

Olivia Wenzel

1000 Serpentes of Fear

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'I have more privileges than anyone in my family has ever had. And I'm still in the shit. I'm hated by more people than my grandmother can imagine. On election day, I spend twenty minutes saying exactly this to try to talk her out of voting for a right-wing party.'

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OLIVIA WENZEL, born in Weimar in the GDR in 1985, studied Cultural Studies and Aesthetic Practice at the University of Hildesheim and now lives and works in Berlin. She writes drama and prose and makes music as Otis Foulie. Wenzel's plays have been performed at theatres like the Munich Kammerspielen, Hamburg's Thalia Theater, Deutsches Theater Berlin and Ballhaus Naunynstrasse. Alongside her writing, she runs text workshops with children and young adults. *1000 Serpentes of Fear* is her first novel.

Translation: **Katy Derbyshire**

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I
(points of view)

Quiet! Hush your mouth, silence when I spit it out

In your face, open your mouth, give you a taste.

Missy Elliott

My heart is a vending machine made of tin. The vending machine is installed on some station platform, in some town. A solitary, factory-made block, and yet inconspicuous. An automaton, a shiny, square, stainless-steel colossus. Why is it standing there all alone, who invented it?

The vending machine has a pane of glass at the front so I can look inside and see all the snacks. I zoom in: The snacks are painstakingly laid out, laughing at me from their cellophane dresses. Market psychology may have played a role in their arrangement, but that doesn't matter now. These tasty little snacks—from the morbid pigs in a blanket to the coconut candy bar—they're all waiting here just for me, and I get to choose. I can look at them, buy them, drool on them, and gobble them up in whichever order I want. *Good grief*, I think suddenly, *another 15 minutes to go*; my stomach gurgles, the train will be here soon.

My stomach gurgles again. All it wants is attention, it's not real hunger. Still I start searching my bag for change. And as I'm thinking about whether I want coconut or pork—my index finger already reaching for the buttons—that's when it happens.

The tin automaton suddenly seems bigger to me; it starts moving. The train track I'm next to starts moving too, the ground around me, the entire automaton, all of a sudden everything is vibrating, me included.

For a moment, I lose my bearings. When I look up, I see that the sky has darkened, there's soot everywhere. My index finger is still reaching.

Coconut, flashes through my mind, then I fall to my knees, then I pass out.

It might have been best if I'd sought refuge inside the vending machine the minute I stepped onto the platform. It might have been best if I'd moved straight into that tin automaton and lived inside it for a few days. If I'd wrapped myself in one of the crackling cellophane foils and eaten what fell into my lap, then built myself a rustling toilet. I'd have had peace and quiet and time, I mean, I love peace and quiet and time, and I'd have been safe. I could have looked out through the glass pane and watched the people on the platform. I could have pulled faces and sung impassioned songs, dubbed people's conversations in real time. I could have asked pressing questions of the people who'd have come to me for a snack. Or answered their questions. I could have fallen in love. I could have forgotten my previous jobs, my previous life, just like that. Just for fun, in a really weird way!

I could have started a new life.

But I so desperately want to go out into the so-called wide world, don't I?

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Right now, I'm in Durham, North Carolina, the second most northerly state of the American South.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FOOD?

Yesterday, I fell in love with a local delicacy: thick, warm waffles with nuts, maple syrup, and chocolate sauce are served with fried chicken on top.

You can choose between four wings or drumsticks.

PERVERSE.

Yes.

WHERE ARE YOU STAYING?

In a decent hotel. It has AC, and you can't open the windows. When the housekeepers have finished, they turn on the lights, all five of them, even when I'm not there. The pool in the courtyard is lit up 24/7, even though it's far too cold.

AND HOW ARE YOU? WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR EYES?

...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TOMORROW?

Sleeping in.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE FOOD.

A busy restaurant, nondescript music in the background. The Black waitress asks me: *You want them wings or them drumsticks?*

Drumsticks please, I say. Then she says she likes my hair. I say: *This was more of an accident, but now I like it*. We smile at each other as if we were friends. Suddenly, I feel at ease... as if I belong.

NICE.

I like the food, the combination of waffle and chicken is wrong, unsettling, perfect. There is no white staff in the place, just a few white customers. A mother and her son are at the next table, both Black, both submerged in the depths of their cellphones for the length of their visit. The boy looks like the dreamy type; he's playing a car racing game, his body is a little too big for him.

NICELY PUT.

Since I've arrived in the US, the first thing I notice is people's skin color.

COOL.

No.

NOW YOU'RE MAKING THAT FACE AGAIN.

STOP IT, PLEASE, IT'S YOUR WHITE-PRIVILEGE FACE.

Sorry, it wasn't conscious.

IN ANGOLA, THEY CALLED YOU A COCONUT, DIDN'T THEY? BROWN ON THE OUTSIDE, WHITE ON THE INSIDE. WHEN YOU MAKE THAT FACE, I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THEY GOT THAT IDEA.

Everybody always wants to talk to me about racism. That's not my mission in life.

HEY, YOU STARTED IT.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Still in Durham, North Carolina.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL AT HOME?

...

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

...

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

I'm saying that a lot of Black people here can't afford a car, but that the city is built entirely for drivers. I'm saying that last year a Black couple was shot dead on campus by a notorious racist. I'm saying that the whites in the countryside have a lot of weapons and that it's better if I don't go there. I'm saying that on campus, there's a tall statue on a plinth called Silent Sam, commemorating all those who fought in the Civil War—for the Confederacy, against Lincoln. I'm saying that the white donors will pull their monies from the university if anyone touches the statue, and that after protests from the Black community, a memorial was placed next to Silent Sam to all the Afro-American slaves who built the university. I'm saying that the new memorial looks like a picnic table: a big round slab lifted above their heads by garden gnome-like figures. I'm saying that these slaves stand submerged in the ground as if they're being swallowed by quicksand, and that some people started sitting on the new small memorial. I'm saying that they then put up stools around it and the memorial really did turn into a table. A table supported by the enslaved Black population, kept from sinking into the mire, a place for wealthy white students to eat their lunch during recess as if it were the most natural thing in the world. I'm saying that I'm not making any of this up. And that I'd like to know how many white terrorists will have to drive their cars into antifascist demonstrations before all the Silent Sams in this country will finally be desecrated.

THAT BLACK PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE BLACK AND WHITE PEOPLE
THINK THEY'RE WHITE.

What?

THAT BLACK PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE BLACK AND WHITE PEOPLE

THINK THEY'RE WHITE.

Yes.

WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR EYES?

I've been crying.

ATYPICAL.

What can I say?

WHEN DID IT BECOME EMBARRASSING TO CRY IN PUBLIC, ACTUALLY?

Sometimes I get back to the hotel in the evening and watch HBO on the gigantic flat-screen TV for hours so I can hide from my feelings. Until sleep comes along. At night I dream about young Black men jumping out of planes to their death, angrily shouting the names of white American women.

Ashley, Pamela, Hillary, Amber!

Lots of clouds, lots of names, a long fall, no impact at the end, only me waking up.

THE WAY YOU STARTED SOBBING WHEN THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT ASKED:

Do you want a cookie?

I cried like a baby, for a whole hour, drunk as a skunk, high above clouds.

YOUR SOFT, OBSESSIVE HEART. IF YOU COULD EAT IT UP, WOULD YOU?

Depends who's offering it to me. What the service is like. What it's served with.

DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE IN PLACES WHERE PEOPLE WORK FOR YOU?

Yes, very. I find service islands calming.

MAYBE BECAUSE HERE PEOPLE DON'T TALK ABOUT POLITICS AT WORK.

IT MAKES THE ATMOSPHERE SOFT AND INNOCUOUS.

On the other hand, politics is always talking about work.

Watch now: the 10 most popular topics of politics of all times! Number seven: the future of labour!

We're so accustomed to the promise of salvation through more jobs that we're not even surprised anymore when someone comes along and whispers:

Hello, little slave of work—shake your booty, make it twerk!

WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO SEE WHEN THEY LOOK AT YOUR
FACE?

Me?

WHO DO YOU RESOLVE YOUR CONFLICTS WITH?

Me?

WERE YOU EVER INVOLVED IN A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION?

No.

WERE YOU EVER PART OF A CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION?

No.

IS YOUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN SAFE?

What are the criteria?

WHERE ARE YOU REGISTERED?

At home.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

...

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

A few days ago, I was in New York. On election night, I was in a bar in
Manhattan, just a few blocks away from Trump and Clinton.

GO ON, GO ON.

I'm talking to British managers working for Shell, we're drunk and full of
good cheer.

Cheers!

I've vowed to be tolerant; I don't want to judge them. They're surprisingly
pleasant, eloquent men; we get on well. One of them says he's a feminist,
that Angela Merkel's policies are destroying Syria because no one's going
to go back to rebuild the country, and that Hillary Clinton has as good as
won. The other one, Keenic, is euphoric. *This is amazing*, he keeps
repeating in his British accent. I'm attracted to his low voice and the
mellifluous language of the former colonial empire.

WHAT DETAIL ARE YOU HOLDING BACK?

...

WHAT DETAIL ARE YOU HOLDING BACK?

And his “ethnicity.”

COME AGAIN?

I’m attracted to his “ethnicity.” It’s embarrassing to put it like that. Or to think it.

WHY?

This is amazing, Keenic says, and he means the atmosphere of this New York night, the election, the sense of what’s coming, maybe that feeling we share of witnessing a historic moment. Around midnight, I go back to his hotel with him; we’re convinced the next morning will confirm that the US has its first female president. By two thirty we’ve drunkenly fucked ourselves to sleep. My phone is vibrating, texts from my German friends.

Nine eleven – eleven nine!

Look after yourself!

What the fuck?

I turn on the TV just as Trump is starting his speech. Keenic wakes up, snuggles up to me (such smooth skin on this guy, and he smells so good, is it coconut oil?) and we have sex again. While he’s thrusting with his well-toned manager’s body, I can’t take my eyes off the TV. Keenic groans, but I don’t understand what he’s saying, so he repeats it twice: *This is amazing. This is amazing*. Donald Trump’s family really does look shocked, I’m thinking while being fucked on the 16th floor of a luxury hotel in Manhattan by a man whose company is dedicated to destroying the environment.

AND FOUR HOURS LATER, ON THE PLANE TO DURHAM, THERE’S THE FRIENDLY FLIGHT ATTENDANT WITH THE COOKIES.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Still in Durham.

There’s a piece of graffiti here on a wall: *Black lives don’t matter and neither does your votes*.

DID YOU EVER DAMAGE GOVERNMENT PROPERTY?

Black lives don’t matter and neither does your votes. I don’t think this is proper English. I think the slogan will stay on this wall for a long time. I don’t know if these things will ever stop or just get worse. In the US, I’m

blacker than in Germany.

This is amazing.

Pardon?

This is amazing.

THE SLAVE TRADE IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS MODEL IN HUMAN HISTORY. FORCED LABOR ALWAYS WAS AND WILL ALWAYS BE A BREATHTAKING CONCEPT! TRADING IN ENSLAVED BODIES: WHIP THEM, RAPE THEM, STRING THEM UP FROM TREES!

I love that idea!

English speakers tend toward violent hyperbole in their language.

I would kill for the cookies they sell over there!

In Germany, people tend toward violent hyperbole in their actions.

I would kill them if I could.

People set fire to hostels for refugees, shout *Go on, jump!* at them until they fling themselves out of the windows, hunt for kids in an 80-strong lynch mob in order to stab them like animals. I have to believe that these people are marginal. I have to believe that mainstream society condemns these attacks. Otherwise, the country I live in would be not much different from the US. Otherwise, the country I live in might soon vote the exact same way. Otherwise, the country I live in would no longer be my home.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHEN YOU FALL ASLEEP?

I fall.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHEN YOU WAKE UP?

Sometimes there's a little melody, a giggle, but often there's a short, cold burst of fear.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL AT HOME?

In my sleep.

WHAT IS THE REASON FOR YOUR STAY?

Where, in the world?

WHAT DO YOU DREAM OF?

...

WHAT DO YOU DREAM OF?

I see a brief flicker of an image from a high school history class, but

updated, newer somehow, including drones. Instead of heads in steel helmets, I see the faces of my friends. My beloved girl friends as they run, duck for cover, trip and fall, as they're hit by shots and kicks, by lashes of the whip, fists and bombs—somewhere in Berlin, somewhere in New York, somewhere in Thuringia. My friends with severed limbs, covered in blood, lying on the ground with twisted faces, my friends among broken, collapsed buildings. Their glassy eyes wide open, tiny flies flitting about them.

AND THEN?

And then:

My girl friends as chapters in a history book that's being slammed shut, without emotion, all businesslike, because this all happened such a long time ago. My dead friends as something that doesn't concern anyone any more. My dead friends as a memory, as a memorial on paper, about which they will say:

Why are you being so sensitive, that was the spirit of the age back then.

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WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

I've just landed, but nobody applauded... it looks cold outside.

ARE YOU CARRYING FOOD?

No.

ARE YOU CARRYING MORE THAN 10,000 DOLLARS?

No.

AT WHICH ADDRESS WILL YOU BE AVAILABLE?

I want to decide spontaneously.

IT DOESN'T WORK WITHOUT AN ADDRESS.

Okay.

WHO SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN CASE ANYTHING HAPPENS TO YOU?

What's going to happen to me?

WHO IS YOUR CONTACT PERSON IN CASE OF EMERGENCY?

If I got run over by a random pick-up truck tomorrow and my grandmother got a dramatic call from the USA, she'd have a heart attack on top, then and there. So that's not an option.

Intense heart attacks! Brought to you by: your grandchild!

I'll give Kim's name and number instead. My grandmother probably wouldn't agree and Kim definitely wouldn't; she hates the fact that her data doesn't belong to her.

SMARTPHONES, FACEBOOK, GOOGLE MAPS – THEY WERE ONCE THE MEGALOMANIAC WET DREAMS OF ZEALOUS STASI OFFICERS.

A sexy, sexy dream come true!

And maybe, I think suddenly, Kim hates me too.

Sorry Miss, we have sad news. We've got your friend here in the hospital. You were mentioned as her emergency contact. She's in a very critical condition. Could you please help us find – hello? Miss, are you still there? But maybe Kim wouldn't just hang up if something were to happen to me. Maybe she'd pause, think of me, worry. Maybe she'd pack a case head over heels, leave her flat and come after me. Maybe she'd be sitting by my hospital bed in the USA only 28 hours after that dramatic phone call. I'd still be in a coma, battered and bruised by the reckless pick-up truck, and she'd hold my hand. Then she'd start sobbing quietly at some point, occasional tears wetting my bed cover, many caring nurses gathering

outside the door, women and men praying for me, for us, *Hallelujah*. Once Kim had finally calmed down and her tears were dry, she'd stroke my blood-encrusted cheek and whisper apologies, very quietly, almost soundless, her warm breath on my ear. She'd regret that we'd hurt each other. And then at last I would wake from the coma and focus my only remaining eye on her.

DOES IT BOTHER YOU THAT MEN CRY IN SO FEW FILMS?

What?

ARE YOU RELIGIOUS?

WHICH FAITH DO YOU BELONG TO?

I don't belong to anyone.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?

Social relations.

ARE YOU UNMARRIED?

That sounds medieval.

DO YOU LIVE ALONE?

Yes.

WHERE DO YOUR CLOSEST RELATIVES LIVE?

I don't know, exactly.

ARE YOU VISITING FAMILY MEMBERS DURING YOUR STAY?

No.

WHERE DO THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY LIVE?

I don't have any real family, in the biological sense.

The lone wolf, far away from its pack!

That's not what I mean.

Out in the open – the adventure begins!

I come from a family in which the idea of travelling as far away from oneself as possible was romanticized to an exaggerated degree.

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

I come from a family in which travel was always an unfulfilled desire. But not lone-wolf-like, more...

YES, GO ON.

Picture this:

My mother: a young woman with bright blue hair and studded belts, a punk, trapped in the GDR. A young woman who starts a relationship with an Angolan man, in a small East German town where everybody knows everybody. A young woman who wishes herself out of there, who yearns excessively for her exit

permit to be approved, shortly after 'the African' has to go back to his country. A young woman who envisions a life together in Angola, a life under a different sun, a life in freedom. But then, at 19, only a few months after giving birth to twins: arrest, annulment of the exit permit, her mental health crumbled away in a Stasi prison like a Hansa butter cookie.

IS THIS A PITCH FOR THE NEXT CLICHED MADE-FOR-TV GDR MOVIE?

The problem with clichés isn't that they're not true.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM THEN?

They're pretty often true. The problem is that they only ever repeat the same one perspective over and over.

SO?

Picture this:

My mother: a woman who brings my twin brother and me up as best she can but as if we're to blame for her life, to blame for her never getting out of the *shitty damn state*, meaning sometimes East Germany and sometimes West Germany.

Before 1990, after 1990 – she always has to stay. The man is long gone, has a new family in Angola because the old one never came to join him back then, and always not enough money, always alone.

BUT SHE HAD YOU TWO KIDS.

My mother today: a 53-year-old woman who can never get over her multiple imprisonments, or her son's violent death. A woman who commits herself to a mental health institution and declares me dead too. An injured creature backed into a corner and baring her teeth, her whole life long.

RABIES?

YOU CAN DIE OF RABIES ONLY 15 DAYS AFTER CONTAGION.

ARE YOU IMMUNIZED?

Against what?

AGAINST EVERYTHING THAT MIGHT BE A DANGER TO YOU.

That scar, that small relief-like raised shape on my mother's upper arm and the arms of so many others born in the GDR. It used to fascinate me, as a child. I thought it was a miniature map of a wonderful secret land.

PERVERSE.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE NOT IN CONTACT WITH HER?

She refuses all contact. I last saw her at the funeral.

IN WHICH INSTITUTION IS SHE NOW?

I don't know.

AND YOUR BROTHER?

What about him?

HOW DID HE LOSE HIS LIFE?

Lose his life. Get loose of his life?

OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS?

My father writes two emails a year from Angola. One of them always comes a day before our birthday, or now only before my birthday. He can't remember the correct date.

AND YOUR GRANDPARENTS?

My grandfather is dead now, cancer, but my grandmother is still around.

WHERE IS SHE NOW?

Probably at home, in front of the TV. Or at the doctor's surgery.

WHY SO DISMISSIVE?

Picture this:

My grandmother: loyal SED party supporter and proud mother of two daughters, proud in general and often, due to her good connections (nylon panty hose and jeans, West German chocolate and a vacation bungalow on the Baltic every summer), proud of her pretty blond hairdos, proud of her obvious beauty, of her above-average intelligence, proud of her daughters' beauty and intelligence. My grandmother: a conceited teenager who longs for nothing more than to be an air hostess. To combine pleasure with profession. To travel to all the countries in the world, to be able to go away without really being away. *Because of course, the GDR is top, it's my homeland, I don't want to actually leave.* To be an air hostess so as to escape her violent father. To be an air hostess so as to see more and be more than the stupid idiots from her town, to be an air hostess so as to find out what flying feels like. But then unfortunately never being an air hostess, getting pregnant instead and later being a secretary. Slipped disc in her mid-forties, since then unfit to work.

SO MUCH FAILURE ON THE MATERNAL SIDE.

Excuse me, is your family: a) cursed, b) just very unlucky, c) mentally ill or d) pretty solid considering the circumstances?

My grandmother today: a cute, plump woman just over seventy, who's afraid of flying and can't set foot in an elevator. A woman who loves the warmth of her electric blanket. A woman who keeps dreaming she can fly and who can't speak openly to me, her easily irritated granddaughter, and certainly not about her other grandchild, the boy who took his own life.

WHY CAN'T SHE TALK TO YOU ABOUT IT? WHAT ARE YOU KEEPING SECRET?

Nothing.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE WORD *HEIM* IN THE GERMAN WORD FOR KEEPING SECRETS, *VERHEIMLICHEN*? OR ABOUT THE WORD *UNHEIMLICH*, UNCANNY?

No.

OR ABOUT THE WORD *GEHEIMNIS*, SECRET?

All the men in the family are dead or far away, the surviving women are damaged, each in their own way, and I can travel as often and as far as I like, even though travel never mattered to me. Even though I didn't need to do anything to travel, apart from being born in the right place at the right time. I can even think about travel as a vacation activity, I can think, while travelling, about the self-determined, pleasant experience I'm currently having, while thousands of people are embarking on forced travel, referred to with words like crisis and wave and influx.

STOP, STOP, STOP, THAT'S A DIFFERENT SUBJECT. CONCENTRATE. TRAVEL AS BASIC SUBJECT, LONELINESS AS SIDE EFFECT. WHAT ELSE?

Why loneliness?

WHY DO YOU BITE YOUR NAILS?

When we were kids our mother would sometimes go on vacation without us. Once, she spent two months travelling around French Guyana and Suriname. Our grandfather was in hospital at that time, which meant our grandmother's life was on hold. So a friend of our mother's, Melanie, looked after us. Melanie's partner, a moderate neo-Nazi, was there too sometimes. When dinner was ready he liked to call my brother and me to the table; he'd yell through the entire flat for us *coffee beans* to hurry up and come to the kitchen. When my mother came back from her vacation, she'd felt so good abroad that it was the first time her nails weren't bitten to the quick, the skin around them unharmed.

SO SHE DID TRAVEL AFTER ALL.

WHERE TO?

She'd be sad for days afterwards, every time, because she had to come back to Germany.

AND YOU?

I have more privileges than anyone in my family ever had. And I'm still in the shit. I'm hated by more people than my grandmother can imagine. On election day, I spent twenty minutes saying exactly this to try and talk her out of voting for a right-wing party.

Intense heartaches! Brought to you by: your grandmother!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

While I pack my trolley case for my trip to the USA I have interesting feelings. Maybe because I can leave aside, for a moment, the baggage my mother, my grandmother and my brother stuffed their shadows into. Maybe because I'll soon be travelling with different baggage. I think there's nothing more liberating than being anonymous.

THERE'S NOTHING MORE LONELY THAN BEING ANONYMOUS.

DO YOU REALLY THINK TRAVELLING HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH FREEDOM?

Maybe. But maybe my nostalgia ahead of travel is exactly the same nonsense my grandmother and my mother fell for.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

My family?

ORIGINS. WHY SO IMPORTANT?

At the end of the day, it's like this: I'm on a rooftop terrace in New York, I've drunk two glasses of red wine and I feel relaxed and grown up. And then, at the end of the day, I think:

In New York, I walk along Fifth Avenue unselfconsciously eating a banana.

My heart suddenly starts pounding, I swallow several times and look out over the city. No wind blowing, no dog barking. I'm alone, my face feels cool, the lights of the tower blocks flashing in the distance as if morsing me a message. *What?* I ask out loud, and I feel the too-fast pounding, *Come on, what?* This racing heart for weeks, more and more often, especially at night. I've got into the habit of compulsively listening to my heartbeat before I fall asleep. Years ago, a doctor told me a rapid heartbeat often had psychological causes, fear and anxiety. So more and more fear, recently? Fear of what? The tower blocks won't tell me. Something is heading in my direction, I know it is, I think, and I belch silently.

YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A BUSTLING METROPOLIS AND YOU BELCH SILENTLY.

Do the people in a city of thirty million bustle more intensively than in the Thuringian Forest? Do I have more in common with the people in New York than

with those in the Thuringian Forest? Why do I feel so comfortable here? At the laundromat, on the streets, in the Mexican food place. The only place I don't dare to go is church. I'm worried they might smell my atheism there for miles against the wind.

FOR MILES AGAINST THE WIND, COME OFF IT.

A few years ago, Kim said she'd seen a diagram that showed I come from the most unreligious place in the world.

WHERE IS KIM NOW?

In Berlin.

AND WHY DO YOU FEEL SO COMFORTABLE HERE AND NOT WITH HER?

In New York, I walk along Fifth Avenue unselfconsciously eating a banana.

EXCELLENT!

THE THREEFOLD PROBLEM WITH BANANAS.

Let me explain:

1. Eating a banana in public as a Black person: racist monkey analogies, *oogah oogah oogah. Ouch.*
2. Eating a banana as an East German – the banana as an allegory of the inferiority of beige East Germany to the golden West. The banana as a bridge to prosperity, exotic fruits as a symbol of economic supremacy. *Jeez, those dumb Easterners queued for hours for them when the Wall came down.*
3. Eating a banana as a woman – blowjobs and all that. The banana as a penis analogy and a tool of sexism. Insecure pubescent teenagers traumatizing other insecure pubescent teenagers. *Do a deepthroat, heh heh heh. Heh heh heh.*

In New York, I walk along Fifth Avenue unselfconsciously eating a banana.

And afterwards I realize: That was a small moment that others call freedom. In

New York, I stand on a rooftop at night and stare nervously and cluelessly at a skyline I know off by heart, from movies and postcards. And afterwards I realize:

That was a small moment that others call future. In New York, I think of my brother and miss him less than usual. And afterwards I realize: That could be so good.