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Some translated short stories and poems

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Preface

I have given some of my (German) stories and poems to friends to have it translated into English, then I worked the poems and the stories over improving the style and the content, which is now slightly different from the German originals. The Irish Ghost-Story and most of the poems herein I had written directly in English.

A note on this story

The story takes place in Brittany in France, a place that I would love to visit. I wrote the beginning (the chapter on Klara) in May of 1992 in French. It was a collaborative effort with two other students during a language course in Lausanne. I also wrote the chapter on Johanna during that time. In the Fall of 2003, I added the last chapter ("Twenty Years Later").

1992 + 2003

The Sorrows of Young Johanna¹

or

"Love and Suffering in Brittany"

Chapter 1: Klara

Exhausted, the three friends put down their suitcases in the reception area of their inn. Klara, Bernadette and Johanna had a long journey behind them. Their fatigue, however, was quickly forgotten once the innkeeper showed them their triple room. As promised in the brochure, it had an ocean view. Indeed, the sun had just dropped below the horizon casting its last purplish-red rays. The room featured a double bed with just one large bed sheet, which was more suitable for a couple, and a solitary bed. Bernadette and Klara quickly agreed to take the double bed and ceded the twin bed to Johanna. After they freshened up, the girls enjoyed an ample supper of several courses, the French '*diner*'.

When the three students eventually went to bed, they all agreed they had made the right choice. They had planned to travel together over the summer break but had only managed to settle on Brittany after a long back and forth. And now, finally, they were at their destination.

The next morning a small breakfast, a so-called '*petit déjeuner*' awaited them with freshly-baked baguette, butter and marmalade. The innkeeper also offered them *muesli* but they would have considered eating it here in France as a breach of style. Right after breakfast, the students ran off in their bathing suits. The cliffs, however, made a bit of a trek necessary before they reached the beach. Just because a travel brochure flaunts a hotel as 'oceanfront' doesn't by any stretch mean that one will be able to jump right into the surf.

On the second morning, Klara had suddenly disappeared after breakfast. Bernadette and Johanna waited a long time for her at the inn but finally decided to leave without her. Just then, in front of the inn, they saw a man walking toward them leading Klara by the hand. Klara looked absolutely wretched. "What's going on, Klara?", Bernadette asked. The man answered for her in astonishingly good German. "She was going to jump off the cliff. Take care of her, please!" Without a will of her own, Klara let them guide her to their room. She climbed into bed but was unwilling to talk. Bernadette and Johanna eventually left her and went to the inn's common room. In all the commotion, they had forgotten to thank the man but it was too late now. They neither knew his name nor the hotel where he was staying.

Klara also refused to join her friends at a bistro in the village for lunch – or '*dejeuner*' – which is actually more like a second breakfast. Bernadette and Johanna then also lost interest in going. But by early afternoon, Klara agreed to at least go for a little walk on the beach with us. Bernadette and Johanna hoped that they might get a chance to talk with Klara outdoors. At the inn, the danger that other guests might catch wind of the conversation was too great. Fresh air, moreover, would surely do Klara good.

¹ Written by me, not by Goethe!

The sky was only slightly overcast with a gentle breeze from the ocean. Apart from the screeches of seagulls and the sound of the ocean, there is a pleasant silence. For a nice day, however, the surging billows were stronger than normal because it had been stormy overnight. The three friends didn't take any notice of this. All three were silent, no one said a word. Breaking the silence, Bernadette finally said: "Tell us what happened? Is there something we can do to help?" Klara answered in a barely audible voice: "My boyfriend Jens is seeing another girl. We had planned to get married at Christmas; we had secretly gotten engaged. And now it's all over!" Klara began to cry. Bernadette was putting an arm around her shoulders but Klara stiffened, turned her back to Bernadette and fell silent again.

Annoyed by the icy silence, Johanna blurted out: "Say something, your silence is deafening. OK, so your boyfriend slept with another girl and you wanted to kill yourself. That's understandable Bernadette, isn't it? But even if you can't imagine it right now, you *will* eventually feel better. I know Jens well. He's my brother, after all. And I'm sure that he loves you – you are all he ever talks about. He is, nevertheless, somewhat polygamous – like the dogs that roam the streets. He's part of the male species and they consider themselves loyal if – after a little fling – they return home in time for breakfast. It's disgusting but that's how men are. I'm sure he'll put a stop to that kind of behaviour once you're married. At least, I hope so."

Klara erupted: "If you don't mind, please keep your smart-alecky comments to yourself! I don't want to listen to it. The fact that he betrayed me is bad enough. That he did so with one of my best friends – *that's* what's so intolerable!" Bernadette interjected: "I don't understand what you mean. *We're* your best friends, aren't we ...?" Klara interrupted her: "Stop lying! You understand full well what I'm talking!" She pulled a photo from her bag. It showed Jens and Bernadette in an embrace. Klara turned to Bernadette: "You wicked beast! I found this photo under the table this morning." Bernadette was very surprised when she caught a glance of the photo in Klara's hand. She pointed a finger to the photo: "Seriously, that's your finance? Good God! Jens never mentioned you. Really, I had no idea that Jens is your finance. Seriously, you *have* to believe me! So my Jens and your Jens is the same person – what a bastard!" Bernadette was shaking with anger: "Just wait till I get my hands on him! Professing his love to me while secretly getting engaged to my best friend! Had I only known!" Johanna added with a sigh: "And this jerk is my brother." Klara didn't say anything. She furrowed her brow pensively. How was it possible that Jens was leading a double life without anyone noticing? A difficult course of study on top of it! Or were all those night classes just a ruse? Klara never would have thought this possible outside of a spy thriller. After a small eternity, she said to Bernadette: "You might be right. It seems that Jens betrayed us both." Then she fell silent again.

For Johanna, the mood had become unbearable. As they approached a beachfront café she suggested: "Shall we stop for coffee?" The other two acquiesced with a weary nod. She entered the café's front garden with its tables and chairs. "Oh, have a look", Bernadette called out turning to Klara, "that's the Frenchman who saved your life!"

The same fellow from this morning was sitting at one of the tables. He had short dark hair with a few grey strands at his temples and he was wearing a red-brown windbreaker. With both hands, he was holding one of those big cups that are so typical of France while carefully sipping his *café au lait*. The three young women approached him. Johanna rose to speak: "Pardon me, monsieur; we want to thank you for saving Klara this morning." Startled, he put his cup down and subsequently looked up to the three friends that he hadn't noticed up till then. Somewhat bewildered he said to them "Oh, good afternoon ladies! Well – *eh bien* –

would you like to – *eh* – join me? Please, have a seat. Would you like some coffee?" Without waiting for an answer, he called over the waitress who had just appeared in the doorway: "*Mademoiselle, encore trois cafés, s'il vous plait!*"

As the waitress left to get the coffee, he addressed the three friends: "May I introduce myself? My name is Jean-Paul Débourg. I'm from Lausanne." Johanna pointed to her three friends: "This is Bernadette and this is Klara – the one you already know. And I am Johanna. We're from Germany." The three friends then sat down at his table. Jean-Paul told them that he had read history and was now in the process of researching the Celts in Brittany for his doctoral thesis. He was currently in search of traces of a Celtic goddess who continued to be revered as a Catholic saint after the Christianization. Jean-Paul knew a lot about the myths and lore of the region and before they knew it, it was time for supper at their inn. They arranged to meet the following day.

Johanna tried to get her friends to reconcile with Jens. He was, after all, her brother. Bernadette and Klara categorically refused. In the end, Johanna decided to call Jens herself after supper – to tell him what had happened and to reproach him. He, however, callously explained that he was fine with the outcome; he felt that he was still too young to make a commitment at this point in his life. What he wanted was fun and free love. Marriage and such was not for him right now. Johanna angrily slammed the receiver on the hook.

Next morning, Jean-Paul awaited the three young women in front of the inn with his car, a Citroën 2CV. "May I invite you to my two-horse-powered carriage?", he asked them. "What do you mean by 'two horses'?", Johanna asked. Jean-Paul grinned: "In France, we call these old-timers '*deux chevaux*', in other words 'two horses'. They went out of production years ago." Johanna frowned. French is indeed a difficult language. '*Cheval*' means horse but the plural is '*chevaux*', she remembered vaguely. She was happy that Jean-Paul spoke German. But he misinterpreted her furrowed brow: "No, no, 'two horses' doesn't mean '2-horsepower', my carriage has a lot more horsepower than that!" Johanna explained: "In Germany, we call the Citroën 2CV 'duck'". Jean-Paul appeared not to be pleased with that designation. It seems he construed the term 'duck' as an insult for a fancy carriage drawn by two horses. As a true gentleman, he opened the passenger door with an inviting gesture and folded down the armrest of the front passenger seat so that two of the university students could sit in the back. Having the same instinct, all three sought the backseats. Klara reacted quickly. "Let me and Bernadette in the back, Johanna. With your long legs, you're better off in the front."

Over the next days, Jean-Paul collected the three students with his car almost every afternoon for excursions into the surrounding areas. They thus saw a lot of Brittany – small villages, fishing harbours, picturesque towns, markets and large parts of the landscape they would have missed on bike or bus. Jean-Paul had a wealth of information and anecdotes to relate. It was obvious that he was interested in the three young German women. Occasionally, Jean-Paul invited them for supper at a bistro or restaurant in one of the villages or small towns they came across while out and about. On such days they didn't get back home till late at night.



On the Cliff²

Chapter 2: Johanna

In a fit of giggling, Klara and Bernadette managed to jointly write an ironic postcard to Jens and they resolved to put him out of their minds forever. They were also adamant about not allowing their holiday to be spoiled because of some fellow. Johanna was sad as she would have liked to have one of her best friends as a sister-in-law. And she secretly envied Klara and Bernadette because they were so close. Toward her they were more reserved – even though she couldn't help it that Jens was her brother!

Despite their intention to forget Jens, Klara and Bernadette were rather more quiet and pensive than usual and they wouldn't permit any kind of advances from Jean-Paul – even though they thought Jean-Paul very charming and nice. For the time being, at most they were interested in camaraderie with men – but certainly not in a new relationship. They explained this to Johanna one evening before bed after being prompted to tell her what they thought of Jean-Paul. Johanna herself was fundamentally opposed to getting involved with a man – even a holiday dalliance – before completing her degree. First a career – then a family! Besides, it would have alienated her girlfriends had she become involved with Jean-Paul. She was, nevertheless, somehow drawn to this French researcher.

A semester break at a university means only that there are no classes; it doesn't mean that there is no work to do. Thus, Johanna spent much of her time at a table in the common room of their inn studying. Her friends, in the meantime, went off to do things alone or read novels on the beach. Johanna was preparing for a math examination scheduled for October. One day, Jean-Paul came to the inn unexpectedly and asked whether the three friends felt like going on a major excursion. He greeted Johanna but she didn't react. She was hunched over books, scripts and vast quantities of notes. He then tapped her on the shoulder. Startled, Johanna turned around, squinted and, when she saw him, smiled. She explained to him: "It's for my math exam. I'm highly focussed and I don't notice what's going on around me when I'm solving differential equations like these. But I love the challenge of solving tricky problems." Jean-Paul and Johanna started chatting and then went for a walk. Several hours later Klara and Bernadette, who had been at the beach, saw them walking back to the inn holding hands.

² Photo: Chris at Ireland's West coast in 1992.

That evening Johanna told her friends: "I'm at a loss myself to explain it but I was overcome by this strange sensation when he was showing me an excavation site. He helped prop me up by supporting my hips at the edge of a steep embankment." Klara and Bernadette darted amused glances at each other. This is a side of their sober-minded, no-nonsense friend that they hadn't seen before. Klara cautiously explained: "I know that feeling. Indeed, Jean-Paul really is a very unusual fellow." She carefully avoided using the terms 'in love' or 'love'.

When Jean-Paul came to collect the young women the next morning, Klara and Bernadette told him they had work to do for the university and let Jean-Paul strike out alone with Johanna. They had hardly left the house when Bernadette said to Klara: "What do you think? How long will Jean-Paul need until our Miss Refrigerator lets him kiss her?" Klara bit her lower lip: "I have no idea. At least we now know that she's not a lesbian. It hadn't been necessary, after all, to offer her the single bed. But be cautious with Johanna! If we were to mention that we think she's in love, it would immediately put an end to her feelings." Klara tried to imitate Johanna's voice: "Feelings are irrational. It's better to choose a partner through reasoning rather than emotions."

Klara laughed. Then she sighed loudly: "Oh, Jens!", and tossed the book that she had been holding in her hand into a corner. Bernadette carefully took Klara into her arm. Klara was sobbing. After a while, Bernadette asked: "Tell me, Klara, did you really plan to jump off the cliff the other day?" Klara had to clear her throat before she could make a sound and then she spoke almost in a whisper: "I don't know. Actually, I was planning to sit in the grass up on the cliff with that incredible view and write a very angry letter to Jens – and to you too. I was going to tell you two to go jump in a lake and then pack my things and depart." Klara was breathing heavily: "But then I thought, if only he had betrayed me with a stranger rather than my best friend!" Klara sobbed again but this time more violently. Trying to console her, Bernadette stroked her hair. She sensed that words were not appropriate at the moment.

Over the next days, the three friends again went swimming in the ocean together and also went on excursions whenever Jean-Paul came to collect them. Klara and Bernadette didn't give Johanna too many opportunities to be alone with Jean-Paul. Johanna had changed. One time, Klara and Bernadette sat reading in their room while Johanna was getting ready to attend a concert in town with Jean-Paul. She was asking their advice on what to wear. She couldn't make up her mind whether to wear her blue or red jumper. Klara put her book down and answered ironically: "Why make such a fuss? He'd probably like it best if you weren't wearing anything at all. Men are like the dogs that roam the streets. You said so yourself, didn't you? Don't bother, men aren't worth the trouble." Johanna eventually chose the blue jumper and hurried off.

Bernadette sat next to Klara: "Are you jealous?" Klara grinned: "Because of Jean-Paul? No, of course not! At the moment, men don't interest me at all." Bernadette stared intensely at Klara: "What is it then?" Klara sat down next to Bernadette and explained: "I'm worried about Johanna. She's so inexperienced when it comes to feelings. Jens told me that she put on a very stoic air when her cat died over the Easter holidays. She spoke of getting a new one immediately because of the mice. On the other hand, she walked around in a stained blouse for days without noticing it, and Jens said she even bumped into a parked car with her bicycle. It's obvious that she can't deal with her feelings." Bernadette snapped: "The same might also apply to you. And grieving for a dead cat is something completely different than grieving for one's first love!" Klara remained sceptical: "The things I learned at uni about the schizoid character type gives me pause. Do you know, for example, that ..." Bernadette interrupted: "Forget your silly theories. Just because most crazy people psyche out with their first love

doesn't mean that everyone who falls in love for the first time will go crazy." She laughed: "Johanna would probably be able to prove that with the help of set theory." Klara didn't answer. Bernadette drew closer to her: "Oh, by the way, as a soon-to-be specialist, would you freak out mentally if you were confronted with lesbian feelings, or are you also schizoid or whatever you call it?" Klara smiled and then looked into Bernadette's eyes: "It would depend on who it is. You perhaps?" Bernadette smiled with embarrassment: "I'm not quite sure if that's what it is. What do you think?" Then she leaned in even closer to Klara.

Even though it was a bit windy, the weather was nice. Johanna was waiting for Jean-Paul in front of the inn. She was under a tree straddling a wooden sheep pasture gate located a hundred meters from the inn. From here she could overlook the driveway to the inn. She sang "*Parlez-moi d'amour*" with her alto voice - even if a bit off-key. Then she looked at her watch: "*Seize heures, mon ami, tu es très tard!* (1600 hours, my friend, you are very late)", she mumbled. And Jean-Paul still hadn't arrived. Finally she started humming "*Les feuilles mortes*" ("Autumn Leaves"³).

After a long period of waiting, she finally heard Jean-Paul's Citroën as it approached and saw it stop in front of the inn. Even before Johanna could run over to it another woman emerged from the inn and climbed into the car next to Jean-Paul. They drove off together. Johanna wasn't able to recognize the woman because of the distance. Completely aghast, she stood motionless for several minutes. Are men really like the dogs that roam the streets? Johanna started to run. The cliffs that Klara had wanted to toss herself off just a few days earlier weren't far away.

Klara and Bernadette were in their room lying in bed arm in arm and talking. Suddenly Klara gave a jerk and called out quietly "Oh". Bernadette tried to calm her down: "It's only like that the first time. I'm sure you won't be as scared the second time around." Klara answered palely: "I think I just saw a white figure, an apparition. It looked a bit like the statue of the saint at that church Jean-Paul showed us yesterday. He said that it was actually a Celtic Goddess. Bernadette reassured her: "Nonsense, those are just your guilt feelings! You probably had a very religious upbringing just like I did. And anyway, if a Goddess appears to you rather than a devil that's probably more of a good sign, right?"

Sometime later she heard the voices of Jean-Paul and a woman. Klara was alarmed and asked: "There's no way the woman he is talking to is Johanna. What's going on?" She got up and opened the door. Outside she spied Jean-Paul with the innkeeper and an unknown man. Bewildered, she asked Jean-Paul: "Where is Johanna? Isn't she with you?" – "No, why?", he answered. In his excitement, his German was now tinged with a strong French accent: "Did something happen? We agreed to meet this afternoon at 4 o'clock. I didn't see her; I was just at the train station with your innkeeper to collect her husband. He was in Paris. May I introduce you: This is Claude, he's an amateur archaeologist and he's got some important pointers for me." Startled, Klara told them: "Johanna left almost an hour ago to meet up with you and she hasn't returned yet!" She hurried outside. Bernadette ran after her. Meanwhile, the innkeeper contacted the train station to ask if Johanna had been seen there. It wasn't unusual that a hotel guest departed suddenly upon quarrelling with a travel companion. But no one had seen Johanna.

It wasn't until evening that one of the men finally found Johanna at the bottom of the cliff. Unfortunately, it was too late.

³ For the song see the last page.



The Cliff⁴

Chapter 3: Twenty years later

Some years later, Bernadette met a man who was 'different' from other men. He, however, left her when she was pregnant. Bernadette's daughter, Anneken, is now a grammar school student who is enthusiastically learning French. Unfortunately, Klara never met a man who was interested in getting married and, out of necessity, now lives solely for her job and patients. Klara also happens to be a godmother to Bernadette's daughter and she looks after her adoringly. At the moment, however, she's somewhat frustrated because Anneken is at that age when young girls don't want to have anything to do with adults. The two friends now only rarely think of Johanna, after all, twenty years have passed since that time.

On a Friday late in the evening, Klara's mobile rang. It was Bernadette: "Sorry to disturb you so late. Anneken has been on a class trip since the day before yesterday and I'm going stir-crazy. I simply need to hear another human voice."

Forty-five minutes later, Klara had joined Bernadette. She had her nightwear with her and had even taken a quick shower before arriving. After all, she hadn't been able to rule out the possibility that Bernadette might suddenly express interest in physical affection again – like she did back then. Klara was hoping that this wouldn't happen but she didn't want her friend to be put off by body odour if they did get physical. The two women drank an herbal infusion, talked about everything and anything – but especially about Anneken's school problems. She was facing a failing grade in math and a suitable tutor couldn't be found. Later Bernadette made up Anneken's bed for Klara to sleep in while remarking: "How convenient that your legs aren't as long as Johanna's, otherwise you would have had to share my bed with me." The fact that Klara wouldn't have minded is something that she keeps to herself. She sat down on the freshly-made bed and wished Bernadette a good night.

Unexpectedly, Bernadette didn't leave Anneken's room. Instead, she sat down next to Klara at the edge of the bed but without touching Klara. She then burst out: "I think it would have been better had *I* commit suicide and either you or Johanna were Anneken's mother. I think that I've failed." Klara laughed: "Johanna would have used one hand to hold her children

⁴ Photo: Cape of Good Hope, 1977.

while nursing and the other to type formulas into her computer. And if one of her children had come running up to her screaming with a burnt finger, she would have coolly told him: "that is a natural process. When organic material is exposed to high heat it decomposes. Do you want me to write up the chemical formula for you?" Bernadette smiled weakly: "I think you're exaggerating; Johanna wasn't quite that extreme." Klara continued: "No, Bernadette, of us three, you are definitely the best-suited to be a mother. I wouldn't have been suitable mother material either. You know what they say about the children of preachers and the livestock of the local miller (German: *Pfarrers Kinder und Müllers Vieh*). They rarely turn out as expected. That's because clergy couples spend all their time dealing with other people's problems, which leaves no time for their own families. And a miller's important primary task will inevitably lead him to neglect his livestock. Well, this basically also applies to us psychologists."

Bernadette remained pensive: "When I look back to that day, I sometimes think that we would have seen Johanna as she ran toward the cliff. I think we would have been able to stop her from jumping had we just been taking a normal walk instead of being caught up in physical affection with each other. Or if I had at least reacted properly to the appearance of the Celtic Goddess instead of engaging in psychological talk!" Klara was a bit irritated: "I think that we have spoken about this often enough! When you consider the strong wind on that day, it would have been highly unlikely for us to go walking up on the cliffs. It's more likely we would have been at a café on the beach having a bite to eat. We wouldn't have seen Johanna. And we wouldn't have been able to save Johanna either if we had reacted promptly to the vision of an apparition and run toward the cliff. That's because by this time Johanna was already dead; the doctor later determined that. But let's go through it again calmly."

Klara stood up and grabbed three of Anneken's stuffed animals. Just like one might expect from a girl's room, it was teeming with all sorts of stuffed and plastic animals. Bernadette was feeling a little wistful. She thought about the many times she and Anneken had played with them, just as Klara had done when she visited her godchild. But that was over now and all too soon Anneken would hawk her stuffed animals at a flea market and decorate her room with posters of pop stars or whatever else today's teenagers put up on their walls. If only – Bernadette was hoping – Anneken would at least refrain from getting piercings or insist on getting a pet rat with a long, naked tail.

Klara placed the three stuffed animals on the ground and explained: "Let's stick with the situation we just had in mind. OK, that there is Johanna on the way to the cliff and the other two are us running after Johanna." Bernadette hesitated. What she was doing seemed somehow silly to her but then she bent forward and picked up one of the stuffed animals. Suddenly it seemed to her that time had been turned back and she was once again a young student in Brittany.

Out of breath, Bernadette called out: "Johanna? What's the hurry? Stop!" Johanna stopped, turned around to her friends and then looked toward the cliff again. She hesitated. In the meantime, both of the friends had caught up with her. "What's wrong, Johanna?" Bernadette asked again. Johanna muttered: "Jean-Pierre, he's ..." then she collapsed, sobbing, into the embrace of her friend. None of the three women said anything. There was only the sound of Johanna sobbing. The wind had become stronger. The cries of the seagulls coming from the ocean sounded sombre. "Come, let's sit down here in the slipstream of this boulder and talk about it," Klara suggested, and afterward we'll go and have a double espresso."...

Bernadette sat back down on the bed. She wiped a tear from her eye: "Yes, that's how it could have been." Klara added: "But only had we been in the right place at exactly the right time."

And that's an extremely unlikely scenario." Bernadette stayed pensive: "The thing I would really like to know is why the Celtic Goddess appeared to you and not to Johanna? If it had, Johanna probably would have turned back from the cliffs – forever sad perhaps – but nevertheless alive." Klara made a disparaging face and grabbed a Barbie doll that had been thoughtlessly lying in a corner of the room. She held the doll in front of the 'Johanna stuffed animal' and explained to Bernadette: "What do you think...what would have happened if the Saint – of the Goddess if you will – had appeared to our Johanna? How do you think Johanna would have reacted?"

Bernadette giggled and called out using a distorted voice: "Oh, how fascinating, a genuine, apparition. What a pity that I don't have a measuring apparatus with me so that I could measure its magnetic fields – or if only I had a camera at least!" Then, in a more serious tone, she added: "I think you're right Klara. It's more likely she would have concluded that she must be bonkers. She would have consulted the first psychiatrist she came across." Klara objected soberly: "No, Bernadette, that would have made a sceptical individual like Johanna all the more prone to leap into the abyss – even if she had not been planning to kill herself prior to seeing the apparition. You know, a so-called '*key religious experience*' like the appearance of angels and so forth is often at the beginning of schizophrenia. Perhaps Johanna only jumped **because** this apparition appeared to her. But I'm more prone to think that the apparition that I saw was the spirit of the deceased Johanna rather than some kind of warning saint. I know for sure that it didn't turn me schizophrenic. And I never again experienced anything of that sort.

The two women sat on the bed – each caught up in her own thoughts – side by side and in silence. On an impulse, Klara then placed the stuffed animal that symbolized Johanna into Bernadette's hand and prompted her: "Tell us about your life, Johanna, if you had continued to live!" And, to her astonishment, Bernadette blithely rattled off what she envisioned:

"You know, after clearing up the misunderstanding with Jean-Paul, who was planning to collect me at 6 PM rather than at 1600 hours, we reconciled. By then, however, I had fallen out of love with him. I subsequently completed my degree with honours and then finished a doctoral thesis on x-dimensional thingamajigs with just a 'cum laude'. Oh well, by the time I had completed my academic studies, all the young fellows who would have been suitable husband and father material had already been spoken for."

Klara took the stuffed animal from Bernadette's hand and continued:

"Yes, and I didn't manage to pass the probationary period of my first job. I guess they thought I was an industrial engineer because they wanted me to do all kinds of primitive business-related stuff – calculations on the overall returns on investments and other such rubbish. And not even a smidgen of integral calculus!" Yes, and then I was unemployed. No work – no boyfriend. My whole life had become senseless. Finally, I was admitted to a hospital. Once there, the doctors sent me to psychologists and they in turn sent me back to the doctors. After I was released, I found a simple office job. Thanks to all the medication I was taking, I wasn't up to anything more challenging. To be honest, I regret that my suicide attempt back then didn't succeed – or at least the second attempt I made to kill myself after I defended my doctoral thesis. The PhD I earned would have looked great on my gravestone."

Bernadette jabbed Klara in the ribs with her elbow: "Stop this nonsense, it's not funny anymore." Klara was dead serious: "It's not a joke, in the course of my professional life, I've seen many such life stories. From what I know today, I can tell you that Johanna would have

been sectioned in her mid-30s at the latest – just like her brother. It ran in her family. Nowadays psychotherapies are available that do without a lot of medications and her condition wouldn't have been much of a problem. But back then psychiatry exclusively treated classic neuroses – and, in part, they did so in a hair-raising manner.

Bernadette was baffled: "Seriously, Jens too?" Klara raised her hand to her mouth in horror: "You didn't know that? Johanna's father and Jens both had been in psychiatric care for decades. Apparently Jens' marriage was also shaky and then, when his wife was in the hospital for the birth of their third child, his illness came to the foreground. It seems that Jens felt overwhelmed as the babysitter for his two small children. Fortunately, nothing serious happened and the children were safe. As I said, Jens' mother called me and I drove him to a psychiatric ward.

Bernadette got up to make some more 'goodnight' tea. Klara followed her into the kitchen. As she poured the water from the kettle into the teapot, Bernadette asked: "By the way, do you have any idea what became of Jean-Pierre? Do you suppose he has children in Anneken's age? Now that Anneken is learning French that would be quite convenient." Klara shrugged. "I'm sorry, I don't know. And even if he did, I wouldn't consider it a good idea to renew our contact. I think that this whole issue would weigh Anneken down too much."

It was already past midnight by the time the two women finally went to bed. The phone rang at 7 o'clock the next morning. Anneken just wanted to say 'hi' to her mother. At least her world is still in order.

The End

H. Chris Gast, 1992
(revised 2003)



Essay on suicide

In 1980, after seriously contemplating suicide, I was asked if I wasn't afraid of hell. Thereupon, I lost my faith in God and didn't recover it until 18 years later. Considering the severity of my depression at that time, I would have preferred even a medieval hell à la Dante to the loneliness of the here and now! If God punishes those who commit suicide with hell, he would be conducting himself just like the former GDR regime, which prevented its citizens from defecting to the West under threat of jail. Can one revere such a God? Not me! So someone can wind up in hell because this person suffers from a disease that medication could take the edge off? In other words, because of a chemical imbalance in the brain? Back then, I never got an answer that I considered satisfactory. When I sought help from the church in 1980 for a mental health emergency, I was turned away – the student pastor didn't have time for me because he was busy preparing a sermon. I wound up in a clinic with atheistic therapists. In the meantime, doctors prescribe medication for me when I need them. For me, this issue is (hopefully) no longer acute.

Islam too – as well as the Far Eastern religions – teaches us about the ill effects upon the soul of those who commit suicide. But perhaps it has always been the case that the ruling classes (worldly and spiritual rulers alike) do not want to lose any of their subjects through this kind of 'ultimate defection' from their grip and authority.

The Bible takes a differentiated view to suicide, which is not automatically considered a sin. It wasn't until Augustine (around the time when the church became the prevailing religion in the Roman Empire) that suicide was automatically deemed a grave sin or mortal sin. Until deep into the 20th century, those who took their own life were denied a church burial. Only as a consequence of new findings in modern medicine and psychology did churches begin to change their views. They slowly came to see individuals with suicidal thoughts as patients in need of pastoral care and medical attention rather than shrugging their condition off as sin. Nowadays, other religions too take a more differentiated approach to this issue. God is more benevolent than people might think.

Unlike in the above story, my issues weren't about lovesickness but rather about fears and depression as well as the difficulties I experienced adjusting from university life to professional life.

Chris

Le chanson "Les feuilles mortes"

Aus: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_feuilles_mortes



C'est une chanson qui nous ressemble,
Toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais.
Nous vivions tous les deux ensemble,
Toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais.
Mais la vie sépare ceux qui s'aiment,
Tout doucement sans faire de bruit.
Et la mer efface sur le sable,
Les pas des amants désunis.

It's a song that resembles us,
You who loved me, I who loved you.
We lived both together,
You who loved me, I who loved you.
But life separates those who are in love
Slowly and quietly.
And the sea erases on the beach,
The footprints of the now separated lovers.

Shorter Stories

The end of the War

Annotation: The following poem with a story is based on a terrible nightmare I once have had. The poem was already published in German in 1995 in "Graustädter Geschichten", and the story in a modified form in the Journal "Siebener-Kurier" about 1994. It is about the end of the war called "Dreißigjähriger Krieg" from 1618 to 1648, when Swedish and French troops participated in the German war between catholics and protestants. The story is about a servant returning home after the war.

Finally the war has ended,
the long and severe fighting's over,
and I am going home at last.
Mama, wait, I'm coming!

No bread is left, nor anything
to eat, and nobody with money,
but we 're alive and it is peace,
Mama, wait, I'm coming!

Here is the brook, which guides the path
into the valley of my village,
How great will be the pleasure there,
Mama, wait, I'm coming!

But I find only nettles there,
and thorny undergrowth!
Some charred posts are all that's left
Where once had been my childhood's home.

Mama, say, where are you?

I was horrified looking and staring at that place, where the village had been. Young shoots of birch trees were already growing among the charred posts. The valley was deathly quiet. I yelled out. I had probably been standing there for a long time, when there was a whistling sound, which I ignored.

Suddenly somebody tapped at my right shoulder. "Can't you hear anything?" someone asked behind me. I turned round. A man, who looked like a hermit and a monk at the same time with tousled hair and an unkempt beard was looking at me. He was dressed in hides of deer and rabbits, which were roughly stitched together. Surely this was more suitable in this time of year than my woollen coat. His appearance left me speechless.

"It makes no sense to stay here," the man said to me. "Everybody is dead here. Now winter can set in any day. Do you know somebody somewhere else, where you can find accommodation?" I stared at him expressionless for a while. Then I woke up from my shock and after thinking about that I remembered:

"Yes, there are my mother's relatives in Schannebach, maybe I could stay with them." The man answered: "Schannebach is devastated too, no one 's alive there any more." I looked at him with an inquiring expression but I couldN't get a word out.

"You don't you know me, do you?" the man asked. I shook my head. "I'm Rainer from the Wiesenhof-farm." No, I didn't recognise him. To me he looked totally different from how he used to look before I left home so many years ago.

"You should come with me," he mumbled, "you can't stay here overnight." Hesitating I followed him. Where else could I go! Rainer took the path through the forest towards Oberhambach. I followed him in silence. I couldn't think of anything. Every now and then I burst into tears.

Rainer was speaking to me all the time but I didn't listen. I simply was not able to understand a word. In the forest, Rainer left the path and turned down a small trail, which was barely visible. We had to climb over a rock and to wade through a spring before we reached a hut made of interlaced woven twigs in the way my brothers had once built one as children for playing.

Some hides of deer covered the floor of the hut. After all they gave me a feeling of cosiness. I sat down on a wooden block in front of the hut, which was usually used as a chopping block, while Rainer was setting some pieces of wood on the fire in front of the hut. Stoking in the fire he asked me: "Tell me, have you been in the Swedish General's service all the time, since he left his quarters in Bensheim? I still remember well that you joined the Swedish troops when your eldest brother got married and took over the farm. So the Swedish general does not need you any longer?"

I woke up from my lethargy and told Rainer that the war was over. "The war is over, there is peace, finally there is peace, you know! The General and his fellow country men have gone back to Sweden but they couldn't take me and the other German servants with them. Otherwise I would have gone there. I had already started to learn some Swedish words. "

Then, after thinking a while, I asked Rainer: "When did it happen that the village was destroyed?" He answered gravely: "About four or five years ago, maybe six. I do not count the years anymore."

I should have been shocked by that again, but since I was tired out of any emotions I continued talking in an unemotional voice: "Then Sepp, the grocer of Bensheim, really is a crook. All the years moving from quarter to quarter with the Swedes, when he came with his merchandise to the camp, I had given him something for my family, a coloured shawl or some saved coins, every time when he came. And every time he promised me to hand it over to my brother or sister-in-law when he went back to Bensheim on market day, when the village people came to town. And Sepp told me they were happy about my presents, and that they all were quite fine. What a liar!"

The last time I had met Sepp, was just after Whitsunday, about six months ago. He must have known about the devastation and should have told me the truth instead of accepting again some presents for my family and giving me false news of them.

I explained: "Rainer, you know, there had not been any payment apart from accommodation and meals. It was not easy to get something valuable which I could send to my family. But I had a better life with the Swedish than at home. As servants we didn't have to go to bed hungry as we used to have as children in the village in those years, when there was crop failure. It was hard work of course but bearable. Life there I could have born till the end of my life. Furthermore, the Swedish behaved better to each other and to the servants. There were not so many loud words or quarrels as in the village..."

I was weeping again because I thought of the sight of our destroyed village and all the villagers who had died.

Rainer gave me something to eat: "Eat, you must eat!" I looked at the freshly roasted piece of meat. I didn't mind that it was charred from the fire. However, I didn't taste anything. It could have been an old piece of bread or piece of tree bark. But I chewed it and it lessened the impulse to cry. Rainer took a piece of meat out of the fire too and sat down next to me. After eating the meat, he started telling me his news.

He made his living out of setting traps for catching rabbits and other small animals in the wilderness. It saved him from starvation, but not much more. Occasionally he had also hunted deer – that's where he got the furs from. But there were no big animals left for hunting now. In the good old days the Count used to hunt only as many deer as would not decimate their population, but in the war the soldiers had "emptied" the forests of nearly all edible animals.

Rainer had only survived the raid of the band of the soldiers in the village because he was in the forest looking after his traps that day. When he came back the next day he realized that he was the only survivor in the whole valley! All the people were dead! Now he was happy to see me, because apart from market days, where he exchanged rabbit furs for everything necessary, he had nobody to speak to.

By the way, the town of Bensheim was the only place which had not been destroyed. At night a woman had let the besiegers in through a narrow door in the city wall, so there had been almost no damage or deaths.

When Rainer and I had told each other the most important things, we fell silent again and listened to the murmuring of the wind in the trees and the tapping of a woodpecker next to us.

"I can't believe that we have peace now," Rainer said thoughtfully. It is hard to imagine, no fights, no soldiers, just peace! What it is like?" Then he suddenly put an arm round my shoulders. I was startled, and moved over a bit. "Don't be afraid!" Rainer said half indignantly, half apologetically. "I won't pounce on you – have you had such bad experiences with men? I'm not like those evil soldiers, who don't care whether they rape women, children or young men. But why is it bad to take somebody in your arms, when you have been alone for years? You don't believe that: Although I often quarrelled with my wife, Resi, you know, - everybody in the village knew - and although I withdrew into the forest for several days after those quarrels, I loved her, somehow, in my own way. You know we had to marry because of our parents, I had to take over the farm."

He thoughtfully stopped telling and began sobbing. "Resi is dead and all my children, too!" I was scared. Apart from very young soldiers, who had come back from the battle and had lost their best comrade, I had never seen a man crying. It must have been terrible for him to lose his family! I felt the desire to take Rainer comforting in my arms but I had some inhibition about touching a man. So I took his hand.

I thought of what I had heard on my way home from the Swedes. They started rebuilding villages and the sovereigns supported such plans and were looking for new settlers. When Rainer was calm again, I suggested that we might ask the Earl of Schönberg, if he would like to help us out with some tools, seed and young cattle, so that we could rebuild a new village, maybe together with some survivors from other villages, perhaps in a new place.

Rainer was pleased with this proposal but he also had his doubts about the idea: "I would have done it right after the destruction of the village but the Earl was searching for me because he knew that I poached in his forests. I wouldn't take the risk of getting caught."

It grew dark and cold. Rainer gave me some large furs to use as a bed-cover and made a place ready for me in the right-hand side of the cabin while he himself went to the other side of the hut to lie down.

When I laid down, too, I had an idea: "I have an idea, Rainer! You can come with me to the nearest forest edge next to the Earl's castle, then I'll go in to him alone and ask him to pardon you. New villages surely are more important for the Earl than this old poaching trifle. If he doesn't agree, we'll try the Count of Baden, where nobody knows you. What do you think about it?" Rainer seemed to be relieved. He thought about it for a while. Then he finally burst out: "That would be marvellous!"

He sighed and continued: "Would you really do that for me? Come on, let's go to the Earl tomorrow morning!"

While I was falling asleep I was imagining how we would rebuild a new farm and felt relieved that I had finally found a place in that world.

Hanna-Chris Gast

An Irish Ghost-Story

One evening our hiking group visited a pub in an Irish harbour town, when we had a walking tour in the west of Ireland. The weather was pretty bad and when a young sailor man entered the pub, some of the mist filled into the room and made it hard to see the sailor very clearly. Outside some birds were to be heard howling very ugly.

"A Guinness please!" the sailor said and continued:

"Oh, it's fine being in Ireland again 'n having real beer, not this washing-up-water the Americans dare call beer."

After he had drunk his beer he looked around:

"Hey, what's the women doing here? I think this is a pub, not a nursery!" He sounded a bit dangerously angry.

"We are tourists from Germany," our group-leader intervened,

"we like Ireland very much and want to see this beautiful country."

The sailor was pleased to hear us praise Ireland and changed his mood:

"The Germans sank my ship, but whoever is an enemy of England is a friend of mine. Come, let's have a beer with me!"

He waved to the assistant to pour us beer, then he toasted with us:

"For the freedom of Ireland!"

Another guest interrupted, he seemed a bit drunk:

"Ireland is free, and from the north of Ireland nobody should speak about as long as he doesn't want problems with me!"

The sailor seemed to be astonished:

"Oh, Ireland is free at last - so Patrick Pearson¹⁾ has had success in the end?"

The assistant waved us a sign not to answer. After another Guinness the sailor said:

"Good by, guys, Good by, German Ladies, nice to meet you, but my comrades are waiting for me on the ship."

He left, and when he had gone, the assistant explained:

"The sailor comes here every year in one evening of this time of the year since my grandfather took over the pub in 1930. Maybe he already came here before that time, I don't know."

Then nobody in the pub mentioned the sailor any more.

Chris

¹⁾ Rebellion without success in Eastern 1916

The Wolf from Chernobyl

Annotation A friend, who worked in the German embassy in Kiev, asked me whether I could write a story about wild dogs in the city and the nuclear Černobyl catastrophe which happened in 1986. So I wrote the following story in October 1997, transforming an old German fairy tale into science fiction.

(science fiction story)

“I am totally sorry, but I must leave you alone for a while”, Margarita said to the children, when she opened the heavy bunker door. Normally the adults never left the seven children alone in the air raid shelter, but today she had no other chance. The other adults of the shelter were all outdoors, in order to repair block 7 of their nuclear power station. The block 7 has been the most modern nuclear power station, when it was built in the year 2015¹. But in the meantime this block had seen 70 summers, and the people from the shelter settlement had to go there every few months in order to repair it.

There has already been no electricity for three days, too much time for the electric illuminated hydroponics tanks to grow food. So Margarita had to go outdoors in order to find something to eat for the children and also to feed the rabbits they had in the bunker. The other adults were still outdoors in the power plant but Margarita couldn't wait for them to return.

Margarita had good luck. Outdoors was only wind-force 7. There had been a storm in the night blowing some junk of the ruined town in front of the shelter's door and the windows of bullet-proof glass. In a quarter of an hour Margarita had everything cleared away. Sometimes the storm was blowing so much junk and dead trees in front of the entrance that the people of the shelter settlement were busy a half of a day with saws and axes to clear up the path to the outside. There used to be days without any storm before the climatic catastrophe, Margarita was told, but Margarita didn't remember these days any more. She's been a little baby by that time.

Margarita went out. “Don't let enter any strangers!” she reminded the children again. “No, Margarita, we won't!” the children promised in unison and bolted the door with a heavy beam. The mechanical lock and the control video camera at the entrance had already been out of order in Margarita's childhood.

The children knew that they were in great danger of robbers and of wolves. They could only go outside accompanied by armed adults. And even then there was a danger of being bitten by big rats. All the people of the shelter settlement learned already as little children to construct crossbows and to shoot with arrows. But it could even happen to armed adults that they became victims of hungry wolves in the outside, because they can shoot only at one wolf in the time. This doesn't help much, if hundreds of wolves are attacking you at the same time. Only the solid doors of the air raid shelter helped against great packs of wolves and against bandits. They were made of stainless steel.

It has been rumoured that some wolves were able to communicate telepathically with each other during their hunting for the prey. Maybe that something like telepathy occasionally turns up among the numerous mutated animals and human beings suffer in the strong radioactivity which was emitted by the crash in the block 4 of the nuclear power station.

¹ Block 4 of the Atomic Power Plant of Černobyl had exploded in 1986, a couple of years before the fall of the Soviet Union.

So the children stayed alone at home. But they were safe in the bunker. The older children looked after the younger ones.

After a while somebody knocked at the door of the shelter. “Open the door, dear children, your mother is back again!” The children were uncertain. Did they really hear a voice? “But Margarita is not our mother, she is our aunt!” one of the children answered loudly.

For a while nothing was to be heard. Then it knocked again at the door and the same voice asked: “Open the door, children, your aunt is here! I have brought delicious rats for you!” - “Disgusting!” the children cried.

The voice disappeared again for a while. Then it knocked for as third time: “Open the door, children, I have brought fresh apples for you!” - “Great!” some of the children called and ran to the door. Only little Nikolai, who was a bit dense, had heard nothing and asked what the matter was. “Aunt Margarita has come back and has brought us fresh apples”, the other ones explained. Nikolai frowned, what the other children hardly saw in the half-light of the emergency lights in the bunker. “I think apples should be ripe in four weeks only, not yet!”

But meanwhile some of the older children had unbolted the door. The door flung open with a crash and a wolf rushed in. The children ran shrieking away deep inside the bunker to hide themselves. The wolfs run after them. Nikolai jumped into the algae-basin of the hydroponics tanks. Once he had heard that cats have fear of water. Perhaps wolves and dogs do fear to go into water, too.¹

Maybe Nikolai would have been the only survivor among the children in the shelter settlement, but suddenly the lights in the bunker went on again. The block 7 of the power station was repaired. The wolf was startled by the dazzling artificial light and left the bunker hastily, horrified by that bright electric light.

When Margarita came back, she found the door open and three of the children dead in the entrance hall. The other four children came sobbing out of their hiding-places.

Differently to the famous fairytale of the wolf and the seven kids, in this story is no sleeping wolf where you could slash open the stomach to set free the devoured children. The three elder children, who had opened the door to the wolf, were dead and stayed dead. They were the more talented children of whom the adults in the shelter settlement had hoped that they grow even a bit of telepathy. But the dull ones survived like the little Nikolai, as it is often in live.

Hanna-Chris

¹ Nikolai was wrong, dogs and wolves are not afraid of swimming. But nevertheless he hid well between the algae in the hydroponics tank.

Darkover-Fans in the Shadowrun-World

A new science-fiction-series appeared in the railway station bookshops: "Shadowrun", a series in which many authors participate. It deals with an extremely gloomy future in the 21st century where multinational companies and the Mafia rule the world, and the problems of poverty and environmental pollution have become even worse than today. Furthermore, MAGIC has returned with dragons and sorcery, and transformed a part of mankind into ugly creatures such as trolls, dwarfs or worse creatures - with all problems that go along with it.

In this story I describe, how such a gloomy future would affect my work in the German Institute of Standardization (the DIN) and - last but not least - the German "Darkover-Fans". Darkover was a fantasy-world of the American Author Marion Zimmer-Bradley with fans all over the World.

The 100th anniversary of Darkover

No one was very surprised when, at the beginning of the 21st century, the states began to crumble and the multinational companies and the mafia grew ever more powerful. The first signs of this immanent event had already become apparent when the telecommunications and the public railways sector were privatized. In a way, this was the very beginning of the disintegration of law and order. Only those institutions which the multinationals viewed as being useful, such as the European Currency ECU and European Standardization, survived this descent into chaos. Even TÜV was turned into a bunch of individual companies. All of the patent offices were shut down as there was no longer any authority capable of enforcing patent laws. However, as long as there is commerce, standardization will be necessary, as for example freight containers must be designed so that they can be used for ships as well as hover crafts for land transport. Eventually, even the police was eradicated, or rather privatised. The protective troops employed by the companies were better at dealing with gangsters and the Mafia than the state police was. They also cannot be bribed as easily as civil servants. Finally, even the Federal Republic of Germany became a confederation of independent states within the European Union.

As copyrights were also no longer enforced, our Darkover Club experienced a revival. Now we can once again write Darkover stories without any repercussions. 3D Darkover movies were shown in movie theatres, but only for a short time. Moviegoers found Darkover to be too boring. Besides, the get-ups were so outrageous that true Darkover fans left the theatres shaking their heads in disgust. The only good thing about it was that the holographics created realistic scenery for Darkover role-playing games. It was very controversial, however, to buy pre-fabricated costumes from the fantasy freak industry instead of sewing one's own. A true Darkover fan sews his or her own costume by hand. At least, this was the rule for the Darkover Clubs in Berlin.

The most popular theme for our Darkover stories was snow and blizzards. However, as it was very unusual to see snow in 21st century Central Europe, critics called Darkover "meteorological fiction" or "climatic fiction".

Around 2010 the German Institute for Standardisation (or rather, the Berlin branch of the European Standards Institute, which still went by the DIN logo), where I worked, relocated its offices from the centre of town to the outskirts where it built an office complex complete with offices, stores, apartments, and a school after crime had become such a problem for the employees on their way to work. At that time many companies constructed similar complexes which as an allusion to Noah's Arc were called "Arcologies". Timid employees only left the security of the Arcology complex accompanied by armed escorts.

When suddenly magic reappeared on Earth, bringing with it all of the fantastic creatures from fairy tales (and from horror stories) we were caught so off guard as we were back at the end of the 20th century when Germany was reunited. One morning there were suddenly trolls and elves standing in line with me at the supermarket. Fortunately, none of my friends were turned into one of these creatures. Maybe this wave of normal people being turned into trolls, elves, etc. was a result of genetically manipulated food or the result of radioactivity released from the Chernobyl accident. Who knows? This sudden occurrence meant a lot of work to be done in the field of standardisation and new employees could once again be hired. Cars, toilets, apartments, clothing sizes etc. now had to be standardised for use by dwarves, elves and trolls as well. Due to the high crime rate a standard on a protective magic spell for public buildings was added to the German Standard Building Contract Terms (VOB). A standards committee "hermetic magic" was created for this purpose.

Unfortunately, the appearance of "meta-people" such as dwarves and trolls served to spurn on racists. Neonazi groups felt that instead on constructing public housing for these meta-people, gas chambers should be built, but the heads of industry viewed these meta-people as potential customers. Only in a few federal states were some "witch hunts" like there had been in America. And by paying high enough bribes, several dragons were even granted citizenship. The dragons of the 21st century were more interested in stocks and bonds than in damsels and gold.

The standards committee for which I worked was responsible for data sockets that computer experts would have implanted in their temples so that they could improve the communication with their computers. Now they could experience the Internet more realistically than with virtual reality. Europe, like America, had adopted the corresponding Japanese standards and now the cordless connection between man and machine was to be standardised. This resulted in a great controversy. The representatives of Chinese and Japanese companies could not agree at the meeting held in order to discuss this matter. Of course this meeting was only a teleconference; I was the only one actually present in Berlin. DIN acted as the virtual "host". My problem was not writing an exact protocol of the meeting the computers took care of that while doing the simultaneous translating. That was no problem for them. My task was rather to rewrite the protocol so that none of the participants lost face while on the other hand making sure that the protocol did not appear to be too much of a falsification. How easy it was in the 20th century when the minutes of a meeting were only a reflection of the truth!

I believe that it was at this meeting that my asthma became so bad that I had to take sick leave. This had only happened two or three times during all of the 60 years since I had started at DIN as a young engineer. And with the help of the company doctor I had hoped to spend my 90th birthday working with full vitality. It was far better to work your entire life with the help of competent medical attention than to die a long and terrible death in a home for the elderly! It was a known fact it had become necessary to abolish state medical care for the elderly in Germany due to the pressure exercised by the World Bank after the European currency was introduced. So only people with work could afford medical help. Frustrated, I went to see the company doctor. He took a quick glance at his tricorder: "Either the oxygen mask or sea breeze! Berlin air is hazardous to your health. Not even superpills can help you."

"Then I guess I'll have to choose the oxygen mask", I replied bitterly. "On the coast they implemented a law preventing newcomers from moving there. You know that since the massive inundations in the coastal regions the Dutch, Danes and marsh dwellers are all crowded in the hills of Schleswig-Holstein still left intact."

"Talk to your superior", the doctor suggested.

My superior talked with management. They came up with a solution. There was a branch "Marine" located in Hamburg, or rather in the plastic cabin-shelters near Norderstedt, where the surviving inhabitants of Hamburg were squeezed in. What had once been the city of Hamburg was now an inland sea which was flooded with a mixture of river-water and salt water each time the tide was abnormally high. The remaining houses of Hamburg could only be reached by boat. Hamburg had become the "Venice of the North".

The head of the committee bribed several superintendents of the shelters and I was granted permission to move to Hamburg. Officially I was supposed to create several new jobs. Actually there was really too little to do there in the field of standardisation even for the colleagues already there. In the field of ship-building CEN and ISO generally adopted Asian standards. The only thing actually left for us to do in Hamburg was to oversee the electronic translators and adjust sizes for Europe, for example toilets on ships must be designed for use by elves and trolls as well. On the other hand, requirements for the protection against pirate attacks were not so strict. European pirates usually do not use atomic weapons or magic.

Most of my time and that of my colleagues in the Hamburg standards committee "Marine" was spent helping the farmers of the region to guard their fields or to acquire vegetables and potatoes from Greenland at the auctions held at the port of Hamburg and ship them to the central office in Berlin. Our DIN headquarters in Berlin is probably the only company south of Stockholm where they have real potatoes in the cafeteria and not only that artificial soy stuff or tropical vegetables which now grow throughout central Europe. Probably the rice grown in Ireland was the most palatable choice. But no potatoes for weeks on end that is too hard for us of the older generation to cope with.

Of course guarding the farmer's fields was not necessarily a safe task. As the coastal region was the only area where non-contaminated products grew, criminal groups tried to get their hands on this commodity on harvest time even by using machine guns and deadly magic. We were responsible for warding off the robber's machine gun attacks, and the farmers warded off the attacks of deadly magic by getting a "Sprötenkieker"¹⁾ from Kaltenkirchen who, with the help of several "Klabautermänner"²⁾, chased off the evil magicians.

A colleague of mine once tried growing potatoes in a climatized greenhouse, but they rotted. With temperatures of over 40 C the air is still too humid despite air conditioning.

Even in the shelter near Hamburg I met fellow Darkover fans. We wanted to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the publication of the first Darkover book and invited fans from all of the German-speaking countries. They came in great numbers which we had hardly expected. Even a dwarf from the Black Forest came, wearing an Alton Garde uniform; and even several elves from the elven country on the Baltic Sea attended. Apparently the Darkover stories are very

¹⁾ People in Northern Germany who used to have clairvoyance

²⁾ Mythological creatures that accompanied sailors on their sea journeys

popular with the elves. As a comparison, hardly any elves had attended the last Star Trek Convention. An elf from Stralsund won first prize in the costume contest. She wore a red Keeper's dress and on her necklace she had a blue crystal which she had charged with magic so that it scintillated supernaturally like an activated Darkovan matrix. She cast an illusion spell to create scenery which appeared more natural than any holograph ever could. Of course I wore my Amazon costume like always, only this time my Amazon sword (i.e. the long knife) was only made of plastic. I was still too sick to be able to handle a heavy real iron sword convincingly.

Unfortunately, our group of fellow Darkover fans is ageing. Hardly any of our friends is under 60 years. But what can we expect a fantasy world with snow in a country where there has been no real snow cover for decades has little appeal to young people under 60. They prefer to see Star Trek or Deep Space 27.

Chris Gast (alias Kris n ha Camilla on Darkover)

(This story was already published in an English fantasy paper in 2001.)

A new science-fiction-series appeared in the railway station bookshops: "Shadowrun", a series in which many authors participate. It deals with an extremely gloomy future in the 21st century where multinational companies and the Mafia rule the world, and the problems of poverty and environmental pollution have become even worse than today. Furthermore, MAGIC has returned and transformed a part of mankind into trolls, dwarfs or worse creatures - with all problems that go along with it. In the following story I will describe how such a future could affect the present time of 1996 if time machines were possible.

The Jolly-Joker-Lady

(if the Shadowrun-future would be the real future, a story in Berlin of 1996)

I was sitting with Christiane, a friend of mine, in the "Begine", a woman's bar in Berlin. The music was too boring to dance and I was watching the women entering the bar. Suddenly a young girl came in who caused my attention. She was wearing bright, colorful strange-looking clothes and had an androgyne appearance as well as quite a big nose. This strange looking girl wasn't the sort of girl who would arouse lesbian feelings in me. She didn't have the look of the lesbians who normally come to this pub. Maybe that she was bisexual or just too bored of boys to go in a normal pub. There was something else which caught my interest. Also her movements were rather uncommon in this place, more like a lady than the young women of today. Somehow she seemed familiar to me. At last I remembered: she reminded me of the jolly joker of a card game with which we had played when we were kids. This playing card character had always seemed sinister to me and also now this kind of fear struck me again. "This woman, I know her!", I said to my friend. The Jolly-Joker-Lady noticed my look and seemed to have heard what I had said. She pointed with her finger on me and murmured: "Forget!"

As a child I could never stand people pointing with their finger on me. It gave me a bad feeling of witchcraft. And even as an adult I suffered from nightmares of magic. My psychotherapist, Dr. Prehm, advised me not to fight magic aggressors in my dreams. They were a part of my subconscious which I had to integrate into my ego. Therefore I had practiced this method in my dreams and since then my nightmares had disappeared. This Jolly-Joker-Lady was of course neither a nightmare nor a splitted ((splitted off??)) part of my psyche. Nevertheless I reacted automatically with the intention: "Absorb the magic and integrate it into your ego."

An unknown strength pulsed through me. What was that? The Jolly-Joker-Lady immediately pulled back her finger and hissed: "Drekhead - you are going to destroy my time machine with that vampire magic!" She thought for a while and asked: "Who are you? Are you also on a voyage through time? There is no magic yet in the 20th century!" The women around were feeling that there was something strange and moved away from us. The stranger snapped her fingers and the people around sank into a deep slumber. That was like in this Darkover-novel "Hawkmistress". A woman with Psi - or "Laran", how Psi is called on Darkover. A woman like this would have been good for our Darkover-club. What a pity ((that?)) she was mad. The existence of Psi is nearly proved but any kind of time machine is ruled out by the laws of physics. Time machines are completely impossible! Only mental voyages through time could perhaps be possible, like in that Darkover-novel "The forbidden Tower" but this woman stood really in front of me!

Without waiting for an answer the Jolly-Joker-Lady said to me: "Now I know who you are: You are Hanna Gast, the witch from the 21st century, who, in her flying wheelchair, saved the sister of the elf-king, her great-niece, from the attack of the troll with his dragon! But you look younger than on the holos." I felt angry. "I'm still steady on my feet and I go by bus or subway, but not by wheelchair." - "Then you used the wheelchair only as a flying object and your frailty was only a rumor?", the Jolly-Joker-Lady asked. I murmured an evasive answer, for you shall not contradict madmen

(respectively madwomen). I bit back an answer like: "As long as I am not faster than 50 kilometers per hour over restricted areas, it's not forbidden anyway..."

Instead, I asked politely: "And who are you?" The woman hesitated for a short moment and then replied: "I am a student of history from the 24th century. I am to explore with a magic time machine, where the magic genes of the lineage of the elf-kings originate from. Whether from the Gast's ancestors from Saxony (*part in Germany around Dresden*) or from the French ancestors of the Gast's. By the way - did you know that you look very similar to Saint Joan of Arc, the cousin of one of your French ancestors? I was there the day before yesterday and filmed her burning at the stake. Do you want to see the record?" I refused. I have had enough of this crazy woman. But where did I know her from? Sometime in my early childhood there had been someone whom I feared and who looked like her. Had this woman perhaps been our babysitter? But then she could not look so young. She appeared like being in the early thirties. "It seems to me as if I met you once before.", I finally said.

"Maybe in the Nineteen-Fifties," the jolly-joker-lady replied, "I was there yesterday and scanned the genes of the Gast family. Things like that are not very convenient - especially for kids - but for historical researches it is necessary ((unavoidable?)) After all one of the Gast's-girls was the grandmother of the first elf-king. But I have not met you there. A "Hanna Gast" with the birth date of 1953 was not among the children although the chronicles say so.

I smiled and although I seldom tell it to strangers I did it this time: "I am transsexual and born as a boy." She stood there with her mouth open. I mentally used her Psi-force to place the woman on the empty chair next to me and my friend. She followed my telekinetic grasp like a sleepwalker. "I do not look having once been a man, do I?" I said smiling. I often surprised people with it. "No, I didn't mean that... I wanted to say... that's the explanation." the woman stammered. "The gene for an extreme magic talent expresses itself somehow differently in ages without magic. But I would not have guessed transsexuality. In the 24th century the best magicians are born with a different sex than the scan of the pregnant mother predicted. You know, prenatal genital goblinisation coincides with high magic talent..." She stopped. "Drek, if I tell you more of that sort, I'll get into trouble with the Renraku-Cops, sorry." And the Jolly-Joker-Lady vanished.

My friend awoke and stretched herself. "Well, I nearly fell asleep because of this boring music. What about you?" I nodded. "I was even dreaming!"

Hanna-Chris Gast

figure: The Jolly-Joker



Aliza's Horses

***Annotation:** When colonies in space have lost contact with Earth, civilisation tends to sink back to a more primitive stage. The history becomes myth, sometimes even the origin from another star is in the legends replaced by myth of Gods and Goddesses. On a planet, the name of which I cannot tell because of Copy-Right-problems, they had horses from Earth, but it is sure that there weren't animals on board of the settler's spaceship. So I have the following explanation:*

The Legend

When the first humans began to farm the land, however, the stronger ones forced those who were weaker to pull the plow and to carry heavy loads. That angered the gods, and they sent snowstorms in order to punish the human beings.

One of the goddesses, however, took pity on the humans. Some say it was Evanda, others Avarra; but in the Hellers they actually speak of a different goddess, Aliza. She descended from heaven and put a large kettle of water on to boil; and as it boiled, she had her worshippers throw in potatoes and other nourishing foods as an offering.

She stirred for the entire winter, and when the snow had melted, the first horses began to climb out of the still-warm cauldron. Aliza, however, died from exhaustion. And thus she is still secretly worshipped by horse breeders to this day.

The **historical reality**, of course, was quite different:

After the navigator of the wrecked spaceship, in spite of her damaged computer, had calculated the autumnal solstice and the length of the year on the new planet, it was decided to sow the available winter grains in the autumn. Luckily, the settlers had seeds from a variety of useful plants on hand when the spaceship crashed on the planet. The supplies were not large, and everything was planted by hand, for there was no fuel for the motorised ploughs.

Mouse-like rodents¹ of various kinds had already caused a lot of trouble during the first vegetable harvest, but these really became a plague after the nut harvest in the Fall. The settlers had to hang their food on hooks hanging from the ceiling and place mechanical traps in the beets.

There were long consultations about whether there were appropriate animals which could be used as mouse catchers and as draft animals. In addition, cattle were needed for milking.

The shipwrecked men and women decided in a full council to determine whether native animals could be domesticated. They were just discussing whether to trap and tame a kind of wolf, which they had heard howling at night, when a delicate woman, wrapped in thick blankets, spoke up coughing:

"The gene bank for the Coronis zoo is still intact, along with its own reactor. We could breed a couple of earth animals in the accompanying nutrient incubator."

¹ It is astounding, but the biology of the planet they crashed on, was more similar the earth than was Australia to North-America, so as if some Aliens had terraformed that planet some Millions of years ago.

A buzz of voices arose. Everybody looked at the woman. Alice was a South American and a biologist. She had been going to build a zoo on the planet Coronis. She had survived the crash landing without being hurt, but the planet's cold climate had forced her to spend most of her time in the infirmary with pneumonia.

The buzz of voices now rose to a tumult. The head of the full council hit the table energetically several times, until the discussion could be conducted in an orderly fashion again.

"Earth animals could endanger the ecology of the planet," some of the settlers objected. "Just think of the rabbits in Australia or the high-yield cattle in Africa, which changed the steppes into desert."

Finally one of the calmer men took the floor. He waited until everybody had calmed down, then said softly:

"We could pick out a couple of important domesticated animals which would not disturb the ecology of this planet, such as cats, dogs and horses."

Then Alice was asked which kinds of animals she had frozen embryos for. She explained:

"We didn't freeze any embryos, but rather chromosome sets from several thousand different kinds of animals. With the help of the computer in the Bio-station, I can combine the chromosomes so that individuals are created which are adapted to the climate here. That will save us several decades of breeding."

Alice was assigned the job of working out several examples on her computer. She spent the next few days staring at a screen, "composing," as she put it, animals adapted to the cold. Then she appeared before the council again, where she presented her results:

"This kind of cat doesn't climb trees or endanger bird nests. I'm certain that it will chase the small rodents which are causing us so much trouble, but not larger animals...."

In this manner she described about a dozen types of domestic animals. When she was done, the council broke up in a thoughtful state of mind.

Only after days of discussion and an intensive investigation of the plant life in the area was it decided in one of the next council meetings to incubate horses, cattle, and sheep, as well as dogs and cats. Rabbits, chickens, and goats were rejected because there was concern that they could disrupt the ecological balance of the planet. Some of the council members had terrible visions of goats which would eat whole mountains bare, and of packs of chickens which could ravage the fields of grain. Furthermore, they said, there was a large number of native birds which could be domesticated and bred to produce eggs.

There was also some concern about the cattle, although Alice assured the council members that the Icelandic cattle which she had selected would not harm the plant ecosystem, to the extent that it had been investigated in the area around the crash site.

One of those who had had visions commented that he had not seen cattle in any of his several views of the future.

All in all, the vote in favour of incubating earth animals was won by a very small majority. After this council meeting, Alice thawed out the appropriate chromosomes, combined them in the calculated manner, and set the incubation tanks in operation. A half-dozen technicians had already checked everything over and brought the tanks on line with the reactor.

Now the humans had to wait. The apparatus was supervised by technicians around the clock. Alice looked in whenever her coughing spells allowed.

First the kittens and puppies were "born," that is, removed from the incubation tank. Two of the women settlers and one of the men, who had been handicapped by wounds suffered in the crash, took care of the animals. It was a lot of work to keep the young animals clean with sponges in place of the mother's tongue and to nurse them by bottle. But in the end, four of the original eight kittens and six of the eight pups reached maturity and learned to hunt the destructive rodents.

Toward the end of the winter, which lasted longer than at home on Earth, the cattle and sheep were born. These required that dozen men and women who knew something about raising animals be detailed to care for and nurse the animals from bottles. There were problems with the cattle and sheep right from the beginning. The sheep died from a virus only a few weeks after birth. The cattle also got sick, but they survived.

In the meanwhile, a native animal which resembled a sheep had been discovered. The settlers called them "Wollys" because of their thick hair. The mothers produced a milk which resembled goat milk, from which butter and cheese could be produced. The humans wondered whether these Wollys might be domestic animals of the mysterious native humanoids, but were unable to answer this question.

With hindsight, the death of the sheep was seen as the intervention of a native god, who did not want any competition for the Wollys on the planet.

The incubation of the horses took the longest of all. It was already summer. The whole colony was waiting impatiently for the birth of the eight horses. The horses were especially important to the settlers. The foals, which have an especially strong attachment to their mothers, required individual caregivers in order to avoid any behavioural problems. Eight women were selected. They were expendable for ordinary chores, but had proven to possess sufficient patience to take care of babies, without themselves having children or being pregnant. They were Ekaterina, Amanja, and six other women, including Alice herself, whose pneumonia had meanwhile subsided.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Ekaterina was shaken awake. Alice and Amanja stood in front of her, holding their oil lamps.

"We've got to get the foals out of the incubation tanks. They could start to breathe at any moment, and the placentas are beginning to separate from the machinery."

Ekaterina hastily flung on her coat. She was already wearing pants and a jacket. They ran to the wreck of the spaceship, to the brightly lit emergency hatch. Red lights were blinking in the Bio-lab, and a loudspeaker was issuing warning noises which sounded like heartbeats. Alice had already spread hay out on the floor in front of the apparatus. They removed the foals from the tanks according to their well-studied theoretical training, washed them off, and rubbed their coats dry with towels.

Each of the women had her own foal to nurse with the bottle and to mother. As she fed her foal, Alice thought wistfully that already, after just one year on the planet, nothing more remained of the former equality of work. No healthy man was allowed to skip the physically demanding work of clearing the primeval forest, simply in order to experience the duties of motherhood....

The technician on duty operated several switches and cinched a cable. The controls on the incubation tanks went out. The food converter, which had been installed in the Bio-lab and

brought on line with the gene bank's reactor, displayed a few additional green control lights. Now it was supplying, in addition to milk for the calves, mother's milk for the horses, all previously pre-programmed by Alice.

"Pray to God or the gods, that the Bio-department reactor and the food converter make it for a couple of more months!" said Alice softly.

"Let's hope so," the technician answered.

When it was morning, the women examined their charges more carefully. The foals all had thick coats, but they looked completely different from one another in terms of build and colour. One even looked a little bit like a donkey. Alice answered the questioning looks:

"These eight foals contain almost all of the genes of horse types suitable for mountainous and cold climates, as well as a donkey. From these it will be possible to breed anything which might be needed on this planet."

The foals and calves grew up. They were very playful, and proved an especial joy for those settlers who already had experience in raising animals and dealing with horses. Late in the Fall, Alice came down with another bout of pneumonia after being caught in a surprise storm while playing with her foal in a field. The others wanted to keep her away from the foals, since some kinds of human illness can be transferred to animals. Alice protested, however, that her coughing spells were not infectious -- neither for people nor for animals. That was perhaps a white lie, but the others believed her, and she continued to care for her foal, which did not get sick.

In the second winter on the planet, when the supplies of medicine from the ship infirmary were exhausted and the food converter no longer functioned to produce them, Alice's pneumonia worsened, and one morning she was found dead next to her sleeping foal. The others were very sad, but other concerns and the demands of work left them little time for mourning.

In the third or fourth winter, however - it was the time of the awful starvation winter - there was a catastrophe: One night the dogs began to bark, but even without them it was possible to hear noises coming from the cattle yards. When the men rushed over, armed with lances and knives, they found all of the cattle and some of the Wollys dead, killed by wolves (or wolf-like native animals of prey). The horses, fortunately, had been in their closed stalls, and thus escaped unharmed. The cattle and Wollys, however, had had only covered shelters out in the open field, since they were cold- and snow-resistant breeds. The flesh of the dead animals and the wolves which had been killed were frozen, and they saved the people from starvation toward the end of the winter. Since the apparatus and the reactor no longer functioned, it was impossible to incubate new cattle. It was a small consolation, however, that Alice had not lived to see this.

This is how it came to be that, of the many kinds of domesticated animals, the humans brought only horses, dogs, and cats from Terra.

H. Chris Gast



Figure: The legend of the creation of Horses

The UFO (a satire)

This short story was written as a reaction to the ban of writing of Darkover stories by Marion Zimmer-Bradley, when the secretary of her wrote us in 1994 that we are not any more allowed to write fan-stories in our Journal "Siebener-Kurier".

March:

An UFO has landed in the USA. A German popular daily newspaper brought an interview with the Aliens, who had come out of the UFO. They say that they are the last survivors of their home planet, which has become uninhabitable because of a climatic change.

After a couple of days the UFO has been destroyed and the Aliens killed by the American police. A court had finally found out in the legal proceedings that the UFO had violated several American patents, among others one on low-energy-drive, which an American trust had bought from a European company to inhibit its application, and a patent on antigrav-drive, which an American inventor claimed to have made up. His name was or Gyro Gearloose¹ or similar.

April:

As the Aliens, who were interviewed, were similar to the figures of an American television-series, the author of this production applied for handing over the editorial staff of the German newspaper to a US court because they had violated his copyright, but the Federal Republic of Germany rejected the extradition.

May:

The American motion for an embargo on Germany was defeated by the majority of the UNO members (especially by Libya and Iran), but the German countermove to adjudge the USA for the genocide of the Aliens was defeated, too. The arguments of the American representatives were plausible to all members of the UNO:

1. The United States of America are entitled to stop any illegal immigration.
2. The Aliens are no human-beings in terms of the human rights.

In an interview the German UNO-representative explained that also Germany wouldn't have been able to admit the Aliens – in Germany they would have to be classified as economic refugees and not as political, racial and religious persecuted persons...

Chris

¹ In German "Daniel Düsentrrieb".

Poems

Autumn

When it's gloomy and dark outside,
And you are plagued by melancholy,
Then I invite you to imagine this:
In the Fantasy-land it is spring!
Chris, 1989

H. Chris Gast

2nd of March 1996

Expelled from Home

Every time I hear them speak
or see photos in the News,
of the country of the banshee,
of the place where I have lived,
I feel very sad indeed.

Memories then start returning
of the days so far away,
of the childhood long ago,
and I'm dreaming of Camilla
who has been my foster-mother,
grey her eyes and white her hair,
never was I left alone.

Often she had taken me
on her horse, and so I've seen
mountains, forests, little towns,
all the country and the sea.

Also I'm remembering
Kieran the red-haired harpist
and the other friends I lost
when I had to leave from there.

But there was no chance to stay.
It's the mighties who decide
where to live and where to work.
So I can't live anymore
where my heart is longing for.

Now I'm living far away
in a city full of strangers
where I'll never feel at home.

Chris

Annotation: Marion Zimmer-Bradley (called MZB by fans) withdrew the allowance to her fans to write storys using her fantasy-world. So we had to stop writing Darkover-stories.

The Copy-Right

The Copy-Right is blocking now
the way into the pleasure ground,
the garden of dear M.Z.B.
wherein we played so happily.

The gate is closed - we cannot enter
the word we loved, the universe
of Laran, Towers, and of comyns,
of Amazones and horses.

The soul is homeless now, alas!
So let us try now something queer:
To live on earth just as we are
within the deepest part of heart.

Chris

H. Chris Gast

September 1994

Annotation: This poem is about a fire in Dublin in the 19th century and gives memory to the great famine in Ireland of 1848.

Mourning for the family

Fire raged in Dublin-city,
Many have been killed.
Families who'd lost their dears
in the famine of the forties
suffered loss again.

Chris

H. Chris Gast

March 1983

Tired

Walking people, lots of strangers
crowded streets of London,
no one is stopping for talking
every one's busy with life.

Walking alone in the darkness
having to go still so far
tired of traffic's loud madness,
thus I was thinking of war.

What is about the great danger,
nuclear war with the East,
setting an end to all mankind -
I wouldn't fear it at least.

As for myself - it would bring relief,
death is like sleeping in bed,
ending the cold and the grief -
but for the others it's sad!

Chris

H. Chris Gast

March 1983 (+1995)

Home

(for Annemarie)

When after long time I come home to the house
where silence is now mixed by sounds of the street,
oh, then I feel lonely as never before!

What life has been here in the rooms of the house
with brothers and sisters, the dog and the cats!
But now there is nothing but silence, my love.

The dog, a black cross-breed, is feeble and old,
thus slowly I walk with him weary and sad
where once we were running so fast in the spring.

The rooms in the house - they haven't been changed,
and still I can find there the very same smell.
But home is no house, it's the people you love!

Oh Darling, you envied my journeys so much,
but cannot you fancy how much I disliked it -
I fled from a home so deserted by now!

Chris

The earthquake of Leninakan

Annotation: The mother of my Russian pen pal, who lived at that time in the city "Leninakan" in the Armenian Republic of the Soviet Union, died during that earthquake in Armenia in 1989. I wrote this poem in July 1989, when I had not heard anything of my pen pal Svetlana since the earthquake wondering whether she is alive or not:

Oh, look, in the valley, at the pitiful ruins
of Leninakan, the most unfortunate city!
Here was the co-op¹ and there was my office,
and this was the highway to Moscow.

There 's still a pillar of the imposing bridge,
over where there had been held market,
where the kolkhoz' workers² gladly sold
the fruits of the field and the garden.

Still sometimes I go to the place of the misery,
pushing aside lots of rubble,
searching the scene of destruction
for friends, for relatives and my sweetheart I loved.

Then still I can hear in my mind
the cries of the dead in the ruins,
buried under rubble they couldn't escape.
((trapped by the heaps of concrete and steel,)) ((???)
Oh, may they rest now in peace!

Hanna-Chris

(Original version of 1989)

Oh, look at, down in valley, the pitiful ruins
of Leninakan, the city without any luck!
to the right was the baker and there was my office,
and this was the road of the merchants.³

There 's still a pillar of the ancient bridge,
and on the river banks was the market,
where in the morning the farmer's wife gladly sold
the fruits of the field and the garden. ²

Still sometimes I go to the place of the misery,
pushing aside lots of rubble,
and looking in the scene of destruction
for my friends, my relatives and my sweetheart I loved.

Then still I can hear the dead cry in my mind,
buried under the rubble,
since dying they couldn't free themselves.
Oh, may they rest now in peace!
Chris

¹ co-operative store, in the former East-Germany ("DDR") called "Konsum" or "HO".

² the kolkhoz' farm workers of the Soviet Union often had some private gardens and fields, the fruits of which they were allowed to sell on the private markets.

³ In the time of Gorbačov private merchants were allowed in the Armenian Soviet Republic.

The cowslip

Finally the winter ended,
First forsythias have started
Showing of in splendid yellow
Followed by cherry trees
Blossoming in maiden white.

Now I see the apple trees
Joining them in lovely pink.
All the trees are blossoming
And regaining tender leaves.

Passing by a florist's shop
I have found a little cowslip,
Nearly hidden among tulips.

And I didn't hesitate
I went in and bought the flower
Planted in a tiny pot.

For it gives me recollection
Of my childhood long ago
Of the village in the mountains
Where I spent some happy years.

There we walked across the brook
And found meadows full of cowslips
Violets beneath the bushes
And a flower on the pastures,
we had called the "Wiesenschaumkraut"¹



Chris

¹ pronounce [vi:sn'shaumkraut], Latin: Cardamine pratensis, English: Cuckoo Flower, Lady's Smock

No Darkover-Stories

In the 1980's and in the early 1990's Marion Zimmer-Bradley had allowed her fans to write Darkover-Stories.

We wrote Darkover-Stories as long as we were allowed to write them and we had published them in the "Siebener-Kurier" and in little books in our fan-club in Berlin.

The story of the boy Theophil ("**Holydays on Darkover**") had been published in three parts from 1989 to 1991 in the "Siebener-Kurier" (ISSN 0948 - 6089). When the secretary of Marion Zimmer-Bradley told us, that the permission was withdrawn, we stopped writing, so the forth part of the story wasn't finished. To avoid copyright-problems, **the Darkover-stories are not furthermore for sale.**

Part 1 to Part 3 translated into English by Eugene F. Gagliano 1991 to 1992.

Chris Gast

Hanna-Chris Gast

Berlin, the 24th of July 1991

((74 pages of text are here omitted))¹

Two cake-recipes for the meetings of the Darkover-friends

When Darkovanians ran out of nuts (because the nut-harvest had been pretty bad the autumn before), they can bake nut-cookies without nuts. The following recipes I baked for a meeting of the Darkover-friends in Berlin (Germany):

Oat cookies (biscuits)

250g oats
125g butter or more
100g sugar (or 125g honey)
2 eggs
some tablespoons of flour

1. Melt the butter in a pan and roast the oats in it until they are dark brown (but not black).
2. Let them cool off and add the eggs, the sugar or honey and some spoonfuls of flour. Terrans are used to taking self-rising flour or adding baking powder, but I get along without it).
3. Put little heaps of the dough on a buttered cooking tin, one and a half tablespoon full of dough on each spot.
4. Let it bake in a pre-heated oven for about a quarter of an hour.
5. Eat the cookies within two days, otherwise they will dry out as hard as stone.

I do not often bake these cookies but I think it is very useful to now how to get along when you ran out of wheat flour and nuts while you have to bake cakes for guests or children.

P.S. I very often modify recipes. It is not necessary to follow them exactly.

Chris

¹ But interested people can get them for scientific research.

H. Chris Gast
Germany

14th of July 1992

Dear friends of Darkover,
You have written in your paper that you are interested in Darkovian recipes.
Herewith I send you another one:

Ordinary nut-cake

- 200g butter (or margarine, which is cheaper)
- 200g sugar or honey
 stir it until it is creamy
- 4 eggs
- a bit of rum, cinnamon and cloves
 stir it again
- 400g ground hazelnuts and 100g wheat flour
or 250g ground hazelnuts and 250g wheat flour
- baking powder (mixed with the wheat flour)
- 3 to 6 tablespoons or more of water, according to your feeling.

The dough should have the consistency of ordinary sponge cake mixture or be a bit more liquid.

Bake about 45 minutes to 70 minutes at 180 °C in the oven. It depends on the oven and the tins. I use 2 rectangular white tins, which I butter and sprinkle with flour and fill then half-way with the mixture.

I don't know which seasoning the Darkovians have, so I use the ones mentioned here. I also don't know what the Darkovians use for baking powder. Maybe some of your readers have some ideas. Of course I could bake only yeast-cakes or sponge cakes (without butter), where I wouldn't need to use baking powder. But I suppose that there is something similar to be bought in Thendara and other towns of Darkover.

We had discussions about the use of sugar on Darkover. Since one of our Darkover-friends is allergic to processed sugar, I use fruit-sugar (fructose) when I am baking for Darkover meetings. By the way - honey is as dangerous for diabetics as ordinary sugar!

In my opinion, honey is too precious for ordinary Darkovian people except in the Dry-Towns and in the Ridenow Domain, because bees need temperatures of more than 10 °C, so they have very little time each year to fly out and collect pollen. They need all of their honey themselves during the long winters. (Beekeepers on Terra feed their bees with some kind of sugar-water instead of the honey, which they sell.) Maybe honey is a precious product like fish, salt and furs which the salesmen (and saleswomen) carry in their caravans.

So I suppose that the Darkovians have some plants, e.g. trees or something like potatoes (which become sweet after being frozen). Since bread becomes sweet during chewing, maybe the Darkovian housewives have some substances to dissolve the starch of flour or potatoes into sugar (not saliva, I suppose; but something similar?).

You can also use some fruits to make cakes and puddings sweet. Maybe that is the most common Darkovian method...

Chris