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Caroline Wahl

rowohlt
Please contact:

Lizenzen@rowohlt.de

Caroline Wahl

1,999 METERS ABOVE THE SEA

English sample translation by Simon Pare

[pp. 153–172]

Still driving

"Fuck," I mumble as I pass the town sign, suddenly catching sight in the pinkish evening light of the luminous turquoise lake that practically hurls itself across the road in front of me, occupying my entire field of vision. It looks like something out of a fairy tale.

I drive on very slowly and wonder how many accidents this super-luminous turquoise lake must have caused. I think of Christian Kracht's novel *Fibreland* and the anonymous protagonist drifting across Lake Zurich in the middle of the night, and I wonder, like so many times before, whether he managed to paddle back to the shore, as I take the first exit from the roundabout into Via Serlas, heading away from the lake and into St. Moritz, and giggle as the friendly Google Maps woman announces: "Your destination is on the right."

I glance right, see an orange Lamborghini or Ferrari or something and think: How wonderful to have such a strange place for my destination. Then it occurs to me that I've forgotten to ask St. Moritz for the exact address of his holiday apartment.

I see other amazing cars and an open carriage, pulled by a pair of horses, with a sleek rich woman and a sleek rich man holding champagne flutes in it. I see other sleek rich people with facelifts in designer clothes, along with athletic hiking people in brightly coloured functional wear with rucksacks, walking in the pedestrian zone, but overall there are more sleek rich people with facelifts in designer clothes than athletic hikers, although the athletic hiking people are also very sleek, slim, healthy and perfectly kitted out and look every bit as rich.

"Gucci, Louis, Prada," I rap, unsure how this line from a rap song goes or if the line or indeed the song even exists, as I cruise past the many luxury stores at walking pace. I banned myself from looking up at the mountains during the drive to avoid an accident. Very soon now, though, I'm going to get out and look at them before the sun sets and it goes dark.

As soon as I get the chance, I pull up on the right behind a black S-Class parked on double-yellow lines, send St. Moritz a picture of a ridiculously small green Prada handbag that wouldn't even hold a phone, a sweet at most, in the shop window next to me and write underneath, "What's the actual address?"

I get out and have a good stretch. "Wow, it smells good here," I whisper because it would be too quiet as a thought, and now I'm sure that the special smell in the air is the smell of snow wafting down from the mountain tops. I close my eyes. It smells of grass, fertilizer, lake water, fresh evening air bearing a foretaste of winter, log fires, pastries and maybe even slightly of chocolate. And snow, obviously. This mountain air is so strangely fresh and clean; I'll probably never be able to return to Berlin after today.

Finally, I allow myself to open my eyes, to look up and at them — the mountains. These unbelievably high mountains crowding around the valley as if they were keeping watch over it. Or threatening it. The feeling that floods my chest as I let them into my sight, into my world, is really weird. Maybe a bit like snorting coke and then lying in bed wondering if you've taken too much and are about to die because your heart is tripping and racing and taking off. But in a good way; after all, looking at mountains can't kill you. Although I wouldn't guarantee it. These colossi looming up into the pink, light-blue, white evening sky as if they owned the world and the heavens too, how many people have they sent to their deaths? But those people have only themselves to blame for thinking they could scale these giants. They know the risks. "Wow!" I shout under my breath. "Wow, wow, wow!" I shout repeatedly now, only louder, because it needs to be spoken. These gigantic colossi piercing the red sky. Oh my heart! What a beautiful and peaceful death that would be: a heart attack while staring at the Alps above St. Moritz. I calm myself, try to ground myself, force my eyes downwards, drink in the hilly green landscape, some of it wooded, the isolated houses that seem increasingly lost and small, a cable car up the mountainside, the steepening forests of firs that give way to rocky, craggy, lethal scree slopes and, finally, the sharp white peaks. How small and cute we are down here with our green mini-handbags and orange racing cars.

'No parking here,' says a man in a black suit and top hat standing outside the Prada store, snapping me out of my mountain-induced paralysis. Cute on him, that top hat. He looks as if he's stepped straight out of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *Alice in Wonderland*. I point to the S-Class in front of my car.

Top-hat man: The driver's waiting for a customer.

Me: But I want to go into the store too.

Top-hat man: We're about to close.

I point to the green mini-handbag.

Me: I only stopped because I wanted to look at that handbag.

Top-hat man runs an eye over me and my car. Calculates how to classify me. Vintage car fan, or poor? I read in his enquiring look. Balenciaga or charity shop? His eyes linger on my orange hair. Trendsetter, or WHAT THE HELL? his expression states, before his eyes swivel to meet mine and he suddenly flashes me an extremely genial smile. He holds the door open for me.

Top-hat man: Please, madame.

"Merci, monsieur!" I say decisively, step inside and view this as a test of my mettle.

Top-hat man: Can I offer you something to drink? An espresso? Champagne?

Me: Yes please. Do you have iced cocoa?

Iced cocoa sounds better than iced chocolate.

A quizzical look.

Me: Cocoa on ice, a bit like an iced latte.

Top-hat man: Of course! Marco, an iced cocoa for the young lady.

Marco, a sleek, good-looking, smartly dressed young man, goes off after greeting me with a friendly "Grüezi, madame!"

Top-hat man: The young lady is interested in the fern-green mini-bag in the window, Marielle." Marielle, a sleek, good-looking, smartly dressed, short, slim, blonde woman of about fifty with bright-red lips, comes over to me. "Grüezi, madame. That is a very special small handbag," she announces in a strong Swiss accent.

Marielle: We also have it in caramel, amber, burgundy, but the fern-green goes so wonderfully well with your beautiful orange hair."

Marielle: Louise, please bring all the mini-bags we have. Thank you!"

Louise, a sleek, good-looking, smartly dressed young woman goes off after greeting me with a friendly "Grüezi, madame!" How many people work in this small shop? I can't see the customer from the S-Class. I can't see any customers at all, in fact. Marielle makes small talk with me as I stroll along the shelves, and presents a range of teeny-tiny handbags. She seems to think I'm only interested in teeny-tiny handbags. I point to a large caramel-coloured bag.

Me: I like that one!

Marielle: Yes, the Bonnie bag is exceptionally popular. It comes in a variety of sizes and colours.

She passes me the bag.

Marielle: Where are you from, if I may ask?

Me: Berlin.

Marielle: Berlin! I thought so immediately. You have that unmistakable urban style. Those heavy shoes with that dainty dress! Is this your first time here with us in St. Moritz?

Me: Yes. And where are you from?

Marielle: St. Gallen.

Me: And how long have you lived here?

Marielle: It's been nineteen years. A friend who was born here told me they either run for it immediately or stay for ever.

Me: Who's "they"?

Marielle: Us. The people who work here and aren't on holiday.

I wonder if I should run for it or stay for ever, but since I don't work here, the rule won't apply to me anyway.

Marco returns carrying a tray with an iced cocoa, a glass of water and a plate with three coloured chocolates in a line. Next to them is a Prada logo sprinkled in gold powder.

"Thank you," I say, taking the iced cocoa, my long-delayed very first.

Me: It tastes fantastic. Very chocolatey.

Marco: Caotina.

Louise comes back from the store room and arranges the mini-bags on the glass table in front of me. I pick up the green one, open it, look inside. It could hold six or seven sweets.

Me: What kind of price are we talking about?

Marielle: Two thousand five hundred.

"Oh, affordable," I say, reaching for the burgundy one and stepping up to the mirror with the burgundy one in my right hand and the fern-green one in my left.

Marielle: An absolute it-piece!

Marielle: With your hair and your minimalist style, the fern-green one looks absolutely divine!

Me: Thank you. But I think the red one's fabulous too. Makes such a lovely contrast to my hair, doesn't it?

Marco: Yes, a lovely contrast to your hair!

Me: Maybe I should just buy both.

Marco: With these timeless mini-pochettes, you just can't go wrong.

Marielle: Where did you get that wonderful black dress?

Me: Balenciaga, I think.

My mobile rings. St. Moritz! Oh shit, why does he have to call right this moment?

Me: Excuse me, it's my investment adviser. I have to take this.

Top-hat man holds the door open.

Me: Hello?

St. Moritz: Salut! So you've made it to St. Moritz.

It's strange to hear his voice, and immediately the image of this amazingly handsome man comes back to me, his short blond hair, his ice-blue eyes and the white VW Golf suit, stepping out on to the roof terrace of Soho House, looking straight at me, making my heart skip a beat. I walk down the street nervously, away from the fern-green and burgundy mini-handbags and the army of Prada minions.

Me: Of course I am. You thought it was a joke or something?

St. Moritz laughs.

St. Moritz: No, I figured you were serious, but I'm still a bit surprised. Anyway, nice to hear you got there all right. How do you like it so far?

Me: A lot! It smells so fresh and strange. It does smell a bit of snow, doesn't it?

St. Moritz laughs again. Cute, I think, keen to maybe make him laugh again.

St. Moritz: You've got exactly the right idea. It has a very particular atmosphere in late summer and autumn. Best of all, though, it isn't so overrun.

St. Moritz: But when St. Moritz is properly snowed in, it's the most beautiful place in the world. You have to experience that.

I give no response and try to imagine what it might be like here when the whole place is full of snow, and my heart skips again.

St. Moritz is talking to someone else in English.

St. Moritz: Sorry, got to hang up. I'll send the address. Ring the bell marked Lüthi, and Brigitta will give you the key to the apartment. Call if you need anything! Amuse-toi bien!

He sends me the address, and I immediately put it into Google Maps. Eight minutes. Easy. Another message pops up. St. Moritz has sent me a picture. It's the view of a snow-covered coniferous forest from a window. The snow on the trees is so deep that some firs are sprawling on the ground, exhausted and broken. It looks like something out of a fairy tale, and I think that what this picture shows might really be the most beautiful place in the world. As I walk back to my car, I give some stupid, smitten teenager a smile and I really couldn't say if it's down to the snow or to St. Moritz.

Starting the engine, I wave goodbye to the man in the top hat.

Three more days in St. Moritz

"You have reached your destination," Google Maps says at the last small wooden house on the street, a little separate from the others, directly next to — or, more like, in — the adjacent woods. It smells even more strongly of snow when I get out. Is it about to start snowing? I leave the suitcase in the car for now, taking with me only my bag containing the Leica, laptop and other stuff, stop in the middle of the path leading up to the front door, get out the Leica, take a picture of the wooden house standing next to the conifers in the growing darkness and wonder what awaits me inside. If it weren't for the red and purple flowers in the wooden window boxes, if it weren't for the small wooden bench next to the entrance and, above all, if it weren't for the sweet little white Suzuki parked outside, the whole thing might not look so inviting and a little scary instead. Or is it scary precisely because it looks so inviting? Who cares. Only one name by the bell: Lüthi. I press it. Twenty-one, twenty-two, the buzzer goes, I push the door open and find myself in a dark staircase.

"Grüezi!" someone calls from upstairs, the light comes on, and an old woman appears on the landing above — slim, petite, dark clothes, short, white, curly hair, a fun face.

"Grüezi!" I call back and go up the stairs to meet her because she clearly isn't planning to come down. She studies me with her arms folded and a grin that doesn't really suit an elderly woman, more a young boy up to tricks.

Brigitta: So, you're the lass Fritz warned me about.

I have to concentrate hard to understand her dialect.

Brigitta: I'm supposed to keep an eye on you. No getting up to mischief!

She gives me a wink. I smile at her and say, "Wouldn't dream of it!", and panic suddenly takes hold of me because I can't remember which name I gave St. Moritz at the time. Soho House, music producer — Sam! If my parents ever found out . . . They used to hate it when Ida occasionally called me Mara. "But Samara is such a lovely name!"

I shake her hand and say, "I'm Sam." Her hand is small and warm, her handshake firm.

Brigitta: Sam! Are your parents English?

Me: No.

Brigitta: Sam for Samira?

Me: No, just Sam.

Me: Like Assam, but without the a.

Brigitta bursts out laughing, throwing her head back as she guffaws. It looks weird. I can't help but join in because I'm glad I've made her laugh with such a stupid joke and because Brigitta's laughter is infectious.

Brigitta: Sam like Assam, but without the a.

She gives me a grin. Her face is really interesting. There's something childish there, an impish mischief in her features. What is it? Her twinkling green eyes and her many laughter lines? Or the small, narrow mouth that doesn't seem to be smiling, even when she has a big beaming smile on her face? Or those ears sticking out of her fluffy hair? Her ears really are peculiar, small and pointy, like an elf's.

Brigitta: You're quite something, Sam!

She presses the key into my hand and points upstairs. She seems to want rid of me and to be done with chatting. Which is very pleasant after my time at Gertrud's.

Me: So you live here?

Brigitta: Yes, I've lived in this house my whole life. My father built it.

Me: And how do you know Fritz?

Brigitta: It's a long story. Maybe some other time, Sam.

She grins at me as if she could see right through me, and that scares me. Can elves read your mind?

Brigitta: Up the stairs. There's only one door. And no mischief!

I do as she says, go up the stairs, insert the key into the only door, outside which there is a mat with three Father Christmases on it, and just before I open it, Brigitta, who is standing in the hallway still, or again, calls out, "Tell me if you need an axe!"

"OK," I call back, stepping into the dark entrance, grope for the light switch, find it, see wood-panelled walls, two doors, a black shoe rack and a slim red wardrobe. I take off my shoes because, after all, there's a shoe rack right there, it smells clean here and I don't want to leave any marks. The shelf still holds a pair of brown hiking boots, size 44, some wellies and indoor shoes, sort of grandad slippers, and I place my boots next to the grandad slippers. I open the red wardrobe to find a winter jacket, a waterproof jacket and a fleece.

Full of curiosity, I open the first door and step into a dark, yellow-tiled bathroom that smells fresh and cold. A white towel and a bathrobe are draped over the edge of the bathtub.

"I'll have a bath later," I mumble.

Beyond the second door is a small living cum dining room, all of fifteen square meters, also with a wooden floor and wood-panelled walls. I hear the whoosh of the small radiator under the windows, as Brigitta seems to have turned it right up, and I smell wood, forest, coffee and fire. I like the smell. By now it's pitch dark outside, so I switch on the light and note that the small leather sofa is the same caramel shade as that fabulous Prada bag earlier. On the floor is a round woollen carpet whose batik-like colour progressions bring to mind the sea. Or clouds. By the window is a small, square oak table, two retro rattan chairs and along the opposite wall are pea-green kitchen units, seventies at a guess.

And next to them, a fireplace. So that explains the axe. I laugh out loud. First impression: very little furniture and stuff, but cosy and strangely timeless.

I stand in front of the only picture, which looks a little lost on the walls. It's a framed photo, 10 x 15 cm, of a golden boy, quite clearly Fritz. Light-blond curly hair, ice-blue eyes whose intensity can only be imagined due to the poor image quality, maybe two or three years old, sitting in denim dungarees on the shoulders of a man who is looking at the photographer with a faint smile on his lips. His gaze is tender. Fritz is beaming and stretching his arms up into the air, with a defiant look at the photographer. Surely the beloved mother and wife. The dark-green fleece the man is wearing is the one hanging in the red wardrobe in the entrance. I look away with a sense of having intruded on a very private moment. None of my business.

I open the door by the window and find myself in the bedroom, which is almost entirely taken up by a large, flat wooden bed. It smells of fresh bedding, wood and forest. I turn on the light and scan the room. Hardly any space to the left and right of the bed with the snowy white bedding, but to its right stands a small bedside table with an orange lamp and a nose spray on it, as well as a narrow wardrobe. There is barely a metre between the foot of the bed and the balcony door either: you can stumble straight out of bed, through the door and on to the balcony. Next to the wardrobe is another door — how exciting! A donkey is propped on the bed with its head and back against the pillow, staring out of the window. Could Fritz be a psycho? What do I really know about him, apart from that he's a bigshot in the film industry? If you believe the influencer, that is. He probably lives in Berlin. With the information I have, I'm bound to be able to find him online. But I decide not to, without quite understanding why. I don't have data in Switzerland anyway. Apart from the donkey, the bedroom is also spartanly furnished, the only dab of colour being an oil painting above the head of the bed.

I've rarely seen a more beautiful picture. Right and left, three high, dark mountains whose summits can only be imagined in the dense clouds, a river winding through the valley between the peaks, a road on the right, a horse drinking from the yellow moonlit watercourse. In the background, tucked away, is a small, dark, wooden house at the foot of a mountain, easy to miss were it not for the smoke rising from the chimney and light in the window. Something is written in the smoke. I perch on the bed near the donkey and study the picture more closely, see the white glacier on the horizon and wonder how far it might be from the little house and whether the person who lives in it has ever been up on it. The writing on the swirls of smoke says I THINK I'LL STAY HOME TODAY. Would I want to stay home if I was in that house, if that house were my home? What's the view like from the window? Must be beautiful. Is the person watching the horse? What does the loneliness there feel like? Does the person live alone in the cabin? Maybe two or three people live there together.

I jump to my feet — this is none of my business —, step out on to the small balcony and have the impression I'm standing in the middle of the forest. I look out into the sprucey, fir-filled darkness in front of my nose, maybe understanding a little better now why this picture is hanging inside, and close my eyes. A stream gurgles, birds twitter, an eagle owl cries out, I smell spruces or firs and wish my nose could tell the difference between the tree species. What else does it smell of? Moss, damp earth, mushrooms maybe? Meadows, hay, cowpats? And now I'm absolutely certain that it smells of snow.

When does the first snow of the year fall here? It's pretty chilly for September, in single digits for sure. How high up are we here anyway? I go back inside and open the wardrobe, which is almost empty. Only one compartment is taken. A quick stock-take: four pairs of white socks, two pairs of knitted socks, four pairs of boxer shorts, ski pants, some black Adidas tracksuit bottoms, two white short-sleeved and two white long-sleeved T-shirts, a pair of jeans, a white shirt, two sets of dark-blue ski underwear.

I imagine him in ski underwear, wonder if he would still look as amazingly handsome and immediately banish these thoughts from my mind.

"Samara!" I hiss.

When I was small, six or seven maybe, I desperately wanted ski underwear after seeing some for the first time in an Aldi catalogue. I'd always liked onesies or matching tops and bottoms, anything that went well together. And then I saw this family of four in the Aldi catalogue, all of them in tight-fitting grey matching tops and bottoms that looked like superhero costumes. I

even reckon that it was in a wood cabin too and that you could see snowbound countryside through the windows.

Me: What's ski underwear?

Mum: For skiing. You put it on under your ski suit so you don't get cold.

Me: Looks very snug! Will I get ski underwear?

Mum: You don't need any. We never go skiing. And you've already got so many pairs of pyjamas.

Mum was right about that. I did have a lot of pyjamas. I loved pyjamas because of my foible for tops and bottoms and because of the great fabrics and patterns. I remember the pink Nicki pyjamas with lots of little piglets on them, and my absolute favourite pyjamas, the midnight-blue silk ones with the yellow moons and stars on them. It was a terrible day when I grew out of them.

Me: But it's so tight fitting. Like a superhero costume!

"And it is especially warm, breathable, moisture wicking and quick dry," I read falteringly from the Aldi catalogue. I'd only just learned to read.

Mum: But where would you wear it?

Me: At home.

Mum: Don't be so silly, Samara.

I shut the catalogue and went to my room to do my homework.

Me: I'm going to do my homework.

Two days later, when I got home from school, the ski underwear was lying on my bed. From Tchibo, no less, and not grey but bright red, because Aldi had sold out of grey. Mum never bought anything from Tchibo.

Mum: And now I want to hear no more about it, got that?

I nodded with a big grin on my face.

From that day on, the first thing I did after I got home from school was to slip into my warm ski underwear and then do my homework or play. I should get a new set sometime, I think as I fold up Fritz's dark-blue ski underwear and put it back in the wardrobe compartment.

Unlike the other doors, the one by the wardrobe looks modern, and the wall isn't wood-panelled but painted white. So the wall and the door were installed recently. How exciting! Expectantly, I open the door and find myself in a very small, thin room: a study. An empty desk with a chair by the window, a slim bookshelf containing mostly novels, among which I recognize a few

current titles but mixed in with lots of classics like Kafka, Salinger, Auster, Keun. I pull out Jenny Erpenbeck's *Kairos*, which I really enjoyed, in search of signs of reading, bent corners or something. Written in pencil on the first page: longwinded, DNF. Funny. I crouch down. On the bottom shelf is an old film encyclopedia, a book about the Baader-Meinhof Group and a bird guide. Wild, I think, chuckling away quietly to myself like a psycho. Fritz, the film-industry bigshot. Should I investigate?

"No, Samara!" I hiss again.

A slip of paper is sticking out of the bird guide, and I flick to the page. A tawny owl, "the silent hunter", stares at me with its button eyes as it flies towards me. "The tawny owl (*Strix aluco*) gives quavering hoots during courtship or when marking its territory. The male tawny owl's eerie song is heard primarily during mating season in autumn and late winter."

I sit down on the wooden chair with its small checked cushion. Not exactly cosy, I think, feeling a curious sensation as I look out into the dark forest. I feel I am on the scent of something, a different lifestyle or something, but above all I can feel how exhausted I am after the painkillers, the hike, the drive.

Shortly before going to bed, I take a bath because I want to be clean for my first night in St. Moritz. I almost doze off in the tub and can hardly stand the silence, so I slip into the white bathrobe, pad back into the bedroom, open the windows and the balcony door wide, turn the radiator off and, with the last of my strength, jump on the bed the way people sometimes jump on to hotel beds in films, although this bed, due to its low frame and hard mattress, isn't as good for jumping as those high box-spring beds in hotels with their presumably very soft mattresses. The last thing I hear is the call of an eagle owl. Ooh-hu. Or was it a tawny owl?

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That afternoon I park outside a rustic building with a large gate. There is nothing but the nice cars outside the wooden building to suggest that this is anything other than an ordinary old barn. I go inside, and the way the light falls through the gaps between the dark wooden slats is lovely, but I don't care for the bags or nets suspended from the ceiling. I watch a man standing looking at the dark-blue mesh bag with his hands on his hips and would like to see what he

sees, think what he thinks about the mesh bag. He stands there for three minutes at least. Is he part of the installation? Maybe he has to stand in front of the dark-blue mesh bag, studying it with interest, so that people wonder what the hell he sees in this dark-blue mesh bag. I wonder what he's thinking as he pretends to study this dark-blue mesh bag. He's probably wondering what's for dinner. Fish and steamed vegetables. He's very slim and wirily athletic, clearly eats healthily, cutting most carbs out of his diet. Maybe he's thinking about the shopping he needs to do after work. Do we have enough toilet paper? Or he has stopped thinking completely. After two weeks of staring straight ahead every day, it's become a form of meditation for him: nothing but the blue of the mesh bag and the light falling into the room at different angles over the course of the day. Is he allowed to change position? Apparently not, I think after observing him for two more minutes. I imagine him getting home in the evening and his wife asking him how the day at the gallery went. "Fine," he replies. This idea makes me laugh, and the man turns to look at me. I apologize, hoping I haven't wrecked the installation, and go down a level. Large oil paintings hang on the white walls. I stop at the portrait of a small boy who stares at me despite not having a proper face. The child stands there, as detached and calm as an adult, in a dark-green rollneck sweater, with his hands folded behind his back, his face blurred and only the outlines of his eyes, mouth and nose recognizable. I try to hold the boy's judgemental gaze. A child staring down the viewer like a grown-up and silently condemning that viewer for their futile actions: that is true horror, I think and have to avert my eyes. All that's missing is for the lad to shake his head. "I know!" I'm tempted to shout out, but then I spot Serena sitting on a bench in the middle of the room, fiddling with her phone. I quietly move out of the boy's firing line and leave his eyes trained on Serena. With his hands folded behind his back the boy is now looking down on the woman sitting on the bench, fiddling with her phone, and I have no desire to know what he thinks. It's crazy that she cannot sense his withering gaze. I take a picture of the two big kids together, and this time Serena notices. She doesn't appear to mind and beams as she stands up, so I walk over to join her.

Me: Sorry, I should've asked, but you looked so wonderful, sitting there lost in thought, and I didn't want to ruin the picture.

Serena: Can I see?

Me: Sure!

I show her the picture.

Serena: Che bello!

Me: Has anyone ever told you that you look like Serena van der Woodsen?

Serena: Oh yeah! Lots of people say that, actually.

Serena: Are you a photographer?

Me: I wouldn't call myself a photographer, but I do take lots of photos.

The Bear, Blair and the Beast join us. We introduce ourselves. The Bear's name is Korbinian, Blair's is Kamilla, Serena's Filippa, the Beast is called Balthasar, and I'm Teresa.

Korbinian: You were on the terrace at the Palace earlier, right?

Me: Were you all there too? I didn't see you.

Filippa: What's your handle on Insta? You're welcome to tag me.

Me: I'm not on Instagram. I'll let you know if the photo goes on show. It's best to give me your email.

Kamilla: Cool! So you're an artist?

I shrug.

Me: What does artist even mean?

Balthasar: What's your surname?

Me: No surname. Just Teresa. Or Resa.

Korbinian: And where do you exhibit?

Me: It's a little complicated

"It's a little complicated," I say, and those words make things complicated.

Me: I'm involved in a collective project at the moment.

Me: All of us artists have a backstory, so we're starting from scratch, that's the idea. Which means no social media, no portfolio, no biography, virtually no name. Nothing but our art. We're meeting up again in three months.

Kamilla: So cool!

Balthasar: But aren't you undermining the project by telling us about it?

Me: We discussed that a lot, but in the end there's no getting around it, and the reactions are part of the performance. How else is it supposed to work?

Me: What kind of artist tells people she has no works as yet, no social media and so on?

Filippa: A con artist!

Me: Precisely! A con artist!

Korbinian: And you can choose the place yourselves?

Me: That's right. I thought St. Moritz would be perfect.

Balthasar: I'd probably have picked St. Moritz too. The number of galleries and the audience are unique.

Korbinian: So it's a kind of competition?

"No, there's no competition in art!" I cry.

Me: It's all about art.

Me: Can art find its way? What part do looks, gender and background play? What happens when relationships and connections fall away? All that stuff.

Kamilla: Well cool! A bit like I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here! except the art world stands in for the wilderness and you have to survive.

Me: Something like that.

Filippa: And what's your goal?

Me: I don't have a goal. First and foremost, I just want to keep making art. Photographing things and people that interest me, and then see what happens.

Filippa nods extremely vigorously. She at least is in the bag.

Me: So you, for example, now know that I am involved in art and taking part in a collective project, but what do you do with that information? What do people do with that information?

My eyes sweep the group.

Me: They want to see the art. They're curious. They google, don't find anything, which just makes them all the more curious, and hopefully they'll focus on the work and not on the person behind it, which is the way it should be.

Me: Or isn't that the way it should be? Is all the other stuff just part of it?

Now Korbinian is nodding too.

"Interesting," the Bear growls.

Me: Anyway, I've got to go. I'm meeting up with a friend.

Filippa: Fancy coming along to the Scarpetta later? Or to the Pavarotti Bar?

Me: That's kind of you, but I'm off up the mountain tomorrow and I need to be in shape.

Filippa: Want to give us your number?

Me: Not allowed to give out my number, sorry.

Balthasar: On Saturday there's a cool, exclusive party at the middle cable-car station on Corvatsch. The barbecue chef's being flown in and there'll be a DJ from Berlin too, if you fancy it? The theme's Lunar Bass.

Filippa: Saturday's full moon.

Me: I'll have to see. We're bound to bump into each other over the next few days. St. Moritz's a small place, after all!

My heart is pounding. The worst that can happen, I tell myself as I hurry to my car, isn't all that bad.

Not long afterwards, I'm sitting by the window in the study again, staring out at the spruces or firs, wondering what exactly Fritz is working on here and what the spruces or firs stir in him. Does it feel like home when he looks at the spruces or firs? Is he overcome by a sense of calm that he doesn't feel elsewhere? You should be able to concentrate here. If you imagine you're out there in the forest among all the trees and the animals; if you imagine you might be an animal yourself, a little squirrel, a tawny owl or an eagle owl. How far up into the mountains do eagle owls fly, actually?

The most unique thing about this place is the smell. I've never smelled anything like it before and I really can't tell if it's the smell of coming snow, the way you can sometimes smell rain before it rains, or if it's the smell of mountains. Maybe mountains just smell so unique. But there's something else, something cold and grand and uncanny in the air, something I've never smelled before, which gives me a strange itch. There's something in this smell, in the air, that makes my heart beat faster, and I don't mean that metaphorically or in some stupid, kitsch sense. I'm not sure the unique smell here really does make my heart beat faster. The smell definitely drifts down from higher up, and I wonder how strongly it would smell up there and whether, if I went up there, I might come back down a different person?

That'd be nice.

There are smells that really floor you. The smell of sea and salt blowing through the lanes of a port or seaside town. The smell after an evening shower in the summer, steaming on the asphalt and sometimes you can even see it. It's called petrichor. But this smell here, the one that's always here, one I can't forget, one that suddenly knocks me sideways, the one that keeps suggesting to me that there's something up there that I'll never grasp, something that makes everything seem pointless and futile. This smell is probably — no, not probably; definitely — the most wonderful thing I've ever smelled. This smell in my nostrils keeps reminding me of the drive over the pass and how scared I was, while all the while thinking if I had a car accident here, miss a bend and go crashing down into the valley, that would be fine. Like a toy car a kid

has thrown off a balcony, I see my small black cabriolet plummeting off the edge with its roof down. That would be a good last moment. I think back to that drive over the pass as if it were a dinner with a nice handsome man I fell in love with over the food.

Again and again, I imagine those rising bends through the gigantic mountains, soaring higher and higher into the sky, as if they were a series of sweet things the man said. I imagine the colour of the sky and the shapes of the clouds as the glow in the eyes of the man opposite me. It was bright blue and pink, the sky was, and I don't recall there being any clouds. I imagine all of this, especially this strange air and the smell, think that it'll be impossible to leave St. Moritz without driving over a pass and that I'll definitely cross the pass with the roof down, and I can't help smiling, can't stop grinning like some lovestruck idiot.

And when I think of that drive and of this strange smell that will be even stronger up there, of the snow about to fall, suddenly I feel fine again. Suddenly everything is all right again.