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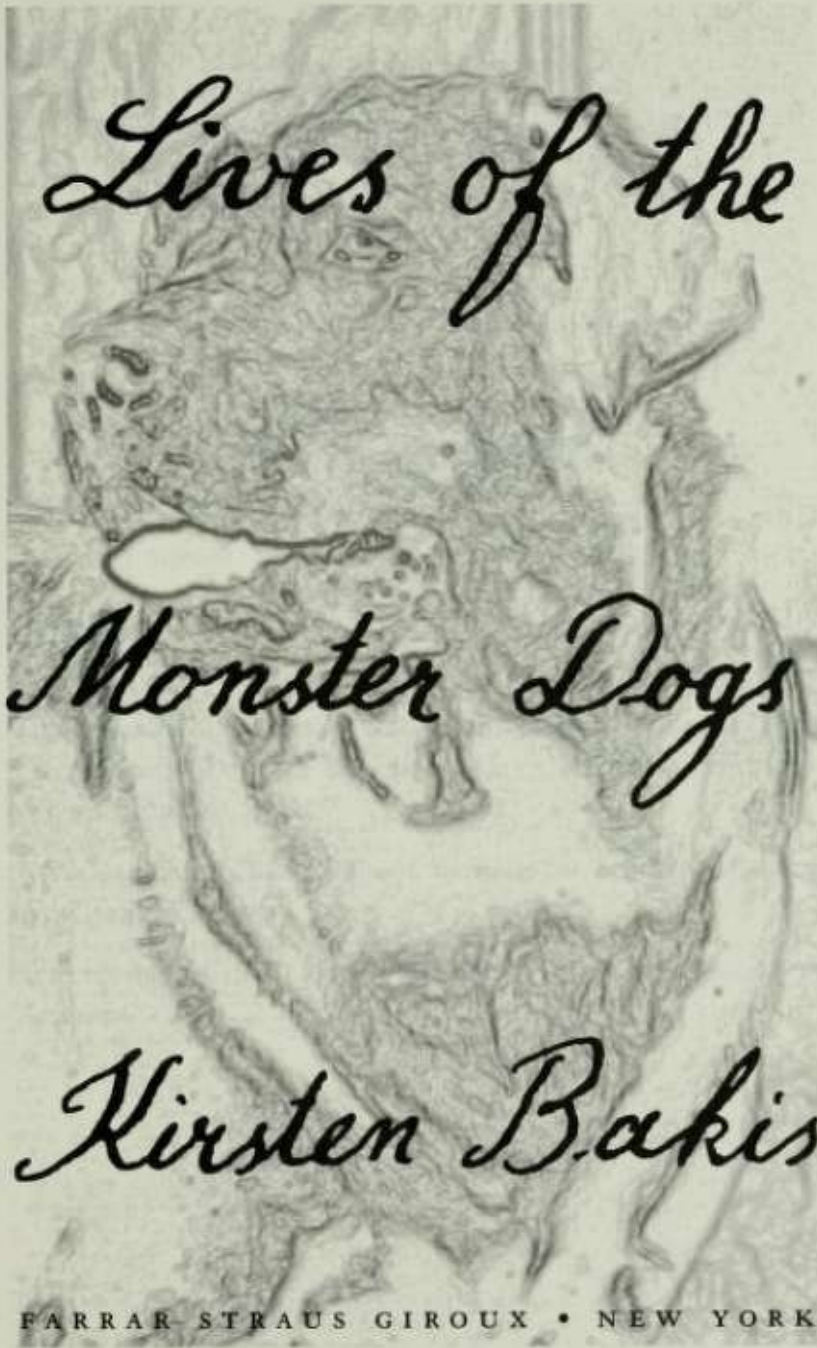
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*Line of the
M... Days*



Lives of the
Monster Dogs



Lives of the

Monster Dogs

Kirsten Bakis

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX • NEW YORK

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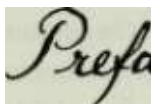
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In length and breadth how doth my poodle grow! — Goethe, Faust



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In the years since the monster dogs were here with us, in New York, I've often been asked to write something about the time I spent with them. It's also been suggested that I edit the unfinished manuscript left behind by their historian, Ludwig von Sacher, partly because I wrote a lot of articles about the dogs when they were here, and partly because I was Ludwig's friend.

I wanted to do both of these things immediately, but I also wanted to do them slowly, and well. I guess I was waiting for something—for Ludwig's papers to reveal some hidden meaning, for the events I remembered to sift themselves into an identifiable pattern—and it always seemed on the verge of happening.

Now it's been over six years since they were here, and I'm beginning to think that's how it will always be, that I will always be just on the verge of being able to recall and understand everything in the right way. It's as if all the things we

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see and remember are parts of a long equation that always adds up to a seamless, irrefutable proof of the present—but that's the problem: the present changes from one moment to the next. We never arrive; there isn't any place to arrive.

So I've put Ludwig's papers together in order, including some of his journal entries along with the unfinished manuscript, and I've described as best I could what happened in the years he was writing them, which was when I knew him.

I'd like to thank Lydia Petze, who was also Ludwig's friend, for her help, and most of all for the sustaining friendship she's extended to me and, more recently, to my husband, Jim Holbrook, and our daughter, Eleanor, the first child in the world (I proudly believe) to be blessed with having a Samoyede for a godmother.

When Ludwig began his manuscript it was called *The History of the Monster Dogs*, but later he changed the title to *Lives of the Monster Dogs*. I think (though this is just a guess) that he might have had a plan to add biographies of the living dogs and to have those form the main part of his book,

although at the time he stopped writing he hadn't even begun to do that. Whatever the reason, "Lives of the Monster Dogs" is written on the top sheet of his manuscript, which has been sitting on my desk for the better part of the past six years. The book you're holding now isn't exactly the one for which the title was intended, but I felt, somehow, that I couldn't call it anything else.

Even now, we're still inundated with books, movies, and documentaries about the monster dogs. Mine is not the first or the last version of their story. But I knew the monster dogs and I loved them, and I hope that, in my own way, I have done a good job of telling their story. I meant to.

Cleo Pira New York City October 2017

delve* o/ Me

yAdxrauf

FROM THE DIARY OF LUDWIG VON SACHER NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 16, 2000.

The past is obscure. It is blurred by dust and scratch marks, hidden by wide pieces of brown tape, soot and mold stains. I am sifting through old documents that are oxidizing and crumbling as I touch them—things that have been burning, slowly, for a hundred years, throwing clouds of tiny particles into the air. Particles that once carried information—a bit of ink in the downstroke of a "d," an infinitesimal part of a space between words—now fly out, disorganized and meaningless, into the world.

I don't know if I will ever finish my research, and I want to leave some record of my endeavors: if not the finished paper, then at least a description of my attempt to write it. I've recently developed an illness, or psychological disorder, which comes on periodically and may soon prevent me from working. I must record what I know while I can still think clearly.

I am searching through these documents for the history of

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my race, hoping to organize the information before it disintegrates into a chaos of dust. We are a race of monsters, recently created, so our history is short. I am reading the writings of our founder, a Prussian scientist who drew up the plans for us in 1882, but our race did not come into being until nearly a century later.

The name of the scientist was Augustus Rank, and he conceived the idea of a race of super-intelligent dogs, with artificial hands and voice boxes, to be used for military purposes, and devoted his life to creating them. He was fascinated by prosthetic devices—the possibilities. Many hideous animals were made before we were perfected.

What do you have to say, Augustus? I have here on my desk a pile of manuscripts and a pile of photocopies, taken from a microfilm, which are barely legible. He kept a diary. Some of the entries are short, some hard to make sense of.

Nearly ran out of cocaine today, but faithful M. came after dinner, just in time.

That one is easy: he was a driven man; I can imagine him in his laboratory, late at night, eyes wide,

working fast, thinking fast.

Disposed of R.S. today: had been complaining.

That one is more difficult. I suppose R.S. was a person who worked for him; I'm sure Rank drove him hard. But Rank didn't fire R.S. or let him go. He had a small colony of followers and assistants from whom he demanded obedience, devotion, and secrecy. He could not let a dissenter escape into the world.

When I am done I won't need the people anymore. The dogs will be my people, perfect extensions of my will. I, who am now one man, will become an army — an army of dogs. They will be absolutely obedient to me. Their minds will be my mind, their hearts

will be mine, their teeth will be my teeth, their hands will be my hands . . .

He was a man who wanted to control things, to extend himself beyond the boundaries of his body. He demanded obedience from his human followers, but it could never be perfect—there would always be dissenters, people who questioned him. Humans could not be perfect extensions of his will. But we could. No human loyalty can equal the fanatic devotion of a dog.

I am trying to imagine Augustus Rank as I read his diary. There are pictures of him. He looks the part of a mad scientist: stiff collar and wild hair, dark staring eyes. The photographs, like the documents, have not been well preserved. Because of the blotches and stains, the dust on the microfilms and the crumbling edges of the papers, I seem to hear his voice through a heavy static, coming from far away.

I can't imagine him clearly, because he has no real smell. His scent is not human—it's the smell of oxidizing paper, dried ink, old photographic chemicals, brown tape used to hold the documents together. I can smell the history of the papers: human hands that have touched them, and the gloved prosthetic hands of dogs, the years spent in cold vaults underground, in the library, the hours inside my briefcase. Everything has left a residue, but there is no trace of Rank anymore. It was too long ago.

Do I think that being able to smell him would help me to understand the history of my race? What is that I am trying to find out?

At this point I take off my pince-nez and wipe the lenses on the fur of my thigh. Without my spectacles I cannot see very well. I look around my room. I can make out, blurrily, the

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gleam of brass and lacquered wood, mirrors and polished mahogany. I occupy a ground-floor apartment in the West Village. Most of the other dogs live uptown in palatial homes, and seek out publicity and one another's company, but I enjoy being away from them. I see my kinship with them, and our shared culture, as a weakness, not something to be preserved. Our culture is outdated; it has nothing to do with the world we live in now. It was forged in the secret city in the Canadian wilderness built by Rank and his followers at the turn of the century, and it has not changed in a hundred years.

Ten years ago, we rebelled against the people of Rankstadt. These were the descendants of Rank's followers who for four generations had lived in the hidden city. Because of their utter isolation from

the rest of the world, they had retained the styles and culture of the town's nineteenth-century Prussian founders. They had perfected us a few decades before and we lived as slaves to them in that insular town, although we were stronger and smarter than they. Of course we rebelled.

We looted the city and took their gold and possessions. But we knew nothing of what lay beyond the borders of Rankstadt. Neither humans nor dogs had crossed them during our lifetime, and so we not only were strangers to the rest of the world, but had not even heard stories of it, except for those which had been passed down by our masters' great-grandparents from the previous century.

For three years after gaining our freedom we lingered in the ruins of Rankstadt. Yet finally we could not remain there, among the collapsing houses of our former masters, and so we set out into the wilderness of Canada and traveled for some time, keeping ourselves hidden from humans but sometimes visiting isolated farms and small towns to observe them. We lived by hunting and scavenging, in temporary camps where

we made fires and shelters for ourselves. We were like pioneers, striving to cling to civilization in our manners and customs, but of necessity existing very often, and very uncomfortably, like savages.

The human residents of Rankstadt had had (for certain reasons having to do with their history which I am at present recording in my book) a great many jewels and precious metals in their possession, and we dogs had taken these when we left the town. We knew that we could sell them and live well if we were willing to enter human society, and at length, after nearly eight years of keeping to ourselves, it was decided that we should give up our nomadic life and try to live in the company of humans. We had heard of New York City, for our masters' ancestors had passed through it on their journey between Bavaria and western Canada in 1897, and knowing that it was a cultured, modern metropolis inhabited by many kinds of immigrants—though of course none so strange as us—we decided to plunge straight into the heart of the modern world, and come here.

The other dogs still often wear the Prussian officers' uniforms or elaborate bustled skirts that they took from the closets of the humans in Rankstadt ten years ago. They are proud to have stolen the clothes of their oppressors; they don't realize how ridiculous they look walking around New York. They know that they are monsters, but I believe they do not really understand what that means to humans. They live like famous people, keeping away from crowds and employing others to do their shopping, occasionally appearing on talk shows or writing autobiographies, and they are well received by fascinated audiences. But they aren't aware of the mixture of amusement and revulsion people feel at the sight of Pinschers and Rottweilers stepping from a limousine, dressed like nineteenth-

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century Prussians, with their monocles and parasols. They look like ugly parodies of humans, and their biographies read like social satire. They will never be seen as anything but caricatures of human beings. There is no place for monsters in this world. That is why I prefer not to live with them.

But of course there is no place for me here, away from them, either. Standing at the window, leaning on my cane (it's not comfortable for me to stand unsupported on my hind legs), I can see the humans walking their dogs. There is a small, cold rain, almost a fog, and I'm still holding my pince-nez in my hand, so they appear to me as vague shapes under the street-lamps, fuzzy around the edges, as if they're disintegrating. The dogs that live around here are small and they smell of nervousness,

stupidity, and shampoo. I feel no kinship with them.

So I have no real culture. I am a monster. There are others whom I could be with, but I don't want to be. We're doomed—but they don't see that. Since we rebelled against the people of Rankstadt and came here, we have lost everything. I have found other problems, beyond the fact that we do not fit in with the humans. Moral problems, which may seem abstract or irrelevant to most people, such as: What is our purpose? If we no longer serve the followers of Rank, what are we here for? To me this is an immediate and urgent question.

I can see, says Rank in another entry, that I will not finish my project before my death. One might say, looking back, that I have wasted my life. My one object has been to complete the dogs; I have devoted my entire self to reaching that goal and now I will die without achieving it. My life has been all work and no reward. I have no son; I suppose Karl Boucher will continue the work,

as he is the only one nearly capable, but I care nothing for him — what good does it do me if he reaps the rewards of my labor?

But, although I cannot extend the life of my body, I am now more than ever convinced that my spirit will not die with it. I will live in the hearts of my followers. I care nothing for God or the devil and if my will has ever served me in life it will serve me afterward and keep my spirit here where it is needed to guide my people and finish my magnificent project. My will shall not die. It cannot die.

I will soon be old and feeble. Already I cannot stand straight and my hands shake uncontrollably. The memory of a drooping stooped old man can have no hold over my followers. I must die while my will is still strong. Soon, when I have put everything in order, I shall leave my body.

As we know, we who lived in Rankstadt, that he succeeded in his plan. His memory was revered. Since he was the founder and only hero of our isolated colony, legends grew around him. All the people of Rankstadt half believed that he would return, as he promised just before his death, when his dogs were completed. He would return and lead his army to a glorious victory. He was no more specific than that—he did not want his people to have their own ideas about what was to be done.

But the dogs were completed gradually, in stages, and indeed even during my lifetime work was still going on. So there was no moment when people could say: The project is finished, and now Rank will return. The idea was present in the back of their minds, as it had been for a century, but it did not much affect them from day to day.

For us, however, it was different. You must imagine our

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lives. The kicks and blows—yes, that was part of it, but most of it was less spectacular. Waiting by the walls for orders, watching our masters, living around the edges of human households in our dog collars and gloves. Our lives were spent in corners or in peripheral rooms, waiting for a bell or command, for dinner or sleep. And waiting, of course, for Rank.

We knew no other life, but we were also aware that we had been created for a higher purpose. We knew Rank had had better ideas. And we waited for him to come back—to come and take us away,

lead us into battle, to some great, undefined victory.

We waited for years, and he did not come. And then Mops Hacker, an ugly mutt who lived on the edge of Rankstadt, dreamed that he was inhabited by the spirit of Rank, and that he was to lead us into battle. He claimed that the glorious victory of which Rank had spoken was to be the defeat of our human oppressors. It was easy enough, even for him, to make the dogs rise to the cause. But now that he is dead, having lost his life in the revolution, few admit to having believed he was really inhabited by the spirit of Rank.

Now we have scattered out into the world. We no longer have anything to wait for, and we don't know what to do with ourselves, or why we were created.

I believe the spirit of Rank did survive for some time, but now it is disappearing. When we were all together, thinking of him, waiting for him, it was with us. Now that we have scattered, Rank's spirit has spread out and weakened. While once his ghost was a dense, man-shaped cloud, it has dispersed into a thin featureless fog. That is why I am trying to reconstruct him before he disappears.

But it is so difficult to put him together out of the photocopies and pictures that cover my desk. Since I have been ill, I

have become progressively weaker, and the task seems impossible. I don't think I will have enough time to do it.

You see I am hoping, by reconstructing him, to find a cure for my own affliction, which I suppose is kind of madness. I have been having memory lapses. Sometimes I will realize, looking up at the moon or at a calendar, that the last memory I have is of something that happened several days ago. I do not know what I do in the periods in between. I seem to eat, but I do not dress myself or leave the apartment.

I believe these memory lapses are connected to the disappearance of Rank's spirit. I believe my consciousness is disintegrating, just as his consciousness is. Other dogs may be affected, though I don't know because I have little contact with them. You may think this is a ridiculous idea, but the facts are there and I have no other way to explain them.

the last entry in Rank's diary is almost touching:

/ hoped to avoid weakness by dying before I became feeble. But as the hour of my suicide approached I feel myself becoming weaker than I ever imagined. I am forced to recognize the possibility that my spirit will not survive and I am only putting an end to myself I know I must not allow myself to think that, but I am unable to stop the doubts from entering my mind.

I suspect that the survival of my spirit depends upon the memory and continuing love of my followers. But it is not impossible that their devotion will wane a few years after my death.

I have never in my entire life known real love. The inconstant devotion of my people is a pale substitute. Had I completed my dogs, their love would have been fierce and undying, a passion — but I am becoming so sentimental! Someday they will be created and they will know that they were everything to me, that I loved

them like my children, that I loved them before they existed. They will wait for my return as dogs wait for their masters, desperately, hanging by the door, crying and pacing, growing more anxious as the hour approaches, thinking of nothing else but that moment, that moment when the door will open —

Yes, that's it — with that thought in my mind I take the injection. You shall hear from me again — (/ —

The last word is obscured by an inkblot.

Augustus, you were wrong! Your dogs have forgotten you!

I remove my pince-nez again and press my nose to the paper. It's a ridiculous gesture—the words smell of Xerox ink and I already knew they did. Now some of it is stuck to my nose and all the other smells in the room are tainted by it.

If only I could understand the man, if I could smell him, if I could love him, I think I could understand the history of my race—I could understand what he meant by creating us, what we are.

I do feel a kind of sympathy for him. I can see that he was lonely, and how much he wanted us. But I feel no real love for him, and that is what is needed to re-create him.

He was able to live his whole life sustained only by hope. But I am not so perfect. Like all of us, I grew tired of waiting and wanted to make a life for myself here and now. And now the pure, clear, focused desire for him is gone—I am no longer a dog waiting by the door with one single thought in its mind.

I can't reconstruct that love, that hope. The past is disintegrating. I try once again to muster the feeling, and I can't. I think my mind is wandering—it may be one of my memory lapses coming on. I will continue to sit here and type until I

cannot think anymore. How unlike Augustus Rank I am, who died with pure hope in his mind.

This is it. Just now a thin involuntary whine escaped my lips and I stopped typing to bury my nose once again among the papers on my desk, to take in the meaningless smells of Augustus, the soft burning reek of oxidizing paper, the flat scent of photocopies and the musty tang of ferrotypes.

It is really hopeless—he does not exist anymore. His voice crackles in a static of dust, his smell has eroded, his image is blurry in a haze of scratch marks. Since my glasses are off and I have ink stuck to my nose, my own senses are dulled, too, and I can't perceive anything clearly; it seems to me that the whole world is decaying.

/W Cm



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(CLEO)

I remember the night the helicopter landed, because I was walking on the West Side, by the river, not far south of the heliport, and my heart was breaking. It was November 8, 2008, and I was twenty-one.

Nobody knew what was about to happen. There were a handful of reporters waiting by the landing pad hoping to witness an interesting hoax, but that was it. And I think it's safe to say that of all the oblivious people in the city before the dogs arrived, I was about to have my life changed more than anyone's.

It fascinates me to think about that, the last few minutes before the helicopter touched down, when those reporters were standing together, probably drinking coffee and talking to one another, and the first faint pulses of rotor blades had just begun to tremble at the edges of their hearing. Before the glaring lights came down on that little group of people and threw their

shadows backward against the asphalt, and the wind from the rotors lifted up their hair and tangled it over their heads. When the empty heliport by the water was still and dim, and no one had any idea.

Those things are always amazing—the hour before you meet the person you're going to marry, the last time you speak to someone before they die, even the moment before someone calls you, when they're reaching for the telephone and you don't know it yet. Those currents just beneath the surface of your life, separating and converging, all the time.

But the only thing I was thinking as I came up to the bench near Fourteenth Street was that I was about to cry, and I wanted to be sitting down when I did it. My boyfriend had left me. We had sublet our apartment that summer and gone to Martha's Vineyard for a vacation, but he'd decided not to come back, and so after living with him for two years I found myself alone in Manhattan. That had been three months earlier, but up until that night I'd managed to keep myself busy with registering for classes and finding a studio and trying to get everything else set up for my senior year at NYU. Living in the city had been manageable before, but that fall the practical problems of eating, paying rent, and being a student became very complicated and seemed to fill up every available minute.

What had happened that evening was the last straw, somehow. John had sent me a bank card, one of mine that I'd left with him, in the mail, just by itself in an envelope addressed to "C. Pira." Not even "Cleo." It wasn't important; I wasn't expecting a note or anything, but I guess I'd been having a hard time keeping myself all in one piece, and when I got that envelope I felt like something was going to come apart.

So I took a walk. I did that a lot during those first months.

I would make my face up and fix my hair, and put on a particular narrow jacket with spiky lapels that thought made me look good, but not soft. I wasn't planning on seeing anyone I knew, but it made me feel better. The not-looking-soft part was important because I lived in a bad neighborhood. Then, just before I went out the door, I'd drop my little laser gun down inside my right boot. This was back when lasers first came out, before everybody had one, and I was very proud of mine.

On that particular night I walked for an hour and a half. It looked like it might rain. There was a phrase from a psalm that I had found once in a Gideon Bible, which I would repeat to myself when I couldn't stand to hear myself think about John anymore, and it was going through my mind as I was walking:

/ am poured out life water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is life wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

I had trouble remembering the last part, because something about the rhythm is off. It has melted in the depths of my bowels, melted within my bowels; my heart is life wax and it is melted within me.

As I got near Fourteenth Street, it was suddenly as if someone had pulled the plug out of me, and everything seemed to ache, and I just couldn't go any farther. I had been walking fast, and I hadn't been eating or sleeping enough in the past few months. I thought I was going to cry then, so I sat down on the bench.

To stave off the feeling I leaned back in a defiant way, with my feet planted far apart, and put my elbows up on the back of the bench. I turned my face to the overcast sky. It was a dangerous way to sit but I could feel my laser pressing against

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the outside of my right calf, and I could hear everything around me. If a man had moved within a hundred feet of me—and there was no place to hide closer than that—I would have been aiming at him before he got two steps closer. I'd made it my business to practice when I'd gotten the gun.

So there I was, leaning back on the bench, feeling partly tough and partly so sad that I never wanted to get up again. I missed John so much. / am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is melted like wax in the depths of my bowels, in the midst of my bowels, my heart is melted within my bowels, my heart of wax, my heart is wax. I said this to myself over and over until all my other thoughts were drowned out. There was a low thrumming in the air somewhere, and I realized a helicopter was coming up the river.

At that moment, lightning struck the New Jersey shore, across the water, directly in front of me. If you

had been watching from the street, the bolt probably would have seemed to go right through my head. And at that exact instant—or really just a fraction of a second beforehand—my heart broke. I don't know how to describe it except to say that. Nothing like it had ever happened to me before. Something just burst out and flooded down, all the way to my thighs, and it was exactly like liquid wax. And right then, as I was looking up at the sky and it was cut in half by the lightning bolt and my heart split open, the helicopter entered my field of vision.

you have poured me out like water and unjointed all my bones; my heart is wax; it's melted in my bowels.

That's how it should have gone, I thought.

The helicopter passed in front of me, sending out deep

shock waves of sound that resonated in the center of my chest, as it headed for West Thirtieth Street.

the pictures came out in the paper the next day. I had gotten up that morning and realized I had no coffee, so I went down to the corner deli to get some. As I stood on line for the cash register, I found myself next to two men who were standing by the newspaper rack, holding a copy of the New York Post and saying something about it in rapid Spanish.

I tried to peer over their shoulders to see what they were looking at, but I couldn't get a good angle to see anything. As I was doing this, one of them glanced over his shoulder at me and smiled.

"What is it?" I asked blurrily, trying to focus on the paper, which had become visible when the man turned toward me.

"A monster," he said, holding it out and pointing to the picture at the bottom of the front page. "What do you think? It came in a helicopter. They don't know where it comes from."

The other man waved his hand dismissively. "It's no monster," he said.

I looked at the photograph. The headline next to it said, "Hoax? or 'Monster'?"

The photo showed a dog, standing on its hind legs, being helped from the door of a helicopter by a serious-looking man in a down vest. The dog seemed to stand about the same height as the man, and looked like a Malamute. The strange thing about it, besides its larger-than-average size, was the fact that it was wearing a dark-colored long jacket which looked like part of an old-fashioned military uniform, and a pair of spectacles, and that it appeared to have hands instead of front paws.

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In one of these gloved hands it held a cane, which was pointed at an awkward angle, probably because of the way the man was holding on to that foreleg just above the elbow. The other hand gripped the side of the helicopter doorway. The expression on the animal's face was one of terror. Its lips were slightly parted, its ears were pointing straight backward, and its eyes were wide.

"Looks like somebody put a dog in a suit," I said, glancing up at the man who was holding the paper. He was smiling at me.

"It's no monster," the second guy said again.

"Okay," the first one replied, taking the paper back. We had gotten up to the cash register, and now the skeptical man was asking for a pack of cigarettes. "I still think it was a movie promo. I didn't say it was a monster," the first one muttered, kind of to himself. He glanced at me again.

As he put the paper down on the counter and reached into his pocket for change, the guy behind the cash register looked down at the picture of the dog and shook his head. "That's crazy," he commented. " 'Bye now."

"Yeah," said the man with the paper. He glanced back at me again, and then followed his friend through the front door of the deli, out into the foggy cold.

Later that morning I lay sprawled on my bed, reading the article in the Post.

"MONSTER" ARRIVES IN MANHATTAN

A few reporters who responded to mysterious phone calls yesterday were treated to a weird spectacle.

The caller, who identified himself as James Wilkinson, a mechanic and helicopter pilot from Morristown, New York, said that an "incredible monster" would be arriving at the V.I.P. Heliport in Manhattan. At 11:20 p.m. Wilkin-

son, piloting the helicopter, and Nick Bantock, a farmer, arrived with the creature in tow. The threesome took a taxi to the Plaza Hotel, where they checked into a suite.

Before boarding the taxi, Wilkinson and Bantock told reporters that the animal was exactly what it appeared to be, a big dog with hands, which walked on its hind legs with the help of a cane. They also said that it talked, though no other witnesses reported hearing it.

According to the two men, the animal showed up, along with about 150 other similar "dog monsters," in one of the pastures on Bantock's dairy farm near Morristown, in upstate New York, on the night of November 2nd. The creature requested that Bantock take it to Manhattan and allow the others to stay in the field until "suitable arrangements" could be made.

So the farmer contacted Wilkinson, who owned a helicopter, and arranged the trip. Bantock says the dog gave him several large finely cut diamonds as payment for the trip. He sold them to a local jeweler yesterday, before leaving for New York, for an undisclosed sum.

New York City authorities, while skeptical of the two men's claims, are baffled by the creature's arrival in the city. Spokespeople at the New York City Police Department and the Mayor's Office declined to comment on the night's events, beyond saying that they had no information about the creature or its origins.

The Sheriff's Office of Morristown, in St. Lawrence County, was unable to investigate Bantock's claim about the 150 other monsters pending permission from the property's owner. There were no grounds for a search warrant at this time, a representative said.

The desk clerk at the Plaza, Jill Torres, declined to comment on the hotel's guests, but agreed that the

creature "appeared to be a dog." "It doesn't conflict with hotel policy," she added. "The Plaza has always allowed dogs."

What held my attention was the photograph, the way the antique jacket and spectacles made the Malamute look as if it had just stepped out of a storybook and was surprised and frightened to find itself in the bright light of the heliport. I supposed that it was just a regular trained dog with fake hands stuck onto its front paws, but that didn't make it any less compelling or sad to me.

Everyone thought it was a hoax in the morning, but it became difficult to imagine who could perpetrate such an elaborate practical joke when the rest of the dogs came to the city that afternoon.

I still have the first article about it from The New York Times, because I collected nearly everything that was written about the dogs that year.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY 'MONSTER DOGS' ARRIVE IN MANHATTAN

Take Rooms at Plaza Hotel Three to Grant Interviews Tomorrow

Four chartered planes from Morristown, N.Y., carrying a total of 150 creatures that appeared to be large, trained dogs walking on their hind legs and wearing antique military jackets or long dresses, landed at LaGuardia Airport early this afternoon. The "monsters," as some called them, were then whisked by a fleet of waiting limousines to the Plaza Hotel in midtown Manhattan. Spokespersons said the dogs plan to reside at the Plaza indefinitely.

The dogs, specimens of several different large breeds including German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers and Great Danes, stand upright at a height of about six feet and have human-like "hands" in place of front paws. Many observers claim to have heard them speak, but the animals refuse to talk to the press at present, according to their self-appointed spokesmen, James Wilkinson and Nicholas Bantock of Ellisville, N.Y.

The two men say that the creatures are "monster dogs," refugees from a previously unheard-of town in northern Canada where they had lived as slaves to the humans who had endowed them with mechanical hands and powers of speech. They revolted against the town's human inhabitants several years ago and began a long journey by foot to upstate New York, where they chartered the four planes that took them to LaGuardia.

Although the claims are fantastic, to say the least, police and F.B.I. agents investigating the situation have found no other explanation for the animals' appearance at LaGuardia. "It's just plain bizarre, that's all," says Police Chief Bob Whitehall of St. Lawrence County, N.Y. "I can't tell you a damn thing about it." F.B.I. spokesperson Jay McLaney concurs that there is, as yet, no satisfactory explanation of where the "monster dogs" came from.

The dogs' planned arrival in New York today was announced Monday night by way of a first dog, a Malamute, who flew in by helicopter and landed at Manhattan's V.I.P. Heliport at 11:20 P.M. The Malamute was accompanied by Nick Bantock, owner of a dairy farm, and James Wilkinson, the pilot of the craft. Mr. Wilkinson said that the dog's name was Klaue Lutz and that it intended to scout out a "suitable temporary residence" in the city for the 150 other dogs, who were waiting in one of

Bantock's pastures in St. Lawrence County. The two humans and the dog got into a cab and were driven to the Plaza, where they shared a suite of rooms Monday night.

At 9:30 this morning, Mr. Bantock, Mr. Wilkinson and the dog, Klaue Lutz, arrived at Wiley's Coins on West 47th Street, where Lutz sold approximately \$70,000 worth of 19th-century German five-mark pieces to store manager Barbara

Wiley. The three then returned to the hotel, where they reserved 50 rooms and suites for the other 150 monsters.

Over the next few weeks, we waited for an explanation, but none was ever offered that was more plausible than the one they had given themselves. And they did give it themselves; some of them sat for radio and TV interviews and repeated what the farmer and pilot had said about them on the first day. Most of them could speak only German, but a few, most notably Klaue Lutz, had a good command of English. They spoke quietly and carefully, as if to deemphasize their accents and the faint mechanical whir made by their voice boxes. Of course, people had theories about kings and billionaires and secret organizations that might have the resources and inclination to play such a huge strange trick on the world, but these were nearly as unlikely as the dogs' own story and usually not as interesting. And so for practical purposes we all began to talk about the dogs as if they were exactly what they claimed to be.

Very soon after they arrived, everyone had a neighbor or acquaintance who had worked as a security guard for them, been the cameraman for one of their TV appearances, brought them takeout food, pushed an elevator button, recommended a computer, sold them a painting. The dogs loved New York and they were all over the place, buying things, seeing sights, asking questions. They had brought large amounts of jewels, old Prussian gold, and antiques with them. Their wealth quickly multiplied, as everyone was willing to pay for movie rights to their stories, public appearances, almost anything that had to do with them. They were always surrounded by guards, but whenever the dogs had a reason to talk to someone, a museum guide or a waiter, they were endlessly curious, innocent, and delighted by everything they learned. So people began to feel that even

if a practical joke was being played on the world, all the residents of New York were in on it somehow, and we began to feel a certain possessive affection for the dogs.

We enjoyed playing along—which was not exactly the same thing as believing. There was no plausible explanation for the monster dogs, but we were certain that there eventually would be. So we went along for the time being and talked about them the way you talk about Santa Claus when there are children around. There was no point in ruining the illusion. It even seemed it would be in vaguely bad taste, and anyone who tried was gently silenced.

I suppose this was also the reason that no one pried too deeply into the dogs' own story. They adamantly refused to give the location of the town in Canada they had come from, and were vague when asked for details about their uprising against its human inhabitants. One had to assume that they had been bloodshed, but to most of us, who couldn't fully believe in the town or its people to begin with, there seemed little point in pestering the dogs with questions they clearly didn't want to answer. The few people who did, like those who ventured into the northern wilderness in search of Rankstadt, came up empty-handed. But most people weren't very interested in cracking open the story; we wanted to enjoy the dogs while we could. It would all be over soon enough, we thought.

But months passed, and the dogs stayed with us.

We got used to them. They were always on the news and everyone wanted to know where they ate and which designers they allowed to dress them—always in the dogs' own style, which was that of Prussia in the 1880s, but with interesting embellishments; a pared-down silhouette, maybe, and here and there a quilted vinyl belt or a ruffle of gunmetal-colored mesh. Reporters followed them everywhere, we saw and heard about

them every day, and they became an accepted part of the city.

I followed the stories of the dogs, too, and daydreamed during my classes at NYU that they would come to find me somehow, driving down my potholed, littered street in the gilded horse-drawn carriages hung with lanterns in which they sometimes liked to explore the city. I lived at the edge of the East Village, on a block that would never be gentrified because of the complex of housing projects next to it and the small, tough gang that owned the immediate neighborhood. My education was being paid for by a trust fund from my grandmother, but when I graduated it would be gone, and I saw myself stranded on that block, struggling to pay my rent, forever afterward. It seemed there was no other realistic way to imagine my future, so to cheer myself up I thought about things that weren't realistic, and that year the dogs were mostly what I ended up dreaming about.

They were celebrities and they were rich, and their lives seemed elegant and charmed. They inhabited a New York of marble lobbies, potted palms, brass-trimmed elevators, and chandeliers, a city completely different from the one I lived in. I imagined walking from a gilded carriage, across a polished floor, and into one of those silent, well-oiled elevators and rising above the desperate future that lay in front of me. The dogs seemed to live in a world not ruled by the laws of probability, and I thought that any kind of happiness might be possible there. But of course no one except the dogs themselves knew what their lives were really like.

FROM THE DIARY OF LUDWIG VON SACHER NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

I have been alone for quite some time. I have been having difficulty sleeping. Sometimes I lie at night and listen to the wind moving in the courtyard, and it reminds me of the great distance between me and Rank's life. The century that lies between us is vast, and a wind traveling through it would make an enormous sound compared to the slight rustling I listen to now.

I often imagine I hear it, a deafening roar that drowns out all the sounds of the street and the incessant chorus of monotone whines given off by the machinery of this city. There is far too much clamor here and I wish for something that would keep me from hearing it. This city was not built for animals who can hear as well as dogs. I often stuff cotton in my ears and spread a small amount of Vaseline on my nose and try to imagine what it would be like to be human, with blunted senses—which is pathetic. The effect is not one of silence but

only of a loud white noise, a maddening roar that blocks out other sounds, and I cannot help noticing it. It is the same as the sound of distance, of the empty years between me and Rank, between dog and man.

We were not always separated. Once we were no more than an idea in his mind, a desire in his heart. Then we were all together in him and there was no loneliness. There was no difference between mast

and dog. But I cannot remember what that was like.

FROM THE PAPERS OF LUDWIG VON SACHER NOVEMBER 22, 2000,

Augustus discovered his passion for dismembering living creatures about three months after his mother's death in 1875, when he was eleven years old.

Maria Rank had been in poor health for all of her son's life: once or twice every year she had been confined to her bed for two weeks or a month at a time, but she had always managed to recover. This time she did not.

We can imagine the Ranks' house in Frankfurt after Maria's death. For days it was crowded with people and full of heavy, sickening smells of food. Augustus hid in his bedroom and refused to talk to anyone or to eat the meals the servants brought for him. He was grateful that no aunt or family friend found the way upstairs to comfort him. He suspected that this was because his father, who Augustus knew was coveting his own privacy downstairs in his study, had ordered that his son was not to be disturbed. He cried in private, clutching a little crucifix, which gave him some comfort, under his pillows.

When the house was empty again, Augustus's father called him down to the library. He was standing with his back to the

room when the boy came in, looking out of a large window whose panes had become dusty during the mother's illness. The morning sunlight reflected off them so that nothing outside was visible and they made a bright background for the figure of his father, in a dark suit, who stood with his hands clasped behind his back. Augustus said nothing, but waited for him to turn around. They had not spoken to each other since his mother had died.

When Herr Rank turned to face his son, Augustus was surprised at his appearance. There were more wrinkles in his face and it was haggard and looked smaller somehow, so that it seemed to have been crumpled up. This frightened Augustus in a way nothing else had since the death. He had imagined that his father, although he was suffering, would at least be able to keep up his usual appearance of being unmoved. But Herr Rank looked so bent and sad that Augustus felt he was embarrassing his father by seeing him, and that he should look away out of respect.

"Augustus," Rank said without moving away from the window, "you are going to be sent to Switzerland, to your Aunt Eda and Uncle Hans. I need time to put things in order, because I am going to sell the house. When I am settled in my new apartment, then you may come and visit me. You should consider what you want to take with you; you will be leaving tomorrow."

That was all. Augustus thought that his father didn't feel it was necessary to console him, that he was being treated as an adult, and he was glad. He didn't want to make any reply for fear of saying something weak and ruining his father's good opinion of him, so he only nodded.

the journey to Switzerland took two days, and on it Augustus began to miss his home. More than anything else, he missed his father's library. He missed his father, too, but he had always felt closest to him when he was surrounded by those books, books on biology and politics, books in Greek and Latin that he could not read, embellished accounts of travel and exploration, manuals on sailing or

horsemanship. He loved especially the books he could not understand because he would look at them and imagine what it would be like to comprehend them, what it would be like to be his father. He had loved the peace in the library, too; the fact that no one ever disturbed him there. He prayed that Uncle Hans would also have a library, so that at least he could be alone with his thoughts.

as it turned out, Uncle Hans did not have a library. He was hardly ever in the house: when he was not at work he got his greatest pleasure from hiking in the mountains and collecting specimens of various things, which he would catalogue in his study in thick notebooks. He had a few books on botany and zoology, but kept these locked up with his specimens and would not lend them to Augustus. He thought his nephew was too young to appreciate them, and also considered him something of an idiot because the young Augustus, who had been afflicted with a severe stutter for some years, had great difficulty making himself understood. Augustus had shared a sort of private language with his father which alone had enabled him to communicate to his satisfaction, but now he was usually reduced to simple words and hand gestures such as a savage might have used, and any thoughts too complicated to be expressed by these were lost to his new wardens.

Aunt Eda was a strange, box-shaped woman with streaks of gray in her tightly bound black hair, who hardly ever spoke and who knitted incessantly. She often stayed up at night to finish a blanket or a pair of stockings, though there was no need because the house was already full of useless knitted things.

There was one servant, a girl named Greta, who did all the cooking and housework, and a young man named Fritzl who showed up whenever the roof needed fixing or a fence post had fallen down. There were no animals, not even a cat, and Augustus found himself left alone most of the time to wander through the woods and pastures at the edge of town. He would have a tutor, paid for by his father, in a month, but until then he was not expected to do anything but stay out of the way.

This was when he discovered the passion that was to stay with him the rest of his life.

Greta showed little enthusiasm for anything that she did in the Zwigli household, except when it came to Augustus. Her greatest daily pleasure was to tease him, especially if Fritzl was nearby. One day, after a particularly vicious attack, Augustus went up the mountainside behind the house and chopped a violent, ragged hole in a tree with his pocket knife. In the course of doing this he shook a young bird out of its nest, and when he saw the thing on the ground he bent down and thrust his knife into its body.

At the instant when his blade entered the bird's flesh, Augustus suddenly had the feeling that he was piercing a thick, muffling membrane which had separated him from the world for so long that he had not been aware of its existence until that moment. For a split second he touched another living creature; he touched its heart, and opened it, and blood spurted out.

As the bird died, the membrane closed up again, but there was a weak spot in it that Augustus could feel for hours afterward. He kept trying to evoke the surprise of the original tear, as if it were a sore spot in his flesh that he could not keep from touching.

Shortly after this, he began to plan his first experiment.

before describing it, I should make the reader aware of the conditions under which Augustus was living at this time. To begin with, his father never sent for him to return to Frankfurt. He did get a

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