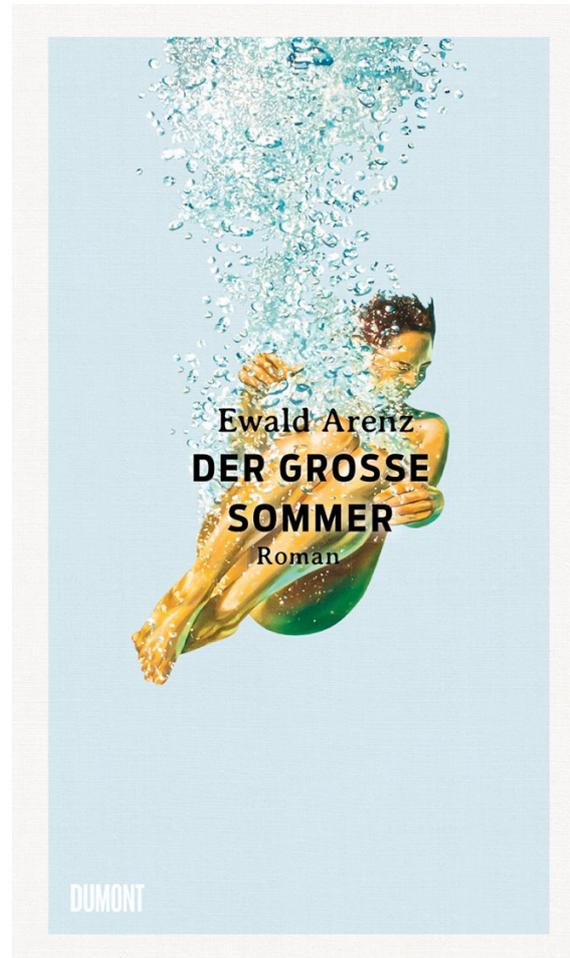


DUMONT



Ewald Arenz
DER GROSSE SOMMER
(The Grand Summer)

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1

If one of the four of us was really going to make it to Rio, then it would be Johann. Somehow that was obvious from the very beginning. Johann had everything you'd need to make it there, and besides, he was the one musician among us. If one of us was going to make it, it would be Johann.

I was sitting next to him that day. The sound of the graveyard bell floated through the open window of the classroom. Over the line of highrises on the other side of the river meadows, an airplane was flying in the hazy distance. The chirping of the swifts cut the light of this summer day into pale yellow, zingingly sour lemon slices, and it occurred to me that I should be outside and not sitting here next to the window. Out there, beyond the river, then I could head north to where the sea was and catch a boat to South America.

Nine-thirty in the morning was the worst time of all. The first two hours were over, but there were still at least four to go.

Johann was scribbling his notebook full of zeroes. He had started doing that in our very first Latin class.

"Come on, let's write the longest number in the world."

It was a stunningly mental undertaking, but somehow cool at the same time. We were taking turns filling ten lines each with zeroes. Three zeroes, a small space, three more zeroes. We had run out of names for our number long ago. It had thousands of zeroes and was almost an entire school year old. Sometimes we passed the notebook around during break, and the others called us rad because they didn't know if what we were doing was awesome or lame.

Johann nudged me and jerked his head toward the window. He had finally heard the bell. At first, he didn't know that it was a mourning bell, so I had to explain it to him.

"Sounds like freedom either way," he had said.

I agreed that was true.

Zippo's voice lay across our classroom like a dark rug. I liked Zippo and his voice, a calming, melancholy bass. A voice that you could go to sleep to as long as you weren't waiting to get back some critical assignment.

“Why does he do that?” I asked Johann softly. “Why doesn’t he just give it back to us? He isn’t usually an asshole.”

Johann shrugged indifferently.

“Dunno. Maybe there’s a rule about it. The school regulations might say that assignments have to first be discussed before we can get them back.”

Zippo was discussing the mistakes that had been made. Each one was being written out on the overhead with its correct answer. He then wrote the range of mistakes up on the board, and as he added the grades, my stomach began to ache. One A, four B’s, twenty-two C’s, two D’s, two F’s. Four out of the thirty-one. I knew who one of the bottom four was, and it sure wasn’t Johann.

Zippo’s actual name was Zigankenberg, but no one ever called him that. At the same time, “Zippo” was much too short of a name for this man. Two meters tall, at least a hundred kilos heavy. He should’ve been a boxer, or a wrestler. Anything but a Latin teacher.

Johann refused to let anyone call him Jo either.

“Johann. Not Jo or Joe or anything like that. Johann.”

That’s what he had said one day during break to Dlouha, who for some reason had started calling him “Joe” during the first weeks of school. Johann only needed to say this once. He was sometimes so serious that everyone felt a little intimidated by him. From that point on, everyone called him Johann.

“I’m sure I failed it.”

It was a kind of incantation. You uttered the worst and hoped that by doing so you could avert your prediction, that in some magical way you could scrape by with a D or C. It could happen.

“Nonsense,” Johann declared.

“Like you really believe that,” I said. Another incantation.

I looked outside. The swifts. The morning light in the long leaves of the willows along the river. The blue blue blue. Why did the beauty of the world have to end at the window sill? Out there was everything. Inside here was nothing at all.

“Albert.”

Finally! Zippo was handing back the assignments. In alphabetical order. Organization was a must. At least he hadn’t arranged the assignments by grade. Everyone hated that, except for the brown-nosers of course.

“Bergmann.”

The classroom grew louder. Naturally. Hey, what’d you make? I got a C. Phew, that’s what I thought I’d get ... Wasn’t so hard, was it? I thought ...

I didn't say anything else as I gazed out the window. Sometimes you could smell the water. It didn't carry a whiff of salt like at the beach, but still.

"Büchner."

I was up next. Zippo walked back to where we were sitting. I couldn't read his expression. He handed me the paper.

"I'm sorry, Büchner," he said. "I don't understand. Your translation is really quite elegant, but unfortunately it has nothing to do with the Latin source text."

If that was supposed to be funny, it wasn't. An F. If it had been a D, I might've been able to salvage something, but an F ... I wasn't good at math, but I could manage my GPA. Math: D. Latin: D. So much for that.

"Figures" I said indifferently.

Johann leaned over until his shoulder touched mine.

"Sorry."

"No, it figures. I told you so."

I deliberately folded the paper into the shape of an airplane, complete with wing flaps. I bent the nose a little downward. The *num* in *numquam* was suddenly a little funny. I had to laugh even though I didn't feel like it.

"Yeah," I said. "Flunked."

I leaned my chair back until the backrest touched the wall. I spun the airplane in my hands.

"You can take the retest though."

I shrugged.

"You really think I can catch up on three years of Latin in six weeks? I'm about to go down in math as it is. And by 'down,' I really mean 'down.' A thousand meters underwater. Marianas Trench."

Johann had to laugh.

"I can help you."

"Sure. You know what won't happen if you do that - any studying."

Zippo returned to us.

"Lohmann."

He gave the assignment back to Johann with a curt nod. Johann took it and glanced quickly at the grade. A C-. It was almost a little embarrassing for him. He set the paper face-down on his desk. I watched Zippo, who had finally noticed the airplane I was holding. I didn't even tip my chair back down to the floor before I sent it out the window with an easy flick of my wrist. It floated in a perfect spiral through the willows, skimmed a branch, spun out, righted itself once more, and landed in the water. Bye-bye.

Zippo watched me, and I took a deep breath, but all he said was: “As if you don’t have enough problems, Büchner.”

He turned around and walked back up to his desk. Two meters and a hundred kilos of Latin. There was nothing I could do. The man was right.

2

It is a quiet afternoon. I’m searching for the grave as I’ve done so many times before. The October sun appears as a blazing red blur in the early evening fog. It’s chilly. The chestnuts along the edge of the path haven’t started to turn yet, but the oak is getting bright now. The sumacs along the graveyard wall are glowing red though, as if they’re already waiting for snow.

You’d think that a graveyard would always look the same, since hardly anything ever happens there. A few new gravestones pop up. Or maybe a path gets moved. But that isn’t the case here. I just keep forgetting where the grave is. I don’t come here every year. But often enough, I think. It’s just that I can never find the grave right off the bat. Perhaps this time I should take a picture of the number on it. Or save a description of its location on my phone for the next time. On the other hand - what for? If I don’t have a little time to look around, what’s the point of coming here at all?

There aren’t any people in the graveyard, but the squirrels are everywhere. This is probably the best spot in town for them. No cars, no people. An entire sparse forest just for them alone. A paradise. Can squirrels grieve? They don’t look like they do.

And me? I don’t know if it’s grief or some other feeling that drives me here from time to time. Often in autumn, that’s true. But is it grief? Sometimes I don’t know what I’ve actually lost, why I’m actually grieving, whenever I search for the grave. Perhaps it’s that one year we had back then. No. It wasn’t even a year. It was that one summer, that probably only happens once in a lifetime. That one summer that hopefully everybody gets to have. That one summer that changes everything. Yes. Maybe it isn’t just grief, but primarily a yearning for that summer - for that irretrievable, tremulously beautiful magic of that first time.

The pool. Fortunately my parents weren't as uptight as Johann's. But maybe my father, who never really took much interest in his children's academic careers, eventually noticed that I hadn't exactly knocked this year out of the park.

"We're considering things," he said. Which was anything but dangerous. My father was always considering things, but almost never anything that had to do with practical matters. I mean, my mother even gave him an allowance! When he considered something, that meant nothing at all. If Mom was the one doing the considering, then I knew I had a problem. But nothing had happened before now.

I sometimes enjoyed going to the pool on rainy days. You had the run of the place then. The entire pool. The pool attendant, more relaxed than ever, would let you go into the fifty-meter pool with flippers on or would open the diving platform for you. Afterward, he would even greet me sometimes on the overfilled sunny days. I thought it was cool to be in the outdoor pool in the rain because practically nobody else was ever there. It was drizzling steadily, but it wasn't cold out. Drops fell evenly from the poplars that dotted the wide meadows. The air smelled of grass, and it was quiet. No wind. It was a very peculiar atmosphere. A little as if you were in another city. Or more like a public place that had suddenly turned mysterious, as if it could no longer be found by other people.

I dashed barefoot across the rain-drenched grass to the diving pool. In the adjacent fifty-meter pool, several old people were doing laps. The rain wasn't disturbing. This quiet, pale gray, rainy air had a soothing effect on everyone. I recognized a few faces. They were probably here every day. What kind of life was that? At the pool every day. Swimming twenty laps every day. Going back home every day. Shit. Is this what happened to you later on?

I set my towel down at the foot of the diving platform, nodded at the pool attendant, and climbed up. Seven and a half meters today. This was a kind of wager with myself. This summer, I wanted to work up to a jump from the ten-meter platform. Weirdly, the three-meter board had been the hardest. I had kept retreating from the edge until at some point I stupidly fell off the platform while turning around. I hit the water face first and had a red forehead for about a day. After that, I did the jumps right away. That was the way it was with me sometimes. I used to be afraid of big dogs until one bit me on my newspaper delivery route. From that point on, I was no longer scared of them. Maybe that's because, when something becomes a reality, it's never as bad as it was in your imagination. I could easily imagine anything, and sometimes that was the very problem.

My first jump from the five-meter board had been so smooth that I just kept jumping over and over again. No prob. And now I was climbing up to the seven-and-a-

half board for the first time. The rungs on the ladder were rough, damp and cool. I felt slightly chilly. I moved forward a little and stood where the railing ended, one meter away from the edge. It was high. It was freaking high. I had actually wanted to do a back flip. Back flips looked cool, but they were also the easiest jumps of all. You actually didn't have to do anything except trust yourself. But up here ... I looked down. Wow. This was about as high as a fourth floor. It was like it had been at the start with the three-meter board. I couldn't do it. I couldn't even work my way up to the edge. And definitely not facing backward. I glanced over at the pool attendant to see if he was watching me, but he was sitting down below under his giant umbrella, reading the newspaper.

Maybe just jump down?

"Hey, having second thoughts?"

I was so startled I jumped a mile. You never figured that in the middle of the rain someone else might climb up the diving platform and be standing behind you. I turned around. I hadn't even heard her come up. She was about as old as me. Bottle-green swimsuit. Dark hair. And pretty. Extremely pretty.

"Of course I am."

Idiot. Idiot. Idiot. Why had I said that?

"If you're scared, we could jump together."

"Have you jumped from up here before?"

I actually had been scared, but now more of the possibility that she might elegantly throw herself off the platform, headfirst or in a twist dive, and I would still be standing up here like ... like something.

She shook her head.

"Nope. I saw you standing up here and waited. I wanted to see how you did it, but you didn't jump."

Now there was a smile in her voice. I couldn't tell, though, if it was a teasing one.

"We could jump together."

I said it reluctantly. I'm sure I sounded like a coward.

"Alright" was all she said as she stepped up to the edge. Okay. Now I had to do it too.

"One," I counted.

"It's really high," she said.

She glanced over at me. I had to laugh. We were both so terrified.

"Okay. We'll jump from the five-meter."

She laughed now too. Relief coursed through me just as swiftly as the fear had before. We turned around and walked over to the ladder. She then came to an abrupt stop.

“No, that won’t work,” she said, “It just won’t work. Come on!”

Spinning back around, she took off at a run and jumped. Shit, I thought and dashed after her, plunged out of control through the air, and crashed into the water with my side in such a way that my breath was knocked out of me. I dove deep, deeper than I really wanted to, thrashed my way back up, and snorted water out of my nose as soon as I broke the surface. Beside me, she also shot upward and tossed her hair back with a single swing of her head.

“I bashed my legs,” she laughed.

“It was my side,” I said breathlessly. “Friedrich. My name’s Friedrich.”

“Beate. You have a cool name. Old-fashioned, isn’t it?”

We swam over to the edge of the pool. The rain was splattering thousands of little rings across the water. The silence in the pool wrapped itself around us like a smooth, transparent towel. The folded red sun umbrellas on the terrace around the kiosk stood in narrow rank and file like forgotten, contemplative soldiers. The shuttered kiosk looked as if it were sleeping. For a moment, everything here belonged to us.

“My parents are strange,” I explained as we climbed out of the pool.

“Ah,” she said.

She had green eyes.

3

Coming home sometimes felt like you were abruptly shifting from one world to another. Whenever I opened the door, there was almost always noise in the background. Sometimes happy, sometimes angry. One of the dogs was barking, or one of my sisters was playing her flute, or Alma was hammering away in her corner of the hallway where she had set up her own mini-workshop in an old wardrobe. Our apartment was too small. Six kids. Two dogs. And two cats. As if my parents were deliberately and generously ignoring the cramped conditions in their apartment. It was great if you were

in the mood to be part of a colorful, noisy collective. It was horrible if you wanted to be by yourself at the moment.

You were immediately drawn inside. In my mind, I was still at the quiet pool in the rain. Next to a girl in a bottle-green swimsuit. I needed to quickly shut an internal door, like you would in a church. Noise didn't belong in church. My little brother Kolya came and took me by the hand, to play *Sorry*. From my mind - out of the church - I watched myself make the little ones laugh. Console them when they once again got knocked back to start right before reaching the finish. Does she have siblings too?

"You lost!"

Triumphantly. For Kolya, this felt like a real victory. The pride was real, as was the joy. He didn't know that I had let him win. Happily deceived. But it was still deception, right? I went to my room.

I didn't have a stereo system like Johann. I had an orange plastic record player with a lame box that my mother had given me for my birthday. Whatever. It was fine for listening to music at night, but it didn't have enough power behind it for a party. Johann had an amplifier and some kind of special speakers. His record player was heavy and was made out of silvery gray metal. It looked expensive. In contrast, the only other thing I had was a tape recorder, and if I ever wanted to make a tape, I had to put the recorder on my bed because the dubbing cable wasn't long enough.

I switched on the record player and threw myself on my bed. I wouldn't have the room to myself for long. The bed was situated such that I could see out the window. A locust tree stood outside. One day, I had looked it up in one of my father's thousands of books, because I had wanted to know what tree gave off such a weightless, sweet scent. I knew nothing that smelled as sheer and yet as pervasive as locust blossoms.

The window stood open. It was still raining, and all of a sudden, the music no longer fit my mood. It was a record I actually liked. Music that my mom had listened to when I was little. Old hit songs that made me smile, but which always gave me a cozy feeling nonetheless. But now they suddenly no longer sounded right. I tried a different record. My shelf held many fewer records than Johann's, and none of them were right anymore. It wasn't that I no longer liked New Orleans jazz or the Jethro Tull record my brother had lent me. It was just that they were all wrong. As if the notes were telling stories that no longer had anything to do with me. Everything was ... somehow nice but totally meaningless. I picked up the pop records and hurled them through the window like a discus.

Kolya dashed into my room without knocking.

"You have to come for supper."

"I'm not hungry, buddy."

Kolya left the door open and ran into the dining room, only to shoot back around the corner ten seconds later. He was a little imp.

“Mama says you have to come anyway. She wants to talk to you about something.”

I stood up from my bed. Talking didn’t bode well.

“With Grandpa?”

I was completely blindsided. Like usual, I hadn’t thought through how things might go. Nonetheless, this suggestion was the ultimate shock. The chatter around the table grew a little quieter since this impacted everyone here. For the first time ever, one of us was supposed to miss out on the family vacation. Specifically, me.

“That’s dumb!”

Lucie, my youngest sister. Eight years old and so precocious that she was an ongoing annoyance to her classmates. I usually found her funny. My friends thought we were a zoo anyway. No other families had as many kids. I didn’t know anyone who had more than two siblings.

“You can’t be serious,” I said. Six weeks! My entire summer break at Grandpa’s house. Of all people. I mean, I loved my grandma. Nana. I thought she was the best. But in terms of my grandfather, to be honest, I was just scared of him.

“You bet I am,” my mother now said. Her voice was nice, but firm on this matter. “You can’t repeat ninth grade again. If you don’t pass the retesting, you won’t graduate.”

“I can study on vacation!”

Okay, I didn’t really believe that.

“Mama, please! With Grandpa! I can ... I can stay here and study. Nobody’ll distract me here. Alma’ll be here too. The two of us could just ...”

Mama wouldn’t hear any of it.

“Alma has to stay in the nurses’ dorm during her internship. And the two of you alone in the apartment for six weeks? No. You’ll get your own room upstairs next to Grandma’s. She’s still there too, you know.”

Swell. Six weeks with a man I’d had to call Sir until I was ten. The Professor. My mother’s stepfather, whom everyone was afraid of. Except for my mom perhaps. My summer break was shot.

"You're stupid, you know that?"

Johann was amused. Seven-fifteen in the morning. It was still cool, and we were standing in the phone booth at the streetcar turning station. I was flipping through the phone book. You'd never believe how many Endres were living in this city. I didn't respond. Johann rolled himself a cigarette and pushed the door open a little as he lit it.

"Why didn't you ask her where she lived?"

Yeah. Why hadn't I asked her where she lived?

"Dunno."

How could I explain that I hadn't been able to ask because it would've shown that I was interested in her. On the other hand, that was exactly what was going on. I was interested in her. Why didn't I want her to know that? Maybe I hadn't asked because she hadn't asked me either. What was that? Did people not things ask because they were afraid of being disappointed? Because someone might not be interested in you back? Brilliant strategy. At least I knew her last name. I had gotten that much from her right before we had parted ways at the exit.

"Are you going to need much longer?"

A woman was knocking impatiently at the door. As if we hadn't heard her. A woman in a flowery smock. Without a blouse or hose or anything. Just the smock. If my mother ever wore something like that, I'd kill her. Or myself. The end of the world.

Johann stuck his head out. "Madam," he said with unbelievable politeness. "Just one more minute, alright?"

Johann could put on such an innocent face that everybody just believed him. He looked like a small child. The cigarette was the only hitch. The woman knocked energetically on the glass again.

"I'm done," I shouted and simply ripped out all the pages with the name Endres on them.

"If everybody did that kind of thing!"

The flowery smock yelled after us indignantly. We ran off, laughing.

I would've preferred to skip school the last two weeks before summer break. Everything was set as it was, and it wasn't like anything ever happened during this time. All we did was watch films in the biology room and try to skip out on the hiking day. Only the rock-hard teachers still gave real lessons. Dr. Ott for example. The "Doctor" always had to be said. Incidents like the one with my paper airplane wouldn't have ever been possible in

her class. Not because of punishment though. I don't think that Dr. Ott had ever even reprimanded anyone. It was just that something like that never would've arisen in her class. Just as rarely as forgotten homework. She had a way of looking at you and then asking with astonishing propriety how something like that could've happened.

"Were you ill? Did a problem arise at home?"

She had called us Mr. and Miss Soandso since the beginning of ninth grade. I think she truly was astonished every single time that someone forgot to do their homework without our city being hit by an earthquake. It was real disbelief, real disappointment in someone's unthinkable behavior, and that always made you feel awful. In her world, things like that never occurred - and after the first week, they didn't happen in her classes either. In any case, I had managed to get a C in her French class, which didn't help my GPA at all.

It was hard to do anything extra in her class, but I spread out the phone book pages in my French book and went through them anyway.

"Are you going to call all of them?"

Even Johann whispered in Dr. Ott's class.

"I'm looking to see if any of them live close to the pool. She was on foot."

I was a little proud of myself for having thought of that. A city map from my father's bookshelf was also sitting in front of me.

"You know she could've taken the streetcar."

Johann grinned at me.

"Don't burst my bubble," I hissed, but I actually hadn't thought of that. Shit.

"Monsieur Büchner!"

I swiftly slammed my French book shut.

"Voulez-vous nous faire part de vos réflexions?"

"No, Dr. Ott. Sorry about that."

Actually, Dr. Ott, I do. I'm about to flunk out, and in principle, it doesn't really matter if I talk in your class or not. I have no clue why I'm actually still here. I just met a girl with a super-common last name, and I was too dumb to ask her where she lives. And I have no idea what's going on and why I'm not in Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro. In some green place at the the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain, between the ocean and the mountain, where music floats in the air everywhere. It doesn't come from anywhere in particular. There aren't any bands or radios or speakers. The music there simply exists in the air and would surround me wherever I went. And it is always the right melody.

Johann pushed a note across to me. A hat and a glowing cigarette had been scrawled on it. Johann was a brilliant musician but a lousy artist in my opinion.

“We have to go back out on the street, Sam,” had been written underneath the hat. “Pool research this afternoon?”

I had to smile as I shoved the note back: “Can’t. Have to go to my grandfather’s.”

“Have fun,” Johann whispered without moving his lips.

Up front, Dr. Ott was explaining the futur proche tense.

J’aurai aimé. I will have loved. Great prospects.

5

We stood at the fence in the lower schoolyard. Johann was smoking. There were two schoolyards. The new building had a big, spacious one with a jungle gym and lots of metal benches. That was the area for the younger students. The rest of us got the lower schoolyard. It belonged to the older school building and sat right on the river. It was paved with cobblestones, and at its center stood a lime tree that they had probably planted when they built the school. 1894. The Lessing Humanist Academy. The best high school in the city. And Friedrich Büchner hadn’t made it here. Too many other interests. As Zippo had said, that is your problem, Büchner. Yeah. Thanks. I knew that already.

I had learned that the tree was a lime back in seventh-grade biology class. We even had a fountain down here, but it didn’t have any water in it anymore. I liked the schoolyard. For some reason, I liked the idea that eighty years ago other students had stood down here at the fence and gazed across the river. And that it had looked just the same back then as it did now.

“I just can’t imagine not being here anymore,” I said.

“You wanted to go to Brazil anyway,” Johann replied.

“Someday I’ll actually go there, but not right now, I don’t have quite enough money. Can you lend me some?”

“I’d be glad to, but you’re not worth enough to me for that.”

I punched him in the side.

“Are you going somewhere over break? I’ll never make it. Six weeks with my grandfather! You have no idea what that means.”

“Sure, I do,” Johann replied drily. “I’ve been there too, remember? ‘Do not mistake, my lad, your run-of-the-mill atheism with the ability to think logically. You need to work on that!’”

We both had to laugh. The sentence had become a catch phrase between us.

Grandfather had examined Johann the same way he examined everyone. I had taken my friend over to meet Grandma. I had always liked Grandma. No, that wasn’t quite right. I ... I admired her somehow. And I could never understand what she ever saw in this hard man, how she had ever managed to fall in love with him. Grandfather had come home unexpectedly early from the hospital that day, still in his white gown, and we had run into him in the garden. There was nothing I could do but introduce him to Johann.

“Johann, is it? Do you know where your name comes from?”

I hadn’t warned Johann about Grandfather beforehand because I hadn’t thought we would see him. But Johann did the best he could.

“From the Bible.” He added, “Unfortunately.” Church wasn’t really his thing.

Without even breaking his stride, Grandfather delivered that sentence about Johann’s atheism and his ability for logical thought. Then we found ourselves standing alone in the garden, and the front door would’ve shut slammed behind the Professor if I hadn’t caught it fast enough.

“Enjoy your time in the sanatorium of the logical grandfather,” Johann said. “I’ll be gone for two weeks, but then I’ll save you from the bourgeois swamp if you need me to. And when your grandfather isn’t home.”

“Thanks for nothing,” I said. Leaning against the fence, we stared across the river into the distance. Around us, the schoolyard buzzed with conversations and laughter, and even a few actual bees. The custodian kept several beehives in his small private garden next to the schoolyard.

“And what if nothing is all that comes?” Johann asked thoughtfully after a short pause.

I understood what he meant.

“You mean that feeling that you’re always waiting on something? That everything is still in front of us? That we aren’t really living yet because we’re still in school and live at home and so on?”

He didn’t answer right away, but I could see that was close to what he meant.

“Maybe it’s not worth it. The waiting, I mean.”

It sounded so off-handed. But it wasn’t

“Maybe,” I said. Then I thought about Rio de Janeiro. About the scent of locust blossoms in early summer. About the girl with the green eyes. “But maybe it is.”

Suddenly Alma was standing beside us. She was wearing a tie-dyed shirt she'd made herself, which had turned one of my white shirts purple forever because Mom had forgotten it in the washer. Alma was a year younger than and a grade ahead of me. I had also repeated the fifth grade, and we had been together until last year. I missed her in my classes. Not just because she was so much smarter than me. Alma was cool. An old-fashioned name, Beate would've said. Yes, I would've said again. We have strange parents.

"Wanna get outta here?" she asked as she caught sight of us at the fence and wedged herself between us. "The Gold Coast?"

We let her in. It had always been that way. It would always be that way. We belonged together.

"Sounds very tempting," Johann said with careful politeness, "but on the basis of moral hygiene, I would like to get two more hours of pointless math behind me before then."

Alma laughed.

"You dork!"

She took the cigarette away from Johann and took a drag on it.

"One more week, boys!" she declared cheerfully.

"Thanks for reminding me," I replied.

The bell rang. The break was over. Alma linked her arms through ours, and we returned to our classrooms.