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**life is different**

**(extract)**

I am still stroking the dog's fur and watching the long threads of saliva hanging from its jaws, although the dog isn't there at all any more, as if in my sleep the man pulled him away from under my hands.

Just as the dog hairs have lodged themselves in throngs in the car seats, with little flukes, so it seems to me, because the vacuum cleaner doesn't get them out, so now invisible pictures hang down in my house and catch me, whenever they choose. I just go down the stairs and I'm suddenly with the man at the beach, on which on the second day he was lying wearing a vest, so that his back doesn't get even redder. I'm lying in the sand with a bottle of water, and he has wrapped his head in a cloth and is sleeping, his right wrist is wrapped in a string whose other end is attached to the dog's head. The animal, too, is asleep, its jaws full of sand, but it isn't bothered by that.

Two days after the separation I phoned up a woman. She works as a numerologist, and I had already got her address a long time ago from a woman friend who had once consulted her. The friend told me so much about her that I thought, you can give it a try, too, if you need someone to tell you, who you are and how you're doing. Actually it's better if no one

tells you how you're doing, because they will then admit, that only you can know, but when one's desperate, and out of utter sadness unable to get at how one's feeling, then there are always many others who are happy to tell one for money. It cost more than 100 euros, I don't know how much more, but it did take more than three hours, in which I concentrated very hard and drank five glasses of water. After I had left her apartment, it occurred to me that because I had concentrated so hard I had no idea what the face of this woman, who had been talking to me for hours, looked like. Perhaps that had been her intention. I now knew a few things about myself and of course also a few things about the man. His tree of life is a massive object. It has a huge crown, she says, but no trunk and no roots, that's why all his ideas and his great creative energy never get off the ground. What can I do about that, and why did I fall in love with a fallen crown and the latter at the time in me? My own tree didn't have such a spectacular message to offer, at any rate, I don't remember it any more.

I was given an envelope, in which there was a list of all the important things, which I should do as soon as possible. There were also reading tips on the list, books which were again full of tips, all the things that would be if and all the things that could be done in order to bear, to change, to forget or to get what is.

I read all the books and also did the other things on the list. For example, I wrote letters to the man, I then burnt them, didn't give them to him, but to the fire, so that I can let go of the pictures, which jump at me, and not just in the stair well. For example, whenever I start the car, a picture jumps up which even has sound with it. Because then the man says to me that the car gets going much better, if I don't drive off immediately after

starting, but instead give it a little time, so that it can rev up. And every time this sound and image comes, I'm grateful that he told me something like that, and every time I also ask myself, whether he could not have told me more, and also things that have nothing to do with cars, big cars and huge cars.

Once we were camping abroad. I could hardly believe that we had found a camping site that didn't just let us in with a huge truck, but also with the dog, which on the camping site banned dog lists was classified as a dangerous fighting dog. Up to that point I had never ever thought that the dog was supposed to be dangerous, but in life it often happens, that one sometimes first of all has to learn, what one can be afraid of. Some people even demand that they be thanked if they teach one about everything that should be feared. You always say the opposite, don't be afraid, and I really am extremely grateful for that. I instantly believe that you are my best insurance, that is, against all those, the many who like to spread fear, I don't know why. Despite the danger, therefore, which the dog represented, we were allowed to park, and immediately after our arrival the man began to build. He wanted to construct a canopy, so that we had even more room to stow away all our things. We not only had a big table and two wine tavern benches with us, but also a huge grill, two hammocks, large tins of dog food and containers for the dog biscuits, ropes and sacks, a hot-solder to weld together plastic tarpaulins, hanging frames for cloth wardrobes, any amount of ratchet straps, mats and boxes with crockery and provisions, with tools and climbing gear, also stones gathered on the way, dug up roots and sand.

In the sleeping berth, however, we had very little space. It was so small that even sitting down one had to draw in one's head, and it was also

important to keep one's arms close to one's sides. We were able to cuddle up body to body not just before falling asleep. We couldn't even get out of the embrace because otherwise we knocked against the inside of the driver's cabin across which towelling had been stretched or against the rucksacks which were hanging behind the driver's seat or against the toilet bags which were dangling from hooks just where the mosquitoes also hid. We just couldn't keep our hands off each other. The man and I, we were just as close during the day as at night, once I was rinsing dishes in a tub at the wash stand, and when I came back, the man was already waiting for me longingly, he said that he was glad to see me and that it did him good. The dog, too, was so close to us, that he was quite tense as he waited for one of us to come back from the toilet. Only when all three of us were together, when we formed a unit, was everything all right and no one was afraid. That's how the days passed at the beach. Once, however, there was a moment, when I felt like I do now. I suddenly thought – the clouds were aslant in the windy sky – how would it be if we parted, and it felt like a rent. The dog stood on the sand, exactly half way between us, and the man went to the right in the direction of the sleeping berth and I to the left in the direction of the river mouth. The dog remained standing in the middle for quite a while and only looked back and forward, because it didn't know, to which side it should go, for whom it should decide. It waited a long time and I became very sad, because I thought it can be like that for a child when the parents break up, then it wants to go with both, but it can't tear itself in two. After a while the dog followed him. That was clear to me, because it was his dog after all.

I'm asking you how things can go on. Why are things as they are? Most of all I would like to be simple. Today I haven't looked up any book to see which tip for the day could be of help to me, I have found something myself, or rather, the spider above my bed has told me that in life it's sometimes necessary to do nothing. The spider is so simple that I can hardly grasp it. It lives so much and does so little. Early in the morning it was exactly there and now it's there again, and because today I was not at all the places where I would normally have been, if I had not decided to stay here, I know that in all the time in between it was exactly there, too. It is suspended at a spot, which it feels to be good, I hope so at any rate, for its sake, does not even have a web there, only a couple of threads, and is waiting for someone to approach. Modest and simple. Probably it's also blessed in that it doesn't have to think much either. But I can't really know that.

Another woman friend of mine consulted an energetic healer, a woman who is called a witch by the man with whom she shares an apartment. I also went to see her. The woman works very intuitively, so unconventionally in a way that as a result I felt so liberated as to be able to ask anything and also to ask for unusual things. I asked her to tell me my future and also the reason why the man refuses to really talk to me or to really look into my eyes, to answer my gaze. I wanted to know from her, whether my feeling is right, that he's afraid of what he would discover if he allowed me into his heart. She told me he lived in a world of his own and since then I've called him wolf. But just because wolf lives in a world of his own, doesn't mean that I can't love him any more. That isn't even necessary, she said, because he'll come back again, he

needs time, he has to learn to accept responsibility. I already knew that, and wolf himself has carved the message in his skin: I take responsibility for my life. He repeated the words to himself for days and broke shards and cried out loud, so loud, that one of his friends, whom I also like, was getting worried about who was screaming all the time round the clock. I only found out about it later, at the time he was screaming, I was already asleep, but in my own bed.

Today, as I'm standing in the kitchen, beside the chopping board and looking at the steam as I make tea, a thought suddenly overwhelms me, which the mediator called up. She said that nowadays it's hard to find a man, who really is a man. She traces it back to the wars, in which generations of men were killed, simply didn't come home any more and in which generations of women had to learn to cope with everything alone. Women involuntarily developed their strategies for doing everything themselves and men have learned what it's like not to be present. She described it something like that, I don't know what I should think of it. But then I don't need to know, it's enough for me to have heard it and now, just before breakfast, to be overwhelmed by it. The mediator said a great many other things as well, she said a great deal and related stories from her own life, which confirmed what she thought.

She, too, was recommended to me by a woman friend. But not the woman friend who consulted the numerologist, nor the one who was first to consult the energetic healer. The webs of advice can indeed be astonishingly woven, it's also possible to become entangled in them. But if one's lucky one can be struck by the most useful bit of advice from a spider or a flock of birds flying past above one's head. It doesn't cost any money either, only all one's attention and a great deal of peace and time.

To run my hands through his hair or not to run my hands through his hair, to rest my hand in his hair, to stroke his forehead, to brush past his mouth, and when we kissed, it was sometimes so tender that it hurt. When I think about it now, it is, I don't know how painful, I want to go on feeling his skin. I still don't know why he simply isn't there. Why he isn't lying there, where my hand is, when I stretch out my arm. The spider is able to stay with me three times as long, although it has three times as many legs to run away with as the man.

I think that we suited each other very well for the most various reasons, the wolf man and I. Naturally there is also something to be said against our liaison, but I'm not talking about that now. In our favour there was, for example, the utter difference in the way we dealt with objects. In that respect we were like the two pans of a set of scales, and consequently the pointer stood exactly in the middle, because he tested objects to the limit while I worshipped them almost as if they were holy. I might even apologise to a cup for having put it too brusquely into the sink for washing up or to the salad bowl, if I scrape its glass rim with a plate. Wolf on the other hand is more likely to examine whether an object really was whole by breaking it in half. When sees how it breaks, is bent and groans, then he knows that previously it was different. He once made a trailer for the bicycle, with all the bits and pieces, with a fantastic coupling, a double thread, properly welded and everything, and when the thing was finished he rode it into the ground on a slope in the woods with

lots of roots. There was an asphalt route all the way round, but he didn't want to take it, which was clear to me. That was on the day his brother asked me, what are you doing with him. I didn't reply, because I was astonished that his brother would ask such a question. Was he telling me what he thought of wolf or what he thinks I am or really something about wolf? Although I didn't reply, I went on thinking about what I was doing with him and on this occasion it occurred to me, that I love freaks. If they could believe that things which are left whole are whole, then I would prefer that, but one can't pick and choose freaks, they fall into one's lap like sugar cubes into coffee.

When wolf has new shoes he clammers about on trees until finally the shoes are no longer new. I like that, because there are so many people, who take care of their shoes when they themselves are already dead. It was very sad for me, for example, when not long before her death my aunt showed me a pair of pyjamas which she had kept in a box and wrapped in tissue paper. She had taken more care of them than the apple of her eye, because one doesn't take care of the apple of one's eye, by deciding not to see. The pyjamas had lain in the box for years, because they had seemed too beautiful, too new and too precious to her to wear. They're special she said. And they were to me, too, of course. But they were also rather old-fashioned, impractical and unused, and so they then ended up at a flea market, when they would have deserved nice hours in bed with my aunt and even more she with them.

I'm not overly careful with things either, for instance I don't wash plastic bags. But when I was young I had a tendency to be overly careful, and so I was pleased by what wolf did, so placing weights on his side of the scales.



Apart from the big outbursts, however, wolf also loves little things, he can be very gentle in modest ways. Now and again he sticks a tiny piece of rock crystal in a flower pot, so that the plant benefits, or he devotedly sands down a piece of wood which he then strings together with others to make a mobile. Or he gives me a necklace of stones into one of which he has carved a beautiful symbol with a mini-cutter, these are the sides with which wolf slips into one's heart, but if he doesn't want to any more, then he goes. It may be that's just when I want to rely on him, when he's no longer there, then I want to hear something, so that I can explain a part of it all, but he doesn't say anything. Then he needs his tongue to lick his wounds, which he doesn't show.

Another reason for us being well-suited has to do with the body. Here it's a matter of navel and of toes, of the way a person grasps his own toes, of the smell under armpits and about the corners of eyes. How someone turns a corner, how he jumps over a stone, bends down a branch or goes about swimming in the sea is not insignificant. How someone opens a door and dries himself after a shower, how he places the filter in the coffee machine and fastens the seat belt in the passenger seat, I can like or dislike all of that. How someone squeezes a pimple or dismantles a sink. Wolf has done all of those things before my very eyes.

Wolf now has a wood gathering permit. At some point after the separation, it was a couple of weeks ago, he asked, what was the number

again of the person he should get he should get in touch with if he wants the permit. I gave it to him, as we were sitting in the car and driving to the dog. We already had the idea about the wood gathering when we were still together, I thought it was a good idea, because I would have found it fun to roam the forests and to fetch wood. I imagine it would be difficult for me to do alone, because I can't cut off big branches, whole trees not at all, and also don't have the strength to heave big pieces anywhere. But together with him it would no doubt have worked out very well and we would have had a good haul. Each of us would have had a part of the whole, and if he had been at my place or I at his, we would either way have benefited together from the heat. And we would always have saved heat. I liked working with the wood and with wolf even on stormy days. We stored wood in the cellar, we stored wood behind the house, so that it dries in the hot summer air, then when it was already dry, we passed it, in a two-person chain consisting of him and me, from the woodpile to the cellar window and right through the window into the cellar. It was a good motion, always taking wood from him, throwing wood and immediately turning on one's axis and taking wood from him and throwing wood. Holding the wood close before throwing so that it fits through the segment of the cellar window, because they are such old windows, which are divided in three parts by iron frames, only the individual window leaves can be opened and the frame remains in the way. After dropping them I didn't even look at the pieces anymore, at where they landed, because wolf was already holding out the next one to me, I took them, we looked each other in the eye, I turned away and dropped them, turned and took the new one and looked in his eyes. Sometimes he held out so many for me, he has bigger hands after all, that two fell to the ground and I only had time to lift up what had fallen if wolf stopped, looked me in the eyes and smiled. It was as if we were on an assembly line, and it was fun

because it made me feel dizzy. Unfortunately I don't know why wolf only fetched the wood gathering permit recently and why the separation had to happen in between. Now I even chop up the big pieces myself. At first that was a very laborious business, because the pieces always fell over on the uneven chopping block, but you'll learn, wolf said and left me alone. Now the chopping is much easier than even a few weeks ago, and it's good for working off aggression as well. A colleague asked me if I had any at all. First of all he doesn't know anything about wolf and second some can always be found if one needs to work them off.

(Translated by Martin Chalmers)