

**Peter Wawerzinek**

*I'll find you /*

***Bad love***

translated by Stefan Tobler

*I thought that if I gave myself to writing, I would escape memory's vicious circle. In writing I plunged deeper into remembering than I like.*

SNOW IS THE FIRST THING I can remember. The world lies far around in white, and I have nothing in which to delight, the tree in the field stands forlorn, all its leaves long since from it torn, this silent night only the wind awakes, to give the tree a shake, it touches its top it seems, and speaks as in a dream. It's snowing softly on the village. Then the snowfall becomes heavier. It's so often winter in my head. It snows so often that I think that in my children's home years there was only snow, winter and icy cold. I see myself wrapped up. Frost and snot sticking to my nose. I'm the eternal winter's child among winter's children as we build our daily snowmen. It's November. I'm sitting in a black limousine. I'm four years young inside the giant automobile. The landscape in my memory is snow-white. The driver is a dark outline. The day that I remember as the first day of my life is a day with a fall of snow. A deep grey day, where red spread out in the morning, promising to be a good day. A dark, overcast day which creeps away behind the cover of clouds, which during the day doesn't like to be seen as day, which cedes the terrain to the snow, which whirls down from the grey sky like dust beaten out of an old horse blanket. Like the hare, who in the Grimm tale can't outrun the hedgehog, the snow calls out to me: I'm already here. Oh cold winter, you bring us such pain, you have plucked the leaves from the bowers, have withered all the little flowers, the bright flowers have grown pale, flown away is our nightingale, flown away, will she ever sing again.

*This past week five-year-old Lea Sophie died in Schwerin. Her parents had let her starve to death. A week before her death the social worker assigned to her case did not insist on seeing the child. Social Services are being prosecuted for negligence.*

I'M ON THE WAY to a children's home. I have no idea where I'm being taken, don't know what to expect at the end of the journey. I'm sitting in a limousine. It's very early. The countryside is shrouded in mist. In the mist the resting stones in the farmers' fields become transparent. In the mist everything in nature appears as if in a crystal bowl. In the mist what is light is heavier than a planet throwing its mass onto the worlds' scales. What is inconspicuous can be experienced in all its nebulous lack of clarity for the first time. The stone sleeping inconspicuously in a farmer's field, at the edge of a path, which on a normal day is ignored, bulky and mute, have a closer look, it steps valiantly forth from the mist, gains dignity. In the mist the world is resting, the woods and meadows dream: soon you will see, at the veil's divesting, the blue sky gleams, the steaming world of autumn, bold, flows in a cool gold. Life *exists, is* in the middle of mist, life *is* mist. Let life and mist be written and framed with gold on my gravestone. Mist surrounding me, I know it wishes me well.

THE FIELD LIES spread out like a nightie. I thought I heard a crow call. I've always respected crows. Since that first day I was conscious, I have always admired crows and strands of mist together. I talk of mist and crows when talk is of lightness and gravity, of the disappearance of things in the mist. Wondrous things are also freed of their inner secret in the mist, are no longer part of the everyday. I find the mist most beautiful when crows scream in it, when they can't be seen, and call in the mist, as if to nobody. I saw hooded crows, mist crows. So mist crows will remain my birds of fate until the end of my life. Mist crows accompany me through life. I will be made fertile in the mist, conceived by mist. Strands of mist form the amniotic sac in which I developed. I know that the father no one knows about is safe in the mist. I know that the mother who forgot who I was is deposited in the mist. I'm a citizen of the earth, was not pressed from a mother's womb but crept out of the mist.

*In March this year it became known that fourteen-month-old Jacqueline had starved to death. At six kilograms the girl weighed only half as much as other children her age. The child had not seen a doctor for months.*

IT IS LATE AUTUMN. September. October. November. It can be January, February, June, July, August. It only snows so motherly and gently in memory. The year is 1954. I've been born. The war was over nine years ago. The war is never over, reason says. The rubble has been removed for the most part. Behind the village, behind the city, behind the metropolises, where they could dig out hollows, the rubble has been piled up into great hills. Hills, which are now part of the landscape. As are all the wars being waged, without ceasing, since I entered the world. Warsaw Pact. National People's Army. My mother's belly, which consists of units, and in which I am barracked. My dream job: Policeman in the People's Force. In the belly of the Soviet Union, which granted my mother wide-ranging sovereign rights. Abandoned for the West by my mother, left in children's homes, heading towards the twentieth convention of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The car is called Chaika, like 'seagull'. Four- or five-door. I can't remember any more. Has about two hundred horsepower under the bonnet, the driver is proud to say. Top speed one hundred miles an hour, he pushed it up to that on an airstrip. Quite a feeling, he can tell you that, pinching his fingers together at his lips, he gives them a smacker. He'd love to chauffeur me all around the country, take off, rise, disturb the famous 'over-all-the-treetops' peace, show the crows, trumpet the Aviator's March for them: I rise like a candle to the skies, straight up towards the sun, about what below me lies: with due respect, I don't give a damn. Hip-hip-hurray!

Question: is it true that the Stakhanov worker Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov won a luxury-class Seagull automobile at the All-Union Exhibition in Moscow? Answer: In principal, yes, but it wasn't the Stakhanov worker Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov, but the alcoholic Piotr Piotrovich Petrushkin, and he didn't win a luxury-class Seagull automobile, but stole a bike.

Snow from the snowfall bangs on the windowpanes. November snow, November snow, cheers the child who is in his fourth year by now but just will not speak, appears to be turned in on himself, and understands everything, absorbs every word, and knows one thing for sure: namely that the curious snow has been listening in, and now wants to see the child who has been mute in himself, the mother-and-father-less orphan, and give him a hearty greeting.

It's snowing into my childhood limousine. Snow is falling inside and outside. My life doesn't know any other season except winter. The year was dominated by early winter, winter and late winter. The years stand in a row like snowmen, dressed in nothing but leaky pans on their heads and carrots for noses in their faces. And mist is eternally around me. Years of mist-snow. Snow-mist days shape me. I prop myself up with phantoms of the mind. No chauffeur opened the door of a limousine for me. Many doors remain closed for the new arrival, the child. I see myself taken by the hand, to back corners, to rooms that don't sparkle. Daily life and rhythms. A gathering and holding hands. Marching up and away again, standing, walking on the spot, left turn, right turn, three steps forward, two to the side, letting go of each other's hands, hands behind the back of your chair and holding it, not saying a word, not grinning, walking quietly to the chairs, not running, sitting down in our places, faces forward, looking at our own place, using our spoon first and starting to eat when we are told to. Being good and eating up everything that has been placed on the plate. Staying in our places until the last one has finished eating. Saying 'thank you'. Arrive, leave, go to the bedrooms, finish making the beds, fall asleep on command, going to the toilet after waking up. Not everyone standing at the sink at the same time. Back and combing our hair. Being in the corridor in three minutes' time.

To know what happened to me, I pass through hermetic barriers in secure structures, to be sure of my memories, to gather evidence where there is no trace of gold in the forbidden rooms and where affection is lacking, where there is none, nor any liberties in all the decades down to the present day. You stop in front of the gates of your memory, in front of closed doors, in front of gates of impossibilities, because daily life is a grind and regulations. You functioned, you carried out group craft activities in the allotted free time, all that time your home was an envelope closed with a smooth wax seal. All that time you didn't want detentions.

To remember time means to step out onto pavement slabs covered with forgetfulness, to overcome the years of isolation, and by writing to finally open the blocking gates, barriers and doors and to step into your true identity. Step into the cathedral, through the magnificent arch, step in, all the crazy days this once, step in, in your dusty shoes, oh step in, to rest for some minutes, step into

the cathedral, little man, step in, silence surrounds you here, each pupil expands, each pupil becomes enormous and shines with the windows' colours. Each chest expands, here you breathe in greatness, greatness you breathe in here. And a choir sings: The home was raised by men, ah, ah, to learn the steps of the stepping, to honour the greatness of man.

*Celestine can't bear hardware shops. When the twelve-year-old Berliner was in a DIY store a few months ago, she saw a silver roll of masking tape on one of the long shelves – and had to leave the building immediately. The masking tape reminded her of her ordeal, which she barely survived. Her parents had stuck such tape across her mouth for weeks, perhaps longer, because she was too loud. They left only a little hole, so that she could breathe.*

REASON CONDEMNS as imagination that image I remembered of being driven around in a big luxury car. No four-year-old charge would be driven in luxurious dignity from a home for toddlers to one for pre-schoolers, not thirteen years after the Second World War. Yet I can't get the imagined event out of my head. I don't want to be taken to a children's home as a silent orphan squeezed on a rattling motorbike behind this man in a leather coat. I wasn't carted over on any rrr-bike. I go by limousine. I'm an orphan. The motorbike has been replaced by a limousine. The memory re-touched. Stubbornly I oppose reason. Stubbornly I insist on my six- or thirteen-door limo with a soft top, which – as far as I know – is automatically retractable, even though it isn't known that the Soviet Union-built Seagull had a moveable roof. Whenever I feel like it, I stand on the backseat. Whenever I want, I push the roof back and forth, so that the lovely snow finds me and flakes on me, can rollick with me on the backseat. I advance with my memories against any inner voice of reason. Wishful thinking helps me at the beginning of my trip down memory lane, as a four year old, to get into the imagined limousine. I don't want to be taken to the children's home in a group taxi, in any ambulance or cattle truck, or in a normal bus.

IF I HAVE MY BIOLOGICAL MOTHER to thank for anything, then my intimate feeling for snow, which I would like to call my snow sensibility. There once was a

mother, she had four young children, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Spring brings flowers, Summer the clover, Autumn brings grapes and Winter the snow. I sit at the window and look at the garden of my first children's home, where snow has been falling from the clouds for days, where snow lies on snow and you can see little birds, who can't find any food in the snow, who collect around the bird-house, who feed themselves from the sunflower seeds in the pot of fat. Fat which I poured into the flowerpot under the watchful eye of the cook, called Mrs Flowers, and which I added sun-seeds to.

At my writing desk, as I'm writing, my limousine dream bursts, as around our globe all beautiful dreams should burst when given notice by the more beautiful existence of truth, however often and fixedly people dream hopelessly.

I arrive. Delivered like some goods, I'm driven up to the children's home. I experience it like a stage. No matter from what side I approach my early years, snow is falling and the house's bricks are red as blood.

THE CURTAIN RISES on a small stage, where it starts to snow. The stage is draped in shining, blood red cloth. As if I were looking into the torn-open womb of a mother, the mother's cave. The man in a leather coat rides up. I can hear the sound of his vehicle from behind the stage. The noise has changed gradually over the years from that of a motorbike to that of a limousine. Three stone steps, on which three women in white stand, are pushed in front of the house facade by strong stagehands. The solid man in the leather coat, wrapped in heavy leather down to his calves, steps up, dragging behind him this little boy, who is four years old, who is me. I'm led up to the home by the man in the leather coat. The next time I'll be as curious and bewildered in front of it will be thirty-three years later, only a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I'm holding the hand of the man in the leather coat. He's a mountain, I can't see the peak of his head however hard I try to crane my neck. He drags me along, tows me, doesn't even use the doorbell. The door is opened for him before we reach the steps.

The man in the leather coat wishes the women a good day. I don't want to have to see. I squeeze behind the man in the leather coat, who pulls out a small metal case containing tobacco and paper, which he uses to roll a cigarette. The roll-up in his hand is snow-white. It glows snow-white between his fingers when he

waves his arm about. I can see all that and not see it, although I see almost nothing of it at all. The month of March, says the man, puffing out smoke along with his words. The smoke, which rises in turbulent currents and wiggling movements above the headless man, becomes instable over the hump of his shoulders and disappears into the day's haze. The swallow crosses the ocean on St Gregory's Day. On St. Benedict's it looks for a place to stay. On Bartholomew's it has already gone away. Old country sayings, says the smoking man, saying that you should step outside on the nineteenth to look at the sky. If it's clear, it'll stay that way all year.

The corpulent woman nods. If you say so. You've not been wrong yet. The man puffs and talks and puffs. Smoke doesn't stop coming from the cigarette. The carers smile, contentedly. They want to take in the child of the day. I've got the wee chappie here, the man in the leather coat says. He grabs at nothing behind him, because I escape his attempt, his plump hand. I can't disappear into thin air. I can't climb into his coat, it seems to be moulded from a hard, intractable material. I can't get a grip on any crack. There's nowhere for me to crawl into. Now, no hiding. Show us what a strapping young lad you are. With the certainty of a man grasping a flopping cod by its gills, the man in the coat grabs me behind his back at the second attempt, drags me out, presents his catch to the astonished carers, who slap their hands to their cheeks and as one exclaim: No, that one, surely not. They say goodbye to the smoking man as quickly as possible. The child is led into his new realm. A sweet-smelling home. The child senses that immediately. I'm thin. Unbelievably retarded, the home director scolds me. I'm retarded, thinks the boy, who is me.

The news that a retarded boy has been brought to the house soon gathers the staff around the new arrival, who is the centre of unconcealed interest. I don't think the head matches the rest. God, look at his feet. What thin little arms he has. I think his ears are beautiful. Look! And his ribs alone. The carers stand in front of me with their heads cocked to the side. They look at me from their cocked heads, looking me up and down. They lift me up. How light he is. Like a feather. Holding him on your arm, you can barely feel anything.

The head on my neck is clearly too big. The body connected to my head is as thin as a spindle. They call me spider. They call me daddy-long-legs, praying mantis,

because of my thin arms and legs. I'm placed in the bath, scrubbed with hard brushes. My ears are cleaned out. My hair is cut, my fingernails trimmed. The doctor comes. He strokes my hair gently. They don't want me to be afraid of the doctor, who is wearing a snow-white, innocent coat. Other children scream, and the doctor has to take the white coat off. The white coat doesn't make me afraid: So are you used to the coat?

They grab my right arm at the wrist. They say the word Mother. They feel my pulse. It doesn't alter, remains constant, when they say the word Mother. The word Mother isn't a term to get me excited. The word flies through my head like an arrow through an empty hall. The words meadow, beach, ball and house say more to me. Meadow is playing and the buzz of bees, eating in the open air.

The list of repairs that needs to be done is a long one. I'm standing naked in front of the doctor. The doctor tells me to breathe deeply, to hold the air in my lungs. The doctor feels each and every one of my vertebrae, from my neck, down my spine, to my bum, feels the inside of my thighs with pointed fingers. He checks my calves, ankles, presses my stomach, tries to reach behind my ribs with his fingertips, presses the pad of his finger into the two hollows my collarbone forms. I have to spread out my toes. He has me contort my head, stretch my neck, stand up straight, crooked. I hear my joints crack, am used to such procedures, don't complain, do as I'm told, gaze past the doctor, look down on the women and their blouses, brooches, fingers, hands, skirts, belts, pleats, hips, stumps, hair ends and the tips of their shoes. Does that hurt? I shake my head. Does that hurt? I shake my head. Does that hurt? I shake my head to all the questions. I see the doctor looking thoughtful, turning away abruptly. He speaks in a quiet tone. The carers take a good look at me, they look at the doctor, before they all nod at the same time. A carer blows her nose into a hanky and leaves. The doctor explains his findings and presents a strategy. It will take three years, apparently. It'll soon pass. From the retarded boy a non-retarded boy needs to be formed, before he can be sent to the home for school-age children. The director of the home joins them: You don't like talking? All right. With nobody? I'm Bani. You can call me Bani. You'd prefer not to talk? Sometimes it's better not to say anything. That fish in the aquarium over there, listen! He doesn't talk much either.

The parts of the body which are used for speech are called articulatory or speech organs. The nose. The palate. The tongue. The throat (pharynx). The epiglottis. The larynx with its vocal folds or cords. The windpipe (trachea). The lungs and the diaphragm. Their relative positions in the human body are important. If the dog's larynx were in the same place as the human's, then the dog would make similar sounds to those humans make. Sounds are waves. To produce waves, the lung sets a stream of air in motion. Sounds are produced by pressing air from the lungs, through the larynx and into the upper articulatory tract (mouth, nose, throat). This stream of air is egressive. The egressive air stream is made to vibrate. The vibrations arise in the larynx. Cartilage composes the vibrations of the vocal cords. The free space between the vocal cords is called the glottis. The vocal cords and glottis form the voice production, the pitch and the volume. Voiced sounds, vowels and consonants like [m], [b] or [d] arise when the glottis is narrowed to a crack and the vocal cords vibrate. With the exception of [m], [n] or [ŋ], German consonants and vowels are oral sounds. The soft palate is lowered. Here the air escapes through mouth and nose. Nasal vowels are created. The soft palate is lowered. The mouth is closed. The air flows through the nose. The nasal consonants [n] and [m] are formed. The lips are together, [m] and [p] can be made. The lips are open, [u] and [o] form. The lower jaw directs the lips. The tongue is a mobile articulator. The tongue can be pushed forward and upwards, the tongue is tucked back for the [i], raised slightly for the [u], and pulled back and downwards to say [a]. A characteristic symptom of well-being in babies is babbling. The child babbles for the fun of it. The endless repetition and modulation of individual syllables create great babbling soliloquies, which have an effect on the articulatory organs, training and polishing them. The child is his own speech therapist.