sagt sie, sie wäre ja auch erst seit ein paar Wochen an der Schule. Na, ausgezeichnet. So viel dazu.

Die Zahl der weinenden Kinder hat sich mittlerweile trotz vieler Tröstungsversuche auf fünf erhöht. Einigen Kindern ist eingefallen, dass sie ja Geschwister in den anderen Klassen haben. Die Angst verbreitet sich, dass es irgendwer nicht rausgeschafft haben könnte. Mira weint und sagt, sie will jetzt nach Hause. Ich weiß genau, wie sie sich fühlt. Bei Shana fließen die Tränen jetzt auch in Strömen. Selbst die Stofftierkatze sieht traurig aus. Ein schöner erster Schultag. Drei weitere Mädchen weinen aus Solidarität gleich mal mit. Immerhin, Klassengemeinschaft wird in der G2 ganz großgeschrieben.

Mein hilfloser Blick trifft den von Maria, die an der Schule ebenfalls als Studentin arbeitet, ich mit drei weinenden Kindern in den Armen, sie mit zweien. Überlege, ob diese ungewollte Situation vielleicht sogar doch was Gutes am Ende hat. Finde, ich gebe grade einen ganz passablen Familien-Papa ab. Dann kommt jedoch das vierte Kind mit Tränen in den Augen an und will getröstet werden. Verwerfe die Papa-Bewerbung also schnell wieder, sind außerdem auch noch zu nah an der Schule dran. Laufen mit den

Kindern in Richtung Gemeinschaftsschule, wo einige achte und neunte Klassen stehen, die natürlich total entspannt, mustern mich eindringlich, als ich mit meiner Horde weinender und aufgedrehter Kinder an ihnen vorbeigehe. Lehrer des Jahres, klarer Fall. Drei Neuntklässlerinnen kommen rüber, um mir einige weinende Kinder abzunehmen und beim Trösten zu helfen. Sehr freundlich. Erlaube mir kurz durchzuatmen. Dann ruft Jackson: „Schaut mal, da kommt Rauch oben aus der Schule raus!“ Sabine, die ich grade erfolgreich beruhigt hatte, bricht wieder in Tränen aus. Ja, vielen Dank auch Jackson. Sage ihm, er soll die Klappe halten. Von seinen ‘mir ist ganz schlecht, ich muss abgeholt werden und nach Hause – Symptomen’ ist nicht mehr viel zu sehen, die Augen leuchten, als wären Weihnachten und Ostern auf diesen Tag gefallen.

Auf einmal steht Theo weinend vor mir. Das ist neu. Bis jetzt wirkte er ziemlich gefasst mit der ganzen Situation. Er klagt jedoch, dass sein Bein wehtut, er hat es sich wohl gestoßen. Verspreche ihm, dass der Schmerz gleich aufhören wird. Nach einigen Minuten seines schmerzerfüllten Schluchzens bin ich nicht mehr so sicher. Er auch nicht, wie er mir tränenüberlaufen klarmachen will. Rufe Maria und bitte sie auf meine zweite Klasse aufzupassen. Schnappe mir Theo und bringe ihn ins Trockene der Fahrradständer. Schuhe aus, Hose hochgekremgelt, ein lauter Schrei. Bein ist komplett dick und blau angeschwollen. Wie hat er das denn geschafft? Bin endgültig überfordert. Zu Hause anrufen wird ohne Sekretariat schwierig. Einen Krankenwagen will ich aber auch nicht rufen, dafür sieht es dann doch nicht drastisch genug aus. Die Rettung kommt in Form einer

Schulbegleitung, die die Nummer eines Familienangehörigen auf dem Handy hat, welcher Theo abholen kommt. Auch mal Glück haben.

Die Direktorin der Gemeinschaftsschule kommt rüber und informiert uns, dass wir am falschen Treffpunkt stehen. Zeige mich wenig überrascht. Zwei Löschfahrzeuge der Feuerwehr fahren aufs Schulgelände und fangen an, ihre Schläuche an die Hydranten anzuschließen. Maxi freut sich, er kann seinen Vater sehen, der ist nämlich bei der Freiwilligen Feuerwehr, wie er seinen Mitschülern stolz erzählt. Finde es immer schwieriger, die Kinder von der ganzen Übungsgeschichte zu überzeugen. Die ersten Feuerwehrmänner gehen in das mittlerweile ziemlich dunkel qualmende Gebäude. So auch der Vater von Maxi. Maxi sieht auf einmal nicht mehr so glücklich aus. Jackson beschließt, ihn zu beruhigen: „Boa, die gehen in das brennende Gebäude, das ist voll gefährlich, hoffentlich sterben die nicht!“ Sage ihm, er soll die Klappe halten. Maxi sieht jetzt definitiv nicht mehr glücklich aus.

Dürfen jetzt in die Gemeinschaftsschule, damit wir nicht mehr in der Kälte stehen müssen. Will mit den Kindern Galgenmännchen spielen, das ist immer eine sichere Bank. Der Klassenraum hat keine Kreide mehr. Natürlich nicht. Mein Kopf rattert, Klasse beruhigen, Klasse ablenken und beschäftigt halten, was gibt's noch? Musik sollte funktionieren, fange an den Kindern einen Rhythmus vorzuklatschen. Das klingt zwar nur so einigermaßen gut, was vor allem daran liegt, dass ich in meiner Aufregung selbst ständig den Faden verliere und total durcheinander trommele und klat-sche. Dafür beruhigen sich die Kinder immerhin und schenken mir ihre

volle Aufmerksamkeit. Grade, als wir uns einem einigermaßen flüssigen Takt nähern, kommt die Direktorin herein und erklärt, dass wir wieder in unsere Grundschule dürfen. Bringe die Kinder wieder in die Klasse und lobe sie dafür, dass sie sich so vorbildlich verhalten und die Anweisungen befolgt haben. Immerhin haben sich jetzt alle wieder beruhigt. Jackson meldet sich: „Herr Kalettaaaaa...?“ Ich weiß bereits, dass ich es bereuen werde: „Jaaaaa...?“ „Kann es ab jetzt jede Woche bei uns brennen?“ Ich kann förmlich spüren, wie Sabine bei dem Gedanken die Tränen wieder aufsteigen. Sage ihm, dass er das mit der Schulleitung abklären soll. Ich wäre jetzt bereit, in Rente zu gehen.

### **Author's note**

Warum man Grundschullehrer\*in werden könnte:

In einer Welt, in der die Missstände kaum noch zählbar sind, die Frage nicht lautet „ob“ schlechte Nachrichten, sondern nur noch „wo“ und „wie viele“, kann die Grundschule nicht nur für die Schüler\*innen einen willkommenen Ort der Zuflucht darstellen.



Als Lehrkraft hat es etwas Faszinierendes, in diese Lebenswelt einzutauchen, die zumindest teilweise noch nach einfacheren Regeln funktioniert. Zu den größten Sorgen gehört die Frage, ob der Thomas auch morgen noch mit dem Jakob befreundet ist, ob Marlene in der nächsten Pause wieder mit der Luna spielt und der Streit um das Fußballtor die größte Krise seit der letzten Neuverteilung der Sitzordnung darstellt.

Dabei sind die Probleme und Belange der jüngeren Individuen in keiner Weise unbedeutend, noch sind die Sorgen auch nur ansatzweise auf die genannten oberflächlichen Konflikte begrenzt. Trotzdem ist der Schulalltag meist folgendes: positiv, ehrlich und auch wenn es vielleicht nur so wirkt, simpler. Nicht immer, nicht alles und nicht für jeden. Aber zum Glück noch häufig. Die Arbeit bringt unerwartete Interaktionen und Situationen, die nur das Leben schreiben kann und unüberlegte Aussagen, die noch Wochen später zum Nachdenken oder Schmunzeln verleiten. Die Routine bleibt gleich und doch ist jeder Tag anders.

Zwar ist nicht immer alles Sonnenschein, aber man lernt auch mit den Gewitterwolken umzugehen. Auf eine Sache ist jedenfalls immer Verlass: Grundschulkinder tun alles dafür, nie Langeweile aufkommen zu lassen. Und das ist einfach immer wieder schön.

Und anstrengend.

Vor allem anstrengend.

Werdet nicht Grundschullehrkräfte.

# FRUITFUL

a sequel to *BBQ* by Lea Köster

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

The cool autumn air was refreshing on her delicate skin, the breeze surrounding her and every passerby in a way that one might think the autumn had missed the people and was glad to be back. The smell in the air was that of life and new beginnings. Her elegant grey coat, that looked as though one might find it in a museum for almost forgotten fashion, was not yet closed.

A smile appeared on the woman's lips as her gaze fell on the flowers that were arranged outside a florist. She stopped and let her fingers brush over the soft, delicate petals. Those precious beings always remind her of home. Their smell and beauty and feel had eventually pulled the woman onto their side and had turned her parents' garden into a sanctuary.

Smiling at the memories of a happy childhood, she continued down the street, the warmth of the sun surrounding her. She could feel her head and hair becoming warmer and the sun beams tickling her nose. It was too late in the year to wear sunglasses, but it would have been nice to be allowed to make an exception, the same way others were. Everyone seemed to be outside and enjoying the last rays of sun - so warm, and soft, and full of life.

Passing a small park, the woman's eyes fell onto a mother with her young child, laughing and sitting next to each other. On a bench they were

enjoying a scoop of ice cream. She could see the love the mother had for her child in her eyes and the trust the child had in return, not paying any attention to its surroundings, too focused on its ice cream and its happiness. That is a perfect little family right there, the woman thought, smiling. A protective mother and a perfect little girl.

Walking into the doctor's office she was a bit sad to have to go inside and leave the warmth and beauty and love outside, but also excited, as she was soon to start her own little family. At the reception, she was greeted by friendly voices and bright smiles. The receptionist asked her to take a seat in the waiting area, where a nurse would pick her up. The woman waited patiently - some might have said stiffly- for her turn. She made sure a smile was on her face as she was shown to the examination room and, with it, the doctor.

'Good morning, Carol, how are we doing today?' she was greeted by her gynaecologist.

'All good, I hope.' She responded with a small, almost nervous laugh.

'Let's see then, shall we?' the doctor said, gesturing towards the chair that Carol always found scary with its attachments for legs and feet, like a torture device.

The doctor pulled up her shirt and made sure, by using paper towels, that the gel for the ultrasound wouldn't get on the waistband of her trousers. The gel was cold on her exposed skin, but she didn't let it show.

'Everything looks great,' the doctor said finally.

‘Could you let me know if it is a boy or a girl?’ Carol asked and could immediately see something change in the doctor’s face.

‘It’s a bit too early to tell for certain.’ The doctor said apologetically.

‘Please,’ Carol said, ‘we are well into week eleven, and you have been able to make accurate predictions so far.’

The doctor thought for a moment.

‘Okay but let me check again.’ And so she did, wondering if it was the right decision.

Carol waited patiently while the doctor moved the small device gently over her belly, again and again to find the right angle. As the doctor removed the device from her belly and finally looked at her again, with a smile on her face, Carol held her breath.

‘It’s a boy, congratulations.’

And let the breath out again. Jonathan.

‘Thank you.’ Carol said, her smile this time forced.

The doctor said something else, but Carol didn’t hear, her hands and mind occupied with the task of wiping the gel off of her exposed skin. Throwing the paper towels into the bin, zipping up her trousers, and pulling down her shirt, she thanked the doctor again before saying goodbye. She booked her next appointment at the front desk, knowing she wouldn’t go, before making her way out of the practice, feeling worse than she had upon entering.

The ladies at the reception had been arrogant, treading her like she was beneath them, giving her fake smiles and judging everything that was

visible above the surface from the moment she had walked in. Their mothers should have raised them better.

She passed the park again, only turning her head to see where the screaming was coming from. It was the child again. It was throwing a tantrum on the dirty park ground, demanding another ice cream. She should have seen this coming; the child had been too loud and too happy earlier. It was too imperfect. What a disappointment: the child was rather beautiful.

Stone-faced, the woman continued down the street, not taking another glance back, even as the screams increased. They weren't worth it.

Squinting against the sun, she almost walked into a bucket of flowers. Such ugly things, what are they even good for, she thought. All they do is look and smell pretty, to hide the things that people want to stay unseen. Wrinkling her nose, she suddenly had the scent of her mother's garden in her nose, and her eyes and nose began to itch. With blurred vision, she looked up into the sky, to let the sun shine onto her face and let it hide her weaknesses and fears. She hoped no one else could see. Flowers are such breakable things, watching them decay is just not worth growing them, she thought, and a sudden feeling of failure overcame her. She let it go.

A breeze wrapped itself around the woman and she shivered. How had she not realized how cold it had been earlier? She closed her coat forcefully. She would have to visit her mother soon. It was time she added to the garden.

At home she took off her shoes and hung up her coat before ascending the stairs to get to her bedroom. There she went to the wall-length wardrobe and took out a box from the top shelf, hidden behind other boxes.

Opening the box, she glanced over a few pictures that were facing upside down, only showing a name on the back; two small glass vials, that had something red in them and some writing on the outside; a tiny leather pouch, filled with a single tooth; and a metal coat hanger, which her hand briefly hovered above.

She made her way into the bathroom. She placed what she needed onto a shelf in the shower before starting to undress. First her trousers and underwear, then shirt and bra, exposing her sensitive skin piece by piece. The socks followed last. She placed everything, neatly folded, onto a chest of drawers, next to the washbasin, before stepping into the shower. The metal felt cold and rough on her hands and thighs. She crouched down and let the pleasure and pain begin, hoping for quick relief.

\*\*\*

He found her in the adjacent bathroom to their bedroom. He had no idea how long she had been home, but there was dried and fresh blood alike. She was sexy like that. Pale and weak, and still the strongest person he had ever known. Her breathing was shallow as she made to stand up.

He knew how it had all started, but it was unimportant now. He looked at his beautiful strong wife and the now bloody devices he had shown her how to use. He had taken them from the practice, on a day he feared for

her life, despite his better judgement - but she wouldn't let him do it and he couldn't lose her.

'Another boy?' he asked in a monotonous, tired voice.

She gave a nod, and he walked over to a dresser in the bedroom, returning with a small glass vial in hand. He handed it to her, and she knelt down, next to the fig-sized clot. Now she would have two additions for her mother's garden.

# WISTERIA

a poem by Wienke Niedermanner

Wisteria is growing  
From a branch above my head,  
In silvery lines it's flowing  
Like a bluish silken dress,  
It lays itself around me  
Like it's laying down its head,  
It buries me alive,  
And I can't stop it.  
It's too fast.

It fastens 'round my muscles,  
It fastens 'round my flesh,  
It fastens 'round my ankles,  
It fastens 'round my chest.

This garden is my mausoleum,  
I'm carved in stone, and you are praying,  
Your knees are almost knitted to the ground,  
But once you dare to go and move on,  
I'll still be blue, even if you're gone,  
A hundred years, but never I'll be found.



A monument might be built up then,  
A colossus of my own island,  
An earthquake of forget will tear me down,  
My ruins lie destroyed and ancient,  
I'm littered with this wistful patience,  
A noble trait, the rapine of my town.

It buries all my branches,  
It buries all my seeds,  
It buries all my hopeful  
and passion driven dreams.

Wisteria is growing  
From a tree somewhere nearby,  
It reaches all my ruins,  
It keeps them warm and dry,  
It lays itself around me,  
It's as constant as a pine,  
I cannot rip it off,  
Although I barely  
even tried.

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

a short story by Jehan Ammar

*Content warnings may apply. Please check page 142 for more information.*

'10.' My family and friends chant, counting down until it's finally my 18th birthday. I feel surrounded by love, with my close ones gathered around me. Never have I felt more myself than in this moment—an anchor for all the future versions of myself.

'9.' They start shouting louder, and my cat hisses, hiding behind some bushes. I love her.

'8.' My best friend raises her arms, a few dots from a failed DIY stick-and-poke tattoo still visible on her wrist. I have the same. We were so foolish at 16. Perhaps we will never be again. The thought saddens me.

'7.' My father doesn't count, but he nods approvingly. That's as much as I get, but he's here, and that's all that matters. I wonder whether my father's father also nodded approvingly back at him when he was just a child.

'6.' My boyfriend counts the loudest, as if trying to express his immense love through the sound of his voice. It's both silly and endearing.

'5.' My little brother kicks me under the table. I screamed at him earlier for drawing a picture with my makeup; I kick back.

'4.' I can see a single tear running down my mother's cheek as she comes to the realization that I won't be her little girl anymore. Is it a tear of sorrow at losing a part of me or a tear of joy at gaining another?

'3.' The sound feels muffled in my ears. I feel disoriented. The ground under me starts shaking.

'2.' It's all quiet now. The moon and stars above me are gone. The sky is pitch black. I feel as if I am dissolving.

'1.' My vision goes completely dark. This is the end of my journey.

'0.'

'I extend a cordial welcome, ushering you back into the embrace of the realm that inherently belongs to you. In what manner did the experiential sojourn transpire, eliciting intricate layers of emotional resonance and cognitive reflection, culminating in a nuanced synthesis of subjective realities within the temporal confines of the undertaken odyssey?' A person in white robes is talking to me. I look around; I am in a seemingly endless illuminated white room. It's neither hot nor cold and I feel no breeze around me, playing in my hair like it did just seconds ago. I feel like puking, but nothing comes out. There is a weird high-pitched noise coming from everywhere.

'W-What. I don't understand.'

'Perceive not distress in your countenance; rest assured, the retrieval of recollections shall imminently manifest within the recesses of your consciousness,' the creature adds calmly.

'I don't understand. Please, where am I? Where is my family? I was just home. Don't hurt me, please, I am just a child.'

The creature sighs. 'You are no child.'

‘Please, I still count sheep when falling asleep. I want my mom back. Help! I need help!’ But there is no one here aside from us. My screaming is not based on logic but on instinct.

‘Just wait a few minutes.’ I bend over. My tears fall to the ground, I cry, not prettily but hysterically as I hiccup on my own snot. My hands feel bigger, somehow, as I cover my ears with them. Minutes pass. I do not remember anything that could explain this situation. The figure before me stands still; I can see the seam of their gown within my vision. The ends of their long blonde hair appear strange and unreal but not out of place. I wipe my tears away.

‘Please let me go. I- I- my name is Allie Anderson. I like the colour green and I like cats and-’ the figure kneels down in front of me. I look up but not directly at it. It appears human-like with features both androgynous and soft yet in a way unsettling.

‘You should remember by now. Why can’t you remember? I know this is the first journey, but you said it would only take a few minutes. You must remember-’

‘Remember what? I have never met you before, so what are you talking about?’ I try not to weep. The noise becomes louder.

‘You are not Allie Anderson.’

‘I am.’

Now the figure seems slightly panicked. I avoid their gaze as they search mine.

‘Technically, yes. You made her. You made them all. You made everything.’ I look at the creature’s hands, now fiddling in a strange way as if they have never been nervous before. ‘You went there to dwell amongst them, to navigate a labyrinth of mortal emotions. To experience it all as a lower being and take in what it means to be blind to the future and the past. To feel not despite your seeming mortality but because of it. And now you have returned. So please just tell me what we have wanted to know from the very start, how was it? Did you acquire mortality in some form?’

I can’t follow; my heart beats, proof that I am human.

‘No, I want my family back, please. Let me go.’ My fingernails push through my skin; blood gushes out. The creature looks at me with sadness and perhaps a bit of pity. It hurts.

‘You are still in this form because you choose to be. The blood is not real because you are not human. You once made me, remember? You couldn’t possibly forget that?’ Their voice aligns with the high-pitched noise.

‘I am a fraction of yourself that you sacrificed and granted freedom. Like a cell having been cut from its original body, you understand? Please don’t forget me. Please. You are all I have,’ they add but it still makes no sense. Maybe I am dreaming? But what if I am not?

I search for its gaze now, observing a loneliness in their eyes that seems to have originated in the depths of mine. I know their eyes, the first eyes I have ever formed with my hands, a part of myself and yet another being. Not all-knowing but the closest it will ever be amongst all other fractions.

Second to me in everything, yet the companion worthy to hold my cold, all-mighty hand once we are finally dying. Doomed to be born, to exist until I cease to, yet still being frightened by the possibility of my absence? Has my creation ever experienced panic before, dreading eternal companionship with a stranger named Allie, now intertwined with me? Can they even name fear as an emotion? Or is this perhaps the first piece of humanity and thus mortality I brought along with me? The reason why I even created it all in the first place, so I can feel what being alive means and therefore acquire what it means to die.

Mutual understanding floods us as my being shapeshifts into something familiar. The blood dripping from my hands doesn't stop but subsides. Proof that I am now part human. Part mortal. I remember—the making, the loneliness, the indifference, the wish to end it all. The decision to create something so I can destroy myself. The creature feels calmer now; I can sense it. I do too.

'So, how was your first part of the journey?' they ask.

I feel warm and sad for Allie and the beautiful experience it was to be her. I miss my home, the uncertainty that comes with being young and vulnerable and the love of the people around me. It pains me to leave her behind, yet I cannot wait for the next part to come.

'It was lovely. I am feeling... warm.' I take the creature's hand, emphatic. 'It'll be easier next time. Don't panic. I will bring great knowledge with me. Six more journeys to go until it's time to start demolishing. I shall return soon.'

Surprised at the unknown warmth of my hand and the blood still dripping down occasionally, the creature's brows furrow. This will be our end.

'I will be waiting for you then,' they answer while running their thumb across my knuckles. I close my eyes; all noises fade away.

'9.'

The chanting startles me, and I hiss.

# A LETTER TO YOU

an acrostic by Alicia Albers

Those trustworthy, faithful eyes  
Hair so beautiful and shiny  
A smile I hope never dies  
Not forgetting these birthmarks, real tiny.  
Kind, caring, funny and smart.  
You must be sent from above.  
Oh, a masterpiece of art  
U're unconditionally loved!



# DESERT NIGHTS

a poem by Lukas Bartsch

When at last sand covers our traces,  
will you find your way back to me?  
To softly embrace me once more,  
atop the scorched red desert sea.

When at last sand covers our traces,  
think not on what may be ahead.  
So, as you gaze up to the stars,  
remember all we had instead.

When at last sand covers our traces,  
put your weary hand in mine.  
Let me keep your sorrows at bay -  
*I promise love, we will be fine.*

# CONTENT WARNINGS

sorted by themes

*Content Warnings may contain spoilers for the respective entries.*

## **Abortion**

Fruitful

## **Alcohol**

Durian

## **Blood**

Kein Ende in Sicht, Happy Birthday!

## **Cancer**

Compound Eyes

## **Cannibalism**

BBQ

## **Cheating**

Who?

## **Child Murder**

Escape

## **Death**

Prologue: Lucy's Eulogy, How Lovely,

Memories Keeping Me Awake at 3 am, Compound Eyes

## **Dementia**

How Lovely

## **Depression**

Passed On, Compound Eyes

*list continued on the following page*

**Drugs**

Hidden Away

**Funeral**

Prologue: Lucy's Eulogy, Memories Keeping Me Awake at 3 am

**Hospital**

Gedankenkarussell

**Kidnapping**

Hidden Away

**Miscarriage**

How Lovely

**Sexual harassment**

Memories Keeping Me Awake at 3 am

**Suicidal Thoughts**

Happy Birthday!

**Swear words**

Durian, Who?

**Violence**

Fruitful

*list continued on the following page*

# CONTENT WARNINGS

sorted by entries

*Content Warnings may contain spoilers for the respective entries.*

## Durian

alcohol, swear words

## Prologue: Lucy's Eulogy

death, funeral

## Who?

cheating, swear words

## BBQ

Cannibalism

## How Lovely

death, dementia, miscarriage

## Escape

child murder

## Passed On

depression

## Memories Keeping Me Awake at 3 am

death, funeral, sexual harassment

## Hidden Away

drugs

## Compound Eyes

cancer, death, depression

*list continued on the following page*

**Gedankenkarussell**

hospital

**Kein Ende in Sicht**

blood

**Fruitful**

abortion, violence

**Happy Birthday!**

blood, suicidal thoughts



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