

There is nowhere to go but up  
Olga Hohmann

*When you shift up a gear, it jolts* says my friend P., when I tell her that I've been so terribly exhausted lately, and I spontaneously think of the air holes into which an airplane sometimes falls, shortly after takeoff. Again and again it tries to pierce the cloud cover, again and again it falls back a bit, on its way to a higher, thinner layer of transparent matter.

*There is nowhere to go but up.*

*(but the road is bumpy)*

The only thought that calms my fear of flying: the knowledge that air is a physical substance, an element, just like water - not completely uniform, but multiform: thicker in some places, thinner in others, sometimes softer, sometimes harder, and sometimes also full of holes, just like a body. The air breathes itself out and in, through its nostrils and mouth cavities of air.

*Too much of nothing.*

*Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?*

So says the familiar nursery rhyme about a sleepyhead who misses early mass. A leaden fatigue has settled over little Jacques, he won't and can't get up. Perhaps the little sleeper is so exhausted because things have just gone up a gear for him, and on the way up he has crawled into the soft hollow of an air hole to rest for a moment. *It's lonely on top.*

*Ding, ding, dong* the church bells aggressively wake him up, slowly he crawls out of his transparent cave and climbs a step further until he comes across a new, soft cloud-empire and can't resist lying down for another moment, *just five more minutes!* Dream and reality intertwine in the perception of the tired staggerer on his way *high, high up*. When the alarm sound no longer wakes you up, you have to set a new one: for example "Cosmic" or "Crystals", "Night Owl" or "Radiate", "Slow Rise", "Stargaze", "Twinkle", "Uplift", "By the Seaside", "Illuminate" or "Classic". The sound of the planets almost sounds like the sound of the sea.

*I don't believe in outer space.*

One church bell always swings a little faster than the other - Ding ≠ Dong. Like a mismatched couple who, in difference, always remain in conversation, an endless conversation, the thread never breaking. Conserved conversation. Again and again I see the same pair of lovers, at different parties, openings or events - they stand next to each other and talk animatedly, exclusively with each other, as if they had just met for the first time. In peaceful detachment and sincere interest, they analyze together what surrounds them - and then go home together, as if it were the first time.

The other day I want to compliment a woman on her beautiful velvet bow in her hair - she's almost scared to death, I'm standing behind her. You only ever see a bow from the back of your head, it's only beautiful to others, never to you, a bit like the sleepy face of little Jacques. A tired child is at least three times as heavy as an awake one - and three times as beautiful. *Look how angelic it is when it's asleep* the parents say, because they know the devilish quality of their little monster, awake.

*Tomorrow morning, God willing, you will be awakened again,  
tomorrow morning, God willing, you will be awakened again.  
And what if God doesn't want?*

*How many legs does a horse have?* I read in my mother's poetry album from the seventies, a friend wrote to her at the time in meticulous handwriting:  
*I'll tell you! Six! Two in the front, two in the back, and two on each side.*

And then four dog-ears at the edges of the yellowed paper:  
*In each / of the corners / there shall be love / inside.*

The expressions of friendship in poetry albums always have an aggressive aftertaste - they are phrases, not only because they rhyme. One believes one can anticipate in them that friendship will not have a particularly long half-life.

In Freud's interpretation of dreams, I only remember very darkly, the boy who nightmares every night of being bitten on the left arm by a horse appears again and again.

What would the biting horse say if it were lying on Doctor Freud's couch? Perhaps it is afraid of being bitten in one of its six legs by a little boy named Jacques? It leaves light sweat stains on the checkered couch, it had run all the way to Doctor Freud's house where it lay down, exhausted, it was a race horse.

*Stewball was a race horse and I wish he were mine. He never drank water, he  
always drank wine.*

*His bridle was silver, his main it was gold.  
And the worth of his saddle has never been told.*

A bite is almost always an expression of love - as a child, my mother once bit my arm so hard out of love that it started to bleed. She lacked the distance that I observe in the lovers who have talked (and then gone home together) as earnestly every evening for years as if it were the first time. *Ich habe dich zum Fressen gern* - a real threat.

The bite mark remains as a scar (of unbridled) love, it becomes a relief - an imprint from which, in turn, one can also take a negative imprint - an endless continuation reflecting into the future.

I myself, I am told afterwards, am separated from my best kindergarten friend at the age of three and a half because I can't stop biting him. He has green and blue traces

of my own unbridled love all over his body, or so I learned from his mother. *I want to lick you to the skeleton* a lover once said to me and I remembered, in a flash, the lost kindergarten friend I was never allowed to be alone in a room with again - it seemed like a nightmare.

The first time I see Judy Chicago's "Last Supper" *in real life*, it's the height of summer in New York and I'm relieved, first and foremost, at the darkened room, which is well air-conditioned - the sweat slowly dries on my forehead and I actually feel like I'm in a church. Judy Chicago's work relieves me, in this moment, and even though it probably wasn't originally meant to, I'll never forget it, for that very reason. Going up a corridor, one becomes sleepy, leaden fatigue marks the progression, a movement outside. Then back out into the Agnes Martin's grid of the city - the AC's, air conditioners, buzzing like giant insects clinging to the facades, dripping like sweating tropical plants. Cars speed by, seeming almost miniatures compared to the height of the houses.

Small cars, collectibles - in the hobby cellar, the family man never grows up; it's his own private, soft air pocket where he's allowed to wear his nightcap.

In contrast to New York's urban canyons, the air gets thin on the dark, Swiss Zauberg, you briefly have a moment of fear of heights, then you enjoy the sleepiness at the richly laid picnic table, a madame prances up and down like a cat, and two lung patients chat about philosophy, distant and animated, like the lovers who have looked for years as if they had just met. An airplane narrowly misses the mountain top and leaves a white vapor trail/consensus trail, the cat lady with lung disease pours consensus milk/condensed milk into her filter coffee.

I realize: when I am happy, down on earth, the fear of flying is especially great. Then, through prayers and rituals, I try to help steer the plane a bit spiritually; I pull up on the armrest during takeoff to help the little metal object to pierce the cloud cover:

*Nowhere to go but up*  
sings Mary Poppins

*(but the road remains bumpy)*  
I add to her inwardly.

Closing my eyes and slumbering, relinquishing responsibility, I only dare to do that on the plane when I can't do it down below. Insomnia is a sign of stagnation, of an inner spinning in circles, of tearing one's hair out. Sleeping upstairs, waking downstairs - or the other way around.

When things are in motion outside, I yawn like little Jacques, who doesn't want to get up yet, who switches the alarm clock to snooze and keeps thinking: *five more minutes!* until it's too late for early mass.

And Mary Poppins sings:

*Life's a balloon  
That tumbles or rises  
Depending on what is inside  
Fill it with hope  
And playful surprises  
And oh, deary ducks  
Then you're in for a ride*

Maybe you can gently give in to exhaustion, put your life in the hands of the pilot and know: When it jerks, it means it's going up a gear.

*And I'm leaving on a jetplane  
I don't know when I'll be back again.  
Oh babe, I hate to go.*

You blink briefly into the commotion and then lean back into the airplane seat, calm as a cucumber. *Ding, ding, dong* goes the alarm clock and I press *snooze*.

And Mary Poppins sings:

*Look inside the balloon  
And if you hear a tune  
There's no where to go but up  
Choose the secret we know  
Before life makes us grow  
There's nowhere to go but up*

**Hannah Sophie Dunkelberg (\*1987) lives and works in Berlin.**

She studied at the HFBK in Hamburg and in Manfred Pernice's class at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). Dunkelberg has had solo exhibitions at Kunstraum Potsdam, Potsdam (2021); bad posture, Lausanne (2023); Gunia Nowik Gallery, Warsaw (2022); Efremidis, Berlin (2022); Ruttkowski,68, Paris (2022); LISTE Art Fair, Basel (2021); and Paris+ par Art Basel, Paris (2022), among others. Her work has also been shown at the Boros Foundation at Berghain, Haus am Lützowplatz, Julia Stoschek Collection, Museum der Fotografie, Berlin; Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig; Kunstverein Arnsberg and Kunstverein Kärnten