



Rothilda von Rotortod:

OVERTURNED

III. The attack *Ten years later*

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1. Wind Day

In the fairytale forest

There were days when Maggie felt as if she was inside a magic book in the forest, where behind every word the gate to another world opened. Each world was a universe unto itself. But it was only through the contact with the other worlds that it found its meaning.

Especially the first days of spring, which just now let their colourful ribbon wave over the forest ground, were such a magical time. Maggie put her head back. Blinking, she marveled at the kaleidoscope of the sky, which winked at her through the fresh canopy of leaves. Golden birds fluttered from branch to branch – or were this just drops of light that seemed to dance in the shadow play of the young twigs?

This, Maggie thought, had to be the time when the idea of the fairy tale forest was born. The skeletons of the trees, lifeless only yesterday, which suddenly, kissed awake by the milder sun, stretched out of their Sleeping Beauty night and blossomed into new life; the Cinderella coat of the forest floor, over which all of a sudden spread a glittering dress of stars; the silent blackbirds, who suddenly shook off the curse of the autumn witch and praised the reborn life with their sparkling songs – what else was this all but a fairy-tale dream come true, the work of a sorcerer who wrote his magic words as living poems into the world?

Maggie closed her eyes. Like on a weightless raft, she drifted through a sea of colourful scents. She felt the breath of the earth, her sigh of relief after the winter's ice sheet had turned into a fertile sea of puddles. She deeply absorbed the spicy smell of awakening. A few more deep breaths, a last look into the enchanted forest, then she carefully removed the simulation mask from her face.

She was always amazed at how perfect the mask could draw the impressions on the canvas of the brain. Although the "Fairy Tale Forest" was her favourite programme, the other natural spectacles that could be experienced with the mask also had their charm. "Flight of Spikes", "Summer Meadow", "Palm Whisper", "Autumn Flames", "November Gossamer", "Ice Palace" ... Every season was represented with its own magic, for every mood the suitable programme was offered.

It had been Thilio who had brought her the simulation mask. "Maybe this will ease your phantom pain," he had said half-jokingly when she had unwrapped the gift. He didn't tell her where the mask came from. Probably a test copy he had gotten hold of at one of the trade fairs he had to visit on business. In any case, she herself had never seen anything like that before.

Of course the present was meant kindly. Thilio just wanted to relieve her wolf child feeling, which she had complained about again and again: this feeling of being cut off from something that was an integral part of her; this homesickness that had been gnawing at her since she was forced to leave her little house due to the expansion of the wind farm and had to move to the city.

Nevertheless, she had been rather annoyed at the souvenir initially. How could a surrogate of nature replace a real experience of nature? But at some point the feeling of inner emptiness had become so strong that she had put on the simulation mask. What did she have to lose?

At first it had been a strange feeling to move through nature without being in nature. In the meantime, however, it had become quite normal for her to live her dream of a fulfilled life in the country this way. "To lie down under the mask" had almost become a synonym for "taking a trip into the green" for her.

Maggie shook her head over herself: Never thought she'd get used to something like this! And yet it had turned out as so often in life: The heroic "I never want to live like this" shrinks to a meek "Actually, I never wanted to live like this" when there are no other alternatives. In the end, the survival instinct prevails, this animalistic sinking of teeth into the few life crumbs that are assigned to everyone.

Unexpected visit

The doorbell rang. Maggie looked at the clock: just before seven. Who could that be – so early in the morning?

When she opened the door, her eyes fell on four children about ten years old: three boys, whose parting, apparently pulled by their mothers, had already been half busted by the rascals' passion for chaos, and a girl with teetering pigtails who tried to keep the gang in check. "Come on now," Maggie heard her hiss, "or have you forgotten the words again?"

Solemnly the girl started to warble, reluctantly supported by the grumbling of her three companions:

*"Wind, Wind, Wind,
we who are your children,
we beseech thee, Venerable Wind:
Give us power fast!"*

Four pairs of eyes looked at Maggie expectantly. She probably should have said words of praise or applauded. But she just couldn't do it. "Wait a minute," she uttered instead. "I'll get you some sweets."

How could she forget that today was "Wind Day" again? If she had thought about it, she wouldn't have opened the door. But now she had to look for something in the kitchen that would satisfy the silly ritual: in thanks for the singing, the children were to be given something that symbolised the power of the wind.

On the kitchen table, the little umbrellas were still lying around, the decoration of the ice-cream sundaes she had bought for herself and Thilio yesterday on her way home. That might be something ... In the fridge she found an opened package of ice cream confectionery. She took out four pieces of confectionery, stuck the umbrellas into it and went back to the door.

"The gift of the wind!" she duly proclaimed when she presented the symbolic wind harvest to the children. "May the wind be with you!"

The quartet grinned somewhat amused at the unusual gifts – the usual ones were pinwheels made of fruit gum or chocolate, which were produced especially for this day. However, this in no way prevented them from completing the rite. Four throats warbled cheerfully:

*"Thanks be to the Wind and its power,
the Wind, the Wind that creates everything!"*

Mister Energy

Sighing, Maggie closed the door. Sure, she said to herself: The kids couldn't help it. For them, the holiday, celebrated twice a year, was simply an opportunity to escape the dreary school routine. As a child, she too would probably have preferred to go on snack tours, take part in the flickflack championships and gaze at the windmill pyramids of the cheerleader groups instead of sitting at the school desk.

It was precisely this – the presentation of wind power as a never ending children's birthday party – that made the whole fuss so perfidious. It was a kind of emotional surprise tactic, ultimately a form of mental child abuse.

Of course, this was basically nothing new. There had been similar tendencies before. However, since the Ministry of Energy had been upgraded to a central government interface, they had increased significantly. Since then, no project

was allowed to be implemented without first being examined by the Ministry of Energy. Everything was tailored to its needs.

As a result, Alfons Heimenross – "Mister Energy", as he called himself – had become a kind of superminister, in fact even the actual ruler of this country. Since the "wind harvesting machines" were now exported to every corner of the world, he had almost become some sort of wind pope, directing the destiny of people all over the world. And it was Heimenross, Maggie thought bitterly, to whom she owed the loss of her little house. It was him who had set a minimum threshold of inhabitants for rural settlements. If the number of inhabitants fell below this limit, the houses had to be cleared for the construction of wind turbines.

Maggie rubbed her reddened eyes. Although the windows had been open all night, it had barely cooled down. The summer heat still stuck in the apartment like melted cotton candy.

This had never been the case in her former dwelling. Behind the thick cottage walls there had always been a pleasant coolness, even in summer it had rarely been warmer than 20 degrees. That is why she would have liked to move to another country house when she had to leave her old home. But the compensation she had been paid had not been enough. It was based on the market value – which had long since dropped to junk level due to the existing wind farm and its foreseeable expansion.

Thilio

A leaden exhaustion tore at Maggie's limbs. If only she hadn't gotten up so early! Wandering around in the flat wouldn't supply her with more oxygen either!

Yawning, she snuck back to the bedroom. Thilio still lay quietly breathing on his side of the bed. He had thrown the blanket off him, so that a ray of sunlight fell on his back through the not quite closed curtain. In the marble light of the morning his skin looked even smoother than usual. Almost like a Greek statue, Maggie thought.

Carefully she lay down next to Thilio and wrapped her arm around him. Muttering he put up with it. Maggie pressed her body firmly against that of her friend. Deeply she inhaled the familiar scent, a scent that was so different from the men she had been with before. Thilio's smell was much sweeter, almost like freshly suckled babies. His body, which was only covered with a thin fluff in some places, had nothing in common with the animalistic power that the male musk note usually exuded. Maggie was sure he would have provided a good model for the angel statues in old cemeteries.

Nevertheless, as Maggie found, Thilio had a distinct erotic appeal. Especially his bud-like skin was very attractive for her.

"You have a skin like a baby's bottom," she had said to him the other day when they were lying next to each other like right now. "How do you do that?"

Amused, Thilio had turned to her. "Didn't you know that I am the inventor of anti-aging creams?"

Smiling, she had responded to the joke. "So why don't you mix me one too? It might come in handy for me as well!"

A mischievous glow flashed in the sky of his eyes. "Sorry: Trade secret!"

"How mean!" Her fingers, just playing with Thilio's full brown hair, had quickly crept to his ears and pinched his earlobe.

"Ouch! Just wait, I'll show you ..."

Maggie smiled with pleasure when she thought about what had happened afterwards. Thilio's youthful exuberance, his strong arms ...

Although Thilio claimed to be her age, Maggie suspected he was actually much younger than her. Probably he only tactfully refrained from giving his real age. In fact she felt flattered exactly because an obviously much younger man found her desirable. For her this was like a fountain of youth. Admittedly, there was nothing she could do about the fact that life inscribed itself ever deeper into her skin. But inwardly, since she was with Thilio, she sometimes felt like a young girl again. The fire in her, which had almost been extinguished after she had moved to the city, had flared up again thanks to him.

She pressed her lips to the shoulder of the sleeping Adonis. Gradually the sweet poison of slumber seeped into her, she sank and sank, her arm went limp, although she imagined to wrap it even tighter around the smoothly breathing body as she fell. But hadn't they long since merged into a single body anyway? Did they not sink as ONE being into the vastness of space, where the deepest fall was synonymous with the highest flight?

The cosmic night embraced them with equanimity. Deeper and deeper they fell into the sea of stars, past suns whose light would reach the earth only in thousands of years, and planets Maggie had never heard of. She felt the life that was cavorting on them, without having the slightest idea what it looked like. And the shooting stars were suddenly within reach, each one a cosmic flower that light years away an unimaginably alien being had plucked and carelessly thrown into the ocean of the sky.

Arrested!

But then, all of a sudden, it was all over. As fast as she had dived into it, the dream spat her out again. When Maggie opened her eyes, she saw nothing but naked, bare walls all around her: she was still in custody. Her new life, Thilio, the comforting warmth of his body – all this had been nothing but a dream. In reality, she was still lying in this dirty-grey cell, whose bleakness was already the first part of her punishment.

Immediately the nightmare in which she was trapped took her back into its stranglehold. The grimacing images that seemed to be buried deep inside her just a moment ago came crashing down on her again with destructive force. Once again she heard the door slamming outside her house, she saw herself stepping to the window and looking at the police cars that had taken position right in front of her door. When she opened it, someone held an official letter under her nose. "Search warrant," she read, without understanding what she was reading.

She wanted to ask something, but by then the flood of uniforms had already poured into her house. It spread quickly, even into the most remote corners of her home. Maggie felt as if someone was poking around in her life with long, pointed sticks.

Finally one of the team had descended into her storage cellar. Shortly afterwards he emerged from the depths again, holding an elongated box in his hand that Maggie had never seen before. Triumphantly, he presented it to the head of the operation. "I've already looked inside," he commented on the find. "If this is not poison, I'll take some myself."

Maggie remembered that she had looked at her mobile phone at that very moment: six missed calls! Five were from Monica, one from Mirko. Apparently, Maggie later combined, they had already heard about the new autopsy findings on the news. But even if she had answered the calls: The idea that she would be accused of poisoning Michael still wouldn't have occurred to her. So what difference would it have made if she had spoken to them?

Maggie could still see the investigator straightening his back and setting himself up before her like an emissary of the Last Judgement. "Mrs Margaret Rhode, I have to arrest you temporarily," she heard him solemnly announce. "You are strongly suspected of having poisoned Mr Michael Pauly."

In custody

Maggie couldn't remember whether she had replied something or whether she was so stunned that she had just surrendered speechlessly to her fate. But what did it matter now? What counted was that she was now crouching in this cell, where life was reduced to a joyless surviving; that the emptiness surrounding her was only a foretaste of the coming days, weeks, months, perhaps even the next years, in which she would have to vegetate in a kind of vacuum; that she was trapped in an existence from which life was locked out – an existence that was limited to dreaming of life pulsating behind incorruptible bars.

Her old history book suddenly came to her mind. In the chapter on "non-European peoples" there had been a drawing that had both disconcerted and fascinated her. Whenever she opened the book, she had to look at the picture, although it already haunted her in her dreams. The drawing showed a priest who

was about to offer a human sacrifice to the gods. The chosen one stood tied up beside him, in a moment he would become a victim of the flames.

What kind of feeling was it, Maggie had asked herself again and again, to pay with the own life for the sins of the community? Was it a consolation to the victims that their lives were given a supernatural meaning by the special form of death? Or were they desperately hoping for a sign from the gods that would put an end to this profoundly inhuman practice?

And as for the spectators: Did they feel pity for the victim? Or did they even feel a perverse form of envy because the doomed ones were in a prominent position, high above the community, for a few seconds? Did they still perceive the one led to the scaffold as a member of the community, or was this person already as enraptured for them as the gods to whom this human life was to be given as a gift?

Only now, in this cell, did she get an idea of how the victim must have felt. Only now did she fully understand what it meant to have to heal a wound not caused by oneself with the sacrifice of one's own life. And only now did she feel the loneliness that must have surrounded those on whom the community had imposed their guilt in order to get rid of it.

Couldn't this be the real reason for her own banishment from the community – for her incarceration behind thick walls without any fault of her own? Was this not a kind of symbolic extinction, an expiatory sacrifice to restore the community to its disturbed balance?

The atonement

Maggie straightened up and slid to the edge of her cot. She could only sleep a few hours on the worn out mattress before it pinched her somewhere. Then she had to give her back a rest to recover from the instrument of torture called "bed" here.

Lost in thought, she sat there and looked at the cell door, which had been firmly locked since the evening. Although it was completely dark in the room, the door shone brightly. It almost looked as if someone had coated it with a fluorescent material.

Maggie turned to the barred window. When she leaned back and tilted her head to the side, she could see the moon. It was all round, a glowing face with a few deep furrows clearly visible. With long, thin fingers he reached into the cell and bathed the door in a shimmering light. It almost seemed to Maggie as if the light would make the cold steel tremble; as if it would have to melt away under the magic of this touch and open the way out into life.

But of course that was pure wishful thinking. Or was it reality after all? Wasn't there a slight, almost imperceptible movement at the door? Didn't she even hear that unmistakable squeaking and creaking that it used to make?

In fact, the door had already opened a crack! Maggie was about to get up and float away into freedom on the moon's ray when she noticed a shadow slipping through the narrow gap into the room. I see, she thought, disappointed, it was only one of the guards! Probably an unannounced inspection to find drug stashes and mobile phones.

But no, it wasn't the guard ... Someone else had gained access to her cell. She felt that she knew the person, even if she did not immediately recognise who it was. She narrowed her eyes and looked more closely. Was that not ... Nonsense, that was impossible! Why should he visit her in prison – and this in the middle of the night?

Concentrated, Maggie watched the figure close the door. And now, as the figure turned its face to her again, there was no doubt left: this was none other than Alfons Heimenross, the Lord of the Wind! What the hell was he doing in her cell?

Maggie wanted to say something, but couldn't make a sound. Something shut her mouth. Heimenross remained silent as well. Slowly, as if guided by an invisible force, he walked towards her. Stunned, Maggie saw him approaching her. What was he holding in his hands? When she took a closer look, she recognised that it was the rotor blade of a windmill. Brightly it sparkled in the light of the moon. Heimenross gripped it tightly with his fingers and held it like a monstrance in front of his chest. At the same time he moved his lips continuously without a sound being heard. He seemed like a priest in prayerful dialogue with his God. The murmuring sounded as holy as it was incomprehensible, as if its sense was only meant for the Most High and his faithful servant.

Closer and closer the Heimenross priest came to Maggie. It looked as if he was leading a procession of invisible believers who crept silently behind him. Soon he would have reached Maggie's bed, she could already smell the incense scent of his robe. The rotor blade now flashed directly before her eyes, she almost felt dazzled by it.

A moment later she sensed a cold breeze: Holy Heimenross had lifted the rotor blade. Now it hovered ominously over Maggie's head. Obviously he was a sacrificial priest who would offer her severed head as a gift to the gods! At the same moment the judging rotor blade rushed down on her neck.

Dream and reality

A hoarse scream rose from her throat. Confused, she looked around. Her gaze glided across the agitated sea of sheets in which she lay, and the chest of drawers with the toy dog she had won at the last fair, to the wide-open, barless window through which the hot breath of summer penetrated into the room. She breathed a sigh of relief: This was undoubtedly reality, the remand prison was the past. But where was Thilio?

At the same moment she heard footsteps in the corridor. The bedroom door opened and Thilio put his head through the crack: "Did you say something?" "Just a bad dream ..." She reached out for him. "Why didn't you wake me up?" Thilio sat down next to her. "You were still sleeping so soundly, I thought I'd better make breakfast first." Maggie leaned her head against Thilio's shoulder. As he tilted his head slightly to her side, their hair strands branched into each other. Like golden lianas Maggie's curls wound their way through Thilio's brown jungle. Thilio gently stroked her back. "I'm afraid I have to go now," he regretted. "I have an appointment at half past nine." Maggie snuggled up tighter to him. "Only five more minutes ..."

First encounter with Thilio

She thought back to the day she had first met Thilio. It had been very close to the apartment, on the green verge that separates the two main streets. She had noticed Thilio from far away. He had been sitting motionless on a bench, his head in his neck, looking up into the branches of an old oak tree.

It was autumn, October was almost over, the path was littered with leaves shimmering golden red. When Thilio heard her steps rustling in the rotten leaves, he had reflexively lowered his head and looked at her. Maggie still recalled his absent-minded look, this aimless gaze of a person whose thoughts are somewhere else. But that was exactly why she had the impression of looking into the untarnished mirror of his eyes. And because she thought she recognised an indeterminate melancholy in it, she had smiled encouragingly to him as she passed him by.

She had already gone a few steps further, when she heard him say: "Every tree has its own language ..."

Hesitantly, she had turned around. At first she thought he was talking to himself. But when their eyes met, she noticed that this time he read in her eyes as attentively as she read in his.

"There is something true about that ..." she had replied uncertainly.

Thilio had pointed to the tree in front of him. "Take this oak tree here, for example. Doesn't its language move in much more winding paths than that of the young birch over there?"

"That must be the wisdom of age," Maggie had joked. But because Thilio still seemed to be fascinated by the intricate stories of the oak, she sat down next to him and listened to the stories of the trees together with him.

How long could they have sat next to each other in silence? Probably not more than five minutes, Maggie mused. But in her memory it seemed like half an eternity. And strangely enough, even though they had hardly said a word to each other the whole time, it was as if she had known Thilio for years afterwards. So they had arranged a date for the evening as a matter of course.

Reunion with Champy

Maggie poured herself another cup of coffee. By the time she came into the kitchen, Thilio had already left the house. Tired, she had taken a yogurt from the refrigerator, in which she now stirred listlessly. The heat took away all her appetite. Furthermore, the dream still haunted her. As ridiculous as it was – in essence it was true. Admittedly, she had been acquitted in the end. But nevertheless she had not fully regained her freedom.

She wondered when she had first become aware of this. Probably during the conversation with Monica ... On the day after her release from prison, when Monica had brought back the pets she had taken in after Maggie's imprisonment. Champy just couldn't calm down when he finally found himself reunited with his mistress after such a long time. As a cream-coloured ball of wool he hopped, jumped and whimpered around her, repeatedly bumping his muzzle against her nose and wagging his tail so extensively that he almost lost his balance. The whole dog was one big joy.

Maggie was so busy stroking and patting him that she initially hadn't even noticed Frieda's absence. When she recognised that her tiger lady was nowhere to be seen, she first blamed it on the cat-typical pouting, this childish revenge for being left alone.

"I wonder where Frieda is," she finally remarked. "Didn't you manage to put her in the basket?"

Embarrassed, Monica saw past her. "Well, I ... I had to give her to the pound."

Maggie stared at her in disbelief. "The pound? Did I get you right?"

"You know ..." Monica justified herself, "it was just too cramped in the apartment with two pets in the long run. And then no one could know that you'd be released so quickly."

Maggie shook her head indignantly. "Why not? An error is an error. It was clear I wouldn't stay away forever."

She could have wept when she imagined her freedom-loving Frieda locked up in one of the cages among all the other cats. Of course, that was also due to over-identification. After all, she herself had been sitting innocently behind bars for quite a long time. Nevertheless, as soon as Monica had left, she had called the animal shelter. But Frieda had long since been passed on to new owners. At least she had found a new home. It could have ended much worse!

Monica's verdict

Maggie forced herself to eat another spoonful of yogurt. She wondered why she still had offered Monica some of the cake she had baked for her – after such a breach of trust! Maybe it had simply been some sort of sluggishness. Or perhaps

it was an aftermath of the bitter bread of loneliness – the only thing that had been abundant in prison. Those who had tasted it once did not throw away long-standing friendships lightly.

However, with her indulgence she had only covered up a fracture that was beyond repair. It only took a few minutes until this became clearly visible.

In the beginning they had talked about all sorts of trivialities: the recipe for the cake, the new supermarket on Monica's doorstep, the leaky gutter at Maggie's house ("I really need to have it done"), the favourite food of Champy, which again had become more expensive ...

Then Maggie had asked: "By the way, when is the next meeting of our anti-wind-power group?"

Monica had looked at her in amazement at first. "Do you really think we would just carry on like that – after all that has happened?" she finally asked back.

"No, of course not," Maggie defended herself, although she didn't know what for. "But the fight must go on anyway. I think even Michael would have ..."

She couldn't finish the sentence. The hatred that suddenly appeared in Monica's eyes wrapped itself around her tongue like a fast-acting poison.

"I can't believe you still have the guts to say that name." Monica shook her head in indignation, almost disgusted.

Maggie looked at her without understanding: "You don't think that I have ... that Michael was ..."

Monica mockingly pulled a face. "What does it matter what I believe? What others believe? What you think others believe? No, you'll have to sort it all out with yourself. But do you know what I don't understand?"

Maggie looked at her questioningly.

"I don't understand how you could get the idea to serve our cause by doing this to one of us. Didn't you realise that such an act would turn everything upside down? That it would deprive us of all credibility?"

Poisoned acquittal

Maggie still recalled Monica's presumptuous look, the know-it-all manner in which she had talked to her. It had been immediately clear to her that there would have been no point in holding long discussions with her. After all, her words merely reflected the general opinion about the case. She herself knew very well that it had been a second-class acquittal. And even that she had only achieved because she had changed lawyers.

Her first lawyer had been firmly convinced of her guilt. All the time he had been pushing her to make a confession. In his view, this was the only chance to mitigate the "inevitable" punishment.

Her second lawyer, in contrast, had enforced a new, more precise taking of evidence. In the process, new inconsistencies had arisen time and again. For example, suspicious fingerprints had been found on the ominous box in

Maggie's storage cellar – but none of Maggie's. And even if it was assumed that she had used gloves, it remained unclear how she would have carried out the poisoning. No traces of poison were found in the thermos flask or in the beverage bottles seized at the crime scene. And the autopsy had revealed no evidence of poisoned food either.

So how could Maggie have administered the poison to the victim? By force? But then why had there been no signs of struggle at the scene of the alleged crime? Had the crime been committed with the victim's consent? But wouldn't Michael have taken the poison himself then?

In view of all these unresolved questions, the court had no choice but to acquit Maggie in the end. It was and remained a circumstantial trial in which the evidence was not sufficient for a conviction. The principle "In case of doubt for the accused" kept her out of prison. It did not only mean, however, that there was doubt about her guilt. "In case of doubt for the accused" – that also meant that there were doubts about her innocence.

This was precisely the tenor in which the process was presented in the media. The unfavourable reporting was also fuelled by the derogatory remarks of political decision-makers. Alfons Heimenross in particular missed no opportunity to stress that an acquittal "for lack of evidence" was not the same as an acquittal "for lack of guilt".

Only little by little did Maggie realise that one could also be set free without being free. Not only was she shunned by her former friends like a leper after the trial. She had also lost her job as a result of the months in custody. Of course, she could have tried to fight for her right to return by legal means. But what good would that have done? She would not have regained a real place in the company anyway. Everyone would have turned away from her, and in the next "restructuring" she would certainly have been the first to lose her job.

The only one who had stood by her during this difficult time without any ifs and buts had been Champy. How often had he laid his head on her lap in the morning, when she no longer felt any strength in her to start the marathon of the day, looking at her from his mischievous eyes: "Come on, let's romp around outside! What do we care about the talk of others ...". He had indeed been her only consolation! All the more she was grieved when he died unexpectedly soon after.

Crushed singing

This suffocating heat ... Maggie felt as if she was being pushed onto her chair by an invisible giant of pure fire. It cost her strength to brace herself against the heat and creep to the bedroom. She closed the window with a sigh. Only stuffy air flowed into the room anyway.

Quickly she put on her thinnest summer dress, slipped into her flip-flops and went to the door. Maybe there was still some oxygen left on the street.

When she opened the front door, she almost collided with the caretaker. "Today is Wind Day," he admonished her. "You still have to install a pinwheel on the balcony."

Wearied, Maggie looked around: All the balconies and windows were covered with multicoloured pinwheels. They blinked and sparkled in competition with each other, everywhere the glittering wings were spinning. The wind, however, had nothing to do with it. The oppressive heat that had prevailed for days was accompanied by a complete lull.

Maggie simply went past the caretaker and stepped out into the street. She heard him yell something about "consequences" and "report" after her, but she was too tired to pay attention to it. Her head throbbed, glowing tongs pressed against her temples.

At the next crossing she turned right and leaned against the mighty chestnut tree, which almost imploringly stretched its branches towards the steel-blue sky. Maggie faltered. An unexpected noise had torn her out of her lethargy: Wasn't that the typical thrush song? But how was that possible in this place, in the middle of summer, in this heat?

She put her head back. Her eyes wandered searchingly through the shimmering branches. And then, finally, she discovered the loudspeaker, which was attached to one of the thicker branches. Now she remembered the campaign that had been announced at the beginning of the year: Everywhere in the city inhabitants were to be exposed to the sound of birdsong via loudspeakers. A study had clearly shown that this could contribute significantly to the well-being of people and thus also to the improvement of working morale.

Image: Gerd Altmann: fire ball (Pixabay)

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