

**Franziska Jebens**

***Above the Crashing Waves***

**Publication July 2026. 352 pages**

- **A novel for anyone looking to treat themselves to some time out**
- **Over 55,000 copies sold of Franziska Jebens' debut novel**



When we find our own strength, we can change the world.

Nea just wants to escape—away from the grey of Berlin, a city that has left its mark on her. Away from a routine life where the woman she longs to be feels like a stranger. Guided by her intuition, she finds herself on a tiny Cycladic island. Here, as if for the first time, she feels the sun on her skin again, the salt on her lips—and her true self. She starts working at the local bar for room and board, run by the enigmatic healer Hera. As she immerses herself in the world of medicinal herbs and the ritual gatherings of a local women's circle she remembers why life is worth living. Surrounded by a cast of quirky companions—including a quiet German expat known as "the Swede," the gentle yoga teacher Yannis, and a spirited goat named Meltemi—Nea learns to reclaim her voice and confront her trauma. When a violent storm hits the island, a life-threatening rescue mission in the crashing surf forces Nea to find a strength she never knew she possessed.

A life-changing adventure. A novel full of optimism, wisdom and courage.

*Above the Crashing Waves* is a declaration of love for womanhood, for female solidarity, for the healing power of self-discovery, for breathtaking nature and, of course, for the sea.



**Franziska Jebens** grew up on the North Sea coast and now lives in a secluded forest lodge in the middle of the woods. As a sea-loving adventurer, she travels throughout Europe as often as possible in an old Land Rover. Inspiration awaits her where the waves crash; she gets her best ideas on secluded beaches. One of these trips took her to the Cyclades. After her bestseller *Immer am Meer entlang* (Always Along the Sea), she sought distance from everything to reflect on her life so far. In unspoilt nature, right by the sea, she wrote the novel *Über der Brandung* (Above the Crashing Waves), which incorporates many of her insights.

## Sample Translation

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I am an island. A Greek one. One of the Cyclades.

I am a paradise barely known. The wild Aegean is my home, the wind my constant companion. I am made of volcanic rock, limestone, and red clay, of glittering sand and fertile earth, and in some places, amethysts even sparkle beneath my skin. But that is still my secret.

I am ravishing, a splendor, a feast for the eyes. I am harmonious, relaxed; they say I have good energy, that I bring happiness.

Strategically, I was never of interest. Only a few hundred years ago, a longing for wild primordiality drove a few brave souls to settle upon me. I was curious about them. In some places, they adorned me with glowing white cubes, decorated with pretty blue details. Other parts of me they planted with fruits, vegetables, and grain. But they left me a great deal of my wilderness.

I live with these people, just as I do with the dolphins, the turtles, and the countless fish that frolic at the bottom of the sea. On my shores, in the limestone caves, monk seals find a sanctuary to raise their young. Even the nocturnal bats like to hang from the ceilings of these caves.

In the *\*macchia\** of my stony slopes, the shy vipers, robins, and wild bees feel particularly at home. I can understand them well, for here, gorse and conehead thyme grow thick and spicy, competing with lavender, chamomile, and rockroses. They offer shade to the animals when the summer sun burns hot upon me. And my favorites—the gnarled olive trees, the rustling eucalyptus, the conical cedars, the feathery tamarisks, and the fragrant pines—are also fantastic providers of shade. Moreover, they protect my topsoil from the *\*Meltemi\**, the wild wind that sweeps across me quite often.

The idyllic lagoon on my east side is popular with the stately great egrets, and every now and then, a flamboyance of flamingos wanders there. You want to know where I am most beautiful? Where the sea ends and I begin, of course. In my hidden little coves, on my long, lonely beaches. Where the waves touch the shore—sometimes wild and thundering, sometimes gentle and quiet. Where the sand shimmers golden in the evening sun and the sea, sometimes turquoise, sometimes sky-blue, entices you to dive into its salty depths.

I am an island. A Greek one. One of the Cyclades. I surprise and astonish, protect and hide, comfort and explain. I liberate and heal.

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I open the small slot on the side of my phone and take out the SIM card.

On the dresser lie the framed photos from our girls' trip to Paris. Also, an upturned Polaroid of Zach and me, and the book cover with the bestseller sticker that my niece Milla painted for me. Beside them, the nails and the hammer.

How long has this stuff been lying around here? How long have I gone without hanging the pictures? So long that a girls' trip was two years ago, a niece is a head taller, and a relationship is long since history.

I grab the hammer and nail the SIM card to the wall. Right where the photos were actually supposed to go. The short strikes are surprisingly loud.

Of course, a second later, Melissa pokes her head through the door.

"Self-preservation," I say, nodding toward the SIM card. She sighs and withdraws. Constant availability is overrated. And I want the opposite of it. The opposite of everything that is now. How hard can it be to disappear?

I take the envelope with the money and go to Melissa in the kitchen. She has just made her morning instant cappuccino, which I wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. I slide the envelope across the countertop to her. The coffee spoon makes that irritatingly loud noise a stirring spoon makes when everything else is silent.



"Here. My share for the water damage. Thanks for taking care of it. And thanks for taking on a subtenant so spontaneously. I hope it works out with you guys."

"How long?"

"I don't know how long yet. I'll get in touch when I know."

"And where to?"

"Somewhere where there's nothing but waves besides me."

My friend looks at me sadly. In her still heavily broken German, which I have grown so fond of, she says: "I find it a pity."

I sigh, "Me too," and pull her into my arms. "But it must." She's happy that I'm speaking broken English for her sake and giggles.

We sway back and forth for a while, and I don't like the fact that I'm a little afraid of missing the smell of that terrible cappuccino. We release the embrace. She takes my hands. I bet she's going to say something now that's supposed to cheer us both up but only makes everything worse.

"Maybe there is a happy ending in a different country? First, this nasty rash on your neck disappears, then you find a super-hot surfer boy and all this crazy shit is already snow from yesterday. And at the end, we celebrate a romantic wedding by the sea. Mamma-Mia-style! I looove that movie!"

Of course, she immediately starts humming the chorus, which will now surely stay with me as an earworm for at least three days, and I have to laugh at how American she still is despite almost four years in Germany.

"No, my dear. That's not what I'm looking for. I don't want a good ending; I want a new beginning."

I wanted to say that casually, but my voice sounds cynical and hard, and somehow a bit cruel. I can read all of that on Melissa's sad face, and my urge to rush out the door immediately becomes so oversized that I can hardly resist it. Instead, I irritably scratch the red spot on my neck.

"I wish for you that the journey brings you a healing. Okay?" She points first to my heart, then to my neck.

I nod and smile. "And I wish for you that you never properly learn German, because yours is so much more beautiful than any real German could ever be."

"What? I speak perfect German!" She laughs.

I say what we always say when we won't see each other for a long time: "Good things happened."

She says: "Bad things happened."

Unison: "We survived both."

I shoulder my backpack, she gives me a kiss on the cheek, two, three, four steps, and I close the door behind me.

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The backpack sits heavy on my shoulders as I wait for the taxi downstairs in front of the apartment building. Who would have thought that the bare necessities could still weigh so much.

Last night, Melissa and I watched our favorite movie and toasted the farewell with a few stiff Vodka Tonics. We fast-forwarded through the bad scenes, and at the part where Reese Witherspoon leaves half her gear at a hiking camp because there's too much superfluous stuff, I packed and repacked my backpack completely one more time. However, almost everything ended up back in its depths for me. Even the blue-and-white summer dress. "It takes up hardly any room," Melissa said, pressing it back into my hand.

I reach for the straps and cinch them a bit tighter. Maybe I'm just unfit. Too much sitting at the desk, too much mental work, too much numbing. Recently, I heard a doctor say in an interview that sitting is the new smoking. Since then, I've felt somehow "smoky," even though I smoked my last cigarette fifteen years ago. I was twenty-three then... back then, my luggage was light. Though—is that even true?

Ten past ten. The taxi is late, which makes me nervous for some reason. But actually, it doesn't matter at all. I haven't even booked a flight yet.

The sky over Roncalliweg looks twilight-dark. January in the big city. It comforts me that Berlin looks just as smoky right now as I feel.





Finally, the taxi pulls up, and the driver hops out energetically. "Well then, hop in, young lady. To Schönefeld, right?" She takes my backpack, expertly tosses it into the trunk, and slams the lid. On the way to the driver's door, she stops abruptly.

"Heavens! Look at that!" Her arm shoots into the air, pointing at a swallow flying high above us. "I've never seen anything like that. In January!" She shakes her head. Her gaze meets mine. "Now don't look so sad. That's not climate change; that's just a mistake. One swallow doesn't make a summer yet."

I nod silently and would love to hug her. At least Melissa and Berlin's endearing gruffness will be missed.

The terminal is relatively empty. No gelled-back business types frantically waving their smartphones at priority boarding. No long lines of hyper children and their sleep-deprived parents waiting to finally recover from the rigors of the journey at the hotel pool. No giggling, champagne-tipsy girls on their way to a bachelorette party in Arenal. Only the animated chatter of the brisk retirees in a study group, likely looking forward to ten days of high-pressure cultural touring in Paris or Rome.

I stand in front of the large board displaying departures and let the listed destinations inspire me. I miss the clicking sound the rotating digits of the analog display boards used to make before everything went digital.

Cape Town is there. And Laos. And Melbourne. All too far. Curacao. Too hot. Seattle. Too cold. Venice. Too romantic. Zurich. Too tidy. London. Too dirty. Mallorca. Too German. Athens. I can't think of a "too" for it. I don't speak the language, nor can I read the Greek alphabet. I've never been there. No memories that could ambush me from behind. A blank slate. Athens it is. The flight leaves in an hour.

"One-way only, surely?" the woman at the counter asks, eyeing me curiously.

My mood brooks no questioning of my plan. In response, I only furrow my brow and refrain from asking what business it is of hers.

"That will be one hundred and sixty-three Euros, please."

Maybe she just meant well.

I stroll through the magazine shops, buy a bag of gummy bears I don't even like, and a copy of *\*Galore\** I probably won't read. Zach would say now that I only do it because I love the idea of myself reading *\*Galore\** while eating gummy bears. Because I find it interesting to test if I could be someone who reads *\*Galore\** and

eats gummy bears, and that this is exactly what makes me a good author. Method writing and all that. I don't know if that's true. Maybe it just makes me a good "self-avoider." And anyway, screw Zach!

In a coffee shop, I order a cappuccino and shout a horrified "No!" over the counter as the barista starts to dust cocoa powder over the foam. I hate that.

He winces and turns to me briefly. "Alright, alright. I'll leave the cocoa off then."

"Thank you," I whisper. "And I'll take that last chocolate brownie there, please."

Wordlessly, he hands me the cappuccino and heaves the brownie into a paper bag, which immediately develops grease spots.

I pay, give a fifty percent tip, blush while doing so, and start to sweat. Socially competent looks different. Will it be better in another country? In a country where I don't understand the people, where I am not understood? Or will it only get worse?

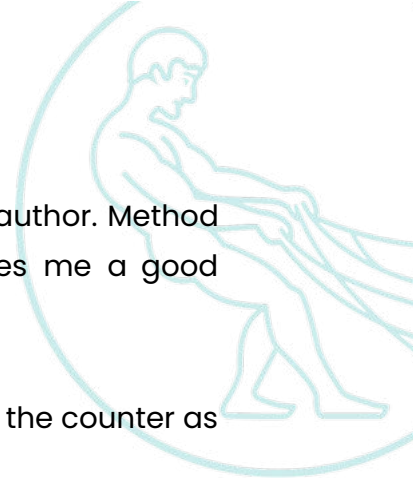
At security, I join the short line. My carry-on consists only of an apricot-colored fanny pack. Inside are three tampons, cash and credit cards, my passport, my cardless phone, and a pair of headphones.

The woman in front of me smells of heavy perfume; the thick gold bracelets on her wrist clatter against each other; her face is over-painted. Her sprawling presence almost crushes me. I bet I'll sit next to her on the plane. I always sit next to people like that. People with sprawling presences that displace everyone else.

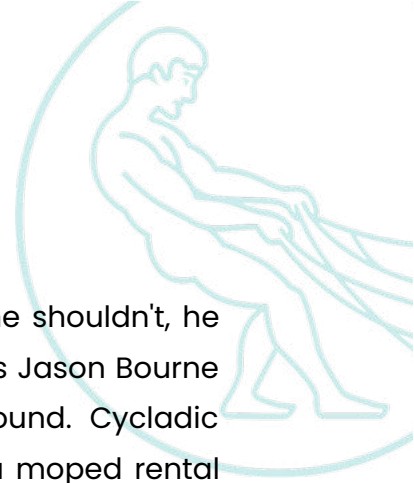
She heaves her Rimowa suitcase, coordinated with her cognac-colored outfit, onto the conveyor belt. From her oversized handbag, she routinely pulls out three zipper bags filled with countless cosmetics and medications. She seems prepared for every eventuality in life. My gaze wanders to my small fanny pack with the three tampons. I am prepared for nothing; I have never been prepared for anything. And that's why far too much always happens to me.

She places her iPad and phone on the belt. Finally, her laptop, after fumbling it out of its protective sleeve. A brief sting in my heart, a brief tingling in my fingertips. My laptop is lying on the bed back on Roncalliweg. I don't want to miss the laptop and what it symbolizes. And I don't want too much to keep happening to me.

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Jason Bourne finds his Franka at the end of the movie. Although he shouldn't, he stands in the doorway looking as inscrutable as only Matt Damon as Jason Bourne can. White cube houses with bright blue shutters in the background. Cycladic architecture, a Greek island. Franka used all that money to open a moped rental shop.

I had completely forgotten that the movie ends so beautifully. But I haven't forgotten how the second part begins. If even Jason can't manage to truly submerge, how can I succeed? Nowadays, where every speck of dust is findable.

The plane is pleasantly empty and the seat next to me remains free. The "presence-flaunter" took a seat four rows behind me. Naturally, before landing, she reapplies a healthy dose of perfume. Naturally, it's that sweet, heavy stuff again, and it wafts through the cabin, wafting around me and clinging to my hair and clothes.

The flight attendant smiles at me kindly and gives me a pack of salted almonds as a parting gift. I let them slide into the bag with the already opened but unconsumed gummy bears.

As I stand at the top of the stairs to the tarmac, I blink against the Greek afternoon sun. It's warm here in Athens. It smells warm. And it feels wrong that I was in Berlin just a moment ago and I'm already here. Unnatural and strange. As if I'd simply been beamed here. As if a part of the journey had been skipped—a part I should have experienced consciously. Rarely have I been so disoriented as in this moment, and I'm glad that at least my to-dos for the next twenty minutes are predetermined. Down the stairs, shuttle bus, maybe the restroom, then wait for my backpack. But after that...

As I enter the baggage hall, a deafening noise hits me. Hectic people and hectic bustle everywhere. Loud cries of a woman who can't keep pace with her husband, babies crying, hysterical wailing from a toddler who fell just a few meters in front of me, a large family trying to balance an entire hotel's worth of suitcases on three luggage carts, two snickering teenagers riding on the luggage belt being whistled back by their parents in broad Southern accents.

Everyone who wasn't at the Berlin airport or on my pleasantly empty plane has gathered here. Aside from the beige-clad study group, who are no longer moving briskly but very cautiously as a cluster.

The busyness of the people pours over me unfiltered. But it's not just unpleasant. In this chaos, I am less visible; I can almost disappear in it. I just mustn't forget to breathe.

At the baggage belt, my hand instinctively goes to my fanny pack to fumbled for my phone to find a conveniently located place to stay. The SIM card is stuck on a small nail on a mint-tinted wall in Berlin.

My gaze brushes a garish billboard. Cycladic architecture. The sea. A few seagulls. A few boats. Wind in my hair.

There comes my backpack, one of the first pieces of luggage coming over the belt. Awkwardly, I tug it into the room to make space for the other people at the belt. It is much heavier than I remembered.

I grab one of the straps and try to take as much momentum as possible to swing the heavy thing onto my back.

The fluid movement is abruptly interrupted. An impact that throws me off balance and makes me stumble forward.

"Jesus! Are you out of your mind?!"

I duck, trying to dodge the verbal attack, pause, can just barely stop myself from holding my hands over my eyes like a child who believes they can make themselves invisible that way.

"Helloho!" the person singsongs, annoyed. "How about an apology?"

"Uhm, I, I'm... uhm... I mean..." I stutter and turn around slowly.

"Oh, German. Of course. I should have recognized it by the backpack."

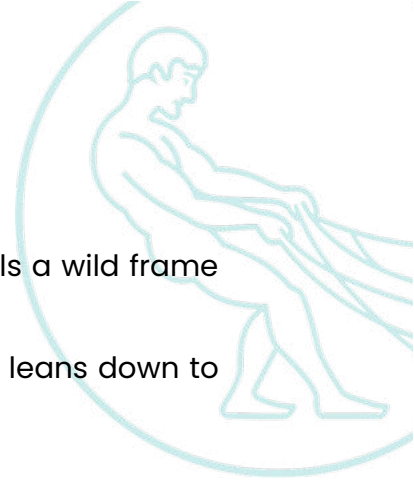
Before me stands a woman with dark curls and fire-spitting eyes. She rubs her hand over her ribs. Her dress is wet from her chest to her hip. An empty cup in her other hand.

I stare at her and briefly close my eyes.

"You owe me an orange juice, a favorite dress, a few intact ribs, and an apology."

"I'm sorry," I stammer, and I feel the tears spring to my eyes. I feel dizzy. I have to sit down. Here and now on the floor. I sit down. Sitting isn't enough. I have to lie down.

A few tears run over my temples into my ears.



The woman steps closer and looks down at me from above. Her curls a wild frame for her face.

"Well, it wasn't so bad that you had to throw yourself at my feet." She leans down to me. "You act as if I tried to kill you and not the other way around."

"I'm really very sorry. Please just tell me what I owe you for the dress."

"You look like you're completely dehydrated and hypoglycemic. When was the last time you ate?" the woman asks sternly.

"Don't know. Last night. Vodka Tonic."

"I see. Sounds real nutritious. Come on then." She kneels beside me. "First, a sip of water."

She holds out one of those fancy water bottles.

"Thanks."

"Do you like coffee?"

I nod.

"Can you stand up?"

I nod and slowly scramble up.

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When we stand facing each other, she holds out her hand, points with her chin at it, says "Sticky," as if that were her name, and grins. I grin back, shake her really very sticky hand, point to my own and say: "Clumsy. Nice to meet you."

"Likewise. I'm Dita, by the way."

Purposefully, she navigates us through the crowds toward the exit. Every now and then, she looks over her shoulder to make sure I'm still there. It's amazing how she manages to weave her huge rolling suitcase through so many people without bumping into anyone.

In the arrivals hall, she points to a small coffee shop: "That's where they have the best." She immediately sets off again. The noise level of the arrival-happy people swallows us. There are greetings, laughter, crying, kissing, hugging, and people being lifted onto shoulders. The people are part of a tremendously positive movement and aren't even aware of it because they're right in the middle. I want so badly to join this

radiant canon of reunion joy, to feel something warm, funny, euphoric too. But inside me, it only echoes hollow.

Dita swings the door of the coffee shop open and shouts "Jassu, Pana! Chaíromai! Ti kanis?"

The woman waves to us excitedly and floods us with a torrent of Greek, gesturing wildly. A scattered "Nee!" here and there is the only thing I understand.

Dita points to a table with two cozy armchairs. I set my backpack down beside them and wait until she is with me.

"I'll get us some coffee and something sweet. What would you like?" I ask.

"Sit down. All taken care of. I ordered us cappuccino and almond pastries. Is that okay with you?"

I smile and nod. "Then I'll go pay."

"Sigá, sigá. First we drink the coffee, then we pay for it." She looks at me searchingly.

"You are really quite German."

"Is that an insult?"

"An observation."

"What does \*sigá, sigá\* mean?"

"You'll find that out soon enough." She leans back as the barista places the coffee in front of us. "So, tell me."

"Tell what?" I ask, annoyed that I sound so defensive.

"Well, what else. Why are you here? How long are you staying? What are your plans?"

"Well, I think this questioning is also quite German."

"Touché," Dita laughs.

We stir our cups in silence for a while, and I think of Melissa and her instant cappuccino.

"I'll pay for the dry cleaning, of course. Or better, the dress. Orange juice on light blue fabric probably won't come out."

"I'll send you an invoice." She laughs again. "Don't worry about it. My aunt owns a dry cleaner. She gets every stain out." She waves her hand, ending the subject. "Better enjoy the coffee now." She takes a sip. "Mmm, it's good. Pana really knows her stuff."

"True. It's heavenly."

I sink into the soft armchair. Inside, it is pleasantly quiet. A peaceful oasis in all the hustle and bustle. Loungy music, the deep hum of the espresso machine, a few muffled voices. Slowly, I relax.



"Do you live here?"

"In the airport?"

"I mean in Greece, of course."

"I'm just pulling your leg. No, I live in Germany, but my family originally comes from Milos."

"Milos is a Cycladic island, right?"

White cube houses, blue shutters. The sea. A few seagulls. A few boats. Wind in my hair.

"Nee."

"Not?"

Dita laughs. "Sorry. \*Nee\* means yes in Greek."

I smile to myself. "I like that very much."

"Me too. Look, you'll be Grecified faster than you can say \*nee\*."

"And, do you miss Milos?"

"Yes, always, every day, every second. How could I not miss the sea? My parents emigrated when my sister and I were about seven."

"Hmm," I murmur, because for the first time, Dita sounds doubtful, and I don't know how much personal stuff I'm allowed to ask someone I've only just met.

"Don't get me wrong. Germany is good. But it's just not an island in the Aegean, with hidden coves and colorful stones and the sound of the sea and goats and wild thyme and rosemary and sage. Sometime, soon, probably, I'll go back." She sighs.

"This is some pretty heavy deeptalk. You're not a woman for superficialities, are you? What do you do for a living? Wait," she taps her cheek with her index finger, "let me guess. You're either an analyst at J.P. Morgan or a psychotherapist."

I have to laugh and shake my head.

"Saleswoman at an outdoor outfitter?"

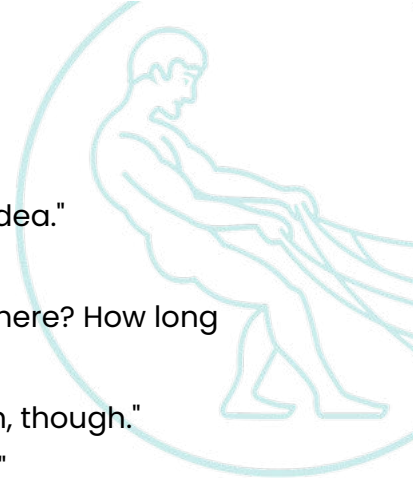
Again, I shake my head.

"No?" Mock wonder. "Could have been, with that giant backpack."

Me in a department store for outdoor clothes. Bringing a customer a pink rain jacket in her size. Standing at the register. Wishing them a nice day and saying goodbye. Doing something completely different than writing. A sting in my heart.

"Is it important what I do professionally?"

"Nee. As in, German no." She tilts her head slightly. "Many topics you don't want to talk about, mysterious stranger."



I sigh resignedly, look up, and say: "Change of scenery. Open end. No idea."

"What?"

"Those are the answers to the questions you asked me. Why are you here? How long are you staying? What are your plans?"

"Interesting. Coming to Greece without a plan. That is not very German, though."

"Well, I thought I'd stay in Athens for a few days and make a plan here."

Dita reaches into her long curls and expertly makes a bun that magically holds itself at the back of her head. Then she looks at me thoughtfully.

"I think I asked you the wrong questions earlier. Let me try again: What do you long for the most?"

For myself. "For the end of the world."

Again she laughs. This time warm and knowing. "I see, I see. Then you are completely in the wrong place here in Athens."

\*\*\*

"You, tourist."

I startle awake, feel some saliva in the corner of my mouth, and wipe it away quickly with the back of my hand. Standing before me is a compact woman. She is dressed entirely in black—simple pants, jacket, headscarf. In one hand, she holds a folded sun umbrella that, at first glance, looks like a lance. Her other hand is propped on her hip. It is still dark. The flickering streetlamp illuminates the woman's face intermittently. Does she look friendly or stern?

"You need help."

Friendly.

"No. Well, yes."

"That was no question."

Stern.

"I would like to go to Hera. Do you know her?"

"Everybody knows Hera. The taxi did not bring you?"

"No." I show her the note.

"Tsetse." She shakes her head. "\*Deilós!\* I can bring you. Hophop!" She points to a small motor scooter with a bag of oranges dangling from the handlebars. "But only



to the big stone. Rest of the way you must walk alone." She points to the moon. "It is full moon." As if that explained anything.

I have no idea how both of us and my backpack are supposed to fit on her bright red vehicle. On top of that, I have even greater doubts that the three of us, plus the umbrella and the bag of oranges, will arrive safely at this "big stone."

She climbs onto the scooter, expertly wedges the umbrella under her arm, and waves her free hand toward the backpack. "Give me this." She places it between her legs.

I have no time to question this strange expedition. The umbrella-lanced orange woman seems to be my only rescue.

"Hophop," an almost imperceptible gesture of the head, which presumably means I should sit behind her.

Timidly, I climb on and ask cautiously: "Helmet?"

Instead of an answer, she lets the engine roar and laughs. "Hold tight, funny German! \*Achtung, Achtung, Autobahn!\*" She giggles and pats her hip with her hand.

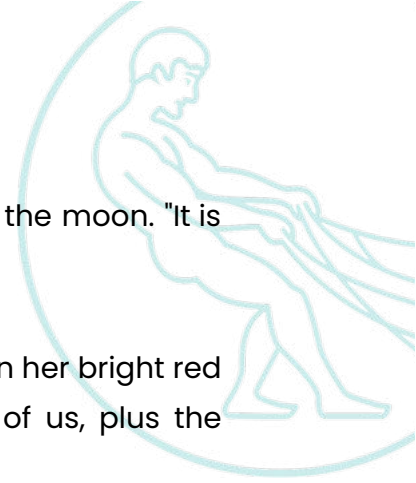
And before I have properly settled on the scooter, she hits the gas, and the cold night wind flows mercilessly through my pant legs. I move a little closer to her warm body and try to figure out the best way to hold onto her without being too indiscreet. Stupid. That really is the least of my problems right now.

We leave the port of Kefonisi behind and drive through dark alleys, past Cycladic cottages that look exactly like the ones on the billboard at the airport.

We leave the village behind, and slowly the two-stroke engine crawls up the serpentine of a mountain. Again, the smell of exhaust. My hands are so cold I can hardly feel them anymore. Only for a moment do I close my eyes, thinking of Zach and how often he envied me for being able to sleep anywhere and everywhere. "Escape-sleep," he called it. It would be fatal now. Better not. I open my eyes and think I recognize a steep drop-off to the right of the road. Then we zoom down the mountain in neutral and, having reached the bottom, leave the paved road. We continue over a bumpy sand track. "\*Achtung, Achtung\*," I hear the driver call out, and already a thick branch whizzes just inches past my head. We drive slower and slower on the worsening track, then at a walking pace. I duck in her rhythm to avoid more branches and shrubs.

Then she stops abruptly. Ahead of us, in the middle of the path, lies a large rock.

"See? Big stone. Hophop!"





Meaning, I should get off.

I take my backpack from her.

"Here." She reaches into the bag and hands me an orange. "Follow the way. Fifteen minutes down, and then Hera. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Good luck, \*Frau Autobahn\*!" Again, she giggles and throws her head back. Then she turns the motor scooter and rattles away.

"Thank you!" I shout and wave to her with the orange in my hand for a while.

The rattling grows quieter, then quieter still, until it can no longer be heard. Instead, there is now a soft rushing sound, like waves breaking on a distant rock. Otherwise, the early morning world makes no sound. A cold shiver runs down my back. Wandering through unknown terrain in the darkness isn't necessarily something I do all the time.

A light wind makes the leaves on a tree rustle. In the bright moonlight, I recognize the matte, mint-colored trunk of a eucalyptus. The overgrown path leading past the large rock looks wild.

It smells earthy and somehow like animals. Small pebbles crunch under my new hiking boots as I turn around once to grasp this place. I feel as if I've fallen out of time and space, unable to truly find my place in the surroundings or the situation. I don't know what awaits me at the end of this path; I wonder why the taxi driver didn't want to bring me here; I am curious and fearful at the same time. Dita and the woman with the oranges are the only people in the world who know I am here. Was this what I imagined "disappearing" to be?

I shoulder my pack and leave the eucalyptus behind, then the large rock, duck under a tamarisk, get brushed by oleander, trip over a root, get caught on a thorny bush that remotely reminds me of juniper, squeeze past more large stones that have broken out of the rock wall to my right. It is now completely windless; I am sweating. I stuff the thick jacket into my backpack. The sound of the sea becomes a little louder with every step. And the moon shines bright. Almost as bright as if it were actually long since day and the sky had simply mistaken its blue.

After a slight bend, the path becomes wider again. The dark sea suddenly lies there like a mirage and surprises me with its eerie and deep beauty. The silvery light of the moon shimmers mystically on its night-blue surface. Within me, something shifts in

the right way. Just briefly. I fail to hold onto it. A blink of an eye, and it has already vanished.

I stand on a rocky plateau from which a weathered wooden staircase leads down into a sandy cove. To my right, behind a spreading pine, I discover a generous wooden deck perched on poles about three meters high, which connects directly to the plateau. Upon it is a small hut nestled against the almost vertical rock wall. The wide deck seems to float over the sea and looks like a fan spanning the hut in a three-quarter circle.

There is no light burning in the hut. I dare to step onto the wooden planks. To the left of the entrance to the hut stands a small bench, which I head for to rest a bit and think about what to do next, or perhaps better, what to leave undone. The planks creak, even though I try to move as quietly as possible on them.

Above the door, I discover an inscription. The moon illuminates it just enough for me to read: *\*As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul.\**

No idea what that's supposed to mean.

Gently, I let the backpack slide onto the bench and sit down next to it. The air is very mild now. My feet ache from the hiking boots that are still far too stiff. Quickly, I unlace the boots and get rid of the socks. My white, somehow spongy feet with the sock imprints look completely out of place on the grey wood. Exhausted, I lean against the hut wall; all tension drains from my body. Escape-sleep. Now. Just curl up here and have a while of sweet nothingness.

"Fuck!" The cry of a little owl startles me. "What am I even doing here?" I puff into the darkness. "The crazy shit just never ends."

"All of life consists of crazy shit, darling," answers a deep woman's voice in English.

My heart almost stops.

"But there is an excellent antidote."

I turn left, then right, but can see no one far and wide.

"Hera?" I ask cautiously into the night.

