

Silke
Scheuermann

THE HOUR
BETWEEN
DOG
AND
WOLF

Translated by Lucy Jones

I remembered an article I'd read about the oldest-ever laboratory mouse—the scientists had named it Yoda. It had lived to the equivalent of a hundred and thirty-six human years, more than twice the age of other mice. This was due to its leanness, reported the article, which was easy on the heart and circulation. However, it had always felt the cold; and for this reason, it had had to share its germfree cage with a roommate, a fat mouse that kept it warm all the time. I wondered what kind of life the old lady lived. Whether she sat in an overheated flat when she wasn't working as a model, and stared out of the window to see what was going on outside. I leant over to Carol and got a whiff of her strong perfume. She looks as if she's playing the idea of death, I whispered. Carol looked baffled. Sshhhh, someone hissed. What age had Yoda reached in mouse years? I couldn't remember; it hadn't sounded half as impressive. Four? When the lights went back on, I quickly left the room, Carol following me like a shadow. What are the photos of the old lady for? I asked. A public ad campaign, Carol answered. It's to make people aware that the eyewitnesses to German history are dying out. I nodded. So she's Jewish? Carol shrugged, like she was bored, and said, at any rate she's a model, a character model. Oh, I said and shifted from one foot to the other. Carol handed me a business card. At last, Kai came.

He wiped his hand across his forehead, glanced absently at my parka and apologized for making me wait. We walked over the gravel to the car. A young man wearing a dark leather jacket and shades with metallic-green lenses dashed past us; he waved, swung himself onto the saddle of his mountain bike which was leaning against the warehouse wall, and pedalled off at breakneck speed. Bye, Paul, Kai shouted after him. Compared with Paul, we dawdled to the car; in my hand, I turned over the ad-agency card that Carol had given me, wondering how Kai and my sister had met. I guessed at an opening of an art show. Kai unlocked the car door. Where did you meet anyway? I asked as I sat inside his extremely well-kempt albeit very old Mercedes, where some films and a bumper pack of tissues lay on the back seat. I waited for his reply while he put his gear into the boot according to some kind of system, and, although he hesitated for a conspicuously long time, I didn't feel awkward about asking. No, it wasn't indiscreet of me: couples always like to answer that one, it was important to the central myth. At a party, I think, said Kai indifferently, and started the engine. Ah, at a party, I repeated, but then let it drop. A party; he could mean an exhibition opening, of course. He would probably appreciate Ines' paintings, her radiant pastel-coloured pictures depicting happy people going for walks or reading on the beach, pictures that portrayed normal adults doing meaningless capers

or kissing each other. You could spot them immediately, these Ines Inah paintings; or I.I., as she was in the habit of signing them. She used this alias because our surname was very ordinary. Art critics were bowled over by these distortions of reality. They wrote that Ines rendered an inversion or an *ex negativo* of suffering; she displayed a brilliantly simulated superficiality. In Rome, I'd talked to a critic who wrote articles on the young art scenes in England, France and Germany, and some other countries, I forget where: he thought Ines' work was wonderful. A newspaper photo of my sister at her first solo show often came to my mind; she was wearing a velvet hat that looked like a turban and a double necklace of pearls. Her dress was creased on purpose, and her hair slightly tousled, making her look like a thin, expensive doll that someone had clothed in a hurry. I had cut out the photo at the time—it was probably in another biscuit tin somewhere—because, despite everything, I was proud of her. It was not her pastel paintings I objected to but those that depicted our dying father in a hyper-realistic, frightening, indiscreet way—if you took into account that he was a man who felt shame to the highest degree. But no more talk of that. I asked Kai aggressively what he wanted to talk about, my voice slicing through the odious, family-daytrip atmosphere that had arisen since we were taking a drive in the rain. Well, said Kai, looking straight ahead, well, the thing is that

Ines would like to live with you for a while. Out of the question, I replied coolly.

We drove along the river. The rain changed, becoming harder, drumming louder. The other cars had now turned on their headlights and, as the storm unleashed itself, it was easy to forget that it was the middle of the day. Kai had long since turned on the windscreen wipers but they didn't help much; the rain came at a slight tilt from an uncertain direction, hitting the windscreen where the glass and hood joined, and spraying up to cover the window in gleaming streaks. I felt a bad mood brewing in me, a foul temper that matched the storm in a way I found idiotic and annoying. I tried to concentrate on a single, blurred raindrop but it didn't work and I felt humiliated—as if I'd fought with all my strength against a bucket of water, but lost. Kai had shifted into the right-hand lane. I could feel his eyes on me. She's not well, he said, and to top it all, there are building works outside her house and they're driving her crazy. She can't work any more and apart from that, I think she feels it's important to make up with you. My defences went up. Why make up? I asked. We haven't fallen out. Oh, come on, said Kai. A crabby tone had crept into his voice, a tone that annoyed me no end; after all, he was asking me for something, not the other way round. I studied my hand with affected boredom, my wrist, to be precise, on which I was wearing a thin, silver wristband. I

pushed up the sleeves of my blouse and let my gaze slide up my arm. On the inner side I had small, white zigzag scars, I couldn't remember where from. I let my sleeve fall back down. Why doesn't she move in with a friend, or with you? I asked Kai, turning to face him abruptly, like an attacker ambushing her victim. This threw him completely and he sounded cagey when he spoke. My place is too small, and anyway, I have a friend living with me who has work to do in Frankfurt. Then she could move into her studio, I said, sticking to the same tack. It was a lousy excuse: Was his place too small or did he have someone living there? Kai, relieved to deflect the subject from his too small yet overcrowded flat, explained that Ines didn't have a studio right now. She had to leave the old one when the lease ran out and she's looking for a new one now, he said. Really? Now I was mystified. So it wasn't that she hadn't worked much recently and only badly, like she'd told me after swimming. She wasn't working at all. This was very untypical of my ambitious sister, not forgetting that she'd even managed to turn our father's death into some profitable business. So, how about it? Kai asked again. He was persistent, my sister's boyfriend, you had to give him that. I want to go home, I answered, please carry on driving.

I filled the kettle, still wearing the parka. As the water began to boil, I paced the hallway, then stopped in