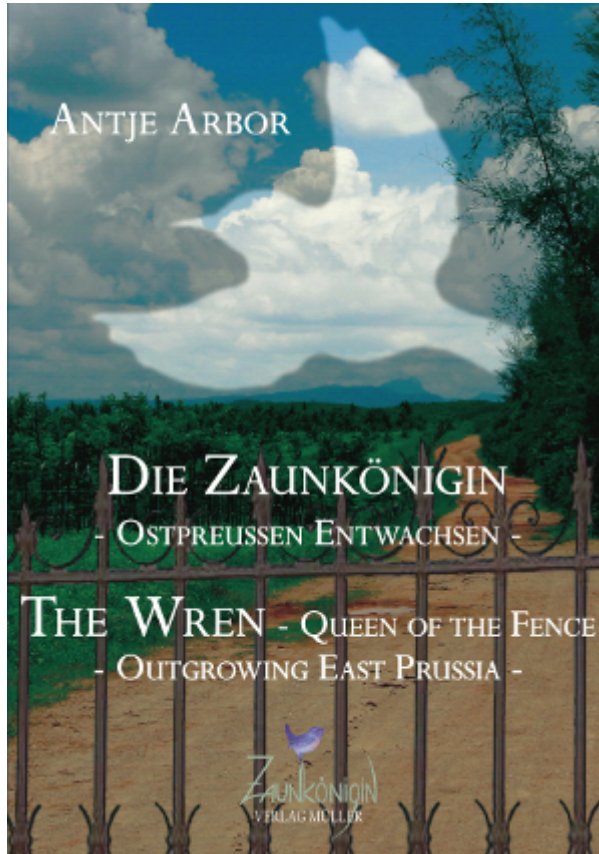


LESEPROBE .....

The Wren - Queen of the Fence  
- Outgrowing East Prussia -



### My Old Steam Train

How I loved that old steam train  
as it took me to school,  
doggedly working  
like some mad giant's tool,

thumping and bumping  
like a rickety cart,  
rocking and mocking  
me with stop-go-stop-start,

huffing and puffing  
like a fat-bellied man,  
clattering and chattering  
like an empty tin can,

glowing and throwing  
firy sparks from its gut,  
wheezing and sneezing  
like a beast in a rut,

hooting and shooting  
puffs of steam to the sky.  
Oh I loved my old steam train  
and I don't quite know why.

English original by Antje Arbor

*"Pull that pillow a little further to the right. That's better. Now push it down to the small of my back. Well done, thank you, Anneken. Nobody does it as well as you. The nurses change so often. And they have so little time."*

*"I'll be back tomorrow, Susu. And I'll take you for a ride again, if you like."*

*She is a good niece, my Anneken. She'll come again tomorrow. The days seem to pass so slowly here, and I can't do a thing on my own now. When the weather is fine we sit on the balcony and I enjoy the sun for a while. Sometimes I can get up with difficulty and with Anneken supporting me. Then I hold on to the balcony rail and look across the garden of the nursing home to my old garden next door.*

*"Are you awake, Susu? I'm off now."*

*"Yes. I was only taking my thoughts for a walk. Bye bye, Anneken."*

*"Cheerio, Susu."*

*What would I do without Anneken! Almost twenty-five years have passed of our twenty-first century that we awaited with so much curiosity at the time; we have done research and we have experimented and have thought ourselves*

*ever so smart - but what do we know about what is really important for man? What, for example, do they know about the loneliness of an old woman who is chasing her own thoughts? If it wasn't for Anneken, there would be nothing but my thoughts, walking away, running, toppling over each other, trying to escape me. I want to catch them, to hold them. If only I could manage to do that before it is too late! I can see my memory images appearing before me like scenes of a film. The past is like the present. I am a small child again, at the mercy of the adults. ...*

### **Alt-Sternberg**

... In the spacious dining-room I climb onto a chair. Nobody sees me. There are matches high up on the sideboard. I grab the matchbox, get off the chair, open the box, take out one of the small sticks, strike its red head along the coarse outside of the box, once, twice. I enjoy the flame. Mother enters the room. Quickly I blow out the flame. The match is still in my hand. The chair is still by the sideboard.

“Did you light that match?”

The question sounds menacing. How superfluous it is escapes me. I am only five years old.

“No,” I lie, scared.

Mother slaps my face. My cheek glows, my ear burns.

“That was for lying,” Mother says, “not for lighting the match.”

Lying is punished, playing with matches isn't. Maybe. I am going to be a good child, a decent girl. I am going to be on my guard.

“Not so fast, I can't keep up,” I call to my nurse-maid. I am sitting high up on her shoulders. She is running, carrying me over the large expanse of the courtyard. She laughs at me. I can see everything from up here: There is the sandpit in the centre of the courtyard, and close by, the water pump with its long heavy handle. All around me I see my home, lining the square courtyard - the long residential building, with the drive on its right and the wash-house on the left, then the garage, the orchard fence with the apple trees behind it, then the hen-house, the cow shed. While the nurse-maid is whirling me round wildly in a circle, I take in the path leading to the corn fields, the pigsty, the stable, the barn, the coach-house. Past the corner where a path leads to the potato field, I see the small building which houses the coachman's family and the forestry office, then the kennel with its four hunting dogs and the vegetable garden fence behind it. I see all of my small, limited world, not knowing how limited it is or how short-lived the security it affords. I am being carried, turned in a circle, I am being moved faster than I can run myself. Don't move so fast! ...

... *“Not so fast, I can't keep up!”*

*“But Susu, you needn't do anything.”*

*“Anneken?”*

*Yes, Anneken's voice. Rumble-bumble my wheelchair is rattling along the corridor. I am at other people's mercy, but I am safe. Like a child. Like a chick under the warm hen - no, not quite; rather like a motherless chick in a cardboard box on the warm stove. ...*

... I am standing by the kitchen range in the centre of our spacious kitchen in East Prussia. Through the broad door of the fire the cooking range is fed with wood and coal. I can see the embers and the flames when the door is opened

for putting more coal or wood on the fire. I am tall enough now to look down onto the black stove-top. Directly above the fire there are the hotplates with their concentric stove-rings. To bring a pot to the boil, cook uses the long poker to remove the central plate, sometimes the inner rings as well, depending on the size of the cooking pot. The flames lick the pots, all of which are black underneath with soot. To simmer the food, the holes above the fire are partly or wholly closed again. The large metal stove-top conducts the heat to the edges, where dishes are kept warm and where, on the far edge, the milk is placed to turn sour in order to provide us with curds and whey and cottage cheese. It is here that one day I detect a flat cardboard box, its lid pierced with holes. A weak cheeping sound can be heard coming from it. We children are permitted to look inside: Ten, twelve tiny downy chicks are sitting and standing in it, snuggling up to each other. Cook cuts up hard-boiled eggs into very fine cubes, cuts chives into small pieces, strews both into the cardboard box. The tiny creatures peck eagerly - we children are happy.

The catkins are as soft and downy as chicks. Not far from the house the willow trees stand in the pasture where so many mushrooms grow in summer. We stuff the catkins into our noses and into our ears. One catkin gets stuck in little Gisela's nostril, she cannot get it out again. We all, the visiting children and myself, try to help her, thereby pushing it even further inside. She panics and starts crying, so we go back to the house with her. A helpful adult pulls out the catkin with a pair of tweezers, and all is well. We put up with Mother's wordy admonitions.