

Bloodbook

Kim de l'Horizon

Novel

German



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Blutbuch

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In Bloodbook, Kim de l'Horizon explores the origins of the eponymous main character, Kim. The text not only traces the female bloodline of the gender-fluid protagonist's ancestors, but also describes their childhood in Ostermundigen, in Bern, which was shaped by a search for identity and a sense that their body was somehow different.

"If there's one feeling from my childhood that I do remember clearly, it's the feeling that my body did not belong to me. That it was there for others, for something other, and not for me to be in it. I was always like a piece of furniture somehow, this chest of drawers for castoff things. I don't know how, but the grown-ups dumped their stuff, their preoccupations, their problems into me."

Author

Kim de l'Horizon was born in Ostermundigen (Bern) in 1992. Kim studied German, Film, and Theater in Zurich as well as Literary writing at the Swiss Literature Institute in Biel. Currently, Kim is studying transdisciplinarity at the ZHdK in Zurich. Kim is part of the collective eOb0ff and writes for the literary magazine "Delirium". During the 21/22 season, Kim was also resident playwright at the Bühnen Bern theater. Before the debut novel *Blutbuch*, Kim tried to gain attention with prizes for emerging talents, such as the Textstreich competition for unwritten poetry or the Treibhaus competition. *Blutbuch* was awarded the Jürgen Ponto Prize and has been nominated for the German Book Prize 2022.

Photo: Anne Morgenstern

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Excerpt translated by Jamie Lee Searle

Prologue

[p. 9-18]

For example, I never officially told you. I just came round for coffee one day wearing make-up, with a box of Lindt & Sprüngli (medium-sized, not the small ones like usual), and then later came to Christmas dinner in a skirt. I knew, or assumed, that Mother had told you about it. 'It'. She had to tell you 'it', because 'it' was something I couldn't tell you. It belonged to those things that people can't tell one another. I told Father, Father told Mother, Mother must have told you.

Some other things we never spoke about: the enormous birthmark on the back of Mother's left hand, the heaviness which Father dragged into the house – like an immense, wet, mouldering deer carcass – when he came home from work; your loud lip-smacking, your racism, your grief when Grandfather died; your bad taste with presents; the woman who was Mother's lover when I was seven, the silver earring this woman gave her, as a parting gift, which hung like a long tear-drop from Mother's earlobe almost to her collarbone when she put it on to provoke Father; the countless hours I spent – when I felt no one was watching – letting the earring glide from one hand to the other, holding it up to the sunlight so it would cast flame-like patterns on the walls, my intense urge to put it on, my unspeakable inner voice which forbade me from doing so, my intense desire to have a body, Mother's boundless desire to travel the world. We never spoke about politics or literature or the class system or Foucault, or how Mother stopped studying for her school-leaving certificate at the adult education centre when I came into the world. We never spoke about how you grew a beard when you were pregnant with Mother, how this is called 'hirsutism', we never spoke about how you handled it, whether you shaved, waxed or tweezed out the dark hairs, whether you take antiandrogens to halt the testosterone – which your body 'produces in excess' – and we never

spoke about how people stared at you, how ashamed you must have felt, we never spoke about shame at all, never about death, never about your death, never about your increasing forgetfulness. We spoke frequently about the family photo albums and every single picture in them, and yet we never spoke about how ridiculous Grandfather looks in the shots taken with the men from his Burschenschaft, how comical they look, chests puffed and legs wide, grinning into the camera; we never spoke about the girl who, up to a certain age, wanders through the photo albums like a ghost, mostly hand-in-hand with you, sometimes with one of your five brothers, no, we never spoke about this youngest sister called Irma and where she disappeared to. We never spoke about whether other families find it this tiring to act as though they're like other families, we never spoke about normality, never about heteronormativity, queerness, we never spoke about class, the so-called 'third' world and the hidden webs of fungi that are far more extensive and delicate than we imagine, we never spoke about all the paths that this world holds at the ready, at the ready for us to run from ourselves, the winding paths, the paths in the shadow of great poplars, the bleak, endless paths that are spun like thread around this world, but we did speak about the paths which, all together, are called 'Camino de Santiago'.

A few weeks ago, we were sitting on the sofa and you showed me one of the photo albums. I forced myself to feign the same interest I had the last ten times you showed me the same photos with the same commentaries. We looked at a photo of your mother in which she's pregnant with you, a photo that surprised me the first few times, because it shows a naked woman, in a bourgeois family photo album from 1935. Suddenly you interrupted your flow of words, looked at me and asked: 'But why are you never there?'

*

I'm sitting here at my writing desk in Zurich, I'm twenty-six, darkness is falling, it's one of these evenings that are still winter evenings yet with a premonition of spring, a velvety scent: of overly sweet and blush-white blossoms;

of people beginning to jog again, carrying their sweat through the excessively-clean streets. I don't jog. I sit here and chew my fingernails in spite of the bitter Ecrinal nail polish, I chew until the white edges are bitten down and then further still, continually forcing them back. Six months ago I took this ultra-boring job in the public record office, I spend the entire day among shelves deep below ground, cataloguing the medical records of longdead patients, I speak to nobody, I'm content, invisible, I'm letting my hair grow, I go home and sit down here at my desk, from where I can see the beech tree in the neighbouring garden, from where the memories come to me of the blood beech, our copper beech, the large, red-leaved beech in the centre of our garden. I write. When my friends, Dina and Mo, who are also somewhere sitting and writing, message me: 'Coming out for a drink?', I don't reply. I try to write, and when I can't write, when I sink into the mudflats of the past, I shave, shower and ride my bike to the Agglom-quartier, the outer reaches of the city, the 'outskirts', as the English say, scour the petrol stations and football pitches, prowl back and forth outside the gyms, the Grindr app my dim torch in the Agglonight, guiding me to the men I'm searching for, the men I need and let myself be needed by, the men I let push up my skirt and inside of me behind the bike shed, quick and emotionless. I have enough feelings and don't need any more, all I need from them is a hard cut, and that's it. I sisternize with the rusty bars of the suburban gym, clinging to them; I sisternize with the railings of the deserted grandstand stairs, they support me; and last but not least, my cheek slams repeatedly against the Securitas breakroom door until I'm pounded back into my flesh by my feelings, then I go home, semen still inside me and the scent of a stranger on me, a warm feeling in my empty middle that fills me for the duration of my journey. I go to the toilet, shave again, armpits, legs, crotch, always fearing the possibility of waking up in the night and smelling of some-body else, then I go to the toilet again to get the rest of the semen out of me, then shower, rub myself down with a pumice stone, moisturise. My skin is irritated from all the shaving. Then I sit back down at the desk, beech tree in view, and only then do I realise that I've been writing to you this whole time.

And if I don't write, I read or think about the possibility of putting my body on the Camino de Santiago, I think about the possibility of walking until I'm no longer thinking about anything or until I reach Santiago de Compostela or the ocean, and I think about the possibility of not doing any of that.

We never spoke about how you didn't find your way home one afternoon and how Mother received a call from the police. We never spoke about putting you in a home, and when you had a really bad turn a month ago and woke up in a rehabilitation centre and asked what had happened to the balcony overlooking Bern, Mother said: 'But they removed it, remember, it wasn't safe anymore'. And you said: 'Oh yes, that's right', and laughed at yourself a little too loudly and then talked about the geraniums on the balcony. I hated Mother for her cowardice in not telling you the truth, at first I was irritated, and then reluctantly touched by her sudden concern for you. Suddenly she's the caring daughter, I thought, but not me, you don't get me as a caring daughter, Ma, and I said goodbye to her more coldly than usual. We don't talk about the high probability that you'll have another turn in the next six months ('a turn' - this doctor-speak, as though you were just making some slight detour), and we don't talk about the high probability that this 'turn' will wipe out what remains of your memory.

Now it's night, and I picture you also standing at the window of your room in the rehab centre and staring the night in the face. I can feel you slowly disappearing. Dear Grandmother, I'd like to write to you before you completely disappear from your body, or can no longer reach your memories.

I'd like to be able to tell you that I was afraid of you, that for example it was me who smashed the jar of raspberry jam that time, just after you'd made it, the one you thought Mother had smashed, and that Mother was actually protecting me, she took the blame and you tore strips off her. I feel guilty about that to this day. I'd like to know what happened to my great aunt Irma, the girl who walks hand-in-hand with you through the

family albums and then disappears. I'd like to understand what it was like to be you: a normal, lower-middle-class woman in 20th-century Switzerland. I'd like to understand why I have barely any memories of my childhood, and why the only ones I have are of you. I'd like to find a language in which I can ask you: "Where are my people?" I'd like to know how this shit gets in our veins.

You were too loud, too demanding, too coarse. You never listened. You sent me money, accompanied by notes: "You know you can visit me any time." I'm sorry I'm such a bad grandchild. I'm too delicate to be decent.

Dear Grandmother. When I think of you, I think of all the things we could never say to one another and never can. I remember how you always used so proudly the words which the Bernese German dialect took from the French, and while I can understand the pride, I also find it incredibly uncomfortable. Because French was brought to us by Napoleon, the language of the occupiers, the language of the cultured yet barbaric warmongers. He brought us the language and some laws, and in return he stole Bern's state treasure, infamous all across Europe. Several hundred billion, if you convert it into modern-day Swiss franc (from French francs!). He used it to erase his debts and finance his Egypt campaign. I know these are my tiny tears of white privilege, and that we've been world masters at high finance robbery since the late 19th century. But Napoleon's looting gave early 19th-century Switzerland a very high emigration rate, and the tax implications reached into the 20th century: before that, Bern residents weren't taxed. So I find it strange that you proudly carry the fruits of the man who carries part of the blame for your poverty.

Traces of Napoleon which can be found in your vocabulary to this day:

dr Nöwö – the nephew – le neveu
ds Fiseli – the son – le fils
dr Potschamber – the bed pan – le pot de chambre
ds Gloschli – bell-shaped petticoat – from cloche
dr Gaschpo – flower pot – le cache-pot
ds Lawettli – washcloth – from laver

You spoke about Madame DeMeurron, the notorious Bern character who was the first woman in Switzerland to drive a car: a patrician who expressed herself almost exclusively in French to show how aristocratic she was. She didn't roll her Rs like the tanners from the shabby Matte district, but instead pronounced them nicely at the back of her throat, à la française. 'Schaffed lir no oder sid lir scho öber?' Do you still work or are you already someone?, you quoted her, sounding the R at the back, totally exaggerated, and you laughed and exposed your teeth. I didn't understand the question. How can a person move up in society if they don't work? (I hadn't yet understood that fat cat capital can only be inherited, not acquired through hard work, in contrast to the rags to riches myth we butter into one another practically from birth.) You're beginning to forget anything that didn't happen before your 50th birthday. You're disappearing. But the French stays with you. I think about how close to you I feel when I'm writing to you, and I think about how distant from you I feel when I see you. How you talk about going to Santiago de Compostela someday, about how happy that would make your mother and Maria and how – after the long, long walk – you would jump joyfully into the Atlantic, clothes and all. I think about how you talk without pause, about anything, about the special offers in Migros Supermarket, about the days when there are double Cumulus card points. About your fear of silence. I remember how you continually protected me after Grandfather's death, so that I wouldn't have to confront loss. No, that's wrong. It's not me that remembers. That's Mother's memory.

In the language I've inherited from you, my mother tongue, "mother" is MEER. We say THE MEER or MY MEER, sneak-tweaked from the French; la mer, the sea, and la mère, mother. For "father", PEER. For "grandmother", GRANDMEER. The women of my childhood are an element, an ocean. I remember my mother's legs, I remember wrapping my arms around them, gazing up at her and saying: YOU ARE MY MEER. I remember a feeling of being home and of being completely enclosed. The Meers' love was so big we couldn't escape it, can't escape it, we swim for a lifetime to emerge from its depths.

In the language I've inherited from you, in my Meer-language, there are only two ways to be a body. Growing up in the palate of the German language forced me continually into this two-by-two kindergarten crocodile.

In the language I've learnt from you, in my MOTHER TONGUE, I don't know how to write about myself. It contains Mother's tongue and your eyes and I, my body, my bodies, my physicality? There's this writing I, and then there's the child I used to be, the child that stands before the kindergarten crocodile and still has to find a way through. I'm suffused with this child, just like the moon in its entirety is held handlessly by the earth, but in writing I have to differentiate between us, because otherwise the childhood, because otherwise the childhoodbody, because otherwise the flood of the past washes me away.

And yet it's not so simple in the Meer-language either: because little detours, one might even say devious, insidious routes, entered in - the women were objects. In place of MEER, all adults, even the mothers - das Mami, das Mueti, das Grossmami, das Grosi - took 'das', the neuter article. And not just the mothers, all women's names were neuter: das Anneli, das Lisbeth, das Regini. And the children too were objects, sweet and tiny like little mocha spoons: das Mineli, das Hänneli, das Hansli. I remember that this objectification infuriated me. I didn't want to be an object; I wanted to be a person, and grown up, and being grown up meant having a gender, a male one. As a woman, you were in danger of remaining an object or becoming an ocean. I didn't want either of these things.

When I think of you, Grandmeer, I think of the Migros Supermarket restaurant, where you always invited me when you wanted to treat me to a meal "out", I think of the primordial sea that arose from the first bacteria, its temperature a rather precise thirty-seven degrees Celsius, I think of Meer and the life she gave up for me, and of the life you gave up for Meer, I think of how you've just been released from the rehab centre, that you're probably standing on your balcony at this very moment and staring angrily at the half-withered gerani-

ums, and I think of all the texts I've never written to you. In one of them, a bearded woman walks all the way from Ostermundigen to Santiago de Compostela. Halfway there, she meets a young person, who has a beard too, broad shoulders, a deep voice, a skirt and kohl eyeliner, and they talk about nothing, they walk silently alongside one another towards the sea, and between them drift the remnants, the flotsam of their long footprints in the semi-darkness.

Part Two

[p. 67-70, 72-76]

The House

There is the house. Around the house is the garden. The garden is alive. The garden remembers everything. It remembers on behalf of the people. In house and garden lives the child. Or: in house and garden resides the child. Or rather: in house and garden exists the child. In houseandgarden it is in the world. In houseandgarden it survives. In houseandgarden it nests. In houseandgarden it grows. In houseandgarden it is there. In houseandgarden it hides away. In houseandgarden it sneaks through houseandgarden. In houseandgarden-houseandgarden. Here is the child in a thousand ways.

The child sits in the house by the window. All around it lay paper cuttings. Cut with the Swiss army knife. Holes scratched into black paper. The child uses the knife frequently. So that Peer sees. Sees that the child needs the knife. Now the child stands. It looks out of the house. It looks at the day. The day stumbles through the scant evening light. Across the Aggloquartier. SABINÄLIII. MAUROOO. LAURAAA. The houses cry commands into the sky. The day slips into the boxwood bushes. The boxwood bushes are swish spheres. They guard the top of the street. Where the main street turns into the neighbourhood. They stand to the left and right. Guardians of sweetness. Ensuring that everything is in order. They cast far-reaching shadows. Into the homeward paths. These shadows mean business. When the family men come home from the city. With their workfaces in tow. Wanting to get back in. To the lovely

family neighbourhood. Wanting to step back into the idyll. They have to strip off their citybodies. Empty them out before the suburb guardians. Like someone empties rain from rubber boots. Before entering the sitting room.

The night eats all objects one by one:

the sheer-spiked fences standing sentinel
the perfectly rectangular vegetable patches
the spic and span summerhouses
the abundance of hanging birdseed bombs
the fertilised and fastened rambling roses
the hollow bodies of the garden gnomes
the view of not-single-family homes far far in the
so-called distance.

The house is crammed with orchids. These pink, white, plasticky ones. And ones dyed with blue food colouring. The house is up to its neck in them. Grandmeer brings one every time she visits. So there's a reason for the visit. Meer doesn't water the orchids. She puts them in the corners. In the cellar. Beneath the coffee table. In spite of this, they live. In spite of this, they survive. Are they actually ghosts.

Streetlamps bite yellow pieces out of the night. Family life spills out of the single-family homes. It shines yellow into the front gardens. Of the single-family homes. The night is small. But the town is smaller. It drowns completely in the night. The family people drown. In the glow of the IKEA kitchen lamps. Their dreams drown. In the pumpkin soup bowls. The mothers drown. In the joy of having children. The fathers drown. In their pale blue shirts. In their orchid blue shirts. Are they actually dyed with food colouring. The fathers. The dinners. The single-family homes. So that they look. Like fathers, like dinners, like single-family homes. Are they actually alive.

In the last light, the child escapes the house. Holding the penknife like a sword. Its hand conceals the engraved names. The child runs to the blood beech. Crawls beneath its branches. The night wraps itself around everything. A fat chamber pot. Here, the child is safe.

Here, it is 12 invisible. Here, it is there. A window opens in the house. A cut on the house's brow. The window screams the child's childhood names. BÄRLI! CHÄFERLI! MÜSLI! BÄRLIMUTZ! MUNGGECHNOPF! SCHNÜGELIBUTZ! The names hover menacingly in the air. Then they strike. They pull the child out of its hiding place. They force it to say: "Here I am." And then: "I'm coming. I'm coming back into the house."

The Meer-language confounds 'house' with 'halse', an old word for throat. This house is Meer and Grandmeer's house, where their voices live.

Peer

Peer is tiny. Room is limited in the house. Peer has to make room. Peer fits entirely into Meer's fist.

Meer and the house are intertwined. Meer will inherit the house from Grandmeer. Great- Grandpeer, Meer's grandpeer, built the house. The house crept out of Great-Grandpeer. Like Meer out of Grandmeer. Being in the house = being in Meer. The corridors are skins. The hallways have hands. The doors are mouths. Every knothole is an eye.

Sometimes Peer sits wide-legged on the sofa. But this wide-leggedness doesn't come without a cost. He has to cut off a piece of himself. He cuts off three hours of voice. In return, the house allows him a moment of wide-leggedness.

Meer is a cemetery. She carries within her all the women of the world. As she reads, the women rise up in Meer. Most of them weigh a million kilograms. Every single one. Meer carries within her:

Elisabeth Kopp
Jeanne d'Arc
Virginia Woolf
Anne Lister
Lady Di
all women beneath veils
all women from the textile factories of South East Asia

all women from the women's prison Hindelbank
all women from Africa
all witches from the history of Europe,
especially Anna Göldi and Catherine Repond.

These women are immensely heavy. While she reads, Meer has to go on a diet. She sits in the greasy armchair and doesn't eat. She stuffs herself with the unhappiness of women. "My body still thinks it has to store fat for the brood," says Meer. The brood. The child knows that's the young rabbits. The child is moved. That Meer's body is storing fat. For Great-Grandpeer's longdead rabbits. "But Meer," says the child. "It's no use. For every uneaten potato, there's a sad woman. You can't balance it out." The child doesn't say this directly to Meer. When the child wants to speak to Meer. It puts Meer's old pyjamas on Barbie. Puts Barbie-Meer on the greasy armchair. When Meer is working. And says: "So, dearie. Do have to remind you who rules the roost here?"

Meer tells the child: "I was my Peer's favourite child. All parents have one. You should count yourself lucky you're an only child, there's no choosing in your case. I helped my Peer with all kinds of outdoor things: garden chores, woodchopping, house repairs. My brother hated the dirt, the earth. I loved the dirt, the earth. The potato harvest was like Christmas and my birthday had come at once. My hands knew what was a stone, what was a potato. My hands weren't the hands of a girl.

Once a month, a chicken had to be slaughtered. Before the slaughter, Peer would be in a dark mood. He would lose his voice. He'd clear his throat as though he wanted to say something, but he never said a word. When the time came, Meer called from the house: ARE YOU DOING IT OR DO I HAVE TO DO IT MYSELF, YOU SCATTERBRAIN. Then Peer would trudge over to the chicken hutch. I was with him, because I sensed I had to be. He always hacked out really quickly, then let go of the chicken and covered his eyes. I had no sympathy with the chicken; they have such small eyes. I felt such heartache for my peer, though, because I saw how much it hurt him. Once I asked why he didn't stop with the slaughtering. He said that his peer and Meer's peer in heaven would

laugh at him if he did. Then I hugged him, and I cleaned the blood the chicken had spurted as it hurtled around everywhere. It was still warm. And afterwards, from that day on, I slaughtered the chickens myself and cleaned my hands thoroughly so that Grandmeer wouldn't notice I was the one doing the slaughtering, not Peer. Another time, Peer gave me a shovel as a present. I took it with me everywhere. Even to bed. We understood one another without speaking, Peer and I. We were very close. Physically too. That changed when I reached puberty, became womanly. One day I was sitting on his lap, like I always had. Then Grandmeer came in and looked at us. Peer pushed me off. I crashed down to the floor. "You're too old for these games now." Then he began to sprinkle these sentences, letting them fall as though they were inconsequential. Like farts. Or slug pellets. "Women are dangerous. Women turn you into the devil." Peer was adamant that my brother attended a good school. He even paid for him to have tutoring. From what he'd scrimped and saved. In the evenings, Peer studied with him. He always asked how he was doing in class. Once I reached that age, it wasn't even a question. "Why would you go to a good school? You wouldn't make it. It'd be a waste of money, you'll marry and have kids." I did an apprenticeship and started to work. And once I'd heaped enough money together, I financed my own leaving certificate as an adult learner. Meer was as tough as an icepick with Peer when she opposed him on something. He was as tough as an icepick with her too. I always knew: I'll never be as icepick-tough as Meer."

Meer strokes the child's head. "My little bear."

Blood Beech

With Grandmeer and Meer in the garden. Grandmeer talks and talks and talks. Grandmeer's words make waves. She has snow-white sea-spray around her mouth. Meer swims. The water comes up to here on her. The child stares into the garden. Blood beech, chicken hutch, walnut tree. The water comes up to here on them too. Grandmeer is in everyone's ears. She can't bear to stay inside herself.

The child is afraid of Grandmeer. That she will turn back into the dragon. The child has an idea.

I'll draw you, it tells the blood beech.

The child picks up a brown pencil for the trunk. A red pencil for the foliage. It draws the blood beech so many leaves. The leaves are ears. It gives the drawing to Grandmeer.

Grandmeer: "Oh, thank you, what a lovely drawing, how sweet of you, and he really didn't tell me about this motorbike, and now he parks the motorbike in the cellar all the time, and what am I supposed to do, am I supposed to say, no, Monsieur, that's really not on, and the other neighbour, the woman from upstairs, you won't believe what she's gone and done again..."

The child goes over to the beech. I drew you, it says.

But you drew me wrong, says the beech. My leaves aren't ears. Do you always draw things that aren't there?

But Grandmeer needs more ears to talk into, says the child.

Can't you listen to her.

When I listen to her for too long. Grandmeer spills over. Then she lives in me. Her voices, says the child.

Well, they have to live somewhere.

But not in me, blood beech. I'm still so little. If I were as big as you. Blood beech. You can just grow. No one decides what shape you'll be. I wish I could be like you.

The child bites off a piece of its fingernail. A lot of nail comes away. There's a hole in the finger. Blood drips from the finger. It drips onto the roots of the blood beech. It seeps beneath the roots. The blood beech drinks it.

Thank you, little one. Do you really want to be like me? asks the blood beech.

The child nods. One of the blood beech's roots winds its way upwards. A thick, bulging root. The root thrusts into the child's open finger. The blood beech spurts beneath the child's skin.

Part Three

[p. 117-124]

The Search for the Mother Blood Beech

Bloody hell, bloody beech, bloody bitch, bloody fucking hell, the wool's far too pale, yet again this wool's too pale for the jumper I owe Grandmeer, and now the wound on my chin's broken open again too because I keep touching it, and it's dripping onto this shitty pale shitty wool for the shitty jumper I promised Grandmeer, promised her last winter even, and now it's late summer, autumn, actually, according to the calendar it's autumn, but summer isn't going anywhere, it's here to stay, and I'm staying too, languishing around on my couch continent, and Grandmeer obviously doesn't even need this shitty jumper in the slightest, what she needs is the occasional HELLO HOW ARE YOU I'M YOUR GRANDCHILD REMEMBER WE SPENT MY CHILDHOOD TOGETHER, but that won't do, right now that won't do at all, because I'm languishing here in this fucking heat (that's not a reason, I know, but the reason can't be crammed into a 'because' clause), I'm dehydrating here in my apartment, in this delirious state, this cocktail of pain meds, gender pharma and the green fairy, because I've been written off sick, haha, sick + written, I wish I'd written, I've spent this entire absurd boilerpot summer rooting around for the story of the blood beech and trying to write about it, and I've written nothing, all I've done is collect, and now that Grandmeer's been admitted to the dinosaur home, now that I should be visiting her instead of knitting the pink jumper or preparing to knit it, now (at the weekend, I mean) that I've been bloody femme-butch beaten, now that the Agglopigs have pounded a second, silent mouth into my chin, now that I'm drowning in time and binging on the remains of my at-home bar, now that I'm sitting on the fat folder of my blood beech research now, finally, I can make a start on the writing, with the blood beech, with this insane

summer. But sorry, one thing at a time. Not in a straight line, of course, but round and round the garden.

Perhaps like this:

Previously on Bloodbook

Part 1, 'The Search for Flotsam': Check

Part 2: 'The Search for Childhood': Check

Meanwhile (while writing, when I was at Grandmeer's on a research trip disguised as a visit):

Grandmeer sees my hand-knitted pink jumper and requests I make her one too.

Season: warmest winter ever

Part 3, 'The Search for the Mother Blood Beech':

This part didn't want to come, I just couldn't get up the writing libido (though other libidos I could), summer arrived, I left Part Two behind me, but couldn't put the blood beech behind me, dreamt of it constantly, in all gardens and parks and green spaces I suddenly encountered BEECHES BEECHES BEECHES, and with them the question why this tree was in my family's garden in the first place, whether this tree isn't actually pretty fancy if it grows in all these über-curated green spaces, and how it came about that this pretty fancy tree came into our – let's face it, pretty poor garden – why the Beelzebub my farmer Grandpeer planted this expensive tree in his garden, in the middle of his vegetable garden, in the garden that had to provide him with food, quite a large space, admittedly, but one that needed every dapple of sunlight in order to be as fertile as possible. This blood beech question came, and it stayed. And as my Meers were reluctant to tell me much about my Grandpeer, and I (for certain already alluded-to reasons) didn't have the easiest of relationships with Meer and Grandmeer by this point, I turned my attention to the blood beech, because I could research it without having to detour around pissed-off relatives. And so I

set to work on this tree which was so important in my childhood, despite my not having the faintest idea what kind of plant it is, where it originated, how it grows, and why – as I was suddenly noticing – it can be found in so many gardens and parks.

Season: another record-breaking hot summer

Part 3, 'The Search for the Mother Blood Beech', second attempt:

I actually research, and very conscientiously at that, the history of the copper beech.

Meanwhile Grandmeer:

has a 'turn' (perhaps the heat contributed?) and ends up going into the home permanently.

Meanwhile I:

Don't visit Grandmeer, research, research (Grandmeer who? shalalala), immerse myself in bloodbeechmadness, collect everything I can find on this tree, trawl through all possible spaces of knowledge in order to discover why my pre-hip self-sufficient greatgrandpeer bought a tree that was of no use to him whatsoever, perhaps in order to get closer to the child, me, through converging with this strange sylvan being.

Season: actually autumn, but upwards of thirty degrees, with the brief interruption of a flood

I, in this summer-autumn:

have, after a terrible summer, collected all the knowledge on this tree, but still haven't written anything for this third section, and I don't find anything more on the blood beech, but some fists find me. A doctor sews me together, so that I know where I am again, from which body I'm speaking, and now I'm sitting here, on my pharma trip, and I've started to KNIT THIS PINK WILLYWOOLY JUMPER, and I've bought the wrong wool (too pale) for the third time, and instead of knitting I find my way into Part Three by writing, the blood beech part, and that's where I am now. Finito Burrito. Or rather, at the beginning.

My blood beech summer began around three months ago, when I ordered a kosher cinnamon bun. Well, in actual fact it probably began before that, when Dina called me: "Hey, so this Jewish bakery by the motorway exit, it's getting really hip, I mean, not quite super-hip, but kind of hidden-gem-hip, we have to go!" And that's how I ended up eating my first ever kosher cinnamon bun with Dina, it was the beginning of summer, the kids' summer holiday ecstasy diffused across into our sluggish limbs, and we sat in front of the bakery, and somehow it was all very juicy: the cinnamon bun, the weather and us (I was wearing a new trouser skirt, kimono style, and Dino was wearing my old broad-shouldered leather jacket). The crème de la crème of Gen Y hipsterdom descended on the bakery, which hadn't yet been entirely monopolised by a capitalism ever-hungry for new locales, and the ripped queers and I ignored one another on common ground, because I'd renounced their ruthless combine-harvester kind of existence. I said to Dina that the kosher cinnamon buns were far juicier than the non-kosher cinnamon buns I'd had so far. And added that I wasn't sure whether the juiciness was only greater because: outing to Jewish bakery and quasi-exoticisation. And whether we were now gentrihippy-fying the bakery away from the Jewish people. And whether that was very bad. "No idea," said Dina. "It's probably as bad as the appropriation of your pseudo-samurai fashion." I called her a bitch, she called me a cultural approprigeisha, and we each thought the other as immensely witty and irritatingly self-reflective as millennial pop-lit writers and their #whitemale-problems, then we immediately found one another boring again in our self-hatred over our affluence-ravaged whiteness, which is all about class distinction, all about distancing ourselves through consumption from the poorer, richer, cooler, gayer, woker, from the difference feminists, from the whiter, less educated, the too rationalistic, the artsier, gen-Z-ier, the less-intent-ondis-associating. Back at mine, Dina talked about her newborn niece, whose life expectancy is twelve years at best, she talked about her mother, who'd been bawling her eyes out on Dina's shoulder, about her father, who had always used Dina to regulate his feelings, and Dina crumpled my sofa cover angrily and talked about her

longing to write out this childhood rage, and about her fear of doing it. What would her parents, etc. "Probably I'll hide it all in poetry," said Dina, and she cried so hard that tears came to my eyes too.

Although, that everything began with the kosher cinnamon bun, that's not actually true. It all began much earlier: Once upon a time there was an I, once upon a time I was an It, I was born and grew up as a human being, I came of age and moved to my country's biggest city, and back then there were only two genders, so my body didn't yet exist, and so I plunged into gay culture neon-shoe-first, where my body – I thought – had the best chance of coming into existence. I'd had enough of being a human being, I grew a hide, cut out my smalltown friends, had no interest in knowing anybody, I wanted to start over, and drew a barrier around me through which my old life couldn't penetrate, I transformed from a smalltown baby into an otter, lived off pornos and fucked until I was saddle sore and even Bepanthen Plus salve couldn't help and the urologist advised moderation, all headmaster-like and protestant-esque, I gorged my way through the nights, watched CZECH & LATINO & CUM IN ASS & SLUT & ASIAN & PUBLIC & PRIEST & BBC (BIG BLACK COCK) & TWINK & BDSM and and and, and then I evolved like the Pokémon, I tried on abs and pecs for size, I worshipped the Moon, I became a werewolf, a wherewolf, a where-and-who-can-I-fuck-today-wolf, watch out, you horny hordes of sweet asslambs, or I'll bite you right open. Here, chookchookchook, come to Daddy*Mommy. I shot back and forth between Berlin and Zürich in ludickrous easyJet-Orange exuberance, I blood-let and took both cities' mainstream gaydom intra-venously. I even grew a beard, and I even waxed the beard, and I also thought that disco muscles and hard bodies and six packs and interval fasting and cottage cheese and steely-slick-shaven necks were my life, I wanted to be one of those aestheticized-to-death Dolce & Gabbana, Tom of Finland queers. I didn't want to know the name of my fuckees, but I counted them and every few months had them tattooed as lines across my bubble butt, its cheeks hardened by countless hot ass tutorials, and the ass antlers of my fuck number grew, the sperm bank

of the European ball herd sowed itself under my skin and grew rampant up my back like the hedge of thorns grows rampant up Sleeping Beauty's tower; I wanted every new guy who set to work on my ass to know he was just another notch on the cellar wall of my ass-memory lust-prison body-archive. Number of notches = fuckability = selfesteem + desirability = looks × fucks = (style - fat mass) × (size of biceps + size of cock + bubbliness of butt) ÷ self-hatred. And I know I'm throwing all the fairies into one pot here, and generalisation yawn, and I know this is a cynical, pumped-up narrative voice that's pontifiquing over this part in such a sudden and laboured pop-literary way, and I apologise for that too, genuinely, sorrysorry, but this period I want to write about, I'm too close to it, it's too ridiculous, too ick for me to allow, from the arsenal of voices, even one not to make fun of it. Pardon, but it's simple. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed of all of it.