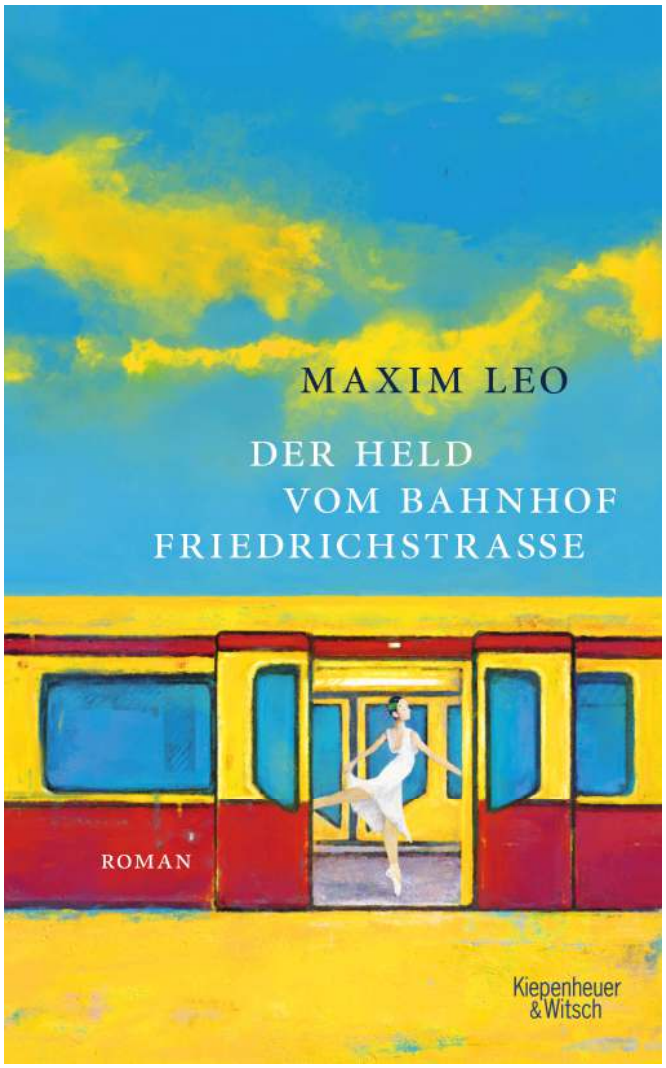
The Hero of Friedrichstrasse Station
by Maxim Leo

Sample Translation by Jamie Bulloch



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A fly landed on Hartung's arm, interrupting his thoughts. Thoughts – hmm. More like a waking coma he sometimes fell into when he sat behind the counter, waiting. Waiting – hmm. As if he were seriously expecting anything to happen in his shop today. The truth was, he wasn't expecting anything. Hartung could sit there for hours, surrounded by a wonderful nothingness.

Beate, who lived opposite and would rent a romantic film once a week, had recently told him about the meditation course she was doing. If he'd understood correctly, meditation was all about letting go of your thoughts, watching them like a passing tram. People seemed to fork out a lot of money for this 'tram feeling'. And most never achieve it, Beate said, because it's so bloody difficult.

I ought to become a meditation guru, Hartung thought. Letting go of his thoughts was something he *could* do; in fact it was probably one of the things he did best.

But he didn't have a clue how he managed it – it just happened. And to be honest, it had only caused him problems till now.

The fly shimmered blue and green, and he felt its legs on his skin. Hartung checked the time: ten past six and already dark outside. Inside the

shop were two old standard lamps that bathed the small room in a dim light. The lamps had been Beate's idea; she said a video rental shop ought to look like a living room: cosy and slightly cluttered. Well, it was certainly cluttered, but Hartung was inclined to doubt it was cosy too. His gaze fell on the uneven lino floor and Ikea shelving, which was losing its veneer.

'Time for the fun part of the day,' Hartung muttered, going to the children's film shelf. *Treasure of the Silver Lake* or *The Olsen Gang on the Track*? After some deliberation he plumped for *The Troops of St Tropez*, put the DVD into his laptop and opened a beer.

Hartung loved those films that allowed him to travel through time. He would see himself back on the brown sofa – Dad on his right, Mum on his left – opposite the black-and-white television set that smelled of burnt dust when you turned it on. The things from back then which still existed now Hartung found incredibly reassuring. These films were like the string that kept his life together.

Winnetou, Egon Olsen and Louis de Funès were the saviours he sometimes called on. Good friends who came to the rescue when needed. He had no idea what was getting him down more at the moment, the shitty autumn weather or Karin, who'd chucked him. Or that letter from the property management telling him that the rental arrears for the shop had to be paid by the end of the month. What was he supposed to pay the bloody rent with? Nobody came to the shop anymore apart from people in his

building, Beate opposite and a few others in the neighbourhood who for some reason thought it was cool to keep using old technology like DVDs. Obviously Hartung was glad to have these loyal customers, but he did find it a bit strange. If he hadn't by chance taken on this video rental shop he would have signed up for a Netflix subscription long ago.

He couldn't say this openly, of course; officially he was an arthouse cinema enthusiast. Jim Jarmusch, Fellini, Lars von Trier, Chabrol, Michael Haneke – that sort of stuff. This had been Beate's idea too; she felt you had to offer people something special. Hartung had acquired his arthouse collection at a knockdown price when another video rental shop went into liquidation five years ago. He'd tried to watch one of these films several times, but he found them long-winded, not to mention utterly depressing. That's why he'd only read the brief blurbs on the DVD covers, made a note or two on the directors and so if a customer showed an interest in Amaldóvar's *Broken Embraces*, for example, Hartung could pipe up cheerfully, 'Brilliant choice of film! A wonderful combination of melodrama and film noir. A treat for lovers of cinematographic reminiscences.' This worked rather well, although it took Hartung a while to be able to say 'cinematographic reminiscences' without getting his tongue twisted.

If only he'd known all of this when Markus suggested he take over Moviestar. 'Absolutely bomb-proof,' Markus had said at the time. He even

sounded offended when Hartung didn't snap the offer up straightaway: 'I gave you first dibs because you've worked here for so long. Because it'll mean you can take it easy until you retire.' Markus asked Hartung to give him one reason why humanity would ever want to stop watching films at home. When Hartung racked his brains but still couldn't think of anything, Markus said triumphantly, 'This is a goldmine, mate. You'll thank me for the rest of your life.'

Markus disappeared off to Portugal with his new girlfriend, but not until Hartung had signed the contract stipulating that half of the profits were to go to Markus for five years, effectively a payment in return for the stock of films and the list of regular customers.

And for the first few years business wasn't bad. Although Moviestar was no goldmine, it was enough to cover Hartung's needs. Until the streaming services came onto the scene and Hartung realised he wouldn't be able to take it easy until he retired. On the contrary, he'd have to put his nose to the grindstone. And putting his nose to the grindstone had never been his thing.

So Hartung had become a victim of technological progress. Not for the first time, it had to be said. For Hartung and technological progress had been embroiled in an ill-fated relationship from the outset. It began in 1976: Hartung had just finished his apprenticeship as a level-crossing attendant and points operator for East German Railways – with a 'satisfactory' grade

– and was looking forward to the future with optimism. Only months later, the new relay technology was introduced in the GDR by the Soviet Union, as a result of which virtually everything Hartung had learned about points and level crossings was now redundant.

Because of poor discipline at work (sleeping and drinking beer while on duty) Hartung was dismissed from the railways and sent on probation to the Bärwalde mine in Lusatia, where he was retrained as a digger driver. A few years later the Wall came down and freedom began, which for many East Germans meant they'd rather heat their homes with clean natural gas than stinking briquettes, forcing the lignite mine to close.

Hartung's subsequent career as a freelance sales rep for a satellite dish firm in the Hellersdorf area of Berlin came to an abrupt end when cable TV began its victory procession through the old East Germany. His next attempt to finally make a professional breakthrough appeared more promising. With the help of his schoolfriend Mike Fischer, Hartung managed to enter the portable C-Netz telephone market. In the early 1990s these were suitcase-sized devices chiefly used by western German developers in the east and the Russian mafia. Hartung sold whole lorryloads of them, had business cards made that read DEPUTY MANAGING DIRECTOR, and drove a dark-blue BMW coupé. Finally, he thought, destiny is smiling on me, but only a few years later the first mobile phones came on the market, destroying his business model for good.

Over the years, therefore, Hartung had developed a rather fatalistic relationship to progress, which was why at first he declined when Markus (who he knew from the C-Netz telephone business) offered him a job at Moviestar in 1997. Hartung was desperate not to be the casualty of yet another technological revolution. ‘Are you sure that VHS video cassettes are future proof?’ he asked Markus, who didn’t understand the question but urgently needed staff and offered Hartung the mind-boggling sum of 2,000 deutschmarks per month for a full-time position.

Ever since, Hartung had been sitting behind this counter, in this shop that had barely changed. Apart from the fact that the VHS cassettes on the shelves soon had to be swapped for DVDs and Blu-Rays, which wasn’t a problem because Moviestar had made Markus so much money that he’d easily been able to afford the transition. This successful leap into the digital video era had alleviated Hartung’s technology trauma somewhat and encouraged his belief in the future – wrongly, as he knew now.

Two years ago there’d been another change, which had less to do with technological development than with Hartung’s financial situation. This forced him to clear out the back room (where the horror films and porn flicks were kept) to make space for a bed, wardrobe and shower cabin with plastic curtain. Not only did this save on the rent for his flat, it also significantly reduced his commute, thus giving Hartung at least another half

an hour in bed each morning, which was a clincher. A win–win situation overall, which is why he kept wondering why he hadn't thought of it earlier.

Hartung took a sip from his bottle of beer and tried concentrating on the film. Louis de Funès was just driving down the St Tropez promenade in his open-top Citröen. One of his favourite scenes was coming: when Gendarme Cruchot and his colleagues drive the naturists from the beach. Hartung leaned back in his seat and the fly took off from his arm.

2

The Moveistar door flew open. A man Hartung had never seen before entered the shop. ‘My name is Landmann, I work for *Fakt* news magazine and I’d like to interview you.’

Hartung looked at the laptop, where Gendarme Cruchot, accompanied by a whooping nun, was concluding a magnificent pursuit. ‘I’m very busy. What’s it about?’

‘As I’m sure you know, in six weeks’ time it will be thirty years since the Wall came down.’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘We’re preparing a special edition to mark the occasion and I’ve got a few questions. It’s about the escape from Friedrichstrasse station on 12 July 1983. The train that vanished to the West. The mass escape. You know.’

‘Yes, and?’

‘Well, I’ve looked at the Stasi files. You were arrested as the main suspect, the mastermind who organised the whole thing.’

Hartung pressed the pause button, freezing Louis de Funès in the middle of a temper tantrum. Hartung’s eyes wandered over to the journalist, who was standing before him with a big smile on his face. ‘Mastermind? Me?’

‘Am I not right in thinking you were the chief signalman at Friedrichstrasse station at the time?’

‘Deputy chief signalman.’

‘Oh well, whatever. In the files it–‘

‘Are you interested in films?’

‘Sure, why?’

‘Because this is a video rental shop, not an information bureau.’

‘But I just want to ask you a few questions.’

‘And I’m rather stressed right now. Are you already one of our customers?’

‘No, like I said, I–’

‘Then please fill out this form. The joining fee is 80 euros.’

‘But… but why should I pay 80 euros?’

‘So I can talk to you during my working day. You can also go for premium membership at 120 euros. Then I can talk to you for longer.’

The journalist gave Hartung a look of irritation, but obediently began filling out the form. ‘It doesn’t say anything about a joining fee here.’

‘It was only introduced recently. I mean, I’ve got to have some way of dealing with the onslaught of customers.’

The journalist looked around the empty shop, trying to swallow his anger. ‘OK, where do I sign?’

A satisfied Hartung took the completed form and gave him a receipt for 120 euros. ‘Right, we can talk now.’

‘In the files it says you worked for an organisation helping people to escape, but nothing could be proved.’

‘Rubbish.’

‘What happened back then? In the prison, in Hohenschönhausen?’

Hartung’s head began working, images popped up. The bright formica table with battered edges. The glass blocks in the window recesses that blurred the view outside. The broad, not unfriendly face of the interrogator. Hartung shook his head. ‘That was ages ago.’

‘Tell me about it.’

‘Oh, I dunno – they marched me off, I was locked up, had to answer stupid questions and was back out a few days later. No great shakes.’

‘In the file it says you manipulated a set of points, sending a train with 127 GDR citizens to the West.’

‘Well, if that’s what it says…’

‘Herr Hartung, have you forgotten I’m a premium customer now? There must have been a reason for your arrest.’

‘Haven’t got a clue. There was something wrong with those stupid points.’ Now Hartung had that smell in his nostrils again, a cocktail of machine oil, tar, dust and metal heated by the sun. He could feel the tracks shudder beneath the heavy wheels of the trains. He could hear the rumbling

of the wheel bearings, the squealing of the brakes, the crackly voices over the radio. All of it was suddenly there once more, as if there was a room in his head that was only filled with these memories. A room he hadn't entered in a very long time. The memories felt strange, as if from a different life, and yet so vivid, as if he'd been standing in the track ballast at Friedrichstrasse station only yesterday, wearing his dark-blue uniform and holding a lantern.

'Herr Hartung? Hello? What was wrong with the points?'

Hartung snapped out of his thoughts and looked at the journalist, whose face was full of curiosity.

'I can't remember. It's like me asking you if the first girl you snogged was wearing a red or blue dress.'

'What a daft comparison!'

'I don't think so,' Hartung said.

'She was wearing trousers.'

'A peck on the lips or tongues?'

'None of your business!'

'You see, that's what I've been thinking all this time.'

'OK, Herr Hartung, I think I know how this works. I would like to be your video shop's first platinum customer. I'll pay 400 euros if you finally tell me your story.'

'800.'

‘600.’

‘OK.’ Hartung fetched another beer from the fridge and put one down in front of the journalist. Elated by the money that had been promised, he delved into his memory. Who’d have thought he’d ever be given 600 euros – roughly 1,200 deutschmarks and almost 6,000 East German marks – just to tell a few old stories from his time on the railways?

‘There was a safety bolt which had to be undone by hand before the points could be switched electronically. They were the points on track 6, signal box 38. Listening to himself, Hartung was amazed at everything he remembered. Signal box 38 – fuck me! More and more images churned around his head. The workshop down in signal control. The vice, the metal shavings. How often he’d sat in this workshop, on the wooden bench beside the tool cabinet. Hartung could see the telephone with the green and red buttons. The portable radio with its broken aerial. The cast-iron stove in which they burned the rotten railway sleepers in winter.

‘What was so important about these points?’

‘They allowed the trains that were repaired in the East to be sent back to West Berlin.’

The journalist took a pen and pad from his pocket and started making notes. ‘I thought the East Berlin train network was completely separate from the West Berlin one.’

‘It was,’ Hartung said. ‘But there was this one set of points at Friedrichstrasse station where the trains from the East arrived. Normally the points were aligned so that the trains pulled into the East Berlin platform. But if the points were switched, the train would head into the West on track 2.

‘That’s why the points had this safety mechanism?’

‘The bolt, yes.’

‘So what exactly happened on that night of 12 July 1983?’

‘I was on duty, and had a bit of a kip in the workshop to begin with. Then came the call from signal control to remove the safety bolt from the points on track 6. This hardly ever happened, and usually we were told about it in advance. So I was a bit startled. I went onto the track and tried to undo the bolt but it wouldn’t budge. I then had a go with the pipe wrench and the thing broke.’

‘What happened then?’

‘I was supposed to report it straightaway, but then I’d have had to get hold of another bolt, which would have been tricky at three in the morning. I’ll sort it later, I thought. At least the points could be switched now, that was the most important thing.’

‘Did you switch the points?’

‘No, they were electric points, operated by signal control. I told my colleagues that the safety bolt was off, then I went back to the workshop and dozed off again.

‘But weren’t you on duty?’

Hartung laughed. ‘And? The night shift on East German Railways was always more night than shift. And nobody was ever woken up if it wasn’t necessary. Someone came to take over at seven in the morning, I went home, had another lie down and that afternoon the Stasi were knocking at my door.

The journalist paced up and down the shop edgily. ‘Are you saying you knew nothing about the mass escape until the afternoon?’

‘How could I? Like I said, I was asleep. The Stasi told me about it later. They were all very animated, I mean, you can understand them given that a train full of passengers had just rocked across the heavily guarded border. And I was supposedly to blame for the whole thing.’

‘But wasn’t that the case? In the file it says that the broken safety bolt got wedged in the points. That’s why the points were jammed later when they were meant to be switched back. Clearly your colleagues in signal control didn’t notice.’

‘They wouldn’t have been able to notice, all they did was push a button and that was it. I mean, it had always worked in the past.’

‘Apart from that night, with the result that the first regular train of the morning, arriving at Friedrichstrasse station at 4.06 from Marx-Engels-Platz, was able to cross into the West.’

‘A cock-up.’

‘Is that all you’ve got to say on the matter?’

‘OK, I admit I didn’t do everything completely by the book that night. But it was just a silly accident, an unfortunate series of events, as they say. It wasn’t planned. The Stasi eventually realised that too, otherwise they wouldn’t have let me go free again.’

Hartung took two more beers out of the fridge; all this talking was thirsty work. ‘To East German Railways!’ he exclaimed, his mood improving by the minute.

‘Herr Hartung,’ the reporter said, looking him in the eye, ‘I understand. You’ve kept this secret for so long, it’s only natural you might not wish to just blurt it out. I’ve read in the file what the Stasi did to you. And you’re thinking, I kept quiet even when they tortured me, so why should I talk now? Is this right?’

‘Tortured?’

‘It’s all in here,’ the reporter said, tapping a pile of paper in front of him. ‘I quote: “Despite two months of intense special treatment, the accused stuck by his claim that nobody gave him any orders and nobody helped him.”’ The journalist took a deep breath. ‘I know what “intense special

treatment" means,' he said with a knowing nod. 'You don't have to try and deceive me, Herr Hartung, I have the greatest respect for your iron will and courage.'

'I haven't the foggiest idea of what you're going on about,' Hartung said.

'In Hohenschönhausen Stasi prison this meant: systematic sleep deprivation, psychological attrition, isolation, withholding food. All of it for two months – nobody can survive that. But clearly you did survive it and, if you don't mind my saying, I think you're a hero.'

Now Hartung was utterly bewildered. Isolation? Psychological attrition? OK, they had put him in a cell on his own and for the few days he was there he saw nobody apart from his interrogator. He recalled the long corridors where footsteps echoed, the heavy metal doors that crashed shut. And obviously he'd been shitting himself, big time. He'd never been inside a prison before, and he had no idea what they wanted from him. After his second night there he thought they'd never let him out.

But there had certainly been enough to eat, and Hartung was able to sleep anywhere. The interrogator had even offered him cigarettes, they'd spent a long time chatting about locomotives and signal technology – the guy had been a real railway fan. That was pretty much all he could remember. Or had he forgotten something? Hartung knew he tended to suppress unpleasant stuff, see things through rose-tinted spectacles,

retrospectively edit his life into a highlights package. But even he wouldn't be able to forget two months of torture.

In all these years he'd almost never thought about it. Only, in fact, on these anniversaries of the Wall coming down when they recalled the most spectacular escapes from the East. When the television showed pictures of those people in summer 1983 who'd arrived so unexpectedly by train in the West. Curiously, it had never particularly interested him. It seemed so unreal, like a fairy tale from a distant time.

There had once been a radio appeal calling for witnesses to the train escape. But it would have never occurred to Hartung to get in touch. It was history, it meant nothing to him. Maybe it had something to do with the 'abrupt transition', as his interrogator kept saying. Hartung could hear his voice again: soft, almost friendly, but menacing too. He'd stood right beside him, Hartung able to smell his breath, see the hairs in his nostrils, the wart above his lip. 'Now, you listen to me very carefully, Herr Hartung,' the interrogator had said. 'From this moment on you'll be leading a new life. You will never talk about what happened that night at Freidrichstrasse station. You'll never talk about what happened here in Hohenschönhausen. Never! Not to anyone!'

Two days after he was released from prison a grey Barkas pulled up outside his door. The driver helped him carry all his stuff out of the flat, then they set off for Barwälde, that Saxon village by the banks of the Spree,

which was only a hundred metres from the open-pit mine, his new workplace. Hartung couldn't recall what he'd felt at the time, what was going through his mind. All he remembered was that pretty soon something much more important happened. Something he'd never forget, which outshone everything else: he met Tanja.

He was head-over-heels in love from the moment he saw her in the brigade leader's office. That ironic look, that long blonde hair. 'Well, well, here's a new one,' she said. And when he couldn't think of an immediate answer she laughed out loud. Oh, that laugh. Like tickling a goat's hoof, the brigade leader said. And Tanja didn't care. Because when she laughed, she laughed. And when she cursed, she cursed. And when she loved, she loved. She was fearless and honest, like a child that knows no evil. She never compromised, and she could enjoy things without reflecting on them. Beside her, Hartung often felt like a coward.

Three months later he moved in with Tanja, into the brand new one-bedroom flat with balcony and rubbish chute. A year later Natalie was born, and the brigade bought them a pram and a washing machine. At the weekends they ate scrambled eggs, swam in the gravel-pit lake, drank plum schnapps they'd distilled themselves and listened to tragic love songs that a singing digger driver from Hoyerswerda had written himself. How often Hartung had woken up at night, lying in bed beside Tanja, wondering when she'd realise he wasn't good enough for her.

The journalist cleared his throat. He was a strong chap with a bald head and very hairy hands that lay on the counter like two dead animals. ‘Take your time, Herr Hartung, it must be difficult remembering all of this. We can take a break if you like.’

‘It’s alright. But you should know that nothing terrible happened to me. Sure, the prison wasn’t a holiday camp, but I was treated OK. And I wasn’t there for two months – four days at most.’

The journalist nodded. ‘I know, Herr Hartung, these are the post-traumatic effects. Many victims are the same – they protect themselves from their experiences by denying them.’

The reporter’s ostentatious concern was increasingly getting on Hartung’s nerves. What was he wittering on about? And in that voice, sounding like a special-needs teacher talking to a child with severe learning disabilities. If there weren’t money at stake here, he’d have booted him out by now. And now the guy wouldn’t stop talking. He said he’d read the confidentiality agreement Hartung had to sign at the time. ‘I know it was drummed into you that you weren’t to say a word about your time in prison. But you’re free now! It’s over, Herr Hartung, the Stasi can’t touch you anymore! You can talk!”

‘I’ve pretty much told you everything, to be honest. Have you got the cash?’

‘Herr Hartung, maybe you don’t see it yourself, but your story is really rather special. Your courage bestowed freedom on 127 people living behind a wall and barbed wire. And nobody knows about it. This is huge! A fantastic story! The German public must find out about this, your life story is a historical legacy!’

Hartung wondered when he’d last heard the term ‘historical legacy’. Probably in Citizenship class when he was in the tenth year. The historical legacy of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Hartung had got an E in Citizenship. Not because he’d questioned the historical legacy of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but because he’d shaken itching powder inside the T-shirt of Nadine Sommer, who sat next to him in class. She’d run screaming out of the classroom and everyone had found it extremely funny. Everyone, that is, apart from Frau Sommer, who wasn’t just Nadine’s mum, but the Citizenship teacher too. She wrote a comment on his school-leaving certificate that almost cost him the apprenticeship with the railways. ‘Michael still has major problems slotting into the class collective,’ it read. ‘He sets a very poor example to his fellow students.’ What would Frau Sommer think of Michael Hartung’s life being described as a historical legacy forty-five years later?

‘Surely you realise that I can only write your story if you trust me.’

‘You don’t *have* to write my story – I don’t care. How about you find out who really was behind the escape? Now, that would interest me.’

‘Herr Hartung, why are you making it so difficult?’ The journalist gave him a baffled look; there was a touch of reproach in the eyes too. Then his facial muscles relaxed. ‘Is it because of the money? You’re absolutely right. A story like this, especially if it’s an exclusive, is worth far more. I’d have to check with the editorial office, but I think a fee of 2,000 euros should be possible.’

Hartung pricked up his ears. Two thousand euros was almost what he needed to cover the rent for the shop. But what would he tell the man? He couldn’t just make something up. What reason would he have had to let a train go to the West? He certainly wouldn’t have helped any people smugglers, those who made money from other people’s suffering. Especially as he wasn’t even on the train himself. Who, for heaven’s sake, would be foolish enough to risk their own arse for an escape to the West, while themselves staying in the East?

He couldn’t help thinking of Caroline, the most beautiful woman he’d ever been together with. Although they’d not ever been together properly. She liked being courted by him, leaving him in limbo, sometimes giving a little of herself, only to then vanish again. At the time he thought that this was what happened when you fell in love with a woman like that, such a stunner. He loved wandering down the street with her, being envied by the other men.

She was a ballet dancer; she floated rather than walked. Her skin was virtually transparent and her body so slender and dainty that Hartung was sometimes worried she'd be taken away by the wind. They'd met at the Prater one warm September night. He asked her to dance – some rock and roll number. Hartung could dance rock and roll, having learned from his elder sister. Slightly drunk at the Prater, he approached Caroline, bowed before her and pulled her onto the dancefloor.

Caroline had just finished at the famous Dresden ballet school and she had one dream: to dance in a Broadway musical in New York. That was why she'd turned down an offer from the Berlin State Opera and instead applied for an exit visa at the tender age of eighteen. When her application was rejected and she didn't get any other offers, she moved to Berlin, where she gave private dance lessons and waited for something to happen.

Hartung had started working at the station one year earlier, and one day she asked him, half in jest and half seriously, whether he knew of any railway tunnel that led to the West. He even discussed it with Ronny, an experienced colleague who sometimes took trains to the West. 'Forget it, Micha,' Ronny said. 'They'll bump you off.' And forget it he did, as a result of which Caroline spurned him and a year later married a West Berliner who ended up taking her to New York.

Sure, he might have done it for Caroline's sake. He'd thought about her all the time, occasionally searching her name on the internet until the

day he discovered that she did indeed make it on Broadway, but then died in a car accident a few years later.

He saw the journalist making a phone call outside in the street. ‘Forget it, Micha,’ Hartung muttered to himself. He’d cobble together the money for the rent somehow. The reporter came back into the shop. ‘Good news, Herr Hartung. Our editorial team is very keen to have your story and is willing to pay the 2,000 euros. We also respect the fact that you don’t want to go into detail about the reasons at the moment. But there’s one thing we do need to know: did you help anyone escape that night? Just say yes or no.’

Hartung thought of the 2,000 euros and he thought of Caroline. ‘Yes,’ he said.

3

Alexander Landmann sat in the large conference room of *Fakt*'s editorial department, which was on the thirteenth floor of the publishing house in Hamburg. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows he could see the bridges over the Elbe in the distance, while the cranes in the container port cast long shadows in the pale October sun. It was eight minutes to ten; nobody apart from Landmann was there. He was jiggling his right knee nervously, in his head going over the story again that he was about to present to the publisher. In truth he'd thought of nothing else since his return from Berlin two days ago. He'd even written a first draft with the working title: 'The Hero of Friedrichstrasse Station'.

Landmann knew it was a good story; it had everything you could possibly want, beginning with the historical and political significance that gave the story the drama it needed. Then there was the fantastic setting: Friedrichstrasse station, the interface between East and West, a place of separation and tears, but also hopes and dreams. Then Hartung himself, a modest, taciturn chap, a simple man of the people who in an act of utter selflessness had risked ruining his life for other people's freedom. Then the Stasi files that gave a candid view behind the scenes of the murderous system. The files that he, Landmann, had finally unearthed after endless research. The woman in charge of the Stasi archive said that the files hadn't

been listed in any register, but had been found by chance when the collection was being rearranged. And as the woman knew how long Landmann had been working on this story he'd been permitted to view the files before anyone else.

The sneering comments Landmann had put up with from colleagues when he kept running off to this archive because he sensed that one day he would hit the jackpot. 'Hey, Landmann, been back to the dark Stasiworld?' they scoffed. His colleagues, almost all of whom came from the West, found the East desperately boring. Whenever one of these Wall-coming-down anniversaries was around the corner a collective yawn would pass through the editorial team. Not 89, Easterners and Trabis heading for freedom *again!* Will it never stop? They'd been writing the same stories for thirty years: the peaceful revolution, Schabowski's press conference, East German nude swimming, the forgotten civil rights activists, and the question of whether the ugly clothes and terrible music were responsible for the Easterners turning into such racists. Everyone here agreed that the GDR had been 'done to death'.

Landmann, on the other hand, liked the stories that came from this East, which was still strange and still very remote. For this reason many of his colleagues believed he was from the East himself, which was essentially correct, but untrue. At the beginning of the 1970s Landmann had come with his parents and siblings from Kazakhstan to Germany. Back then they were

called ethnic Germans. Or Russian–Germans, even though Kazakhstan had never belonged to Russia. But seen from the thirteenth floor of a Hamburg publishing house, that was a mere detail.

When Landmann's family arrived in Germany they had practically nothing to their name. They spent four years living in a reception camp; it wasn't until his father got a job in the tyre factory and his mother started working in the laundry that they could afford their own flat – six of them in three rooms. He was the only one allowed to follow an academic path at school and then go to university; he worked his way up. No matter what he did, he was the first in his family to do it. He stood out because he spoke slightly differently and because he thought slightly differently. But in all likelihood he stood out most because he was worried about standing out from the crowd.

He was watched, nurtured and praised. From the outside his life looked like proof that it was possible to integrate fully in this country. Sometimes he'd seen it like that too, but mostly not. He felt he had to make a great effort to be the way people expected him to be. When other people were satisfied with him, he didn't recognise himself anymore. He was happy to receive praise, at the same time suspecting this wasn't the real him being praised.

Landmann had been pissed off at the East Germans for a long time. As he saw it, they were given everything the Russian–Germans had never

got. Especially attention. When the Wall came down everyone only ever talked about the poor East Germans, their suffering, their struggle, their courage. Not a word about the Russian–Germans anymore, who'd had to live far further east.

But then things changed. The Westerners found the Easterners ungrateful and annoying, and soon Landmann wasn't pissed off with the East Germans anymore, because he realised they hadn't had it any better than him.

The conference room slowly filled up. At the tables, which were arranged as a large rectangle, sat the heads of department, senior writers, senior editors, the duty publisher and the chief editorial office. In a ring behind the management sat the deputy heads of department, simple editors and freelancers. Landmann was sitting right at the back, beside the door. For fuck's sake, he thought, why didn't I get myself a better seat today? But it was too late for that – the publisher entered the room and it fell silent at a stroke.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' the publisher said, 'before we come to the day's business, let's have a discussion about our 9 November special edition. Thirty years since the fall of the Wall. What have we got?' He looked at the only two editors with East German backgrounds, the GDR experts, so to speak. They made a few routine suggestions. 'Boring,' the publisher said.

Then Landmann spoke up. ‘Erm, I’ve got something…’ He gave a résumé of the story, exciting titbits with a hint of philosophical depth, interspersed with jokes, a touch of emotion and a promising conclusion. His deep voice filled the room. He sensed those colleagues who only a few minutes ago had looked bored listening to him spellbound. ‘It was one of the biggest and most spectacular escapes in the history of the GDR. Until now nobody has known the players and the background to the story. But I’ve found the man who planned the whole thing and executed it.’

The publisher nodded his approval. ‘Excellent! Landmann, that’s fantastic!’

Landmann leaned back, relieved; he was well aware he needed another fantastic story. The magazine was in trouble and redundancies were in the offing. Bloody media crisis. A success was unbelievably helpful at a time like this.

‘What’s this guy like, the hero of Friedrichstrasse Station? Why did he do it?’ the publisher asked.

Landmann hesitated; this was the crucial question to which he was regrettably still lacking an answer. Hartung had been very guarded on this score, even though Landmann had called him twice since. He felt he just needed a bit more time to gain Hartung’s trust. It was perfectly natural not to reveal all to any old reporter who came along. In truth, the fact he hadn’t blurted it out suggested Hartung was serious. And there was still six weeks

to go before the special edition was published – he must get more out of Hartung by then. Landmann cleared his throat, ‘Freedom, that was what drove him. And he was even prepared to keep living in unfreedom himself.’

An appreciative murmur went through the room.

‘This Herr Hartung acted according Christian values,’ a senior editor chipped in. ‘Was it perhaps the deed of a God-fearing man against a godless state?’

Landmann took a deep breath. ‘Well, I don’t think we can exclude it as a possibility.’

More murmurs and whispers.

‘Is this hero photogenic? Can we stick him on the cover?’ the publisher said.

‘Absolutely.’ Landmann said.

‘How many people did he save?’

‘One hundred and twenty-seven in one go!’

The publisher nodded again. ‘Sounds to me like… well, a bit like the story of an East German Oskar Schindler.’ The publisher thought for a while. ‘I think we ought to publish the article right away. It’s too big to wait another six weeks. Is that OK for you, Landmann?’

Landmann froze. He should have said that his research was no way near complete. That the reasons for Hartung’s actions were still very unclear. But his throat felt constricted. Which is why he merely nodded.

‘Let’s do that, then. And my compliments again, Landmann. Journalism thrives on research like this. The big story that forms everyday lives. Decisions that come from the heart. Shrewd Christians who stand resolutely against evil.

Everyone rapped on the tables enthusiastically. Landmann sank back into his chair, exhausted.

4

The ring of the telephone wrenched Hartung from his sleep. His head was throbbing. It probably hadn't been a good idea to tuck into that bottle of brandy last night on top of the beer. On the other hand, when did he ever have good reason to invite his mates over for a drink? And the 2,000 euros in his account was certainly a good reason. An excellent reason, in fact. Hartung felt for the phone on the floor beside the bed. Recognising Natalie's voice at once, he was immediately awake. 'Yes, my little sausage, this is a surprise!'

'Dad, don't call me little sausage.'

'OK, I'm sorry.' Hartung tried to remember when Natalie had last called – it must have been last Christmas. She lived near Nuremberg in a small town whose name had slipped his mind. Something with Bach at the end.

'Hello? Dad, you still there?'

'Yes. How are you? Has something happened?'

'I've read the article about you. It… it's unbelievable.'

'You've read it? I had no idea it had come out yet.'

'You're on the front cover, Dad! The hero of Friedrichstrasse Station. Why did you never tell me about this? I mean, all those people you smuggled out.'

‘Oh, well, it’s probably a bit overblown. I just helped–’

‘Don’t be so modest, Dad. The article also says you’re so quiet and reserved. But presumably that was the only way you could keep your plan secret for so long.’

‘My plan?’

‘That’s what impressed me the most – the fact that you took so long preparing everything, waiting patiently for the right night, and you never lost sight of your goal all that time. I always thought you were quite different.’

‘What did you think I was like?’

‘Well, er… a bit, er, not quite so purposeful, perhaps…’

‘Is that what your mother told you?’ Hartung felt sadness welling up inside. When Tanja left him Natalie was seven. They’d agreed he could see his daughter whenever he liked. But how was that going to work when they lived so far away from each other? In the first year he went almost every month – eight hours there, eight hours back. He would always stay in that little pension, not far from the house with its double garage, where Tanja lived with her new man. But at some point Natalie no longer wanted to come to see him at the stupid pension. Perfectly understandable if you were used to a villa with a garden, which Hartung wasn’t allowed to enter because Tanja’s bloke wouldn’t allow it.

At any rate, later he rarely went to Bavaria, and in the end stopped going altogether. Natalie turned into a woman and he experienced none of this. For him she was always the little girl he'd carried on his shoulders through their apartment, who he'd taught how to swim in the lake, and who he'd served pancakes with apple sauce in front of the telly on Sunday afternoons. And for her he remained the dad who lived somewhere in the east, did strange jobs, drank a bit too much, changed girlfriends quite often and told old railwayman jokes.

Everything had happened so quickly; all of a sudden Tanja left. In retrospect it probably wasn't that surprising; for a long time he just failed to see the problems. As far as Hartung was concerned, everything was perfect, he worshipped that woman, he would have given anything for her. But at some point Tanja was no longer satisfied. 'You want so little,' she said one day. 'I want you,' he answered. She smiled sadly.

Hartung was numbed. Not by all the nonsense that must be in the article. No, his little Natalie was worried about him! She was proud of him! He had to compose himself to be able to speak half-way normally. 'It all worked out and it's a long time ago now, my little sausage.'

'I know, Dad, but when I read the article I realised how little I actually know you, how little I know *about* you. I think it's such a shame that Mum and you… that we have so little contact. I really want that to change. Will you come and visit us soon?'

‘I’d love to,’ Hartung said. And for a while after Natalie hung up he was still clasping the phone in disbelief.

5

When Hartung opened the door to Bernd's late-night store he realised that something was different. Normally Bernd didn't bother looking up when Hartung came in to get a 'manbag', as they called a six-pack of Berliner Pilsner here. Today, however, Bernd pounced on him excitedly, clutching the magazine with Hartung's photo on the front. 'Jeez, Micha, I'm just reading this. Fancy a beer?' In truth Hartung never drank before midday, but exceptional circumstances called for exceptional measures. Besides, it was scientifically proven that the hair of the dog relieved headache better than any aspirin. He and Bernd drank a toast, then he read the article in peace.

The exaggerations and inventions were so absurd that on occasion he laughed and several times he had to swallow. Especially the end of the article, when Landmann actually wrote:

Michael Hartung shrugs when asked about his imprisonment. He lowers his eyes; the terrible memories of that time play out once more in his mind: the windowless basement cell, the days of darkness, the angry cries of his interrogator. The heavy bunch of keys of the prison guard, who hammers against the door to his cell every three minutes to stop him from falling asleep. The letter from his mother, faked by the Stasi, begging him to confess to everything.

Michael Hartung is suddenly reliving all of this again as if it were only yesterday. He says he tries to keep the memories at arm's length, often wishing that none of it had happened and now he could live a normal, untroubled life without being haunted by the ghosts of the past on a nightly basis.

But then a sheepish smile appears on Michael Hartung's face. He talks of the day when he was taken for yet another interrogation and saw a little spider on the wall in the long prison corridor. 'At that moment I saw this spider as the symbol of life,' he says softly, struggling to hold back the tears. On that day Michael Hartung resolves to stick it out, to stay strong no matter what happens. It cannot be a coincidence that spiders are still his favourite creatures today.

When nowadays he sometimes wonders how to go on living with these horrific experiences, he recalls what Nelson Mandela wrote after being released from prison: 'As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.' These words from the great South African freedom fighter have always been of great comfort, Michael Hartung says, before falling silent.

Utter crap, Hartung thought. Nelson Mandela? Is Landmann off his rocker? On the other hand, the piece was well written; for a while – forgetting it was supposed to be his own story – Hartung was even moved

by it. And if he was moved by this tale, which he knew was largely fabricated, how would other readers react? The idea suddenly made him feel very queasy. Ought he not to ring the editor right away and protest against this falsified version of his life? The thoughts were churning inside Hartung's head. If he complained to the magazine they'd want their money back for sure. The money he no longer had because he'd paid it to his landlord yesterday. But if he didn't complain all these lies would become his lies. And what would happen if someone who read this could see the catalogue of untruths and embellishments for what they were? He wouldn't be able to claim he'd said none of it, would he?

Clearly noticing Hartung's unease, Bernd put another beer in front of him. Hartung drank it down in one. Then another.

6

With his feet up on the desk, Alexander Landmann read the handwritten letter from the publisher for the third or fourth time. It showered him with praise, even dangling the prospect of a job as a senior reporter between the lines. The letter had been accompanied by a forty-year-old Scottish single malt, which Landmann had poured himself a glass of. The amber-coloured whisky smelled of peat and fame.

Besides his own colleagues, journalists from other papers had congratulated him on his article too. Even Matthias Kolletzky, the legendary reporter with *Blick*, whose judgement was usually so scathing, flattered him with compliments. Kolletzky, who sat on the jury of the German Reporter Prize, hinted that he thought it likely Landmann's piece would be nominated for the next award.

Landmann took a large sip of whisky, making his belly feel pleasantly warm and his head pleasantly soft. This must be what success feels like, he thought. When you've made it. He'd sometimes imagined what it would be like if he ever made it into the limelight. He, the little boy from Kazakhstan, on the big stage. Everything had been so simple in his dreams: triumph harboured no doubts, happiness no cracks. But now he sensed sudden fear alongside the joy. Fear it might all be some misunderstanding. Fear it might all disappear as quickly as it came.

Noticing himself in the reflection of the windowpane, he raised his glass and whispered, ‘Relax, old chap. Enjoy your happiness, you’ve deserved it.’ Then he took another large sip. Outwardly Landmann always tried to exude composure and confidence. His wife called him ‘my rock’, which had to be slightly ironic, but not meant as a total joke. His brawny physique, his ice-blue eyes and his deep voice gave him a touch of invincibility. He was more easily able to convince others than himself.

Landmann’s mobile rang – it was Hartung, his hero from East Berlin. ‘How could you write such garbage?’ he heard Hartung bellow down the phone. It took Landmann a moment to climb down from his peaty cloud of happiness. ‘Just calm down,’ he said. ‘What’s this all about?’

‘You’ve made the entire story up. Everything you’ve written is a lie!’

‘Hold on one second. My article is based completely on the files and what you told me.’

‘I already told you the files are full of nonsense. And I’m not saying it because I’ve got a trauma or I’m scared of the Stasi. And where the fuck did you get the idea that spiders are my favourite creatures?’

Landmann took his feet off the desk and sat up straight. ‘OK, the spider thing was a bit of artistic licence, nothing important. My dear Hartung, it’s supposed to make you appear likable and human. My wife was reduced to tears.’

‘Oh, really? And did she cry at the bit about Nelson Mandela too?’

Landmann took a deep breath. ‘I know I exaggerated a bit in places. I got a bit carried away when writing, I admit. Although I really like the analogy, I mean, ultimately you were both fighting for freedom–’

‘That’s enough! Put me on to your boss. I want him to set the record straight. I’m not going to have people making a fool of me!’

Landmann felt cold sweat on his back. He could have sworn that Hartung would be happy about the minor embellishments. Didn’t he feel flattered to be mentioned in the same breath as Mandela? And wasn’t it thanks to Landmann’s emphatic style of writing that this hero grew on you?

‘Herr Hartung, let’s talk calmly. I’m sorry if I’ve offended you. My piece was meant as a tribute to you, I wanted people to love you.’

‘You didn’t listen to me. You’d already worked out your story before you came to see me. Do you understand the situation you’ve put me in? My daughter called me to say how much she admires me – for something I never did!’

‘Rubbish, Hartung, you broke the safety bolt that later meant the points were stuck. Without you this train would never have gone to the West.’

‘But I didn’t do it on purpose. There wasn’t any plan behind it.’

Landmann stopped short. ‘Hold on, Herr Hartung, you confirmed to me that you helped people escape.’

‘Because you insisted.’ Hartung cleared his throat, then added softly, ‘And because I needed the money.’

‘Oh Christ, that means… You didn’t… ? You lied to me?’

‘Yes, I’m sorry,’ Hartung said.

‘Let’s go over this again, nice and slowly. You’re accusing me of falsifying your life story, and yet it’s *you* who told me a lie?’

‘I told you what you wanted to hear, and it was a mistake. I apologise. I couldn’t know you’d blow it all up out of proportion.’

‘Are you saying you really weren’t tortured in Hohenschönhausen?’

‘No, it was exactly like I told you.’

Landmann tried to digest what he’d just heard. If Hartung really hadn’t had a plan that night, then he wasn’t a hero either. And without a hero there wasn’t a story. If that got out he was finished. Bye-bye senior reporter. Bye-bye reporter prize. Not only that, but they’d kick him out on the spot and he’d never get another job in journalism. Sources not checked, background not clarified, instead too much ornamentation. That was enough to get him the sack, no matter how much he pointed at the files and Hartung’s statement, or his nose that had never failed him before.

‘Well, well,’ Landmann said finally, ‘it looks as if both of us are up shit creek. I was desperate for the story, you were desperate for the money. If this gets out, both will be lost. There was silence for a number of seconds. Landmann could hear Hartung breathing agitatedly.

‘Does it *have* to get out?’ Hartmann eventually asked.

‘Not necessarily,’ Landmann said, hoping his relief wasn’t too obvious. ‘If we’re both agreed, I don’t know who would question this story. The Stasi people certainly won’t and, even if they did, we’ve still got the files.’

‘So where does it go from here?’

‘Nowhere. In two weeks at most all of this will be forgotten – that’s what it’s like in our business.’

‘OK,’ Hartmann said. ‘Right now I need a beer.’

After they’d hung up Landmann sat for a long time at his desk, mulling things over. How could this happen? How could he have got so carried away? The danger was averted for the time being, but could he be sure this would be the end of it? He switched on his computer and clicked through the news portals. So far no one had picked up on the story. Landmann hoped it would stay that way.

He poured himself another decent glass of whisky, but the effect wasn’t the same. If earlier he’d felt as if he were floating on a little cloud, now all he could feel was tiredness. The more Landmann thought about it, the fewer things about this story slotted together. He could see how the Stasi might have turned Hartung’s accident into an organised escape to give them someone to point the finger at. To distract from the fact that a dozy railway worker had been able to incapacitate the entire security system at

Friedrichstrasse station. But why did they arrest Hartung as the brains behind the operation, only to let him go again inconclusively? Why did the protocols mention intense special treatment which Hartung claimed never happened?

Yawning, Landmann switched off the light and staggered to the lift, where two colleagues from the sports department nodded at him and said, ‘Great article.’ Landmann essayed a smile, but he felt no pleasure anymore.

7

When Hartung unlocked the door to Moviestar just before eleven o'clock the following morning, quite a crowd had already assembled on the pavement. But these clearly weren't customers coming to rent films. When Hartung stepped outside, a woman holding a blue microphone rushed at him. The others immediately followed suit and moments later Hartung was surrounded by photographers and cameramen. Reporters whipped out their notebooks and he was blinded by the camera lights. 'Herr Hartung,' the woman with the blue microphone said, 'how do you feel?' A reporter in a red quilted jacket called out, 'It was the greatest mass escape in the history of the GDR. Why have you stayed silent for so long? Did you want to remain anonymous?' The reporters tried to shove the woman with the microphone out of the way so they could get closer to Hartung. The woman stood her ground and there was a slight kerfuffle, which a man in a beige trench coat used to thrust his dictaphone under Hartung's nose. 'What do you feel when you go into Friedrichstrasse station today?'

Hartung stood there in bewilderment, thinking how often he'd seen scenes like this on television when celebs were besieged by journalists. Having thought it must feel great to be the centre of attention, he now realised how dreadful it was. Especially as none of these reporters looked

really interested. Rather they came across as aggressive, seasoned and insistent, like a gang of youths trying to steal your wallet.

Hartung took sanctuary in his shop, bolting the door behind him. From the counter he watched the journalists make phone calls, smoke and get coffee from Bernd's shop. He saw Bernd giving lengthy explanations to camera. Couldn't Bernd just keep his trap shut? Hartung dialled Landmann's number and told him what was happening, all the while keeping an eye on the reporters who were making themselves comfortable on the flower tubs outside Moviestar. 'What should I do?' Hartung whispered. 'They're exhausting me with their questions.'

'Keep your cool!' Landmann said, whose own lack of cool was plainly apparent. 'The story's now made it to all the major news portals so of course the TV and radio stations want to get in on the act.'

'But what should I tell them?' Hartung said.

'Nothing. Stay where you are and keep the door locked. I'll come to Berlin and together we'll work out where to go from here.'

Hartung sat down behind the counter. The DVD of *The Troops of St Tropez* was still in the computer – just what he needed to take his mind off things now. When the blonde Nicole appeared, Gendarme Cruchot's daughter, Hartung couldn't help but think of Natalie. The fact that his daughter had got in touch, he thought, was the only pleasing thing about all this mess.

About an hour later there was a knock at the back door. Now these pesky door-steppers are coming at me from the other side, Hartung thought, but thank God it was only Bernd bringing him a few cans of beer. ‘What a scene outside, Micha. It’s like the Pope was coming to visit,’ he said, beaming.

Hartung nodded wearily. ‘What did you tell them?’

‘Oh, they want to know everything about you. What you’re like, how long we’ve been friends.’

‘Friends?’

‘Of course, I only said nice things about you.’

‘That’s reassuring,’ Hartung said.

‘I mean, I was the first person you told the story to.’

‘What?’

‘You know, a few years back when we were trying out the new cherry liqueur at my place and you told me about the East German railways.’

‘I may have told you I worked for them, but not much else.’

‘To be honest, I don’t remember exactly either, but there definitely was talk of Friedrichstrasse station. And those points you always had to set. It all came back to me as soon as I read the article. Thanks for confiding in me, by the way. I mean, it’s not something you tell everybody, is it?’

‘Sure, Bernd, you only tell your best friends these sorts of things,’ Hartung said, resigned. Then they watched the rest of the film together – Gendarme Cruchot managing to arrest the gang of thieves who’ve stolen a Rembrandt painting. But Hartung could scarcely concentrate; his thoughts kept wandering. Why hadn’t he insisted that Landmann correct the article? Of course it would have been dumb to have had to give back the money, but was that his only consideration?

There was another knock at the back door: Beate with a plate of rolls. ‘For our hero,’ she said in a honeyed voice. Then she stood facing Hartung and looked at him as if she’d never set eyes on him before. ‘I’m not at all surprised, you know, that you’re capable of such things,’ she said. And because Hartung didn’t react immediately she kept talking cheerfully about the specific masculinity of East German men who didn’t say much, but took action, who were solid, pragmatic and who lent a hand when it was needed. Like her ex-boyfriend Mirco, a musician from Halle, who liked meatballs, could change heating valves and preferred urinating outdoors. ‘I felt looked after when I was with Mirco, protected, he was so… physical, a real man. Not a pansy.’

Hartung nodded mechanically. He remembered Mirco very well, a gobby macho type, a parasite who sponged off Beate for half a year before disappearing without trace. When Beate went to work to earn money for Mirco’s new guitar, he sometimes came to the video shop and rented a porn

film. Always the same film for months on end. Out of sheer curiosity Hartung watched the film one day. If he remembered correctly, it was about a young man who gets lost in the mountains and finds shelter with a buxom mountain farmer, who has it off with him in her sturdy country bed. So much for the masculinity of East German men, Hartung thought.

'Come on, then. Eat up,' Beate said, giving him a meaningful smile. Beate was in her mid-forties, from Gelsenkirchen and had come to Berlin by chance towards the end of the 1990s. She worked as an assistant to the management of a furniture company and was one of the most refined people Hartung knew. Unfortunately she had this dreadful taste in men, which also meant she'd ended up in bed with him. Both of them immediately realised, however, how wrong it felt and, without saying another word about it, proceeded to forget the whole thing as quickly as possible.

Ever since, they'd stood by each other when either of them had 'life worries', as Hartung called it. He himself was under no illusions that he tended to cause more worry than suffer it. Women liked him because he made them laugh and, with his thick mop of hair and teasing boyish eyes, looked younger than he was. Like any half-way shrewd man, at some point Hartung had worked out a theory about his love life, which went something along the lines of: since Tanja left him he hadn't been able to let any other woman come close to him. He was forever scarred; his major suffering could never be offset by the minor suffering he inflicted from time to time

out of self-protection. His official worry balance thus remained more or less even.

It was Beate who sometimes gave him a friendly reminder that Tanja's terrible betrayal was twenty-seven years ago and that he'd now reached an age at which a certain level of emotional maturity and capacity to form grown-up relationships seemed not completely unreasonable. Yes, she was very diplomatic in this regard and expected similar discretion from Hartung to avoid shattering her grand delusions any more than necessary.

'Thanks for the rolls,' Hartung said.

'Pleasure,' she said with that smile on her lips again.

'What's up? You're being kind of strange,' Hartung said.

'I'm feeling very emotional, Michael, I just have to tell you that. I cried earlier when I read what they did to you in prison. I don't think I can ever be angry at you for anything again. I probably couldn't anyway, but even less now.' Beate faltered, unable to go on talking.

'Now, now,' Hartung muttered. He took Beate in his arms and she snuggled up to him. Her face was warm. He felt like a traitor; he hadn't deserved her sympathy. At the same time he was touched by her warmth, and would probably have been prepared to tell her absolutely anything just to make her cry over him again. He wasn't particularly proud about it, but there was nothing he could do.

[END OF SAMPLE