

The note



Bastian Fähnrich

It was a wonderfully sunlit but bitter cold November day. A great deal of snow had fallen overnight, and in the morning everything was covered with a thick, powdery layer of frozen crystal-white. From the sea blew a chilly, somewhat gusty wind. The air was filled with millions of ice specks and, thanks to the light beams of the bright winter sun, many of them even happened to blossom for a split second in my field of vision. An overwhelming spectacle, I thought, compared to the blaze of colours of flowers that normally develop and unfold their natural beauty already at an earlier time of the year. Hence, the only thing that was somehow absent in the present scenery and which I tended to miss a little bit was the fragrant scent that usually emanates from spring flowers.

A few moments later I found myself in the town's library, attracted by the odorous smell of thousands of books. I chose a book from the shelf in the English section and headed for the loan desk to borrow it, and caught sight of her. There she was, again, the librarian, a beautiful young woman, a rose among roses. For a short while I was able to watch her out of the corner of my eyes. Then we faced each other, I gave her the book, and, after she had handled it, I received it again. Yet, this time, I didn't turn right away but opened the book immediately, put my nose closer to it and sniffed the pages. She gave me an amazed look. What a pleasant scent, I thought, and enjoyed the whiff in its full flavour.

Over the book's rim I noticed that her gaze was still fixed on me, and hence I explained in a whisper, not sure if she really heard what I said,

"There's nothing more tempting than the fragrance of printing ink, is there!?"

I got no answer, but a rather dazzling wink, instead.

As I left the library, I went further on in my reasoning and eventually concluded that it must be merely the letters and words that make up the special odour of books. Letters and words, almost meaningless as such or in terms of quantity, of course. But taken together, arranged into narrative form, they denote the content of life. Well, at least they might hint at it or give a little bit of evidence of it.

Later, as I sat in the bus on my way home, I took the book and began to read. Haroun and the Sea of Stories, by Salman Rushdie, the famous master of language and renowned creator of make-believe worlds. Without doubt, this surely must be a book about the very essence and significance of letters and words! And, after a few pages, my assumption proved true, since I began to understand that this book has actually something profound to say about the existential meaning of storytelling and, correspondingly, about the vital importance of listening to any sort of tale. So, for that reason, I was quite keen to go on with my reading.

But, when I turned the next page, a little piece of paper suddenly slipped out of the book and dropped on the floor. I bent down and picked it up. Holding it in my hands, I discovered that it was a loan slip with a return date on it. As I inspected the sheet of paper at closer range, I realised that I had forgotten to take a new one for myself. That is, the return date on the loan slip obviously referred to the lending period of the person who had borrowed the book before me. What the heck, I thought, I can get another loan slip tomorrow, or, perhaps, I just note it down for myself. I pulled my pen out. And then, there, on the sheet of paper, I somehow spotted something else, apart from the usual text: letters, words, a note. Or did I dream? Was it a poet's grieving, longing account? Well, in any case, it took me some time to make up my mind. But, lastly, the only possibility that I saw was to go back. I simply had to give it a try, and sort this out.

At the next stop I left the bus and rushed straight away to the library. As usual, I had to line up in the queue before the loan desk. However, this time, it felt as if I had to wait for ages until my turn came. The young lady recognised me at once when I finally approached her. She welcomed me with a curious look. I placed the book in front of her on the table and addressed her in a thoroughly reasoned way.

"Excuse me, I found this loan slip here in the book ... between pages fifteen and sixteen, properly speaking. Well, the case is that someone somehow left a very

strange note on it. And the return date refers clearly to the last lending period, so the person who borrowed the book before me must have written the note and has also left the loan slip in there. Hmh, I would really like to talk with that person. Perhaps you can help me and find out *who* this was?"

I handed her the small piece of paper. There, right under the return date stamp, were the following lines, in a clear handwriting:

'The rose of my world – I lost her, forever. She faded, withered, went away. She: the loveliest flower in the universe, the most precious plant in my garden. I: the dreaming poet on a drifting planet, the caring gardener. We: the perfect couple under the sun, both made of stardust, however. Now I know, but yet it's too late.'

She observed the piece of paper carefully and read it several times through. Then she gave the loan slip back to me and said with an interested voice.

"Oh, that's fascinating. But, unfortunately, I cannot tell you ... unless I, you ... what did you say, where did you exactly come across the loan slip?"

"Between pages fifteen and sixteen", I replied and immediately sensed a delicate feeling of excitement in the pit of my stomach.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes, no doubt." I stated.

And then, after a short while, she answered, with a sly, amused smile on her face and an undeniable sparkle in her eyes.

"So, guess this means ... that ... *you* ... Please, let's discuss about this in more detail after I'm off from work. Do you have time this evening?"

I was speechless. She really couldn't be mistaken. Well, she, a librarian, simply had to know. That is, in the end, it all made sense: the letters, the words, the note. And there it was, again, the fragrant scent, even on a winter's day. It's never too late.

Bastian Fähnrich, Oulu, Finland, November 2001