

Extract from the Novel «The Sister of the Shadow King»
(«Die Schwester des Schattenkönigs», Kiepenheuer&Witsch, Cologne 1998.
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Mother has brought one marguerite with her, I myself did not think of flowers for even an instant.

«Sleep well, coward,» she whispers and throws the little flower up at the freshly whitewashed Alps. Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, close enough to touch. They had been veiled for an eternity. Until the blanket of fog lifted this morning and revealed the winter sky. The entire Mittelland took a deep breath. Now the sun has been shining for almost six hours. Clouds of steam are floating in front of every nose. We bury our hands in the pockets of our woollen coats. A thin frothy layer of snow is glittering on the gravel paths, the pine branches.

Mother's marguerite is losing its little petals, they are sinking into the white of the Alps. The stem quietly twirls into the grave, rests on Uncle Sebastian's oak coffin. Mother twists her face into a grimace, cries and laughs at the same time. She stretches her arms out as if there were snow flakes to be caught. Her face softens and she laughs, laughs hysterically. Father snuggles up to her, whispers in her ear. His black woollen trousers are freshly ironed, as is his cotton shirt.

Next to Father's unusual elegance, Mother appears somewhat dishevelled; she is wearing a dark blue shirt, the material of which is threadbare at the knees, and even her light blue roll neck jumper does not exactly look new. Though she did manage to smoothly comb back her short hair, which is streaked with grey. Her laughter freezes to a sob. She pulls a paper handkerchief out of her pocket and blows her nose loudly.

«You've caught cold.»

«Gran is crying,» Timmy says and clings to my legs.

«Everything will be fine,» Father says. His cheeks are shining red in the cold. They felt soft and warm. He must have shaved freshly. We hugged each other for several minutes.

«I am so happy,» he constantly called out, «I am so happy that you are here again, Luzia, we will make a new start, we will begin again right from the start.»

It was not until we let go of each other that I saw just how many wrinkles were already creasing his face. Now he presses his hands to his mouth, laughter lines are rippling around his eyes. Timmy is pulling faces.