

andere den einen auf, zog ihn in das Loch, aus dem er hergekommen war, spuckte ihn dann wie einen harten und leeren Körper aus. Jedesmal war Thomas bis auf den Grund seines Wesens von denselben Worten angewidert, die ihm nachgelaufen waren und die er als seinen Alptraum und als die Erklärung seines Alptraums verfolgte. Immer leerer und immer schwerer wurde er, nur noch mit unendlicher Müdigkeit bewegte er sich. Nach so langem Kampf wurde sein Körper ganz opak, und dem Betrachter vermittelte er den Eindruck von erholsamem Schlaf, ob schon er nicht aufgehört hatte wach zu sein.

My window overlooked an empty landscape where nothing ever moved. No houses were visible, only the debris of the collapsed wall, a bleak stretch of snow, the fjord, the fir forest, the mountains. No colour, only monotonous shades of grey from black to the ultimate dead white of the snow. The water lifeless in its dead calm, the ranks of black trees marching everywhere in uniform gloom. Suddenly there was a movement, a shout of red and blue in that silent grey monotone. I seized my overcoat, struggled into it as I rushed to the door; changed my mind and went back to the window, which was stuck fast. I managed to heave it up, stepped out on to piles of rubble, then pulled it shut behind me with the tips of my fingers. Slithering on the frozen grass, I ran down the slope; it was the quickest way; and I had eluded the woman of the house, whom I suspected of keeping watch on my movements. There was no one on the narrow path skirting the fjord, but the person I was chasing could not be far off. The path plunged into the forest. At once it got colder and darker under the trees, which grew close together, their black branches meeting in dense entanglements overhead, intertwining with the undergrowth lower down. Twenty invisible people could have been near me, but I saw the ghostly grey coat flicker among the firs, and occasionally caught a glimpse of its checked lining. The wearer's head was uncovered: her bright hair shimmered like silver fire, an *ignis fatuus* glimmering in the forest. She hurried on as fast as she could, anxious to get out of the trees. She was nervous in the forest, which always seemed full of menace. The crowding trees unnerved her, transformed themselves into black walls, shutting her in. It was late, after sunset; she had come too far and must hurry back. She looked about for the fjord, failed to see it, lost her bearings, and at once became really frightened, terrified of being overtaken by night in the dark forest. Fear was the climate she lived in; if she had ever known kindness it would have been different. The trees seemed to obstruct her with deliberate malice. All her life she had thought of herself as a foredoomed victim, and now the forest had become the malign force that would destroy her. In desperation she tried to run, but a hidden root tripped her, she almost fell. Branches caught in her hair, tugged her back, lashed out viciously when they were disentangled. The silver hairs torn from her head glittered among black needles; they were the clues her pursuers would fol-

low, leading them to their victim. She escaped from the forest at length only to see the fjord waiting for her. An evil effluence rose from the water, something primitive, savage, demanding victims, hungry for a human victim.

For a second she stood still, appalled by the absolute silence and loneliness all around. A new ferocity pervaded the landscape now that night was approaching. She saw the massed armies of forest trees encamped on all sides, the mountain wall above bristling with trees like guns. Below, the fjord was an impossible icy volcano erupting the baleful fire of the swallowed sun.

In the deepening dusk every horror could be expected. She was afraid to look, tried not to see the spectral shapes rising from the water, but felt them come gliding towards her and fled in panic. One overtook her, wound her in soft, clammy, adhesive bands like ectoplasm. Wildly choking a scream, she fought herself free, raced on blindly, frantic and gasping. Her brain was locked in nightmare, she did not think. The last light fading, she stumbled against unseen rocks, bruising knees and elbows. Thorns lacerated her hands, scratched her face. Her flying leaps shattered the thin ice at the fjord's edge and she was deluged in freezing water. Each breath was painful, a sharp knife repeatedly stabbing her chest. She dared not stop or slacken speed for an instant, terrified by the loud thud of pursuing steps close behind her, not recognizing her own agonized heartbeats. Suddenly she slipped on the edge of a snowdrift, could not stop herself, fell face down in a deep snow-grave. There was snow in her mouth, she was done for, finished, she would never get up again, could not run any further. Cruelly straining muscles relentlessly forced her up, she had to struggle on, pulled by the irresistible magnet of doom. Systematic bullying when she was most vulnerable had distorted the structure of her personality, made a victim of her, to be destroyed, either by things or by human beings, people or fjords and forests; it made no difference, in any case she could not escape. The irreparable damage inflicted had long ago rendered her fate inevitable.

A pitch black mass of rock loomed ahead, a hill, a mountain, an unlighted fortress, buttressed by regiments of black firs. Her weak hands were shaking too much to manipulate a door, but the waiting forces of doom dragged her inside.

Stretched out on her bed, she could feel the hostile, alien, freezing dark pressed to the wall like the ear of a listening enemy. In the utter silence and solitude, she lay watching the mirror, waiting for her fate to arrive. It would not be long now. She knew that something fearful was going to happen in the soundproof room, where nobody could or would come to her rescue. The room was antagonistic as it always had been. She was aware of the walls refusing protection, of the frigid hostility in the

air. There was nothing she could do, no one to whom she could appeal. Abandoned, helpless, she could only wait for the end.

A woman came in without knocking and stood in the doorway, handsome, forbidding, dressed all in black, tall and menacing as a tree, followed by other indistinct shapes, which kept to the shadows behind her. The girl at once recognized her executioner, whose enmity she had always felt without understanding it, too innocent or too preoccupied with her own dream world to guess the obvious cause. Now, cold bright pitiless eyes swam in the glassy depths of the mirror, darted towards their victim. *Her* eyes were widely dilated and black with dread, two deep pits of terror, of intuitive nightmare foreknowledge. Then a sense of fatality overcame her; she experienced a regression, became a submissive, terrorized child, cowed by persistent ill-treatment. Intimidated, obedient to the woman's commanding voice, she got up and with faltering steps left the platform, her white face blank as paper. When her arms were seized she cried out, struggled feebly. A hand was clamped over her mouth. Several figures towered above her. She was gripped from all sides, roughly handled, hustled out of the room, her hands tied behind her back.

Under the trees it got darker and darker, I kept losing sight of the path. In the end I lost it entirely and came out at a different place. I was close to the wall. It was impressive, intact, no break in it anywhere; I saw the black shapes of sentries posted along the top. Two of them were approaching each other and would cross quite near me. I stood still in the shadow of the black trees where I should not be seen. Their steps were loud, the hard frost magnified every sound. They met, stamped their feet, exchanged passwords, separated again. I walked on when the footsteps grew fainter. I had a curious feeling that I was living on several planes simultaneously; the overlapping of these planes was confusing. Huge rounded boulders as big as houses, resembling the heads of decapitated giants, were lying near, where they had fallen long ago from the mountainside. Suddenly I heard voices, looked everywhere, but could see no one. The sound seemed to come from among the boulders, so I went to investigate. A light flowered yellow in the blue dusk: I was looking at a cottage, not a mass of rock. People were talking inside it.

I heard yells, crashes, the frightened neighing of horses, all the noises of battle. Arrows flew in clouds. War clubs thumped. There was loud clashing of steel. Strangely dressed men came at the wall in waves, swarming up it, using their feet as well as their hands, holding cutlasses in their teeth. Agile as gorillas, they came in their thousands; however many were thrown back, a new wave always came on. Finally all the defenders of the wall were exterminated, the second line defences forced back. Invaders already inside opened the gates, and the rest burst in like a tidal wave.

People barricaded themselves in their houses. In the town there was utter chaos. Hand-to-hand fighting in the narrow streets; savage meaningless cries like the cries of wild animals resounding between the walls. The strangers raced through the town like madmen, pouring wine down their throats, slaughtering all they met, every man, woman, child, animal. The wine streamed down their faces mingled with sweat and blood so that they looked like demons. A little snow fell: this seemed to excite them to frenzy, they laughed insanely, tried to catch the falling flakes in their mouths. The horsemen carried long lances with pennants or feathers attached. Hacked-off heads were impaled on these lances, sometimes infants or dogs. Huge fires blazed everywhere, it was as bright as day. The air was full of the reek of burning, of charred wood and old dust. As people were smoked out of their homes they were massacred by the enemy. Many preferred to die in the flames.

I had no weapon, and searched for something with which to defend myself. I was in a street where dead horses had been piled up to form a barricade, among them a man who had been killed with his mount. He had not had time even to draw his sword, which was still in the scabbard, engraved with intricate patterns, a beautiful piece of work. I tugged at the projecting hilt, but in falling the blade had jammed and I could not move it. The dead beasts had been heaped up in such frantic haste that my persistent efforts were shaking the whole construction; carcasses worked loose, rolled down, forming a breach. Before I could repair the damage, a troop of horsemen galloped along the street with a fearful clattering din, waving their lances, yelling their senseless cries. I threw myself flat on the ground, hoping they had not seen me, expecting the worst. As they came up, one of them jabbed his long lance ahead of him into the dead rider, dislodging the body so violently that it fell on top of me, probably saving my life. I kept perfectly still while the whole troop went careering past, rolling their bloodshot, demented, animalic eyes.

Eis

Anna Kavan.

Übersetzung Silvia Morawetz und Werner Schmitz.

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Mein Fenster ging auf eine kahle Landschaft hinaus, in der sich nie etwas regte. Häuser waren keine zu sehen, nur die Trümmer der eingestürzten Mauer, eine trostlose Schneefläche, der Fjord, der Tannenwald und die Berge. Keine Farben, nur einheitliches Grau in Schattierungen von Schwarz bis zu dem vollendeten Mattweiß des Schnees. Das totenstille, unbelebte Wasser, die Reihen schwarzer Bäume, die in einheitlichem Trübsinn in alle Richtungen zogen. Da rührte sich auf einmal etwas, ein Aufschrei von Rot und Blau in der monotonen grauen Stille. Ich griff mir meinen Mantel, zog ihn mir über, während ich zur Tür rannte, überlegte es mir anders und lief zurück zum Fenster, das jedoch klemmte. Es gelang mir, es hinaufzuschieben, ich kletterte hinaus auf die Schutthaufen und zog es anschließend mit den Fingerspitzen wieder herunter. Über das gefrorene Gras schlitternd, rannte ich den Abhang hinab; es war der schnellste Weg, und auf diese Weise war ich der Hausherrin entkommen, die jeden meiner Schritte argwöhnisch beobachtete. Auf dem schmalen Pfad den Fjord entlang war niemand, doch die Person, der ich nachjagte, konnte nicht weit sein. Der Pfad führte tief in den Wald hinein. Es wurde sofort dunkler und kälter unter den Bäumen, die nahe beieinanderstanden und oben ein dichtes schwarzes Geflecht bildeten, dem das Unterholz entgegenstrebte. Zwanzig Unsichtbare hätten in meiner Nähe sein können, doch ich sah nur den geisterhaften grauen Mantel zwischen den Tannen aufblitzen und erhaschte ab und zu einen Blick auf das karierte Futter. Der Kopf seiner Trägerin war unbedeckt: ihr helles Haar schimmerte wie silbernes Feuer, ein ignis fatuus, das im Walde glomm. Sie hastete weiter, so schnell sie konnte, um den Bäumen zu entkommen. Der Wald machte sie kopfscheu, er war ihr eine ständige Bedrohung. Die dicht stehenden Bäume verstörten sie, wurden zu schwarzen Mauern, schlossen sich um sie. Es war spät, schon nach Sonnenuntergang, sie war zu weit gelaufen und musste schnellstens umkehren. Sie hielt Ausschau nach dem Fjord, fand ihn nicht, verlor die Fassung und war mit einem Schlag völlig verängstigt, ihr graute davor, im dunklen Wald von der Nacht überrascht zu werden. Sie lebte in einem Klima ständiger Furcht; hätte sie je Güte erfahren, wäre es nicht so gewesen. Es war, als stellten die Bäume sich ihr aus Bosheit in den Weg. Ihr ganzes Leben war sie davon überzeugt, zum Opfer vorbestimmt zu sein, und jetzt wurde der Wald zu der bösen Macht, die sie vernichten würde. In ihrer Verzweiflung wollte sie losrennen, stolperte aber über eine verdeckte Wurzel und wäre beinahe hin-