

Translated excerpt

Terézia Mora
Das Ungeheuer

Luchterhand Literaturverlag, München 2013
ISBN 978-3-630-87365-7

pp. 5-41

Terézia Mora
The Monster

Translated by Zaia Alexander



As she leaned over him her breasts swung forward and a fragrance rose up from her belly, he lifted his head slightly to look at her navel, a small shell with a brim at the top, the view pleased him, but what intrigued him most was the small protuberance jutting out from the underbelly, the chocolate brown pubic hair; yet here, of all places, something went haywire, a bright flicker disrupted the image, at the same time voices clamored inside, there were many of them, at least one man and one woman was among them, they talked and laughed, not so close, in an adjacent room they spoke inaudibly and laughed, and just as increasingly hot waves of great joy ("there you are, finally!") and anxiety ("don't even dare to think it's only a dream or it will end") surged inside Darius Kopp, now rage set in, that was the hottest wave, a fierce hammering pounded his head, a sledgehammer on metal, infernal, irrepressible: rage. What's there to laugh about, hyenas, who are you anyway, what are you doing here, Yuri, goddamn you, you pig! He's got somebody with him again, when did he pick her up, we came here together, nobody came with us, he waited until I fell asleep and then. Andreina and Monica, wild strawberry-blond curls, they'd be willing, grunted Yuri in Kopp's neck. Do what you want, I'll go to a hotel. Yuri's saliva felt like a furious pinprick on Kopp's skin. It's time you pulled yourself together, honestly. I should pull myself together? I should pull myself together? You pull yourself together! You'll see what that gets you, I'll walk right over and give you a knuckle sandwich! It's all your fault! I was happy and satisfied until you showed up! No, I wasn't, but it worked fine, and then you came and took it away from me. That you can't live forever? Nobody does that! Nobody lives forever! Yuri held the woman in his lap, the knees and elbows folded around each other, they guffawed with a hundred teeth, waved to him and laughed: Come on! Kopp started to howl, rage, impotence, pain, he couldn't go over to them, from the waist down he felt heavy as a ton of bricks pressed into a mat that was way too soft, he fought like a bull; howling, he yanked his head up with the heavy horns and then fell right

back down again, he struggled to free at least one arm, yanked it with all his might, but suddenly it was very light, flew over him and thudded against the wall. The pain made him draw back his knees and they crashed too, the bang and pain were worse, but at least he now knew where he was, he simply lay there.

My beating heart.

A so-called half room. Closet / ironing / guest room /storage room. A cluttered shelf and a bunk. The brightness over there is the window, a clothes rack on wheels is blocking the entrance, one half is draped with outer garments, the bag with under garments is lying under the other half. It wasn't the first time the wall had been bumped into, it's just too close, and I toss and turn too much. Beloved, beloved, beloved.

Otherwise, I rarely dream. Only since I got here. That I'm on a ship, in a hotel, in an unknown location, in an unfamiliar apartment. The voices of the others penetrate through the walls and I want to smash them into a thousand pieces every time. By the way, he now knew it wasn't Yuri. It's the wall next to the neighbor's apartment. Two beautiful, tall, friendly people live there, a pilot and his wife. Talking and laughing with each other. By contrast, it's silent as death in this apartment. Could it be that Yuri had left without waking Kopp beforehand? Usually, he wakes me up, and usually he's pushy. I'm leaving now, can't stay in bed all day. Assigns me small tasks as if I were his wife. Pardon, his housekeeper. This isn't men's rehab work here. Bring down the garbage, clean kitchen, groceries.

Kopp turned away from the wall, an arm and a leg fell from the bunk to the floor. Through the upper section of the window you can see a revolving crane. Now you can also hear it. You can also hear the workers. There's no woman with them, but they also laugh occasionally. They speak with a strong Saxon dialect. The crane stands in the rear courtyard of the house across the way, sometimes the loads move to the left, sometimes to the right of the neighbor. The bundles hover in the air, the containers and the dust. When the window is open, clouds of the latter

blow inside, when it is closed, it faintly seeps through the cracks. Thank God they're done with the jackhammer. The crane was also at work this morning, Darius Kopp watched it, until the urge to urinate wouldn't let him anymore.

Cautiously snuck out of the room, but there really was nobody around.

No way to avoid a look in the mirror. They're everywhere here. No matter which way you turn: a cross between a blonde, pug-nosed boy in his mid-40s and a reptile. Bags under the eyes, wattles. I look wasted. Which I am. Beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved ... so often until it's just a sound, and not even a particularly beautiful one, you can't compare it to birds singing or some other pleasant thing, there's no beauty in it, not a trace of sparkle, dismal clatter, beloved, beloved, beloved.

He didn't bother to wash his hands, stood just as he was at the window in the living room watching the crane. It was balancing a bale of insulation material. Hovering in the air, the bale dangled, the Saxon shouted something, then the crane spun further and the bale fell into the courtyard of the neighbor to the left. Laughter and shouting all around.

Hello! Have we gone deaf? And why are we still naked?

Yuri stood behind him, not naked, on the contrary, dressed to impress, holding a paper bag filled with pastries. Chop, chop comrade, into the shower you go!

(Always this stupid bullshit. Why's that ape-suit hounding me?) Then it gradually dawned on him: The Job Interview. Under the old name employment interview. They took care of that for me too. A small job, OK? Nothing that'll demand too much of you. You just go in there and have a little conversation. Yuri will drive you to the front door so nothing can go wrong. He's supposedly driving that way anyway, but actually they just want to make sure you really go. Before you leave he chases you into the shower. He counts the minutes you waste time and water, but he also

insists on making you go through a complete cleansing ritual at least every other day. You have to shave, people trust slick dudes more. Afterwards you get handed a cup of coffee and half a roll with jam in the kitchen and then you will be rushed out again. We have a choice of no more than 2 suits and three shirts; that limits the possibilities of making a mistake (or getting it right), but that Yuri even checked the color of the socks was going too far. I've only got black ones anyway, you whiz! Kopp was handed instant polish for his shoes, and don't forget to wash your hands again!

That was the moment Darius Kopp would have liked to punch his best friend in the face with the clenched fist of his right hand, it was the second time during this young morning, (and the third time since last night), preferably not just once, eye (bones, veins), nose (bones, cartilage), mouth (teeth on soft tissue), and then aim for the knock out spot, but I only pulled that off once when I was a teenager, and that was just by chance. ("Kopp knocked out Czernicky! "Kopp knocked out Czernicky!) And then go and lie down again. With the unconscious Yuri in the hallway. No, you couldn't lie down. You should leave. Collect your few things and leave. He'd come to at some point, probably in pain, and curse us.

Us!

Now I'm starting to talk that way too.

Can you fasten your seatbelt so I can get going?

For 8 weeks now, I've been putting up with you. 8 weeks that seemed a lot longer to Darius Kopp than the entire previous year. No, only 10 months, from August to June. A winter that felt long. These last few years winter has become so incredibly harsh. Every year, the heater starts with a breakdown, but if you're like Kopp, who has plenty of experience, you don't get worked up about it, he simply lies down next to the heater and carefully lets the air out, he places a rag below so that the excess water

can drip into it. Laid there, listened to the hiss, watched as it dripped. The rag was an orange polo shirt.

From August last year to June of this year, Darius Kopp did not leave his apartment. People came at first, people who I'm not totally indifferent to, who felt sorry for me, or felt for me because of the hard times I'd recently gone through, but after the cold had settled in and an unprecedented snowfall created high mountains of snow that allowed only a minimal access to the city, they ended up staying away. It froze and melted a bit and froze again, everything cracked, fissures ran through the walls. Kopp saw and ignored them. They were only hair-thin lines, it would take much more for the outside to become the inside, and before that happens there's no reason to get frantic. He had invented a system that enabled him never to go outside. The system was ingeniously simple, it encompassed a single goal, namely, getting something to eat and drink. As far as that goes, I couldn't be a simpler case. He only ordered pizza, always from the same delivery service, and always stubbornly moving down the menu from the top. From Margherita to Speciale, 24 varieties, always from top to bottom. Pizza delivery men who rumbled their way through snowy landscapes that would do Alaska proud. 24 varieties of pizza, 4 pizza delivery men for this delivery area. If there was any danger somebody could start getting too familiar, Darius Kopp placed the money on the doormat, and after the shuffling noises in the stairwell had subsided, he'd find his pizza in the same spot. Once a day he opened the window, as one should, so the stale hot air could be replaced by painfully cold air; just as relative silence was replaced by the usual roar of a four-lane highway with tram and approach path. When he felt like it, Kopp took a bath for the duration. When he came out, this utterly inconceivable noisy cold fell onto his soft, warm, damp body; heartbeat, respiration, mucous membranes, pores responded as they should with alarm, but Kopp walked evenly ahead, closed the window, and got back into his chilly clothes from the day before.

Regrettably, spring was coming, albeit with a considerable delay. One morning, Darius Kopp opened the coffee can, saw it was empty, took a new pack out of the cupboard and saw it was the last one. When it finally was evident that Darius Kopp's wife wasn't coming back to live with him here, he made a last attempt to maintain the old standard by ordering large quantities of mineral water, alcohol and coffee from a beverage delivery service. The liquids had been drunk ages ago and now as the last package of coffee was opened, it suddenly started to thaw heavily. During the next 5 days, Kopp reduced his usually lavish television consumption and watched the fascinating spectacle of thawing! Heaviest thawing! Gurgling mountain streams in the middle of a four-lane highway, icicles crashing onto the sidewalks and avalanches sliding from the rooftops. It took 5 days for the last crusts to crack away, and the street turned into a field after a battle: end moraines made of grit, ashes, garbage, dog feces, fireworks and the carcasses of small animals: chickadees, pigeons, crows, mice and rats. In the nearby cemetery, a fox and a few squirrels. In a park pond all the fish. People also didn't look good. They and their clothes had turned gray, they gathered in front of a soup kitchen. It was a normal fast food joint, but they gave the general impression of having just survived a war.

He thought it, Yuri said it. The thaw had flushed him to the surface too. He barged into Kopp's private rooms and started cursing. What a shitty neighborhood, especially now with all the garbage in the streets! Dude, I saw a dead rat in a garbage heap! And this? What's this here? It fits the image perfectly, like apples and oranges!

It was just a chest of drawers in the bedroom, the one where all the junk usually piles up: coins, paper clips, pills, bandages, notes. Between the original décor consisting of three candlesticks and two Mexican clay figures. That's how it used to be. In the last 10 months the apartment hadn't changed much, except for the terrace filled with pizza boxes.

But Yuri went berserk.

Get over here! Get over here right now!

Now, of all times, the thaw had to start leaking through the roof. Past the rubber seal in the skylight, along the power line of the actuator, at first a few drips, but when Yuri stuck his finger into the rubber seal, it gushed like a waterfall. No one is left now to pitch my tent or to set up my shelter. Yuri's head and suit sullied by thaw. It almost gets him into a good mood. Takes the matter right in hand, while standing in a puddle, he immediately calls two friends named Potthoff and Muck, who are experts in renovating. Old theater rule: when there's no way forward, re-arrange the stage. For some people, it's enough to move the furniture around, in your case, you need to change apartments. You're going to move out of this apartment Can you even afford it anymore? Don't be stupid. Don't go broke. It's just an apartment. Luckily, it's in a trendy, which means overly expensive, area. You should take advantage of that.

Kopp said, truthfully, with all due consideration, that he doesn't want to do that. He doesn't want to take advantage of any such thing, he was doing perfectly well, I'm not going to rip out all my teeth just because of a hole in one tooth.

OK, said Yuri, and stared at him, which he doesn't usually do. A person who doesn't look into other people's eyes. He prefers to act as if he was too quick for that. OK, said Yuri, keeping an eye on Kopp, I see you've changed your strategy. Although, the old one—scarfing food, boozing, consuming, grinning – was by far the nicest thing about you, but hey, whatever. So you decided to be a bum. Just looked for an excuse to drop everything. Tons of stories like that. Used to be an engineer, lost his job, lost his wife, ended up on the street, and all that because of a weak spirit. Letting a weak spirit triumph over your life is fatal, much more dangerous than most people think, and it goes a lot quicker. Everyday bellyaching doesn't fall under weak spirit, on the contrary, it's a repair mechanism, Yuri had learned that from Nadia who is a psychologist, either by profession or hobby; at the moment it wasn't apparent which of the two, but who in the hell is Nadia?

© 2013 Luchterhand Literaturverlag, a division of Verlagsgruppe Random House

My girlfriend, you ass-wipe.

You have a girlfriend?

Half a year now, you ignoramus!

It then occurred to Yuri he hadn't tried to call Kopp more than 3 times in the last half year, and that he had possibly neglected to mention he had a woman on his side now...

At least, Kopp said mildly, I won't be a bother to anybody. I'll finance the whole thing myself.

But for how long, my friend?

Darius Kopp hadn't figured that out yet. To figure it out and then let yourself fall apart would be cowardly.

You're an idiot! At some point they're going to carry you out onto the street, if you can't pay the installments anymore.

The thought of it made Darius Kopp giggle. There are few occasions in which a healthy adult gets to be carried.

Stop that idiotic laughter! What's happening with that room over there! You don't dare to go inside! What are you? Garcia Lorca!?

(?!?!?!)

Come on, said Yuri, come on, put on some clean clothes, we're going to go get a decent meal, then we can think more clearly.

Look, he said a little later with bits of coriander gleaming in the corner of his mouth, we only want what's best for you. Potthoff and I will organize a storage space for you. You can store your things nicely there, while the apartment gets completely renovated. And Muck will help you out for just 10 Euros an hour. And once it's renovated, you'll sell it and fix your finances. If you can't pack up your wife's stuff, Nadia will take care of it for you.

(I don't know this Nadia at all. On the other hand: better a stranger) And where, dear friend, am I supposed to live in the future?

For the time being: with me. Listen pal, it's time for you to get reintegrated.

Just once, right in the kisser...

Don't be so hard on him. All things considered, he's a loyal friend. Really tries hard to deal with me, and every day now for the last 8 weeks. Now they've even found a job for you - Did you study the Job ad? Yuri asked him more often than he liked to and is the subscriber to a national newspaper. Which job ad, asked Kopp in response- it was only temporary, as a computer something or other for a science institute where Halldor is doing something, not a career, but better than nothing. As far as work saving you goes, Darius Kopp had modified his world view since losing his job and especially during his year in seclusion. Either you will be saved by working, or by not working, by chance or by design, or by nothing at all, but getting out of Yuri's storage room is absolutely a short-term objective, therefore, at least pretend you want to find paid work by whatever means.

The modernest (sic!) technology and start-up center houses eleven extramural and several intramural institutions, as well as new companies in exciting fields such as Life Science and East-West North-South Economic relations, each one of them housed (again) in the modernest equipped gray buildings. Each one of the buildings is different from the next, but not so much so that you'd be able to find your way around them. At least they could make the house number visible for once! Yuri curses as he turns the corner, while Kopp plays tourist in the passenger seat with a look of interest on his face and distance in his heart.

Meanwhile, Yuri has started yelling into the phone, he yells at Halldor, where the hell etc, he doesn't have all day, etc. Maybe he really did have an appointment somewhere. Halldor comes to the front entrance, Kopp is being delivered in return for a receipt, Yuri drives off with screeching tires. Come, says Halldor, whose hair is down to his waist- (Million dollar

question: does your appearance still correspond to a scientist or at this point to a homeless person? Caricature above Halldor's desk, a gift from a colleague) - come, he says, I'll introduce you to the boss.

The boss is Turkish, Can something or other, out with the old and in with the new, welcomes everybody as if they were a journalist, is eager to show off the entire institute, including the building it's housed in, a building that works without air conditioning, the name of the architect is so and so, look, there is a shade moving right now, not by magic, but controlled by sensors, and this is Mr. Rose's bedroom, hahaha, we'll just drop him off right here, by the way, that would be your computer workstation. (Table. Face to the wall, back to the room, at least a window, sideways) The job, of course, is temporary, poorly paid and – as one can read from Darius Kopp's Vita –he's over-qualified, but Kopp says he doesn't mind. I'm in the process of reorienting myself after taking a break, (In fact, Potthoff and Yuri have provided me with information about so-called stop-gap measures) trying something new.

What did he do during the so-called "break"?

A trip around the world, Darius Kopp said without batting an eyelash. (That's not just a bunch of bullshit. I knew somebody who checked what was going on at the Robinson Island every week. Today there was a storm on Más a Tierra, the Juan Fernandez hummingbird hid under the leaves of giant dandelions, etc. But if need be, I could lie at the spur-of-the-moment, it's no coincidence I used to be a salesman and used to watch countless travel shows.

They chatted for a few minutes, then Mr. boss-of-the-institute shook Darius Kopp's hand warmly, looked him in the eye and promised he'd hear from them soon, and Darius Kopp suddenly realized: the tour wasn't for somebody who they practically considered part of the team, no, it was only a game, the guy likes to play, he can't stand Halldor and Halldor can't stand him, that much is clear ("bedroom." Fuck you, said Halldor's smile), but that's about the only thing that was clear. Frankly, I don't have a clue

what I just did. Like a robot, mechanically reciting everything I can do, or used to be able to do, and indeed, it now comes back to Kopp, unfortunately peppered with more than a few sighs that might be interpreted as being bored or annoyed or resigned. I should have been more attentive and suppressed it. Supposedly, I constantly speak that way lately: sigh, half a sentence, sigh, then the rest of the sentence, it slips out of my mouth, instead of being spoken somewhere, preferably straight ahead, to where there sits an expectant or not so expectant, and therefore let's try even harder to get them back, and another sigh at the end.

It was a pleasure, said Darius Kopp, after all, what was he supposed to say, and mirrored his opponent's glowing enthusiasm. While deep inside he was completely extinguished. Apparently all I can do now during a job interview is either: sigh as I watch the light sensory blinds, or fly into a rage in 2 seconds flat.

Another feeling surfaced at the sight of the closed canteen on the science campus: the longing of the loser filled with shame. Cozy red leather chairs, if I sat there it would do me a world of good now and in general, why are you closed, you lazy bums, and what about breakfast for the people who have to spend the night here because they've got a job, a project that fascinates them, or gives them a headache, or who don't have anywhere else to go, my God, Halldor has hardly said a word for a while now, he's been pretty much conversing with his hands, and apparently nobody even notices it, he also had gotten thrown into the loony bin at some point, don't say loony bin, especially not you. Go back, don't we want to get a coffee, they've got joints everywhere—but he was too far from there, all the way back again? No, not that and here's the S-Bahn.

That it was possible to find it by absent-mindedly following the green direction signs was a small comfort. But two steep stairways led to a windy platform, climbing was so difficult, he thought he'd never make it to the top. Pain in the legs, veritable pain, rusty tin man, and there's no

© 2013 Luchterhand Literaturverlag, a division of Verlagsgruppe Random House

elevator, I could roll to Schoeneweide with a wheelchair (rage), and who (even more rage) came up with those fair-weather-only platforms, even with no wind, it's as drafty as a mouth with a freshly extracted tooth. When did waiting areas disappear –and where did they go- to sit in a waiting area in a foreign country just once ...- And why didn't I ever make it into a lounge? I thought I was some kind of wonder-something, and yet I'd never made it into the business lounge. Darius Kopp, M.S.I.E. (TU Berlin) is standing on a platform at the edge of town, grinding his teeth. But so loudly that a person standing three feet away could hear it. He pulled himself together and kept his jaw still. He had to hold his breath to do it, there was no other way. [The longer you hold your breath, the louder the roar in your ear, and it kept getting louder in Darius Kopp's ear, but never loud enough that he would not have heard the other sound through it: the goose-bump-evoking grinding noise continued. He jerked his head around and was startled: somebody was standing there. A person's presence is one of those things, not to say it's always a negative thing, on the contrary, there are (after the initial shock wears off) pleasant and calming presences, but this one here was not. The other man on the platform was maybe 10 years older, maybe 10 years younger than Darius Kopp, who could possibly tell with those awful clothes. When a person looks washed out and dirty at the same time. Dirty white, disgusting yellow, vomit violet are his colors. He's not as dirty as a bum, he doesn't smell like one, but he's the kind of guy who doesn't like to use the bathroom for one reason or another. What does it matter, life's a filthy whore, why bother being clean? An empty dangling blue shopping bag in his hand. So, the guy next to me is poor and not particularly cultivated, but that's not the clincher. It's that he grinds his teeth, as was mentioned earlier. You can hear it and see his jaw grinding back and forth and above it, or around it, is a face that bars any hope it might simply be a harmless quirk. What you see here, from the hairline down to the trembling double chin, no, even further, in his entire body: is a barely controllable hatred. This man hates everything and everybody, and when he notices me staring at him, I'm the next best target. I've been indoors

too much lately. I'm not used to something like that. Hatred on TV is like Food on TV: no calories. But that one there, he has them, and Darius Kopp noticed he was starting to tremble. Get rid of the guy, as soon as possible, but how? Wasteland, how else to get out of here except by train. Taxi. But before he could make an escape from the platform, or whip out his phone, the train came. Kopp jogged a short distance so he could board a different car than the tooth grinder, but he wasn't fated to.

He wasn't fated to settle down, or, if you will, settle back into an extinguished passivity, then back to nothing, if nothing else is bearable. Darius Kopp went from the frying pan into the fire; in the car he ran to on his aching legs, sat two skinheads. He didn't notice them at first because they were dead silent and motionless. As soon as the train took off and there was no escape, they started in the blink of an eye to stomp their boots on the floor and belt out some song, the only word you could understand was "Deutschland!" the rumbling from the car and the pounding of boots were too loud. On the other hand, what more do you need to understand than "Deutschland!" "Deutschland!", that's all there is, just: " Deutschland, Deutschland ". There were only a few people in the car besides Kopp, just two women, and Darius Kopp soon realized that the skins were singing to him and to nobody else, because he was a man. At the very latest, Darius Kopp realized he was running the gauntlet, there are days like that, and this is not the first time I'm having such a day, when crazy shit comes at you from all directions, and I used to be good at filing it away with a smile. Smiley-face Darius Kopp, things are different now, the crazy shit is the same, but now I'm somebody else, that's the problem. Kopp trembled, but he didn't hide out to the point of having no more eye contact. If a smile isn't possible, or, as in this case, an unaffected placidity, then it's best to stubbornly remain motionless. So he sat there and looked back at them and the two skinheads sang and stomped until the train came to the next stop. They stopped abruptly. They sat silently at the stop, some people boarded and the train took off again, and the skinheads started to stomp and sing and started grinning

even more. Darius Kopp understood there was no point in continuing to look at them. He changed his seat.

They got off at the same stop as Kopp, but they didn't look for him, they were halfway down the stairs, bumping into everybody who came their way. They ran in zigzag on purpose so that everybody really did get in their way. Kopp only needed two steps to reach the driver's window. Let him know what's going on. It cost him no small effort to take those two steps, and he looked through the driver's window, but for the life of him, the driver did not look back. He knows it, Kopp realized. He knew it all along, he could have called a supervisor a long time ago. The car took off. Darius Kopp dazed on the platform. And that was the third strike.

How am I supposed to get home? Or to wherever I'm living now? How am I supposed to get anywhere? Change trains. That ought to be manageable. You have to try. After all, you're not a cripple, right? Darius Kopp in the widely branched underpass. With teeth grinding. Fuck it. At least I'm not a Nazi. No, just an ordinary coward. Were you afraid to ruin your suit? An old suit. Frankly, no. Were you worried about your nose, about the rest of your face, and skull? Honestly, yes. Well, we avoided that, or it passed us by, but that doesn't mean you've accomplished anything today. Institute Director Can. Gestures that seemed like acceptance, but in truth expressed rejection. The same probably goes for the signs in the underpass, you only understand them in hindsight. The arrows pointed to exits and passages that did not exist, and where there was a path, there was no sign. Maybe it would have helped to read the temporary posters, but Darius Kopp grew increasingly frustrated and angry. All these people. You are in the way, really in the way. Not a single face here that you could look at for a lifetime.

I can't take it anymore! said a person in blue overalls as he walked out of the newspaper shop.

That sort of brought Kopp back to his senses, a small, distant voice inside him that he hadn't heard for a while even laughed briefly. I can't take it

anymore at 10 O' Clock in the morning? No. It was ten when you were auditioning with Can Eren (That was his name! A gorgeous name! I wish it was my name!), now it's noon, the idiots from the flower shop have managed to spill water all over the entire underpass, a whole bucket or whatever, no way around it, you had to step into it. His shoes were polished instantly to a high sheen, but there was a hole in the sole, it occurred to Darius Kopp as he stood there, and then he felt it: slowly but surely, the sock in his shoe was getting wet. Last time that happened, he was walking through a forest with a right foot that kept getting wetter. Kopp began to limp. As if you had to limp with a hole in your shoe.

And then they appeared. They came up from a very bright area of the stairs to the earth's surface. Hand in hand: a very large woman and a very small man. A dwarf. A real dwarf, not just very small. A real, crooked dwarf and the woman was probably of a normal height, but seemed huge compared to him. Darius Kopp stopped being angry and was deeply moved. Is that my salvation? A woman walking hand in hand with a dwarf? Do men walk with female dwarves too? Surely somewhere. Because of that you're moved to tears? I am. Go home, cry, no plans for later.

The two wriggled past him, he hungrily watched them go by. They passed a giant poster with a humongous baby bottle shaped like an hourglass in which most of the sand had run out. A blow for all women of childbearing age, this gift hasn't been given to them for eternity, those selfish bitches! Kopp's mouth went dry. He stepped closer to the poster. It only showed the telephone number of the poster company. Is the person who designed this poster to blame for anything? Is the person who has provided the wall space for it to blame? Is the person who launched this campaign to blame? Trembling and sweating, Darius Kopp fumbled for his cell phone to take a photograph of the number, but then somebody painfully punched him in the arm:

Hey, you!

It was the dwarf.

If he could at least nicely ask before taking a photo of him and his girlfriend.

Excuse me?

That's the proper thing to do! Every person has a right to their own image, yes sir, that's how it is.

What? excuse me, this is crazy.

Whether Kopp is thinking, whether he is thinking something, no idea what I'm supposedly thinking, I know what I am thinking, if that gnome touches me again with his dirty finger...

Never mind old man, it's not about you!

But he saw that certain grin on the dwarf's face, he wants to, he wants to pick a fight, his dromedary girlfriend in the background is grinning too, he wants to prove something to her, and she wants him to prove it. He could explain. Check out this poster, don't you agree that it's an affront, a very painful affront towards women who can't, there are women who are so sensitive, she'd burst into tears if she saw that here, what do people who do such a thing think? Who do they think they are?

So you think the little man can't defend himself, right? Extinguish it, or I'll extinguish everything in you!

After which the blood rushed into Darius Kopp's brain, he withdrew the left that had been holding the phone from the dwarf, while clenching the right into a fist and struck. Unfortunately, he did not score a knock out, nor any other vital spot, he hit something at the periphery and the dwarf was just waiting for that, he virtually came flying through the air and clung onto Kopp, the next moment they were savagely beating each other up. The dwarf tried to knock Kopp over, Kopp stumbled, his shirt slipped out of his pants, seams busted, the dwarf tried to strangle him with his tie. "The horrific agony of circus elephants," Kopp read on a newspaper stand at

the periphery of his vision, while trying to grab the dwarf by the throat. Kopp began to whimper. The enemy thought it was because of the pain he had inflicted on him. He laughed panting. Whereupon Kopp Darius closed his eyes and started wildly punching around him, regardless of whom or what he hit. He didn't hit much. The police came and separated them.

Kopp's eyes were glowing, he bared his teeth and panted like a wild animal. He looked like an evil man. He remained defiant - but he didn't need a lot of defiance. He wasn't centered, he was trapped in a hot, overly bright room. Later he saw a table or a chair leg, and linoleum of an indefinable color. People, who get tortured, end up there. He felt pain, that is, he became conscious of his pain. In his jaw, chest. Bruised ribs. But nobody cares. Nobody has come to examine my wounds. How can they justify that? I could have internal injuries! There's something sticky in my ear. Mine or his? But, of course, they measure the alcohol in my blood.

Have you taken anything else? Drugs? Medicine?

Like a hospitalized elephant, he keeps shaking his head.

They leave him alone.

That's irresponsible. I could do something to hurt myself. If only I could get centered. But all I can see is a table leg and the linoleum. I can't go anywhere. My face is sticky with snot and tears.

My wife! My wife! Darius Kopp sobbed because he absurdly thought he couldn't go home in that condition. She'd have thrown him out, if she heard what he'd done. And yet you know: She would never have thrown you out for something like that, but what good does that do you, you can't go home anyway.

She had moved to the country at first, both of us had just lost our jobs, both at the same time, and not for the first time, things happen, but she simply refused to, she refused to ever go back to the city, she refused to enter our apartment, she survived the entire stormy autumn and the

entire harsh winter in a hut at the edge of the forest, I've never seen such a harsh winter as in the last 2 years, she stuck it out, but she died anyway in the spring. She hung herself from a tree, away from the path, it took a day and a half for somebody to find her, barefoot, I didn't see her, but I know her feet didn't have any callouses on them, never. It's all a nightmare. I see the linoleum, a lamp is shining next to me, they're going to haul me in to interrogate me, soon they'll torture me, I've always been secretly afraid of that. I never told that to anybody. I claimed, I never dream, but in truth, I dreamt that you were sitting 3 chairs away from me in a row, and they started shooting people and you were going to come next.

Darius Kopp sobbed in a way they'd never seen here before, and they've seen a lot here. His lament moved somebody he wasn't able to see because he couldn't see anything at all, he only heard people on the telephone around him in the distance, and he just cried, cried hot tears, while the interrogation lamp shone in his face. Beloved, beloved, beloved.

Eventually a woman came in, introduced herself as a psychologist or psychiatrist. Called him by name, asked him some questions that he could answer with a yes or no, he kept his eyes closed because of the bright lamp until she asked him to open them.

Please open your eyes so that I can assess your condition.

He opened them, and there was absolutely no lamp. Or they had turned it away in the meantime. Two men were standing behind the woman, paramedics. In case I get dangerous?

Do you have anybody at home?

Whereupon something broke inside Kopp, sarcastic laughter and tearful whining at the same time. He grew short of breath, fumbled routinely for his asthma inhaler. It was in his pants pocket, but he couldn't get it out on time.

Wait, the woman said, I'll help you. I think it would be time for a tranquilizer too.

He shook his head. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. He closed his eyes again.