

Jarka Kubsova

In the Light of the New Day

Publication August 2026. 304 pages

- **A writer in search of herself. Deep in the Bohemian forest, the fates of two courageous women intertwine.**
- **The new novel by the SPIEGEL bestselling author of "Marshlands" – over 150,000 copies sold.**



‘Perhaps the forest wasn't just a refuge. Perhaps it was a place where she could finally be free.’

In order to write her new book in peace, author Elli Hajek retreats to a remote house in the woods. Here she is reminded of a character her Czech grandmother once told her about: Viktorka, the young woman who was declared insane after a serious incident and from then on lived alone in the Bohemian forest. When Elli learns that Viktorka really existed, she travels to the country she herself fled as a child. Elli wants to find out more – but deep in the forest, between glowing ferns and a rushing river, another task awaits her: before she learns the truth about Viktorka, Elli must face her own repressed history.

Rights of *Marshlands* sold to: Czech (Albatros Media/ Kniha Zlin), Danish (Turbine), Dutch (Atlas Contact), Italian (Neri Pozza)

Jarka Kubsova was born in 1977 in the former Czechoslovakia and has lived in Germany since 1987. She has worked as a journalist, ghostwriter and co-author of several successful non-fiction books. Her debut novel, *Bergland*, was published in 2021, followed in 2023 by the novel *Marshlands*, which was nominated for the Independent Bookshops' Favourite Book award and adapted for the stage. Jarka Kubsova lives in Hamburg.



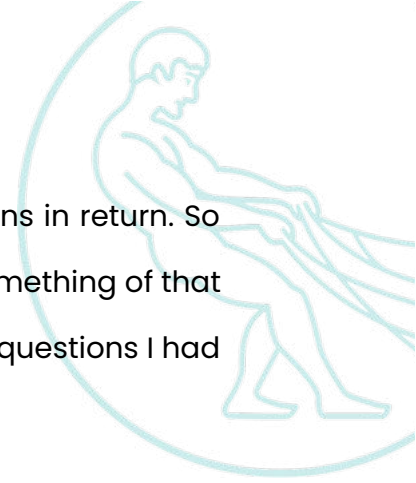
On the day I first visited, it promised exactly the conditions I had hoped for. It could scarcely have been more remote. On the drive to the address I had been given, I left the houses behind me first, then the fields, then the tarmacked roads. At one point I was following the satnav with the feeling that the route could not be right. The track grew bumpier and narrower; a strip of grass sprouted down its middle, and it ran so close to the trees that some of the branches brushed the roof of the car, or the windows, with a sound as though something were being torn open.

At some point I stopped abruptly, with the feeling that I had arrived. I got out of the car, and there it was. The house stood in a small clearing; it resembled a simple hut more than anything else, the kind a child might draw: a rectangle of wood with a pointed roof, on which sat a slender chimney. From the chimney, coils of smoke rose at a leisurely pace into the pale blue sky.

At a little distance from the house, the trees stood in loose rows, except behind it, where they grew dense and tangled, almost like something dark and alive. That was the only thing, at the time, that stirred a faint unease in me. But I would not need to venture into that impenetrable part of the forest, I told myself. I had already viewed several other houses before this one, but each had some flaw: too close to a busy road, or too near a railway line.

What's more, Voland, the landlord, had been skilled at making the house appeal to me. He wore cargo trousers, a green shirt beneath a waistcoat with many pockets, and a small hat on his head. He was probably a hunter, or so I reasoned, for he kept

his personal life to himself, and I did not ask, so as to avoid questions in return. So you want to live here, alone, as a woman? I had been prepared for something of that sort, but it never came. Which suited me well enough, for these were questions I had no wish to ask myself either.

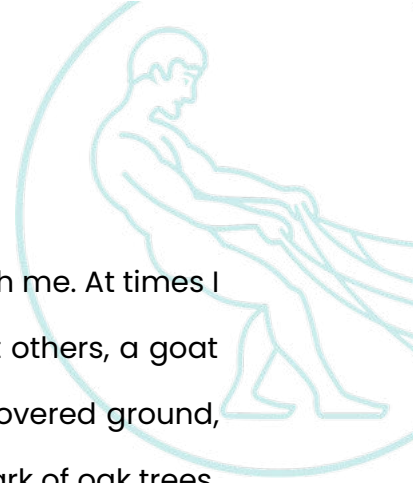


It was only when the conversation turned to the forest that Voland grew talkative. He led me round and told me that we were standing in a Hutewald, or rather in what remained of one. And since he could see from my expression that I had no idea what he meant, he explained it. As he spoke, he leant on a long branch that had been worn smooth, something between a walking stick and a shepherd's crook.

Hute, or Hude, derived from Huth, the verb meaning to tend or guard, he said. For that was exactly what had once been done in such forests: the tending of animals. Rather than clearing the land, people had let their livestock graze there, cattle, pigs, horses. The animals fed on beechnuts, acorns, fungi, but also on the young shoots and saplings. The result was open woodland with little undergrowth and broad-crowned, ancient trees.

He raised his stick and drew a semicircle in the air around us. "All of it stands under special protection. This is more or less primeval forest. Nobody touches it, nobody takes anything out; what falls, stays where it lies. What is dead nourishes other life. A forest like this has a soul, it holds stories within it," he said.

I wondered what he meant by that, but he was still talking. There were no other houses in these parts, and none would be built. The cottage had been an exception for so long that no one could remember quite why. I would do well to decide quickly, he advised me. An offer like this was rare.

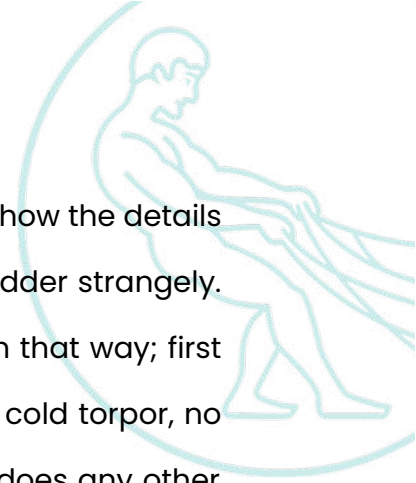


A persuasive salesman, this Volland. He won me over, and swiftly.

Ever since he had told me about the forest, his words had stayed with me. At times I saw a heavy-limbed brown ox crashing through the undergrowth; at others, a goat stretching towards a branch. I heard hooves stamping on the leaf-covered ground, and the muffled scraping as horses rubbed their flanks against the bark of oak trees. I saw a young herdsboy resting between enormous roots, dappled sunlight playing across his sleeping face.

I have a vivid imagination. Though I would not call it a faculty, for it is nothing I consciously bring about or practise; it is more that it simply happens. People, things, events, I see them sometimes, when I learn of them or am obliged to think of them. The more I know of something, the more clearly it takes shape before my mind's eye, like shadows or ghosts, though not the kind one need fear, for they are not truly there, but only in my imagination, which is a particularly lively one. These images are not lasting things; I pass by the place to which they belong, or my thoughts turn elsewhere, and they withdraw, or dissolve.

During the viewing, the forest had been quite still. That, too, was part of why I had made up my mind so swiftly. I might have guessed it would not remain that way. It had been February then, and the forest had still been locked in its winter stillness. Yet only a few weeks after I moved in, it awoke with an almost unbridled vitality I had not foreseen. In the treetops there were suddenly countless small birds, trilling, singing, almost shrieking, as though the winter had dropped away from them like an iron clasp. In the early mornings, when the light broke through the branches, it fell in hazy, pale yellow shafts onto the mossy ground, and day by day it roused what had burrowed and hidden itself there in late autumn, had frozen in place, organisms barely pulsing with life.



I recalled how, years before, I had helped Klara revise for biology, and how the details I had entirely forgotten from my own schooldays had made me shudder strangely. The idea that a living creature could reduce all its vital processes in that way; first the breath, then the movement of the muscles. In frogs in a state of cold torpor, no brain activity can be measured at all; the heart does not beat, nor does any other organ continue to function, yet the eyes remain open. I could not comprehend it; by every definition they were dead. And yet, when the right moment came, the animals simply woke again.

As they did now. As though at some secret signal, everything was suddenly in motion. The brown knots on the branches burst open and the green pushed out; leaves unfurled. The conifers seemed to have grown soft, pale green brush-tips overnight. The bramble thicket, which on the day I moved in had caught my eye as a grey, withered tangle I intended to clear before long, appeared all at once full of sap, supple and alive. You could almost watch the shoots lengthen by the day, reaching, it seemed, towards the house.

I could almost feel the teeming, the sudden busyness, the creeping and scurrying, the swelling and reaching of roots and branches around me. I shut the windows, drew the blinds, switched on the lamps, and yet felt with every fibre how out there everything was driving forth with a blind, exuberant urgency and haste, how it distracted me, how it wished to infect me and lure me out of doors, so that I might look, breathe, touch, so that I might marvel and wonder. Even indoors, shut away from it all, it was as though something were tugging and pulling at me.

I resisted. I was here to write, after all. I had already been struggling with the manuscript for an unusually long time; I was behind, not dramatically so yet, but the deadline was drawing closer. From now on I would work with an iron discipline. It was

to be my finest book, the one that would win everyone over. With that in mind, I unpacked only the bare essentials; most things I left in boxes for the time being. I tried to overlook how they cluttered and spoiled the already modest living space. The cottage consisted of a kitchen with the sitting room adjoining it; upstairs was a bedroom and a room which I used as a study. Sometimes I did need something from the boxes, and whatever I retrieved while searching for it I simply left out. It was not a priority just then.

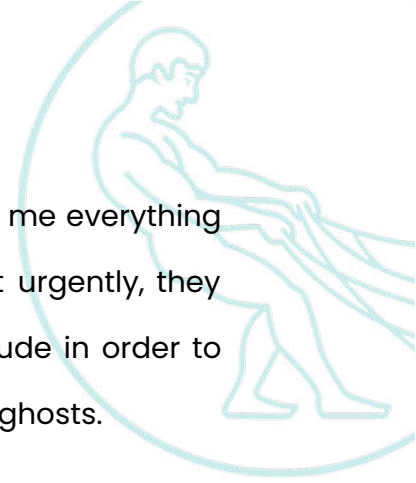
The priority was the desk. To my irritation, I had forgotten to tell the removal men in time that certain pieces needed to go up to the first floor. And so I hauled the desk upstairs alone and in a temper, for that was precisely what I was: alone, and in a temper. The staircase was narrow, and I gouged an ugly gouge into the wall. I was annoyed about that, but far more annoyed at myself.

Jan would have shaken his head, had he been there. "Why won't you let people help you, Elli?" I could almost hear him say.

"Well, it's up here now," I muttered to myself. Then I looked at the desk. It fitted that spot perfectly. Through the small window, a rectangle of light fell across the centre of the desktop, and I felt a small wave of something faintly foolish rise within me. Everything I had come here to achieve, everything I had hoped for, seemed in that moment simple and within reach, as everything feels simple and within reach for as long as one is only imagining it.

Then I began work in earnest, and the small wave of happiness broke against the shore and seeped away. The story I had drafted sounded contrived and implausible; every sentence I wrote felt wrong. Hours slipped by like minutes, with nothing to show for them; everything was exhausting, and heavy, and maddening. A feeling of dread took hold of me and grew greater with each passing day. Writing was my remedy,

successful writing at any rate. I am not good at many things, so for me everything depends on writing. Yet now, just when I needed my abilities most urgently, they seemed to have deserted me. It felt like a curse. I had sought solitude in order to accomplish something great, but what I had found, instead, was only ghosts.



I had found Viktorka. I saw her for the first time during my daily walk. I make a point of an hour's brisk walking; otherwise you seize up too quickly, and get a rounded back from sitting long hours at a desk. Here in the forest I always took the same route, along an overgrown forest track. At the first bend, a vast, rugged tree trunk lay to the right. One among many. What Voland had said was true. Each of those fallen trees was singular. Many were smothered in dark green moss; others looked almost burnished, gleaming silver. From one, the roots jutted out, curved like the talons of an enormous paw. Some had hollows, oval and dark, like a mouth torn open, shaped into a silent scream.

I followed the bend in the path, and there I saw Viktorka sitting on a moss-covered trunk. She was looking down at her legs, which she was swinging freely. Then she raised her gaze and looked directly at me, with eyes like coals. That very description of her came to me at once, and it was startling how right it felt.

I walked on, a little disorientated, a little faster than before, and when I reached the part of the forest where the ground to either side of the path turns marshy, I saw her again, wading through mud that reached to her calves. This time she did not look at me; her head was bowed, as though she were searching for something in the squelching mire. She had gathered up her skirt and seemed to be taking care that it did not get dirty. Even after I had passed her, long after I had passed her, I had the feeling she was still there, and that she was watching me go.

I walked back to the house and tried to think of something else. I tried very hard, but, as is the way with such attempts, every thought led me back to her image, and with each thought it grew more present. And so I resolved, at some point, to do the opposite. And I believe that was precisely what Viktorka wanted. I resolved to look for her.

I went back up to the attic room. On the desk lay the printed pages of my unfinished manuscript; I ignored them. I wanted to know what the internet knew about Viktorka. I typed Viktorka into the search bar, and, since I knew that was too imprecise, I added the name of the woman with whose life Viktorka's own was bound up: Božena Němcová. That was the name of the writer who had invented Viktorka, or so I had believed all those years. Then I pressed Enter.