



**LIQUID CENTER (Editors)**  
**WIR KOMMEN/ COMING**

A Collective Novel  
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The following text is a collage of voices: 18 authors, from different generations, who all took part in an experiment at the invitation of the LIQUID CENTER collective. Over a period of six weeks in the summer of 2023, they wrote anonymously in a single, shared document; the editors then condensed the resulting material into this book. Only the subject was specified in advance: female desire, sex and age.

## Content Warning

This book contains descriptions of sexualized violence as well as passages on the topic of suicide. Please take care of yourself when reading, as this content may be triggering or re-traumatizing.

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## Prologue

A photo: quadratic image detail; close-up of my white bedspread, wrinkled. In the middle of the picture: a pale-pink glass object, transparent. The arm of an octopus, its tip gracefully coiled. The right-hand side of the object, seen from the perspective of the viewer, is embellished with little nubs. Who's up for it?

Me.

Oh yes, an octo-flirt, a kraken dance.

I'd like to have that many arms at my disposal. Or tongues.

I'd pull up my T-shirt and let you finger me, tongue me.

Just the T-shirt?

At first, yes. Let's take it slowly. I like it when your nubs gently sucker themselves on to my body.

I'm listening in to the *plop* noise. Nub by nub.

it's a well-known fact that octopods are built differently to human beings and have sensory organs in all their limbs, which they use to feel and experience their surroundings. what would it be like, having that kind of many-armed corporeal experiences? all-encompassing touching? underwater? i'm getting in on your flirtation.

I'd like to be that slippery and smart.

You are to me.

Give me more. What's next?

## Dispossession

My father died two weeks ago, and I don't know how I feel. When I think of him, scenes and actions and words appear, in scraps, most of which don't exactly demonstrate love or affection – or if they do, then in what seems to me a perverted form: the form of seizing possession. There wasn't a single day in his life on which it occurred to him that this might be inappropriate. He was old, sure, a child of the war, and yet I ask myself how many people like him must be walking around out there.

Modes of seizure that I often heard: 'You'll always be my daughter.' Meaning: 'I will always have the right to interfere in your life, to judge it.' One consequence: his suddenly grabbing my bum from behind, to judge how fat or not fat I was. How attractive to men, is what that meant. Other women were praised at this point (held up to me as an example). I was usually too fat; he'd comment on that. My figure was, so to say, my father's property, even when I was 50, when I was 60. Age regardless.

And what did that do to me? I found any kind of physical contact with him repulsive. I didn't like going to visit him. Each time, I would be dispossessed. Dispossessed of my own body. Not to mention the other, non-corporeal aspects of my identity (such as: my books, my intellectualism, my setbacks, my worries). None of it worth anything, in his eyes. I was a female body to be made available (to other men).

My divorce, then, could only have been my mistake.

But what am I saying – 'I didn't like going to visit him.' He didn't live alone. He lived with my mother. To be more exact: she lived next to/behind him. She supported it all, experienced it, spread it further.

Let's speak plainly here: if that's the background you bring with you and lug around as a parent, over six decades of life – what does it do to you?

And now: that gaze, that hand is no more. The end, *fini*, over, *adieu*.

How do I feel?

Relief?

Yes, in part. But not just that. It isn't automatic. I'll have to earn this, I think. Permit myself this. Grow out of that judging machine.

## Down There

My mother never talked to me about sex, about menstruation or my genitals. It was as though her mouth had been circumcised by the silence of previous generations. ‘That’s for down there,’ she said, tersely, when the blood could no longer be denied, and surreptitiously slipped me a packet of sanitary towels. And before that – for many years – her anxiously repeated question: ‘Have you got it yet?’

‘No,’ I forced out every time. Even when I was thirteen, and we both long since knew. She did my laundry, after all! She saw the blood. All the same, I continued to say ‘No’ and, relieved, we changed the subject.

I was one of the first girls in my class to get my period. I would have liked to have waited, would have liked to stay the clever, chubby girl who sang loudly in church on Sundays, who wasn’t afraid to do anything and rolled around in the hay with her friends after school. Shortly before I got my first period, I lost something else fundamental: my childhood faith, in which I had lived for more than a decade as though it were a second skin. My earliest writings were dictations to God. I wasn’t a meek believer, more an outspoken negotiator, but I believed with the kind of fervour and love that can only exist in childhood. I don’t remember the exact moment, but I do remember the morning I woke up and realised all this was nothing but stories that people told each other out of fear of the future. A little later, I was surprised by my period. My friends were still children. But I wiped away the blood between my thighs and thought: *So, now you’re going to have to shag.*

I was the last in my class to start menstruating. I felt left out when my classmates furtively passed each other tampons under the desks. Once, I defiantly closed my fingers around one and didn’t pass it on. My friend V, who sat next to me, smiled and placed a hand on my shoulder in acknowledgement. It was a full six months later that they did actually start. I was with V and her family in north-west France during the summer holidays. That afternoon we were at the beach, running into the pounding surf, letting the Atlantic churn us up, then stretching out to dry in the hot sun. The previous day, I’d bought a new swimsuit in a shade of apricot intended to show off my lightly tanned skin. V’s older brother came out of the water and stopped in front of me. ‘Ewwww,’ he cried. V followed his gaze, and quick as lightning threw a towel over me. In the toilet block, I nervously ripped open the tampon packet, fumbled the plastic wrapping off and tried to push it inside me. I couldn’t do it. ‘Why’s it

taking so long?' V was waiting on the other side of the door. I was crying with frustration, but I couldn't bring myself to confide in her, to admit that I'd been lying about menstruating this entire time. Eventually, I stuffed six tampons into my knickers at once, and ran around with shorts on for the rest of the day. Only later, in the holiday photos, did I see the bulge between my legs, my penis of tampons.

I was the last in my class, too. My mother took my first period as an opportunity to tell me I should be careful about who I had sex with – some men only wanted to take advantage. We were sitting in the bath together, and that was all she had to say to me on the subject of sex. In hindsight, I feel sorry for her. In hindsight, I think that perhaps I went to bed with men so indiscriminately in my twenties because I wanted to prove to myself that I could. Because I wanted to. Without anyone taking advantage of me.

Reading this, it's that image in particular that jumps out at me: the two of you sitting in the bath together – lovely.

Yes, true, and I'm pleased you wrote that. The women in my family cultivate a strong physical intimacy. My mother cuddled and took baths with her own mother right into old age. Even when my granny was in the advanced stages of dementia, we'd sometimes crawl into her bed simply to be close to her. That was another thing my mother passed on to me: an awareness of how important physical contact is.

Everyone is female and everyone loves it! \*Confetti\* Everyone is female and everyone loves it!

\*Gunshot\*

For several years, I got my first period again every month, because every time I repressed the fact that this was something my body could do.

ever since i was a child, i've been unable to discipline my body. it does whatever it wants. it does what it's seen and learned, or not. my body doesn't do what other people's bodies do. doesn't develop breasts but an enormous nose. while the girls at school brag about their periods, nothing happens to me. my body refuses to become one gender, a specific one, thereby losing the opportunity to become another gender. perhaps it's because of my grandmother's and mother's experiences of violence that my body protects itself from entering this space from which there can be no escape – or, if there is, then only an awful



one. i'm still not ready to accept that i'm to become a woman and nothing else. on the other hand, our surroundings specify exactly who fits into the gender norm and who doesn't. my face is male, they say; i behave like a boy, they reproach. a neighbour jokes that i'm not a woman but a hermaphrodite, which is the worst swear word of all. the word pursues me; i'm afraid of actually being a mixture of two sexes, ambiguous. also because friends unquestionably become women. long before me. i don't dare talk to anyone about it; i shoulder this apparent aberration, lug it around with me.

At the age of forty, I woke up one night in a puddle of blood. Sobbing, I sat in the bathtub and let the water rinse the red liquid out of my insides. My gynaecologist advised me to have my womb removed along with the fibroid. I thought this was a good idea. Finally, no more blood. I was still a woman, but without all the physical side effects that come with it. No longer being able to conceive was an enormous relief to me.

I like it when blood drips out of the corners of her mouth after cunnilingus, her face all red and sticky. I like it when a dark stain forms at the crotch of my light-coloured trousers. When I get up and leave behind a smeary red on the cushion, visible to all.

I never liked it, that disgusting bleeding, the smell, the dirty knickers, the pads rubbing at the delicate skin around the vulva, the panic about not finding a toilet in time, the panic about unwittingly having a tell-tale stain on your clothes, somewhere at the back. I have unpleasant memories of both times I had sex while menstruating. The bed full of blood. I couldn't understand that men liked it.

The gorgeous outfit she wore for her confirmation. A white blouse with a large, sweeping collar, reminiscent of childhood Sunday blouses *but with a modern twist*; a black, sleeveless, knee-length jacket; a skirt she doesn't remember; shiny ballet pumps with a small heel (her first). They'd been shopping together, she and her mother; none of it was second-hand, all of it new. It was her debut appearance as a woman – that was how she saw it – and she looked forward impatiently to the confirmation mass at which she would finally step on to the stage in front of the altar, would show herself to everyone.

When it finally came, the day ran away. Her mother was bleeding heavily, an unstoppable flow; *the change*, she'd heard her say. Two super-plus tampons, the biggest there were, had been pushed inside her mother, two thick pads layered on top of each other in her knickers, yet still the blood flowed,

threatening at any moment to run out of her trouser legs, flood the church. She stroked the fine material of her jacket and kept turning around nervously to look at her mother, who was sitting wanly between her grandparents. Tried to understand what was happening. She hadn't yet started menstruating herself, but she knew all about it: the slimy clots, the oozing, the dripping, her mother's smeared fingers, which – when her time finally came as well, six months later – were barely distinguishable from her own, as though she had twenty fingers that were fumbling the plastic wrapping from the tampon, guiding it inside her.

I got my period on Christmas Eve 1994. A small package wrapped in blood-red velvet, it lay under the Christmas tree, tied with a golden bow. My parents nodded benevolently at me as I carefully untied the ribbon. Holding my breath, warmed by their loving gaze, I unfolded the velvet fabric. A little wooden casket emerged. I fingered the polished wood, played with the filigree metal clasps. When I felt my mother's hand on my shoulder, I finally dared to lift the lid. And there it was.

How many times is it now that I've been through puberty? When will I understand the world through my desire? I no longer have that much time left. In my desire, I see the whole world burning. Like memory foam for trauma. But we don't need to know about that in such detail. 'I now no longer use the better words' (Ilse Aichinger). Be imprecise, imprecise. This here isn't the trend for autofiction, so let's forget that. Us against the zeitgeist. But what if I . . . I mean we forget ourselves, as best and as properly as we can, but the self still slips through, has its cover blown, is revealed to be a wholly *false woman*? It was me who just said that, and not me. Of course, this can only make us crazy, but, all the same, we still force ourselves to look good while doing it. Or ugly. We will, at any rate, be magnificent.

## Place of Love

I'm not interested in women, I always emphasised. No, no, I'm hetero. Then I fell in love with a woman. And it suddenly became clear to me: I'm a lesbian. And I felt like myself for the first time in my life. Felt that this was me, really me. That my body, my sexuality, my desire belonged to me.

Afternoons with my first boyfriend. I close my eyes to kiss him and, when I open them again, the afternoon is over and I have to hurry home for tea.

On a Tube train in London, not far from Paddington station. I'm twelve years old, on a city trip with my family. We've spent endless hours in the British Museum. I remember the Rosetta Stone, sarcophagi and vast quantities of shattered ceramics. Now, dog-tired, we're on the way to our hotel. The carriage is full. So full that we have to stand and I'm constantly touching someone, something. I'm sweating. My white T-shirt is sticking to my torso. The train stops at regular intervals and spits people out; what seems like twice as many step into the carriage. A man gets on: maybe twenty-five, maybe thirty. He's wearing a white shirt, his short brown hair streaked from the heat. He's somewhat taller than me; slim. I don't remember his face, but that body – that slim, white-shirted body – unleashes something inside me. I'm not yet a woman. I don't yet wear a bra. My breasts are only just beginning to grow. For the first time, I feel how my nipples contract under my T-shirt. Behind me, my mother; I'm already a couple of centimetres taller than her. In front of me, not even a hand's breadth away, the stranger. The carriage jolts. I lean forward, my fingers round the strap above me. With every bend, his body swashes towards me. And then we really do collide. My white T-shirt against his white shirt, my breasts against his stomach. Again and again. In unbelievably soft, barely noticeable brushes. Tiny electric shocks that I'll never forget.

Recently, I saw someone doing very strong front crawl in a lake. I suspected it was a man whose arms were parting the water so powerfully. 'He must have a good body,' I murmured – and caught the consternation-filled glance of the young woman sitting next to me, who quite evidently did not think that my lustful fantasy and wrinkled face went together.

How often did we sit together in the library that summer. Rode our bikes through the city, through its suburbs, out into the country. Lay beside the lake. I watched her swimming then, tracked her features through the water. Those

couple of centimetres between us, always those couple of centimetres. We passed a paddock filled with stags one night, when it wasn't yet fully dark at eleven. One of them raised his head and watched us watching him.

When I'm finally allowed to touch her, the world stands still.

Do you still remember the underwater film scene with Björk and Matthew Barney, where they tenderly cut off each other's limbs with big knives? Do you still remember the rope I tied around your wrists?

I rest my head on your warm belly, in which our baby is growing.

'Set boundaries, but from a place of love,' my astrologer says at the beginning of the year. I can't tell if by that she means our sex life.

## Forest

One of my earliest memories of sex: my parents' phone sex. Me in my mother's bed. My father on a business trip abroad. My mother masturbates and moans into the telephone. I pretend to be asleep. Her voice: 'Your dick is a thunderbolt.' I didn't know the term thunderbolt. Only many years later would I hear the word again and be able to form a mental image.

According to the internet, thunderbolt is also applied to the skeletal remains of extinct cephalopods, belemnites, which were similar to present-day squid and existed from the Carboniferous to the end of the Cretaceous period. The age of these petrified fossils, then, can be up to 358 million years.

Or:

- the fossilised internal skeleton of an extinct cephalopod, see skeletal elements of belemnites
- a Stone Age flint axe, see flint axe (Stone Age)
- thunderbolt (mythology), a divine weapon in many myths
- a weapon belonging to the Hindu gods Shiva, Indra and Vayu, and a Buddhist symbol, see vajra
- thunderbolt (heraldic), a heraldic device, the weapon of Zeus and Jupiter

I remember the story a friend told me about her mother sleeping with a man she'd only just met on holiday. He'd invited her to his holiday house, and because my friend didn't want to sleep in a room on her own in a strange house, the three of them shared the same bed. She was eight or nine – I can't remember exactly – but she was listening when it happened, pretending to be asleep, holding her breath and trying to understand what was going on, what those noises were that her mother was making, that seemed so otherworldly and strange.

Another friend, who was around the same age, talked about the constantly changing procession of men her mother brought home at night; the ones she sometimes didn't know, who would suddenly turn up at the side of the bed, shocked to find a child lying there. How confused she was, because she could never make sense of what was happening; her mother never said anything to her about it or offered any explanation of what exactly she did with these unknown men. Nonetheless, she let her take part in a blithe kind of way, calling out to her from the bed – goodnight, and go back to sleep, sweetheart, we'll have Sugar Puffs for breakfast. When my friend was eleven, she had sex

with a man for the first time. She told me about it; I was only a year older than her and completely out of my depth in that situation. Overnight, I broke off our friendship, started laying out my towel in a different area at the outdoor swimming pool, taking long detours to avoid walking past her house. Drew a line around my childhood. We were never close again; I heard other people talking about her, saying the same things that were said about her mother, and I was ashamed of not standing up for her.

When I was older, I often thought of that image – those two girls in bed and the protection they were lacking – and I asked myself just how many generations that went back.

I think about those two girls, and I instantly picture other girls, other children, who no one helped. I see my first boyfriend, in whom abuse had left traces so deep that he took his own life at the age of twenty. V, to whom so much happened. V, who is also long gone from this world. Or M, who prostituted herself as a teenager after her mother left them. I think about these people who once meant a lot to me. And I think about myself. As a child, as a teenager. I was lucky. I was, despite all the shit, a child who was loved. I think about the law of energy conservation, about how energy can be neither created nor destroyed. It only changes form.

a friend has announced that she's coming to stay, and it crosses my mind that i still feel complicit in a violent assault she experienced when she visited me, a frequent traveller, for a few days somewhere i was staying in asia. i was too busy to accompany her on her explorations, let her go off on her own. on the hunt for cheap accommodation, she came across a landlord who instantly began to exploit her openness and lack of experience. they danced and drank beer, and eventually he coerced her into sleeping with him, even though she didn't want to. we exchanged text messages, were still planning to meet up, but the electricity kept cutting out across the whole country. on the phone, she told me about trips to the beach with this landlord. only when she was back at our house did she admit that she hadn't been able to put up any kind of resistance to the guy's intrusiveness. to this day, i'm certain that i left her in the lurch.

At a panel discussion held during the Berlinale film festival, a filmmaker talks about which cinematic devices he can use to arouse certain expectations in the audience. He talks about conventions and viewing habits and then gives an example: *So, when we see a girl running into a dark forest on her own, we already know something bad is probably going to happen to her.* He doesn't go into any

more detail, but it stays with me. That image of a girl, running into a dark forest on her own.

I think, too, about C, an erstwhile friend I recently googled to see what she's up to. She has a son and a job at the university, and she still has that fierce mouth. The last time I saw C was many years ago, in Bogotá, which was where we'd met. Late at night, we said goodbye to one another outside a bar. I'd called a taxi, and when I asked how she was getting home, she just said, Oh, I'll walk. It was a long way to where she lived; I tried to persuade her to come in the taxi with me. The idea of her, a woman, walking alone at night through Bogotá was awful. But C simply pulled her baseball cap down on her head and said: Don't worry, I'll be fine. She did it often. With those words, she vanished into the night, and I love that image of her, that last glance out from under her cap: I'll be fine.

And then I'm standing at the tram stop in the morning, on the way to a meeting, and some club in my neighbourhood spits out a horde of night owls. I notice a young woman, who's so drunk and/or high she can hardly walk any more. She's being held up by two young men; it looks as though the three of them are friends. One of them buys her a coffee, but she can't keep herself upright long enough to drink it. Every now and again she tries to be funny, to dance a couple of steps, but then she just collapses again. It's clear that the boys are going to take her home now, but something about it seems strange, too – perhaps an exchange of glances between the two of them that suddenly makes me mistrustful. What are they going to do with her now? Do I need to intervene? Do I have the right to do that? What am I actually imputing to these two young men, who are clearly friends of hers? And, at the same time, I catch myself feeling annoyed at the woman: *girl, I think, girl, what are you doing here? You can't let yourself get into a situation like that! You can't lose control like that!*

And just how often have I been that girl.

And just how many people have seen me running into the dark forest and been absolutely sure that something dreadful was about to happen to me.

To watch a horror movie is to know that something bad is going to happen. To have a body is really the same thing.

Julia Armfield, *Guts*

There's something that scares me out there in nature, in open fields, in the forest. A little while ago, I made a bet with myself. I wanted to retreat to the garden and write. The house seems made of cardboard, the noises hugely amplified, the nights truly dark. I lost the bet. I didn't have the guts to spend

the night there alone. Although I long for that. For inner freedom. Independence. And, perhaps, for something to set against my fear of the forest.

I think of the figure of the witch. Long shaggy hair with streaks of silver. Layer upon layer of fabric enveloping her body. Optional markers: warts, crooked teeth, bent back, wrinkles, a hooked nose. These women always live alone, often secluded, in the deep dark woods. They're supposed to teach us to fear, but the older I get, the more I want to be like them.

'We don't say witch these days; we say healer.'

That's what the editorial intern said to her recently, my friend tells me.

We look at one another for a moment, and then we laugh, cackling and dirty, like the old witches we are.

The night I understood that one day I too would be an old woman and that there was nothing to protect me from this existence in the patriarchy, I read a biography of Simone de Beauvoir. In it, there was a description of how much she suffered under her arrangement with Sartre. That she too might have wanted to have children. And ultimately ended up empty-handed, while he took younger lovers. I felt absolutely wretched, betrayed by this woman writer who really should have known better. I was so angry I couldn't sleep and then went out at four a.m. in a coat and tracksuit trousers. Walked around Kreuzberg. Something I might otherwise have been scared of. Tongues clucked, someone whistled, but inside my coat pockets I balled my fists: *just you come here*, I thought, *I'll bash your head in*.