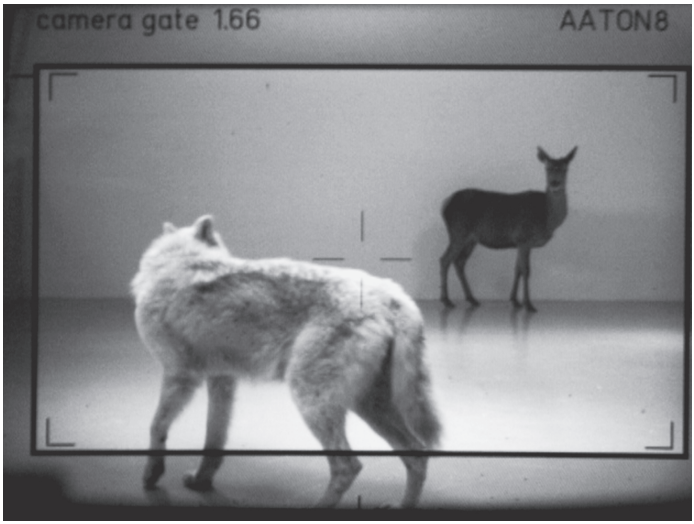
TO LEAVE WITH THE REINDEER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for Phu Si
who did not hang himself in his room

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You don't know if you like animals but you're desperate to have one, you want a creature. This is one of the first indications of your desire, a desire that's all the fiercer for remaining unfulfilled.

Tigon, leopon, pumapard, jaglion, tiguar, jagulep, leoger, tigoness, lipard, jagress aren't only rare words, these are also creatures of flesh and blood, born in breeding centres under the observation and with the assistance of researchers dedicated to ensuring the survival of our great predators. These strange animals can't be considered truly wild for, strictly speaking, they don't exist in the natural world and belong to no recorded species. It follows that we must be legally permitted to acquire them. We have to understand nonetheless that to invite one of these specimens into our home is to put ourselves in danger, especially as scientific studies have shown that interspecies offspring frequently demonstrate severe mental problems.

You have been told that you didn't want to leave your mother's belly. There are even photos of you sitting proudly between your parent's legs, head in the

air. Your breech position was the first inkling of your wilfulness.

We may wonder what 'mental problems' means for an individual resulting from the coupling of a tiger and a lioness, or a tigress and a lion, or a lioness and a leopard, or a leopard and a puma, or a jaguar and a leopardess, or of any other of the multiple combinations for which we can invent new names as required. Observers in daily contact with these creatures may have noted an abnormal tendency to docility among them, which would explain why they are classed with domestic animals and why we can, therefore, welcome them into our homes. With hybrids, everything is possible.

You've also been told that you were a magnificent baby, with a smooth head and a round, smiling face, due no doubt to your having been born by Caesarean, which spared you any physical exertion. According to family legend, your natural docility is actually born of indolence.

To find out which animal we have the right to own or tame, we must consult the laws, by-laws, statutes and decrees that differentiate the species, races and subspecies of domestic animals, the wild species, the species under threat of extinction, the wild species threatened with extinction, the protected species, species considered dangerous, and species both dangerous and protected.

You don't like wild animals. You prefer household animals, ones that live with humans as part of their families: it's those you want.

Anyone may refer to the statutory documentation to find out if they are violating the law by keeping at home a boa constrictor, a flea, a poison dart frog of the Rivan 92 cross-breed, a yellow-tailed woolly monkey, a Tibetan blue bear or a cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), so charming a companion in its early years that it will jump onto your bed and lick your face before curling up at your feet. Charm is not the decisive criterion for distinguishing the wild from the domestic.

For a long time, you believed that your mother saw *Rosemary's Baby*, the Roman Polanski film, while she was pregnant with you. When, years later, you saw the film, you imagined the awful distress she must have experienced awaiting a baby that could have been human or animal.

Can we love what we don't know, can't go near, can't see, can't touch, what we imagine? Could imagination be the substrate of love?

During the very earliest years of your life, despite your docility and the perfect smoothness of your head, you showed a tendency to risk your life by rocking your cot violently or by bouts of impassioned yelling. Of this period, in which you made your presence felt with an abandon that was not to last, you have no memory.

Some wolveries, in which the trained wolves live behind bars and howl at the smallest incursion by an unfamiliar creature, may contain both wolves and 'hybrids'. The word 'hybrid', used by the trainers to reassure visitors and temper the animals' apparent ferocity, doesn't always have the intended effect.

From the age of three, you wanted a pet that would give you a break from human company. You realised that your teddy bear was not a living thing. Kissing him, yanking his ears or pulling out his fur therefore offered only moderate satisfaction.

Everyone loves teddy bears. Many people also love animals. Only, those who use them, live off them, breed them, capture them, sell them, hunt them, kill them, do not speak of love. When it comes to animals, love is a luxury that we may or may not be able to indulge. Not everyone is lucky enough to be able to love animals.

You wish you could be lucky, you wish you could be like everyone else, you wish you could say I love animals. Because when you say that, there's no need to explain, love itself is enough and exonerates us from the rest. You love animals.

From the age of three, you begged for an animal, a little ball of fur that would be entirely under your sway, in your possession, your control, in your hands, in your power: yours. Your parents refused, deciding that you wouldn't be ready to look after one, that they'd end up doing the work for you, and you felt, though you couldn't explain it, that there were deeper motivations behind this categorical refusal.

Undomesticated species are those that have not been modified by means of human selection. In contrast, domesticated species have been subject to a pressure of selection that is constant and ongoing. This pressure has resulted in the formation of a species, i.e. a group of animals which has acquired stable and genetically transmissible features, and which cannot produce fertile offspring with other species.

Rosemary's Baby tells the story of a woman who has terrible nightmares throughout her pregnancy. As she can't remember precisely the circumstances that led to her child's conception, she ends up wondering if her

husband could have drugged her and allowed some vile beast to mate with her. You would like to know what effect seeing this film might have had on your mother's pregnancy.

In legal terminology, 'fertile issue' generally refers to the newborn animal, product of the coupling of two other animals, anthropomorphically known as the 'parents'. When there are no parents, this is because they have been killed or caught by predators, and likewise for humans. For a great many species, it may also occur that the animal is abandoned at birth by its so-called parents, whether because of its non-viability or excessive vulnerability, or on the contrary because it possesses innately and from the first the qualities it needs for independence and survival.

Should animals left to themselves in the wild be considered abandoned or simply independent? So long as abandonment does not become a precondition for independence.

Like many children, more even than to buy a pet you want to rescue an animal born in the wild and abandoned by its parents. Your father scolds you sharply every time you express this desire. You don't understand his anger. You keep on asking.

In France, before the passage of statute 76-629 on 10 July 1976, which introduced the concepts of environmental heritage and the conservation of species, all

fauna and flora were considered *res nullius*, or belonging to no one. When something belongs to no one, anyone may take possession of it. Once a person has taken possession, this proprietor is responsible for their property, as indicated in Article 1385 of the Civil Code. 'The proprietor of an animal, or whoever makes use of an animal, is responsible during the period of its use for any damage caused by the animal, whether that animal was in his or her keeping or whether it was lost or had escaped.'

Due to this statute, of which neither your father nor your mother knows the exact terms but which they apply by intuition, you may not rescue any animal, abandoned or otherwise. Should you do that, you would become responsible for it, which, it's agreed, you're not ready for. At four years old, there is, it seems, no responsibility you may take on.

The world is a fabric of words; we are completely sheltered and sustained by the simultaneously coercive and maternal resources of the text.

You need your parents. You could die in your sleep, by choking, by putting your fingers into sockets, by spilling a bowl of hot water, by handling blunt instruments, by toppling from an open window, by falling into a pool, you are at risk, you have to be watched night and day, accidents happen so quickly, you are under the meticulous surveillance of your parents.

Wolveries are mostly established far from towns so that the wolves' howling does not disturb local people. The trainers, however, must live in close proximity to the kennels, in part to keep track of their animals' comings and goings, and in part because all training demands continual contact with the creatures one is meant to be training.

The howls you emit in the first years of your life have left no trace in your memory. Instead, you have a crystal-clear recollection of the fear you read in your mother's eyes when you used to go on all fours under the bed, or tried to hide, to escape her gaze.

There are no wild animals, there are only protected animals.

You have no experience of animals, no contact with them at all. You occasionally see them in elaborately produced films that expertly frame faces, eyes, tufts of fur, muzzles, tongues, ears, teeth, but thereby cause you to miss what's most important: the sensation and the scale of them. You miss the scale, you miss the smell, you miss the fear, you miss the sense of comparison and difference, you restrict yourself, you separate yourself, you confine yourself to those you know, you are surrounded by people who are like you. Instead of being surrounded by animals, you are surrounded by people like you.