

# TEENAGE DREAMS

## My Slice of Cake is a Very Big Mess

Luise Mörke

This is a true story. It is what happened and why there now is a car, a shattered window, and dozens of formerly towering cakes reduced to sad, creamy debris, dripping on the metal hood.

Tall, ugly buildings had enclosed her from all sides, their dark windows staring at the intersection like hollow eyes that watch a lonely figure cross the empty road. Perhaps that figure had been a cloaked man, homeless, on his way to nowhere, which would have been a convenient elation of the scene's retrospective eeriness. All of this illuminated by the artificial warmth of streetlights. Was he shivering?

She had been in the car, back and buttocks warmed by the seat heating, tired from a day of incessant darkness. The weather and mood would be joyless and bleak for at least another three months. Lost time, during which the body had to be covered by layers of clothing, providing warmth on loan from various animals: sheep's wool, cow's leather, the downs of some unhappy duck. Over the duration of the winter months, one's own skin became an unknown surface, encountered under the shower each morning in alienated bewilderment, then rubbed dry, lathered in lotion with disinterested motions, covered up once more. Sheep, cow, duck.

Thinking back on the incident, she mostly remembered the cinematic of the car tires on the asphalt, an acoustic drama that vouched for the factuality of what had happened. The shriek had cut right through the humdrum rhythm of the drive, ruptured the posthumous, faraway song the playlist had spat out: Blackstar, blackstar. It had grown into a blaze, totalized all perspective, swallowed her whole. Wasn't that something rather than nothing? A shift, she had thought afterwards. Something had shrieked, then something had shifted. The traffic light had been red, but she had started to drive, utterly unable to stop the car, progressing instead at syrupy slow speed towards the center of the intersection. Clutch, gas, brake; all of the intuition newly acquired in countless driving lessons had dissipated. And so the car simply stood right on the intersection, suspended in an impossible, possibly dangerous situation for the better half of eternity, until she gathered herself, started the engine, drove off.



She had lost it and the losing had been frightful. It had involved all the markers of insanity – even the pavement had seemed to tilt upwards. Twenty minutes later she had arrived at home, at the table with her parents, lightyears away from the helplessness, solitude, and strangely lucid discombobulation on the intersection. Dinner was carrots and potatoes, sliced into slivers, served with cream sauce and sausages, ketchup on the side. A bizarre, frugal concoction that could not satisfy the desire for pleasure that always lingered unfulfilled during these gloomy and cold days. She was careful not to mix the two sauces to avoid the piggy pink color that resulted from this simple bit of alchemy. At this time of the year, meal times marked the rare points in the day to look forward to. It was easy to place all expectations for satisfaction on the little branches of nerves on the tongue: send a signal to my brain to tell me I'm alive, that I am enjoying myself! Ideal enjoyment, she thought, would plunge the self into a cushioned zone of debilitation, void of the need to do anything. Forkfuls of food at least stuffed what yearned to be stuffed with undigested mash. But the dissatisfaction mostly remained as a nagging, persistent need that she could not account for. An

array of potential lacks was on offer: romance, the movies wanted her to believe, clothes, the internet suggested, progress, school had taught her. She was smart enough to know that none of these solutions were adequate, and thus had come to suspect that the nagging could not be solved. It was the frostbite of existence, reminding us of our being and its abhorrent inadequacy.

Despite the shift, business continued as usual the next day. Notable events at school: the ink cartridge had to be replaced by mid-day, an unplanned vocabulary test crushed everyone's mood, lunch hour was spent in the cafeteria, surrounded by the stench of boxed and boiled potato powder. She had started drinking coffee only a few weeks ago, perhaps in preparation of the final exams that would soon conclude her school career and determine the worthiness of twelve years with a grade – no pressure. Perhaps she had picked up the habit because she had been driving on unlit country roads with a watchful instructor on her side several times a week. Clutch, brake, gas, let cruise control take over every now and then. That too had been a source of exhaustion. The coffee habit was new enough to still send her scalp into a caffeine tingle. She could feel the hair follicles expanding, stretching the skin to impossible dimensions. A contraction always



followed, preventing the eyes from falling shut by the time 2pm rolled around, formerly the hour of sluggish languor. Coffee, she had noticed, made her a more enthusiastic, motivated being. The jolt was just unsettling enough to tinge life in slightly more vivid colors. The habit had already begun to shape her sense of normality. Gestures that had to be carried out in a day now included drinking a cup or two, the obeying of an appetite with little enjoyment in the process. Was that compulsion? Two hours later she drove home. Snow piled up on the side of the road. The cold turned to white, turned to slush, soon enough.

Now there is a car, a shattered window, and dozens of formerly towering cakes reduced to sad, creamy debris, dripping on the metal hood. A horrible mess. A small dispersed group of people standing behind the red and white police tape, gasping at the scene. Aquaplaning, the driving instructor used to warn her, stretching the word as if it were German. Aqua. A liquid sound itself, like an underwater landscape. “The tires lose their grip, you just drift uncontrollably. Nothing you can do about it, really. Don’t panic, don’t steer the wheel, just let it slide and hope for the best.” The advised combination of sliding uncontrollably and not panicking evidently had not worked for her. She desperately steered against the car’s drift, causing

a sudden push as soon as rubber and asphalt regained contact, right in the direction of Konditorei Fiedler's curved windows. A well preserved, beloved remnant from the 1950s, now a pile of broken glass. She had fond memories of walking by the café and gazing at the seductively presented cakes, which drew busloads of pensioners, armadas in beige, to get their Sunday fix. On her family's rare visits, the chocolate cake exuded a special allure: alternating layers of biscuit dough and ganache, covered with chocolate flakes and a white chocolate truffle on each slice, nested in a bed of whipped cream. Other baked goods had been sources of fascination, such as the papert-thin layers of dough, shaped in the curves of a body, coated in dark chocolate, or the sponge cake covered with whole strawberries, pineapple slices, grapes, kiwis, floating in a transparent gelatinous mass. Lavish obscenities of sugar, flour, butter and cream. Their aesthetic perfection and neat containment had transfixed her.

Containment and perfection have given way to mayhem. Her inability to "let it slide" has destroyed the window world's intricacies, save for a single, customised sample cake on the top right shelf, white fondant with someone's name in funfetti colors. Happy 75th Birthday! In the middle of it all she just sits and stares,



thinks vaguely about insurance costs, her preliminary licence, and feels – shockingly – a glimmer of satisfaction at the site of chaos, at the sea of unstiffened cream that trickles down the windshield and the toppled baroque delicacies, like guillotined aristocrats, their layered dresses in disarray. A police officer knocks at the car window and mouths words indistinctly, as if underwater. She knows enough about bureaucracy to divine the procedure that will follow. Her mother will deal with it, she knows that too. There will be a black file, labeled “accident,” on her shelf for the next twenty years. Papers will be sorted, signed, sent off, phone calls will be made. Things will be put in order again. They will swipe it all up, they will rebuild their empire of sweetness and celebrate with an immaculate chocolate cake: alternating layers of biscuit dough and ganache, covered with chocolate flakes and a white chocolate truffle on each slice, nested in a bed of whipped cream.