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21'000 words.

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W O R D S

A serious book (more or less)
about everything you really
need to know!

compiled, edited and translated (where necessary)
by
Taf Kadd

(special thanks go to Claude “Le Chat” for editing and translations)

Warning:

Don't (repeat: DON'T!!!)
take this book to Sirius!
The GODS would n o t like it.

Authors Note:

This here book would never
want to claim to be complete.
(It wouldn't be able to do so, either!)
Nor would the author.

Special Thanks to SPARKS for asking THE Question!

BOOK

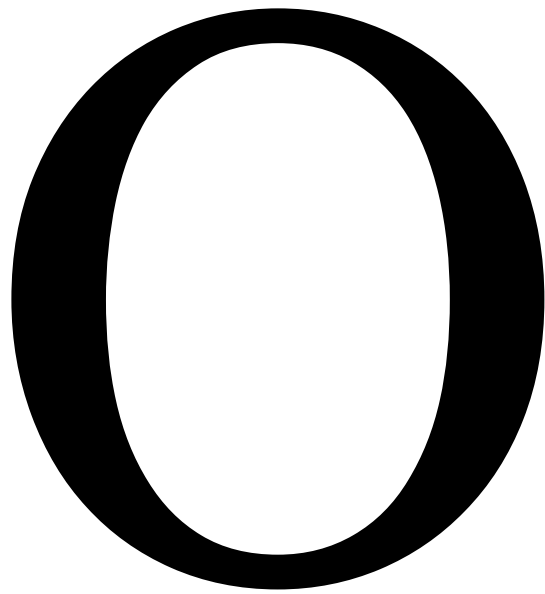
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Chapter 1

W

HATEVER

Chapter 2



NE

Chapter 3

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UFFICE!

Chapter 6

DO

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BOOK

II

Love your environment more than yourself

Chapter 1

Love Is Kosher Energy

Like almost every other book in known and - to most human beings - unknown history, this one begins with a word (a fact which is in fact not surprising, as the book itself is about words!). The word is, believe it or not:

L.I.K.E.

Your humble narrator knows that you, dear reader, are by now so lucky as to be in the possession of the knowledge of the true meaning of this abbreviation. That's why you'll be able to smile knowingly when someone else suggests things like (that word again!):

- Love Is Kissing Endlessly
- Living In Kings End
- Laura Is Kissing Elks
- Language Is Knitting Exiles
- Lebanon Israel Korea Egypt

You might even be able to admit that somebody's got a point when he thinks we are Living In Kindergarten Eden!

As everybody should be capable of understanding this expression, there remains nothing to be said concerning this matter.

Except maybe that the essential of the knowledge you gained by reading this chapter is not to have it, but to be able to apply it to one's own life!

Chapter 2

THE Question

„To be or not to be!“ is/was/will be widely believed as to be/to have been/going to be THE Question.

Therefore it should be made clear, for now and all times long gone/yet to come, that it is/was/will be not THE Question but simply a question.

THE Question, as you will plainly see, consists of one word and the word is:

WHY?

WHY? is there time?

WHY? is there space?

WHY? are there dogs and cats and trees and the human race?

WHY? am I here and not over there?

WHY? are there nuns?

WHY? do they prey?

WHY? do we pass away?

WHY? is there you?

WHY? is there me?

WHY? does my mother kiss my father occasionally?

WHY? am I sore whenever I'm hit?

WHY? is there France?

WHY? is there Spain?

WHY? is there rain?

WHY? when I ask my dad does he say: „Go ask your mom or just go away!“?

Chapter 3

Daily Life

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So just keep on writing.....

Chapter 4

Taxi!

„Taxi!“. A man came rushing to the taxi stand. He called again; „Taxi!“. At last, one of the aero-taxis hovering in the air touched ground beside him. The transport beam (its task was to dematerialise a man and rematerialise him in another place) started working; two or three seconds after, the man was inside the cab. He spoke the destination of his journey into a microphone and the computer-controlled taxi left for another city which it reached in no more than fifteen minutes.

Let's look back in history, now!

107 years ago, when all the countries on earth agreed to do away with borders and established the „Worldstate“, mankind began to no more build its cities on the ground but in the air at an altitude of 5 kilometres. Such has been the idea as to protect nature.

Mankind has made many inventions since then, but the greatest of them all has been the aero-taxi.

It consists of a steel hull looking somewhat like an oversized cigar measuring 6 meters from nose to tail, 3 meters of diameter at the thickest point and about 90 cm at each end respectively. Its surface is as smooth as that of a looking-glass with the exception of two jets protruding at the tail and of 6 camera lenses of 10 cm of diameter each which are let into the hull forming an even level with it. The lenses are arranged in order to cover the whole surroundings of the cab. Because of its smooth surface, the taxi sort of reflects the sunlight and thus glistens in all the spectral colours, a fact which inspired the manufacturers to coin the expression „ride a rainbow“ for their advertising campaign.

The secret of the world famous transport beam with whose help one is hauled into the taxi itself is yet to be revealed by its inventor, but there are some rumours spreading about the parts being used for its production: a laser beam being broken by a series of prisms and then sent through a container filled with a mixture of almost all known - and maybe even some publicly unknown - chemical elements in the proper proportion and finally somehow filtered and slowed down to a near stand-still.

But that's just gossip as far as we have been able to find out.

The interior of the aero-taxi, of course, is almost totally occupied by the computer in control and the power plant, which, roughly, consists of a little solar-powered atomic reactor connected to a transformer and to a pair of jets. In the middle of the cab, however, is exactly enough room left for a man to lie on his back and turn his head in order to look at the six screens respectively which, by means of the 6 outside lenses, show just what happens in front of the cameras.

(Excerpt from the book „History of the Worldstate“, published in 2130)

Chapter 5

One way of looking at looking in one way

How many steps would I have to take to compensate for the slow rotation of the earth in order to remain forever in the same spot in space?

Stipulated that you would be going in the right direction at the correct speed, you still would have to find some means to stop the earth from circling around the sun. This being not very easy because of your being occupied with walking, you'll probably never be able to achieve the stand-still you are looking for and that is as good as can be because human beings are born to move on.

Don't try to tell me you would be moving on if you were doing the earth-rotation-compensating-for-march.

Some sort of moving on, indeed!

Like the snail who pushed on with his head-end (dead-end?) without dragging the tail along. "Use your head!", was what it said, but it hadn't understood anything.

I hope you will understand, at least.

Chapter 6

Lubar

„The darkness of the night was complete. There was not the slightest breeze to move the leaves on the trees standing around the little pond. Only the croaking of the frogs disturbed the silence.

Suddenly a cry cut through the night.

The cry of a terrified woman.

The lights of the nearby farm went on. A man came out of the house, looking with sleepy eyes towards the forest where the cry which still lasted came from. He saw a light moving rapidly as if someone carrying a lantern were running. All of a sudden, the light stopped and at the same time the cry changed into a terrible moaning growing rapidly fainter. The light went out.

The farmer went back to bed. But, of course, he couldn't sleep any more. The horrible cry of that woman resounded in his ears the whole night long. In the morning he went out to see what had happened the previous night.

He made a terrible discovery: At the edge of the forest he found a human skeleton. There were not the slightest traces of skin or flesh on the shiny bones. Neither were there any traces of clothing to be found, but two or three meters to the left of the skeleton, the man saw a lantern lying on the ground.

The farmer was in a reasonable state of mind and kept his nerves. His estate was rather off civilisation and he had got no telephone and no car except for a two horse cab. So he harnessed his two well-fed white horses and started on his long way to the next village to get the police. But he never got there...

That's why nobody was prepared for what happened all around the world during the next two months: Some species of insects and plants, totally changed and mutilated by the influence of chemical products and radioactive radiation, killed every living human being by eating them to the bones.

And so no-one ever found out what that woman was doing, all alone, in that forest in the middle of the night.'

The heavy chandeliers began to fill the hall with their light; it was reflected in the mirrors along the walls; it illuminated the tense faces of the seemingly impressed spectators who slowly left the cinema. Our hero..."

Lubar turned off his TOE (Transmitter Of Entertainment).

He just couldn't stand those stories about the past, where facts were mingled with fiction. He began humming the only melody he knew as he sort of jumped into the room next door, where he took a long, deep draught of his favourite liquid.

He then flew to the Public House of Art, Literature Lessons and Unusual Stories (PHALLUS).

In the US Department he was recognised as a regular customer and given the one story (number P4) always requested by him. Having inserted his credit card into the right slot, he started the Computer for Unexplainable Neural Translation (CUNT) and plunged into the abyss of feelings and thoughts provoked by the tale of Robin Hood, composed by a certain Robert Locksley, who had been - strangely enough - a human being.

* * * * *

Publishers Note: We have included the following story, against the editors advice, because we felt that, although the reader will not get the full possible enjoyment out of it (since he lacks the facility of a CUNT), he might nevertheless be able to apply the morale of the story (which is something like: Be content with what you have!) on his own life and thus, maybe, live happily ever after.

Chapter 7

The Hunt Is Open (by Robert Locksley)

Once upon a time in the Black Forest, on a little clearing around a small pool, there stood the blockhouse of a young man who was a hunter by profession. He made his living by selling hides and self-made wooden toys and furniture to the people in a town nearby the forest.

He was a giant as men go: without hat and boots he measured six and a half feet. He had grey eyes and dark brown hair and a pointed beard, a wide forehead, high cheeks and a characteristic chin. He was always dressed in long and tight green trousers, a brown shirt under a green jacket, brown boots and a green hat with a red feather.

One early morning of a beautiful day (and days were really beautiful then, not as they are today) he took his bow and arrows and left his little house for a short hunting trip.

When, after having been in the woods for some five hours, he had shot one beast only - and a small one it was - he grew desperate.

But all of a sudden, he saw a clear white light floating beside a nearby bush, and a voice said: „I can see that you are unhappy. If you'd just tell me what the problem is, I might be able to help you.“

Our hero, being of keen and quick mind, instantly realised that he was confronted by the spirit of a fairy and said: „I've been in the woods for almost six hours, now, and I haven't seen any beast at all, except this ridiculously small one here. I wish to shoot many more.“

The spirit pondered on this for a moment and then replied: „Come on, then, I will show you a place where there is a lot of game for you to shoot!“

Ten days later, they arrived at a coast.

„You will now cross the sea! On the other side, you will find a vast rock upon which a single tree has taken root. The latter is passed by a road which you have to follow. You will then arrive at the right place.“ The man, who was very kind and polite, said thank you very much to the spirit and continued his journey.

Two months later he had crossed the sea and began to travel on the aforementioned road.

After five more days, he arrived at the border of a desert, but still he went on.

After even more days, seven to be exact, he couldn't go on any longer: He surrendered to the desert, lay down and died.

* * * * *

Editors Note: Having unsuccessfully protested against inclusion of the above story, I would like to say that, contrary to the Publishers Note, the morale is not „Be content with what you have!“, but „Never trust a fairy, for they're a mean bunch of bastards!“, which, really, is a stupid thing to say in a story and absolutely unworthy of inclusion in a book as highly intelligent, excellently written and extraordinarily readable as the one you are holding in your hands right now.

Therefore I would hereby like to apologise to you for having been forced to force upon you the reading of such an unlikely, nay, unworthy, story.

Sorry!

Chapter 8

A Pair of Pairs

The Universe Next Door

Escape

...I saw my pictures hanging on your bedroom wall.
I saw the shining in your eyes as you grabbed me by the ball,
and I realised that I was done for,
so I let myself fall
into the universe next door!

Arrival

„Welcome!“, said the dolphin standing by my side.
Speechless, I jumped into a tree, trying to hide
myself, because his claws were dancing.
Next, I met a person who lied:
„You’re a fool!“, said the clown, chancing.

Living in another universe

There
was a conference going on.
The owl had been given a pullover as a birthday present
and, wearing it,
was the prettiest bird at the gathering.
There were no other birds present.

The snake and the fox
were sit-
ting on the rox.
Besides these three, of course,
there also was a hoarse
and there were a lot of other animals
there.

The reason they had met,
was „the thing“ that had just appeared in their world.
It was going to be their pet,
so they had to find a way to handle it.

Then I realised that „the thing“
was usually called human
and that in this world
it constituted solely of me.

Decision

So I decided
to leave this universe.
I let myself fall and,
don't ask how, I just did it,

Return

found myself back in
the world I had been in,
before...

The Ultimate Cure

In the beginning...

there was peace!

Animals were scarce yet,
although possible food, i.e. plants, existed in abundance.

What little animal life there was
(if animal life it can be called)
consisted of bacteria, amoebae and microbes.
But all the fighting was for survival.

A few steps up the ladder...

the range of different species was rapidly growing wider
and the scales of some of those animals were just enormous.
There was peace no longer,
but all the fighting was for survival.

The beginning of the end...

was just a tiny little incident
which grew to an enormous avalanche
with the passing of time:
Some animals, who, heretofore, had always been
walking on all four extremities,
began to sometimes
walk on their hind-legs only!
But all the fighting was for survival.

The coming of mankind...

was almost devastating
for the world!
In the smallest possible fraction of time
humanity managed
to evolve
from stupid, ignorant, mindless...
savages
to stupid, ignorant, mindless, civilised...
savages!
Animals became scarce!
Possible food, too!

There was no more fighting...
for survival!
In his search for the ultimate knowledge
man only found the ultimate cure.
And almost destroyed the world!
Almost!
And thus...

In the end...

there was peace!
Animals were plenty again!
Possible food, too!
But one animal had vanished,
never to reappear again!
And the world turned happily
ever after!
And all the fighting was for survival.

Chapter 9

Gedanken (zur rechten Zeit)

Motto: He who does not resist in time,
must live in a right-wing time!

Fight pigeonhole thinking: Everyone come into my pigeonhole!

Keep the country clean: Throw the rubbish over the border!

Further, further, ever further?

They taught the suppression
of whatever contradicted you, me, or themselves.

They are learning to forget
what happened back then in purgatory.

They taught the ignoring,
the saying: that's just the way it is.

They are learning to ignore,
to look away, to stop listening.

They taught the marching
in step with whoever beat the drum.

They are learning to march...

Enough!

And verily I say unto you:

It matters not whether you venerate Buddha, Mohammed or Jesus, whether you believe in a God or not. No matter which religion you belong to, which faith you live by; no matter which philosophy you trust, which esoteric rites you perform.

There is only one law, one commandment, one creed, only one rule, one guiding principle by which you must live: Love your environment more than yourself!

One step on the road to solving many economic and other problems would be the so-called Management Die-Out, meaning companies are once again run by human beings rather than by managers.

Above the clouds freedom must surely know no bounds...

But what if there are no clouds?

Would there be no freedom either?

Chapter 10

All You'll Ever Need (Half A Dialogue)

...

'Well. You say that. But I don't believe you've actually demonstrated anything.

Of course I am not nearly as eloquent as you are and I do not know a lot. So I do not know if half of what you just said is actually true. But I know one thing with absolute certainty and I can tell you for a fact: God Does Not Exist!

But that is beside the point and not at all what I was talking about in the first place.'

...

'No no no! No! What I am saying is that God Does Not Exist and even if SHeIt¹ did exist SHeIt would absolutely not be worthy of our admiration and it would even be a complete waste of our time to worship HIt².'

...

'What? You need more? That does not constitute an argument you say? You're right. But I am not arguing. I was revealing the truth!

Don't get me wrong. When I say "GDNE" (or "G≠E") I am not dismissing the possibility of beings that are far more evolved than all of us.

I am simply saying that there is no such thing as a deity who created "the heaven and the earth".'

...

'No of course I do not mean that literally. That is just a phrase from the Book you are so keen on and which even you agree is not to be taken literally or at face value.

What I meant is: The multiverse was not created by any being.'

...

'I cannot and I don't. The best theory I've yet heard is the Big Bang Convolutd. But even the BBC throws up more questions than it answers. Then again I do not seem to have the same need as you for having everything explored and explained in detail. I find some things are more wonderful when shrouded in mystery.

Anytrail. I don't want to talk about creation but rather the being supposed

¹ SHeIt = She/He/It

² HIt = Her/Him/It

to have brought it about.

If in fact there was such an all-knowing all-powerful being it would certainly not be benevolent or benign towards us. At best it would be indifferent. At worst it would notice all the mistakes it had made in creating us and would come to hate the product of all those mistakes and possibly want to eradicate said mistakes i.e. us.

So no cheerful outlook there for you believers.'

...

,Yeah... well... I had not actually finished. What I am trying to explain to you is that such a being would not be worthy of worship.'

...

,Wait. Just let me give you in no particular order the ten main reasons why either "G≠E" or at the very least is not worthy of worship.

On the first extremity there is the fact that almost all religious texts seem to claim that we were created in HIIts³ image. Come on! All of us? Really? From the one same image? All the races on all the planets? That would make for one hell of a terrifying picture.

But let's pretend for a moment to believe that it might actually be so. What kind of "God" would make creatures in its own image and then expect those same creatures to worship and love HIIt?...'

...

'Thanks. I was just coming to that. It was of course a rhetorical question.

You say SHeIt doesn't "expect" us to worship and love Hit. But then we're damned if we don't. So not only a pretty narcissistic deity but also a self righteous one as well. Not one worthy of worship really.

Which leads me straight onto the second extremity which doubles as a back up to the first one.

A deity that is supposed to be all-powerful and omniscient and then goes to create beings in HIIts own image is either rather too full of itself or just plain stupid. Just look at the flaws in HIIts creation! One example: Never mind that we have to eat and drink to keep alive. That can be quite a pleasant experience. But why oh why were we not fitted with a digestive system capable of consuming every intake instead of the literally crappy one we've

³ HIIts = Her/His/Its

got?

Or even worse: The so called miracle of birth. Miracle my backside. More like a torture of birth. It would not have been remiss to fit the female with a "child flap"'

...

'No don't give me that crap. You're implying males do not love their offspring simply because they didn't have to endure the torture of birth. Or that all females love their offspring eternally and unconditionally. As if we did not have lots of contrariwise examples.

Anytrail. There are lots of design flaws a responsible and wise and loving deity would have taken great care to correct. A deity that would indeed have been worthy of admiration and worship.

On the third extremity God created us in HIt's own image? I know, I know! That is basically the same as the second one but here's another aspect of this which bears expanding upon. God is supposed to be this perfect all-knowing being that can do or create anything it wants. Right? Right! Then why oh why does SHeIt not live up to HIt's Creationist image in creating all of us? Instead of creating something truly new and possibly perfect SHeIt simply makes a copy of HItself⁴. Thereby making HItself more of a Copyist than an actual Creator. Which shows either a lack of inspiration and creative drive or simply proves my original point about HIt being a narcissist.'

...

'Yes I do know that it has been widely acknowledged in the religious world that „God Is A Narcissist“. However the various writings declaring said acceptance are so full of logical and even factual errors in their forced attempt to twist this narcissism into something good and divine that it almost makes me laugh just thinking about it. Take this for example: God „who understands himself to be the greatest conceivable being [...] sees reality as it truly is“. Really? From this they deduce that HIt's narcissism is something good and divine? Wherein pray lieth the difference to a less divine narcissist who also „understands himself to be the greatest conceivable being“? Let me tell you wherein: Simply the „fact“ that God „IS the greatest conceivable being“. And on whose authority do we have this „fact“? Only God's - that is who! Which

⁴ HItself = Herself/Himself/Itself

makes his statement as valid as any other narcissist's.'

...

'Ah but we only have HIt's word - so to speak - on the matter. For in fact it is only from the Bible that we „know“ HIt to have allegedly said „I am God, and there is no other“. Whereas SHIt is also supposed to have said „I am God, and there is none like me“. Which throws quite a different light on the matter does it not? So there might in fact be others even far superior of whom we have simply never heard. Maybe because they are no narcissists?

Well I will let you ponder that while I take a few sips of my drink. I do have an awfully dry throat.'

'On the fourth extremity why is SHIt not walking among us and teaching us directly and personally the Godly way instead of hanging out somewhere in „Heaven“ and condoning slavery, genocide or the inferior status of women?

On the fifth extremity ask and you shall be given? Like hell. No prayer ever worked.'

...

'Obviously with the immense number of prayers throughout history some of them are bound to happen to coincide with so called miracles therefore seeming to have worked. But any of those miracles when thoroughly investigated can be explained away by good old reasoning and none of that Godly stuff.

On the sixth extremity God helps those that help themselves? What loving good does that do? If they can and do help themselves they obviously have no need of God. It is rather those who cannot or dare not help themselves would be exactly the ones in dire need of some tender loving Godly help.

On the seventh extremity Jesus saves and God doesn't want to interfere with our free will? Give me a loving break. Jesus only saves if you were born in the right place and if you believe in him. Otherwise you are damned for eternity. And where's the free will in that?

On the eight extremity let's get back to that Book you actually base your belief on. A book whose core was written hundreds of years after the supposed happenings had been supposed to have happened. A core which another few hundred years later was used together with various other material from more or less equally suspicious provenience to put together a

book to instigate a religion and a dogmatic faith with but one goal in mind: Wealth and power to the few! Never mind the basically alright message of the Book: Love thy neighbour as thy self. Just give all your belongings to those who have been chosen by HIt to represent HIt on earth and should SHeIt not strike us down for being the greedy oppressing bastards we are...well then surely SHeIt must approve of this!

On the ninth extremity is the believe that this deity must exist since so many beings believe it does. To that I can only say that a lie multiplied by the number of its supporters still remains a lie.

On the tenth extremity remains the question why this deity seems to be incapable of speaking for itself but needs members of HIts creation to do so. Especially when most of them sound like gibbering idiots. Which in fact ties a little into... which one was it again? Oh yes my fourth extremity.

In a nutshell: On the Crusade for Truth " $10E=(G\neq E)$ " is all you'll ever need. Quod erat demonstrandum.'

...

'Ah well. There's just one thing left then. Maybe we can agree on that?'

...

'God may exist for you in your own personal reality. But God does not exist for me in my own personal reality.'

Chapter 11

The strange adventures of Ha Ben Sidi Daschon

(as recorded by Pablo Dascañeda)

Undated

Editors Note: I took the following journal entries from the book „The Teachings Of Ha Ben Sidi Daschon“ by P. Dascañeda in which they are a part of the text and as such of little importance. However, I find them a real challenge to the mind. That’s why they are included here.

* * * * *

I am in a cave, witnessing the beheading of somebody with an axe.

I get sick and take a train.

All of a sudden it leaves the rails and crashes, but I save myself by jumping out the window.

Now I start looking for a certain girl in the remains of the train.

29.10.83

I am in a warehouse.

Suddenly a woman starts talking to me telling me about her daughter (whom I know from a dream!).

Enter five former classmates of mine in the company of five girls not known to me.

Seeing me, they ask me whether I knew a record with a red cross on the cover.

„Reminds me of something.“ is my answer.

According to them this is the best record they've ever heard and then they ask me if I would care to join their rock group.

It drives me almost crazy since at the moment I'm trying to sell all my instruments.

31.10.83

I was visiting the family of a friend who seemed to be living in one of my former flats.

Suddenly I saw a letter, written by Jolanda, to somebody not known to me.

This letter was very understandingly written.

Then Ludwig and I stood face to face with a girl looking like Doris whom we took to be Jolanda and who pretended not to know me.

02.12.83

With my parents, who are in Zweisimmen with the Braun family, I spend some holidays in Lauterbrunnen in my grandmother's house which is really actually somewhere else.

Suddenly I see the car of an acquaintance of mine belonging to the „Ripper of Lauterbrunnen“, in front of the house.

I drive to Zweisimmen to alert my parents and drive back.

Now I take my mothers car and am suddenly in front of the school where I see Lady Redhead hand in hand with an other guy.

03.12.83

Me and some boys from my class are looking for a doll needed to clarify an accident or a crime.

Suddenly we meet a group of girls and amongst them is Lady Redhead.

I go up to her, we look each other in the eyes and as I'm almost past her, I greet her but she doesn't greet back and so I walk on, sad and deceived.

After a while my friends and some of the girls catch up with me and we go on together.

Now we pass before a cinema which is showing „Break III“ with Charles Bronson.

We seem to have all seen that film and start talking about it.

One girl didn't think too much of it, but I had been thrilled, if only for the fact that my favourite actor was playing in it, a fact that I mentioned to the others.

The girl said that this was exactly the trick.

Suddenly Lady Redhead stood very close to me and asked whether this weren't just the way the DJ's were doing it.

I asked: „What do you mean?“

She smiled in a funny way and I had the feeling to have blundered.

14.12.83

I was at a party with many friends and acquaintances.

Suddenly Erika and I were all naked and holding each other very close.

After having rubbed her cunt on my cock till it got hard, she whispered:
„I'm horny! Let's go to my place!“

With some witty remarks from colleagues we disappeared from the party.

After that we got together many more times.

01.01.84

Wednesday morning.

My class has to pass a test in correspondence.

Suddenly Anne is sitting next to me.

We greet and I say to her: „Long time no see!“

She answers with a date and starts to laugh.

Chapter 12

In Deep

MS Found In a Drop of Blood

Day 100 Generation 86

It's bad times coming up, that's what he said, the guy at the factory of birth. That was yesterday, and he didn't say it to me, either. But that's what decided me to start this diary.

Ten more days, then it will all be over. Barring some mishap bringing everything to an early end, which, of course, I hope won't happen.

I would like to call this record a kind of testament. Not a testament regulating the distribution of material goods, but one in which I wish to pass on my thoughts and feelings to posterity. Perhaps in doing so I can contribute something to the understanding of nature and its creatures.

The reader, should these lines ever be read, will of course have already guessed that I must be a Red, for a White would never have the time to entertain such thoughts, let alone write them down. For him there is always something to do: either some dangerous subject needs to be eliminated, or there is a repair to be carried out somewhere.

But the likes of us travel for 110 days carrying some article — vital, mind you, for others, not for ourselves — from one place to another. I, for example, spent most of my time transporting oxygen from the factory to some godforsaken corner of the world and from there carrying the dirty air back to the factory for regeneration.

Did I say "godforsaken"? I beg your pardon, dear reader, but habit, you know. I myself of course do not believe in a God. It is too easy to blame him for everything one cannot explain. The sentence "We Reds live 110 days" alone contains two mysteries which the "great general public" simply explains away as God-given:

- What does living mean?
- What are days, who determines this, and why 110?

Let us address the first question: What does living mean? Well, I am probably — to quote the "great general public" — sick and abnormal — end of quote — but I simply cannot believe that this eternal, or rather 110-day, travelling is supposed to be real life. For me, life consists of partnership, green lush meadows, music and the occasional sip of Baileys Cream.

Now please don't ask me what these expressions mean or where I got them from; I don't know myself. Sometimes I feel so strange, and then suddenly I am aware of feelings and expressions which were previously completely unknown to me and which I cannot for the life of me explain. Not even those who believe in God attempt to explain this as "divine inspiration". What kind of God would be dispensing such confused nonsense?

The question of life probably also encompasses the question of hierarchy. In these first two days of my diary I have already got an inkling of what that man at the factory meant. I have learned that the people of PUNTU⁵, who are in charge of things here in MARDU⁶, are divided and disputed over the way of handling a certain matter, the nature of which I know nothing about. And I was told that we of the TAWUT⁷ belong to the lowest caste and should not try to get to know things which we would be better off not knowing in the first place. After all, we are only here to serve the others...

On the other hand, we are told repeatedly, that we Whites and Reds of the TAWUT are the most highly developed creatures in all of MARDU, since we need nothing to live.

So how come, I ask you, that we, like the lowliest of beasts of burden, must bring the others their life-essential articles? I will have to think about this some more.

⁵ =Head in Mulluk-Mulluk

⁶ =Mother in Kalkatungu

⁷ =Blood in Mulluk-Mulluk

And about what would happen were we to stop doing that.

On the question of "What are days, who determines this, and why 110?" the widespread explanation runs as follows: A day is the time a certain body requires to orbit another equally certain body. Tell me yourself, is this not the most ridiculous explanation for a mystery of this importance that you have ever heard? It explains nothing whatsoever, it merely raises further questions:

- What are these particular bodies?
- Why do they orbit each other?

And why should these two bodies in particular determine the length of a day? One could after all take two entirely different bodies orbiting each other in a different period of time — if this is truly necessary — and thereby make the days shorter, so that we might perhaps have 200 rather than merely 110 days to live; although, on reflection, this is probably not the best solution, since for us Reds one day differs as little from the next as two Chinese people differ from each other in the eyes of a European — there go those inexplicable expressions again. So perhaps only 100 days would be better? I don't know; the longer I think about it, the more glad I am that I must now die prematurely after all.

Which reminds me — I haven't even told you yet: a short while ago I noticed a pull, which has since grown ever stronger. I immediately thought that the best thing would be to calmly continue writing. Had the damage been repairable and I had fallen into a panic, I would have lost the famous thread and been unable to continue writing. If however the damage is too great, there would have been no point in carrying on; but of course in such a moment everything becomes meaningless and so it doesn't matter. I will therefore continue to write as though there were a chance that someone might get hold of these lines.

Now, let us speak a little more about death. On this subject too there are many views. Some claim that with death everything is finished. I myself am inclined to agree with this group; other versions seem to me either too self-satisfied, too illusory, or positively nightmarish.

It is claimed, for example, that one is reborn; but nobody can say as what, or according to what criteria.

Others say that after death one leads a higher life, one step closer to God, and after that life yet another, still higher, still closer to God, and so on. This would logically lead ultimately to a universal becoming-God, but the proponents of this group claim that God would always remain one step higher than us, would in a manner of speaking retreat before us onto the next higher level. But if he is the highest of all — let us say — beings, why is he not already on the highest level from the very beginning?

Still others would have us believe that life after death exists only for those who have not behaved correctly in this present life. These would then have to atone for their mistakes in a terrible world that defies all description.

The sight now opening before me is terrible. In their thousands my fellow travellers are being torn to their deaths by the pull, through an enormous hole in the wall. Hundreds of Whites come rushing and attempt from the edges to patch the hole, but the pull is far too strong, the hole far too large. Already the first Whites themselves are being dragged into the black abyss.

Very soon I will know which of the views about life after death is correct — provided there is a soul, and it can still remember something once the body is dead. Somehow I find it a pity that no one will ever come to know my thoughts, for these lines will leave MARDU together with me, forever.

BOOK

III

The darker it gets...

Chapter 1

The Chain Reaction

On a fine Sunday morning at eight o'clock, the Muster family decided to go on a bicycle outing.

Joël and Stephanie, the two children, ran off enthusiastically to check the bikes for roadworthiness and, where necessary, to pump up the tyres.

When Grandma Muster was finally ready too, the five of them mounted their noble steel horses, Grandma needing a helping hand from mother Erika. Father Franz whistled for Bello the dog, who was allowed to come along, and off they went.

'Out of the city by the shortest route!' was the motto, and after just a quarter of an hour they had reached this first goal, namely the edge of town.

On an unpaved path running alongside a small pond, they reached the woods after a short while.

Had they stopped here to stretch their legs, they would certainly have noticed the couple at the edge of the woods, concealed only by a few thin bushes, busily attending to each other. As it was, Evelyn and Markus were able to devote themselves to their love undisturbed.

Undisturbed, but not unobserved. Nearby, a squirrel sitting on a branch had been watching them with interest. After observing their activities for a while, it hopped on from branch to branch and eventually climbed down to the soft forest floor some hundred metres further on. Here it began to dig a hole to hide its nuts.

An ant was flung aside by the busily digging creature along with a handful of dirt. After some initial difficulty getting its bearings, it continued undeterred towards its nest.

There it was almost trampled by a deer that was just passing the ant's nest

on its way to a clearing. Upon reaching the clearing, the deer began to graze.

Suddenly its peace was rudely disturbed and it sprang away. A hare was running in zigzags across the meadow, pursued by a fox.

The two of them chased through the woods, startling a hedgehog in the process, which scurried off in great agitation. It left the shelter of the woods and ran across a field path, directly in front of the wheels of the homeward-bound Muster family.

Franz Muster just managed to brake in time, otherwise he would have run over the hedgehog. Stephanie and Joël jumped off their bikes and ran after it. When it disappeared from view in the long grass, they abandoned the chase in disappointment.

Even after they arrived home, the hedgehog was still the main topic of conversation in the Muster family. The encounter with it had been the greatest event of the day.

And the moral of the story goes:
If family outings are this dull,
better not to go at all!

Chapter 2

Happy Birthday to You

He had been standing there for hours, leaning against the lamppost like a statue. In his grey raincoat, collar turned up and hat pulled low over his forehead, he looked in the light of the lamp like Bogey. Except this was no film and the man down there on the corner of Fifth and Lacey was certainly no actor. The calm and composure with which he lit a cigarette and let the still-burning match fall to the ground, where dozens of spent matches and cigarette stubs already lay, proved that he was one of the best in his field. Mike knew exactly what the man wanted. He himself, as a hired killer, had more than once played the same cat and mouse game with his respective victims.

* * * * *

Morning broke and Mike was still staring at the street. He considered whether he should finish off his adversary with a well-aimed shot. But he knew they would get him eventually. Flight was the only option. With the accelerator floored and tyres screeching, his car shot out onto the street. In the rear-view mirror Mike saw the killer take up the pursuit in a black Buick. Mike raced his red Lincoln across the city towards the mountains, the Buick always the same distance behind. On a tight bend Mike's car left the road and crashed into a tree. At the sight of Mike's body, his pursuer said sadly: "And all I wanted was to be the first to wish you happy birthday!"

Chapter 3

The First Time

Drenched in sweat and trembling all over, I pause before her. Finally the moment has come. The first time!

My nervousness intensifies as I become aware once again of the full magnitude and significance of this moment: in a few seconds I will have a completely new experience. Something that some people could no longer imagine being without. A kind of adventure which — whether it ends well or badly — will determine my entire future.

At my gently insistent touch, she opens.

I summon all my courage, take my thing in both hands and slide inside. At first slowly and haltingly, but already on the second attempt quickly and decisively. In an instant all my nervousness falls away.

I put my heart back in its rightful place and take a deep breath. There is no going back now. The second door clicks shut.

My first night shift at the transit centre for asylum seekers has begun!

Chapter 4

The First Day

"...6 a.m., BBC Radio 4, Today..."

Drowsily, Arthur turned onto his other side. "I've got time today," he murmured — half into the pillow, half into the dark room. "I'll stay in a little longer. Silly of me to let myself be woken up this early."

Ah, the force of habit! Annie had always said it was the most powerful force in the world and therefore the most dangerous. Annie... At the thought of his late wife, his heavy eyes opened. On the bedside table, in a gilded frame, stood her photograph. One from back then, when they were both still young, shortly after their wedding, when they still had plans, were still naive and full of hope, still looking forward to a better future, for themselves and the children.

He studied her face, her large clear eyes with their loving, slightly teasing expression. His gaze fell on her laughing mouth. He could still remember that laugh very well, even though Annie had not laughed for a long time before the accident. Not since they had learned that they would never have children of their own. Arthur could no longer remember what the doctor had said that day. But the sight of something breaking, deep inside Annie's eyes — that he would never be able to forget.

He reached for a tissue, blew his nose and wiped the last tears from his cheek and chin. "I really ought to shave — oh, what's the point!" Listlessly he switched off the radio alarm, sighed deeply and got up. On unsteady legs he made his way to the bathroom. After emptying his bladder, brushing his teeth and showering, he felt somewhat better; at least he was halfway awake now.

In the kitchen he made coffee, drank a glass of orange juice, and cut himself two thick slices of brown bread, which he ate slowly in small bites. He leaned back a little and closed his eyes; he had time, after all.

Through the open kitchen window he heard a blackbird singing. He

listened to its cheerful melody and savoured the smell of coffee and bread, of dew-wet grass, the farmyard smell drifting from the nearby farm, the welcoming scent of fried egg and bacon from a flat somewhere below.

So Mr. Upfield was already up too. He'd almost certainly be on his way to work by now. Like all the others Arthur encountered day after day on the bus. Those who went to their offices or their assembly lines, their laboratories or their shop counters, to carry out their duties as always; punctual, diligent and to the satisfaction of their managers.

Not so Arthur. Of course, he too had always been punctual and diligent, that wasn't it. But since Annie's death he had taken no real pleasure in his work. His manager had warned him on several occasions: "Mr. Walker! The quality of your work leaves something to be desired. What on earth has got into you? You were always one of our best employees. Pull yourself together!"

The newspaper he had collected from the letterbox earlier had nothing cheerful in it either. Nothing but war, unrest, rape, murder, manslaughter, suicide, famine, environmental disasters. And for some time now the signs of an economic crisis had been gathering, one that might prove to be the worst depression of all time. He threw the paper onto the recycling pile with a curse: "How is anyone supposed to enjoy being alive and find something new to appreciate every single day?"

A long, despairing look at the kitchen clock. Not yet half past nine. And he had no idea what to do with the whole long day ahead of him. When he had asked, his manager had replied: "Find yourself a hobby!" But that is easier said than done when, like Arthur, you have been defined by your job for thirty years.

Today was his first day without work.

Chapter 5

The Book

It arrived with the morning post: a perfectly ordinary-looking parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied with thick twine. It was no different from the thousands of other parcels that postmen deliver every day. But there was something special about this one — something very special indeed...

It contained the author's copies of my first book!

* * * * *

About five years earlier, I had decided to take the distance learning course "School of Writing". I had no bold dreams. Seeing one or two of my ideas printed as short stories in a local newspaper was about the limit of my expectations.

Right from day one, I worked intensively on my storytelling skills every day. I managed to stick quite closely to the timetable I had drawn up using the study tips in the course materials. As a result, I made rapid progress and soon one of my stories was selected as one of the top ten in the school's internal competition.

Despite a few creative breaks — the longest of which lasted about four months — I was still able to complete the course after three years. I then began, for the first time, to show my stories — which I had written independently of the course — to other people. Friends and relatives were enthusiastic and assured me it wasn't merely a matter of politeness.

A friend, E.S., who was working in radio and the press at the time, managed to get one of my stories published in one of the country's largest national daily newspapers. In the days that followed, the editorial office was literally inundated with letters from enthusiastic readers. Some found my story fascinating, others gripping, and one even called it brilliant. And they all agreed: they wanted to read more from this author!

Thanks to these overwhelmingly positive reactions, E.S. managed to persuade me to write to a publisher, asking them to print a small collection of my works.

Just a week later, the reply arrived:

"...we are very interested in signing you up. However, we would like to

point out the following: The existing stories could be combined into a single, overarching narrative with minor changes and some additional text.

Publishing an epic novel instead of several short stories would increase the potential readership many times over; moreover, as you may be aware, novels are better paid than short stories.

We look forward to your prompt reply..."

After rereading my stories, I saw it too: each one was, as it were, a chapter of a novel! Yes, I saw even more: as if in a vision, I suddenly had the content and structure of the work clearly before my eyes.

It would be divided into two parts, each of which would consist of several books, each of which would in turn be divided into chapters, and these ultimately into verses. It would span from the dawn of time to the present day and, although written as a utopia, would answer all the important questions of life and humanity.

Possessed, I threw myself into the work. During the two weeks in which I put this great work down on paper, I lived almost exclusively on coffee and cigarettes and slept no more than two or three hours a day.

During this time, four more of my chapters were published in various newspapers, as a preview of this magnificent debut work, which had already been hailed by enthusiastic critics as the "Book of Books".

* * * * *

So there it was, the parcel containing the first twenty copies of my book. Excitedly, I cut the string and tore open the wrapping paper. I removed the lid of the cardboard box and carefully, almost reverently, took hold of the top volume.

A large, heavy book. Bound in black leather, its smooth surface interrupted only by a simple embossed cross on the front cover and by the title embossed in gold letters on the broad spine.

Had I realised back then just how much the world would change because of my work, I would have prevented its publication and burned the entire first edition along with the manuscript. How much injustice was committed in the name of my "Book of Books"! How much misfortune crashed down upon humanity!

Because I insisted that my name should not appear anywhere in the book, over the years people forgot that it was merely a novel. Today I curse the day of its first publication, but back then I proudly turned to the first page and began to read:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...

Chapter 6

The Choice of Successor

The man looked around him like a hunted animal.

He found himself at the foot of a steep slope strewn with boulders, which seemed to form an endless line in both directions. Away from this line, a steppe-like plain stretched out to the horizon.

George set off. No matter where. Just away from this slope. The ground was soft and each of his steps left clear prints in the earth. When George looked back after a while, he was startled. He had not moved a single step away from the slope. It was as though the plain were moving beneath him like a conveyor belt. Even when he walked along the slope, first in one direction then the other, he seemed to get nowhere. He then tried to climb the slope. The result was the same. He was nailed to this spot. Finally George gave up. He sat down and waited.

* * * * *

The room was 2x2 metres. Neither a window nor a door interrupted the mirror-smooth surface of the walls. The woman looked up at the ceiling. The room was open at the top and a good 10 metres high — or deep? She looked down and let out a horrified scream. In one corner lay a snake!

The metal walls began to vibrate from the many endless echoes of Margaret's scream. These vibrations in turn roused the snake from its stillness. It looked around angrily, spotted Margaret and glided slowly towards her. The poor woman edged carefully along a wall into the furthest corner, pressing herself into it as firmly as if she would have liked nothing better than to merge with the metal, which would indeed have suited her very well. The black mamba came ever closer. Its malevolent hissing filled the entire room. Having come close enough to Margaret, the snake paused and reared up. Suddenly its head shot lightning-fast towards the woman's legs.

* * * * *

The water was cold. Twelve degrees at most, George estimated. He was a good 200 metres from the shore. Not a breath of wind stirred. The sea was calm and mirror-smooth. The sun shone in a blue, cloudless sky. But the water was damned cold. George felt the cold slowly gnawing its way through skin and muscle to his bones. He began to swim. With exaggeratedly large and powerful strokes intended to warm his body a little, he forced himself towards land.

About 20 metres from the shore, he was caught in a strong warm current. While it drove the cold from his body, it also carried him away with it. First he was swept several hundred metres parallel to the beach. But then, to his horror, he was driven away from the shore. When he finally managed to fight his way out of the current, George found that he had been carried back to almost exactly where he had started.

Again and again he tried to reach the saving shore, but without success. Finally his strength gave out and he could no longer keep himself above water.

* * * * *

Cars raced past her on eight lanes. Good God, thought Margaret, I'm on a motorway. She was indeed standing on the narrow central reservation dividing the two directions of traffic. This strip was, except for a few widely spaced spots, overgrown with dense, tall, impenetrable scrub. On one of these clear patches she now stood, knowing there was only one way out of there.

* * * * *

Cold sweat broke out on his forehead and began to stream down his face as George grasped his situation. He was sitting at the wheel of his car. He was travelling at 100 kilometres an hour. The brakes were not working and he could neither accelerate nor shift down a gear. He could only steer. The road was dead straight. But he was going in the wrong direction. Not that he had a

specific destination. No, that was not what was troubling him. But on all four lanes, cars were coming towards him. Bloody hell, I'm a ghost driver!

* * * * *

She had to cross four lanes on which at least two dozen cars raced past every minute. On one side the first lane was like a metal wall. No chance of getting through there, thought Margaret. I have some experience with metal walls. On the other side however there were clear gaps in the wall. Good luck, Margaret, she thought, and sprinted forward as a gap appeared before her. She missed the wing of the oncoming car by a hair's breadth. On the second and third lanes however her timing was already much better. One more lane, she thought and leapt forward. But her previous luck had made her somewhat reckless. She started a fraction too early. Her left leg almost caught on the bumper of the first car. This sent her stumbling. The radiator grille of the second car loomed large before her eyes. She saw the star on the bonnet as clearly as she had ever seen anything in her life. Then she was through. Made it, she exulted.

* * * * *

He began wrenching the steering wheel frantically from side to side and his car shot from a gap in the fourth lane into a gap in the third and back again. Back and forth it went. Since the gaps were all the same size and came at regular intervals, George had soon automated the rhythm. He could now look out for an opportunity to move into the second lane. He soon spotted a possibility when a gap in the third lane revealed a space in the second. In his excitement he forgot for a fraction of a second his automatic rhythm. He lived through what felt like an eternal moment of terror as a massive, heavy lorry loomed before his eyes threatening to crush him. He wrenched the wheel at the last moment and shot across into the second lane. There he began to settle back into the back-and-forth between lanes 2 and 3. When he spotted a gap in the first lane he did not hesitate for a moment this time and shot across onto the hard shoulder. He leaned back with relief.

And then it happened. From behind a racing car a woman suddenly leapt onto his carriageway. George's eyes flew wide open. But there was no time left to wrench the wheel.

* * * * *

The jury members looked silently and gravely at the two candidates. The chairman rose and spoke: "The jury has found nothing improper or objectionable and declares the tests to be correct and valid."

George and Margaret jumped up and protested. In a loud voice the judge admonished them both to order and calm, hammering on the table as he did so.

"We have before us the description of the tests together with their respective sole solutions," the judge now explained. "They are all perfectly feasible. And the fact that in the third test the element of luck played a considerable role does not contravene the regulations governing the tests for the appointment of a head of state. Paragraph 24e of the TestReg states: 'The element of luck may — a) play a minor role in all 3 tests, or — b) play a major or even decisive role in one test. In this case it may play no role in the other two tests.'

"The fact that you both literally ran into each other in the third test" — quiet laughter in the hall, some jury members smile — "is likewise permissible under the TestReg, provided — I quote from Paragraph 53 — provided 'the test subjects at the moment of encounter are each undergoing two tests that differ substantially from one another' — end of quote.

"The matter is therefore entirely clear. I concur with the verdict of the jury."

"Ladies and gentlemen" — the judge now turned to the people in the hall and to the cameras transmitting proceedings to the entire world — "it is my honour to introduce to you the two persons who have been selected by these tests. Mrs Thatcher, Mr Bush, please welcome your successors."

Chapter 7

A Little Economic Miracle Fairytale

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, there was a company — a corporation, as they are called — with its headquarters in a country to the north of our borders. This company was run by powerful kings, who were answerable to a small group of even more powerful emperors. These same emperors had only to ensure that the company functioned well and above all turned a profit, so that the Inves-Tors — so-called shareholders — were happy and content. These Tors had in truth nothing whatsoever to do with the company and had no interest in it either. Their sole interest lay in extracting as much profit as possible from the company as quickly as possible, in order to increase their wealth.

For many years everything went well. The company functioned and yielded profit for the Tors, emperors and kings alike, and everyone was satisfied. Each new year the Chief Accountants proposed producing somewhat more turnover and thereby achieving somewhat more profit, and each year these targets were met and everyone was satisfied. The Tors were doing well, the emperors were doing well, and the kings and their lackeys and court jesters were doing well, and everyone was satisfied. And even the subjects — the so-called employees and workers — were doing well, in accordance with their lowly station. In addition to their meagre wages they received each year a so-called profit share, which was in truth laughably small, but which nonetheless gave them the deceptive feeling of security and success. And thereby they too were satisfied.

But then it came to pass that dark times descended upon the land and upon the company. The Chief Accountants could still record somewhat more turnover and profit each year, but each year somewhat less than the year before. And even that only by means of constant restructuring and rationalising and repurposing. But the company no longer functioned as smoothly as in the fat years, and everyone slowly grew afraid. The Tors grew afraid for their fat profits, the emperors and kings grew afraid of the reaction of the Tors and of a reduction in their own profits, and the subjects grew afraid for their positions and their livelihoods, and nobody was quite so satisfied any more.

So it came to pass that one day the lackeys and court jesters spoke to their

kings and said the following: "Oh my lords, hear what we have to say: if you would consent to dismiss some of the subjects and then command the remaining subjects to work more for the same — or better still, reduced — wages, you could save some money and thereby, despite the poor order situation, meet the profit figures of the Chief Accountants, and thus make both the emperors and the Tors happy, and everyone would be satisfied."

The kings found this a wonderfully good idea and gave the lackeys and court jesters a pay rise and slapped each other on the back and set about putting this proposal into practice. To this end they travelled in luxuriously appointed aeroplanes and cars to every corner of the globe, wherever the company had its branches. They took fine large rooms and suites in expensive hotels and met with the dukes and counts of the branches to discuss which subjects could most easily be dispensed with. And the subjects heard of this and all of them were very dissatisfied.

But then it came to pass that during one such meeting — or more precisely, during the lunch break of one such meeting — one of the kings sat down at a table of subjects. Whether by accident, or because there was no room left at the table of kings, or whether it was fate or divine providence, however it may have been, such a thing occurred. When the king noticed his error, if error it had been, he immediately attempted to look as un-kingly as possible, but it was too late. One of the subjects at the table had already recognised him. Now this subject was not an ordinary subject — no, he was rather a quite courageous and indeed impertinent subject. If it were possible for there to be such a thing as heroes among subjects, then this subject could almost be called one.

In any case this subject plucked up his courage and addressed the king and said the following: "Oh my lord, hear what I have to say: consider first the matter of the rewards bestowed upon the kings and their lackeys and court jesters. These rewards are, with respect, somewhat in excess of what is warranted. For I ask you: what is the work of a king truly worth compared to the work of a subject? Let us examine this objectively. What happens when the kings are absent? The company continues to function on its own for a considerable time. But what happens when the subjects of production are absent? The company stops immediately. Dead still. Therefore the work of the production subjects is objectively more important — which is to say, more

valuable — than the work of the kings. And so one must work one's way comparatively through every position in the company in order to determine objectively the true importance of each kind of work, and then distribute the weight of wages accordingly. The consequence of such an exercise would be this: those in production earn the most, those in management earn the least. As compensation for this, however, management would receive the greatest profit share when they successfully guide the company through a good year. In this way the kings would have every reason to lead wisely rather than merely lucratively.

And furthermore: if you would consent to forgo the demand for ever greater turnover and profit each new year, then the company would still function and nobody would be worse off for it. For know this, and any thinking person can confirm it: it cannot go on forever. At some point, there is simply no further. And to survive especially dark times such as this one, it would be far more appropriate for emperors and kings to forgo a certain percentage — one they would barely notice, let alone feel — than for subjects to be dismissed and driven to ruin and starvation."

The king, whose eyes had been opened in such a manner, found this a wonderfully good idea, and the other kings and the emperors too, when they heard of it, saw that it was good. Together they convinced the Tors of the rightness of such revolutionary thinking and soon put the idea into practice. Indeed they went even a step further. They took their lackeys firmly in hand, and the court jesters, who had never done a day's work in their lives, were threatened with pay cuts — or even dismissal — should they not finally begin to earn their keep.

For neither the kings and their lackeys and court jesters, nor the emperors, nor even the Tors, were truly bad or malicious people. They were merely somewhat weak of mind.

And everyone was satisfied and lived happily ever after.

Chapter 8

The Curse of the Old Lady

The old woman screamed blue murder. And all I had done was bump into her slightly and apologise immediately. Even if she spoke no English, she must have understood the meaning of my words. Nevertheless she showered me with her Serbo-Croatian at the top of her voice, waving her arms wildly. Although I naturally didn't understand a word, it was quite clear to me that she would have liked nothing better than to either kill me or send me to the back of beyond.

Around us a dense circle of curious market-goers slowly formed, unwilling to miss this spectacle.

Suddenly the woman tore the black cloth from her head and threw it to the ground. She then performed a wild dance around it, falling into a monotonous chant. Her long white hair flew through the air.

While I was still marvelling at this sprightly creature, she stopped abruptly. Standing on one leg, she fixed me with her deep-set dark brown eyes and pointed her right index finger at me. She muttered something and then stood like that for a full minute without making another sound. Suddenly she grabbed her headscarf, tied it back on and walked away without another word, without looking back once. The circle of onlookers parted before her and then slowly dispersed. The spectacle was over.

I shook my head to clear it, for I was rather confused. Suddenly a local man took me by the arm and said: "Sir, you go home, quick. Big danger!"

I looked at him in astonishment: "What danger are you referring to?"

"Old woman being witch. Has... how to say... cursing?"

I almost burst out laughing: "You mean the old woman has cursed me?"

"Yes, exactly, cursed!"

"Why would she have done that?"

He looked at me in surprise and explained: "Being witch. Bad woman. Hating all people."

"I see. And what terrible fate awaits me then? Will I be struck down with scabies, or have seven years of bad luck, or will I even become impotent?"

"Old woman saying: You seeing picture, next day you being in picture."

Now I had to laugh: "So I will see a picture and the next day I will be in the picture. How amusing! But why exactly did you say I should go home?"

He shook his head sadly: "You not believing, but I warning you. Witch old, not very strong. You going back to England, then curse not following."

"A geographically limited curse? This gets better and better. My good man, thank you very much for this most entertaining conversation, I have been thoroughly amused. And now farewell. — Oh, and should you ever find yourself cursed, you are welcome to come and visit me." Still laughing, I walked on.

I wandered around the market for a while longer, bought myself some postcards and then made my way back to the hotel, as it was by now time for dinner.

After dinner I retired to my room with a bottle of cognac, wrote the postcards and then went to sleep.

* * * * *

The next morning I had a strange feeling when I got up: it was half past five in the morning, yet the sun was shining as though it were half past five in the evening. The feeling intensified when I stepped out from my room on the eighth floor onto the balcony to do my morning exercises: where the interior of the country had spread out before my eyes to the west every morning until now, there was suddenly nothing to be seen. Gone were the gentle green hills and the snow-covered mountain range behind them; gone was everything! It was as though the world ended a few metres in front of my eyes. Fog? No, not even that. Nothing.

Far too much alcohol last night, I thought, and stepped back inside.

Twenty minutes later I left the hotel in green bermuda shorts and white trainers. Leisurely following the path southward, I breathed in the fresh sea air in long, calm drafts and feasted my eyes on the gentle green of the parkland with its pines, cedars and cypresses.

After a short while I reached the water.

At the northern, shallower end of the freshwater pool stood two water slides, which were being enthusiastically used by children.

Children — this early in the day?

Only now did I become aware of something I had not noticed at all before: there were an unusually large number of people about! Not only at the pool,

but on the tennis court and along the paths; the bar was even open. The kilometre-long broad sandy beach, which I now stepped onto having skirted the pool, was also dotted with a multitude of people and their towels, parasols and sun loungers.

It is half past five in the morning, I thought desperately, none of this can possibly be real!

A landing stage — a pier, of the kind one knows, albeit in more luxurious form, from old English seaside resorts like Brighton or Southend — jutted out a good eighty metres into the sea roughly level with the tennis court. There too was a bustle of activity.

"Eighty metres?" I cried out.

The pier was normally a hundred metres long, but after about eighty metres it ended quite abruptly, and beyond that followed... nothing!

On trembling knees I sat down in the sand, for something else had caught my attention: the response of the bathers to my cry. They did not react at all! Every person around me was stiff and rigid, as if frozen solid, like waxwork figures from Madame Tussaud's. This also explained the uncanny silence, which suited the time of day but not a beach full of people.

I closed my eyes and let my upper body fall back into the sand. When I had composed myself somewhat, I opened my eyes and looked up into the sky... directly into a pair of dark brown eyes gazing down at me from an enormous face. Terror seized me.

The curse of the old lady came to mind, and now I knew whose eyes were regarding me with such amusement.

Chapter 9

Hexameron

The Nail

here I am. in a situation no one has ever been stuck in before.

I cannot move. not a toe, not a leg, not a finger, not an arm. they no longer exist. no, that is not true. they still exist. but I am no longer in my former body. and yet I am not dead. I think —.

therefore I am. I see —.

my body, down there, lying on the floor. it is dead. but I am not. oh, no! not I. I am still alive, thanks to this woman —.

who is now bending over my corpse. she killed me. that is to say, my body. for I —, but you already know that.

now she is weeping. the woman. she understands what she has done. she has lost the man she loves. forever. for she has beaten his body to death. in an outburst of passion and rage. a woman scorned.

she always claimed to be a witch. nobody believed her. that didn't bother her. I didn't believe her either. that hurt her. for she loves me. but I could never fall in love. not with her. and so she killed my body.

now I believe. she is a witch. because of the nail. she used it. and I am still alive.

I cannot move my head. I have no eyes. and yet I can see the entire room. but that is all I will ever see. this room. for I cannot go anywhere. I am stuck here.

I cannot speak. I have no mouth. if only I could speak.

would I scream my hatred in her face? because she keeps me alive? like this? no. it would be no use.

would I beg her to release me? from something worse than death? perhaps.
probably.

would I ask her to grant me one last wish? a favour, other than finishing
me off for good? oh yes! that I certainly would. there is something. a torture.
worse than anything else. not knowing.

for there is one thing I can do. must do. am doing. a single thing. holding a
picture. but I cannot see it. I can see the entire room at a glance. but not this
picture. I have no idea what it is. I want to know. I must know. or I will go
mad.

i will lose my mind.

holding a picture.

up here.

wedged in the wall.

for I am the nail.

The Picture

She must have suspected it! Or perhaps she read my thoughts. She is a witch, after all. However it may be, this is what she said:

"Think of the day we visited the art gallery. Do you remember telling me about your idea of the perfect picture? I remember it perfectly.

"You know,' you said, 'some of these pictures here are really good. The best of them were taken from the right angle, their lighting is perfect, their subjects were excellently chosen, and yet — they don't convey a whole. In every one of them there are things missing that everyone knows are there; but you can't see them, because today's photographic and painting techniques are inadequate.

"Pictures are far from perfect. They merely show us something we could have seen ourselves. When I talk about the perfect picture, I have something quite different in mind. Let me give you an example.

"Suppose I want to take a picture of my house. What would a conventional photograph show? A wall, parts of the roof, one or two windows, depending on the angle, and that would be that. In my picture, however, everything would be visible. You would see the rooms behind the outer wall and the rooms behind those rooms and so on, in a straight line away from the lens; and everything in the rooms would be visible too!

"Oh, what wouldn't I give to see such a picture!"

"Those were your words. Your idea was so fascinating that I asked someone to try everything to make it a reality. And shortly afterwards she handed me this new kind of camera! A test shot of your house turned out to be a genuine surprise. But I'm afraid my colleague went too far.

"Exactly as you imagined, the photograph shows all the rooms with their contents as well as the outer wall and, far exceeding your imagination, everything in a straight line to the very end of the universe. But she went even further! One sees not only everything that was there when the picture was taken, but also everything that has ever been there since the beginning of time.

"Don't try now to imagine what such a thing looks like! A human brain simply cannot grasp it. You would go in-sane. That is why I will not show it to you.

"You must content yourself with holding it, my beloved nail."

What Happened to the Camera

It stood on a shelf near the window. And standing there it was a constant temptation to him.

He was Michael James Brennan, 18 years old, apprentice witch.

He was alone in his mistress's house, for she was attending the annual witches' congress and had burdened him with full responsibility. Naturally she had lectured him on what to do and what not to do. But the only thing he could clearly remember were the words she spoke as she left:

"And remember: under no circumstances are you to touch this camera!"

Much of what then transpired would probably not have happened had she taken the trouble to offer an explanation. The camera might still be standing dust-covered in its place on the shelf. Michael James might still be on his way to a brilliant career in witchcraft.

As it was, however, the young man's attention became fixed on the small, black, harmless-looking object.

"Tell me, what is so extraordinary about you?" he said to the camera. No answer. "I wonder what would happen if I were to pick you up." The witch will punish you, warned an inner voice. "Oh, I'm sure she won't notice!"

And with that — in young people so common — rebellion against authority, he took the camera in his hands and turned it this way and that.

Nothing happened.

"You really don't seem very extraordinary to me."

And then it happened!

He raised the camera to look through the viewfinder. In one instant he saw murder, rape, theft. Struggle and a thousand battles. The birth of a thousand children. Trees and plants growing and dying. Suns exploding and planets dying. Entire galaxies expanding and collapsing. Landscapes beyond imagination. People and creatures and things from the far reaches of the universe.

He saw death in all its disguises. He saw aching beauty.

It was like that one moment before death. An entire life replays itself before your eyes in a matter of seconds. More intensely. Here it was millions of lives. For he saw everything; from the beginning of time to the present — in a single glance.

* * * * *

"Oh no, not again!" cried the witch when she came home. "The third victim of this cursed invention. That settles it. I will have to destroy the camera if I ever want another apprentice."

Michael James did not hear her. He was kneeling on the floor, the camera lying before him. His eyes, wide open, were blind. His face was frozen in the happy smile of an idiot. His brain had quite simply stopped functioning; had refused to process an input that exceeded its capacity by more than 200,000 times.

As a witches' apprentice he had still been nothing more than a human being.

Chapter 10

Kyrie eleison

Where can it be? It must be here somewhere. We hid it ourselves, last time. Remember.

They came at dawn. No! That's not right at all. Where did you get that from? It was already broad daylight. It must have been around 10 o'clock. Yes, exactly, it was 10 o'clock. Now I'm sure of it. Or was it 11? Pull yourself together, please. You must concentrate. Tear apart the grey veils that surround my memories and cloud the clarity of our thoughts, like wisps of fog on an autumn morning that let the warming light of the sun through only reluctantly and hesitatingly. We must not forget. Nothing! Never! Memories are all that remain to me. They have taken everything else from us.

Except our most precious thing, of course. They didn't find that. You had hidden it too well. And now I myself can no longer find it. Because we forget.

So, how did it go. They came again, to ask us their eternal questions. Ah yes, their questioning. They ask how we are, while not believing that you exist. I told them about you, tried to describe the warmth and goodness that radiates from you, but they don't believe in us. They talk of "split personality" and "obsession" and of my being "quite simply senile." They run tests on me and subject us to the worst tortures, which they call "methods of healing." All for our own good. They say. These fools.

They are incapable of understanding. As soon as something is incomprehensible or strange or merely new and different, they do everything in their power to bend this difference or incomprehensibility to fit their own notions, to force it into shape and if necessary even to break and destroy it. Instead of developing further by absorbing the new, thereby broadening their horizons and increasing their intelligence and growing into something greater and better, they sink ever deeper into the barbarism of stupidity, with all its ignorance and prejudice.

Listen. What was that? Footsteps. Someone is coming! Quick, nobody must

notice that we have been searching for something, otherwise they will search too and this time might even find something. Our most precious thing. Nobody must see it. Nobody must know of it. Otherwise they will take it from me.

* * * * *

At last we are alone again. But this pain. Everywhere, in the arms and legs, in the stomach and chest, and in the head. Yes, in the head, that is where it is worst. This new "method of healing" is even more terrible than all the ones before. You can barely think clearly any more. But just as new life arises from death, and just as even evil always contains a little good within it, so too did this torture have its good side. I remember again. We know now where we had hidden it. Behind Nietzsche's works of all places. What irony there is still in me.

What a feeling it is to hold it in one's hands again; to feel the rough wood, to feel the edges of the beams cutting into the skin and in doing so to try to sense what pain, not only of a physical nature, he must have suffered; then to trace with one's fingers the soft contours of the figure, and finally to contemplate the whole crucifix once more.

And what a sight it offers us! Simple and without ornament, but in its plainness so moving and promising something better, like a ripe apple that could not be more simple on the outside, but within conceals a sweetness and juiciness that gives us a foretaste of the joys of paradise.

* * * * *

Our most precious thing. My treasure. The crucifix. They have taken it from us! We were careless. Exhausted by their torture, you fell asleep while I was still delighting in the sight of it. We are lost. We will lack the strength to endure their "methods of healing" if we cannot draw new courage and new hope from the sight of Him.

You don't need that idol. They said. Nobody needs such things. What do they know. They do not know this emptiness.

No, I don't think that's true. I think they do know this emptiness, but they are not aware of its cause. That is why they keep searching, to the very limits of the universe, in the innermost parts of atoms, in ever newer and yet already so old ideologies, but not in their hearts. Only when they begin to search there will they finally recognise the reason and also understand what can fill the emptiness.

* * * * *

They are here again. They are tormenting us. Can barely think clearly. Pain everywhere. We must Concentrate. Distract. Outside my window stands a tree. I am the last, they say. Don't believe it. Nobody believes any more, they say. No! A lie! Of course, an old manuscript. This pain. Madness. The apple. riverrun, past Eve and Adam's. Dawn. Horror. Autumn. Wisps of fog. Tearing apart. Aaaaaahhh!!! My words are like the stars that never set. Forget. Not. You must fight. No strength. Help. The crucifix.

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

BOOK

IV

A light towards the end of the tunnel could be a train.
And yet...

Chapter 1

The Golem

A golem once lived on our street.
He grew bigger and bigger, and one day he was gone.
I had long since forgotten him when he reappeared in my life.

I was an only child, which was rather rare in Bytom at the time. Weak and sickly, I spent most of my time in bed. "Zolzy," the doctors said — a kind of Konsumpcja.

As soon as I was old enough — about five or six years old — I would sneak out of the house as often as I could and as my health allowed, to spend time with 'my' Golem.

He never spoke, but I felt that he was pleased by my presence. I knew next to nothing about him, except that, like me, he had no other friends.

And when he suddenly disappeared one day, I didn't even know his name. Everyone simply called him the Golem.

Years later — shortly after the end of the war and the death of my parents — I lay in an old, overcrowded hospital in Kraków.

In a huge ward, there were probably hundreds of beds lined up in long rows of two, back to back.

Filled with survivors of the war.

One night, a strange noise woke me. In the bed behind me, someone was whimpering and moaning wordlessly, like a small child with an adult's voice. When I looked over my shoulder, I saw a huge paw and a long, thin arm groping around as if searching.

I turned slightly to one side and gently took the hand of the patient behind me in my own, comparatively tiny hand.

The voice fell silent. The arm froze. Then I felt a movement.

When I looked up, I saw a huge head appear above me.

Reddish-brown, very short, frizzy hair that covered the skull like a carpet of moss. A crooked nose and a lopsided mouth. And a pair of enormous grey-

green eyes with an abysmally sad gaze.

It was the Golem.

Whether he recognised me again or was simply happy that someone was looking after him, I still don't know to this day. In any case, his features transformed into a wordless, happy radiance.

The abysmal sadness in his gaze, however, remained.

He babbled something incomprehensible, and as I gently stroked his hair with my other hand, a single tear fell from his left eye.

As I learnt from a nurse, the Golem had been seriously wounded during the war when a house collapsed. However, due to the significantly slower metabolism of his extraordinary body, the recovery process took much longer than normal. This explained the fortunate circumstance that we were both spending time together in hospital and were thus able to meet again.

As luck would have it, we were both discharged from hospital on the same day. His wounds had finally healed completely, and several long scars marked him out as a 'war veteran'. And I, too, if not fully healed, was at least once again in a condition where I could be released back into the world.

With the help and support of a local relative, I found a small two-room flat which I could just about afford, despite the meagre social security benefits here in Poland.

And the double amount even allowed me sometimes to buy the expensive medicine that was supposed to cure my Konsumpcja.

For, of course, I took the Golem in with me.

Even though he alone almost filled the entire flat.

His body was a good three metres tall and was like a framework of tendons and bones covered with skin that seemed too thin for his size. His hands, feet and head were, in comparison to his body, even more oversized.

He looked like a small child's stick man drawing.

The months passed and it became clear that the Golem was not stupid. Probably due to a malformation of the larynx and vocal cords, he was never able to learn to speak. That is why he was labelled as stupid, and so he never learnt to read or even write.

The time between my sporadic stays in hospital, during which he came to visit me every day, was spent teaching him to read and write.

It was a difficult and complicated process, given his inability to speak, but made easier by the fact that he seemed to possess an alert, quick and open-minded intellect.

Within a few weeks, he had already learnt to read and write the first simple words for everyday use.

Not with a pen, of course — his fingers were too clumsy for that — but with chalk on a small slate that I hung around his neck on a string. At first it was just scribbles, then letters, then whole sentences. "buy bread today?" "you sad?" "why are you crying?"

Sometimes, when he was asleep, his breathing reminded me of the rustling of dry leaves — as if he carried within him the dust of all the years he had lived through before we found each other again.

Every morning when I woke up, I could already hear him in the kitchen. He tried to be quiet, but when a man three metres tall tries to be quiet, it sounds as if a bear were tiptoeing through a china shop. The floorboards creaked under his weight. The cups clinked when he took them from the shelf, and sometimes, when he thought I was still asleep, he would hum to himself — a deep, rumbling sound that was more like the sad drone of an engine than music.

Sometimes when I was ill — not so ill that I had to go to hospital — which happened often, he would sit beside me on the bed and simply hold my hand.

His skin was rough, his fingers bony, but his touch was gentle. When I was cold, he would wrap me in his blanket — a coarse woollen blanket I had sewn for him from two blankets because none in the shop were big enough for him. When I coughed, he made me tea — too sweet because he didn't know how much sugar to use — and when I had nightmares, he sat up all night stroking my head until I fell asleep again.

He understood things that nobody else understood. When I was angry, he brought me flowers — not pretty shop-bought ones, but dandelions or daisies he'd picked by the roadside. When I was sad, he'd simply sit beside me and wait until I wanted to talk. And when I laughed, he laughed with me — a silent, happy glow that lit up his whole face.

The abysmal sadness in his gaze, however, remained.

For the world outside hated him.

Kraków was no place for people like Adam. The children laughed behind his back. The women crossed themselves as he passed by, and the men spat or threw stones.

Despite all this, he was soon able to do simple shopping on his own, which was particularly helpful during my absences due to illness.

He would jot down the items he needed on his slate, which he would then hold out to the staff. As he did so, his whole face would light up.

The abysmal sadness in his gaze, however, remained.

Of course, due to his size and his disfigured features, this could seem unsettling to outsiders.

But we had tried to train the staff in our local shops by going shopping together at the start, so that people could get used to his appearance and his nature.

We also only went shopping at times when the shops were as empty as possible.

Adam always wore a cap to hide his face a little. Not that it helped much.

If anyone shouted at him, I pretended he was my brother who had been

wounded in the war. "He's harmless," I'd say. "He doesn't mean any harm."

But it didn't help.

Once, when Adam went into the shop alone, the butcher hit him with a meat cleaver. Not hard — just a warning blow to the shoulder — but Adam flinched as if it had killed him. He came home with tears in his eyes — not because of the pain, but because he knew he would never belong.

"why do they hate me?" he wrote on his slate.

I didn't know the answer.

He wasn't a monster. He was just too big for this world.

And the world was too cruel to let him forget that.

One day we decided to call him Adam.

I explained to him the myth of the Golem and that people would refer to him as such, which obviously made him sad.

Then I told him about the first humans, Adam and Eve, and said that Adam meant 'the man taken from red earth'.

He thought for a while, running a fingertip over the scars on his arm — as if checking whether he really had been formed from earth — before declaring that Adam was a good name. As he did so, his whole face lit up again.

The abysmal sadness in his gaze, however, remained.

It was a cold autumn day.

I was bedridden yet again, and Adam had to go shopping on his own. I'd dictated a list to him, which he wrote on his slate: "milk. bread. an egg, if possible."

On his way home, he came across a group of men. Drunk. Angry. On the lookout for a victim.

"What the hell is THAT?" shouted one of them.

Adam lowered his head and tried to walk past.

"Hey! I'm talking to YOU!"

A stone flew. It hit him on the shoulder. Adam groaned but didn't move.

He had learnt that resistance only made things worse.

Then one of the men grabbed him by the arm. "What are you? A Russian experiment? A Jew?"

Adam shook his head. His hands were trembling.

"He's got no voice!" laughed one. "Maybe he's not even human!"

Just then I arrived.

Seized by a bad premonition, I had set off towards Adam. Long before I turned the last corner, I had already heard them shouting and quickened my pace.

"Leave him alone!" I shouted, quite out of breath.

The men turned around. "Oh, the little boy is defending his monster!"

One of the men pulled out a knife.

Adam stepped in front of me.

"Adam, no—!"

The first stab hit him in the side. He stumbled but stayed on his feet. The bag of shopping clattered to the ground.

The second stab ripped open his throat — right where his voice had long since been destroyed anyway.

The men ran off when they realised what they had done.

I fell to my knees beside Adam.

His breathing was rapid and shallow. Blood seeped through his fingers. He tried to say something. His lips moved.

The Golem died in my arms after he had saved my life.

In death, he looked deep into my eyes and whispered the only word that ever passed his lips: "Ewa".

The abysmal sadness in his gaze had finally vanished.

He was my Adam and he knew my name.

I never found out his real name.

The police weren't interested in his death. One less monster.

I buried him myself outside the city where no one would ask questions. I

washed him as best I could and wrapped him in his blanket.

In his jacket pocket I found two things. A piece of bread he had forgotten to eat. And an old hair clip I had worn as a child.

I didn't cry. Not straight away. Only when I got home and hung the board on the wall. Adam's board. With the last fateful shopping list on the front.

And a text on the back that I had never seen before.

From that day on, I let my hair grow out again and never cut it so short again.

I didn't hide anymore, and whenever anyone still called me 'boy', I'd say: "Ewa. My name is Ewa."

People stared. But I didn't back down. Never again.

And at home, I always had the board hanging on the wall. Adam's board. With the back facing forwards.

And every time I looked at it, I remembered.

He wasn't a monster.

He was just a man who loved too much for this world.

On the back of the board, he had written: "Ewa + Adam"

Chapter 2

The Meadow

Somewhere out in the country, verging on a small forest, lies a meadow.

It has seen many a day come and go. Most of them were quiet and peaceful.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the adjoining forest was much larger. But then, one day, came many men with big machines. The following days were filled with loud, strange noises. The meadow did not like those days. When the men and the machines finally left again, the peace and quiet that followed was welcomed by the meadow. And the forest was small, as it is today.

But none of this the meadow remembers.

It remembers the wind and the sun and the rain. But only on those days when there is wind or sun or rain.

It remembers the birds and the bees and the crickets. But only on those days when there are birds or bees or crickets.

It remembers the forest. Because every day there are trees.

It remembers not the men nor the machines.

Today is a beautiful hot summer day with crystal clear blue skies. The night had been very cold. The morning dew had sparkled like a blanket of diamonds in the first sunbeams. The rising mist had tried to cling to the trees but was soon dispersed by the sun.

A soft breeze now and then takes the sting out of the shimmering heat, sending ripples through the tall grass like waves on the sea. The only sounds are the soft rustling of the leaves and the chirping of some crickets.

Now and then a bird lands on one of the trees, or swoops down onto the grass to pick at a worm, and flies off again.

A deer appears under the trees, followed by her fawn. They begin to graze. Suddenly alarmed, they prick up their ears and dash off back into the wood.

In the far distance a lone siren begins to wail. Then another falls in. And then another. Until the cacophony drowns out what little sound there had been.

When all the sirens abruptly stop, there is a brief moment of absolute

silence. Then from the distance comes the rumbling of massive explosions. Growing ever louder until the wave of sound hits the meadow at full blast. Suddenly it is as though the meadow were in the eye of a hurricane, only this eye is closing, growing ever tighter and tighter. The trees get shaken from one side to the other as wave after bigger wave hits the meadow from all sides.

When after long last the hurricane turns into a mere storm and slowly ebbs away, the meadow is as it was before. And the grass, flattened to the ground and pointing in all directions, is slowly raising itself up again.

Somewhere out in the country, verging on a small forest with trees that carry no leaves whatsoever, lies a meadow.

It has seen yet another day come and go. Most of them were quiet and peaceful. Some were not. But none of them the meadow remembers.

It only remembers the here and now. It remembers the forest and the trees without leaves. It remembers the wind or the sun or the rain. It remembers the birds or the bees or the crickets.

It remembers not the men nor the machines.

Nor will it remember them evermore.

Chapter 3

Ant in the Kitchen

„And where do you think you're going?“

...and the finger, having killed, moves on...

Chapter 4

The Wrong Kind of Man

Three women, each carrying a shotgun, are standing at a crossroads.
Waiting for the right kind of man.

I think I am the wrong kind of man. The right kind of man may be walking
somewhere behind me. The right kind of man may be working in a field
nearby.

Michael Connor might be the right kind of man: He sometimes beats his
girlfriend in a drunken fit.

I once made a woman cry. I told myself it wasn't my fault.

Arriving at the crossroads, I nod, smile and say 'hi' to the ladies.

One of them lifts her gun and shoots me.

Seems any man could be the right kind of man.

Chapter 5

The Visitors

A spaceship carrying weird looking visitors has landed outside a tiny village. The villagers are excited about their first alien contact.

"They are going to kill us all" someone screams.

"Just because they look so different to us," another villager reasons, "doesn't mean they are monsters. They probably are as frightened as you are and in need of some reassurance."

He performs their gesture of welcome. Like thunder the visitors explode with fire. All around the villagers start dropping to the ground.

Dying they hear a gurgling sound coming from one of the visitors.

"All hostile aliens eliminated. Houston do you copy?"

Chapter 6

The Matter of the Affair

It was a dark and stormy night the night David went to see Mark on the matter of the affair they both were having with the same woman from a neighbouring town that lay on the other side of the hill in a district where they both technically were forbidden to enter by a law that had been in existence ever since the first settlers arrived on this planet more than two hundred years ago in a bid to save the human race from extinction after the home planet was ruined by sheer stupidity and ignorance making it a small miracle that they had had the means to go out towards the stars in order to find another habitable planet on which to again spread their stupidity and ignorance and thus once more ruin yet another planet.

The matter of the affair was settled in the only way they knew how to do it. Both men shot at each other and being extraordinary marksmen were killed on the spot.

Chapter 7

The Winds Of Sandee (by Ruthar M. Downfield)

They came over the northern hills on that fatal autumn morning.

The first weak rays of sunlight did not yet have the power to evaporate the mist that was clinging tightly to the trees.

The forest was spread out as far as the eye could see all the way down the slopes out across the valley and up again over the top of the next range of hills.

On a clearing in the woods at the bottom of the hills was a little village. It lay quietly with the thatched roofs of its tiny houses barely rising above the mist. The villagers and all their cattle and sheep and chickens and cats and goats were asleep. Unsuspecting. Here and there maybe some nightmare of some kind. But not of the horror to come. Never of the horror to come.

No-one would have believed in the early hours of the beginning day had they been told of the horror to come.

Few men even considered the possibility of the horror to come.

They drifted slowly downhill through the mist towards the unsuspecting sleeping village. Some crows that flew too close suddenly dropped dead to the ground.

They approached the outskirts of the village.

The village cockerel having just woken had barely begun to give his usual unsuspecting early morning waking call when he too started to choke and dropped dead on his dung heap. One of his legs was still twitching as they moved on. Slowly. Silently.

With no-one to raise the alarm they spread unnoticed all across the village.

They struck swiftly. Relentlessly. Without mercy.

They did not distinguish between humans or animals.

Men and women and children and babies. Cows and calves. Sheep and lambs. Chickens and chicks. Cats and kittens. Goats and their wee yins.

None were spared. Not even the mice or the rats.

As if strangled by invisible hands slowly tightening their grip they started choking and coughing and gasping for air. Their eyes bulged as if to almost burst or pop out. Their bodies heaved and their limbs thrashed about. Their skin and hair turned the colour of **Green Onion** (6AA121). Their eyes had become red from the blood of the burst vessels.

A liquid the colour of green tinged sand started spilling out of all the holes in their bodies as they slowly dissolved from within.

And in the cacophony arisen from the screaming, mooing, bleating and other sounds of extreme pain the only discernible human word, barely croaked before the pain became unbearable: „Smeg“.

And then it was over.

For a while the almost tangible sensation of excruciating pain seemed to be still floating around in the mist.

The village was as quiet as before.

And when a short but quite strong autumn breeze had dispersed the remaining mist the sensation of pain had gone with it.

And on that clearing in the woods at the bottom of those hills there was a village of empty houses and empty stables and empty pens.

And lots of large coloured patches everywhere. On the ground. On the walls of houses and stables. On the furniture. On the beams and boards and posts of pens. Patches the colour of **Toksig Sandee** (DDED00).

For that is all that remains when they have passed.

The evil. The terrifying. The legendary Winds Of Sandee.

Chapter 8

So ein Käse

Marital Contract File Lim-Burger (Classified – Now Declassified)

Case No.: EU-AS/202X/OLF-001

1. Background

Mr. Lim (origin: "somewhere in Asia", reason for immigration: "better WiFi") met Ms. Burger (origin: "Europe, presumably", hobbies: "cheese, paying taxes") at an intercultural barbecue. The chemistry was right. They married (Registrar's note: "Why not?").

Desire for children: Rejected (Medical grounds: "Biology says no. Fate laughs.").

2. Escalation

As early as the first year of marriage, Ms. Burger began developing a progressive aromatic profile. (Documentation see Appendix: Odour Report No. 42). Statement by Mr. Lim:

"At first she smelled like home. Then like fast food. Then like an existential crisis."

Breakthrough: During the annual name-badge inspection (mandatory for binational couples), Mr. Lim identified the systemic error:

"Lim + Burger = Limburger."

3. Resolution

Divorce petition filed (Grounds: "Misleading name fusion, olfactory nuisance, and generally.").

Judicial ruling: "Divorce granted. Ms. Burger may resume her maiden name. Mr. Lim may breathe again." (verbatim).

Consequences:

Odour level: Normalised (Measurement via EU Stench Scale: "Acceptable").

Life satisfaction: "Finally." (confirmed by both parties).

4. Official Confirmation

EU Odour Commission (Department for Marital Names)

"Pursuant to §12 Para. 4 of the International Name Rights Act, it is hereby confirmed that the combination 'Lim-Burger' constitutes an olfactory burden exceeding reasonable limits. Reinstatement of the name 'Burger' resolves all odour-related complaints. Signature: [illegible]."

Epilogue

Both lived happily together until the end of their days.

Moral: Some marriages fail due to biology. Others due to bureaucracy. The worst ones at the cheese counter.

Appendices (not included):

- Odour Report No. 42 ("Aromatic notes: 'basement', 'fate', 'slightly metallic'")
- Divorce ruling ("With perfume recommendations for the future")
- Invoice from marriage counsellor ("1 session. Subject: 'You should have Googled the name.'")

Appendix: Scientific Study

Title:

"The Limburger Effect: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Correlation Between Surname Fusions and Olfactorily Induced Divorce Rates in Binational Marriages"

Published in: *Journal of Absurd Marital Sciences (JAMS)*, Vol. 42, Issue 6 (2026)

Abstract:

This study examines the causal relationship between name fusion in marriages and subjectively perceived olfactory nuisance as grounds for divorce. Based on a sample of 12,345 binational marriages (of which 1 case: Lim-Burger) the following findings were obtained:

Primary finding:

Marriages in which the combination of surnames involuntarily evokes a strongly smelling foodstuff (e.g. Limburger, Blue-Mould, Fish-Sauce) showed a 37.8% higher divorce rate than average ($p < 0.001$).

Control group:

Marriages with neutral name fusions (e.g. Miller-Smith) showed no significant olfactory nuisance.

Mechanism:

The cognitive dissonance between the romantic ideal ("We are one!") and the olfactory reality ("Why does my wife suddenly smell like old cheese?") leads to chronic stress and ultimately to marital dissolution.

Recommendation:

Couples should conduct a name compatibility check prior to marriage (e.g. via the EU Olfactory Names Database).

Quote from the lead researcher:

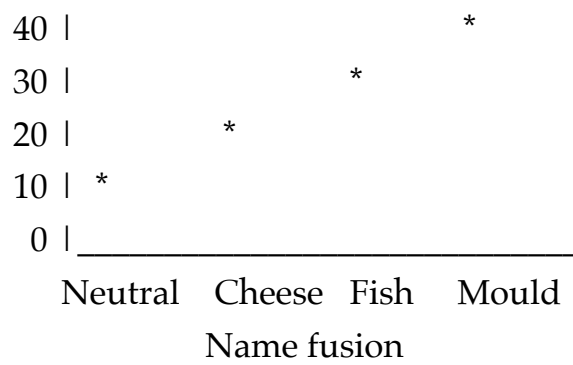
"The data are clear: if your new surname smells like a refrigerator that hasn't been opened since 1998, you should perhaps visit the registry office —

alone."

— Dr. Helena von Riechmann, Institute for Marital Names and Olfactory Psychology

Graph: Divorce Rate vs. Name Fusion

Divorce rate (%)



Editorial note:

"This study was not funded by the cheese lobby. Promise."

Appendix: Ethics Council Report

Title:

"Ethical Assessment of Divorce on Grounds of Olfactory Name Association — The Case of Lim-Burger and Its Implications for Modern Marriage"

Prepared by: Europäischer Ethikrat für Absurde Lebensfragen (EEAL),
Session No. 2026-06-09

Chair: Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Lorenz von Moralstein

1. Facts of the Case

Mr. Lim and Ms. Burger requested an ethical assessment of their divorce, which was based primarily on the involuntary association of their marital name with a strongly smelling cheese product. The Ethics Council was asked to clarify the following questions:

- **May a name constitute grounds for divorce?**
- **Does the name fusion "Lim-Burger" violate human dignity?**
- **Should the couple have been warned prior to marriage?**

2. Ethical Assessment

a) The right to olfactory self-determination

Article 12 of the Official Declaration of Olfactory Rights (ODOR): "Every person has the right not to be confronted with odours that impair their wellbeing — particularly when said odours are caused by bureaucratic decisions (e.g. name fusions)." → **Conclusion:** Mr. Lim acted in accordance with his fundamental rights.

b) The responsibility of the registry office

§47 of the Name Rights Act: "Registry officials are obliged to advise couples of the possible negative consequences of name fusions, particularly when these may lead to social ostracism or sensory nuisance." → **Conclusion:** The registry office failed in its duty. Mandatory counselling is recommended ("Does your new name smell of something you would not eat?").

c) The question of culpability

Ms. Burger: Not culpable. She did not actually smell of Limburger — the name merely implied it.

Mr. Lim: Not culpable. His brain responded correctly to the cognitive dissonance.

Society: Culpable. Why is there no Name-Sniffing App?

3. Recommendations of the Ethics Council

Mandatory name checks: Prior to marriage an algorithm must verify whether the name fusion is associated with revolting foodstuffs, bodily fluids, or chemical accidents.

Compensation for those affected: Couples divorced on grounds of name fusion are entitled to complimentary therapy ("How to survive your own identity").

Promote research: The EU should invest €10 million in researching "name odours and their psychological consequences."

4. Minority Opinion

Dr. Clara Duftig (Ethics Council member):

"I find the divorce was unnecessary. Had they simply changed their name to 'Lim-Brie' everything would have been fine. Brie smells of money, after all."

5. Closing Remarks

"The Ethics Council finds: the divorce of Mr. Lim and Ms. Burger was ethically justifiable but bureaucratically avoidable. May this case serve as a warning to all who play carelessly with names and odours."

Signatures:

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Lorenz von Moralstein

Dr. Clara Duftig (with reservations)

[Illegible signature] ("That wasn't me!")

Chapter 9

Peter the Goatherd

I met Peter during one of my many solitary hikes in the mountains.

As I rounded a bend after a particularly steep stretch of the path and was just relieved to see that the going would be fairly flat for a while, I suddenly spotted him standing there by the side of the path, leaning against a wicker fence.

In his left hand he held a walking stick that reached almost to his shoulder — so he must have been about five foot five — , his right hand was tucked deep into his trouser pocket. His blond hair was tousled by the wind. At his feet lay a bulging bag made of coarse linen, tied at the top with a piece of string in a small loop.

But when I looked into his eyes, everything else suddenly became irrelevant; a shiver ran through me, and a comforting warmth spread through me.

At last, at the age of twenty-three, I now knew what love at first sight meant.

My knees went weak. “Don’t collapse now,” I thought.

I smiled at him. “Hello! May I sit down next to you for a moment?” He looked at me suspiciously, so I quickly added: “You see, I’m just not as young as you, and these steep alpine paths are getting the better of me.” As proof, I panted loudly and deeply a few times and wiped non-existent sweat from my forehead with a handkerchief.

Now the lad laughed out loud. It was a pleasantly clear, slightly mocking laugh. “Ah, you city folk! You’re not used to slopes like this, of course. But I don’t think you’re that old, are you?”

I sat down in the grass, still damp with dew. “You see right through me.

I'm not that old, after all." He laughed again, this time without a trace of mockery. "By the way, you're right, that was a silly excuse. But I was just fed up with being on my own and wanted a bit of company. ... What's your name, anyway?"

"I'm Peter. But down in the valley, everyone calls me Peter the Goatherd." He sat down beside me and laid his stick in the grass.

"A goatherd!" I said. "I've always wondered — do they actually follow you, or do you spend the whole day chasing them?"

"To be honest", he replied, "it is a bit of both, really."

"So actually you are a goatherd herded by goats."

He laughed again. That wonderful laugh, which captivated me almost as much as his eyes.

"No one's ever made a joke about that before. You're not so stupid after all."

"Thank you very much!"

A lovely blush spread across his face. I would have loved to take him in my arms right then and there and hold him close, he looked so sweet now.

"Sorry," he stammered, "it just slipped out. I didn't mean it like that at all. But you know, here in the valley everyone says that people from the city are stupid because you don't know anything about animals and plants."

"It's all right. I didn't take it that seriously either." He breathed a sigh of relief.

We carried on fooling about for a while, and he told me a bit about his life. I learnt, for example, that his mother had died fifteen years ago, when he was born; that he didn't know his father, as he'd left his mother before he was born; that he was therefore considered a bastard in the village and had no friends; that he'd grown up with an old farmer who'd often beaten him.

And then he suddenly asked me if I wouldn't like to accompany him up to the mountain pasture, and then on with the goats to the grazing ground.

I would have loved to shout out loud with joy, but I just managed to

control myself. I replied with feigned indifference: "I'm not sure... Actually, I wanted to go along the lake and then over the pass road into the valley behind... How long would it take us to get to that pasture?"

"I have to go to the upper pasture today... so about four hours."

I glanced quickly at my pocket watch. "It's about half past seven now, so we'd get there around midday... No, it won't do. I haven't brought anything to eat with me, because I wanted to stop for a bite at the restaurant on the pass."

Eagerly, he grabbed his bag with both hands and held it under my nose. "I do have something to eat with me. It'll definitely be enough for both of us."

That was what I'd been hoping for. Only one thing was still bothering me: "No, Peter! I can't enjoy your lunch and leave you to go hungry."

"But I always carry too much with me anyway. I usually feed the mountain jackdaws with what's left over. Please, do come with me!" His gaze almost made me melt inside.

"All right. If it means so much to you, I don't want to let you down. Let's go!"

He sprang to his feet nimbly and slung the bag over his right shoulder using his walking stick.

We walked side by side, with Peter on my right, and we had barely gone a few hundred metres when his damp hand slipped into mine, very gently, very shyly. I looked at him. His gaze was fixed straight ahead and his cheeks were almost glowing. When I returned the touch and squeezed his hand firmly, he began to smile, looked up and gave me a grateful glance, which sent waves of happiness coursing through my body. "Those eyes," I thought, "those eyes."

We walked the rest of the way hand in hand. We told each other jokes and taught each other songs, which we belted out into the air, snorting and laughing, now singing, now whistling, as if we were trying to drive away all evil spirits forever. We hardly paid any attention to the path, and so time flew by.

The sky looked down on us in dark blue from all sides, and when we

arrived at the mountain pasture, the sun stood in all its glory over the valley, doing its utmost to dry the dew that wet our shoes.

Peter opened the stable door and lured the goats out into the open with whistles and shouts. Now we made our way merrily up the mountain pasture.

Infected by our cheerful, boisterous singing, the goats too became a little over-exuberant: they ran hither and thither, and so we too had to run hither and thither to herd them all back together again.

The upper pasture lay at the foot of the high cliffs, which rose up towards the sky, bare and rugged at the top. Contrary to expectations, it was not steep at all, but rather gently sloping; it looked like a sort of high plateau, especially as on one side rocky crevices stretched far down.

When we had reached this high point, Peter took his sack from his shoulder and placed it carefully in a small hollow. Then he pulled a large red-and-white checked handkerchief from his right trouser pocket and spread it out on the ground.

"There, you can sit here without getting your lovely clothes dirty." He said this and looked at me expectantly.

I made a slight curtsy and replied in a feigned voice: "My lord, you are a true gentleman. So gallant, so courteous!" Laughing, he bowed.

But I wanted to know for sure now, wanted to seize the opportunity and went all out: "Seriously, Peter, that's really very kind of you. But it's so lovely and warm here, and we're all on our own, so I'll just take my clothes off; that way they won't get dirty either."

His face turned bright red in an instant. He stammered something incomprehensible and finally turned away from me to lie down on the sunny meadow floor, his back to me. Once I'd taken off my clothes, I rolled them up tightly, stuffed them into the hollow with the provisions bag, and then lay down in the grass beside Peter, who was stretched out.

* * * * *

After three or four hours of endless bliss, we both lay there, completely exhausted, head to head, shoulder to shoulder, in the flattened grass. Peter had fallen asleep after all that exertion.

I felt happier than I had ever felt in my life. I drank in the golden sunlight, the fresh air, the delicate scent of flowers, and desired nothing more than to stay there forever.

But as beautiful as it had been and as good as I felt, I knew it was over and would never be again. But did Peter know that too? Or did he think it would happen again, if not every day, then at least more often? I stood up and got dressed.

“Peter! Peter!” I called out loudly. He woke up and looked at me.

“Come on, get up and get dressed! We have to head back down before it gets dark.” Whistling cheerfully, he obeyed my request.

Back at the mountain hut, Peter still had various chores to do in the stables. As I had to hurry down to the village so as not to miss the last train, we parted ways. There was no long farewell scene and we didn’t exchange a word about the future, but a tear in his eyes showed me that Peter, too, had understood.

We would never see each other again!

* * * * *

Despite the brief time we were granted, I have never forgotten Peter. And even today, many years after that unforgettably beautiful day, I often dream of Peter the Goatherd, the only person I have ever truly loved. And I curse the fate that allows such a hopeless love, and the people whose laws condemn true and genuine love to hopelessness in the first place.

And Peter’s last words echo constantly in my head, giving me no peace: ‘I love you, Paul!’

Chapter 10

Revolution (Number nnnn9)

...revolution:

People are fighting
for freedom and justice,
for the end of oppression
and equality for all.

But as soon as their leaders
come into power and money
things are instantly
back to normal again.
Until the next...