MONA HOVRING

Translated by KARI DICKSON and RACHEL RANKIN

BECAUSE

ROSSED

ALPINE VIOLET ON THE DAY

THAT
I WAS BORN





BECAUSE VENUS
CROSSED AN
ALPINE VIOLET
ON THE DAY THAT
I WAS BORN













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MONA HØVRING

translated from the Norwegian by KARI DICKSON & RACHEL RANKIN

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You get bored with the truck. You push it into a bramblepatch where it loses balance and falls slowly over into the tangled branches.

MONIQUE WITTIG, THE OPOPONAX















THE ALPINE VILLAGE













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Owing to a mild speech impediment I've had since childhood, I confuse the pronunciation of the author Stefan Zweig's surname with the German word Schweig—be quiet. Not that I'm as well-read as I'd like to be, and my German is really rather poor, but I have admired Zweig for a long time. I devour his books and read everything I can find about him. Oh, what a sorrowful end he came to in Rio de Janeiro, and that heart-wrenching suicide note he left: "aus freiem Willen und mit klaren Sinnen." Whenever I throw myself into my own writing, my own attempts to understand the world, there he is, a quiet reminder—Verwirrung der Gefühle.

This story begins with me and my sister arriving in an alpine village well into the afternoon. It was winter. The train came to a halt by a station that both slumbered and soared, self-consciously proclaiming its height above sea level.

My sister didn't make the slightest move to help unload our suitcases. She positioned herself on the







platform and stood there, completely indifferent, while the conductor helped me with our heavy luggage. I was on the cusp of explaining that she was sick, that she'd just got out of hospital, but contented myself with shaking his hand and saying that I appreciated his thoughtfulness. Before he blew his whistle and boarded the train, the conductor winked at me and wished me good luck. Was it out of pity? Had he understood something I hadn't, seen something I hadn't?

My sister disappeared around the corner of the station building. I had to wheel and carry everything by myself. It was hard going.

In the days before we left, I'd been living in a perpetual daydream. I studied the glossy, seductive brochures we'd been sent. The colour of the sky in the photographs was reminiscent of the light and hue of old films, and the mountains shone with irresistible pinks—they seemed to whisper to me in an unknown language. I pictured an exotic winter wonderland. I dreamt of alpine ski slopes and indoor swimming pools and sophisticated menus curated by expert chefs from the continent. It was like the ecstasy of transformation. I envisioned another epoch.

But it was not an alpine village in some Central European monarchy we'd arrived at, no—my sister couldn't standairtravel, so we were staying in a simple Norwegian village. It lay in splendid isolation at the bottom of a









steep mountain, and the people there weren't exactly incomprehensible, but they did speak in a distinctive, slightly drawn-out dialect.

I found my sister by the bus stop. She had positioned herselfbeside an older woman and a young boy. She looked like any other traveller—nothing suggested instability, nothing screamed hysteria or breakdown. It looked as though she had full control over both time and place, and even though I was outraged by her behaviour, her convincing composure did give me strength. Yes, it pleased me greatly. But I couldn't thank her for the calmness she was emanating, couldn't comment on it. I had to keep my thoughts to myself. Praising her was the same as giving her a task, an obligation. I feared that even the smallest hint of responsibility would whip up her anxiety and contrariness. No, thanking her would ruin everything.

We could see the hotel from the bus stop. It lay a good way up the side of the mountain. It looked like a golden crystal bird, its formidable wings spanning the sheer overhang. I reckoned that it was both rundown and dilapidated now, and its fashionable glory days were long gone. Nevertheless, the building had an alluring splendour about it, illuminated by sunbeams shining with gay abandon. Everything up there in the valley enticed me—harmonious and untouched. It made me think—though not without some resistance—of the doctor who had







encouraged us to go, and of Mother who, untroubled, had offered to pay for our stay, as if her freedom could be bought. Freedom from what?

But I didn't get caught up in the question. The magnificent landscape made me feel at peace.

I glanced at my sister. She was standing upright, looking almost distinguished. She made sure to conserve and accentuate her aesthetic qualities: her light grey woollen coat, her large Russian fur hat. She was beautiful, she knew that—beautiful in a certain way.

"This air can cure the sick," I said.

My sister smiled. Her smile resembled the uncontrollable smile that Mother used to wear when she had too little to do.

I thought the hotel up there in the clouds could surely inspire courage in the most wretched of souls. It was an edifying thought.



