

## Out of the house

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I was a writer by calling at the time, and didn't go to the door every day – often I wrote or drank, or both, or I bought paper or wine in large-sized cartons for which I didn't need to go into the street, thanks to a clever choice of apartment. There was also an elevator. Basically, I didn't like getting out in the fresh air if I could think of something better to do, and usually I thought of something better to do, or something else. I loved alternatives. But then there are moments when one locks jaws on a text which urgently wanted to be written and can neither unlock one's teeth, nor chew the bite one has bitten, and then it is good that there are streets and people who you almost assuredly and with a high degree of certainty won't know, even if you should meet them. Thus, I pushed the half drunken glass of wine to a corner of my desk, and the still blank pages to another, pushed myself up from the chair, which was more a token gesture than a necessity since I was rather underweight for my height with my 63 kilos, and pulled the door closed behind me.

The street was fairly far away and quite a ways down. I threw a glance out the window of the stairwell and thought about jumping, not out of desperation or moodiness, but simply as an abstract possibility. "Sometimes I think too much," I thought, and forbid myself the thought. My legs had already chosen the path downwards, which was smart, thinking like legs, and they had also stopped in time to prevent me from walking into the glass door that divided my basically hermetical world from the rest of life, and prevented the street from intruding on me. I nodded to myself to take courage before I pulled down the catch on the side, a foolish gesture, which should have made the walk more ceremonious and important than it was, as it was later shown. From the right came people though the nearest hallway, the last inner courtyard, with empty shopping bags, to return with other faces and fuller or even additional bags, from the left. I merged in, without any kind of bag, in the line going outside, which only existed in my world – we were all far enough apart for a solo dance, but I suppressed myself. Actually I was on the street in no time at all.

I blinked. It was shady on this side – but in case you haven't noticed yet – I loved gestures, rituals. Packaged meaning without content. I approached the next passing girl who was sure to be old enough not to be my daughter and asked: "Excuse me, I live here ... where am I exactly?"

Whoever stops at such a thing is either exceedingly polite or is looking for an argument, and since I wanted to clear my head, I was looking for the latter. She really did stop, looked at me and said only one word: "At home."

"Then I want to get away from here," I answered, without being asked, and wondered whether that had actually been two words.

" Good luck." Since she didn't turn away, and I had apparently started walking at ground level, I adjusted my gait to hers. She was good on foot, maybe she was a sports student

or simply young and therefore at an advantage, but I kept up pretty well, since she apparently didn't see any need for haste.

"Are you following me?" I laughed. "But I'm next to you."

"That's true too," she nodded. "Are you walking with me?"

I thought about it a little. "Maybe we simply are going the same way."

In the meantime it would have been enough to make a public scene but she decidedly differently and laughed. Derisively, perhaps.

Perhaps, but I saw a corner of her mouth, and when the other one was also there, only on the other side, then that was not a hostile face.

"Where are you going, then?"

"Away from home."

"Your place or mine?"

I didn't understand the question exactly. "Home is at my place."

"You're right, neither of us want to be there."

"Your place is totally elsewhere."

"You're not going to follow me home, are you?" She didn't understand me either. That didn't matter. When I was outside my writing room, I could often only communicate with a translator. "That's impossible. We're both just coming from home."

"We could go around in circles."

"Why should we do that?"

"But this conversation is."

"Then let's stop talking."

"Can you do that?"

"The whole day."

"And walk in circles." Then she turned a circle, and since I was next to her and all of a sudden within the circle, she forced me to turn as well. Her shoulder pressed me into the new direction. Sometimes you need someone to lead well. We were silent, and since we seemed not to have a specific goal, I had lots of time to think useless thoughts.

There weren't for a while so many people on the street, which I am used to feeling, but a lot more faces. Some of them were lost in long distance calls, and others looked for every crack in the sidewalk, but many others just looked at others, some people even greeted each other, although not me. I was often looked at, which surely had something to do with my escort, whom people had difficulty placing in my life.

"You could be my litter sister."

"I would know that."

"I mean, for the others."

"You don't really know how to stop talking, right?"

I didn't want to be told how to do that and kept my mouth shut. Several times.

She determined the way we were going again and again by directing me with her body, then we turned to the left. We often passed the place where I had been at home, but not she.

"Are we going to your place?" I said that to avoid questions. She shrugged her shoulders, which I couldn't feel, and veered off. That I felt. I looked after her, and she must have missed me already. "What's wrong?" So I ran until I caught up with her.

"You have to tell me when you turn". And since she didn't want to talk, she took my hand on the spot and led me to her circle, without pulling. I am a writer, when I am not outside, and I love having no responsibility. At some point I didn't let go of her hand when she led me. She wrestled a bit with mine, and then gave up.

"Don't you start thinking that I'm now going to start holding hands with you."

We didn't want to talk, so I didn't say anything.

In that moment, the city felt right, and there was a purpose to walking, even in a circle. I saw a house that had supposedly been standing there awhile, and minutes later stood another one next to it, when we there again. Maybe it had existed the first time around, but when walking, your eyes always go in different circles too. We both also found after awhile, following one or another impulse, new paths, new circles, sometimes, it seemed to me, even straight ones. We passed a park which I had heard about, and since I mentioned it, we walked a penalty round within it, for talking in view of the city, and there were a few trees which filtered the air for us, and behind an open gateway a few cars again, and as we ran into people and I thought, I would even be able to be with you alone, I asked her out of some urgent need to be polite.

" You hopefully didn't have anything special planned for today, did you?"

"Yes I did", and in all seriousness, "this."

And then to leave no doubt about it she let go of my hand, and I stood knee deep in my city, and missed actually very little. One could have written a poem about it if one had been at home at one's desk. But there it wouldn't have crossed one's mind.

What did cross my mind. "Are you by chance...." I had a question in my head, but it disappeared as I talked.

"You never know," she answered, supposedly laughing. It sounded like it, and I didn't want to check. I was doing well going forward and I was worried I could get stuck.

"I've never been here," I said, after having this feeling for a long time. We were walking on cobblestones, which I felt, and also naturally saw, and she unlocked a bicycle in front of a house and took it into the street.

" You're taller," she said then. Faced with death, one uses the informal "du", and death loomed dangerously near.

" I know."

"So you drive. Can you?"

"This is totally impractical, " I said nodding, totally convinced.

" I know." It went downhill and I worried about the brakes, but more at the back of my mind, and since she was in the back, and held tightly on to me, I wasn't too worried. The cobblestones disappeared quickly and we turned into a row of town houses, on a straight street, and I didn't see much of the city anymore, but the city felt good, mobile. I was being lead again, whereby we spoke more, and some shrill people were also around when I was late in braking or turning away from people whom I saw too late.

" Are you often in this neighbourhood?" I asked at some point, when it once went slightly uphill and we both helped with our legs.

" Today, yes" she answered.

We got through the city well, today, because we didn't have any certain goal, even if it sometimes felt otherwise. Finally, the bicycle stood back at its place, as if we had stolen and returned it, and she locked it up again, as if tomorrow would be a normal day, when people do things they planned.

" I'm going to stay here now," she said. " Are you going to find your way back alone?"

"Of course, " I lied. " I'm at home in this city," which was even true, today.