

Praise for László Krasznahorkai

‘By turns beguiling dream and elusive allegory, it is an object lesson in both scale and perspective, masterfully juggling orders of magnitude across time and space. That such enormity can be contained in little over 100 pages is perhaps nothing short of a miracle’ *Financial Times*

‘A little object of meditation. Much like the secret garden itself, it is really very beautiful; and though there are longueurs, they are dreamy’
M. John Harrison, *Times Literary Supplement*

‘Intensely thought-provoking’ *Los Angeles Review of Books*

‘Beautiful ... through Mulzet’s exceptional work, we can appreciate the enchantment of language that is attentive to precise details’
Irish Times

‘Explores the beatific, languorous, and even beautiful possibilities of extreme syntax ... One of the impressive achievements of *A Mountain to the North* is how well it maintains its reverie – how dull it isn’t’
Asymptote

‘He is one of the great inventors of new forms in contemporary literature’ Adam Thirlwell, *New York Review of Books*

‘Best known for his dense, entropic fictions and grubby, Gogolian characters, László Krasznahorkai will surprise longtime readers with the cosmic serenity of his latest ... gorgeously translated by Otilie Mulzet’ *The New York Times*

‘Krasznahorkai throws down a challenge: raise your game or get your coat ... the intensity of his commitment to the art of fiction is indisputable ... exhilarating, even euphoric’ Hari Kunzru

‘In the fiction of László Krasznahorkai, man struggles to achieve infinity only to find madness as his consolation prize. In *A Mountain to the North*, *a Lake to the South*, *Paths to the West*, *a River to the East*, the pretty grandson of a prince seeks a mythical garden that haunts his every waking moment. His search leads him through a labyrinthine and seemingly abandoned monastery, whose astonishing beauty and inevitable decay the author painstakingly details’ *Vulture*

ALSO BY LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI

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The Melancholy of Resistance

*A Mountain to the North, a Lake to the South,
Paths to the West, a River to the East*

Satantango

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Spadework for a Palace

War and War

The World Goes On

HERSCHT

07769

LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI

Translated by Otilie Mulzet



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Hope is a mistake.

RAINBOW STRANDS

within nothing out of nothing	1
from somewhere to somewhere	32
the world was disappearing	83
the silence in Berlin	107
the only message was that they were there	133
when it comes to Bach, nothing is easy	144
it was a source of deep consolation	151
he served big scoops	203
in the presence of greatness	222
<i>Falsche Welt, dir trau ich nicht!</i>	269
there is nothing else that is perfect, only	283
and light blue	306
only for complete emptiness	330

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Willy-Brandt-Straße 1, 10557 Berlin—that was the address he wrote down; then, in the upper left-hand corner, he wrote only Herscht 07769 and nothing else, signaling, as it were, the confidential nature of this matter; no point, he thought, in wasting words by adding any more precise indicators of his own self, as the post office would send the reply back to Kana based on the postcode, and here, in Kana, the post office could get the letter to him based on his name; most essentially, everything was contained on the piece of paper which he had just now folded twice, nicely and accurately, slipping it into the envelope, everything formulated in his own words that began by noting that the Chancellor, a learned natural scientist, would clearly and immediately understand what was on his mind here in Kana, Thuringia, in wishing to call her attention to the need for such a personage as herself, who, in addition to tending to the everyday troubles and cares of the Bundesrepublik, must also attend to seemingly distant troubles and cares, especially when all of these troubles and cares were besieging everyday life with such destructive force, and now he was obliged to speak of a siege, a staggering presence, in his view, threatening the existence of the country, indeed all of humanity, as well as societal order, a siege looming from ever more directions, but among which he must emphasize only the most important: the seemingly unanswerable distress signal emitted by natural philosophy in the course of the vacuum experiments, concealed within methodological descriptions—although it had come to light a long time ago, he himself had realized only now that in a completely empty *space*, demotically understood, *events* were occurring; and this in and of itself was enough reason for the leader of the country, as well as one of the most influential people

in the entire world, to prioritize this and exactly this matter and convene the UN Security Council—it was the very least she could do—because at stake here was not merely a political matter, but one of immediate existential import, and he sketched out the details briefly, and that was it: he was of the opinion that it would be best to be succinct, as he knew the addressee would have very little time to read his letter, no point in being verbose when writing to an expert, he signed the letter, folded it twice, slipped it into the envelope, and addressed it, but no, he shook his head, it wasn't good, he took the letter out of the envelope, crumpled it up and threw the paper to the ground, as he said to himself (as he usually did): I must start from the assumption that the Chancellor is a trained physicist; this meant that he did not have to explain everything in detail but could hit the ground running so the Chancellor could at once grasp the importance of this matter and act immediately, at a minimum, convene the Security Council, and he leaned with his elbows on the table, resting his chin in his hands clasped together, he picked up the piece of paper, smoothed out the wrinkles, read through what he had written, and since he had a pen that could write either with blue, green, or red ink, he took the pen and, clicking on the red ink cartridge, strongly underlined the words “Security Council” several times, then the expression “at a minimum”; he nodded to himself as if signaling his approval despite his earlier misgivings, folded the paper twice again as before, nice and neatly, following the earlier fold lines, put the letter back in the envelope, and already he was on his way to the post office, where altogether there were two people waiting in front of him, the first person was done quickly, but the second one, holding a small package, was trying to find out something with dreadful thoroughness, wanting to know how much it would be to send a package by regular mail, how much by DHL ExpressEasy registered, how much by DHL ExpressEasy unregistered, or how much by registered mail alone, she really didn't want to finish, she kept drag-

ging it out, asking more and more questions, then she just hemmed and hawed like someone who was having a very hard time making up her mind, although the person standing right behind her didn't have too much time even with his extended lunch break, because the Boss hardly ever let him out, the Boss was suspicious of Florian, clearly he considered his supposed toothache an unacceptable pretext, a German doesn't get a toothache, he thundered, but still he had no choice other than to let Florian start his lunch break one half hour early so he could get to the Collier Dental Clinic, but only to see Dr. Katrin, and in no way Dr. Henneberg, because he was afraid of him, and, well, to tell the truth, it wasn't too convincing when Florian started bringing up this toothache again, although he had no other choice, as he didn't have the courage to tell the Boss the truth, moreover, as far as that went, already, in the beginning of the beginning, he hadn't had the courage to tell the Boss the truth because he knew him well, he knew the Boss, to initiate him into this matter would have meant allowing a glimpse into his self, more precisely into that one single hidden compartment of his own self where the Boss hadn't yet reached, only Frau Ringer had reached there, and not the Boss, because Florian did not want to hand over his one single secret, no, not this single secret, because otherwise Florian told the Boss a good many things, or, in other words, the Boss was always able to get nearly everything out of him, he was an open book as far as the Boss was concerned, I know everything about you, the Boss used to repeat, even what you don't know about yourself, you are my responsibility and so you always must tell me everything, because if you don't tell me everything I'll sense it, and then you know what will happen, and Florian knew, because ever since the Boss had prevented him from becoming a baker and taken him into his own business, Florian had become a wall cleaner and was on the receiving end of the Boss's countless blows for everything, because everything he did was bad: not like this, don't put that over there, don't do that now, do it later,

don't do that later, do it now, don't use this, use that, not so much, not too little, nothing Florian did was ever good enough for the Boss even though he'd been working with him for five years now, in a word, no, he had to be quiet about this matter, and Florian was quiet, truly from the beginning of the beginning, namely from that point on when, for the first time, he felt as if he were struck by lightning as he was walking home from Herr Köhler's house, and he was thinking about what he'd heard, because truthfully put, he didn't understand, for a long, a very long time he hadn't understood what Herr Köhler was trying to say, only then, as he was headed home, it was truly as if he'd been struck by lightning because he suddenly realized what Herr Köhler was trying to say, and he was very frightened because this meant that the entire universe rested upon the inexplicable fact that in a closed vacuum, in addition to every one billion particles of matter, one billion antiparticles also arise, and when matter and antimatter meet they extinguish each other, but then suddenly they don't, because after that one billion and *first* particle, the one billion and first *antiparticle* doesn't arise, and so this one material particle remains in existence, or directly it brings existence into life: as abundance, as surplus, as excess, *as a mistake*, and the entire universe exists because of this, only because of this, namely without it, the universe never would have existed—this thought frightened Florian so much that he had to stop, he had to lean against the wall when he got to the end of Oststraße, and turned left on Fabrikstraße, going toward the Shopping Center, his body was flooded with fever, his brain was buzzing, his legs trembling, he couldn't bear to go on, namely according to Herr Köhler, science had not yet been able to explain this, and as he spoke, Florian was still thinking about how earlier, he'd said that something could arise from nothing; Herr Köhler had explained that the process within a closed vacuum begins in such a way that within nothing and out of nothing suddenly there will be something, or rather: this event begins, which is fully impossible,

nonetheless it begins with the simultaneous birth of those one billion particles of matter and those one billion antiparticles which immediately extinguish each other such that a photon is released—Florian was still thinking about this part of Herr Köhler's explanation, trying to grasp it; he could still hear Herr Köhler's voice as he explained the conclusion to this process which, in his view, was even more startling, although the gist of Herr Köhler's explanation only became fully clear to Florian as he passed by the abandoned train station and its lance-holding saint bolted onto an iron arch; he staggered alongside the boarded-up windows, he staggered along the empty street, then somehow he got home,

within nothing out of nothing

and he staggered on farther, dragging himself up the staircase like someone who'd been beaten, it was too late to go over to Frau Ringer so what else could he do but go home, but it was so hard for him to get the key into the lock, and so hard for him to open the door, and he found the kitchen filled with some kind of murky fog as if some kind of evil force were preventing him from reaching his usual spot in his own kitchen to finally plunk himself down, he was broken, he just sat there, holding his head in his hands so it wouldn't explode from the throbbing, and only his thoughts were dragging themselves on, so that it was no surprise that the next day as he got into the Boss's car at the corner of Christian-Eckardt-Straße and Ernst-Thälmann-Straße, the Boss immediately noticed that something was amiss, he asked him, too, goddammit, what the fuck is your problem now, and after Florian only shook his head, staring fixedly in front of himself, the Boss only added: well now, fuck it, today's getting off to a good start, and it looks as if you didn't even shave!! by which he meant that Florian had a screw loose again, but no, he only felt burdened, very burdened by everything that Herr Köhler had told him

yesterday, and it wasn't so easy, because first he had to understand Herr Köhler, to try to understand what Herr Köhler was saying and what it meant, this in and of itself was already difficult, partially because his knowledge of physics was confined to whatever he had managed to read ever since childhood and whatever he'd been able to comprehend in the course entitled Modern Paths of Physics given at the Adult Education School located in the Lichtenberg Secondary School building: Florian only had a secondary school certificate, afterward graduating from baking industry vocational school: every Tuesday evening he would sit there among the other students, for two years now, he'd walk up the hill along Schulstraße, and he listened and he paid attention and he took notes and he finished up the year industriously, then he registered once again for the following year so he could attend the same course again as the first time around he had not understood many things properly, and it was good to hear the instructor, Herr Köhler, once again as he explained *the wonderful world of elementary particles*, as he termed it, and then one day Herr Köhler suggested to Florian that if he helped him cut down a large, dried-out spruce tree in his yard on Oststraße he would explain to him everything that he hadn't understood about *the wonderful world of elementary particles*; it was only at the end of the second year that Florian had been able to pluck up his courage and gone over to Herr Köhler on the last night of the course in the basement of the Lichtenberg Secondary School where Herr Köhler held his adult education classes, to tell him that, regrettably, a few things were still not completely clear from the lectures he had been attending for two years, no problem, Herr Köhler replied, Florian was welcome to come over if he would assist him in cutting down the tree, but of course Florian wouldn't let Herr Köhler assist him in this task, and the very next weekend he chopped down Herr Köhler's tree all by himself, neatly trimming away the branches, bringing them out to the garden gate, then, as Herr Köhler watched him dumbfounded, Florian grabbed the trunk of the tree, and,

just as it was, took it outside in one go as if it were just a little twig, and he piled it on top of the branches to be hauled away, it wasn't a such big deal, but the result was that not only did Herr Köhler explain everything to him again, but that from that point onward, Florian could pay a visit to Herr Köhler every Thursday at seven in the evening, it was in fact Herr Köhler himself who suggested this, at first it was just the following Thursday, then it was the Thursday after that, then it became a regular occurrence, and now here he was in the post office with this woman in front of him who would not finish up with her package, and he only had twenty minutes left in his lunch break, what was he going to say to the Boss if he was late, he couldn't lie anymore about so many people waiting at the dental clinic, because the Boss knew it wasn't so busy there at this time of day, they hardly saw any patients after twelve noon so he couldn't use that excuse, the best thing would be to finish up everything quickly, he watched Jessica behind the glass as she answered the old woman's questions nicely and patiently, but when it was finally his turn, things didn't go so speedily, because now it was Jessica who started dragging things out, saying, ha, what is this supposed to be, Florian? Angela Merkel?! ha, what are you thinking, that you can just write her a letter and she's going to read it, eh? and Florian didn't know what to say to this, because Jessica was not well known for demonstrating comprehension in matters outside of the scope of daily life at the post office; Jessica and her husband, after they had moved away from Bachstraße, both always assumed that everything was uniform and transparent, moreover Jessica's husband, Herr Volkenant, even trumped Jessica at such times, he'd say, no need for all that nonsense, everything was just as simple as a punch in the face, and that was it, although Florian's view of these matters was quite different, as it was in this instance, too, as Herr Volkenant called out from the parcel storage room behind Jessica's back: she's not going to read it, and if you want to send this letter for eighty cents, Florian, then you might as well just take your eighty cents

and throw them out the window, do you understand? and he said again: it's as simple as a punch in the face, and because this "punch in the face" reminded Florian of what was clearly waiting for him once he got back to the Boss, he urged Jessica on, and counted out the eighty cents on the counter, not replying to either of them, they didn't force the matter but only looked at each other, obviously they couldn't care less, Jessica shrugged her shoulders, and, with a grimace, stamped the envelope forcefully, while the expression on her face said that as far as *she* was concerned, Florian could toss his coins out the window; and the Boss didn't say anything either, he just smacked him once, he didn't rebuke him with either this or that, just smacked him as usual, Florian pulled in his neck and provided no explanation, like someone who knew that there was no point, it was 12:47 and he was seventeen minutes late, so what should he say, that there had been a lot of people waiting at Dr. Katrin's office? there was no point, the Boss realized anyway Florian hadn't gone to any dental clinic, but he didn't resign himself to Florian keeping it a secret: you may have no secrets from me! he yelled at him in the car as they turned off at the intersection on the B88 on the way to Bibra, but Florian held out, he didn't answer, only stared fixedly in front of himself, and for the time being that was enough, because the Boss didn't say anything to him until they got to Bad Berka, but there he only said "get a move on already," and "take out the goddamned Kärcher"; after treating the pavement with chemicals, they were still mutely scrubbing where "some miserable idiot" had spilled paint that wasn't easy to remove, they had been called because they were known throughout all of East Thuringia, the Boss's prices were good, his work always carried out thoroughly, accurately, to everyone's satisfaction, and he didn't care what had been spilled or what kind of graffiti had to be removed, their spectrum was broad, they dealt with everything: cleaning, protection, sandblasting, scratched glass, even removing chewing gum; almost everything fit into the *spectrum*, as the Boss called it, and the *spectrum* had to be broad so as to contain almost everything, do you understand, Flo-

rian, not only graffiti, but everything, because that's how we make our living, do you understand, of course you don't understand, such a giaaant, but he never understands anything, because that's what the Boss called him if he was in a good mood—it happened rarely, but sometimes the Boss was in a good mood—then he would come out with this giaaant, saying, well, such a fucking huge giaaant made of pure muscle, but he understands nothing, because for him there's only the universe, of cooourse, the universe, then the Boss would hit the steering wheel and glance over at him—and now, with much less conviviality, he almost spat out the words: Florian should leave the universe for the Jews to figure out, the Boss said, and pay more attention to practical things, as, for example, every single line of the national anthem, did he know the entire national anthem, because he should know it, and a German should always begin from the beginning, did he understand?! and not with the third stanza, what kind of lib criminal gang is forcing this crap on us, telling us we can't sing our own national anthem from the beginning to the end, no one can take it away from us, those motherfuckers, because for us, this is the beginning of everything: by then, the Boss was yelling at the top of his lungs; in his fervent excitement, as he thought about the entire national anthem, he pressed down hard on the gas, nearly standing on the pedal when emphasizing this or that word, making the Opel's engine roar, and now he started yelling even louder to be heard over the noise of the engine, he hollered: sing, Florian, sing—those goddamned motherfuckers—sing, let that wonderful first stanza ring out, then the second stanza, no one here is going to tell us what OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM is, and Florian had to start singing immediately:

*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,
Über alles in der Welt,
Wenn es stets zu Schutz und Trutze
Brüderlich zusammenhält ...*

the engine roared, they were going 135 or 140 kilometers an hour, that was usually the maximum the Boss dared to go with the Opel as they raced along to the next job and the one after that, and Florian couldn't not join in, because whenever they were driving somewhere in the Opel the Boss made him sing as well—your voice is so fucking insipid, Florian, are you some Jew or what? the Boss thundered at him on every occasion, then he bawled: well, fuck it, you won't be appearing at the Semperoper anytime soon, that's for sure, and he took his foot off the gas a bit, as it were expressing his contempt for Florian and everyone else who sang so falsely; a German has a clear, beautiful ear for music, he kept saying, so that Florian had to renounce his Saturday morning strolls with Frau Ringer; instead, he had to wash his overalls on Friday so they could more or less dry out on the radiator by the next day, and every Saturday morning at eleven a.m. he had to be present at rehearsals to train his musical hearing, but his musical hearing didn't improve, his voice remained insipid during the repeated singing of the national anthem in the Opel which the Boss had purchased off the books, secondhand, the car was four and a half years old, and of course it needed tinkering with, this or that part was always breaking, that's how it is with an old car, the Boss muttered, and he didn't curse the car but praised it, because at least it's German, he explained irritably, and an Opel will always be an Opel, no? it's just that you have to tinker with it now and then, because those Yanks messed it up, they really ruined this masterpiece, so that the Boss was always tinkering with it, he was happy to do so, and exclusively by himself, meaning that when he was doing so Florian didn't have to be at the Boss's place, he wasn't even allowed to set foot in the Boss's yard, which he never liked to do anyway because of the dog, sometimes, though, the Boss would discuss this or that with the neighbor, Wagner, but only with him, and they just chatted, and only he, the Boss, was allowed to touch the Opel, do you even know who Adam Opel was? the Boss turned to Florian some-

times in the car, and Florian was already replying that he was the father of Wilhelm and Carl, at which—like a joke they both enjoyed repeating—the Boss corrected him: Wilhelm *von* Opel and Carl *von* Opel, he said, only that Florian wasn't really so happy to repeat it, because for him it wasn't so funny or interesting, to tell the truth he was a little bored by it, all this is boring to you, eh? the Boss sensed, as he made him answer the question again, oh, of course not, Florian shook his head unconvincingly, but of cooourse, you're bored by this whole thing, I can tell! the Boss would yell over the engine, for a while they drove along in silence, then Florian got a whack on the neck, as the Boss jokingly called it, just like that, unexpectedly, one whack and that was it, and the discussion was closed: Florian took the Boss closing a discussion of this or that topic with a whack as perfectly natural, and, as one accepting of his fate, he merely pulled his neck in at such times because the Boss was his fate and that could not be changed, he accepted it and waited for an answer to his letter from Berlin, but then, when the answer was clearly delayed, he began showing up at the post office whenever he could get there during their open hours as Herr Volkenant closed up at six p.m.; sometimes, coming back in the Opel, they got back late, and then Florian ran over to the Altstadt to no avail, because the post office wasn't open so he couldn't make any inquiries, but sometimes he did manage to get there in time; Florian always asked the letter carrier too because he knew he'd be at the IKS pub every evening drinking until it closed; he asked, but nothing, both Jessica and the letter carrier just shook their heads, although as far as that was concerned, the letter carrier now shook his head without even being asked, continuously, and chiefly around closing time—no, nothing, and the Boss too started asking after a while: why the fuck do you keep going over to Jessica in the post office, tell me nicely already—what was Florian supposed to say to that—you like her, eh? well that's very nice, going after a married woman, I'm about to piss myself, the

Boss smirked and slapped his knee, and that was just the beginning, because then he started laughing in his own way: his mouth gaped open but no sound came out, he just shook his head with this gaping, opened mouth, then he leaned into the other's face, and he thought it was hilarious; the Boss always laughed as he was laughing now, then he smacked Florian on his back once, then once again, which Florian should have perceived as a kind of recognition although Florian did not perceive anything of the sort, he only turned completely red, his smile constrained as if conceding what the Boss suspected him of, in the end though he slunk away to get out of the Boss's sight, because for as long as they were together he had to be horrifically on his guard, he could never know what the Boss was going to come up with, although the Boss suspecting him of carrying on with Jessica was actually the best outcome, because everything became much harder when the Boss informed him that the homeland needed everyone, and so it was high time for him, Florian, to quit putting things off—time for him get into line and ask to be taken into the unit, because that's what the Boss called his pals, the unit, and—although it wasn't entirely clear what this meant—Florian knew he had no desire to be a part of them, he was afraid of them, all of Kana knew about them: Nazis, people repeated in lowered tones, which made the Boss's ever more belligerently expressed wish even more threatening, because if Florian signed up with the unit, then he would have to struggle, day by day, not only alongside the Boss (with full devotion), but among these Nazis, too (of course with no devotion), as he could be certain—he knew them well enough—that they wouldn't leave him alone, he'd be under pressure to get tattooed, and he was more afraid of this tattoo than of the dental clinic, he had no wish to be tattooed, no Iron Cross, no red-tongued German federal eagle which the Boss had been recommending vehemently, Florian got goose bumps on his arm just thinking about the needle and the tattoo machine with its frightening whirring sound

which he himself had heard on occasion when accompanying the Boss, after rehearsals, to Archie's studio as another newer or older member lay down beneath the machine while the others waited outside, he felt like running away, insensate, in the opposite direction from where this needle and this tattoo machine were operating—no, no to this, and inasmuch as he felt able, he even pronounced it decisively aloud, no, he was never going to have himself tattooed, that wasn't his style, he added softly, at which, of course, the Boss's face turned crimson in rage: what, you don't belong with us?! you do belong with us!! wherever I belong is where you belong, because how many times do I have to tell you that you are my responsibility, how many times do I have to keep repeating into those deaf ears of yours: think it over, and make up your mind, either an Iron Cross or a red-tongued German federal eagle, because next week you're coming with me, and you're going to lie down underneath Archie's hand, fuck it, even if you come out of there bawling; but thank God, Florian had managed to get out of it so far, and he had not yet lain down beneath Archie's hand, although he still regularly had to admire the Boss's chest made of pure muscle upon which there bloomed the Iron Cross, because I earned it, the Boss said, and you too have to earn it, and he said nothing else, he pulled his shirt down again and by way of explanation only said to the others: Florian doesn't have his tattoo yet, he's just like a kid peeing in bed, the only problem is that he's so, but I'm telling you, so strong, that even five of us wouldn't be able to hold him down under the needle, do you get it, not even five of us, he's strong as a bull, boys, that's what he's like, one time the road construction made us go sliding off the B88, it was muddy, and we couldn't get the right side of the car out of the mud, and this here Florian got out and he lifted the entire Opel out of the ditch with me inside, get it? with me inside, and he lifted the car back onto the road, so all of you will have to persuade Florian that he wants this tattoo, to which the others said not a word, they only looked at the Boss, who

wasn't too pleased with this wordless gaze, he quickly ordered beers, distributed them to the unit, and he said: to the Fourth Reich, and they clinked their glasses in the old way, just like real Germans used to do, meaning that as they clinked their glasses a few drops of beer spilled into the other's glass or onto his hand; discussion of this question was put aside for now and Florian could hope for a bit of breathing room: there wasn't usually talk of the tattoo during weekdays but toward the end of the week, most often on Fridays when clearly the Boss had the upcoming weekend meetings on his mind, if there were no problems with the Opel, because there were always problems with the Opel, either the propeller shaft or water pump or radiator, always this or that, some indicator or other was always flashing, which meant that on Saturdays, the repairs had to be taken care of first, they went for spare parts either to Adelmeyer's or Eckardt's, but in no way to Opitz's, because their noses were stuck in the air, those Renault people, they didn't know shit about Opels, the Boss instructed Florian, and so they went to Adelmeyer's or to Eckardt's; after which Florian wasn't allowed to set foot in the yard, the Boss went in and Florian closed the gate quickly after him as the dog barked, pulling on its chain, and Florian only said: well then, I'll be off now, and he left, if it was raining, then he went to the Herbstcafé or to see Frau Ring in her library, and if it wasn't raining he went to his favorite spot on the banks of the Saale, where there were two benches beneath two chestnut trees in front of the sports fields, situated almost directly on the riverbank near a small bridge; Florian really liked this spot, and if the Boss was working on the car and it wasn't raining, then hours stretched before him, hours in which he could sit here alone on the shorter bench of the two and continue to think over what he had heard from Herr Köhler in order to digest, here on the bench, the developments as he sat idly; the handball field was relatively far away, the yelling from there was barely audible, and he was thinking about what he should do, what could have happened in Berlin, because no reply had come; yesterday, he had been

over to ask Herr Volkenant and he'd asked the letter carrier as well, but they both just shook their heads, although not sarcastically like at the beginning, but rather regretfully, so that Florian had things to think about, namely what should he do, or should he do anything at all, this is what he racked his brains over as he sat beneath one of the chestnut trees by the little bridge, because his excessive impatience was also a factor here: he surely could not expect the Chancellor of Germany to immediately read his letter, understand it, and already be writing him *back*, so perhaps it would be best if I try to be patient a bit longer, he decided, while sitting on the shorter bench beneath one of the two chestnut trees near the small bridge, and then he listened to the sound of the Saale's small rapids as the brisk waves of the shallow water broke over the river stones polished smooth in their path, he listened to the peaceful, tinkling, sweet gurgling of the water, and he thought about how difficult, but how horrendously difficult it was to connect this sweet gurgling together with that spatial vacuum in which from nothing there will be something; in reference to this, Herr Köhler had also said this was exactly why he'd ceased his own inquiries into quantum physics, resolving to speak on this topic only at his evening classes, and only for as long as he still had students signing up; he turned away from quantum physics precisely because it could not be reconciled with common sense, and therefore he sought something else that would require, only and exclusively, common sense—of course he didn't discuss these matters at the Adult Education School where he confined himself to *the wonderful world of elementary particles* as opposed to the horrific world of elementary particles—Herr Köhler had sought and found that something, and that is why for years now his primary occupation had been meteorology, he even ran his own little amateur meteorological station, as well as a Private Weather Station listed with the state radio broadcaster Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk and the *Ostthüringer Zeitung*, he had built it up by himself through the work of long years, and now he had everything he needed for such a Private Weather

Station: he could measure temperatures, wind speed, air humidity and pressure, at the beginning he could do that much, then as his reputation grew and he could draw upon both Norwegian and MDR meteorological data, the desire within him to expand the number of tools at his disposal, as he termed it, grew ever stronger, he wished to construct his own chemical actinometer—because all he had was a Michelson-Martin actinometer purchased on the sly, a commercial chemical actinometer was out of reach pricewise, but still—he asked himself—what kind of an amateur meteorologist would he be if he didn't prepare his own measuring instruments; and Herr Köhler took the plunge into homemade implementation, and the attempt proved so brilliantly successful that his neighbors, who understood absolutely nothing about this, came over right away to see the miracle, but people from the MDR and the *Ostthüringer Zeitung* came by as well, marking the starting point of a fruitful collaboration, Adrian Köhler—Herr Köhler raised his voice a bit—had at his disposal a recognized weather forecasting station, although the professionals didn't really like this kind of thing, they usually just smiled at the amateurs, just as they smiled at him at the beginning, and quite right too, he added, but eventually they accepted him, thanks to his implementation, if he could put it that way, of the homemade chemical actinometer; he hoped and believed that the German and Norwegian meteorological services as well as the MDR sometimes took a peek at his data, maybe, he tilted his head a bit to the side, who knows, in any event, he was able to provide fairly reliable weather forecasts to Kana and the surrounding area, and he was satisfied with that, he had no desire to compete with anyone, how could he even do so, he'd simply fallen in love with meteorology; this was nothing like quantum theory where acceptance of the absurd was a basic requirement, in meteorological forecasting—although of course it entailed relativity and uncertainty—one dealt in probabilities, but only until it began to snow or until the temperature climbed

above 28 Celsius, if he predicted snow, he was happy, and if he predicted temperatures above 28 Celsius, he was happy too, because Kana was enough for him, and it was enough if people—or at least a few of them here—recognized that it was worthwhile to follow his weather forecasts, as many felt that Herr Köhler made his predictions just for them: don't drive too early on the L1062 heading toward Seitenroda because early morning mist is probable, and better to avoid that forest road for a bit, or to take an umbrella because rain is likely, a thirty-five percent chance of rain between two and six p.m. was high enough to warrant tucking an umbrella into one's bag, and as for me, said Herr Köhler, smiling, that is enough, in a word, I'll admit to you, Florian, that I'm doing all of this just for my own amusement, some people like to grow roses, others repaint their houses every year, but as for myself, I would simply like to know if there will be fog on the B88 in the early morning for the next three days, meaning that the residents of Kana should set off in their cars a little later, and that is all, he said, and as a matter of fact, Florian, you should also find some kind of simple science that you would enjoy, why not stick with what you studied? why not become a baker? but Florian just shook his lowered head, as if to say: unfortunately, this has not been given to me, this is not something I may choose for myself, I must be preoccupied with the essence of what you, Herr Köhler, have shown me, and I am very worried—come now, Herr Köhler made a gesture, you have nothing to worry about, my dear son, because one day the quantum physicists will figure things out, only we won't live to see that day; well, that's the thing, Florian said, looking at him sadly with his two large light-blue eyes, that's what I'm afraid of, that I won't live to see it; but there's nothing to be afraid of, Herr Köhler shook his head, and he adjusted his glasses: look at the sky, look at those clouds, these rays of sun coming in, these are tangible things, you don't need to get so wrapped up in this whole vacuum question because you could end up sinking into it for good, especially

since what weighs on you so heavily is not the bankruptcy of quantum physics, but the bankruptcy of the limited human mind—that's what Herr Köhler said, but in vain, because Florian was so deeply immersed in that one single thought that had grabbed hold of him from everything that Herr Köhler had been explaining to him every Tuesday for two years now in the basement of the Lichtenberg Secondary School, explaining to him accurately and with truly illuminating, nearly incendiary, force, so much so that Florian had to come to a standstill, and he did come to a standstill, and then he sank, and he sank into it definitively, and he felt—he confessed at times to Herr Köhler—that he would never again be the same as he was before, because he never could have thought that the world, under the danger of a redoubtable fact, would be laid open to a destruction that could occur at any moment, and not only destruction; already, the beginning of the beginning horrified him, and he said: if, in fact, everything teeters on this knife-edge of destruction, then it must have been this way when we came into being as well, and therefore I can no longer be happy, Herr Köhler, when I look up at the sky, because I am fully seized by dread, I sense how unprotected, so unprotected the entire universe is, and because his mentor was seriously alarmed at how Florian always broke down in tears at this point, he tried to console him: look here, my son, it's all just physics, science; and science isn't finding the answer to these questions right now, that is certain, not yet, my son, not yet, for the time being, and it has ever been thus, science is always posing questions for which it has no answers, and yet: despite all the difficulties, the answer will come to pass, and the answer to this seemingly unsolvable question will come to pass as well, you can be completely sure of that—and after one of these conversations, as Florian left, Herr Köhler sat slumped in his armchair, accusing himself and asking himself why he had spoken about the unsolvable problems of physics to Florian; in certain respects, he was still a child; although surprisingly clever and

susceptible, he didn't really understand anything but merely transformed it into his own peculiar system; in other respects, his poorly interpreted knowledge only kept his overly sensitive soul, inclined to melancholic ecstasy, in a state of unnecessary excitement; how many times had Herr Köhler wanted to stop talking about *the wonderful world of elementary particles*, because the world of elementary particles was precisely not wonderful but horrific; Herr Köhler himself didn't take the whole thing so much to heart, but here was this kid grown to giant size, this child to whom it was only pointless to keep repeating, to try to persuade by argumentation (it was too late for that now anyway) that science would, one day, solve this problem, because it was not clear that science would solve it — disheartened, Herr Köhler watched a tiny beetle on the floor as it struggled onward in a thin crack from somewhere to somewhere, of course there were some questions for which physics needed to give answers, meaning that physics did not know the answers to the *most essential and fundamental questions*, moreover, physics continually put itself in the position of posing unsolvable questions, forever colliding with itself then leaving people in despair, leaving them to wonder just what was coming next, what exactly was going to come from all this, which of course did not mean that Florian was correct in thinking that the experimental proof of both Dirac's prediction and Lamb's shift had opened Pandora's box; in the sacred conviction of Herr Köhler the future was not at all as frightening as that; Florian was overexaggerating, and yet Florian himself did not think that he was exaggerating anything, so that when it occurred to him, as it did after a while, that perhaps his letter never even reached the Chancellor, that it might have gotten stuck in some kind of bureaucratic labyrinth, he did not choose patience this time but instead determined he would sit down in his first free hour to draft a new letter with the intention of explaining the *grave import of the consequences*, but then, when he had that free hour, Florian began by calling the

Chancellor's attention to the problem: beginning with the subatomic state and progressing toward dimensions perceivable by us, we are witness today to a process of sustained deceleration down below in the atomic and, respectively, the subatomic chaos—regardless of the fact that nothing like “velocity” exists down there—an event-series of horrific velocity, or, how shall I put it, even quicker than horrific velocity, it is hard to formulate this with words as I write to you, Mrs. Chancellor, a *perpetually lightning-quick* series of events is taking place and even this, this “lightning-quick,” only approximately, moreover misleadingly, expresses what happens, unfortunately, as we proceed toward the larger units to an increasingly decelerating *conceptual* field; inside, as seen from the deep world of quarks, where accordingly there is no time for time, if we proceed from here, employing this method, we approach the macroscopic dimensions, then, within this very, very, very decelerated state, we must hypothesize that Something which we perceive as the world, and it is only in this state of extraordinary deceleration that it makes sense to speak of time and space within this crazy infinity of coming into being and cessation, because generally speaking there is no time or space in the depths, and well, here is precisely the problem, because with regard to the deep structure of reality, the question of coming into being or ceasing to exist is EXACTLY not the point: in that annihilating world of matter and antimatter, nothing comes into being and nothing passes out of being, because by the time something comes into being it already *doesn't exist*, because the photon which is liberated in that moment is light, and light is *nothingness* itself, the velocity of time and space *does not exist*, and there also *does not exist* any kind of Something, unfortunately, and an even bigger problem is that, consequently, down there below in the depths *nothing at all exists*, for that Something we would need to raise ourselves toward a different point of view, we would need other circumstances, and the essence of these circumstances—I repeat!!!—is that we must decelerate our percep-

tion horrifically, so that there may appear to us, as space, as time, as the locale and duration of events, the Something; but shit—here, the words stopped functioning and the pen stopped in his hand, because Florian knew all too well that one may not speak in such a manner, especially to a Chancellor, Angela Merkel did not appreciate curse words, in particular vulgarities, and she would consider this a vulgarity, Florian wrinkled his forehead, the face of Angela Merkel appeared before him, then the entire Angela Merkel, her movements, her posture, her gait, and that attractive face, that fine beauty which he must take into consideration, it wasn't as if he were expressing himself in a particularly uncommon way, no, not at all, here in Kana even old ladies frequently used the word "shit," but in this case, in a letter written to the Chancellor, this clearly could not be permitted, he read the letter over again, and the word really popped out, he was ashamed at how it had slipped out of him at the end of the letter, and yet he couldn't cross it out either, because how would that look, how would a letter to the Chancellor look in which there was a crossed-out or hatched-out "shit," no, he had to start over, he decided, so he set to it and recopied everything he had written onto a blank piece of A4 paper, but now without the word "shit," and he continued on calmly, indicating that he was writing all this down as he thought it worthwhile to expand upon the threatening situation sketched out in his previous letter, namely he was of the opinion that his earlier description of the hair-raising state of the world provided more than adequate demonstration of the grave import of the situation—of the world in which we live, in which our days are numbered, only that we don't know how many days are left, perhaps hardly any—and that was why Florian had taken upon himself the courage to address the Chancellor, and he hoped his letter would meet with her understanding as he eagerly awaited her reply here in Kana, he was Herscht, he wrote, full name Florian Herscht, eagerly awaiting her reply, and he sealed a new envelope and was already

headed to the post office, and although he had plenty of time he hurried along Bahnstraße, then along Jenaische Straße, to Roßstraße, to get at last into line in front of Jessica; Herr Volkenant called out when he saw Florian: well, what can we do? nothing came for you today either, at which Florian motioned to him: oh, it's not about that, and he pointed at the new envelope, oh my goodness, Jessica shook her head when he handed her the envelope and she saw the addressee, this again?! Florian, can't you understand that high-up people like that never read these kinds of letters? we can't get to them, you know, they're up there, and she pointed at the ceiling, then she pointed to the ground, and added: we're down here below, do you understand? but Florian only smiled and counted out his eighty euro cents, he took it as a matter of certainty that things weren't like that and Angela Merkel wasn't like that, Angela Merkel listened to the voices of ordinary citizens, moreover in the past few days he'd been feeling calmer about his first letter as he also took it as certain that his first letter would make its way to its addressee sooner or later, bureaucratic labyrinth or no, only that the Chancellor had to consider, amid her thousands of tasks, what was to be done, for this matter was very important, more important than anything else: if the Chancellor understood this—and Florian was doing everything in his power to make sure she did—then it was entirely clear that she would hesitate not a moment longer and convene the Security Council, for naturally she, Angela Merkel, could not handle this matter all by herself, *unfortunately*, all the heads of state were needed, or at least the most important ones, the top decision-makers, and with lightning speed, for this could brook no delay; relieved, Florian strolled uphill along Roßstraße, because he wanted to go down the hill in the other direction to the Porcelain Factory near the Hochhaus where he had been living on the highest floor from the beginning of the beginning, ever since he'd been discharged from the Institute and the Boss took him under his wing, because that is how he

had to describe what the Boss had done, truly everything was thanks to him, his being able to get an apartment in this Hochhaus, not having to remain unemployed in this great unemployment—as the Boss reminded him, his training in the baking industry was getting him nowhere—he had no personal belongings, only a backpack that he kept clutching, whereas the Boss got him a pair of gray overalls and a Fidel Castro cap and instructed him in the art of surface cleaning, namely, he was providing him with a genuine trade, the Boss explained to him, weekly pay in his pocket, Hartz IV benefits with the rent subsidy and everything—Florian’s life was on a secure footing now, and for this he had the Boss to thank, the Boss who had neither child nor wife, so that it was as if Florian were his son, you are a child who has been entrusted to me, Florian, and that’s why you will do what I say, you will do it when I tell you to do it and you will keep on doing it for as long as I tell you to, and the Boss had to explain everything in crystal clear detail and repeat it continually, because, well, the Boss explained to his cronies, even though he seems like someone who might have gone to university, I wouldn’t even put a cell phone in his hands, because on the one hand he’s a genius, but on the other, this child is off his rocker, somehow he isn’t aware of his own self, you know what a giant he is, but if you yell at him he runs away, it never even occurs to him to stand his ground and fight back, although if he wanted to he could finish us off with his bare hands, that’s what I’m telling you, to which the others said nothing at all, although they didn’t tend to talk very much anyway, that’s the kind of unit this was, few words and many deeds, that was the spirit that guided them when, on a Friday or Saturday evening, or if there was a holiday, they gathered and made their plans, expressed in few words, if it became necessary to show force, extend protection, or if they had to demonstrate resistance, simply put: if they had to be present somewhere; and they gathered together, of course, on *real* holidays, because those were plentiful, the past is rich, we shall never exhaust it,

Fritz noted, no one can take that away from us; among them, no one was named as chief, commander, unit leader, no one was designated as such; they regarded the Boss merely as a kind of thought leader, because here among them there was democracy, *this*, comrades, one or the other would pronounce, is a real democracy, and our unit here is based upon words and deeds that are open, direct, and sincere, because what we protect is a value, a single value which still existed at one time, although its survival now depends only on us, that's how it is, comrades, it's all on us now, they said to each other in the house at Burgstraße 19, because it belonged to them and so they called it the Burg, "the Castle," and as for this Burg, those filthy cops couldn't mess with them here; it symbolized perfectly everything that united them, their pledge of protecting the homeland, that and nothing more, and this was not such a small task, this was everything, surrounded as they were by a hostile environment, because of course, for the most part, the town and the entire precious Thuringia were populated by scum, cowards, and opportunists, and not only Thuringia but the entire country had been sold out to antinationalist powers via the machinations of mendacious and—as Fritz put it—international fiscal authorities, it's gone, they said, everything here that once spoke of the glorious past, the sacrifices of fathers and grandfathers, self-sacrifice, fidelity, German ideals, and the proud protection of race—gone, so that they, the few, must stand in readiness, they knew this: no one had called upon them, everyone had come together of his own accord and found the others, they did not have to be organized, the unit simply assembled at one point and waited for that time when they could step into action, as they named that moment which would indicate the start of the battle for the Fourth Reich, at one point Day X would arrive, they had been waiting now for years, for that day and that hour when they would say: this far and no farther, and they would arise from their stools at Burgstraße 19; they would take their weapons from their hiding places

and set to their task, and there would be no mercy—they drank to this every Friday or Saturday evening at Burgstraße 19 or at the conclusion of a genuine holiday when they went back to the Burg, they didn't frequent any pub or anything as did so many other similar groups in Thuringia or Saxony, not them, because they had no interest in making a show of themselves, there were groups like that in Thuringia and Saxony, and elsewhere too, they knew about them, of course they knew about them, those other ones for whom it was enough to have an internet connection, they put on their brown uniforms and waved their shrewd little flags around here and there as during the May Day march in Plauen, but in the unit's view this was just a circus, and they did not want a circus, they wanted war, and it's not the migrants we have to be afraid of, the Boss said, we're not like those other groups bawling day after day about the migrants this and the migrants that, how they're letting in the tablecloth-heads and the wrap-heads, the veiled and the pipe-smokers who are going to take Germany away from us, goddammit, he raised his voice, it's not the migrants we have to focus on, but the Jews, because they have *already* taken what is ours, and no and no, we have no reason to create an alliance with any other group because we don't want to be big, we want Germany to be big again, this is our mission, at which the others nodded, day by day this message inspired them, this was how they inspired each other in the Burg, not with pompous speeches, they despised pomposity, this was a unit and they were soldiers, comrades struggling in the weighty, fateful situation in which Germany found itself, the Boss frequently spoke of this to Florian so he could understand clearly this huge fucking situation, but his words scarcely reached Florian, are you even listening?! he thundered at him and whacked his neck, at which of course Florian nodded: he was listening, of course he was listening, but he wasn't listening, because all he could think about was whether he had been able to express himself clearly enough in the two letters he'd sent, between which

there had now passed more than two months, and if there had been any point in mentioning, in his second letter, that the relativity of time and space and so-called events would sooner or later lead to the inevitable disappearance of reality, and whether or not it was correct to have raised this topic without expounding further upon what the exact focus of attention should be in Berlin, but he could not answer the questions he posed to himself with any reassurance, so that on the next working day, after he'd sent the second letter, he regretted having mentioned time and the desperate ungroundedness of all fundamental concepts associated with it; I have only managed to confuse the Chancellor, he thought ever more irritably, because this is not the essence, I must speak to her of the essence, and not of my own consternation, that is my own problem, while the essence pertains to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, she is the one who must act because only she can be trusted, as long as I formulate things clearly and distinctly, Angela Merkel will understand—but it would come to nothing, namely, his clear and distinct formulations would come to naught, because that evening, when, after work, he went home to the seventh floor of the Hochhaus and sat down to draft a newer warning to Berlin—a correction to his previous missive—Florian was no longer capable of succinct formulation, and the thought that he might not be able to seize the essence of what he had to say made him feel so irritated that he couldn't get down a single word even though the next day he didn't have to go to work but straight into combat, that's what the Boss yelled at him when early next morning, much earlier than their usual meeting time—it was in fact the middle of the night—he rang the buzzer to his seventh-floor apartment, and as Florian sleepily leaned out the window, the Boss yelled, red alert! Florian! red alert! no need to shave because we're going into combat, I just got a call from Eisenach, he explained in the Opel, leaning over the steering wheel and stepping on the gas, the Bachhaus has been desecrated, I wanted to bring my submachine gun, but for now let's have a look and see what's there,

and they looked and saw what was there, the Bachhaus in Eisenach, which functioned as a museum, was not Bach's birthplace as previously thought, the Boss explained as they approached the scene, the house where Bach was born was located on Ritterstraße, but birthplace or not, it was the Bachhaus building in Eisenach that had become the center for the cultivation of Bach's heritage, and we accept that, that's fine by us, and the Boss's explanation came to a halt because they had arrived, they parked the car and approached the building, and the Boss only emitted an inarticulate scream as they faced two large graffiti apparently sprayed with acrylic paint on either side of the entrance gate the previous night: it wasn't there in the evening, the museum guard, who always closed up at six p.m., stated, everything proceeded as usual, I locked the entrance, that's what he told the police officers, then I looked back, like this, and he demonstrated how he looked back, because I always do that, everything was just as usual, it must have happened late at night, because in the evening there are still a few people around here, mainly youths and homeless drinking beer, but I'm positive it wasn't them, these kids and homeless from Eisenach are bad, they're bad, but they're not capable of something like this, it was some migrant, I swear it was some migrant, and the museum guard held his two hands apart, and then in the same way, using the same words, he told the story again and again to the interested and the horrified, who, seeing the commotion and the police car with its flashing lights, quickly gathered after the museum opened and Florian and the Boss got to work; the Boss examined the paint thoroughly as at least fifty or sixty locals stood there gaping at him, taking a sample and slowly crumbling it between his fingers, all the while looking up at the sky, his eyes closed as if he were not only examining but vigorously scrutinizing that material with his fingers, murmuring "hmm," then he took another sample, placed a speck of the paint in his mouth with his fingertip and spat it out forcefully; he struck the wall in rage, slamming the muzzle of the paint-sprayed animal face on the left side of the