



Heike Geißler

The Week

Novel

(Original German title: Die Woche. Roman)

316 pages, Clothbound

Publication date: 07 March 2022

© Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin 2022

Sample translation by Laura Wagner

pp. 7 – 17

1 SUNDAY

We are dumb, daft and dopey.

We are good for nothing.

We are completely out of order.

We don't even notice anything.

We notice everything but we don't trust our senses.

We don't understand ourselves, but we don't claim that there is a fundamental right to understand oneself.

We don't think much of ourselves.

We don't attach any importance to it either.

That comes later, when we notice how much time more or less well-known people, groups, structures spend on loudly and efficiently finding themselves amazing. We are always ready to add to that list.

Oh, and we yawn.

We yawn our strong opinions into the windows of the flat we lived in until recently, from which we were very evicted somewhat charmingly.

You can't really put it like that, Constance says.

Yes, you can, I say, put it like that, even though it's wrong and nothing about it was charming.

Everything was impolite, suffocating, cowardly and brutal, but I don't want to talk about that, because I don't even know how to talk about it without repeating what has already been said

thousands of times. This eviction problem is well known, but I don't have the words to talk it up like an uncharted territory that one would like to spend time on with curiosity and decisiveness. Who wants to slog away at familiar problems anyway.

I don't want anything to do with it anymore.

My battery is still at five percent.

I have to deliberate.

A woman of forty, Constance says, probably has to deliberate everything.

True, I say. But right now it still feels as though there is little for me to consider even though I try to consider everything. Right now, I'm still full of free samples and promotions for myself. But soon I'll be over.

We pull ourselves up by the windowsills.

I never was a big fan of living on the ground floor, I said, I was always scared of burglars.

Haha, in a moment we'll crack up laughing about that. As if being afraid of burglars was worth it. Our fear stimuli are wired wrong, our fear stimuli were set on the wrong track.

Yes, Constance is going to say to that, a completely wrong track.

Soon we'll stand in front of wastelands, in malls and at protests with unsuitable fears and we already face the news like deer caught in the headlights anyway.

Everything in our former flat has been reshaped. We don't recognise it with the sliding curtains, Ikea paintings and bowls of potpourri. And everything so neat.

The owner or tenant storms into the room that we are looking in from the outside, which is no longer our almost dance-hall-sized living room, but a collage of small areas: the dining area, the relaxation station, the home cinema, etc. The occupant claps her hands as though chasing away pigeons.

We climb a little higher on the windowsills and fly away chattering.

Then we jump off the starting block at the outdoor pool and swim as if we were ploughing the water.

There is always too much and too little power at the same time.

Oh, the techniques of moderation and the happy medium.

We balance through the medium half-heartedly or ruthlessly or bigmouthed or pettily or crossly or foolhardily on a shiny string at a manageable height.

You'll never get that slackline thing, Constance yells, we're at the indoors bouldering centre, because my children wanted to go, and I'm standing in those far too tight, stinking, borrowed climbing shoes and I get off the slackline and don't fall even a little but still flop onto the dull-soft floor mat. We walk through this padded landscape like elements of a different period table, we reach for the holds and briefly develop ambition. I think about the muscles of those climbing next to and above me, about my arms, let go and look up at the dark ceiling of the hall. I slip into a short nap.

The children climb up, to the side and back down to the floor and jump over me as I dream of the Alps.

We don't build a mountain out of our shortcomings, and we don't climb any peaks to get a better view.

We're forever digging our own grave.

At some point, we'll stop that.

We look forward to that.

We are the proletarian princesses.

We sway our crinolines and dust off our jeans. We say, if anyone needs a monarchy, it's not us, but we're princesses nonetheless.

Not really textbook examples of princesses. But just you wait, we'll find our way into the story books.

Our parents had no idea which path we'd be taking one day. Our working-class parents knew nothing about the royal parts of their genes.

We reveal all secrets.

Oh, Constance says, I'm scared already.

Well, we might not reveal all the secrets. It's not certain. Sometimes a fairy tale emerges alongside the secret and pretends to be family history.

Since we only have an inkling of a past unknown to us and largely concealed or untold instead of a family history, we discover our history in all the books we know. Still, we never know what happened to us, where we come from, who we are.

Good grief.

Someone always says: Good grief.

We are completely messed up, we are completely destroyed.

Really? Constance asks.

Well, I say, that's the prognosis as of now. And that's going to be the fallacy.

Sooner or later, rather sooner than later, we will feel wrecked. And you'll notice or you won't.

Depends on what we can or want to reveal.

Depends on what we can or want to hide.

We have, Constance says, hidden everything well.

Yes, I say, we have mastered the art of hiding things, events, opinions, memories.

But we can't hide ourselves well, because we feel the need to giggle in our hiding spots even in abject fear.

We're not really great at finding things or we're not so good at searching.

I type *buying a house Leipzig / buying a house Buckow / buying a house Groß Neuendorf / buying a house Los Angeles / buying a house Warsaw / buying a house Chemnitz / buying a house Berlin / buying a house Zeitz etc.*

I still play lotto at irregular intervals and expect a fairly large pay out soon.

I have won twelve Euro so far.

I don't look after the pennies but expect the pounds to look after themselves.

Under no circumstance do I want two birds in the bush, and I don't lure any birds into my hand.

But all birds in my hand are welcome.

With birds in the bush, it's just one of those things.

Sure, Constance says.

Yes, I say. There are pigeons, for example, and once, in Banjul, I was asked by a friend, or rather by the man I loved at the time and didn't notice how different we were, if I would give him money for his pigeon farm so that he could buy food and I refused without giving an explanation. Instead, I said, he couldn't use condoms twice and later wired him money via Western Union because he thought a bicycle hire was a great idea and he would make a solid living off that.

Did it work?

Is he still alive?

If not: Who can send my regards?

How do you contact the dead?

Let's stay in this world, says Constance.

Let's keep our eyes on the earth and the horizon and let's hold hands.

Are you still alive?

Of course.

Am I still alive?

Of course.

Are you guys still alive?

Are you well?

Can you manage?

Do you talk about the weather but really mean politics?

Do you talk about politics but really mean the weather?

Can you start a hare?

Can you say which way the hare is going to run?

Look at this hare. Isn't it pretty?

And I'm also talking about that bunny at the Forum Romanum, which sat there and ate the dry grass and wasn't disturbed by me and my children, that relaxed bunny in the tourism hotspot, as though it was an exhibition piece, placed under the special protection of the place, truly nonchalant, true story.

Oh, let's not get the hares and bunnies involved in this.

But look at them closely. And don't be hunters or huntresses.

We'll write that in letters to you that we ultimately don't end up sending.

As if, says Constance.

I will, I say, I'll write that in all the letters: That they shouldn't be hunters or huntresses. I, the mother of two children in whose classrooms are children with fathers who hunt, have had more than enough time to form an opinion on hunters and I'm not criticising the act of hunting per se but the lifestyle that seems to go along with hunting and the mindset, so to say.

We put the hares back on the field.

And we see: They are hares that put up a fight.

We send the hares into the field with our best wishes, and I hold on to my sons. I hold my sons so tight that my sons get an eerie feeling.

We lie on the floor like windfall.

We lie on the floor camping mats.

We lie on the floor like tiles.

We're about to be pressed into the floor and completely overwhelmed, but we don't realize it yet.

We lie around in gyms and on lawns and always get a bit sad when they say it's time to get up. To our own surprise, we have now already developed a special interest in lying down: We try to penetrate the Earth's surface lying down, even though we know that it's impossible, to try and escape the conditions alive.

And that on a normal Sunday, on which my children want to stay at the outdoor swimming pool a little longer and I go ahead.

They do something that is lively, that doesn't have any part in calamity, and that can potentially not be erased by calamity.

I still worry about them all the time.

Constance has been calling out to me for years: Everything is hanging by a thread for you.

Yes, it does, I call back: Ropes were and still are sold out.

But I know how children can be saved sometimes, years ago, I read about how to treat children who are about to die in a book by Hugo Loetscher. You hit them in the face and say: "I'm beating you, if you give up I'd sooner beat you to death than let you die on your own."

We have given up on the world, but they don't know that yet.

We're going to be surprised to find out that it's not like that after all.

How could we.

That's not in our nature.

It's going to have been nothing but a delusion.

A big play that we will have attended for too long out of stupidity, inexperience and blindness.

We press our ears into the grass and try to hear something. We would love to hear anything at all and change sides.

We are the above-ground underground.

We try to implement the system change in any way, shape or form.

We try to live the way we really want to live.

If you could please not disturb us.

If you could please stop using all your attention and all your capital to disturb us.

If you all could please not disturb us.

As much as we love interruptions.

Just not this one.

Or that one.

We didn't disturb you either.

Unfortunately, we didn't disturb you.

We sat up straight with our arms crossed obediently and watched and listened to you.

We are actually always just waiting for the end of the lesson.

I was just thinking that, I say.

You believe that? Constance asks.

Yes, I say, I wait obediently and postpone the things that are considered inappropriate in class to the break, but I feel the breaks are too short to even carry out part of what I postponed.

Look, says Constance, all that obedience, see it lie at the ready, docile, for inspection.

Well, would you look at that, I say.

What does it look like? More greenish-yellow than pleasant.

Constance says: The collected politenesses and obediences of C and H, and what they did with them.

Well, I say: And what they did with them.

But as soon as obedience is laid out for inspection it's gone and only politeness remains, and we don't want to reproach it, lying there in front of us so alone and virtually naked.

The hare is running across the field. Just recently we had a pet cat who was sometimes there and sometimes not, who decided when I got to get up from my chair: never when she was lying on my lap.

So we're nice and born into some body with which we are happy, sometimes more, sometimes less, and with which we are at odds or not, but that we just have.

We can sound pragmatic, but we all fall into the body image trap. That's irritating.

And after a few days that hypothetical question: Imagine you could ensure world peace, but you'd be twenty kilos heavier in exchange. Would you agree to the trade?

Well, we're going to stammer at that, we're going to try and change the subject, to spurn the question and be stuck for an answer.

When we look outside the window, sometimes a person is falling from the roof. Or rather, they are jumping, not falling, in any case they aren't falling accidentally.

That's Caspar, whose funeral we are going to attend one day, but a lot of time will pass until that day. By then, we're going to have wished many times that he would finally die, so that no one would fly past our window any more and hit the ground with a dull thud, because we just can't get used to it; nor to the fact that after the impact he just gets up effortlessly, dusts down

his trousers, crosses the road, pees on a tree and then keeps ringing our doorbell incessantly to be let in again.

Caspar doesn't have keys or a rental agreement. He lives under so-called questionable circumstances under our pitched roof. Where he has erected his shelter with tarps and stones, no water comes through the roof, underneath that the attic where we hang our clothes stays dry. It's a mystery to us why he's allowed to live there, as is the reason for why he jumps off the roof, even though, of course, we know general reasons.

Caspar jumps as though he had never been born.

Caspar jumps as though he wasn't there at all.

I say, I'm just noticing that as a child I learnt how to tidy up like other people put out fires, by placing different cuddly blankets, sofa blankets that is, folded to the right size, over unsorted piles of newspapers and other things that were lying around, so that they could no longer be seen. In my childhood, there was never a lack of blankets and cushions that could be used to hide lots of things. Likewise, all our cupboard doors locked, and I knew which ones had to be opened with special care, because behind it lurked all the hidden, concealed, mouldy things and among that a book, borrowed from someone and urgently in need of return, by Ottokar Domma, for example.

Ah yes, says Constance, Ottokar Domma, who amused us all, whose book I borrowed from a friend and read in the armchair by the TV, eating sliced rolls with pork in its own juice and ketchup. I ate roll after roll until one of the halves fell from my hand and onto the page of the book. Panicked, I washed the page, I dried it with dish towels, I tried to wipe off the ketchup stain that had turned orange, to think it away, I hid the book in the overflowing cupboard and when my friend asked about it, I promised to bring it the next day, only to put her off to the following day.

[...]