



Lisa Krusche

Our Anarchistic Hearts

S. Fischer Hard Cover

How are you meant to rebel when everything already seems lost?

Two young women: Charles and Gwen. Charles is dead against moving to the countryside with her post-hippie parents. Luckily, she can count on a newsagent's, a palm tree and wifi. And Gwen? She lives nearby, her wild, grimy lifestyle an escape from her parents' prosperity. She steals money from the boys she sleeps with and gives it away. It is high time these two women met.

Lisa Krusche's debut novel *Our Anarchistic Hearts* is about the impossible demands of modern life. How are you meant to rebel when everything already seems lost? All that remains is friendship. And this friendship develops its own explosive impetus...

Lisa Krusche was born in 1990 in Hildesheim and lives in Braunschweig. She studied Art History and Aesthetics at Braunschweig University of Art (HBK). Her writing has appeared in magazines and anthologies including "Mindstate Malibu. Criticism is just another form of escapism". She won the 2019 Edit Radio Essay Prize, followed in 2020 by the Hans-im-Glück Prize, and the Deutschlandfunk Prize at the Festival of German-Language Literature in Klagenfurt. *Our Anarchistic Hearts* is Lisa Krusche's first novel.



S. FISCHER VERLAGE

The world is blue at its edges and in its depths.

This blue is the light that got *lost*.

Rebecca Solnit

[...] and I want our hearts to be open.

I just wrote that. I want our hearts to be open.

Leslie Jameson



Sample translated by Bradley Alan Schmidt

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CHARLES

Dad is running naked through Charlottenburg.

“Faster,” I say to Achim, the Uber driver, “we’ve got to catch him before the police do. Dad used to be an anarchist, he doesn’t have the best relationship with the police.”

Achim has one hand on the wheel and flicks a cigarette butt he’d just smoked out the window with the other one. He speeds up.

“What’s he now?” Achim asks.

“A sad lunatic,” I say, pointing to Dad’s bare butt at the end of the street. Every once in a while he disappears behind people, trees, trash cans, cars, only to reappear, glowing white and infinitely embarrassing.

“I’ve never chased someone,” Achim says.

“Isn’t that the top league for Uber driving?”

“That’s the long haul trips. That’s where the real money’s at.”

“Oh Achim, it’s not always about the money.”

“Hey, knock it off. You gotta make a living somehow.”

“Sure,” I say.

“What’s your Dad got in his hands?”

“A head,” I say.

“Ah,” says, Achim, even though he doesn’t understand. How could he? He can’t know that the head Dad is holding in his hands belongs to his former gallerist.

“It’s not real,” I say, “it’s a replica. Dad’s a lunatic, not a murderer. Not yet.”

“Well, I’m glad about that,” Achim says.

“Me, too.” My phone rings. “Hi.”

“Hey, Charlie. What’s up? I’m riding my bike and I’m on way.”

I grin. It feels good to hear Gustav’s voice.

“Make way, watch out. Sorry, yeah, I know this isn’t a bike path, but I’m chasing someone down here, I’m so sorry.”

I hold my phone a little away from my ear while Gustav yells at passersby in his constantly polite manner.

"Another one of your relatives?" Achim asks.

"No," I say, "even better. Gustav. The best boyfriend in my life."

"Aren't you too young to be able to make claims like that?"

"You just know some things."

"Hello?"

"Hi."

"I thought you were gone."

"Just didn't want to go deaf."

"Sorry. People again. Regardless of whether it's life or death, the most important thing is always upholding traffic laws. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for traffic rules, too..."

"Gustav."

"Yeah?"

"We're on a mission here."

"Okay, don't go off, got it. So, where are you guys?"

"Just outside Dad's gallery."

"Is that where he's going?"

"I don't know. I'm just guessing."

"All right. I'll meet you there. See you in a bit."

I hang up. Dad barrels into a man, who yells after him, gesturing. Dad doesn't even turn around.

"Your Dad's in shape."

"It's the drugs, they keep you young."

"Are you a sad lunatic, too?"

"I wonder that myself sometimes. But I think as long as you wonder that, everything's still fine."

Dad stops.

"Pull over, pull over. Wait here, All right?"

"Sure," Achim says, flips on his blinker and lights another cigarette. I jump out, slamming the car door.

"This ain't no tank."

I sprint over to Dad.

"Capitalist pigs."



I have to laugh as he stands there, my father, so lost and so naked, accusing his gallery of being interested in money. A few people have stopped to watch the spectacle, others just walk by, because you can't stop and stare at every crazy naked person.

"Hey!" Gustav jumps off his racing bike and lets it hit the ground.

"Take it easy, Dad," I say.

Dad lifts the hand with the head up high and staggers slightly from left to right.

"What's that?" Gustav asks.

He sewed himself a doll version of his gallerist. Because of Kokoschka and everything. Then yesterday he wanted a ceremonious parting of ways. To get a fresh start."

"But it got a bit out of hand?"

"You could say that."

Now Dad is bellowing incoherent fragments of lines from Leonard Cohen songs, waving his arms in the air and rocking his naked crotch back and forth. His penis hits against his thighs, left, right, left, right. If anything were to go badly later on in my life, I'd always blame it on this moment.

"Oh. We're in the Cohen phase."

"We're in the Cohen phase," I repeat, "more specifically, the part where he can't remember the lyrics."

"This is art, Gusti, art," Dad says.

"No," says Gustav.

"Really, it's not," I say, "it's crap, Dad."

Gustav pulls a bathrobe out of his backpack.

"That's what I love you for," I say. Earlier, when I got Paloma's message that she'd possibly just seen my father walk past naked, I just left, dipped my hand into my parents' not-so-secret money box, and that was it.

"Put it on now," I say, and hand Dad the robe.

"Seriously," Gustav says.

Something inside Dad slips. His gaze shifts from manic to empty. He puts the head down beside him. As he awkwardly tucks his arms into his sleeves, he looks at Gustav like a gullible dog.

I spit my gum on the ground, pull a new piece out of my pants pocket, flick the silver paper against Dad's head, and stick the stick into my mouth.

"All right. Let's go," I say.

Dad just nods again. I reach for his hand, which is as big as ever, though somehow he seems smaller to me, and we to the Uber. Gustav carries the head behind us.

“Does your mother know?”

“No. She’s at a class on improv dance and self-awareness.”

I roll my eyes.

“Maybe I could, I mean I’d really, really love to smoke a blunt,” Dad says.

“You can when you get home. Until then, maybe Achim will give you a cigarette.”

“Who’s Achim?” Gustav asks.

“Me,” says Achim, leaning against his Uber.

“Okay,” Gustav says, “you take the car, and I’ll get there later with my bike. All right?”

“Sure,” I say.

“Sure,” Achim says.

I turn to Gustav again.

“Thanks,” I whisper.

“Always,” Gustav says.

Dad bumps his head trying to climb into the Uber.

“But don’t throw up,” Achim says.

“That’s another one of you Uber drivers’ pat sayings, right?” I ask.

“You’d know what I mean if you constantly had to clean up strangers’ vomit.”

I nod. We drive off, this time a little slower, which isn’t half as funny, overall it all just doesn’t seem very funny to me now. The head glares up as me from the footwell.

“What was with that cigarette?” Dad is sitting in the middle of the back seat, legs spread. The robe only barely covers all that it should.

“Only the driver is allowed to smoke in here,” Achim says.

“You’re one of those people,” Dad says, curling up, “who won’t give me what I deserve. I deserve it.” He traces the seams of the back seat’s upholstery with his finger.

“Come on, Achim,” I say, “give Dad a smoke. Knock it off.”

Achim looks at me, then reaches into his shirt pocket and hands me the pack of cigarettes.

“I was a social work student for a while back when,” he says, “and the word that comes to mind for this here is ‘dysfunctional’”

“You don’t have to studied to know that, though,” I say. “Lighter.”



S. FISCHER VERLAGE

"You'd make a good boss someday," Achim says.

"With those kinds of parents," I say, "it comes with the territory."

Achim smiles. I pull a cigarette from the pack, turn around, stick it between Dad's lips, and light it.

"Take a drag," I say, and Dad takes a drag

"Good," he says, and then he smokes for a while. Achim rolls down the window in the back.

"Charlie Charles," Dad says, "we can't tell your mom. She'd go crazy otherwise, completely crazy."

**GWEN**

Kicking off side mirrors and smashing windows and destroying motorcycles colors the world completely pink, the kind of pink at the edges of the horizon when night turns to day. Never thinking, holding back nothing, always hitting, grabbing the rage and striking, that's how demolition mode works. Smashing against things with your body, motions against possessions. And I know how to tell if it's hitting the right things. Hitting other people is different, I don't have much experience. But the thought of it triggers such a flicking haze inside me, and I hope it could be golden.

"You do it," Mo whispers to me, referring to the guy who just shouted "better if you give up now" across the empty parking lot. His friends egg him on, and he jumps up and down, his head held high, his grin lit up with adrenaline, his body taught with tension. There's a supermarket, which has been shuttered for years, shielding us from the street. The blades of grass jut out through the cracks, blackberries wrap around the façade, there are random old shopping carts standing around, full of leaves and garbage, some of them overturned, missing wheels, demolished. A plastic bag blows across the lot, rises up and then sinks again, whirls around, entangled in an oblivious dance. I run my tongue over the surface of my teeth, so smooth. I still have a baby tooth that doesn't have a replacement underneath, so I can't lose it.

the only thing I hold sacred: one last baby tooth

Mo's breath is right behind me. I want to, but my hesitation. But the tooth.

"You're really scared after all?" Mo asks.

His voice is soft, I think 'tender', warmth spreading over my neck.

"She's scared," Dennis says.

A head nods in my direction, elbowing Vince. He opens another beer. It's from his dad, who Vince says doesn't notice, and himself doesn't notice or just acts like it, as if it didn't have something to do with the huge lostness we're all connected by.

For real, is what I want to ask but I don't really know who to ask, the others or me.

"We're not here for fun and games," someone from the other side says.

Idiotic, I think, always these same sentences and just like the grass in the cracks, the only thing that grows between the repetitions is an ever increasing lameness. That takes the cake: we're not here for fun and games. We connected on Rumblr, victimless casual fights for free, get matched with people who want to be knocked on the mat. Anonymous, efficient, and with pro tips for good meeting spots. No one was really shocked when the app came out, shock is such a worn out category anyway. But maybe the fun is in the seriousness after all, the aim to destroy your opponent. When I think of the Thai boxing coach from YouTube, the goal is always breaking their leg. I think, I'm not actually here to think. I think about everything I swore to myself. Then, finally, I get moving.



"Yeah, man!" shouts Vince after me.

"Finally," I hear Mo say.

The guy yells past me, "you really sending a girl?"

And everything turns red. It flows across the parking lot, floods without waves, just a massive wall. It washes over the silver in the shopping carts, covers the dilapidated front of the supermarket, envelops the dark green blackberry leaves, swallows the plastic bag. My rage is bigger than I am, it's everything I am and more, it's my devotion, it's everywhere, and that's good because then it's even in my every move.

When does a man disappear? How much can the texture of his face, of his body be changed, when does the humanity get lost? And my desperation makes itself spread on the floor with other people's body fluids? My inadequacies, my limitations, the other, when does the dissolution begin and does it feel like relief? A body under my pubic bone that has given up, a body like pudding, sublimity kicks in. Gold has always been my favorite color because there's something so warm about it, and how it pours over the whole world, over my insides, lighting everything up, like the sun turning the night blue into something lighter. Arms wanting me to stop, voices calling me to let up, but how can you stop people who have nothing to lose except the contemplation in the fucked-up moment? Mo, dragging me away. The body's friends who rush to his body. What's wrong with me. How much of a psycho can you be. I hear myself saying we're not here for fun and games. I stagger across the parking lot, dazed by how clear the world is. Everything is so crystal clear. I feel enormous, bursting out of myself. I think of Hulk, sheer nerves. She's completely nuts, they say. One of them is on the phone. Face all white. God, I think, we all look like baby ghosts. Blue lights flashing ominously at us through the gaps between the buildings, getting closer and closer, the boys cursing something, me just standing there, the ramification of the blood on the stones, hopefully I can get my hands up, and the wailing sirens fuck my eardrums, and Dennis yells that we have to get the fuck outta here now. I tilt my head to the sky, it depends on your perspective when you look at the pictures, and I howl like a dog, the sirens sound like the mystical call of the great wolf. Everyone looks at me. Their fear materializes in purple shivers. There's nothing they fear more than a woman gone mad, you should think about that. But the siren wails hard and harder and Dennis tries to pull me along and Vince yells, asking if I'm completely whacked out, that I should come with them now, they're the fucking cops. My heart is all quiet.

"Fuck you then," Dennis shouts, already almost gone.

Squealing tires, returning blue, and the thought of my mother's face as seeing her daughter on a screen in the custody of the police jail. I run off somewhere, I don't know my way around here at all, from the parking lot, through neighborhood, across the yard of an elementary school, a fence, another fence, an allotment, another fence, and then I lean against a shed between two stacks of wood. Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, I tell myself. The bushes have raised their bare branches admonishingly, as if to say, not everything that glitters is golden. My body steams, my legs burn, I feel so cloudy. The sky is perfectly blue. I picture my sweat is silver, like a snail slime trail down my side to my waist.

you wanna lick silver from my waist, I write M.



S. FISCHER VERLAGE

what?

DM

where RU?

dunno

what kinda tard move was that

was everyone's idea.

nope, not that way

I send a shrug smiley. It's a lifestyle.

@ Mickey D's now

OK coming, I write

No answer, but blue check marks. I start running again, but this time easy, like with a morning jog, to start the day right, and like I never do, because I don't know why you'd start days in the first place.