



Maren Kames

Hare Prose

Novel

(Original German title: Hasenprose)

182 pages, Hardcover

Publication date: 18 March 2024

© Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin 2024

Sample translation by Joel Scott

pp. 9–10; 124–128

Looking retrospectively, the thing with the hare was actually the summer of the looming, the patterning. Subcutaneously, everything was moulting, browsing itself along underwoodly through the grass to a spot that seemed secretly preselected, each thing picked itself out a cautiously carved-out hollow and scarred over peacewardly, gradually, as agreed. Yet there was a time for every thing there, or so it seemed when contemplated backwards, indeed there was quite a lot of it, but I didn't have an inkling. Undescribed I strode forth, in my seven-league boots, my travel socks, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

If that's all there is, I yelled over my shoulder, I'm moving out! I mean, I didn't have an inkling. How unsuspecting I was, how duck egg and dewy-eyed. I shimmered wanly but constantly, like a glasshouse at night, an easygoer, lightling, flatteringly wishy-washy and seldom efficient, not quite a good-for-nothing, but not far off either.

So the others kept milling along. Seen from the back, everything was grazing wildly, plugging away at a seemingly common cause in evidently tireless acceptance, sometimes they waved as well, as rough, long-armed forms way back on the edge of the grass, I definitely saw them

wagging, but I didn't understand why. Inklingless, I stood on wobbling stilts, there'd been a trembling and cracking for a long time, then it burst, and I crashed.

I flew through the roof. I flew through the roof that for so long, far beneath me, had thought itself and me to be safe. We sailed down flailingly, a few rafters and me, in free-fall, as they say, but how lead-like that was, how disgusting. That's what you get for sitting up on high, I thought, still plummeting, that's what you get.

I was in the field. With great haha I had driven into the field, still cockily admiring my own fit of fury, but the furrow that my braking left behind was no joke but was in fact extremely serious and precise and deep, so I fell into the field of flowers and began to sleep. I think people were singing for me. My blouse was wet. Above me gaped the gap in the roof. And that's where it was that I saw: the hare never appeared to me more clearly than in sleep. I couldn't stop looking him up and down incessantly, sometimes with a stolen sideward glance, sometime with a gifted glare, even in sleep (mine, that is), his sighs sprayed up out of his throat, he snorted and shuddered. He was so sassy.

Secretly, I think, the hare was the master of everything. He knew the score. At first, that came to me as an inkling, given how sleepy I was. It drove toward me in a heavy block of questions, drove through me or around me, things were so uncertain that you could no longer even say that with any confidence.

Was there a jolt in the moment, I asked, is something itching me? Is that my nasal bone? And where should I look then? Into which era? Which century, and what is behind me? Why does that tauten across the cheek? What has made me sore? What is that tightness around my chest, something shell-like, something hard? Should I protect it? Am I a basket? Wickerlike and woven, out of flax or rattan? And will it hold? For how long?

[...]

The hare had taken let himself out for a run again and was wrestling nearby on a cloud. As ever, I stayed close by vibrating in a standing position, the plane engine buzzing quietly beneath my behind, I had pleasant feelings, timeless and hovering, the hare was humming. For a while, everything wallowed and oscillated along in a peaceful balance, a dozing, the sky had beautiful colours. Then the hare suddenly sang loudly and with audible conviction: *I'm getting older, I think I'm aging well* – and I swiftly fell back in time and thought, I don't think I am.

Straight away I thought along the plumb line again that ever since I watched my grandma, the more grief-stricken one, aging, I thought, with that grandma in me it makes me worry that it will be similar for me. Her palpable discomfort in her own body, her inability to tolerate her creased, sagging skin, to acknowledge the layering, accumulating fat and the heavy breathing, the constant groaning.

Back then, she was the very first, this I know, to judge my baby body, sceptically, ultimately disparagingly weighing it, and declaring it too chubby, the only one of her son's three babies to receive this judgment, that's the way it was told to me, at least – something her son and then his son in turn bluntly adopted, and constantly repeated during my upbringing in a two-voice needling, *as a joke*, until at 14 I stopped eating meat as an excuse to eat less, and then for a long time ate very little of anything.

She was just as strict with her own body for as long as I knew her, which made her judgement more plausible, so I stuck to it.

Or she had been so strict with me, and that was why, in a certain sense, I didn't begrudge her that partially bodily induced grief in her old age, while at the same time being ashamed that I felt that way.

Her permanent struggle against flaccidness, which was always just short of total resignation, her hardly-being-able-to-get-up-from-the-sofa, the arduousness of climbing up to the top floor to get to our living room, her audible groaning and grunting with every step, the almost collective, silent disdain toward her self-pity that pervaded the air when she arrived upstairs. The *incident with the tablets*, which my Ma condemned as a mere cry for attention, as subterfuge, also as an affront to her, my Ma, which she consequently punitively ignored. The *pseudo-suicide*, as she still refers to it today.

There is almost nothing that makes me sadder than knowing, than having known, that she ever so slowly faded away down there, ever so slowly disappeared, like something that gives up on itself, or that gave up at a more or less defined point long ago, and as a consequence necessarily keeps continually fading away, especially when the external reference points and coordinates disappear: a husband, for example.

The way she jeopardised the affection of her own descendants, in part, in my opinion, out of resentment (or as an extension of her husband, though with a less pronounced talent for charm, in a certain sense as a kind of memorial to him), her ever more stubborn recourse to being stressful and stressed out, I suppose you have to come to terms with things and assert yourself somehow, after all, a writhing, a flailing, resisting against the overall situation and the dynamics of everything.

How nobody really paid attention to it – to grandma – nobody really considered her, took her seriously. How nobody really took care of her, even my Ma, for all the assistance that cost her countless amounts of time and work, ultimately only took care of pragmatic things, like paperwork and prescriptions, which she worked her way through, and laundry, which she threw in with our clothes, and always with mutual resistance and reluctance.

To this day, I find myself wading through that thick layer of clan guilt on the ground floor when I descend the stairs and enter the space where my father and brother's workshop is now located,

where my piano used to be earlier, where I spent plenty of hours alone myself before grandma moved in, and asked myself while she was still living there, also in comparison to my own solo time in this room, what she did there, all the hours of the day and all the days, something I still ask myself today. How indistinctly, how hazily the time probably passed for her there. That she might have had no idea what to do with time for years, because perhaps she had never actually been able to figure out how to deal with time when she was all on her own and the time was just for her.

The way that, in multiple phases, as I woke up in the morning, I would find by this feeling in me that clung to me like sleep's leftovers, a stickiness, an emptiness, a lack of direction, without any actual palpable, conceivable reason for the heaviness, which made it even more stale, and made me think physically of that grandma. Was that the feeling she had in her body, I would ask myself in the morning of those kinds of days, and if it was going to get stronger, *who am I then, and where am I then*, asks Friederike Mayröcker, asks my grandmother, I ask myself in the morning, *and am I still alive, and which day is it today, Tuesday, good, but what kind of Tuesday, the eighteenth, good, but what month, nobody can tell me that, can they, and what year is it, which number do we write down*, writes Friederike Mayröcker, writes me, *I'm no longer in my right mind (...) even in the early morning it already smells of boiled potatoes.*

A looming, inkling, the looming of an inkling, or relation, is that a relation, a line, a patterning, that runs from me to my grandmother, and is it old age, the spectre of aging that now sits by the edge of my bed, nesting, as soon as I open my eyes in the morning, just as it must have sat by her, every hazy morning.

She read lots of biographies, I know that much, often about women, sometimes about the *wives of important men*, as they say, or about women who lived *in the era of important men*, as if by coincidence, like old Günderrode, Varnhagen, Thingamajig. And week after week (this too was an extension, a continuation, a kind of memorial to her husband), she kept poring over that fat

broadsheet newspaper and solving those bloody crosswords, there wasn't much more of a weekly routine to be had, not that I'm aware of, anyway, especially after she had an irreconcilable falling out with the one accomplice she'd had in the village for a few months, and had vehemently rejected taking further part in any kind of seniors' meet-ups after the first few times.

But what was with all the time-filled, time-stuffed hours, when the pots, left to drip-dry, but then quickly wiped dry anyway, her small breakfast cleared away, the heavy slab of marble on the living room table always spick and span, in the evening watching whatever documentary happened to be running on the regional channel, the *Tagesschau*, the evening variety shows, she must have gone mad, or at least worn down, I mean, switching from the pleasantly restless mobility that a life with many moves had brought with it to that point, the friends on the telephone, mostly outside of a neighbourly closeness that at some point also becomes tedious, from which the two of them would regularly and consciously wean themselves off, checking out, signing off – so this grandma who once drifted around West Germany with her tablecloths and pot holders and her entire elegant wardrobe flapping in the breeze, and then without the perennially prattling, galloping husband trotting along beside her, how long is time when you're suddenly – I almost want to say – saddled with a sedentary life, sitting around on the ground floor of an apartment in Hesse.

What kind of a sentence is that! yelled the hare. So he *was* listening. But a second later, he drifted off again, on his cloud, and so I kept thinking, virtually in the same sentence –

How she was stuck in this sedentary life, sitting around in that ground floor apartment in Hesse, a whole seven more years after Erich had shipped out. Stuffed like a Swiss roll with too much cream, when you don't even like cream or were always on a strict diet, that's what time must have been like, and grandma, in my imagination, tootling loosely through time, a grief-stricken capsule (a thunderstone, for all I care) in a fairly small universe.