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I was received by the city as I stepped into the world again

HANNES BAJOHR

Translated by Kayla Rose van Kooten

¶1 As a child I had a dentition that indicated an unconventional division between a Jawling and a Pondhead. The Jawling was rooted in strength, the Pondhead was steadied through an extremely slim base that pulled the jaw out of the Jawling in the same moment as the legs shook. I suspected that the Jawling's legs had bitten into the indifferent Pondhead, expressing a future of community by this immediate gesture, not just in the sense of possibility—since there were already many people there—but also through the deployment of all the other means: through the rasterizations of its own layers, through an uncomplicated combination of bowels and gutters of sweat, through the counter-condensation from hundreds of valuable experiences, through the reproduction of progress.

¶2 All of that was completely and absolutely unimportant for me: their sharpness, their toughness, their strength—everything that I had always taken care of had been decided for me too much. As a child, I saw consciously and with my own eyes the path that leads a human body shape towards suicide. I traced characteristics that would be important to me in every phase of life, I tapped into the story of the possible, and it was just like it always was: I was dead, but also not. That's also how I understood what had happened to my father.

¶3 Both heads, that is to say the Jawling and Pondhead, swung as the only force that carried me as a

child, upwards; they were like the ribs in a tightly tuned guitar. In such moments I always saw the mouth, my mouth, that I wanted to press on his chest. The words shuffled in, a stagewalker was able to guide me by the hand; I held the first sentence that communicated before me, in order to see how he reacted. It was a sentence that had so little to do with what I now expected from him, but always pronounced again and again an indispensable message in combination of conditions and behaviors; from the mouth an unbelievably massive force sprang out. The dentition transformed into a tender smile. It was an hour in which I had come immediately to my Jawling, and as I pulled him out, I felt the warmth of the cave in my fingertips. Hands of beauty pressed my chest, so as if they wanted to allow me to lie to my father—my words could become true—and I was moved by the feeling of being naked in a desert. Later I looked at the little, incomplete face and I only found a beauty that the connection between chest and jaw explained. It was enchanting, but unnatural.

¶4 In such times, when I held the Jawling in my hand, I could consider the head of my original life, how it pleased me back then, and could absorb it into myself again; I was also able to recognize my father, from whom this beauty flowed, and I felt the energy of the city as if through a nerve-collection which had probed his power for so long. He ap-

peared to me in moments like this like a wonderful vaulted point for memories that are no longer allowed to haunt my head. In addition to that, there were the thoughts that I always immediately forgot, such as: that my parents were not exactly genuine as they had loaned me the city and I, for important reasons, spent a few weeks here; that in school I hadn't always picked up on a growth spurt, a few notes and a wristwatch; that during the week that I spent here, the feeling in the shoes had also somewhat solidified; and that I could go through the city and I had nothing to lose.

¶5 It took a while till I reached the outskirts of this city, which at first seemed so lonely, so isolated, so cold. But it wasn't even like that, it was simply the city where I had left myself behind and had loved myself. Life in the city is not the same as life in the region. When I left the city, it was almost as if I had marched off forever. There were no graves or memorials in this city; no men, women or children lived here, there was only a hand on the horizon, from which the skeleton of the blades of grass reached out. It showed how the city grew, how the city developed, where the mountain range ended and where the south began; here was the entire city in all its grandeur, it was like an empty vessel laid out in the hills, and in a certain sense I wanted to see the city with its towers, its gardens and trees, and the places along the way. Whatever the people looked like, they were all so beautiful. They were so beautiful, from their skin to their little houses and their beds; whatever they wore, I had not encountered different beings in this city, like those around the caves.

¶6 My father always told me that there were so many cities in this world that were not as beautiful as this city. It was on a morning in the first week of June when he brought me to his house. I had done nothing in order to observe him—as I usually did—and yet he was not as how he had been before. The morning was bright and my father was

in the hills, but since he had always moved out of the bedroom two hours before me for the last few weeks and had only seen me at noon—I did not want to watch him leave. I still had the Jawling in my hand, and it was as if I had to force him to go out with the head of the door, in order to say: “it'll stay tomorrow!” My father did not accept that and took the Jawling away from me. Without a head and without legs, he grasped him and laid him in his bag. Then he approached me, as if I had not seen him. It was still in the house, and I didn't know why we were not sitting in the big room at the moment, where I so often went down the big stairs. Instead we stood in the street and looked at each other.

¶7 (Once I sat in a café with a school friend and I confessed that I knew that a sickness would come over my parents in the next few days. It was not easy to divert the attention from their suffering of life in the city and many other places.)

¶8 “Where are we going?” I asked. My father spoke: “That is a site where one can gather together—if you're lucky.” Then he said that he may ascend a staircase there, “only so that you can see the people in your happiness.” He kissed me and climbed up, for he wanted to show me my admiration; if I climbed up there, I would see how he met up with the child that was me. However, he had forgotten the Pondhead; I still held him in my hand. He looked so different, his skin was so withered and his little house was still dark. He was an old man and had sat on a high throne and explored the world, while I had lived on his arm.

¶9 We climbed up the stairs. My father held the Jawling in his hand. I didn't know what he planned on doing, he let him down in his hand to sleep, but I knew that we would do it for the city on the other side. My father would, when he woke up, push his bags together on the bed; there were, however, still more books and heads in them, also such that I had never caught a glimpse of. Once brought to-

gether in a room and separated once more, they would have been brought back together again and again. And I knew that he, as he climbed up the stairs, had subdued all the things that I didn't know in this corner. "Let's wait here," he said, I only looked at his face, because suddenly, silk-like, I held the Jawling in my fist.

¶10 The Pondhead, on the other hand, slept; he slept so soundly that he, as I believed, did not notice the Jawling when I pulled him on his neck. We had climbed without fire, but still with many creatures and with many, sometimes with sheer bodies, that were pushing from above, and with those we had started with, that from under us they forced themselves upward. The city beneath us lay frighteningly quiet on aggravated feet; it lay like I did, without a single shadow. I saw that the mountain range was no longer in its place; but the mountains were here, the trees there. As the head of the Ponder woke up again, we sat on the island next to his land. "Is everything correct the way it is?" I asked. My father shuddered, said nothing and set off on his way back. Thus, our excursion was only a small part of explored feelings, a small part of the world as I knew it from my heads.

¶11 As a child I had a dentition that indicated an unconventional division between a Jawling and a Pondhead. I spoke of the Pondhead already. The Jawling probably had the task of taking down the Pondhead. After our journey it seemed to me as if I had mutilated my mouth, so my parents decided that I should stay in a small hospital until I was exhausted enough to be unscathed again. Once there, my mother closed the door, just as I passed by the cradle of the Ponder. Suddenly I stopped in my tracks, and I thought about whether I should open my mouth again, because if I opened it again, nobody would talk to me anymore. So I never opened it again.

¶12 My father later shot the Jawling, on a different hike, as the Pondhead advised him to do so.

[Generated with the GPT-4 transformer language model, fine-tuned for five epochs on the novels by Berit Glanz, Joshua Groß, Julia Zange, and Juan Guse that Elias Kreuzmair identified as "literature of the digital society" in his essay "The Future of the Present (Berlin, Miami)."¹ The output text has been revised for grammatical correctness and occasionally reformatted, but otherwise entirely originates from the language model.]

1—Elias Kreuzmair, "Die Zukunft der Gegenwart (Berlin, Miami)," *Digitale Literatur II*, ed. Hannes Bajohr and Annette Gilbert (Munich: edition text+kritik, 2021), 35–46.