

# The Green Shape, the Rose Shape, the Green Shape, the Rose Shape

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*Translated from German by Max Landwehrjohann*

Ms. Faßbender was indignant. A grease stain adorned her glasses, her slouch hat losing the battle against the heat, her neck protector stuck to her like a wet shower curtain. And now she was standing before this impossible shrub: a dog rose that had the impudence to blossom and carry fruit at the same time, even though the blooming period was over, and the fruit shouldn't ripen for two months at the earliest. This could not be.

Twenty minutes earlier, Ms. Faßbender had set out from the last parking spot beneath the hilltop. Immediately the forest had indifferently yet definitively admitted and engulfed her. The last kilometer in particular had been outrageously inhumane: too many European beeches and ashes were stuck in the ground, much too thin and much too high. The side of the hill was like the thorny back of a slain giant with knobby spears protruding from its spine, covered in hairy stinging nettles and splintered branches. The closer she got to her destination, the more the swarm of trees turned into scrub and scrub and scrub. Foxglove and blackthorn, elderberry and buckthorn, cornel and lilac embraced each other, crossing their disrespectful arms, sprawling in red leaves and pink blossoms and white calyxes, and Ms. Faßbender thought it ridiculous, found it ridiculous, this potpourri of shrubs, which taunted her, and which had not been documented on her forest map. The wood seemed as if it hadn't seen a forest ranger in years, even though her predecessor had been seen off to retirement only a month ago. The snotty-nosed vegetation simply pretended he had never existed.

And now she was standing before this impossible shrub. She took a step back and her forehead wrinkled. This forbidden dog rose had to be up to five meters high. It had no right to grow so tall. Ms. Faßbender took another angry look at her map, trying to make sense of it all.

First off, the vanilla scent. Faint down in the village, even stronger up here. This couldn't possibly be her imagination. She certainly smelled it, how it burned in her nose, sweet and artificial and repugnant.

Secondly, the fits. Coughing, vertigo, nausea, fainting. Fifteen people hospitalized. The doctors at the local hospital had no idea. The district's environmental agency had done air measurements in the valley. The result: far too much oxygen everywhere in the village and an unknown gas, which the lab couldn't identify. They were waiting for the analysis and suggested preemptive evacuation, but the villagers wouldn't leave their houses if no one could tell them what they were fleeing from and for how long.

And then there was the aerial image. To verify the information of her predecessor, Ms. Faßbender had started the drone and landed it, all confused: such contrasts were impossible. The green. The rose. This could not be.

Snorting, Ms. Faßbender pulled herself away from the dog rose and dug out the GPS tracker. Not much farther until the spot she had arranged for the drone. Defiantly, she trudged on. Her path went up, to the cusp of the hill. Whatever was supposed to be up there was impossible to determine, with the

thicket blocking the view and the way. For the last meters, Ms. Faßbender had to duck beneath the shrub arches. Then, she stumbled into the clear.

Vastness. The clearing had to cover multiple hectares. Silence; no wind whatsoever. A gigantic grass field lay quietly below the cloudless sky. The blades stood straight, disciplined like a lawn precisely cut to waist level. They formed one unit in green, and this green was perfection. She had never seen such a luscious, deep green before. It was hurting her eyes, but Ms. Faßbender couldn't turn away from the motionless plane. Too baffled to be angry, she walked up to the edge of this strange Green Shape and knelt to inspect the grass. The blades had no right to stand this closely together. They were virtually impossible to tell apart from one another, almost seeming like a corrugated wall. This was not supposed to grow, neither naturally nor by human hand. Slowly, Ms. Faßbender lifted her right index finger. With effort, she identified one individual blade. Gave it a nudge.

A rustle and whisper shuddered across the clearing. And like a single three-dimensional parallelogram made of biomass, whose lines were the stiff blades, all of the grass recoiled from her and fell over by its roots. Ms. Faßbender looked up. The grass border had sunk and revealed a rose color underneath it. A perfect, painful rose. Covered by the Green Shape – within the Green Shape – there stood thick stalks just as closely together as the grass blades. A never-before-seen, physically impossible ocean of symmetrically perfect blossoms. There was another rustle and this Rose Shape, the Rose rhombus, started moving slowly towards her, bent down to the ground and flooded her with a vanilla scent. Ms. Faßbender gagged, jumped up and stumbled backwards. The two shapes froze still and flat in an absurd carpet pattern, until all of a sudden, they simultaneously moved back up and down again in the opposite direction. The grass came rushing down in front of Ms. Faßbender. And switched with the blossoms. The shapes began a mechanical dance, to and fro, and ever faster, they swung like two giant, entangled windshield wipers. The rustling turned huge, steady, military. The Green Shape, the Rose Shape, the Green Shape, the Rose Shape. And then a flicker rose from the shapes: thick air, which fractured the light like in an oil puddle. A prismatic gas blend, vapor wafting about in streaks and forming antenna, feelers, lashes, tentacles. Whipped up by the swinging shapes, the gas spread across the clearing and the first tentacles ventured past Ms.

Faßbender into the bushes. The vanilla scent became unbearable. A heat wall bubbled toward her. That was when Ms. Faßbender noticed the little blue flame tongues flaring up across the field, reflected in the gas mix. More and more tiny flames popped up, grew bigger, caused clouds and deflagrations, and more and more tentacles crept into the forest. Then, one of those tentacles lit up and a column of fire swooshed past Ms. Faßbender into the thicket, where it dispersed. Stunned, she stared back at it: the bushes were unscathed. Another tentacle lit up, and another, but no soot, nothing charred. In all her bewilderment, Ms. Faßbender didn't even notice one of the gas tentacles penetrate her. Breathing turned to coughing turned to choking. Behind her, the Green Shape, the Rose Shape sizzled. The last thought Ms. Faßbender had was how nice and neat those two shapes were after all.

Six kilometers away, the valley filled up with gas. The villagers heard it before they burned up. The hissing of a fuse, then the chemical reaction erupted from between the trees and came barreling down the slope. A blue-red avalanche swallowed the valley. The town of Angerschlag im Hunsrück burnt at gable level.

