



Lara Schützsack
My Body is a Cage

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Summer

There in the sky, round and unbelievably yellow, is the moon. Lucinda and I are lying on the bridge and look up to the sky. It is a warm, seemingly endless night. The bridge, or rather what is left of it, lies on the edge of the city. No one ever comes here. Only we do. When everyone else is sleeping, we sneak out of the house. In the past, there was a river here and if you wanted to leave the city at this spot, you had to cross it. You can still walk onto the bridge on either side but at the centre wooden beams have first rotted and then partially broken down. If you dare to walk to the centre far enough, you will see the bottom several metres below you. The signs that once stood at the ends of the bridge and that forbade trespassing at the risk of one's life are no longer there today. Someone had covered them with graffiti and then had knocked them over.

Lucinda says it is important that we experience summer in all its magnitude. From within the dark green grasses and bushes you can hear the chirping of crickets and the leaves trembling in the wind. Nowhere else can you smell a summer's night the way you can here. "What does it smell like?" I ask. Lucinda takes a deep breath: "Moist and heavy and unsettling. As if you should never allow yourself to fall asleep for fear of missing out on something." Then we lie quietly on this forgotten old bridge. Sometimes you can hear a faint rustle as if someone was sitting in the bushes. But we are not afraid. For the most dangerous thing is fear itself.

"Adults are always afraid," Lucinda says. "Everything frightens them. Especially the stars. Because they can't understand how something can be so bright and so beautiful and at the same time be light years away. They would love to shoot up into the sky until the brightest star falls down and, at the peak of its light, burns out crackling on the ground. Afterwards, scientists from all over the world would arrive and watch the fallen star. They would hook it

up to cables, measuring instruments and computers. It would be broken down into fragments and the results would be transferred to formulae and charts. But they would have given away its secret already." We hang our heads over the abyss."

"What if we fall?" I ask.

"We won't fall," Lucinda says and leans down further. "Just look how beautiful the desert below us is."

For a while, we simply look down at the dried-up river bed. Then we lie down with our faces pointing towards the sky and Lucinda tells stories of Tenebria. Tenebria is the country where all of the people go who aren't made for this world. The ones with thin skins, the ones made of glass, those who wish for too much, those who have taken too great a risk and have lost too much. The Tenebrian sea heals all the scars we receive while being in this world. Its waters are unbelievably deep and salty and the body floats weightlessly on top of its surface. In Tenebria, we all sleep naked and wrapped up in furs of polar bears, lying close to each other.

"Like Inuit people," Lucinda says.

"Everything is easy. If you love someone there, then that love is forever." Naturally, Tenebria has a national animal, the blue cat. The cat has bright yellow eyes and fur blue like the ocean. Meeting it will bring you good luck. Touching it will give you comfort. Tenebria is a dark country. It's always night there and in the sky, Lucinda says, in the sky there are countless stars.

Lucinda's voice is soft and deep, so deep you can feel it. She plays her voice like an instrument, slowly stroking every single one of its strings, until you feel your belly ache with the longing for the things she is talking about. The most beautiful thing, however, are Lucinda's eyes: narrow green eyes with yellow sparks in them. Eyes you will never forget. I think there is always someone somewhere in this world thinking of my sister's eyes. Lucinda is the kind of girl who makes people turn their heads on the streets. It's not because she is simply beautiful but also because you can feel that something will happen to her. Something that doesn't happen to everyone. You can feel it in the way she moves, in the breath of air that touches you when she passes by. You can see it in the light shadow that lies on her face and in the light that is incessantly flickering in her eyes.

When she has finished her story, we stay and lie there for a long time and listen to the sounds of the night. I take Lucinda's hand and hold it up to my cheek. The hand is cool and smells of metal. Far away you can hear dogs howling. "Can you hear that?" Lucinda asks. "At night, summer sounds different. As if it could swallow you up and then you would be gone." The handlebars wobble dangerously. Lucinda and I are riding on a rickety bike, on a dark road. There is not a single car to be seen, so we drive in the middle of the roadway. Lucinda is driving in generously wavy lines. I'm sitting on the carrier with my arms wrapped around

her waist. Her long dark hair is blowing in my face. We are singing some song called *Up in the clouds*. You can't really call that singing; it's more like we are shouting. I'm the background vocalist. Lucinda sings "Up in the clouds" and I join in: "Ayeayeaye!" Lucinda leans deep into the curves and sometimes I scream a little. Not with fear but because something in my belly is jumping up and down with the excitement and wants to get out. We are heading right towards the gas station when a car at high speed suddenly appears right behind us. We notice it so late that we don't have the time to move to the side. The car only just manages to swerve. It almost hit us. The driver honks angrily. "Up in the clouds," Lucinda bellows. The car slows down, almost comes to a halt next to us, then rolls on in our tempo. The driver winds down the window. I close my eyes. Since I was a child, I have been doing that. Firmly shut my eyes whenever there was about to be trouble. Back then, I thought that it made me invisible. Although I've understood by now that that's wrong, I still close my eyes. "Girls, you are riding your bike in the middle of the road with no lights on! Are you crazy?" His voice is cracking with anger. Lucinda presses her feet down sharply on the pedals: "Of course we are crazy! What do you think?"

"That's suicidal!" he bellows.

"Yes, it is," my sister says in honeyed tones.

"You've totally lost your mind!"

The man accelerates noisily and rushes off. We laugh. I press my head against Lucinda's back and wrap my arms even tighter around her slim body. "Up in the clouds"

"Ayeayeaye"

After the city sign she makes a turn to the gas station at a breakneck speed. We stop at the gas station right in front of the shop window. Lucinda punches the window with her fist. Bernd, a boy from our neighbourhood, is sitting at the counter behind it. The bang makes him jump but when he sees Lucinda, his face lights up. Bernd is already eighteen but short and plain with pimply skin. The girls in our street laugh at him. They call him crater face and they don't care if he can hear them or not. Lucinda maintains that he is more interesting than others exactly because he looks the way he does.

"I don't understand," I say. And she says: "You will. Some day."

Lucinda gets off the bike and shoves it into my hand. "You wait outside!" Then she enters the harshly lit shop at the gas station, but only after undoing her braided hair and taking a look at her reflection in the window. Her steps express a buoyant mood. I watch her through the windowpane.

When Lucinda enters a place, everything is set into motion. There are no laws anymore. Her presence puts everything into question.

She takes a quick scrutinising look at Bernd. When she sees to her satisfaction that he can't help but to follow her with his eyes, she directly heads towards the ice chest, fishes

something in coloured packaging out of it and shows it to me through the window. Twister, my favourite ice cream. I nod. When my sister walks from the ice chest over to the till, her movements seem to be in slow motion. She slowly pushes the ice lolly and a pack of chewing gum across the counter towards Bernd. Without looking up, he reaches for the Twister. She holds on to the ice lolly for one second too long so that his fingers touch her hand. He looks up and when he catches her eye, he blushes and quickly looks back to the till. Then, he scans the items with a trembling hand. Lucinda smiles as she turns around and leaves the gas station without paying.

“Let’s go!” She hands me the ice lolly, reaches for the bike and gets on it. I jump up on the carrier behind her. We start out in wavy lines, giggling.

“Is he watching?”

I turn around one more time, swaying from right to left, rolling out of the gas station’s light into the darkness.

“Yes, he is watching!”

Bernd is sitting behind his till and watches us leaving. His shift has only just started. And I think, right now, it feels to him like it’s going to be an endlessly long one. I feel sorry for him because that’s exactly what nights without Lucinda feel to me: endlessly long.

“Can I sleep next to you tonight?” I ask.

“What?” Lucinda shouts while she lets the wind and her hair rush past her ears.

“What did you say?”

“Next to you, may I sleep next to you tonight?” I call out.

Lucinda’s bed is not a bed. It’s a cave. It’s a boat. A cave boat which brings us through the night, packed with cloths, posters, books and many secrets – stones which she collected everywhere and which in the dark are imbued with magic powers, stories which are so eerie that I have to cover my ears halfway through them. My sister defies all my parents’ requests, all their pleadings with her that she may tidy up her bed. On the contrary: The treasures her bed holds are gradually taking up more and more space. Somewhere in between my sister lies. Covered by books, notes and colourful cloths. In some rare nights, Lucinda allows me to sleep next to her. Those nights are special nights, filled with our whispers, Lucinda’s soft voice and hundreds of my questions. My sister answers them all. There is not one truth that is the same for all people, Lucinda says, and therefore there is not a single question you can’t answer. There are innumerable truths. Only what we feel can also be true for us. Everyone can answer every question if they have enough colours in their minds.

Unlike me, Lucinda falls asleep as soon as she closes her eyes. For as long as I remember, two worries have been haunting me: the fear of darkness and the fear of my sister leaving me alone. So I try to keep her awake. I ask her questions. “What do you think the weather will be like tomorrow? Do you think Mom and Dad kiss often when we don’t see it? Are there

dogs on other planets?” When Lucinda’s answers become harder to hear and slower, I know that she will fall asleep soon. “Good night!” I say. “Good night,” Lucinda says. Then, it is quiet. I don’t want to be awake all by myself. “Sleep tight,” I say. “Sleep tight,” a sound from far, far away. “Sweet dreams,” I manage to come up with eventually.

No answer. I’m scared my sister will sleep forever. What if she simply doesn’t wake up anymore tomorrow morning? “And wake up well tomorrow morning!” I whisper imploringly into the silence. Then, I can’t come up with anything else.

I’m alone. I lie awake like this for a long time before I manage to fall asleep.

Intrigued? Contact us for further information:

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