



Gianna Molinari
The World Behind the Hedge
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Here the Arctic, there a little village

A village fears its disappearance. That is why it is taking measures: the hedge, which is popular with tourists, is cherished and cared for, and the village treasury is checked regularly. But most importantly, the village takes care of Pina and Lobo, because these children are its future. But Pina and Lobo stopped growing a long time ago. While the village waits for the children to experience growth spurts, Pina's mother is in the Arctic watching the ice melt and the borders shift. Because there is no growth without disappearance.

Following her acclaimed debut, Swiss author Gianna Molinari once again presents a sensitive portrait of the mutual permeation of nature and culture. *The World Behind the Hedge* is simultaneously poetic and political, inviting us to think in a whole new way about growth, stagnation, disappearance and nature.

“Each of Molinari’s sentences are deliberate and skillful.”

Der Standard on *Everything is Still Possible Here*

Gianna Molinari was born in Basel in 1988 and lives in Zurich. She studied literary writing at the Swiss Literature Institute and modern German literature at the University of Lausanne. She co-founded the art action group “Literatur für das, was passiert” (Literature for World Events) and the author collective “RAUF”. Her debut novel *Everything Is Still Possible Here* was nominated for the German and Swiss Book Prizes.



Gianna Molinari

Behind the Hedge Is the World

Sample Translation by Katy Derbyshire

DORA

She has often imagined the Arctic. In her mind, Dora has been there many times. Looked out on ice and ice-cold water. Passed through a landscape, neither on foot nor by ship, but instead always from a bird's-eye perspective, close to the surface of the land and sea. In her imagination, she was an Iceland gull or a raven, and so passed over the landscape as a bird.

From above, she looked down on the well-swaddled ornithologists who observed her through especially cold-resistant binoculars. Whose interest was piqued by her wingspan, who pointed at her with their swaddled fingers and said: Look at that common raven. Look, what a gigantic exemplar of its species.

And all of them looked, all of them without exception. There was not much else to see. Not much that moved.

The ice floes move.

The land moves.

And the blood, the lungs, the heart.

Traces have been found, deep furrows rammed into the seafloor by icebergs running aground. Oceanographers have dated the traces back to the Ice Age.

The icebergs back then were giants. They were up to 1200 metres tall. The furrows they dug are fifteen metres deep and up to four kilometres long.

What noise it must have made when the ice tore open the seabed. What kind of sounds were they, which animals witnessed them?



One famous iceberg, for instance, was the one involved in the sinking of the Titanic; nameless, presumably calved from a glacier in southwestern Greenland in the late summer or early autumn of 1911, it drifted not north into Baffin Bay but instead in a south-westerly direction, towards the south of Labrador and Newfoundland.

Or Iceberg B-15, which calved from the Antarctic Ross Ice Shelf in the year 2000. Along its journey, it broke up into several parts. The largest of these parts, B-15A, was approximately 3000 square kilometres in size and 140 kilometres long and was the largest free-floating object ever sighted on the world's oceans. Along its further journey, it gradually shrank, melting and continuing to break up. For instance, it collided with the Drygalski Ice Tongue in 2005 and lost five kilometres in length through the impact. That same year, B-15A ran aground at Cape Adare in Victoria Land and broke up at the end of October into several smaller parts, which continued their journeys as B-15M, B-15N and B-15P, among others. In 2018 the iceberg's B-15Z fragment was sighted with a large rupture, and an astronaut shot one last photo.

The needle spins, disoriented. The closer to the North Pole, the less reliably the compass shows the direction. Dora has learned to use the Plough to find the North Star.

She wishes she were a little more animal and a little less human. It would be useful to have an elk's sensitivity to cold. An elk does not feel the cold until minus 40° Celsius.

The word seems too small, to her, for the animal.

E-l-k, as if there were a letter missing between E and L or L and K, or several letters.

She wishes she had downy feathers growing out of her skin and the ability to freeze certain body parts for certain times and thaw them out again without them being damaged.

Dora would not get far here with damaged body parts.

Sometimes she looks into the Arctic Ocean ahead of her and wishes a monster would break through the surface, something from a myth or legend. Perhaps a giant squid.

Better a monster than this smoothness, better movement than standstill. The fastest movers are gulls and clouds, followed by the barely visible drifting of the icebergs.

And when it grows too cold or too white, Dora thinks of Pina.

They lie deep, blanketed by the world's oceans, connecting the USA to Fiji to New Zealand or Portugal to Senegal to Ghana to Nigeria, Israel to Italy, Singapore to Indonesia to Australia. Digital signals flow through them, impulses: search requests, stock exchange data, daily news, emails, voices, images, letters, numbers. The submarine cables run along the seabed, partially covered by sediments, partially visible. Including for sharks, which bite into the cables. And between their teeth, encased in plastic and several layers of steel wire reinforcements, along the middle of a water barrier and a copper tube, information of all kinds moves at top speed, messages from boredom to indignation, full of love and bravado, full of the utterable and the secret, full of horror and suffering and joy and happiness.

They glide along their laid-out corridors, going their way, won't be stopped by either sharks or waves, nor by dragnets, ships' anchors, seaquakes or cable thieves. For now, everything runs smoothly.

Were they to be made audible, these messages crossing the deep sea, it would get loud. So loud that whales and kraken, coral and plankton might wish they were on land.

While Dora records her own voice talking, she thinks of Pina, who will hear her voice not much later. Dora presses *Send* and her voice dives down, speeds along the submarine cables on the seabed, hits land, hurtles onwards to the middle of a village with only one street, a few houses, a pond, a jetty, a hedge, with a guesthouse, its broken signage above the entrance flashing at reliably irregular intervals. And lands in that guesthouse, waits for Pina.

1

No one knew how the hedge had got into the village. Perhaps the hedge had been there first, and then the village came along. Perhaps the hedge was planted to fend off the wind almost constantly buffeting the roofs of the few houses here, which would blow even wilder without the hedge. Perhaps it was planted for aesthetic reasons or to shield something from view, though it was unclear what view it was to have concealed: the view outside of the surrounding area, or the view from there of the village.

All those no taller than one metre fifty were the village's great hope. The list consisted of Lobo, Pina and Pilaster, Emmerich the architect's dog. Though Pilaster wasn't really counted, since the prevailing opinion was that a dog couldn't be expected to contribute to the village's future.

The village was very concerned to make the future sound good to Pina and Lobo.

Once the village treasury allows it, they said, the school will come back to the village, and with it families, other children. Or: once the village coffers allow it, we'll build a new railway station and then more tourists will come, and you'll be the station manager, Pina. Eat plenty of nuts, children, get plenty of sleep, your growth is our growth.

Pina and Lobo wondered when a village could be called a village. A railway station doesn't make a village a village, and nor does a village shop or a school. There are villages without stations, without village shops, without schools.

They stood on the hill and put their hands in front of their faces to cover up parts of the village, and they thought about whether the village would still be a village if Lobo's house were missing, the shed next door or the jetty on the pond.

The shrinkage worried the people in the village in general. In general, they were afraid of disappearing. The part of the village street navigable for cars shrank because weeds grew rank on either side of it, slowly obscuring it beneath them. The school shrank until it disappeared entirely. The village was shrinking. And they too were shrinking. At least, Pina and Lobo had stopped growing – two years ago. Lobo was one metre thirty-five and Pina was one metre thirty-eight point seven tall, and they grew not a millimetre more.

What did keep growing, however, was the gigantic hedge on the western edge of the village. It stopped the wind from entering the village unhindered, and instead brought in tourists who admired and photographed the giant hedge. And despite how annoyed the village gardener Ms Werk was by the rubbish the tourists left behind around the hedge, which she had to clear away, the hedge was the only real reason for the village to exist, its visibility in the world. In this world that for the village, at least, was endlessly large and very far away.

The hedge grew slowly, but it grew. It certainly wasn't shrinking; everyone in the village agreed on that. Should the shrinkage spread to the

hedge, Ms Werk said, that would be the end of it all. And Pina's father Karsten agreed with her. The hedge was the village's security, they said. If it weren't for the hedge, we'd disappear off the map.

Ms Werk was the best informed about hedges. She knew the hedge's twigs were both nesting material and feeding material for birds. She knew hedges were important for the environment. She liked to refer to the hedge as a miracle, and when tourists admired and photographed the hedge, Ms Werk felt a sense of pride.

Pina stood by the hedge and looked out at the night. She stood so close to the hedge that she felt its leaves against the back of her neck. Perhaps the hedge's growth might spread to Pina that way, perhaps all she had to do was stand exactly that way for long enough, wait long enough. Things grew loud behind Pina's back. The hedge rustled, creaked, groaned. A bristling sound came out of it. Like an animal, Pina thought, turning around and getting a shock. An eye flashed here and part of the animal broke loose there, fluttered into the night.

2

The museum exhibited rarities. Though the sign outside the museum announced in large letters VILLAGE MUSEUM, the objects inside it had far more to do with everything around the village than with the village itself. The village itself was barely represented, apart from in the Hedge Room. This room documented the hedge, its growth and annual rings, the stories entwined around it. For instance, an illuminated panel explained that it had been planted as a kind of lighthouse, a lighthouse with no lamp, as a reference point in the landscape to help people find their way back to the village.

The panel explained that the hedge was the remains of a large maze or that the hedge had been suddenly there one morning, appeared out of nowhere, and cast its shadow.

The village museum housed a stuffed shrew. Shrews are not rodents, said Lobo's grandma, whom everyone called Loma; they're insect-eaters. They're more closely related to moles than common mice, and the really interesting thing about them is that they shrink in winter.

She dusted the grey-brown fur on the shrew's back with a brush.

In winter, shrews' brains get smaller and smaller, and their organs and bones too, Loma went on. And they don't start growing again until the spring. They reduce themselves to survive. Imagine that, children. And though Pina and Lobo didn't like it when people called them children – Loma, the others in the village or the tourists – they imagined an already very small shrew getting smaller and smaller.

The weather troubled the people from the village. The wind blew practically around the clock.

The main thing going on in the village was the wind, Pina's mother had told Dora. And she'd said it bothered her that only the village street led out of the village, and no other road.

On days with strong wind, Pina and Lobo sat in Loma's living room and played a card game invented by Lobo, which never quite worked out.

They drank tea out of small cups like old people, though only Loma was old.

Could Lobo imagine being as old Loma, Pina asked.

Not at all, he said, and Pina felt the same way. He couldn't imagine how wrinkles felt, he said. And she felt exactly the same way.

Though Lobo's game never worked out properly, it took a little of the boredom out of the windy days. But Pina usually got bored of the game at some point, and she walked home through the wind.

On days with strong wind, Pina's home situation looked no better, except that her father didn't play cards but instead spent all day sitting behind the reception desk drinking tea.

On days with little wind, Lobo, Pina and her father sometimes carried three armchairs out into the garden with the view of the pond, sat side by side and watched the reeds, which barely moved, or the flight of a gull, looked at the surface of the pond, watched a fish jumping and making circular waves, or a duck diving down and not surfacing for a long time, sometimes such a long time that Pina wondered whether the duck might have made its way out of the pond through a subterranean passage to the other side of the hedge.

Pina's mother Dora lived on a research vessel in the Arctic. She and another woman, an oceanographer, were collecting sediment samples from the seabed to decipher information: about the melting of the glaciers, about the changing of the climate, about the behaviour of the glaciers in the changed climate.

They spoke on the phone at irregular intervals, but often the connection was so bad that they couldn't hear each other, and then they would keep the connection open for a long time, usually until Dora hung up. Perhaps because a polar bear put in an appearance or because she saw no point in holding a speaker up to her ear as it emitted only white noise.

In those moments, Pina wished she had Lobo's good hearing. Lobo heard mice burrowing inside the earth. He heard the tourist bus engines long before a bus was visible on the village road. He heard the flapping of fruit-fly wings, the thudding of hearts.

He claimed he could only hear into the earth and not all the way through it. But Pina could at least have tried it, and if by chance the magma in the centre of the earth had happened to stand still and if the worms, snails, moles, mice, all the creatures in the earth had stopped their burrowing and digging and scratching and scraping for at least a moment, then Pina might have heard Dora.

Since they knew by now that the connection to the village was unreliable, Dora had begun to make recordings of herself, which Pina could

listen to whenever she liked. And then Pina listened while falling asleep or on days with strong wind, sat on the sofa and listened to Dora's voice talking about the Arctic, about the cold, the ice and the polar bears, or about Pina as a small child.

Lobo's eyes were very big through his glasses. It might have seemed like he ought to see very well with such big eyes, but in fact it was the opposite.

Loma said people who heard well didn't necessarily need to see all that well. Good hearing gets you a long way in life.

Pina wanted to get a long way in life too. All the way to the Arctic, or further.

ABOUT YOU AS A SMALL CHILD

You weren't yet two years old when you learned to climb the streetlamps without help. At three, you caught the biggest fish ever pulled out of the village pond. You were a very unusual child. At six, you could jump a metre high, and at seven you were so strong that trees slanted over when you leaned against their trunks. At eight –

DORA

Sometimes Dora dreams herself into the village and behind the hedge. To that place where the Arctic seems out of reach. To that place where hardly anything seems within reach. She dreams herself onto the banks of the pond or into the shade of the hedge. She dreams herself beside Karsten, her hand on the nape of his neck, beside Loma cleaning a display case, or beside Pina, sitting in the workshop and working on a weathervane, not noticing her mother at first; and then she does and gets a short shock and then she smiles.

She comes from a village entirely subjected to standstill. Where nothing moves, or almost nothing. Where the most exciting thing that happens is the plants growing.

In the village, they hear the hedge growing.

There are barely any plants where she is. And here too, barely anything moves.

She hears the ship's grating scraping of the ice and the clanking gurgling of the water between the ship and the ice. Sometimes she looks for movement in the corners, which she knows remain motionless.

Even when the temperature falls below minus 40° Celsius and the elks start shivering, it would be better for Dora to be an elk.

Once it became clear to Dora that even the village street was disappearing more and more, she announced she was taking part in the expedition. The village felt a sense of pride. Every one of them.

Just for a few months, Dora said. She packed Pina's weathervane in the shape of the pond.

Then you'll think of me whenever the wind changes.

I'll think of you anyway.

But then you definitely will.

Dora held Pina tight until the bus driver beeped her horn.

Then she ran to the bus, got on, drove off.

Another coordinate has been reached. Dora and the oceanographer attach the plastic tube to the winch and then let down the tube; it submerges, still visible for a moment, and then disappears in the darkness of the sea. It stops at 280 metres. Dora operates the winch again, reels in the rope. After a few minutes, the tube emerges from the water, filled with sediment.

Success, says the oceanographer.

And Dora is pleased along with her.

And then they lift the tube out of the water. Dora siphons off unwanted water with a large syringe while the oceanographer cuts a piece of green foam to size. Once the oceanographer has removed a small sediment sample from the tube, she inserts the foam into the upper end of the tube and then seals both ends with a lid. Dora labels the tube so the coordinates of the sample will later be clear in the lab, and what is top and what is bottom.

While the oceanographer notes down time and place and a brief description of the sediment and the photographer takes a shot of the sample spread onto one of his glass slides, Dora places the tube upright in a crate and gives Mika a sign to move the boat on.

Dora imagines herself standing at the geographical North Pole, at 90° north. Beneath her, ice four metres thick. And beneath the ice the Arctic Ocean, 4261 metres deep. And beneath the water mass, the Arctic ground.

3

Pina spent a lot of time building weathervanes. She sawed wood into shapes, sanded them, painted and varnished them. Then she put them together.

Lobo's favourite was the fiery bicycle; Pina liked the bird in a storm.

Weathervanes were more important where they lived than clocks. They were what set the course of the day. With a glance at the weathervane, people decided whether to leave the house or devote the day to tea and card games. And the weathervanes were popular with the tourists too. Pina often set up her wobbly camping table in front of the hedge on weekends, switched on her little wind machine and sold her weathervanes to tourists who lived in places where there was perhaps no wind at all, or certainly not wind as strong as in the village.

Pina listened to Dora's voice. And suddenly the recording broke off and Pina listened to the white noise.

The thing with the trees doesn't work any more, Pina told her father. They don't start to slant when I lean against them now.

You grow out of certain skills, he answered.

When did people normally stop growing, they asked Loma, and Loma answered that people never stop growing, that was the great thing about being human. And she told them not to worry, they were perfectly healthy children who just weren't growing for a while. It would all work out, growth came in spurts, she said.

Pina and Lobo waited for the spurts. They didn't know what the spurts would feel like; perhaps like a gust of wind hitting them unexpectedly.

The shrew isn't the only animal that can adjust its size to suit its circumstances, Loma said as she ripped up an old sheet and held out a piece each to Lobo and Pina. Pina sprayed cleaning fluid on a display case and rubbed the glass clean with the piece of cloth.

The black-capped chickadee, Loma said, hides hundreds of seeds in the autumn as food for the winter, and its brain grows so that it can remember all these hiding places, and so does its memory for place. And once the winter's over it shrinks again.

Oh, to be a chickadee, Loma said, tipping her head and looking diagonally up at the display cabinet to spot any streaks on the glass.

And Pina went on polishing and wondered what *places* were for a black-capped chickadee, whether they included a crack in a tree's bark, a furrow in the ground or a notch in a leaf.

The fewer natural enemies animals have, the bigger they get, Loma said. And Pina wondered whether the hedge had too few and she and Lobo had too many natural enemies, and if so, who their natural enemies were.

The Bramble Cay mosaic-tailed rat, for example, had barely any natural enemies, Loma said. It lived only on Bramble Cay, and that was where it became extinct.

A team of scientists staged a major search operation, a last attempt to find a few living specimens, perhaps the last of their kind, to save the species. For six days and six nights, the women and men searched every inch of the island, peered into every hole in the ground and every hollow in the sand, ran their hands over every clump of grass, turned over rocks and driftwood. But they found not one pawprint, not one mark of a tail in the sand.

The reason given for their extinction was the storms that buffeted the cay more and more often and more and more harshly, flooding it over and over. The island's plant cover was reduced and the mosaic-tailed rats lacked food, lacked hiding places. Perhaps they starved to death, perhaps they were caught by high waves in a storm, washed away.

The Bramble Cay mosaic-tailed rat has become famous. Not for its existence but for its disappearance.

Dying out is more unsettling than dying, Loma said, the thought that there'll be no more life after death.

There are places, Pina's father said, that disappear off the map. It's not just us. Other places disappear too, islands are submerged, mountains crumble into rocks, then stones, then dust.

Pina's father believed the village lay behind the hedge, and was therefore better protected than other places.

Pina believed the world lay behind the hedge. The world, and somewhere the Arctic as well. Pina imagined she could stroll past the hedge and get further and further, on foot, on trains, on ships, and one day she would get there. She would clamber onto the research ship and say: Here I am. Dora wouldn't believe her eyes; she'd whoop for joy and then she'd call Pina's father and the connection would be a good one for a change, so that Pina could tell him about the people and animals she'd come across along the way, about the

valleys she'd crossed, the mountains she'd climbed, about her journey across land and water.

Theirs was a village where more people left than arrived, Loma said. That much was obvious. Another obvious thing was that maintaining the vacant houses had a negative effect on the village coffers, and the question increasingly arose of how much longer that maintenance could be kept up. The architect Emmerich was in charge of the vacant houses; he carried out repairs, kept wind, water and rodents from entering the buildings.

The birds needed the hedge. At least, it wasn't inconvenient for them. Quite the opposite: they fluttered around the hedge and into it, mated on it, nested in it, pecked at it, and when tourists came home from their visits to the hedge they told friends about the twittering hedge as full of life as the stuffed-full aviaries in parks, except that the hedge wasn't an aviary and the village wasn't a park, they said. Only a handful of people still lived there. What did they live on, that was what they wondered.

DORA

Before the icefjord, the mainland lies in its summer bloom; in greenish yellow and brownish red and orange, with black-violet berries and moss, very pale and very dark.

Mika says the summer is almost over now, since he has seen a star in the night sky. In the bright polar summer nights there were none. Now, he says, they are reappearing, and with them come shooting stars and wishes.

What does Mika wish for?

A second berth in the harbour, Mika says. A precise map of the seabed to circumnavigate the sandbanks. A life without cares and woes. Money doesn't necessarily make you happy, he says, but a bit more money might make you a bit happier.

Getting to the Arctic or getting away from it is a complicated undertaking. Prices for plane tickets are high. Prices for petrol are high. The inhabited places too remote. The routes too impenetrable, always more fjords and more ice. There's always a hindrance, always no roads, few flights, boats don't go out in a storm; it is not hard to believe the end of the world is right here, or at least very near.

About Mika, Dora knows that his mother lives on the mainland and that he and his girlfriend never go there, apart from once every two years. That his pay stretches only to one flight every two years but he wants to stay on the island, and that means one visit every two years will have to do. Dora knows about Mika that he guides researchers through the ice, and when there are none around he goes fishing for halibut with his girlfriend's father and makes transport runs with Knud and Knud's transport ship. He usually transports other ships or a car or material for building a house: particle board, beams, sheet metal.

Radar planes flew over the Arctic island and ships sent data, for the topographical measurement of the ice-covered surface. The data was used to make an island model with no ice at all. The model shows valleys and mountains, reveals the world's largest canyon, structures of lakes, meteorite impacts normally beneath the ice, not visible to the naked eye. Dora can float above the model on the monitor, zoom in, follow contour lines, she can dive into the canyon and visualise the island with no ice. The gigantic canyon crossing the island lies below sea level, but if the weight of the ice were gone the bottom of the valley would rise, there would be a huge push of land mass, the island would elevate, and the melting ice would flood coasts elsewhere.

Where was the beginning, and have we reached the end yet? Dora wonders.

She would like to tell Pina about the beginning and end.

What's not visible:

The world's largest canyon

The beginning

The end

When the sky is cloudless the stars can be seen again; Dora sees the constellation of Ursa Major, the bear who gave her name to the Arctic. A she-bear lying up there, looking down on the white. And above Ursa Major the Little Bear, bearing the North Star in the tip of her tail. She too looks down on the white and at Dora, standing there in the midst of a great landscape that could not be more unknown to her. Without Mika she'd be lost here, neither the little nor the big she-bear could help her. They might be a comfort to her, their light, the knowledge of the North Star; no more than that.

4

Alongside the tourists, specialists came to the village at regular intervals to measure the children's bodies from top to toe. The length of their arms and legs, the distance from shoulder to shoulder, the circumference of their waists, heads, wrists and ankles.

They stood still.

If you must refuse to grow, you might at least stand still. That's what the men said. And the children said nothing.

The specialists waved their fingers in front of their eyes, listened to their backs through their stethoscopes and to the beating of their hearts. They looked for reasons why Lobo had stopped at precisely one metre thirty-five and Pina at one metre thirty-eight point seven, and had not grown one millimetre for more than two years. They came to very differing conclusions; blamed the climate in general, the village's location, too little exercise, too little sleep or poor nutrition. Eat plenty of nuts, children, get plenty of sleep.

The specialists stayed overnight in the Golden Ratio Guesthouse, the only guesthouse in the village which acted like a guesthouse; in fact, the only

guesthouse there was and which was open when the specialists arrived or a rare tourist group decided to spend a night in the village.

Pina and her father were the only people who lived in the guesthouse permanently. Pina's father was in charge of the guests, when guests signed in. While he remade the beds in which no one had slept for weeks, dusted the furniture, opened the windows and let fresh air into the rooms, Pina guarded the reception desk.

She liked sitting at reception. She liked the brass bell, the key rack with the keys, the big revolving chair. She liked sitting on the chair, turning to the left and right and keeping her eyes fixed on the entrance door. Ready for the entrance of a male specialist or a female tourist. Ready for the entrance of a female adventurer who would end up in the village by mistake and ask for a bed for the night. Ready for Dora's return.

On measurement days, Pina and Lobo had to get up early. The specialists would already be setting up in the guesthouse breakfast room. They'd ply Pina and Lobo with a bag of nuts each as they assembled their various measuring devices. Pina and Lobo would watch them, chomping on nuts. They'd chew slowly. They would not say a word.

As soon as the specialists were set up, Pina and Lobo had to hop on one leg, turn their heads as far as possible to each side, clench their teeth, stick out their tongues, cough three times, hold their breath and cough three more times, touch the tip of their nose with their forefinger, walk across the room with one eye shut and draw an imaginary eight in mid-air. As they did so, the specialists took notes, spoke into dictation machines and to one another, often saying *norm* and *stagnation*, and also *case*. When they spoke, then it was in hushed voices but with clear intonation. They paced the room, scratched their chins, rubbed their hands and wiped the sweat from their brows with their handkerchiefs. They exchanged glances. They nodded a lot.

On measurement days, the specialists also examined the hedge. They took samples of the bark, counted the annual rings, placed leaves under microscopes, determined their length and their weight.

The surrounding land was also of interest to the specialists. They measured with yardsticks, laser devices and tachymeters, they registered every dent and elevation, the highest and lowest points.

They measured Ms Werk's flowerbeds and Pina's nailbeds, the surface of the pond and the palms of Lobo's hands, the span of Pina's arms and the size of the nature reserve.

Pina and her father watched two specialists steering a drone above the hedge. They saw the drone flying in a circle. The drone filmed the hedge with a measurement camera, calculating its height, length and breadth, creating a digital 3D model.

And while they were watching the drone, Pina's father hoped that at least this flying measurement camera would manage to put two and two together and work out a connection between growth and standstill, between the hedge and the children.

After all the measurements were done, the specialists packed their bags and left. Pina and Lobo went to stand in the wind. The guesthouse was vacant again. The only one left was Pina's father, who had learned nothing from the specialists, because the specialists had learned nothing themselves.

If the village treasury permits, the people from the village said, then the vacant houses will be completely renovated, then new people will move into the village. Or: If the village coffers permit, then we'll put up a new building with roof terraces and the terraces will offer the very best view, and you two will move into the new building one day. Get plenty of rest, children, get plenty of sunshine, your growth is our growth.

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