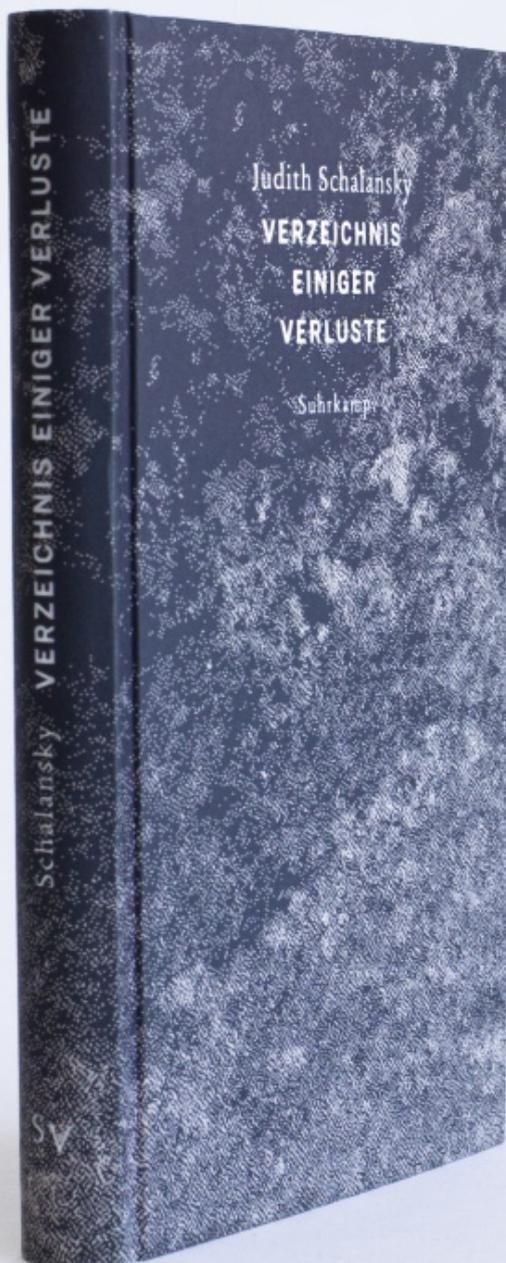


# Judith Schalansky

## *An Inventory of Certain Losses*

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*»There is always something missing.  
The eye observes, the brain  
complements: Broken pieces  
become structures and the feats of the  
dead back alive, more glorious and  
complete than ever before.«*

**Suhrkamp**

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**World history is full of things that have gone astray – willfully destroyed or mislaid over the course of time. In her new book, Judith Schalansky dedicates herself to that which the lost leaves behind: dying echoes and disappearing steps, whispers and legends, apostrophes and phantom pains.**

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Beginning with objects from nature and art like an incinerated painting of Caspar David Friedrich's, an extinct species of tiger, a Roman baroque villa, the holy writings of a vanished religion or a sunken island in the Pacific, she presents a panorama of the long lost and disappeared, a panorama which traces the world's blank spaces together with those within natural and cultural history while opening up areas of knowledge where delivery has failed. The protagonists of these short stories are outsiders: a bizarre old man hoarding the knowledge of humankind in his garden in Tessin, a lunar researcher from Bohemia who gives up all earthly curiosity for a position in the Archive of the Moon, an aged Greta Garbo who dreams of appearing on the silver screen as Dorian Gray, Judith Schalansky's own father who left the family before she could even form a memory of him. These texts speak about beginnings and endings – and at the same time are an autobiographical trip into a country that no longer exists: childhood, the GDR of the 1980s.

Each of the twelve stories in this collection sketches its own world through a subject-specific language, a world in which the boundaries between presence and absence have disappeared as much as have those between fiction, memoir and essay, while simultaneously questioning the reliability of our individual and collective memories as well as future instruments of transmission. Moreover, every one of the 16-page stories begins and ends with a black page, which, as in a photofit picture, suggests more than depicts the lost. As such, the collection proves itself to be a document of the power of print, the book a more efficacious and long-lasting medium of transmission than any other.

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After her *Atlas of Remote Islands*, in this, her *Inventory of Certain Losses*, Judith Schalansky once again sounds the spaces between reality and imagination, truth and myth, fact and fiction. The result is a lively evocation of the lost and the remote, which suggests that perhaps the difference between presence and absence is only marginal as long as memory still exists – that, and a literature which reveals just how close preservation and destruction, loss and creation, really are.



Southern Cook Islands

## TUANAKI

Also known as *Tuanabe*

\* *The atoll was situated about 200 miles south of the island of Rarotonga and about 100 miles southwest of the island of Mangaia.*

† *Tuanaki must have disappeared during a seaquake in late 1942 or early 1843, because missionaries were no longer able to locate the island in June 1843. In 1875, Tuanaki was deleted from all maps.*

On a clear and perfectly windless April day exactly seven years ago I discovered an island I hadn't known about, on a globe in the map division of the state library. The secluded island, named Ganges, was situated in the northeastern void of the Pacific Ocean, in the backwash of the mighty Kuroshio, the curling, bluish black ocean current pushing warm, salty masses of water from the island of Formosa ever northwards along the Japanese archipelago, as an imaginary, northern vanishing point of the Marian and Hawaiian island chains, of which the latter still bore the name John Montagu –Fourth Earl of Sandwich – at least on the plaster orb, about the size of a child's head, and artistically printed papier mâché. Intrigued by the familiar name and the unusual location, I started investigating the matter and learned that near the coordinates 31 ° N 154 ° O a reef had been sighted twice, and even land had been sighted four times, yet various authorities continually cast doubt on its existence. On June 27, 1933 a bevy of Japanese hydrographers concluded a detailed investigation of the region in question and reported the official disappearance of Ganges, yet the world barely took notice of this loss.

The old atlases list countless phantom islands. As maps became more precise and offered less room for uncharted territory, seafarers, more than ever before, believed they had spotted such islands, impassioned by the last white patches, allured by the wasteland of the immense sea, misled by low clouds or drifting icebergs, disgusted by brackish drinking water, maggot-ridden bread and tough cured meat, so keenly thirsting for land and fame that in their boundless greed all that they desired coalesced into a lump of gold and glitter and lured them into recording wondrous names along with factual-sounding coordinates in their logbooks, in order to spice up the uneventfulness of their days with supposed discoveries. This is how names like Nimrod, Matador, and the Aurora Islands found their way onto the maps, bold, cursive lettering next to the faintly outlined contours of scattered chunks of land.

But it was not these long-unchallenged claims that captured my interest, but

rather the islands whose former existence and subsequent disappearance are attested to in numerous reports, and among all the testimonies principally those that told of the disappeared island of Tuanaki, surely in part because of its sonorous name, with its whiff of a magic word, but even more because of the peculiar tale that was told about the inhabitants of this island, namely that they were utterly unfamiliar with battles, and that the word “war” was alien to them in any of its negative layers of meaning, which I was instantly inclined to believe, out of a deeply ingrained vestige of childlike hope, even though it also reminded me of the utopian pipe dreams found in quite a few treatises that made the bold and grand claim that a different world was possible, but that this alternate world—as the often rambling descriptions of their social orders became more and more meticulously specified and hence more detrimental to life—was, all in all, preferable to the existing ones only in theory. Against my own better judgment, then, I, like so many before me, was seeking a land devoid of memory and grounded only in the present, a land in which violence, adversity, and death were forgotten, in which they were unknown. This is how Tuanaki appeared before me, just a tad more splendid than the way the sources described it: an atoll made up of three islands barely above sea level in the shallow, fish-filled waters of a milky blue lagoon, shielded from the strong surf and the intrusive tide by a coral reef, forested with slender, towering coconut palms and lush fruit trees, inhabited by an uncommonly friendly, peace-loving people, in short: a delightful place, which I pictured, for simplicity's sake, as paradise, deviating from the often extolled archetype of paradise by one subtle but decisive element, namely that there was no knowledge inherent in the fruits of its trees, apart from the truism that it was more beneficial to stay here than to go. As I soon found out, to my astonishment, the Garden of Eden in this region was a place of refuge and not of banishment.

The news reports about this improbable patch of land were just detailed enough to verify its former existence credibly, even though the chronometer never determined its exact location, for neither Tasman nor Wallis nor Bougainville, nor even a whaling captain who had drifted off course ever sighted its gentle shores. Again and again I looked at the paths of the major South Sea expeditions, following the dashed and dotted lines through the grid across the paper sea, and comparing the routes with the presumable location of the island I had highlighted in a burst of imperial spirits, on the empty square at the bottom.

There was no doubt: The explorer whom a small continent glorifies even today as the greatest among all seafarers voyaging into every corner of the world must have just barely missed Tuanaki on his third and final voyage on March 27, 1777, and indeed, his two ships that were once launched as colliers in the fog of Whitby must have sailed close by it, just beyond the seafarers' field of vision— with billowing sails, proud as frigates,

in full regalia. More than a month had passed since James Cook's long-serving *Resolution* and its younger agile escort vessel, *Discovery*, had weighed anchor in the traditional home bay of the Queen Charlotte Sound in New Zealand with the beginnings of a slight breeze, and passed through the strait named after their captain; after two days they finally left behind the hills of Port Palliser, shimmering black and green in the mist, and steered out onto the open sea. But the winds were against them. Fresh breezes, which often changed directions, were followed by woefully weak ones, and rain-swept squalls alternated with agonizing periods of calm. Even the drift of the westerly winds, which ought to have driven them at the accustomed steady pace northeast to the Otaheite meridian, failed to materialize, contrary to all seasonal forecasts, and shifted the nearest anchorage into a more and more perilous distance. A great deal of time had already been lost, and with each passing day one more vestige of hope vanished of being able to sail along the coast of New Albion that northern summer, on a quest to find the entry point to the often-invoked waterway that held out the promise of a shortened sea route they were seeking between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans on the imperfect map sheets. The dream of a navigable passageway—even one lined with pack ice—was as old and persistent as any cosmographic dream, and had become even more firmly entrenched since the earlier dream of a vast southern continent had to be given up once Cook, in search of the legendary land, had plowed through the southern seas with huge, sweeping zigzag tracks and saw nothing but mountains of ice.

The two ships drifted on with slack sails, and a roaring silence began to descend on them, a silence that differed so fundamentally from the peaceful quiet of my library life. Sometimes I could still hear it anyway, the long, rolling swell, the mockery of the fair weather, the endless litany of the relentlessly rippling, then ebbing waves that had once beguiled Magellan into calling this ocean the *Pacific*, an eerie unison, the inexorable sound of eternity, more horrifying than that of the maddest storm. At least a storm comes with the certainty that it will eventually be over.

But this sea was neither pacific nor calm; in its murky depths there lurked indomitable forces that were certain to return. Its bottom was fissured and furrowed, the earth's crust rutted by undersea trenches and mountains, unhealed scars from prehistoric times in which the continents, which had yet to be divided, and were afloat in the ocean as a single mass, were torn apart by colossal forces and impelled into the earth's mantle until their plates forced their way over one another and burrowed underneath the others, down into precipitous chasms, up into light heights, acquiescent to the laws of nature, which know neither mercy nor justice. Water buried the volcanic cones, and myriads of corals settled into the edges of their craters to create reefs in the light of the sun, skeletons of new atolls on whose fertile ground the seeds of washed-up branches flourished, while

the extinguished volcanoes sank all the way down to the distant dark bottom— in the time scale of infinity. And while all this went on with an inaudible din, below deck, the cattle, the bull, the cows, their calves, and the rams, ewes and goats were bellowing out their hunger, as the stallion and the mares neighed, the peacock and its chicks screamed, and the fowl clucked. Never in his travels had Cook taken so many animals on board, but at the express wish of the king he had brought along half an ark's worth, intended, like the menagerie of its earlier incarnation, for reproduction, and he wondered how Noah had been able to fill all the hungry mouths, which consumed as much food as an entire ship's crew.

On the fifteenth day on the open sea, far away from the course they had plotted, the captain, who, as it says in the journal of the cooper who accompanied him, was particularly attentive to the welfare of the horses, ordered the slaughter of eight sheep, which were intended to populate a South Sea Island with their species, in order to save on hay, which was in short supply by this point. But a portion of the meat disappeared from the mess hall even before it was prepared, a little act of pilferage that was repeated once too often. The captain sensed insubordination, he sensed betrayal, and when he reduced the meat ration for the entire crew until the guilty party was turned in, whereupon the men refused to touch their paltry meal, he even sensed mutiny. This word, a match under the scorching sun, its only function being to strike sparks, was in the air, during a couple of endlessly long days in which the wind changed direction once again, now blowing from the south, and it appears that the manifest unapproachability that had always marked the commander's interactions with his crew now erupted into sheer rage. Cook, a towering, solitary figure, stomped and seethed, his imprecations resounding all the way down into the powder chamber. Concern gave way to all-consuming suspicion, and during those days the image of the strict but fair father that many of the men had had of him darkened into that of an old despot who was as unpredictable as the winds. Anyone seeking the origin of a chain of circumstances that would bring the life of this man to a violent end two years later at a bay in Owyhee might well look to the disquieting events of that voyage and the fact Cook himself made no mention of the incidents in his diary.

Now, however, the rest of the days went by in a month that stretched out endlessly, and time had long since been transformed into an eternity, a near-standstill in which the single hour and the single day counted for nothing. Albatrosses and storm petrels circled the ships, flying fish whirred in the dry air, porpoises and dolphins passed by, as did a swarm of tiny jellyfish, round and small as musket balls. At one point they saw a large white bird with a red tail, which heralded the existence of land nearby, even if it could not be spotted, at another they saw a thick tree trunk that had been drifting in the

water for such a long time that it was coated with a pale layer of barnacles that suggested smoldering pus.

Then, at long last, on March 29, 1777 at 10 a.m., the *Discovery*, sailing ahead on the leeward side, hoisted the red, white, and blue flag of Holland, as a signal that land had been sighted. Almost simultaneously, on the northeast horizon, the gleaming gray and blue coast could be made out from the masthead of the *Resolution* as well, appearing barely more real than a mirage. All the way to sundown, the ships headed for the unknown strip of land, vibrant in the distance, and kept maneuvering throughout the night until the break of dawn as they approached the island to about four miles away. Its south side must have offered them a startlingly appealing picture in the light of the sun rising out of the floodwaters. Deeply moved by this heavenly sight, several crew members rushed to get out their paintbrushes and pens so they could hold fast to the enticing panorama in watercolor, with brushstrokes that displayed varying degrees of skill, beyond the deceptive confines of their memories: the moderately high hills shimmering purple in the morning sun, their peaks wooded with multicolored trees and scattered palms, the lush dense green vegetation at the edges, the coconuts, breadfruits, and pisang figs gleaming through the bluish pink mist.

I looked over these pictures, which still bore evidence of the yearning that had fostered them, in the stifling map room; as I was told when I inquired, the milky windows in this room had to be kept closed to conserve the holdings. Among the sketches was a map made by the navigator of the *Discovery*, whose task it was to record the dimensions of the island and to plot it out as well as he could from the sloop with which he was circumnavigating the relatively small stretch of land. The page with the sketch of the island, framed by double lines, whose bold strokes hinted at hills, but could just as easily have been depicting the swirl of a shock of hair, bore a doubly incongruous title, with the cursive writing solemnly proclaiming that this page was a map of “Discovery’s Island.” Yet another name, I thought, presented as an untenable assertion, presumptuous and useless, like the traditional custom that had given rise to it.

By now, gathered at the shore, were the people who had been discovered and were unwittingly assigned the indispensable role of the natives for any report from far away. Conveniently for the travelers in this respect, the islanders were already lined up, clubs on their shoulders and spears drawn, and the more of them emerged from the dim shadow of the steep slope into the morning light, the louder and more insistent their guttural singing grew. They brandished their weapons, extending them upwards again and again in the rhythm of their calls – even with the repeated use of a telescope it could not be determined whether this was intended as a threatening or a welcoming gesture. Even though the explorers could see through the telescope that the multitude, which now

numbered two hundred, had come much closer, the instrument, which was made of wood, brass, and polished glass, proved useless in clarifying the incomparably more significant questions. Notwithstanding their genuine curiosity, notwithstanding the wordy descriptions that conveyed language and gestures, body types and clothing right down to hairstyles and skin decorations, and notwithstanding the undisputed accuracy used to compare this tribe with another, the essential point of the gaze at these people that had preceded all these words was still baffling, for this gaze could discern only foreign or familiar, only similar or separate, and it pulled apart what had been one, and drew boundaries where there had been none, like those overly distinct ragged coastline sketches on the nautical maps that professed to know where the water ended and the land began.

I have spent quite a long time thinking about who truly understands how to interpret the signs, the language of muskets and swivel guns, the countless right and left hands, raised up or stretched out, wild or constrained behavior, impaled limbs over an open fire, noses rubbing against each other, an upright banana or laurel branch, gestures of greeting, symbols of harmony, of cannibalism. As I entered the cafeteria, sank back onto the row of seats upholstered in dark red velvet and watched the people around me, engrossed in their meal, I wondered: what is peace and what is war, what is the beginning and what is the end, what is grace and what is guile? What does it mean to share food, sit together at night in the reflected light of a fire, or exchange a thirst-quenching coconut for ironworks and baubles?

People were standing at the shore, trudging through the shallow water, wading into the reef, evidently as they were dancing and letting out piercing screams. But what were they thinking? Who was I to decide that? Even though I had plenty of invitations from abroad back then, I was leading the life of someone who had stayed back home, a library patron forever on the prowl for new research topics to shed light on a hidden origin of her existence and to imbue it with meaning in this semblance of orderly daily tasks. So once again: they thought what they thought, and they saw what they saw, and they were right.

This much is virtually certain, at any rate: two islanders in a narrow boat with a high forked stern paddled to the ships and did not touch a single one of the gifts tossed their way, neither the nails nor the glass pearls nor the red cloth shirt. There is also documentation that one of them was intrepid enough to reach for the rope ladder and climb aboard the *Resolution*, where he introduced himself as Mourua from the island of Mangaia. He must have stood face to face with the captain in his cabin while the two of them sized each other up like animals encountering one another for the first time: two men, Mourua’s round head juxtaposed with Cook’s birdlike one, the soft facial features,

bright eyes, and full lips of the one, the severe, an aquiline nose, thin lips and deepset, piercing eyes of the other, the long black hair of the one bound into a thick bun atop his head, the sparse hair of the other hidden under a silvery gray wig, the olive skin, tattooed black from shoulder to elbow next to the pale, the knee-length, ivory-colored bast garment on the stocky, well-fed body, and on the tall, lanky frame, the light knickerbockers with the open, gold-braided tunic navy blue tunic. As far as I could tell, the huge scars that disfigured both men were the only evidence of a veiled connection between them, even though the numerous paintings and engravings depicting Cook, as well as the ship's draftsman's portrait of Mourua made that afternoon opted for the well-intentioned choice to conceal them: The long, poorly healed wound, sustained in a fight, on Mourua's forehead, and the bulging scar from a burn between Cook's right thumb and index finger that ran down to his wrist. And as if to seal this moment of unexpected closeness, an iron axe changed owners, and the islander took it with him when one of the dinghies brought him back to the shore of Mangaia. The surf was still as strong as ever and any hope of landing or dropping anchor was soon abandoned; no matter where they dropped the plumb line, it indicated only that the bottom was too deep and covered in sharp corals. The crew was seized with woeful regret at having to leave this land untrodden, a feeling that swelled to crushing disappointment when the wind wafted over gentle wisps of ambrosial fragrances in the evening hours.

And this is where the records of the witnesses left me. They may have provoked my opposition at times, but they had still gotten me this far, under the red banner of England on board those yellow and blue ships, which would fade into the distance on the following day at the break of dawn. All of a sudden I was standing alone on deck, or rather at the shore of an island that was familiar to me only from a hazily outlined picture on a map, and for a moment I forgot that I had wound up not on Tuanaki, but on its neighboring island of Mangaia, the ray-shaped atoll three miles above the ocean floor, surrounded, like a huge ring, by wide limestone reefs with innumerable interior cliffs and caves carved out by the strong surf, while in the interior, rolling hills with dewy peaks and dry flanks on the leeward side rose above fallow land and marshy lakes. At the same time, the Mangaia sources also provided eloquent information as to who was—or became—whose son, who wound up with which title, be it by inheritance or deception, since the days when their forefathers had paddled on an eastward course toward Sirius in dugouts and canoes and settled these scattered patches of earth. But the tales they told did not trace a set of dates, but instead the paths of blood that branched out in lines of descent and succession before being shed again and again on the battlefield.

I could only speculate about how Mourua might have been greeted at the shore, although for some surely dubious reason I formed a clear picture in my mind of his

fellow countrymen badgering him with questions about the nature and provenance of the pale visitors, and all concluding that they had been sent by Tangaroa, the god once worshiped on Mangaia, who had been defeated in battle by his brother, Rongo, and fled to the open sea a very long time before. And in my mind's eye I saw them recall that fateful battle as they went together to visit Rongo's stone statue near the coast to thank him for routing the adversary and his entourage once again. In my feeble imagination, Mourua was the first to step before the idol and sing its praises with the pride of an honorable man whose powerful build revealed that he was a long-time warrior. It had been a long time since he had started out in the back row of warriors as an untried youth with an ironwood club, until, battle by battle, he kept moving up, and eventually—and fearlessly—closed the gaps his forefathers had left, trading the weapon for hatchets and spearheads made of hammered basalt down in the valley of the old lagoon, over which the windswept bluff arose like the stands of an enormous amphitheater, where the warriors of various tribes, the descendants of contending gods, had been waging one battle over and over again, from time immemorial, a battle that lasted until the somber sound of the war drum announced its end and the dance began, the piercing sounds of which drowned out the groans of the dying, a ghastly triumphal song quivering through the night, which would not be replaced by the song of the peace drum until the break of day. The victor's reward was nothing less than the title of ruler: *Mangaia*. Mangaia meant peace, Mangaia meant power, power, that is, for a restricted period of time, but solid enough to enable its holder to decide over everything: who could plow and live on which land, and who would be banished to barren, karstic cliffs, where nothing but dry weeds grew. There, in the dank limestone caves, the losers often held out as they wasted away to mere skeletons – or proliferated so considerably that they pinned their hopes on beating their previous vanquishers in the next battle. I saw the mottled whites of their eyes in the darkness, heard the water dripping onto their heads and necks from the spiky stalactites, the distant echo seeking its reverberation.

Over the weeks in which the rites and customs of that island were revealed to me in the first missionaries' ethnological reports I learned that in Mangaia, power was not inherited, but achieved – attained in battle or by devious means in drinking binges at night, which tended to degenerate into massacres in which those who were duped—dazed, that is, by ground kava roots—ended up simmering in their own juices in a pit among hot stones, to be served as dinner.

Now, however, Mourua's hands were clasping the shiny axe from the stranger, and anyone who might think this was nothing but a piece of iron on a wooden handle, a well-intentioned gift, knows nothing of its power. This axe, which was henceforth bestowed on whoever emerged victorious on Mangaia, had more practical uses than any other

tool; it could be just as easily be used to split wood in making vats, boards, and weapons as to split the skull of a doomed man on Rongo's altar at the start of every new reign.

Mangaia was not only one island among thousands upon thousands in this vast sea; this was the whole world, a world in which it made no difference whether one was doomed to starve to death in the labyrinth of musty grottos or to perish in a rotted pirogue under the scorching sun. Those who lost, lost everything, their names, their country, their lives, and anyone who could get away had no thoughts of return. Some were able to escape, and there is much to suggest that those lucky souls found refuge on the island of Tuanaki, which was two days' travel away. But on Mangaia, reign followed reign until the cycle of victory and defeat came to an abrupt end. These were variations on an unvarying story: strangers arrived, intruders who needed to be driven away, whalers holding a mottled seashell in their chapped hands, its serrated opening like a hungry mouth; missionaries and their wives, who, stricken with mortal fear, threw themselves back into the surf soon after reaching the shore, leaving all their possessions behind on the beach: a boar and a sow clad in bast, who were henceforth worshiped as a divine couple, thick books with black, tattoo-like marks, whose torn-out, wafer-thin pages adorned the dancers with a swishing sound, and finally an unnamed epidemic that claimed more lives than all battles put together. That was the beginning – and what followed was the end, an extended parting from the gods. Their ironwood images were exposed, sacred groves ravaged, shrines burned down. The plaintive cries of the last pagan tribe were futile, as was their begging for mercy in the last battle of all. Those deemed unregenerate met their deaths with axes made of American steel, and a church was soon built from the ruins of the Rongo statue. Cook's axe was nothing but a rusty relic of an era and a reign gone by, and now that it had served its purpose, it was handed on to a British missionary of the second generation; I could not determine whether this was done with pride or in the vague hope of either reinforcing or terminating the once-sealed alliance. The missionary did not know this either, so without further ado, he consigned the iron object to the British Museum.

My thoughts were drawn to the forces of the earth's interior. When they prevail, the age-old cycle of rise and fall, blossom and decay is condensed. Islands emerge and go under; their life spans are briefer than those of the mainlands, they are fleeting phenomena when measured against the time period of millions of years and the endless expanse of this sea, the backs of all the globes on display in the map room, glowing in turquoise, bright blue, or pale blue, which I now scrutinized ceremoniously, convinced that I had finally found the thread, the thin umbilical cord, that ties together Mangaia and Tuanaki: it was the force of a seaquake that lifted Mangaia from the bottom of the sea up above the surface of the water one day, a ring of dead coral and basaltic lava, a

mountain peak rising up precipitously from the depths. And it was the force of a seaquake that tore Tuanaki into the depths one day and buried it under the masses of water of the Pacific Ocean shortly after missionaries began to search for the atoll. The gray shadow of an enormous wave had silently approached from the horizon and swallowed up everything with a single wash of the waves. By the next day the site where the island had been situated had nothing to show but dead trees on the sea, which was smooth as glass.

Just a year earlier, a little schooner with seven men had found its way into the reef and reached the deserted shore of Tuanaki. One of the sailors had headed inland at the behest of the captain, armed only with a sword, tracking through the thicket of banana trees, coconut palms, bougainvillea and wild orchids, inhaling the air that carried the scent of frangipani, hibiscus, and white jasmine, and eventually coming upon a clearing with a meeting house in which several men had gathered. All those men, I read with endless pleasure in the only report of that encounter, wore the Mangaian poncho and spoke the Mangaian dialect.

One of them, clearly the eldest, invited the visitor to enter, and when the latter complied, he inquired about the captain of the ship.

"He's on board," the sailor answered truthfully, but apprehensively.

"Why isn't he coming on land?" the man asked, with no change of expression. A conch shell was dangling from his neck.

"He's afraid you might kill him."

Silence followed, and for a brief moment the surf seemed perilously close. The elderly man gazed into the forest foliage and after some time had passed, remarked calmly, "We don't know how to kill. All we know is how to dance."

I took one last look at the pale blue globe, and quickly spotted the location. Right there, south of the equator, between a few scattered islands, is where this perfect piece of land had been situated, apart from the world, about which it forgot everything it had once known. Yet the world grieves only for what *is* known and has no idea of the loss it incurred with the forfeiture of that tiny island, even though the spherical shape of the earth would have made it possible for this lost patch of land to be its umbilicus—it would not be the tightly bound cordage of trade and of wars connecting it to the world, of course, but rather the far more finely spun yarn of a dream. For myth is the highest of all realities, and, I thought for a moment, the library is the true setting for the events of the world.

Outside it had started to rain, a misty monsoon, uncommonly warm for these northern latitudes.

*Translated from the German by Shelley Frisch*

Ancient Rome

## CASPIAN TIGER

*Panthera tigris virgata*, also known as *Persian*, *Mazandaran*,  
*Hyrcanian* and *Turanian tiger*

\* *It was the separation of their territories, less than ten thousand years ago, that led to the split into two subspecies, the Siberian and the Caspian tiger. The Caspian tiger lived in the upper reaches of the River Aras, from the forested slopes and plains of the Talysh mountain range to the Lankaran lowlands, on the southern and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, on the northern side of the Alborz mountain range up to the River Atrek, in the southern part of the Kopet Dag mountain range as far as the Murgab River basin, as well as along the upper stretch of the Amu Darya and its tributaries, in the Amu Darja valley to the point where it reaches the Aral Sea, and in the lower reaches of the Zeravshan, upstream of the Ili, along the River Tekes and into the Taklamakan desert.*

† *Direct hunting, a dwindling habitat and a decline in its main prey populations were the reasons for the extinction of the Caspian tiger. One was shot in 1954 in the Sumbar River valley in the Kopet Dag range, on the Iran-Turkmenia border. Other reports suggest the last tiger was killed in 1959 in the Golestan National Park in northern Iran. Caspian tigers were last sighted in 1964 in the foothills of the Talysh mountains and the river basin of the Lankaran lowlands near the Caspian Sea. In the early 1970s, biologists from the Iranian Department of Environment spent years scouring the remote, uninhabited Caspian forests for them, in vain. None survived in captivity. A handful of preserved cadavers found their way into natural history collections in London, Tehran, Baku, Almaty, Novosibirsk, Moscow and St Petersburg. A stuffed Caspian tiger was on display in the Tashkent Museum of Natural History until the mid-1960s, when it was destroyed in a fire.*

In the evening they are hungry and restless. No meat for days. No hunting since they themselves were captured. Instincts worn down by captivity until they lie bare like gnawed bones. Fire blazes in the cats' eyes. It is the reflection of the torches. These herald the arrival of the handlers who, each time they pass by on their rounds, peer through the bars, listen into the darkness for signs that their cargo is still alive.

The cage opens. Yet rather than a meal, it is a den that awaits them. Torches guide the way. Spears force them into a black, windowless hole, two wooden crates barely higher than their withers. These are rolled onto the waiting wagons. Senses sharpened by hunger. Commotion, movement, a clamour of voices: the barked orders of the handlers, the piercing whistle of the driver, the jangling of the bridles, the clunking of the corn

barges against a far-off quay, the clatter of the wheels, the flick of a rope.

The convoy jerks into motion, sets out on its preordained path. To the innermost heart of the city. To the outermost reaches of being. The axles creak at every turn.

The two animals are separated by a single partition. They crouch in the darkness. They know everything and see nothing. Not the mouldering docks and the steaming knacker's yard, not the Prænestine Gate, which they pass, not the buildings of marble and Tiburtine stone that gleam even at night. They are animals. Animals like us. Doomed like us.

It is still night when they are taken into the catacombs. During the last hours of darkness they turn in tight, aimless circles, strangers to one another – whether equally matched remains to be seen. The cells are musty; dungeons hidden from the sun. And when it finally rises, not one ray filters down here, into this underworld of passageways, ramps and lifts, of traps and doors.

Far above them a sail is now unfurled until it arches like a second sky over the stone bowl that is gradually filling with people: consuls and senators, vestal virgins and knights, citizens and freedmen, discharged legionaries – and at the very top, around the edge, the women. They have all come to see. They have come to be seen. It is a feast day, a spectacle, and anyone calling it a game has failed to appreciate the holy order inherent in it and the deadly seriousness that attends it.

The day is still young as the emperor steps into his box, pushes back the hood of his robe, shows off his tall sturdy physique, his stout neck, his imposing profile that everyone knows from the coins. When finally he sits down, the dungeon is unlocked, a chasm opens at ground level and a colossal animal of a kind never before seen emerges from the pit, bursts into the ring, races around the enclosure, leaps high against the parapet separating the public from the arena and, with a thunderous din, beats its mighty paws against the iron gate, stops, looks around, and for an infinite moment stands still.

This beast is preceded by a reputation that transcends oceans and mountains: it is said to originate from the depths of the forests of Hyrcania, the wild, rugged, evergreen land that borders the Caspian Sea. Its name is at once a curse and an incantation. It is reputed to be swift as an arrow, wild as the Tigris, the fastest-flowing of all rivers, from which it takes its name. Its fur blazes red as an open fire, the sooty stripes akin to branches in the embers, the facial features finely drawn, the ears upstanding, the cheeks powerful, the muzzle bristling with white whiskers, the eyes glowing green beneath heavy brows, and on its forehead a dark symmetrical marking, the meaning of which no-one knows.

The creature shakes its huge head, reveals its large, terrible teeth, its two pointed fangs, its fleshy maw. It runs its tongue over its bare nose. A growl rises up from its th-

roar; a hoarse snarl unlike anything heard before echoes through the terraces – a blood-curdling sound, after which every word becomes a whisper. And a rumour circulates, half lore, half poem: that there exist only females of its species, for the animal is savage, as savage as only a mother can be when robbed of her offspring. Chance alone bears out the assertion: beneath the tail with its brown-black rings lies concealed a fertile womb that will bear no more cubs.

The animal moves off again, paces the ring with silent steps, clings to the shadow cast by the walls, looks for a spot offering refuge, quiet and shelter – and finds none. There is only the greasy grey of the palisade, the barred openings, the white dazzle of the billowing togas, patches of brightness, naked faces frozen into masks.

When, in fact, had they first set eyes on this animal? Not in a nightmare, as a man-eating maniac with the sneering face of a child, its bared jaws full of powerful teeth, its tail armed with stings, but in the flesh, part of an Indian delegation on the shores of the island of Samos. On that occasion too it had been a female, the only one of the group of solitary beasts to have survived the desperately long, torturous journey. It was paraded before Augustus on a wrought-iron chain as a gesture of reverence – and as a hideous wonder of nature, as rare and horrifying as the herm-like boy who had been made to stand beside it: half-naked, his whole body dusted with spices, with no arms, these having been cut off at the shoulders when he was still an infant. There they stood, the snarling animal and the mutilated human – two wondrous beings, a bizarre pair, a cue for poets to pen epigrams about the majesty of the abominable.

It was six years later that this creature was first seen in Rome. On the Nones of May, it was brought out for the long-awaited inauguration of this theatre, together with a rhinoceros and a patterned snake ten cubits in length. The beast was changed beyond all recognition, for it could be seen licking its handler's hands with its rough tongue like a dog.

The empire of the Romans was vast, extending raggedly in every direction under the sun. Not only had they subjugated the Latins, the Volsci, the Aequi, the Sabines and Etruscans, they had also conquered the Macedonians, the Carthaginians and Phrygians, even claimed victory over the Syrians and Cantabrians – and had now tamed this monster as they would a Barbarian people, driving out its wild nature with whips and crowbars, stealthily winning its trust with goat and rabbit meat, and in return granting it protection, as they did all their subjects. It seemed almost as though this tigress, who blinked away every ray of sunshine yet did not flinch from the intrusive glances of the humans, were about to be declared a citizen of this empire, like a slave about to be set free. But then from somewhere, more out of whim than conviction, came the call for revenge, which never fails to resonate, the unchanging shrill chorus of budding suspici-

on and sudden distrust. It was suspected that their submission was merely feigned, their gentleness but a ruse. The predator may have hidden its claws, rolled on its back and, with its belly fur exposed, asked the handler for a caress, yet it lost none of its terror. Almost nothing stokes fear as surely as having won power over an enemy to whom one still feels inferior despite the victory. For as always, there was no denying the truth: nature was not vanquished, the wilderness remained untamed. Every breath the animal took served as a reminder of long-held fears and impending doom – and rendered its swift death as necessary as the sacrifice of thanksgiving after victory in battle. The verdict was unanimous: the tame beast was to die in combat, like all enemies of Rome. Yet when they set about choosing an adversary, no-one could be found who dared to take up the challenge. So they killed it in its cage.

Chains rattle, swords clatter, a wooden hatch drops onto the sand. The ground opens. A murmur passes through the tiers. Out of the darkness a tan head appears. A lion steps into the arena, calm, composed, his head held high, framed by the cloak of his rusty-black mane. The dark wool extends down over his shoulders to his underbelly, a shaggy coat. He sees the unfamiliar feline, takes in her perfect predator's build. The two animals stand there and eye each other for the first time – from a safe distance. Beyond the gates, a horse whinnies, a whip cracks. Otherwise all is quiet. Everyone is leaning forward to try and interpret the beasts' expressions, their mute demeanour, their motionless stance. But nothing gives them away. No hint of superiority, nor any trace of that understanding that binds predator and prey out in the wild.

The lion now sits, enthroned, showing no sign of agitation, with his shoulders drawn in and his chest proud, rigid as a statue, a long-serving monarch. No-one can say which came first: his noble status or his heroic appearance. A world that does not venerate him is unthinkable. A fable that does not make him the ruler not worth telling. His mane shimmers reddish in the sunlight. His gaze is frozen. His eyes gleam amber. The furry tassel of his tail whips the grainy dry sand. He opens his jaws, wider and wider, reveals his big yellow teeth, pushes his head forward, pricks back his ears, narrows his eyes to a thin slit – and starts to roar, a groan issuing from the depths of his chest, again and again, followed by a terrible rumble that seems to rise from an even deeper abyss each time, growing ever louder and more breathless, ever more urgent and menacing. It is the howl of a raging tempest, say the Indians, the roar of a charging army, the Egyptians, the thunder of Jehovah's fury, the Hebrews. But it might also be the elemental sound of creation announcing the end of the world.

The tigress drops low, tenses her long narrow body like a bowstring, presses her straggly white beard into the sand, stretches her hind legs in feline fashion, the sheer power of her muscles smouldering beneath her shoulders. With infinite caution she

advances one paw, then the next, creeps and sidles closer and closer, pauses – the lion in her sights.

He sees her coming, but remains calm. The lion's proverbial bravery is borne out. Fear has no hold over him. He stays stock-still on his spot and awaits whatever may come. Only his tail swishes back and forth, describing the same curves over and over in the dust. Destruction blazes in his eyes. And perhaps there is truth in what is written: that his blood is hot enough to melt diamonds.

There comes a breeze; a pigeon is briefly trapped beneath the sail and flutters in search of open sky. In this instant the tigress launches herself, springs through the air at the lion. He rears up, the two animals collide with a dull thud, and a tangle of bodies and fur writhes in the sand, turning lightning pirouettes until flashes of bare wooden boards show through. A hissing, panting and roaring fills the theatre, mingles with choruses of hooting and bawling, swells to a deafening racket that embodies everything: the plaintive cries of an exhausted lion in a dark pit, the hoarse yelps of a tiger cub caught in a net, the weary trumpeting of a wounded elephant, the groans of a hind pursued to the point of exhaustion, the pitiful squeals of a injured pregnant sow.

They come from the furthest reaches of the empire; panthers, lions and leopards from Mauritania, Nubia and the Gaetulian forests, crocodiles from Egypt, elephants from India, wild boar from the banks of the Rhine and elk from the Nordic swamps. They come in ships with sails and oars, in torrential rain, heat and hailstorms, wretched from the swell of the sea, with bloodied paws and teeth filed blunt, in crates of rough elm and beech wood, like prisoners of war or condemned criminals, on some ponderous conveyance drawn by oxen which, when they turn their bowed necks beneath the yoke and catch sight of their cargo, immediately shrink back from the drawbar, snorting, their eyeballs white with terror.

Under towering skies the wagons cross the shimmering plains and dark forests, the barren or fertile terrain, stop and rest in the shabbiest parts of towns and villages, which are required by law to provide for the animals and their keepers. All this for Rome, that temporary, fragile epicentre of an empire that nourishes itself from its peripheries. But most die along the way. Carcasses thrown overboard, bloated by the water, dried out by the sun, a meal for dogs and vultures. Theirs is a cruel fate, though it seems kinder than that of the survivors.

They roll into Rome on high-wheeled wagons alongside the military equipment, receiving an enthusiastic welcome like all rare and precious goods, their names and places of capture emblazoned in large lettering.

They are kept outside the city walls, near the docks, crammed into cages, prepared for the arena where every hunter becomes prey, and those found stoical are stirred to

hatred. If an animal is overly docile, it is left to starve for days on end, pelted with sharp thorns and burning brushwood, festooned with bits of jangling metal or teased with straw dolls dressed in red. Any animal that refuses to fight in the amphitheatre, that is reluctant to play the role assigned to it by others, has lost its life. The games are serious. As serious as the deaths of those men and women whose memory they honour: victorious generals, heirs of Caesar who perished before their time, the emperor's father and mother.

The fight is sacred. To force the spectacle, tormentor-slaves chain the animals to one another: aurochs to elephants, rhinoceroses to bulls, ostriches to boars, lions to tigers, so that animals that would never come across each other out in the wild face each other in the semicircle of the arena – forced into hostility, robbed of their habitat, driven to a state of terror and frenzy, exposed to everyone's gaze, tethered to existence by invisible cords, condemned to die the painful and pleasing death for which they have been kept alive. The verdict may be unequivocal, but the crime of which they are guilty remains obscure to the last.

It may be an old ritual, but here no-one pulls their toga over their head to spare themselves the sight of death. No god will be appeased by these steaming entrails. No dirge will extol these dead, no cenotaph will conceal their corpses, and only those that survive countless games, cheating death again and again, those that kill even the bestiarii and remain alone in the arena at the end earn themselves a posthumous reputation and a name: the she-bear Innocentia and the lion Cero II, who in the end was savaged by a nameless tiger before a clamouring crowd.

The tigress shakes herself free, rolls to one side. The lion lashes at her with his right paw, catches her on the head, rips a flap of skin from her scalp. He scents blood, he scents the injured kid bleating for its mother that once lured him into the trap in the wastelands of the Atlas mountains, he scents defeat and victory. He hurls himself onto her back with all his might, his hind legs on the ground, buries his claws in her neck, tugs her head backwards. The tigress yelps, hisses, bares her fearful teeth. Again the lion moves to attack, drives the tigress back until her tail is brushing the walls of the arena, pursues her, pounces at her once more, aims for her throat and sinks his teeth into her neck with full force. The battle seems already decided. A soft moan escapes the tigress, like a sigh. A bloody triangular wound gapes beneath her left ear. She ducks, writhes, finally frees herself from his clutches, leaps onto the back of her adversary, buries her paws in his neck, drags him to the ground, digs her claws into his fur, springs apart from him again and lands a distance of two rods away in the swirling dust. Cheers go up, applause resounds, a fanfare plays.

The lion, looking dazed, gasps for air, turns his heavy head and surveys his wounds,

two red gashes running across his back. Then he shakes his mane, reverts to combat stance, charges at the tigress, groaning, snorting – with a bellow of pain. She lunges out, aims for his forelegs. The two of them rear up and lash out at each other. Red, yellow and black fur goes flying. The crowd yells, erupts into chanting, shouts wild encouragement for the fight it has contrived. They call it a hunt, but there is no undergrowth, and every way out is blocked by the barricade, the high walls resembling occupied battlements.

They are watching a cross between an execution and a theatrical performance. A crude throng with delicate nerves, accustomed to the magnitude, the sheer numbers, the monstrosity. To everything the mind can imagine. Every boundary only there to be overstepped. Their delight is laced with disgust, and their disgust with delight born purely of curiosity, the urge to act on every thought. For they, though they pride themselves on having a choice, are similarly only following their instincts, like children who throw stones at frogs just for fun.

Curiosity also spawns the question of who would win if all the animals from the menageries were brought here to test their powers and penned in together in this sandy abyss. A drama that simultaneously quells every fear it unleashes. A spectacle, bigger than the games staged by Augustus to honour his prematurely deceased heir. What, then, would represent the pinnacle of all ferocity? A trained tiger that tears apart a tame lion? A lion that chases rabbits around the arena, scoops them up and carries them around in its jaws like its own flesh and blood, toys with them then releases them, only to catch them again? Hecatombs of big cats paraded and slaughtered in the arena in a single day until women faint and the ground is littered with bodies that can no longer be called bodies, lacerated, torn to pieces, drenched in blood, the heads twitching, the carcasses half-eaten, the limbs cold and rigid?

The Circus will be reincarnated. For once a thought comes into the world, it lives on in another. Big cats crouching on pedestals, piled into pyramids, posing in quadrille formation. They will ride on horses, glide on wheels, rock on seesaws, balance on ropes, jump through flaming hoops – use dressed-up dogs as hurdles until the crack of the whip, which is the signal to lick the sandals of the animal trainer dressed in a gladiator tunic and tow him around the ring in the chariot: lion and tigress – the social animal of the steppes, the loner of the damp forests – side by side, an unequal pair yoked together as if pulling Bacchus' chariot as depicted in the mosaics found at ancient sites: Africa versus Asia, control versus passion. What use to them their heroic past, their honourable titles on a par with those of the Caesars? The lion has become the pet of emperors and saints. While he is fulfilling martyrs' deepest desires, others are pillaging his realm. One privilege is gained, another lost. Cities, countries, kings demand his image on their crests. And in assuming this new role, he forgets his origins, the broad plains, the strength of

the sun, hunting as a pride. And what use is it now to the tiger that it remained forgotten in Europe for a thousand years? True, its rarity did save it from becoming a frozen emblem. A strange creature classified in Latin bestiaries as either a serpent or a bird, judged by a foreign concept of virtue. They cursed it as cowardly when they should have called it clever. It evaded humans for as long as it could.

Look far into the future, see your sorry fate: your house will fall like that of the Julii, their lineage snuffed out, your last descendants stuffed like bird carcasses. Forever trapped in dioramas with the dusty steppe or broken reeds in the background, hissing, with glassy eyes, mouth open wide, their mighty eye-teeth bared menacingly – or beseechingly, as at the moment of their death. A life in nature reserves and in the custody of humans, behind glass and ditches, among artificial rocks, in tiled rooms and barless enclosures, their days sacrificed to inactivity, flies swarming around their heraldic heads, an existence marked only by eating and digesting, in the air the smell of mutton, horse-meat, beef, and of warmed-up blood.

The audience rages. The fight ceases abruptly. The animals release their grip on each other, pause, breathing heavily. Blood trickles down their flanks. The tigress drags herself away, leans her broken body against the barricade, struggles for air. The lion stays put, muscles twitching, chaps drenched in blood, mouth brimming with foam. His gaze is dull and empty, his eyes bottomless. His ribcage rises and falls, breathing the dust. A shadow falls across the stage, a cloud obscures the sun, just for a moment.

Then all of a sudden the arena brightens; unfamiliar light illuminates the scene. An opportunity appears, like a miracle, an unimagined glimpse into the future, a way out, a departure from the preordained path, something new and different that banishes any thought of approaching death. Yet it is also the need, the urge to survive that drives the two animals inevitably towards one another in that vision. A force connected not with the end, but with a beginning. Their ritual obeys a powerful age-old rule: safeguard your clan, preserve your species before its line dies out. And when coming into heat, know no choice. If one instinct fails, let another take its place. Whoever lives must eat. Whoever eats must procreate. Whoever who procreates will not be destroyed. The signals may encourage hostility, but the message is clear, the musk in their urine an invitation to a game with consequences: menacing gesture is followed by a hint of timidity, proximity by flight, and resistance by sudden, fleeting submission.

They rub up against each other, nuzzle their heads together. They swipe at one another, hesitate, their paws raised, their eyes locked on each other, they fend off the inevitable, flee their beloved foe, stir the embers, feel their fervour build to the point of no return, rapt and mesmerised.

Eventually the orange-and-black cat slumps down, prone, and the lion steps over

her, lowers his fawn body, sinks down on her, and while, for all their kinship, a vestige of unfamiliarity remains, the process is universally ingrained: he sinks his teeth into her neck with a roar until she lashes out at him, hissing, and – be it with a blind or seeing eye – they mate, driven to it only by their unnatural proximity. Nothing on earth can prevent what is now happening. Who decides what is contrary to nature and what is part of it? What are those cats doing if not heeding the call to be fruitful and multiply? Traitors to their species yet also its preservers. That their nuptials were enforced need not trouble their descendants.

And after a hundred days, what began as a dream reappears like an illusion, a creature resembling a chimaera, in which the parents' nature is both doubled and halved: the tail black, but without a tassel, the belly pale, the mane short and the coat light as sand, a reddish ochre dappled with patches that gleam like stripes, the father's stature, the mother's profile, their unmatched silhouettes, the straight back of the lion, the roach back of the tiger. Monstrous in size, its being intrinsically divided, quick-tempered like a tiger, stoical and tenacious like a lion – a social animal condemned to solitude, a swimmer that shuns water, a popular attraction, a spellbinding sight – bastard, lion-tiger, liger.

They're everywhere, aren't they? In the colour copperplate of the three cubs from the travelling menagerie of an English performer, which were taken from their tiger mother and given to a terrier bitch to nurse, and all perished in their first year of life. In the naively rendered, colourful painting of a hybrid feline family in their enclosure, their trainer in their midst like their own child. In the footage of the sandy-coloured liger beside a lady in a silver bathing costume, a colossal animal, the world's largest cat, a male of keen instinct and lost potency.

A cry resounds around the upper tiers, people wince, momentarily avert their gaze then turn their faces back to the arena. The dream is soon over; the offspring remain unborn. And as if to dispel the thought, the spectacle gathers pace. The entire globe and its myriad worlds dwindle to this semicircle, this inhospitable place, the bare enclosure comprised of sand, spectators and stone, where flies buzz and some in the crowd, craving cool air, fan themselves with a restless hand.

The tigress picks herself up and circles her adversary again. The embattled lion fends her off, but his blows miss their target. The orange cat draws back and launches into a leap, shoots through the air like a bullet, lands on the lion's back. The huge bodies, now streaked with blood and brown with dust, roll across the arena. The lion gives a hoarse roar, shakes the tigress off, pants, stumbles, sinks to his knees. He has two gaping wounds running across his back; blood streams from deep tooth marks. Immediately the tigress leaps onto his shoulders once more, sinks her fangs into his throat. Only his mane

saves him from certain suffocation. The tigress loosens her bite, gasps for air herself, great mouthfuls of lion hair catching in her teeth. At this the lion lunges out, hits her hard. The tigress sways but recovers herself, surges forward anew. They go in for another attack. The tigress throws herself on the lion, sinks her teeth into his flesh. He rears up, shakes her off, opens his mouth wide, collapses on the sand with a fading moan. And lies there, motionless.

The tigress surveys her work, sinks down and, trembling, licks her wounds. The stripes in her fur are barely visible for blood.

Emperor Claudius laughs his loud, depraved laugh. There is spittle clinging to the corners of his mouth. He stands, takes a step forward and starts to speak, keen to praise the mother whose memory today's games are intended to honour.

He stutters, though, and the words disintegrate in his mouth. Mute, he slumps back into his seat, hearing in his head the abominable name his mother once called him: a monster. The vile word echoes inside him, a curse that has haunted him for as long as he can remember. Who could blame her? What then brought him to power? The mere fact that he was alive, the only member of the imperial family, the last of his line. Nobody had ever taken him seriously, him, the monster.

So it was pure chance that bequeathed him the office that was never meant for him: benefactor to the masses, ruler over life and death. He sees the marble seats of the senators, the narrow purple hem of the knights' togas, the quizzical looks. Were it not for the fear, it would be easy to rule. Sweat trickles down his temples.

A bell rings. A gate opens. The crowd yells. A man enters the arena. A bestiarius, wearing nothing more than a tunic, no armour nor shield, bandages around his legs, in his left hand a bridle, in his right a spear which he keeps raising aloft, directing the masses. The tigress sees the half-naked figure, stalks him, prepares to pounce – but in that split second the lance pierces her chest. The tigress writhes, staggering blindly, trying to shake off the spear. Her head hangs, her eyes search, incredulous, her gaze moves over the fighter, the spectators, who are in a raging frenzy – and the animal slumps down. Her eyes fade, her gaze freezes. Bright blood flows from her nostrils; red froth streams from her open mouth. Already the bestiarius is performing his lap of honour, taking in the applause, the chants, the dancing pennants, the wild behaviour. Duty has been done, order restored, chaos defeated for a moment.

Gradually the grandstand empties. Quiet descends. Men come and drag the carcasses out of the arena, down into the catacombs to join those of the other animals piled there in their hundreds. The odour of decay hangs in the air. In the afternoon will come the main event, the gladiator games.

*Translated from the German by Jackie Smith*

Rhone Valley, Valais, Switzerland

## GUERICKE'S UNICORN

\* *The physicist Otto von Guericke, who became known principally for his vacuum experiments, is ascribed with the first-ever reconstruction of an animal skeleton from single finds. In reality, Guericke, who merely mentions in his New Magdeburg Experiments (1672) the discovery, in 1663, of a "unicorn skeleton" in the quarries of the Sewecken mountains near Quedlinburg, couldn't have found those bones, far less reconstructed them. Moreover, as far as the two copperplate engravings from the years 1704 and 1749 reveal, they originate from various ice-age mammals, such as the mammoth and woolly rhinoceros.*

† *The bones in question were kept in the Quedlinburg castle vault before being distributed, piece by piece, to interested parties. A plastic reconstruction of the unicorn skeleton, measuring over three metres in height, is now on permanent loan at the Magdeburg Museum of Natural History.*

Years ago, I spent some time in the mountains. Tired from a period of prolonged strain, I decided to seclude myself away for a few weeks in a deserted Alpine hamlet, in a chalet put at my disposal by an acquaintance. I was contemplating the original idea, as it seemed to me at the time, of writing a nature guide to monsters, those ogres which, even though they had arisen predominantly from the human imagination, nonetheless inhabited the world just as matter-of-factly, despite all refutations of their existence, or so I had nonchalantly claimed while presenting this book project to a group of potential funders, as the representatives of the actual fauna, which, I had proposed, meant that their nature, their appearance, as well as their traditional habitat and specific behaviour, could be similarly researched and systematized. We didn't need to kill the dragons, but rather dissect them, I had added somewhat pathetically, and without giving much thought to the target readership, scope or form of my book, I signed a contract and took the next night train heading south. Towards midday, I reached the train station of a small mediaeval town. It was mid April, the air still wintry fresh, the sun lacking in strength, the subsequent bus journey seemingly endless and the route from the final stop up to the hamlet stony and steep, exactly as I had imagined the journey into seclusion to be. I remember, as I followed the curves of the path lining the forest through a craggy wilderness of rocks, being amused by the thought that I, having been rather anxious as a child and afraid especially of horror films and of being alone, should now choose to go into self-imposed solitude and study, of all things, the monstrous products of the human imagination, which are often gruesome enough in and of themselves. The fact that the

ascent was so long-winded and arduous was, however, predominantly down to the vast number of books I had brought with me.

The light was already fading by the time the black and white houses came into view, scattered over the slope beyond a rocky embankment. It was completely silent, apart from the hum of the electricity mast cables above me. I found the key in the agreed hiding-place and entered the simple but spacious living space, which was on the upper floor and panelled with broad larchwood planks, then fetched firewood from the soffit, stacked it next to the stove, lit the fire, brewed myself some tea and put clean sheets on the bed. Darkness soon descended over the mountain slope and my new home, and my first night's sleep, if my memory isn't deceiving me, was deep and dreamless.

When I awoke the following morning, the sky through the dormer window resembled a pallid gruel, and it took me a while to remember where I was. Outside, the shadowy, densely-wooded mountainside towered up with its furrowed, snow-crowned peaks, which despite considerable effort I was unable to assign to the entries on a map laid out on the kitchen table. Perhaps this was down to having grown up by the sea, which knows neither elevations nor depressions and remains shapeless even in a storm, I thought to myself, as my gaze hovered over the dark hachures that denoted a rift-valley, gouging its way sideways into the wide basin.

I pulled on my parka, stepped into my walking boots and went out, straight into the forest. The blue tits' tsir-tsir and a ring ouzel's chiding call sounded out, residual snow glistened in the ditches, and the trunks of numerous trees were covered with a sulphurous, fluorescent web of miniscule, delicately enmeshed arms, which reinforced once again my observation that even completely artificial-seeming organisms occur in nature. It was easy to detach from the bark, and felt like dried moss in my coat pocket. After around half an hour, I reached a ravine, which gaped in the slope like a fissured wound. A narrow wooden footbridge, barely a hand's width, spanned the shadowy and damp abyss.

I made an about-turn, and by the time I reached the hamlet again the sun had only just climbed over the eastern ridge. The air was still fresh. I could see my breath, which together with the smoke coming from the chimney of my chalet was the only sign of human life for far and wide. The two dozen houses lay there silently, residential quarters on stony plinths built into dark boulders, the roof ridges facing the valley, with blind windows and closed shutters, and even the door of the chapel at the edge of the settlement refused to open. In front of it stood a water trough, hewn from a boulder. The water was icy cold.

The first week passed without any noteworthy incidents. I got up each day at 8 o'clock, took a long walk to the ravine and back before breakfast, and on my return, as

though I had done nothing else my whole life, I threw two or three logs onto the fire, made coffee, boiled myself an egg, then sat down at the narrow kitchen table and read. I was contentedly self-contained, and had already stockpiled ample provisions during the first few days in order to spare myself, for the time being, the trip to the grocery store in the village lower down the valley. Wood was in plentiful supply, as were books and a ring binder full of photocopied psychoanalytical, medical-historical, crypto-zoological and other mythical research literature, and I liked the thought that, in the event of one of the catastrophes longed for in my recurring daydreams, I at least wouldn't run out of fuel anytime soon.

And so I immersed myself in my studies, and swiftly filled an entire notebook, recording in it the varied characteristics of the monsters and mythical beings, as well as elements of their legends, and the functions which each one of these creatures fulfilled in the teeming cosmos of fear. I'll admit that I was a little disappointed. The repetitions were striking; each new story soon revealed itself to be a mixture of long-established set pieces, each figure an unsurprising hybrid-being of imagination and experience. In short, the biodiversity wasn't exactly bountiful, and real nature was considerably more eccentric than fiction. All the stories of monstrous apparitions testified to little more than the stubborn persistence of recurring narrative models and motifs: the Phoenix, bursting into flames every five hundred years and rising again from its own ashes, the pompous Sphinx with her riddles, the deadly stare of Medusa, of the catoblepas, of the basilisk. All the varieties of dragons, which in the end always get shot down, their membranous wings, their air-polluting breath, their hunger for gold, the inevitable bath in their blood. Even mythical creatures from foreign cultures failed to bring the hoped-for variety. In essence, the story was always the same: a woman's innocence had to be protected or sacrificed, a man's bravery proven, the wild conquered and the past overcome. What I especially disliked about the reports was the whispered significance, the grandiose air of the scandalous, its inevitable reference to a calamity which was either impending or had already occurred (in the dim and distant past). The only aspects I found even more tiring were the derivations made by those researchers who were unwilling to see anything in the beasts but a misunderstood reality. For them, there was nothing mysterious. The dog-headed people of the cynocephali were merely a group of marauding baboons, the phoenix a flamingo, blurred by the dazzling morning sunlight, the sea bishops from the historical pamphlets nothing but lost monk seals, and the unicorn a mistranslated rhinoceros or an oryx antelope in profile. Yet when it came to the obvious question as to why the dragons bore a striking resemblance to the dinosaurs, to this of all questions, I was to my great disappointment unable to find a convincing answer anywhere.

Nonetheless, I kept to my plan and tried my hand at categorising the monsters,

only to rapidly come to the conclusion that my provisional organisation was no more useful or curious than, for example, the classification of Swiss dragons which a Zürich nature researcher had devised in the early 18th century. Despite learning that the griffin originated from Hyperborea or India and the gigantic bird roc from Arabia, that Chinese dragons had five toes, Korean four and Japanese three, that basilisks dwelled in well shafts and that the thorny tentacles of Yateveo, the man eating plant native to South America, caused deadly boils, and agonizing over whether the scarlet-red Mongolian death worm Allghoi Khorkoi belonged to the cryptid classification (in any case vaguely defined) or whether it was to be included without further ado with the snake-like variants, I was nonetheless unable to report any notable advance in knowledge or feel even the faintest glimmer of satisfaction.

It was no wonder that, one day, I decided to create better monsters myself, perhaps even an entire world including cosmology, a complete Olympus. As so often when I found myself unable to progress with the writing, I turned my attention to painting. But even the very first creature I sketched one afternoon, with a handful of watercolours I had brought with me, looked, despite its scaly, vibrant poison-green skin, the leathery webbing between its claw-armed feet and its watery, bloodshot eyes, more comical than frightening. Seldom have I felt so incompetent, so banal, so empty. It was undeniable that evolution was incomparably more inventive than the human imagination. What was the monstrous Kraken from the mariners' stories compared to the giant squid's search for a female mate – which was so protracted that he unceremoniously injected his semen beneath the skin of every congener he encountered on his jaunts through the lightless deep-sea, without first checking their gender. What were the crooked talons of the ancient Harpies against the terrifying visage of the hook-nosed predatory bird of the same name, the agonised death throes of the nine-headed hydra, decapitated by Hercules, compared with the potential immortality of the fresh water polyps, and even those dragons of myths and legends, hysterically guarding their treasures, against the sublime nonchalance of the giant lizards dozing on the cliffs of the Galapagos Islands.

With increasing frequency, I interrupted my reading and stared into the embers of the fire, ran my fingers across the knot of neon-green lichen, or painted my name in different scripts on the reverse sides of a photocopied article on monstrous birth defects which I had eliminated soon after my arrival. From time to time, I read a few pages from a collection of Upper Valois legends that I had found in the drawer of the nightstand, in an attempt to distract myself from the monsters with the wandering souls of godless farmhands and child-murdering women, cut my fingernails or combed my hair until the coarse, dark hairs lay in the fold of the books like bookmarks, or looked at the display of my mobile phone, even though it almost never had reception, and out of the window at

the mountainside opposite, as though I was expecting something or someone.

Then, on the twelfth or thirteenth night, I dreamt of a bathtub full of snakes, whose bulky, short bodies reminded me more of amputated, limbless varans. The strangest thing about them was their girl heads, with youthfully rosy faces and blonde hair plaited into long braids. I tried to speak to them, but they remained silent, and instead rose into the air and flew around the room. Only their expressions made it clear that they felt the same way I did. When I awoke, I couldn't help but think of Baku, the Japanese monster with the head of an elephant, tail of a bull and paws of a tiger, that feeds predominantly on human nightmares, and wondered whether he had liked the taste of mine.

That day, I decided to take a break from my research and go out amongst human beings. The sky was overcast, and the clouds hung over the forest in loose, grey swathes. The colours were pale, but for that very reason everything seemed surreally clear: the section of tarred road, the cracks in the asphalt and a bright, signal-red marking at its edge, which could just as easily have depicted a snake as a misshapen question mark. I knew that a two-headed snake wasn't a sign in itself; only the hiker who encountered it made it so. The steeper the path became, the shorter and quicker my steps, in order to balance out the downward gradient. In the distance, a few sheep clung to the slope. Animals could clearly cope with being at an angle better than humans; they were able to live their entire lives on steep slopes. A provisional state that was as normal to them as the lowlands were for me. On all sides, boulders jutted out of the slope as though they had been thrown into the landscape with intentional haphazardness, their windward sides covered in moss. It was hard to imagine that all of this had come into being, instead of having been deliberately created. Arisen without assistance, then given the finishing touch. The unpredictability, however, had remained. Nature was capable of far more than God. Nonetheless, I was touched by the idea that he really had hidden the fossils of animals which had never existed in the Earth's crust in order to fool us. What arduous work for such a crude joke. For a moment, I even wished it were true.

I started to sweat, but it wasn't quite warm enough for walking around in just a pullover either. The hardest thing was finding the rhythm for the descent, transforming the gravity into momentum. Beyond a hill, the mist lifted. Beneath me, the steppe-like slopes, and beneath them, stretching out and suddenly astonishingly close, the bright-green, open landscape of the valley, the bottom of an erstwhile sea. The possible was a tremendously fertile ground, even if it was rather unlikely that a vertebrate many thousands of years old was in the labyrinth-like caves of the Earth's interior fearing or even longing for its discovery. Perhaps the dragons really were just pale likenesses of previous experiences, residue of times which have long since passed? Why shouldn't memories push for their survival, self-preservation and propagation just as organisms do? After

all, there was probably nothing as monstrous as the power of images, of the once-seen. I recalled the legendary stories of pale-skinned women who gave birth to black-skinned or fur-covered children because they had looked at sacred images, of Maurice or John the Baptist, during the conception. But if that was the deciding factor, what kind of creatures would the world be populated with? How far could memory trails reach back? At a certain point, everything vanished in the haze. Ouroboros, the world serpent, bit into its tail.

The yellow signpost stood at the fork in the road, as always. I was impressed by its gesture, its precise instruction, its steadfastness. Some things really were completely clear, completely unequivocal. In my head, there were only phrases and sayings. What was that lovely one? A path comes into being when you take it. Simply let go. How many times had I heard that and immediately tensed up? You could achieve a great deal by thinking, but it was of little help when it came to feeling. The entire body a fist that could only be opened with sheer force. Everything in hand, yet not that elusive heartbeat. This business of you-just-have-to-believe-it-will-happen. Hand-painted notes left beneath the Christmas tree. The disenchantment of the world was, in the end, the greatest of all myths. A child's magical thinking stronger than any statistic, than any prior experience. A counting rhyme was suddenly true, a crack in the pavement meant unspeakable horror, and whoever stepped on it was irretrievably lost. You could only lose against the myth. Miracles couldn't be ruled out, of course, but they weren't to be relied upon. Cause and effect were easily confused. What was desire, what was will, what was nothing but bodily function? Let go or hold on? Become a vessel. Give up on the expectation of something greater than what there is. Something like mercy. Something like humility. An unparalleled humiliation.

At last, the terrain began to level out. The path now led past terraced fields and along a paddock. On it stood a solitary bull, its horns protruding, nostrils pink and damp, a shaggy coat of hair, not an eye to be seen, nothing but reddish-brown, matted hair. The sound of an electrical current. A few cherry trees, the scabby bark glittered like copper rust. And then a feeling of surprise, as behind the large barn the grey-blue shimmering roofs of the village appeared, a settlement halfway up between the valley and the Alps, where the air was thin and the meadows green. The path led onto a street, where the asphalt shone as though it had just rained. The place seemed devoid of life. Not even a cat to be seen. The houses stood so close to one another that it would have been possible to jump from roof to roof. Residential houses alternated with barns, stalls and garages. Amongst them were narrow passageways and stony steps, barely any wider than half an arm's length, and so dark, as though they led straight into the heart of the mountains, into the deeper layers of time.

A buzzing reached my ears from somewhere, then a dull thud, a crashing sound, followed by an abrupt groan. It seemed to have come from the lower floor of a chalet. The wood of the door was old and silvery grey. There was a crack at knee height, just big enough for an eye. I peered in. Inside, complete darkness. It took a moment before I was able to make anything out. A shapeless mound in the straw, the surface area slimy; a whitish, purulent layer, smeared with blood. Whatever it was, it was still alive. The pulse irregular, in its final throes, the beginning of the end. A growth, whether it was benign or malignant, you could only tell after operating. The words of the doctor, a woman: Physiologically speaking everything was tiptop. *Physiologically*. The body was always right. The lump of flesh before me twitched, like an organ exposed in an operation. I was reminded of the faded, often indefinable organic material in museum vitrines. Conserved in formaldehyde, collated, a mishmash in which the unusual was hard to differentiate from the exemplary. As long as it was expressive, that was what mattered. The music and lighting had to be right; the rest was down to the imagination. The eye alone was stupid. The lump twitched once more, it moved or was moved. A bubble appeared, full of blood, and hovered, glided down to the floor. The bundle began to thrash around, as though it were being restrained. A slaughter scene. A slain animal. Suddenly a black muzzle, that leant down, small, sharp, yellow teeth, an outstretched tongue, licking off the mucous in rhythmic movements and eating it. A hoof that prodded at the lump until it moved again and took shape, a rump, individual limbs stretched out – thin, spindly black-and-white legs, jutting crookedly upwards, a short tail, a skull, the back of the head flat, the face completely black. A single eye. Only then did I notice the stench. The smell of dirty fleece and sheep faeces, of coagulated blood. Nausea rose inside me. I pulled back my head. In my knee, a stabbing pain which abated only after a few steps, down the empty lane to the whitewashed church, its pointed, high tower like a screwdriver bit. The empty marketplace with the bus stop, the postbox, a red fire hydrant, everything seemed as harmless as a fresh crime scene in the paper, on the bad page, the one named Miscellaneous, Panorama, From Around the World. Crimes that were suddenly in the world in duplicate – as deed and thought. One person's desire, the other's fear. Every boundary existing only in order to be crossed.

A little bell tinkled, frantic and bright, as I entered the shop. There was no one to be seen. The shelves were packed all the way to the ceiling, the colourful wares neatly arranged. A labyrinth whose few pathways always led only to the checkout and back to the exit. I was neither hungry nor thirsty, nor did I feel like picking something out. Whether or not this meant I was perfectly content, my basket remained empty. The bell rang again. A man burst in. He wore an old uniform with shining buttons and looked at me as though he wanted to be spoken to. I passed through the checkout, where a

woman appeared out of nowhere, the shop assistant. Her gaze was empty, as though she had spent her entire life in this place, tired and expectant at the same time. I had never seen her here before. I instinctively reached for a newspaper and rummaged around for some change. The cashier called something out to the man. I didn't understand a single word. Despite how hard I tried, I never would. She sat down, her hands relaxed into her lap, and that was when I saw it, a tattoo on the inside of her right wrist, a white horse's head, with a light-blue, winding horn on its forehead, framed by pink clouds. My coins clinked into the little bowl. A question from the cashier, my hasty headshaking, and once again the shame at never understanding a word that anybody said to me here. A few gold bracelets slipped down over the tattoo and back again. Hand and unicorn wandered up to the cashier's face, the fingers ran through the blonde-dyed hair, brushed a few strands back into place. For a brief moment it was really close, looking at me. A bright dot glistened in its big, blue comic eye. Its gaze was friendly, harmless and penetrating all at once. Then the animal had disappeared again. She searched in the open drawer for change.

A sign nonetheless, an unmistakable reference. Not to be disregarded, not to be ignored. I feigned deafness and ran out, setting off the irritating tinkle once again, then I was back in the marketplace and taking the main path, at a brisk pace, almost light-footed, without hurrying, up the mountain, back or away, it didn't matter. My heart loud all of a sudden, as though in pursuit or in flight. It was easily startled, pounding high up into my throat. It felt good to simply run on, to surrender to the gravity. Step-by-step, away from the horn. The dragons may be slain, dead and buried, their fossilized bones pasted together into skeletons and exhibited in museums, propped up by steel corsets, but the unicorn, this corny, ridiculous, transparent thing, was immortal, ineradicable, omnipresent – whether on a cashier's wrist or in the cabinet of curiosities in Basel's Totengässlein. It had stood there smooth and shimmering, hard, dizzyingly large. A specimen of itself. The greatest monster by far. *Do not touch*, said the sign. As though I would have been out to stroke ivory, calcium phosphate turned by nature. A medicine against any poison. A miracle drug. But I wasn't ill. Tiptop. And not so desperate that I would be taken in by a horn. After all, I wasn't a virgin anymore. But in its eyes perhaps I was. So what would it do with me, in the middle of the forest? Nestle its head against my chest, lay its horn down in my lap? It amounted to the same thing, after all. The joys of virginity? Where there's a horn, there's a hole. The hymen, too, was just an enemy, an enemy to be bored through. An apple that had to be plucked. If only it were that simple.

The road went around a bend, and behind it a small village appeared on a plateau, the blackish-brown houses nestled closely against the church, surrounded by pastures, high above a steep drop, barely a hundred metres away from me and yet separated by a ravine. Not far from the precipice, two brown horses grazed in an enclosure. They

were facing in opposite directions, their tails, not their heads, were turned towards one another, mirrored, as though waiting in an invisible harness for a command. The image seemed familiar to me. But from where? Two horses, back to back. From school, an illustration in a history book, a sepia-toned artwork. The picture of the diverging horses, their necks straining under the whip, the immense effort, their snaffles covered with foam. Sweat stains under the harness. Two coach and sixes, or even coach and eights, their heads turned away. And between them an orb, pumped empty: the vacuum, an unimaginable emptiness, a dead space. Behind, the panorama of a hilly landscape, and above, hovering in the skies, two hemispheres, a godlike, blind pair of eyeballs. There was nothing more terrible than emptiness. And every single monster existed only in order to fill it, to obscure the blind spot of fear, making it doubly invisible. A sensation in my abdomen, hollow and heavy. Not a rock to be seen, nothing to sit on. I stayed on my feet, squatted down. My insides clenched like a fist. Is this what emptiness felt like? How heavy was emptiness? The possible was a tremendously fertile ground. So was the impossible. A white delivery van thundered past me. I crossed the road, and discovered on the other side a dark opening in the shrubbery, a sunken road, a swathe that burrowed its way ever deeper into the forest, the undergrowth like a rampart on either side. Bare deciduous trees, soon the shade of the firs. The ground was soft, carpeted with coppery-toned needles. A hollow knocking resounded from somewhere. Apart from this, it was completely peaceful. My steps were muffled, almost soundless. The path meandering, without any particular course. At times it followed a gorge downwards, then it led closely along the rock again, before vanishing completely on a shady rise. The terrain began to open up and revealed the wide, western basin, the slopes of the mountain pushing their way onto it like curtains. The river which gave the valley its name glinted in the haze. Now I also saw, not all that far away, a bare spot in the forest, where the trees lay crisscrossed on the ground like fallen matches. Alpine choughs screeched in the sky, plunging down then climbing again, up beyond the tree line. Behind them, a half-dilapidated barn hung on the slope, unreachable, as though it had been painted on – framed by the white of the snow, as distant as the summer. It seemed unimaginable that a path should actually lead there. Where were the signposts when you really needed them? On a slope, there were some stones between two pieces of rock, layered to form steps, almost a stairway, a direction, the suggestion of a path. Pain in my knees, groin, lower back. Why can't the body just function the way it says in the textbook for once? What had I done to make it not want to obey me? To do whatever it wanted. To not do what I wanted. The path was becoming increasingly steep now, probably more of a chamois trail. In any case, it was easier on all fours. That way I at least made progress, groping my way up, crawling through the slate and rock debris until the vegetation began to increase again, a sparse

blanket of grass, almost a pasture. Then a house, and another, an entire group of them scattered over a slope. A settlement, a small village. And then the white chapel, the well trough. It was the hamlet, my hamlet! The very settlement I had set out from hours before. It was as like having known the solution to a puzzle the entire time. All the detours had been in vain. I couldn't even lose my way properly. Was I relieved, or disappointed? Probably both. A thin trail of smoke climbed from one of the chimneys, and there was a red car on the small parking lot. I was no longer alone.

The living room was cold, the stove without embers. The logs refused to catch. Eventually I helped them along with a pile of photocopies until the flames sprayed sparks. Even after supper, the pains still didn't dissipate. It was as though something was boring its way into the intestines. My legs as heavy as lead. Then, at night on the toilet, the blackish-brown blood in my underwear. A sign as unmistakable as the dull pain in the abdomen and the tugging in the chest. The newspaper lay on the tiles, a picture on the front page of a scorched forest, a foggy landscape of charred tree trunks and withered green pines. By the time I finally fell back to sleep, it was already getting light outside. I woke up a few hours later. Everything was shrouded in grey mist, which I thought was fog at first, until I realised that clouds had sunk down from the higher levels. I put more wood on the fire, went back to bed and flicked through a nature guide of the Alps until everything dimmed before my eyes and I nodded off. The next time I woke up, the clouds had thickened. It was so quiet that, for a moment, it occurred to me that perhaps the world had died. The thought didn't alarm me, on the contrary: it was comforting. I cleared the books off the table, washed my clothes in the sink, hung them up over the stove and cooked myself a few shriveled potatoes. In the evening, I opened a bottle of red wine which I had found beneath the sink. Then I decided to paint a self-portrait, but the only mirror was hung in the unheated bathroom and refused to be loosened from its mount.

A few days later, as I was returning from a walk, a man came towards me. He was short, and his skin smooth like leather. Apparently pleased to see me, he immediately started talking, excitedly and in an unusually fast pace for this dialect. It seemed to be about something important. I told him that I didn't understand. He repeated his litany, just as quickly as before, until I shook my head again. His eyes were blackish-brown, shielded in deep hollows by bushy brows. He looked at me, then at my boots, and walked away without any gesture of regret or apology.

That night, there was a storm with long-lasting sheet lightning. The wind pulled at the window shutters. Unable to sleep, I studied the photos in the nature guide and discovered the neon green cocoon which adorned my kitchen table. It was wolf lichen, highly poisonous to the nervous systems of carnivorous vertebrates. I took the dry, green

bundle and a shovel, and buried it behind the house in the rain. Afterwards I washed my hands, arms and face repeatedly with washing-up liquid. I eventually fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, a cuckoo was singing. I followed its call and went outside. A warm downwind was blowing. The jagged contour of the mountain ridge in front of the pale-blue sky looked like a paper cutting. It was hard to make out whether the sky had pushed its way in front of the mountains, or the mountains in front of the clouds. Dew lay on the grass. The white patches in the forest had melted into dots. Even from afar, the rushing sound could be heard; the ravine now contained water, which was gurgling down into the depths. The snowmelt had begun. I went back, packed my things, vacuumed the room, hid the key behind the firewood in the soffit and set off down into the valley.

*Translated from the German by Jamie Lee Searle*

Manhattan, New York City

## **THE BOY IN BLUE**

Also known as *The Emerald of Death*

*\* Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's first film was made in the spring of 1919, at the moated castle of Vischering in the Münster region, and in the area around Berlin. The most important plot device was a painting based on Thomas Gainsborough's The Blue Boy, but with the original face replaced by that of Murnau's protagonist Thomas van Weerth, portrayed by Ernst Hofmann. As the plot unfolds there are various clues which agree on the fact that the main character, the last of his family, is living impoverished and isolated with an old servant in his father's castle. He often studies the portrait of one of his ancestors, with whom he feels a mysterious connection not only because of their great resemblance. Is he the reincarnation of this young man in blue, who wears on his chest the notorious emerald of death that has only every brought his family misfortune? To avert the curse, one of his forefathers hid the emerald. One night Thomas dreams that the 'Boy in Blue' climbs out of the painting and leads him to the hiding place. When Thomas wakes up, he does in fact find the emerald in the place in question, and ignores his old servant's pleas to throw the stone away. At the same time minstrels come to the castle and take everything from him: the emerald is stolen, the castle burnt to the ground, the portrait destroyed. Thomas falls ill, but survives thanks to the pure love and selfless devotion of a pretty actress.*

*† So far no evidence for a premiere of the silent film has ever been found. It was probably never shown as a main feature, since none of the contemporary critics mentions it. It is considered lost. In its nitrate collection the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin has preserved 35 short fragments of the film in five different tonings.*

She might have caught a cold. Her nose was running. Had she been blocked up? She couldn't even remember. That made her suspicious. After all, she paid great attention to her health. Where were those goddamned Kleenex? The pack was here just a moment ago. What a bitch. Either way, without tissues she couldn't go out the door. Oh, there they were, under the mir-ror! So into the handbag they go, hat and sun-glasses on, door shut and get a move on. What was that smell in the corridor again? Oh, yeah. Soft soap Monday. That meant that at the ab-solute crack a cleaning unit came from Queens and scoured the marble like a bunch of crazed monkeys, which meant that she was dragged from her sleep even before sun-up. And no one in the building got up as early as she did. The char-woman stench would hang in the air until Wednesday at least. She would have to think about moving house again. It never stopped! It would make you weep. At least

the elevator came straight away. The boy had been more po-lite. Hadn't he been told who he was serving? Pretended he hadn't recognized her. Barely out of diapers, but already a total wreck. Probably prided himself on that baby face of his. Still no other guests. That would have been all she needed. And still it was an eternity. Sev-enteen floors was still seventeen floors. At last they were there. At least the porter knew who to behave, got up out of his lodge and opened the door for her. Hey, come on. Heavens! The air was clear. Not a vulture in sight. No one paid her any attention. Probably something to do with the new sun-glasses. Well, fine. She wasn't choosy, she just took the first one who came along. He really wasn't particularly elegant. And still he was a good choice. He was walking fast towards the East Side, spotted her through the crowd, gave her a direction, a rhythm. That was something. Sometimes he disappeared into the throng, but she quickly caught up with him again. After all, she was an experienced pedestrian. The only discipline in which she had acquired a certain mastery. Basically it was her only joy, her religion. If need be she could do without her calisthenics, but not walking. Not window-shopping, straying around the place, going off course. At least an hour a day, two was even better. At least down to Washington Square Park and back, sometimes up to 77th Street. To start with it was good to stay close to the calves of strangers. Letting herself drift would come later. Anyway, you couldn't get lost. An advantage of islands.

It was colder than she'd expected Too cold for April, anyway. Even by East Coast standards. It was always either freezing cold or roasting hot in this city. A mystery why she lived here, in this disgusting, draughty climate, where you caught nothing more easily than a cold. She should have gone to California back in March. As she usually did. March would have been the right time, back in March! Admittedly it was deadly boring if you had nothing to do. But still, the climate was perfect: fresh air, plenty of sun. You could walk around all day stark naked. Well, theoretically. The only shame was that Schleesky hated it. So had to take care of everything herself: organising a flight, a driver, even a place to stay since the house was sold and they didn't have Mabery Road any more either. When she had enough to worry about anyway. She'd been looking for the right sweater for weeks. It had to be cash-mere. In gammalrosa, her favourite colour. And anyway she had meetings, idiotic appoint-ments. Usually she cancelled, but it was still exhausting. Cecil had tried again, clearly under the impression that he could just present her with a time and a place or, even worse, ask her for them. How could she know whether she would be hungry or thirsty or feel like seeing him tomorrow or in three days' time? Quite apart from her shattered state. Her health had never been particularly good. Although she took really good care of herself, always dressed up warmly enough and never, ever sat down on the toilet seat. But this was really how it was: a hint of a draught and she was flat on her back with a wretched cold. Last time it had caught her when

she was having tea with Mercedes. And she had only leant out the open window for a moment. That same evening she developed a horrible itch in her throat, so as always she went to bed in long woollen socks and two sweaters, and woke up feeling miserably sick the next day. It was weeks before she was even half-way back in the game. Basically it was easi-er to say when she *wasn't* sick. And then there were those damned hot flushes out of the blue. Just terrible. She urgently needed new panties. In London last autumn she'd seen those bright blue knee-length ones. Cecil had written to tell her they only had them in royal blue, scarlet and canary yellow at Lillywhite's. But in that case he should have had a look in Har-rod's. At any rate he'd promised to get hold of some. To think that she still had to worry about all this. Maybe she should meet him after all, just for the panties.

Oh, wait a second. What had got into grey suit? He just abandoned his course, drifted to the right, approached the glass façade. What the heck! He wasn't going to... oh he was, no! It couldn't be! He was making straight for it. And he actually disappeared into the revolving doors of the Plaza! When she'd just got used to him. If it had at least been the Waldorf Asto-ria! Wild horses wouldn't drag her into the Plaza. It had the shabbiest rear entrance in town. Who would imagine such a high-class hotel would have a courtyard that stank so badly. She knew her way around rear entrances. Yeah, if only she knew her way around everything as well as she knew her rear entrances! With garbage bins or those vats full of foul-smelling dirty laundry and the staff elevators that stank of leftover food. Just her luck! It wasn't even ten o'clock, and already she'd had her first disappointment, not counting the little bell-hop. It was simply time to stop engaging with anybody. So there she stood. Nose dripping. Snot flowing. And no one held her back. What a lousy state of affairs! There was no one there to look after her. To pay attention to her. Recognize her. Help her. Everyone was running past. Past her. A woman rummaging in her handbag with gloved fingers. Those damned Kleenex, as if they'd been swallowed up by the ground. The fountain on Grand Army Plaza wasn't even turned on. But was that a reason to interrupt her stroll, after less than two blocks? Right, then, snort back the phlegm, cross the street on the next green light, and then no more exper-iments, a little way down 5th Avenue and over to Madison. Grey suit had been a mistake. One more mistake. Nothing more. Again. Hardly surprising. She was always making mistakes. It was just terrible. And it hadn't always been like that. In the old days it had been different. Bac then she'd never made stupid mistakes. She'd always known exactly what she wanted and how much. She'd had the magic touch. Without thinking. Thinking had never been any use to her. Thinking had never helped her make a decision. That pitiful brooding that just gave you wrinkles. She had never in her life thought about anything. She had no idea what it was supposed to be. Intellectually she

was useless in any case. She didn't know a thing. She was totally uneducated. She'd never read anything either. And what had she learned? The meanings of the various head postures: bowing your head meant being submissive, leaning it back the opposite, a head tilted slightly forward meant support, a head held high was calm and consistency. Amazing that she could remember all that. She never remembered a thing. Not a clue about anything, but she did have a sleepwalker's intuition! She'd been able to rely on it. Ever since she'd been a boy she knew what she wanted. In the old days at any rate. And now that lousy intuition had gone. Fled. Where had that famous intuition of hers been when she had squeezed herself into that monstrosity of a swimsuit? Had run wide-eyed to her doom, on camera. Pure suicide. The air was thin at the peak. Look down and you're lost. Then sheer terror took over. And after that there was nothing left.

Did the dripping nose come before the blocked one? Or after it? Now what on earth was the classic sequence of the illness? She'd call Jane later and ask her. Jane knew things like that. Or at least she pretended to, which amounted to the same thing. Even though she hadn't known what to do last night either. Surely when you're in trouble you can call up a girlfriend at night? Great idea that had turned out to be. Nothing but idiotic ideas all the time, crazy dreams. Unbearable. Right now it was obvious what it had been: a cold on the way, but last night it could just as easily have been a stroke, rheumatism or cancer. Was there such a thing as nose cancer? They probably had another name for it. But a cold wasn't out of the question either, possibly sinusitis, the way the snot was flowing. And she hadn't even washed her hair last night. What on earth had stopped her? Oh, right, Cecil, the purring old queen, had called again and rabbited on and on. To think that she'd let them put him through! Every single scrap of affection was punished in an instant. The wailing old fairy was even worse than Mercedes. Nothing but reproaches and declarations of love. No wonder she'd had migraines afterwards. If only she hadn't answered the telephone and had washed her hair instead. Then at least that would have been out of the way.

Her nose again. Oh great. At least the lights had just turned red. But what was that? A camera, over there. Pointing at her. Well there we are. Or maybe not. A woman behind it, a young thing, kind of girl that looks great in a blouse. Bit different. But that girl couldn't just have? She couldn't have? Now on top of everything she'd had her picture taken blowing her nose! In broad daylight too. Monstrous! They spared her nothing. The photographer had gone already. Slipped the coop. The street was full. Hell of busy. Salvation Army girls with flyers and accordions, that poor little squirt with his little hot dog stand, the newspaper guy behind his pile of nickels and his stacks of paper. They all had something to do. She was the only one who didn't. She didn't even read the paper. There was never anything in it. Who was that cutie-pie there on the *Life* cover? Why,

would you take a look at that! It was little Monroe, eyelids at half mast, bright blonde hair, bare shoulders – half lowlife minx, half classy dame, not without a certain style. And she really had some grey matter. The 'talk of Hollywood', apparently. The things you come out with. In the end people had been saying the Angora rabbit really did have something going on upstairs. And she'd prophesied as much years ago. A missile. Hell, she was a B-52. And perfect casting for the girl that turns Dorian Gray's head. Heavens! That would have been it. Monroe as Sibyl, and herself as Dorian. Yes, that would have been it, the perfect part for a comeback. And at some point in the film: Monroe naked as a jaybird! If it had to be, it had to be. The great Garbo, ruined by little Monroe. A triumph of the actor's art! Damn it all, that would have been it. And she'd known. Yes, she'd just known. Except no one got it. But they never got, those lunkheads. They always came to her with those womanly roles. Dying for true love or some such pathetic drivel. A corpse dragged from the Seine, pursuing a career as a weakly grinning death mask. If it had to be a mask then at least do it properly. She'd wanted to play a pierrot, a male clown who's actually a woman behind the make-up and the silk pants. And all the girls who admire him can't understand why he won't give them an answer. But Billy hadn't got it either. A traitor like all the others. Now her gorge was rising again. The way he'd dared to mention her name in the same breath as all those forgotten faces from the silent screen. As if she'd already been written out, as if she was already dead! Just shoddy. And in any case there was only one director that she had blindly trusted, and he was dead as a doornail. For him she'd even have played a ghost in the night –hell, she'd have played a bedside light! He could have done anything he wanted with her. Anything! But he didn't want to. But he'd liked her, at Berger's that time. And she'd liked him too, deeply tanned as he was. Just back from the South Seas, tall and gaunt as ever. Completely skint, but staying at the Miramar with his German shepherd. Wonderfully arrogant and magnificently authoritarian. You never knew exactly how he meant something. How he'd told her that his family had emigrated from Sweden centuries ago. And he stood quite stiffly as if that proved something or other. Simply captivating! But then later on the billiard table he became quite soft. As sozzled as they both were. His brown, quick eyes, his red hair, his twitching mouth, that constantly rolling voice. Her blood group exactly. But no! Again just the beginning of the end: five weeks later he was dead. Like everyone who really meant something to her. Alva, Moje. And likewise Murr. They could have had a pretty nice time. He'd been far from reluctant. The fact that he liked boys wasn't an issue. On the contrary: she'd never been a girl. As Cecil had mocked her. *Come on, you were never a boy.* But then he'd dug out a photograph of her and seen something, a moment that didn't yet contain the later ones. Her twilight childhood. The wretched poverty, the ash-grey life on Söder. Father bet over a newspaper in one corner, mother in another,

improving clothes of some kind. The air always thick. She wanted Cecil to grab her. And above all not let go until she shrieked *Nicht machen!* – in German. Schleesky never touched her. And his hands were the size of toilet seats. It was a shame.

The decor in the fashion salons were more tasteful too. How could she get hold of a mauve carpet? And when had she seen that painted furniture? Either way, her apartment would still be hellishly boring even with it. A stupid hole with a view of Central Park. She liked nothing in it. It was dreadful. She'd have to move again. A vagabond life. Life in flight, in the margins. Always lonely, on her loneliest lonesome own. Went to bed with the chickens. Rarely to the theatre, the cinema only if there was no line. There was nothing for her to do. Virgins are supposed to be able to mend themselves. But all she could do was move house. *C'est la vie*. No, it wasn't life. It was her herself, Cecil was right. She was wasting her life, her best years. If only someone else could live on her behalf, feed her with his blood. But who would that be? She'd even used up Jane's patience tonight. In this situation! Even working out the number of times she had called was pretty steep! Ten times? Even if! Only Cecil's grotesque accusations, then the acknowledgement that she wouldn't be able to summon the strength to wash her hair today. And then Jane's cold-heartedness. Unfortunately by now Cecil was so clingy that it was merely pitiful. Almost as bad as Mercedes. Except that the old crow also brought her bad luck. That chiropractor she'd recommended to her. Dr Wolf, even his name was a bad omen! In actual fact she'd only had something wrong with her wrist. But then he'd clicked around at her back and her hips. He'd dislocated her whole skeleton. He'd nearly killed her.

Maybe she should have a cup of coffee? But where? She was already too far downtown. Oh, damn it all to hell. Why hadn't she thought of it before? She needs to go to the health food store! She was supposed to pick up her nettle tea there last week. Imagine forgetting something so important! Typical. She did have something to do, she did have a goal. The health food store on 57th Street and Lexington Avenue. After all, she was ill. Perhaps that cute little brunette would be there. Not exactly a beauty, but so trusting. Everything would turn out fine. What a glorious idea. She would sell her new Kleenex too, and maybe mix her some kind of vitamin cocktail. After that she could call Jane and summon her to lunch in the Colony. Give her another chance. Or go on her own to the Three Crowns and eat smörgås-bord. Just for once no screamingly boring steamed vegetable and no grilled chicken. Allow herself a nice whiskey in the Peacock Gallery and smoke a whole pack of Kent Gold. She could go to the men's tailor and have them make her a new pair of pants. In fact she could even call Cecil and have him unearth a gammalrosa sweater for her. He'd probably even manage to find one. He was so lively and so shockingly good at life and so terribly interested – in things and people. Why in

the name of all things holy he wanted to spend time with her was a mystery to her. But she herself knew better than anyone how incredibly boring she was. After all, she was the one had to endure her own company all the time. She couldn't simply set it aside when it got too much for her. She couldn't part with herself. Sadly that wasn't possible. Oh, how she would have loved to take a vacation from herself. Be someone else. That was the good thing about all that dreadful filming. It was practical when there was another script on the way. On the other hand Schleesky wasn't a particularly talented writer. But sooner a bad little master than none at all. A two-digit figure at least. Women didn't count. They were on another page. Perhaps it was Cecil after all. She did like him. Who else could she say that about? And to think that he hadn't just grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and dragged her to the altar. Instead the great fool had waited for a yes. Hadn't worked out that she had to be forced into happiness. That she had simply forgotten how to say yes. Of course she wanted to make films. But you were allowed to wait for the good offers to come in. She had owed herself that after the disaster with the swimsuit. Except that now it wasn't so easy to spot such a thing: a good offer. Madame Chichi from *The Magic Mountain*? Marie Curie and the X-rays? Her intuition had fled. Just gone. And that over-attentive horror Schleesky could get hold of a car and a bottle of vodka for her in the middle of the night, but in these matters he was anything but a help. Of course he was tyrannical. That was the wonderful thing about him. For a small man he had very large hands. They allowed him to order everyone else around. Without raising his voice. Everyone was shit-scared of him. A Carberus or Cerberos or whatever it was. But at least someone who knew what he wanted. The way he sometimes looked at her. With cold fish eyes. As if she wasn't even there.

And there it was, next to the automated restaurant. Her goal, her lighthouse, her beloved health food store. And she was in luck. The little brunette was there, and clearly no one else was. She was already holding the tea in her hand. You could count on her. The apron really suited her, when she leant forward. Why was she giving her such a queer look? 'My good-ness, Miss Garbo, you don't look at all well.' What was this about? 'What? Have I changed so much?' She looks so horrified. 'No, no. Not at all.' Now she was playing it down. Now she was trying to make everything not have happened. But she hadn't thought it through! Oh God, she had to get out of here straight away. Give me the tea. It was already paid for. And out of there. Shit. Obviously she looked frightful. Or at any rate worse than usual. She'd have to check. Where could she do that? A mirror in the store window. Shit. What was that? She really did look terrible, dreadful. Red eyes, red nose, wrinkles, more than ever. Her neck was very slack. Lines all over it, well on their way to becoming creases, hell, great furrows, cracks like trenches around her mouth from smoking those damned cigarettes. No mask-maker would be able to

spatula that one right. The marble was crumbling. Any remaining contour would slowly dissolve, turn spongy and cracked. The role of the death mask would have suited her down to the ground. She'd just kept Murr's. What hadn't she done for that face? Levelled her hairline, straightened her teeth, changed her hairstyle and her hair colour. No wonder those schmucks imagined she belonged to them. She just had to bat an eyelid and the whole world pounced on it. Her smile, sibylline. Her eyes, prophetic. Her cheekbones, divine. What unbelievable bullshit. Any worship was the beginning of the end. All that remained after that was torpor or sacrifice. What a bunch of crap. All because of goddess. A made-up asshole, that was what she had been for all those years. She would have made a good man. Good and tall, broad-shouldered, with huge feet and hands. But she didn't want that body. They'd taken their heels when they'd seen it half-naked. Too big a pedestal, a nutrient solution for that goddamned countenance! That was her true enemy. Talk about marble. Nothing but a mask, an empty vessel. How keen they were to learn what lay behind it. There was nothing behind it. Nothing! But now she knew! It wasn't the swimsuit! That hadn't been the problem, as she had always thought. It wasn't the swimsuit, it was that goddamned bathing cap! Yes sure, the infernal strap under the chin, which left a mark on the skin. The flesh there was already soft, a little slack. Ageing starting early. Basically with birth. It was all too late now anyway. Fuck it all. What the hell. A cigarette would be good now. Bring me those little death-sticks. The last ten years had been hard. The next ten would just be cruel. She was so tired of it all. Even tired of being tired. Other people had husbands, children or memories. She had nothing, apart from her accursed fame and all that lousy money that condemned her not to have to work. The truth was that her life was over. Talk about a woman with a past. A woman without a future, that was what she was. A rudderless ship, always alone. Poor little Garbo. A hopeless case. Not a workhorse any more, but a stray dog roaming day after day through Manhattan, through that sewer of a city that stank of garbage even in April. But where was she supposed to go? She was a face all over the world. She could wrap a scarf around her head, put on a fisherman's hat and enormous sun-glasses, or envelop her-self in a floor-length sealskin coat, sooner or later she would be discovered. There were vultures everywhere. It was just a matter of time. Not, it was good that it was over. That it had been her decision. Eventually you had more to lose than to gain. She had worked hard. Never had time. She had it now, but not the foggiest notion what to do with it. A lot of women went mad. Not her, sadly. She just got sick. Maybe she'd gone crazy ages ago and simply hadn't noticed. Or perhaps she was dead already? Who knows, maybe for many years. Had she ever really been young? She couldn't remember. Nothing new there. She never remembered anything. Just the feeling of having seen and experienced everything: the mountains of mail, the hum of the spotlights, the flashing came-

ras, the whole deal. California was one big nightmare. There wasn't a more boring place in the world. A whole damned city with no sidewalks! Dear God in heaven. How many times she had taken the five-hour drive to Santa Barbara just to go for a walk, only to realise that even there she couldn't go anywhere for a cup of tea. That they were lying in wait for her there too. All she wanted was to be left in peace. But why did nobody care for her? Why, in fact, did she have no husband and no children? All the people she loved died. And the people who still admired her were old. As old as she was. She should have done as Murr had done. Sold up and vanished for ever. It wouldn't have had to be the South Seas. Coming back had meant the end for him. A truck on the opposite carriageway, an embankment. Everyone else was unhurt, the chauffeur and the little Filipino, in the first blush of youth, sitting at the wheel. The German shepherd had simply run away. It was probably still wandering around the valley. The beautiful back of Murr's head, crushed completely. But none of that was to be seen when he lay there in the funeral salon, in his grey suit, his noble, arrogant face garishly painted like an old Berlin whore. A stick-thin, dolled-up corpse amidst gardenia wreaths and crosses. Here even the dead were made up as if for Technicolor. All around, nothing but empty garden chairs with those waxy, brightly patterned chintz cushioned that no one wanted to sit on. Just there for a few dolts anyway. The last of the faithful. Fire or earth, that was the question. She hadn't even made her mind up about that. Oh, what she wouldn't give to turn back the clock. Not to miss the connection, marry or even shoot a film! She wanted to! She'd even done screen tests. In La Brea she'd recited her script very nicely with the wind from the machine in her hair/ Hadn't everyone been delighted? And hadn't Jimmie said to her, Miss Garbo, you're still the most beautiful woman in the world? And he really meant it. That wasn't that long ago. So close. What was it again? A duchess who becomes a nun after an unhappy love affair. Who cares. She was a nun anyway. Even though it had been nice with Cecil. Queers were just the best lovers. The way he had grabbed her by the hair, pulled on it till it hurt. Sometimes he knew exactly what she needed. She'd been so close. She'd been in all kinds of nonsense. She'd worked her ass off, she'd even exercised her upper arms. But no, every time she thought it was about to happen, something got in the way. Like a curse. Schlessky, who had said she was like Duse. Duse had withdrawn for eleven years too, and then she was back on stage. Had had triumphs like never before. What year was it again? 1952, damn it all to hell. So those eleven years were up. It was eleven years since the whole world had seen her in the pool and laughed at her. And now? What was she now? A woman with nothing to wear. An unemployed actress. A living fossil. A ghost wandering through Midtown in broad daylight, in search of gammalrosa cashmere sweaters and some kind of meaning. A zombie, buried alive in these ravines of bleak, straight streets, red-brick buildings. All the things

she'd tried! Astrology. Theosophy. Even a course of psychoanalysis. With Dr Gräsberg, the only Swedish analyst in the whole of West Hollywood. How he had told her after a few weeks that she had narcissistic personality disorder. What an amazing achievement! And when she went out there was that poster of her hanging over the highway, larger than life. How would you not have a disorder in those circumstances? She had never gone again. And anyway she hadn't liked the idea of people probing away at her soul. Cecil doubted whether she actually had one. He was probably right. Probably she was really just a bad person. Yes, she was. A bad person with bad manners. She wouldn't change. Her spinal column was very sensitive. No one was allowed to touch it. It slipped out of place so easily. Only Cecil had tried it once. And had he ever really believed she could play his wife. Another offer of a role. The last one. Now it was too late for everything. But when had she grown old? It couldn't be that long ago. When had that happened? When had it started, that damned ageing? When she started getting excited about the springtime? After all, in the old days it had left her cold. In the old days she had only ever missed the winter. That one, withered, dead tree behind her apartment on San Vicente Boulevard, her winter tree. How often had she imagined it was the cold that had stripped its leaves away, and that soon the snow could come and cover its bare branches. But of course it never came. How could it have? In fucking California. What came was rain after Christmas, when it came pissing down till the canyon overflowed. You could leave everything behind, your parents, your language, your nationality, but not the climate of your childhood. Roses blooming in April, the sweet scent of orange blossom. The damp, misty days on Mabery Road, the mornings on the Pacific, the only place to go for a walk. Swim-ming naked in the sea at 7 o'clock, In the end all attempts to escape were thwarted by the climate. And she could have lived even in hell. But here, in this stench of formaldehyde, sweat and garbage? The first time she came here, she had still been a callow youth. It was summer, so scorching that you couldn't go out. She thought she was dying. Didn't close an eye all night because the rubbish was being crushed in the courtyard. Just lay there and listened to the repellent slurping sound of that infernal machine, the sirens of the fire brigade, the honking of cars, that nerve-shredding noise. What she really wanted to do was drown herself in the bathtub, but there wasn't one in the room. And now that hole of a city was the only home she still had. She wasn't dead. Dead people didn't have colds, that much she knew. No, she was alive. She was still alive. That was the problem. So California. Or Europe? Staying here was out of the question. Perhaps just start small. One thing after the other. Go home first. Put on some tea. Call Jane. Take a trip to Palm Springs. Then Europe in the summer. Nice is supposed to be such a beautiful island.

*Translated from the German by Shaun Whiteside*

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Die sieben Bücher des Mani
Hafen von Greifswald
Enzyklopädie im Walde
Palast der Republik
Kinaus Selenografien
Personenverzeichnis
Bild- und Quellenverzeichnis



<b>Extent:</b>	252 pages (224 pages with text and 28 dark grey pages with illustrations)
<b>Trimmed Size:</b>	12,0 x 20,0 cm
<b>Print:</b>	1/1 c. black
<b>Paper:</b>	90g/m2 Werkdruck Cordier Schleipen, hochweiß, 1,5 faches Volumen 120 g/m2, Gebr. Schabert, f-color, 455 schiefergrau, 1/1 printed black
<b>Cover:</b>	120 g/m2 Favini Remake Smoke 1/0 printed in color, Pantone 6 U (not mixed, oxidative drying paint!)
<b>Binding:</b>	thread sewing, 1,5 mm board, rounded back, marker, embossing foil at the front and at the back (Kurz col: Metallic silver)
<b>Printer:</b>	CPI, Druckerei Ebner & Spiegel, Ulm, Germany

The first 8 pages of the book are title pages and a short preliminary note, followed by a 16 pages foreword. The twelve stories each are also exactly 16 pages long. The book then ends again with 8 pages containing an index of names, references to the illustrations, and indication of sources. Every second chapter is wrapped by seemingly black pages (they are in fact dark grey), containing a fitting illustration to the story, printed in black. Hence the book consists of 224 white and 28 black pages, 252 pages in total, and is therefore regularly striped when closed.

Detailed information about the contained illustrations and the respective rights holders are available.

## Biography & Awards

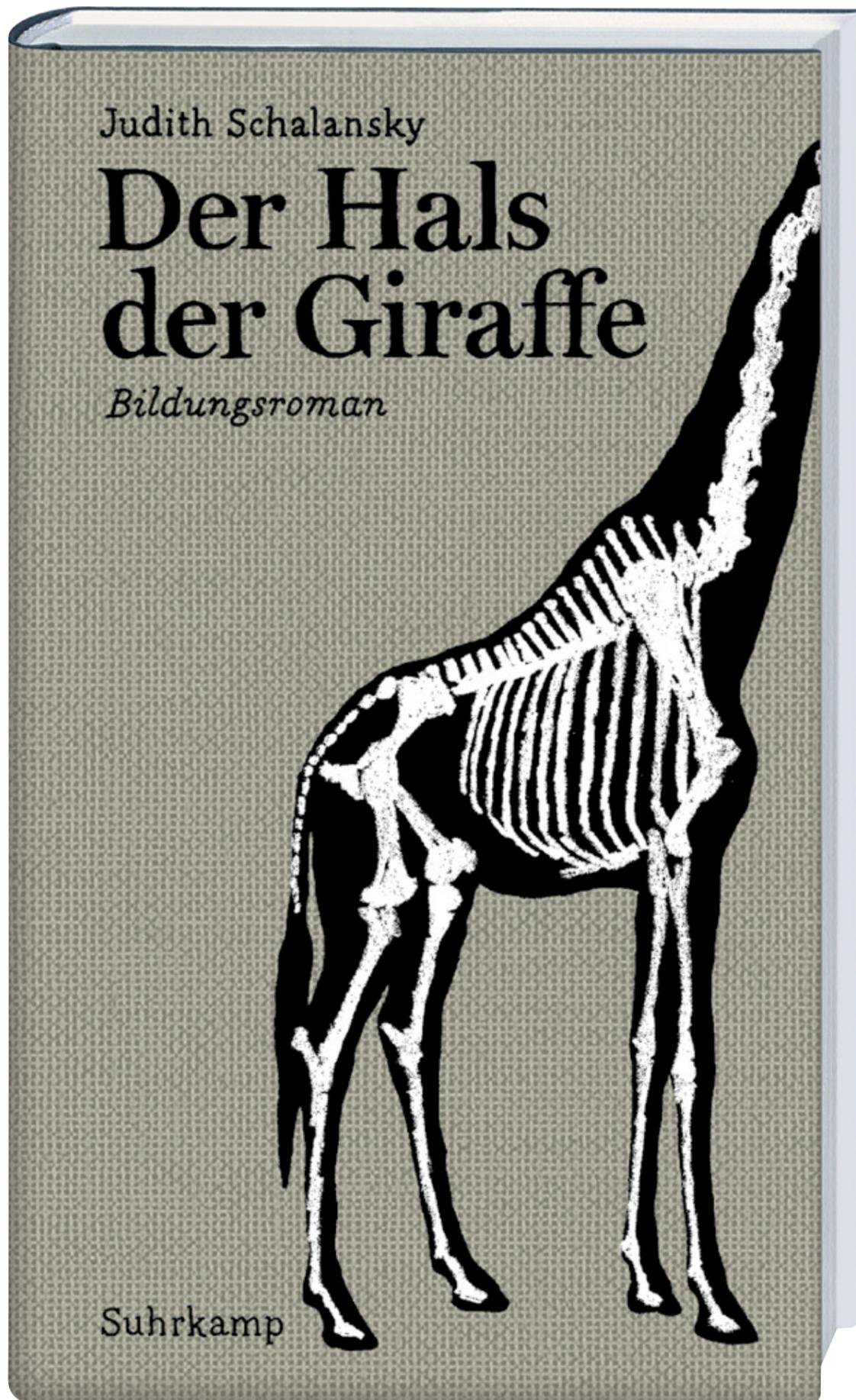
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**Judith Schalansky**, born in Greifswald in 1980, lives in Berlin as a writer, editor and book designer. Her work, which includes the internationally successful bestsellers *Atlas of Remote Islands* and *The Giraffe's Neck*, has been translated into more than twenty languages and has won several prizes.

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Droste-Preis 2015  
Preis der Literaturhäuser 2014  
Mainzer Stadtschreiber-Preis 2014  
Literaturpreis des Kulturkreises  
der deutschen Wirtschaft (Shortlist) 2013  
Lessing-Förderpreis 2013  
Märkisches Stipendium für Literatur 2013  
Preis der Stiftung Buchkunst 2012  
Spycher: Literaturpreis Leuk 2012  
Hölderlin-Förderpreis 2012  
Comburg-Stipendium 2012  
Alfred-Döblin-Preis (Nominierung) 2011  
Deutscher Buchpreis (Longlist) 2011  
Wilhelm-Raabe-Literaturpreis (Longlist) 2011





## *The Giraffe's Neck*

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Judith Schalansky's novel *The Giraffe's Neck*, which followed her highly acclaimed *Atlas der abgelegenen Inseln* (*The Atlas of Remote Islands*), portrays a biology teacher fighting to adhere to the laws of nature. Straining her neck while trying to eat the forbidden fruit, the protagonist eventually ends up losing faith in her personal God Darwin.

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More than 250.000 copies sold domestically

Translation rights sold to over 20 countries

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With 20 Illustrations by the author – 224 pages  
Clothbound – Release: 2011

International Sales: English world rights (Bloomsbury), Spanish world rights (Random House Mondadori), Chinese simplex rights (People's Literature PH), Chinese complex rights (Locus), Russia (Text), Brazilian Portuguese Rights (Objetiva), France (Actes Sud), Italy (nottetempo), Netherlands (Signatuur), Denmark (Vandkunsten), Sweden (Pequod), Norway (Press), Finland (Tammi), Korea (Galmuri), Czech Republic (Paseka), Hungary (Typotex), Bulgaria (Geia-Libris), Romania (Allfa), Estonia (Tänapäev), Turkey (Ayrinti), Israel (Keter)

## Selected praise for *The Giraffe's Neck*

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»Schalansky's ability to write both densely as well as elegantly, seriously as well as playfully, is what makes her second novel one of the most unusual and best post-reunification novels.«

*Der Spiegel, Germany*

»The Giraffe's Neck is a subtle, understated book, tension, emotion and dark humour bubbling away underneath the surface, with a melancholic air of retrospection about it. In terms of atmosphere it's unlike anything else I've read, and I'd recommend it as a meditation on the need or otherwise for change in one's life.«

*The Big Issue, UK*

»This novel is a Bildungsroman, two or even three times over. A novel about education and the education system. And a novel about the formation and deformation of a woman whose mind and what is left of her heart are permanently and violently scarred through an encounter with the limits of her worldview. We don't mind saying it again: this is our book for the season.«

*Die Welt, Germany*

»Her book is at once a report on the new Germany, an acid reflection on school and adolescence, the portrait of a woman and a study of concrete cases illustrating the eternal ›struggle for life‹ according to Darwin«

*Libération, France*

»Schalansky writes her way into current European literature with this little pearl of a novel«

*Berlingske Tidende, Denmark*

»Judith Schalansky presents us with an inverted Bildungsroman, a little anti-Darwinian manifesto. She handles urgent, weighty topics with a singular elegance and lightness of touch: the ageing population, climate change, rural depopulation, and the failure of the knowledge society.«

*FAZ, Germany*

»Just as the world which Inge Lohmark has painstakingly built up around her crumbles, so too does the utopia of a country founded upon a vision that is both rigid and deterministic«

*La Repubblica, Italy*

»Judith Schalansky has created a character who is both wonderfully cruel and at the same time equally pitiful and touching. She has developed a magnificent, haunting voice, at once sarcastic and extremely funny. ... A voice that will remain in the reader's mind long after they have finished reading.«

*taz, Germany*

»Sublime [...] A beautifully quirky novel, genuinely recommended«

*Trouw, The Netherlands*

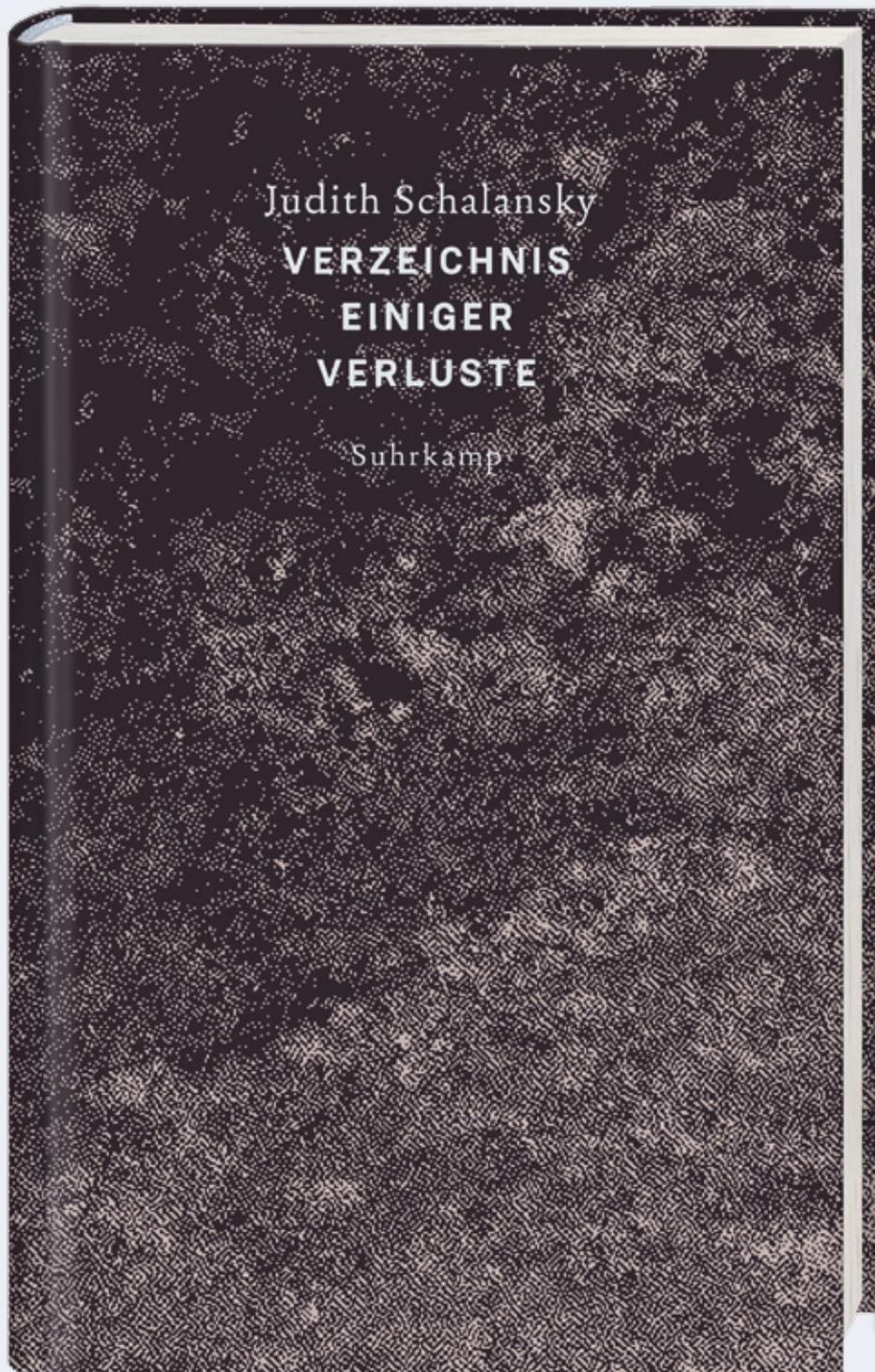
»In short pithy sentences, Judith Schalansky paints a picture, by turns pointedly comic and bitterly affecting, of a confused, helpless society that unthinkingly allows itself to be swept along by the course of the world.«

*Lesart, Germany*

»A subtle case against a misconstrued Darwinism, and compelling proof of what literature is capable of.«

*NDR Info, Germany*





**Judith Schalansky**  
**An Inventory of Certain Losses**

With 12 illustrations

(Original title: Verzeichnis einiger Verluste. Mit 12 Bildtafeln)

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