

Sample Translation

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The reddish moon is suspended in the sky. Outrageously large. It was named after a fruit, they don't know anymore which one, it doesn't matter, I don't look at it.

The door to the balcony stands wide open. I lie on the floor up to my neck in the apartment, looking out into the night. The threshold is my pillow. Not very comfortable, but it's too cold for me to be outside.

I covered myself with my coat. The collar reached up to my chin.

It is pitch-black in the living room. Only muted router lights next to the keyboard.

I don't care. I look straight up.

Two, three stars shine softly in Vienna's light pollution, in addition to blinking airplanes, ghostly satellites, and invisible space trash. The brightest ones were gone all summer. However long it always takes. Now Jupiter is high in the sky again and if I turn my head to the left, tiny, Saturn which will disappear again in two hours, at the latest by three in the morning. Orion will soon finally be in position, and with Orion, Betelgeuse.

It can be seen first in the countryside in September, as a glowing granule then imbedded in the sky on the edge of the flattest fields. *Based on the color (fire, blood) associated with war. Called the herald.*

I shiver.

I brush a strand of hair out of my face. Some bleach their hair a hydrogen peroxide blonde; the stars are also made out of hydrogen. Someone mentioned that in a podcast; it has to do with their death: *Supernova. Plural supernovae. Explosion. The luminosity of the star increases a million- to a billionfold; for a short period, it will be as bright as a galaxy.* Fusion chains of the so-called shell burning: hydrogen to helium, helium to carbon, carbon to neon, neon to oxygen, oxygen to silicon, frenzied, faster and faster, the star discards its shells, collapse: silicon to iron, *the element with the atomic number 26. Iron atomic nuclei have the highest bonding energy of all atomic nuclei.* The synthesis from helium to oxygen will continue for millions more years; the conversion of silicon to iron happens within a few days. That's the end.

No more energy released.

Death of a star. But not now.

The trees rustle. The wind rips off leaves which rustle. One falls onto the balcony.

Autumn: *In the temperate regions, the time for the harvest and the shedding of leaves. The Latin carpere means "to pluck" and is found in Greek, as karpós, "fruit, harvest", in Lithuanian as kirpti, "to prune", as well as in the Greek krōpion, "sickle."*

I tilt my head as far back as I can, look through the bars on the balcony; there is Saturn. I hold my hand over my eyes so they remain sensitive to the timid light overhead because three feet next to Saturn, a foot and a half from me, sits Joseph. Outside on the balcony on a bench.

His cell phone lights up.

Please, I say, and Joseph, I say reproachfully.

Just a second. What's wrong?

I don't want to say anything, so I don't say anything, but then I say, *For a few hours, I've had heart palpitations in my knee.*

Joseph: *Oh, dear.*

Theresa: *I already took something, but it didn't really help.*

Joseph: *Did you sleep this afternoon?*

Theresa: *No. I had to fill in.*

Joseph: *Don't overdo it again.*

Theresa: *Don't say things like that. I'm being careful.*

Joseph seems nervous. Looks at me. Smokes faster than normal. He's freezing, just sitting there curled up. The hand he's not using for smoking is wedged under his armpit. He wears a striped shirt that is so thin his nipples shimmer through the material in the daylight; they aren't large and reddish; I think they're beautiful.

Would you like to listen to some music? Joseph asks.

I close my eyes.

Sad strings from the synthesizer. Then a soft, somewhat bitter voice with a spark of richness in it says, *Night*. And continues: *White rain*. I don't know the song. Joseph sets his cell phone next to my head, steps over me into the apartment. *Hard labor. Special clothing, special footwear. Angle grinder and side cutter, on the powerline in the rain*. The song is right next to my ear; I turn my head even closer. In quick succession, the singer lists the metals: *cadmium, cobalt, copper, nickel, tin, zinc, bronze, lead, something for everyone*.

Joseph in the kitchen; he opens the refrigerator; the freezer crunches when it's closed and I call, *please bring me an iron capsule*.

Joseph returns. With a glass and a pill in his hand.

He lies down next to me. I turn onto my side, look at him.

My head is in my hand. His head is in his hand.

I kiss him on the cheek.

We eat dark chocolate. It was in the freezer. On the edge of the package, the frost is prickly. Wherever I touch it, it's wet.

Joseph puts his hand on the inner side of my arm.

I'm wearing the striped sweater that scratches.

He lets the chocolate melt in his mouth. I prefer it when it breaks frozen, and I roll onto my back. Slight pain, lower left.

Perfectly round.

Wera wants to move to Vienna, says Joseph.

Not again.

She doesn't want to be in Warsaw anymore.

And that's why she wants to come to you.

No, but she thinks Vienna is beautiful.

When is she coming?

She's already here, I think.

You think.

She is already here. I wanted to tell you earlier.

When?

A couple of days ago. But she used to show up sometimes, then disappear again. And I wanted to wait for the time being.

Where's she living?

With friends. In the Fruchtgasse.

Around the corner?

*Just temporarily. The room there is cheap. In a shared apartment.
I'd like to know if I still have the pictures from the photo booth I took last time she was here.
Apparently, nothing permanent. The toilet is in the hall.
Maybe they're in the briefcase with the postcards.
There isn't even a kitchen.
Are you going to loan her some money?
I offered to pay her first rent.
You know we don't have any money either, don't you?
I know. She'll give it back.
Maybe I put the pictures in the folder with the old bills.
What pictures?
Pictures from a photo booth. I took four pictures of me when she was here the last time. After
the movies.
I know. We didn't see you at first.
I thought I was going alone with Wera.
I was there, too.
Don't know.*

*Well, I was there. She wants to look for work, Joseph says, maybe in some kind of factory, and he laughs, and I laugh, too, a little derisively; I don't want Wera to be here, but she is here, along with her eyelashes, *cilia*, *Latin cilia*, which was the very first thing Joseph fell in love with. The half-sentence in which he mentioned it once in passing. Her eyebrows, he said, were transparent in her blondness, but her eyelashes, deep dark brown like four feathered little animals, constantly communicating conspiratorially against one another, sometimes in sync, then again not, one side moves, the other stays still. He never mentions her eyes. Whenever I've tried to remember Wera's face since then, I see a surface with the usual facial curves and depressions, a small, heart-shaped mouth, oval nostrils, and the entire face is dominated by the only thing moving, somehow on the move, her eyelashes. In between: no whites of the eyes, no iris, no pupil. Only a dark colorless spot.*

Wera and Joseph met when she tried to steal his wallet. In it, there was only change. Which is why she gave it back again. Suddenly, an attraction at a level neither one was able to ignore, and not knowing what else to do, slept with one another almost where they were within thirty seconds after the undoing of the theft. Inseparable. Even in sleep, they held hands, or so I imagined, and Joseph says it certainly wasn't like that, you're just imagining that; when you constantly touch, you don't have to be holding hands, too. Until Joseph had to go to Vienna again after a few days. Six months later, I met him at a party, through a mutual friend, he introduced us *Theresa Joseph Joseph Theresa*, we talked, that was all. Indecision. I had the feeling, I could kiss Joseph, but I could just as easily not kiss Joseph, so I kissed him, a couple of days later I came down with a high fever. It was almost 99 degrees outside; in my body, a little warmer. Joseph brought over a watermelon. It smelled pink and watery with a few scattered white seeds inside. We watched a movie by Jacques Becker, *The Hole*, 1960, five prison inmates who want to hammer their way out of the prison, take turns and care for each other when they drink coffee in their cell, eat bread, the camera so close to the rough hands, sweaty hair, dusty shirts, that I eventually fell asleep exhausted, feeling like I had worked really hard myself.

We kissed the next morning when it was over 103 degrees; soon after that, everything began to blur. Vague memories of burnt carrots in a pot of soup. Various body parts that we bumped sometimes in a pleasant manner, other times in an unpleasant one. Joseph's head fiery white. Stories

of dreams, which were barely distinguishable from reality. Something with a cup that was checkered, black and white and white and black, similar to a chessboard, but sewn out of material, coffee dripping continually from the bottom. Eventually, I staggered dizzily out of the last remnants of the fever.

Zwieback crumbs on the floor.

The first shower. My stomach empty, as I stood under the lukewarm water and watched the tiles spin around me as if I were their eye. How I sit in the shower pan. How I can barely stand up.

I walked feebly into the kitchen. Looked into the atrium. Shooed away a pigeon. Drank a mug of coffee. Shooed away another pigeon. Felt odd, until I realized, I missed the presence of this much too-hot person who was a room away in my bed.

Joseph looks at me with narrowed eyes. I breathe. Inhale deeply. In my diaphragm, there is a trapdoor, or so I tell myself, that opens, the breath falls through it, almost to my pubic bone. Schaller said, *your breathing is soft. Your breathing is soft, Mrs. Neges, it warms and strengthens you from the inside out*, but inside me, breathing is difficult, jolts past the heart and liver and stomach, causing a racket in my lungs. I exhale deeply. I inhale, I continue breathing, air in, air out. It is half past one, how I would love to be tired.

In the past, we would have been smoking weed, but now we know I shouldn't smoke weed.

Last year I tried to catch the crescent moon with a cage on the first day of winter. I borrowed one from a pet store. I saw right away that this mid-size cage would be perfect, and took out a multi-legged creature, set it on the floor, and lugged the cage through the town center, it still smelled like the animal, and a tiny skeleton rattled against the bars from a small animal the animal had probably eaten. I went straight across the Ring, Josefstädter Straße, through Ottakring, continuing higher up to the Perlmutterweg, *built on the waste from the mother-of-pearl turners*, previously a gleaming surface, there is still a ghostly shimmer in the asphalt at this point that I follow up to the Wilhelminenberg.

The waning crescent moon hangs in mid-air between frozen branches. I open the small doors, have to hurry because the moon moves one and a half inches away from the earth each year, while the Alps only grow one-half to three-quarters of an inch; goal: to stop the progressive displacement. That evening, the moon wasn't far from Earth yet.

Hello, I called. No reaction. So, I put a piece of black cardboard in the bars because I was sure, otherwise, it would only be lured by pearlescent objects, but I don't, I'm resourceful and I lifted the cage. Then I had the crescent moon and I fed it with the spoon. But not right away.

First, I brought it home. Heavy cage. Covered with a cloth, I put it on the balcony, so it won't notice the presence of the sky, and set up a clever device next to it made out of a gramophone, garlic press, pencil sharpener. The funnel powerfully suctioned out the excess dust from the Milky Way that I ground to an iridescent puree. I spoon-fed that to the caged crescent moon, until it was full and tired and didn't long for his usual wandering anymore.

Eventually, I woke up in the hospital.

Joseph, I say, *that gets on my nerves*.

What?

Oh, do what you want. If you kiss her, I'll leave you.

Come on, let it alone, there's nothing there. Are you going to see Schaller tomorrow?

Who?

Schaller.

Oh. I don't know. I can't stand him. How he expresses himself and how he nods. And he told me it's not okay if I cancel an appointment. He's bitter, I mean, it's my problem if I can't come sometimes.

But you should go. Even if it's difficult.

I think I'll stop.

Theresa.

Maybe I'll do it again in the spring. I'll stop now and continue in the spring; I think that's a good plan.

Then look for someone else.

Then I'll get someone again like the time before last.

Definitely not.

It's my birthday soon. Then it's winter. I have a good feeling. Maybe nothing will happen this winter.

Of course, nothing will happen this winter and not the next one either; you see the therapy helps.

How? It's not because of Schaller that I'm doing fine, but because of me.

But you said yourself you don't sleep well anymore.

One night!

Two. That's not irrelevant, and especially not if you don't stop eating something other than fondant squares and forget to take your medicine half the time. When was the last time you ate? I mean, something proper?

I just had some chocolate.

So, you haven't eaten.

I did eat. Stop treating me like a child.

I only want to help you. Why aren't you being honest? Just say it, please, don't begin with that again.

Please, just relax and don't stress about it, that stresses me more than anything else when you suddenly ask as you're leaving, apropos of nothing, if everything's okay, everything is okay only because I've stopped somewhere.

Your hands clutched the table.

So?

Like on a cliff.

Never.

Your knuckles were white.

They were not white.

They were snow white.

I fought with Marianne, okay?

You didn't.

Can't I fight anymore?

That wasn't until later.

And besides, it's normal for my knuckles to be white, it's fall.

What do you mean by that?

In the fall, not only are the knuckles pale, but my hands are too, and arms and everything are too.

That's different.

Look! Everything's pale, pale, pale. I say, waving my hands, opening my eyes wide and grinning like a happy person, even though I don't feel like one, I'm faking happiness, personally just for Joseph, even though inside me it is a little dark. The chamber, I feel it again now. It was gone for a short time, over the summer, but now it's back again, will always be there, will never go away, so I can forget everything and everything will be empty in me and I will think and everyone will think, the chamber just disappeared, great success, until they discover that within me lives a rectangular cavity. The empty, dark chamber, didn't disappear, it is now me. And nowhere a star. Not above, not below, or to the side. Nowhere. Only darkness.

Sorry.

Do you know, my health is like a larva lying on my head. Such a mask. Not thick, but thin. Here, so thin, do you see how when I pull on my lids, how fragile everything is? And under, it simmers like pipes and cables and arteries and bones, like under the asphalt, the sewer system extends through the entire city, you just don't see it, and under the skin and under the asphalt, it stinks, I guarantee it, it stinks for every single person, for all of you, and it's easy, very easy, for something to get mixed up below this larva. And Schaller said, this isn't true, the sewer system under a city like Vienna is reliable, well-maintained, organized, nothing breaks, ha, if he only knew how it smells there, even for him. And if I talk aloud to myself and if I fidget, then it's a relief for me. So, I can show how thin my larva is. My thin face into which everyone looks and knows what's going on, and it makes you afraid and that's great!

It doesn't scare me,

You don't understand it either.

I know a lot and I'm still living with you and I love this face.

You know a little something about me, but still: nothing.

Well, in the meantime, I've become an expert on hospital literature.

And once you swallowed a twenty mg pill. Adorable. You think that's funny?

I don't think it's funny.

Why are you smiling then?

It's a reflex, I think.

You're joking; you think you know everything, just because you've read a book and once took a Zyprexa? Did the tablet taste good? Sweet or bitter or nothing at all. Asshole. I'm going now.

Please, Theresa. Where?

I'm going out. For a walk.

Where?

It doesn't matter. I'm going to buy cigarettes.

Why do you need cigarettes?

I'd like to smoke them. Let me go.

I don't want you to go out. I'll let you go as soon as you promise. Please. Promise me. Then I'll let you go.

No.

Come on, stay here. Please.

No.

Everything that you need is here. You don't need to go out.

Fine. Then I'll go into the bathroom.

Why?

Come on, let me get up. Please, I'm going into the bathroom, I'm going to sit on the edge of the bathtub and read.

You're just saying that.

Give me the book and let me go.

No.

I'm going to read now.

You're lying. You don't want to read; you want to run outside.

I love to read! And when I've finished the book, I'll start it all over again, I like it so much. I read a lot of passages over and over and all the most beautiful sentences circle around me until I'm dizzy until I can't voluntarily get out of the Chukovskaya book anymore. I could read it in one sitting, but I don't because it would be a shame to waste the skimmed sentences I want to be inside the sentences and not outside. Like you, because you're superficial.

Ouch. What are you doing! Stay here!

Well, buttface, please, keep your coat, I don't want to lie here next to you anymore, ha, let me, I'm going to the next room now and I would like to slam the doors...

Theresa, stop it...

Slam all the doors to all the rooms behind me, but there aren't any! Because we don't have any doors!

Not the ashtray!

Because the master architect has put all the doors in the basement, because a pure doorframe really can't be compared to anything. Unique! This beauty! The beauty of doorframes not burdened by doors!

You'll be sorry if you stop the therapy, I tell you, I'm not going through this again!

There is only one entry door and the three doors to the balcony and the bathroom door, that's all! How I hate that!

At least that's five doors!

And where is the bedroom door? And where is the living room door?

Fine, please, then just go away, then please go out, I'll tell you what will happen then; this is what will happen ...

Say it, please.

You will go out and before you get to the train station, you'll be harassed by a couple of deadbeats and you will run from them or not, maybe you aren't fast enough, because you are already tired, well, not in your head, but your legs and your arms. Or, you'll go toward the city center and if you don't meet anyone, even after two or three or even after four streets you don't meet anyone, everything is deserted and everything is quiet except for your steps, then you'll become afraid and do like the last time and come back, out of breath and exhausted two hours later.

Never.

At the latest!

Tomorrow I'll come back. At the earliest!

After two hours, and in these two hours, you will have forgotten everything that is right now! You can't remember any rage anymore! Like always! Reconciliation. Like a leaf in the wind.

Leaf in the wind?

Wind leaf. Yes.

Aah.

Like you. You turn once in one direction and then again in the other, just as you please, and like an idiot, I play along.

Wind leaf. Poetic.

Stop being so cynical.

Please, then give me a cigarette, you idiot.

No.

Give me that, let me take one drag, then I'll stay. And go to my therapy like a good girl.

I'm worried, don't you understand that?

You scratched me.

Sorry.

Here.

The last time, you were completely hysterical when you came back.

I cried.

You sobbed.

Sobbing is healthy. If I had to, I could hypnotize myself in an emergency.

No one can do that.

If it's my words or those of someone else, what's the difference? A spiral staircase, I go down a spiral staircase slowly, down many small, steep stairs, I go down, over each stair, I don't skip any, and I hold onto the stairs I've left above me, so that I don't stumble because they are steep, but actually, I really want to go back up, I want to climb each and every one of these small irregular stairs, why always down, always further down, what's the point; can't I find something at the top, too?

Joseph sighs. Then I sigh, I want to sigh just like he does, but I don't.

Look at me.

Sometimes I think about the nurse Robert.

Maybe I can hypnotize you.

Come on, let's go outside and have a cigarette, he always said.

You would definitely take up smoking again because of him.

Stop.

That was too short! You have to look at me properly.

And if Peter is still there? He always had a pain like that in his legs. He wanted to deliberately break his bones because he knew that a saint always left a message in his bones, sometimes in one, sometimes in another. Rolled up like in a fortune cookie. Every few months, a new one, because the old messages faded, because a new truth has to be added, but it is hard for Peter to read them because how is he supposed to get into his bones.

Oh, dear.

Hospitals smell strange. But they have advantages. Viennese breakfast, spicy breakfast, vegetarian breakfast, sweet food. Which would you take?

Don't know. Tell me again.

Viennese, spicy, vegetarian breakfast, sweet food.

The spicy breakfast sounds good.

Cornflakes, milk, margarine, a piece of bread, an orange.

What's spicy about that?

We fall silent. Joseph smokes. I take a drag and hear a chirping as if from faraway technical devices, suddenly, I say: I love you, forgive me, please. And I flinch, because I didn't want to say that and wonder to whom I have even said it, not to Joseph, at any rate, at least it doesn't feel like it, but rather to myself or to Pegasus in general, to the head of the snake, to the raven and all the other constellations that I can't see in this bright city. I want to be in the countryside. I need more darkness. What's all this light for.

Joseph exhales the smoke and kisses me on the forehead. And Joseph kisses me on the mouth. His slightly-parted lips on my closed lips. We could sleep with one another, I think, and I know,

that Joseph is thinking the same thing, maybe it would help, the last time I felt better. I read that it isn't the sex, but the nearness, that helps. *Relationship aspects are important to people and can have a stabilizing effect even for many people. It can't be said, though, that satisfactory sex is effective against hallucinations or delusions; that is definitely not the case.*

Joseph stubs out his cigarette and opens the button on my pants. *Do you want to?* I don't know, I think, actually, I don't have any desire to undress and somehow get wet, and look into the yellowish night sky. I like his tongue. It is relatively thick and soft and hard, at the same time, I like it when he shoves it into my mouth and I wrap my lips around it. Joseph tastes like chocolate, On his lower lip, a spot of hard skin, usually, it is my lips that crack in the fall, as soon as it gets windy, and I kiss the rough spot as if I could soften it.

The coat, which is my blanket, slides even lower, soft rustling, I push it aside, without moving noticeably, feel lazy, exhausted from the effort, from counting oranges, the jars of honey, the bottles of catsup, and Joseph tugs my sweater up above my breasts; the air is cold, Joseph's hands are cold, my nipples harden, and I flinch, because I think, lower left, just a little bigger than an inch, perfectly round. But I don't think about the one I saw on the Internet that was roundish and pink, a little ugly, a little beautiful.

Joseph presses my nipples together, turns them slightly, and then more vigorously, pushes my sweater higher again above my breasts, up to my neck, the other he takes in his mouth and I briefly consider whether anyone sees us out of all the windows looking out at the secret park.

I take off my pants. Spread my legs. Watch Joseph as he leans over my vulva without looking at me. *It refers to the totality of the external primary sexual organs and consists of the mons pubis, the labia, the vaginal vestibule, and the clitoris. Generally, the area of the vulva is covered by pubic hair (pubes, crinis vulvae).* He licks my lips with his tongue, the clitoris, and I stretch one arm out behind my head onto the balcony, stroke the concrete slab, a pebble, then another, and for a second, I look back to the railing and I look at it, am still looking at it, when I'm already spinning.

I saw Betelgeuse for the first time when I was thirteen. I still lived at home, in a small town at the end of a street, in the loudest house with thin walls. Rose hedges, Comte de Chambord, famous for their heavily-scented flowers whose petals hang like little wet towels seconds after blooming, their weight so heavy that their thorny stalks snap. In the house: my parents, seven siblings, me. My father: employed in the administration of the town hall. A lot of copying, signing, a lot of filing. Privately very rude regarding numbers, because their jobs require meticulous accuracy, vague quantities in the form of hundreds, thousands, billions. My mother: sun allergy. Has her dark hair dyed once a month with light strands, which is called *meche*. *Mèche*, French, wick, string, strand. Based on this, over the years she developed the habit of bringing French words into conversations, the frequency of which depended on the degree of her irritation. The main focus on abusive language and fruit. Sale menteur, misérable maraudeur. La fraise (dirty liar, miserable marauder. Strawberry). Don't forget: L'abricot, (apricot), but her favorite word: l'aubergine (eggplant). Vegetable.

Seven siblings. I personally named them each after the Pleiades. *Open star cluster, 444.2 light years away from Earth. Time of discovery: prehistoric. According to mythology, they were pursued by Orion*. Also: Pleiades, Seven Sisters, M45. They are the Pleiades for two reasons. On the one hand, they are far away from me, since I never speak with them. And on the other hand, they are still there with stubborn reliability just waiting until I come back to them. From the brightest to the darkest in descending order, I picked out their names: Alcyone, the oldest. Brightest star, deepest eye bags. Then Atlas. Androgynous. Strong tendency to brood. The third: Electra, plays guitar. The twins: mathematics teacher Maia and Merope, model. The runner, Pleione. One year older than me, one year younger again Taygeta, our only brother, whom I switched in the order with Pleione. It doesn't matter, he doesn't know anything about it. Unfathomable preference for antiquities, especially for tables with a thick beige stain. Most likely to be found in the protection of the rose hedges after his tenth year, with his hot air gun, which glowed a more intense red than all the roses. The stain curled, Taygeta scraped it off and read the etched writing like a message from an oracle, as mysterious as it was unimaginative. Electra, sitting on the stairs to the patio, was inspired to compose songs overnight.

I myself: eighth sister: lost child, second to the last child. Theresa Neges. I don't belong to the Pleiades. I am the quietest of all of us. A strange center amid a cluster of children, who tend to be very impatient, all of whom are endowed with conspicuously pointed noses, slanted eyes as well as slick hair that gleams strangely in the twilight.

Eventually, I discovered that there were two possibilities to escape the unrest. First: protection through music. Worked especially well after a recommendation from my grandmother: Maria Callas, *Greatest Hits*. The impact was that of densely falling snow at the push of a button, which cushioned the shrillness. Second: the strategy of geographical distance. I was thirteen, the first time I ran away, it was late fall, I took the bus. I got on at the stop next to the rose hedge, went straight, on the end of one street, it joined another and it kept going until I eventually got off.

Once: a bus stop between two towns and between two trees bent by the wind even though it was completely windless. To the left fields of sunflowers, to the right fields of sunflowers, sunflowers in front and behind. No people, no siblings. Very far away: reeds. Behind that, the lake, a tiny reflection. I didn't go there. I stayed at the bus stop on the side of a country road. I sat on the bench. And there were birds there even though it was night. They pecked. They didn't pay any attention to me. Or to the sky. It was huge. And broad. Brimming with stars, that shone like the slanted lights of a city. *After the sun and moon, Venus is always the brightest object in the sky. Earth is the most closely*

studied planet. Mars: besides volcanoes of varying sizes, there are also large plains covered with volcanic emissions. Jupiter radiates almost twice as much energy, as it absorbs from the sun. It has to have an internal source of energy. The planets Neptune and Uranus are also very similar. The discovery of the ninth-largest planet, Pluto, was the result of an intensive search. The sun is a particularly important research object for astronomers because it is the only self-illuminating celestial body so close to Earth, the details of the processes and structures on its surface can be observed. At least that's what I hear in physics. Lessons in stars. Professor Katz read his space information from an old note, as he had been doing for the previous three centuries, presumably triggered by the impatience of his advancing age, skipping over more and more planets that seemed less and less important to him. An old volume with the title *The Universe and Space Travel* lay on his desk.

Next to me, Harald was half asleep, the classroom darkened, while I squinted against the light of the overhead projector, Jupiter hung there white on black in the air above the board, like a burger consisting of numerous layers, with an olive-like eye in the upper left. The hairs stood up on my neck. After the hour I asked Katz if I could borrow *The Universe and Space Travel*, and he gave it to me and said I should keep it. In this book, everything was recorded about the stars. Numbers, letters, formulas; with them, the trajectories they moved in could be predicted. I suddenly became good at mathematics, finally, it had a purpose: the exact calculation of the distance of the celestial bodies from my body.

Tiny waves slap against the edge of the pool.

Right in front of me: shaven legs of the lifeguard. Red Adidas slides. Tattoos just above the knee: the face of a woman. He looks at his watch.

Three and a half minutes. Come out. Your lips are completely blue.

I want to say something, but only nod. Only three and a half minutes.

In the afternoon, you'll go longer. At least that's what I've noticed. I've thought about it.

That's nice. Sorry, I have to get out here; if you stay here, I can't leave the pool.

The towel.

Thanks.

Can I ask, what you're doing later, my colleague is taking over for me soon.

Have to work, I say and with my head lowered, hurry past the lifeguard to the stairs leading to the changing room; he would run away screaming if he knew what it looked like inside me, another one of those larvae, who smells badly under his face, he doesn't know anything about it, not a single time since I've known him has he thought about his own face, since he threw me out six months ago because I crashed into the water from the ten-meter board without looking down; they gave strict instructions, anyone who did that had to get out right away, *you are the first woman.*

Press overview

Der Standard, August 22, 2024

“More than plot Zeman generates atmosphere and adds ever more complex details. (...) The dialogs are works of art of conflicting discourse.”

[Barbara Zeman shows what happens when you don't take your medication – Literatur – derStandard.de › Kultur](#)

Der Tagesspiegel, August 28, 2024

“It (the novel) is captivating due to its extraordinary language and the imaginative power of the author.”

[Barbara Zeman's novel “Betelgeuse”: The magic of the Viennese shades of blue \(tagesspiegel.de\)](#)

ORF, September 1, 2024

“Beyond the romance of the starry sky, Zeman succeeds in gently and tenderly relaying the feelings of a human breakdown.”

[ORF Sound](#)

SR2KulturRadio, August 22, 2024

“One can't escape the magic of these diverse Viennese shades of blue, so original and captivating are the paths and ideas described in this text in the constellation of Betelgeuse.”

[SR.de: Barbara Zeman: “Betelgeuse”](#)