

# LET'S TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

by Leif Randt

Sample translation by Peter Kuras



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“You’ll probably end up being one  
of those men who refers to himself as sensitive”

\*Carolina Flanders

## Wannsee

The mourners gathered at around 6:00 pm on the western shore. There was no dress code; only about half the guests were wearing black. The bouquets prepared on the wide wooden gangway had been counted out, they had decided against vases and for a modest buffet— there was chilled mineral water in small glass bottles, pale slices of green apples, and soft pretzels, wrapped in cloth napkins and served slightly warm. The need for the soft pretzels had been called repeatedly into question, especially by Marian’s father, but now everyone seemed happy about them. For many of those in attendance, it was a kind of reunion, but others were meeting for the first time. Friends and relatives met longtime fans. Marian, whose forehead had already turned red in the sun of the hot June day, found the mood suitably exuberant. It was exactly what his mother would have wanted, he thought. Not that anyone had ever had an easy time properly ascertaining the wishes of Carolina Flanders.

There would be some bubbly on deck as soon as the ship was underway. The idea that one should celebrate and enjoy departures had been established for some time in the Coen and

Flanders families. They'd even danced at a country inn in the Rheinland after Marian's grandfather Valentin Coen was cremated in the late summer of 2011. Some of them had really opened up, which Carolina had mentioned positively on the trip home. Although she hadn't opened up herself at all, or at least not in any recognizable way. At the time, Marian had found the old people's dancing off-putting, though he now hoped that a similar dynamic would take hold on the Wannsee and at a dancehall called *Ballsall Kopernikus* later on. His relations were certainly trying their very hardest.

Marian's half-brother Colin had been respectful enough to leave his five-year-old twin daughters with a babysitter so he and his wife Lucia could actually attend as mourners, instead of putting on the family show that normally sucked all the air out of the room. Marian thought that Colin and Lucia, who held soft pretzels while wearing dark gray pantsuits and slightly exhausted expressions, looked more charming than ever before. He hadn't seen them alone together in years.

Marian's half-sister Teda, who had just returned from a ten-day tour of Australia, wore a fisherman's hat made of dark nylon. It would have looked ridiculous on most people, but it looked great on Teda. His mother would have noticed the hat--Marian was convinced of it. His half-sister might have been the only person who could still wear fishermen's hats at all. Carolina might even have said so, to make Teda feel good after the exhausting gigs in Sydney and Brisbane. Teda would have been flattered. The ice

between the two of them might have been broken. The realization that it was now definitively too late for that would have reduced Marian to tears a week earlier, but exactly on the day of the alternative sea burial Marian felt more stable than he had in years. He held a small bottle of mineral water in his hand and smiled.

Exactly how many years Carolina had suffered from her mysterious ailment was a fact known probably only to her GP, Selin Odün. Selin was only in her mid-thirties but had been running her own practice for four years. Carolina had effused about her more profusely than she ever had about anyone else.

“Can I offer you some sun block,” Selin asked shortly after they said hello. Her gaze had been drawn repeatedly to Marian’s reddened forehead.

“It might be too late already,” Marian said. But Selin, who was slender and wore a lead-grey jacket with oversized arms, handed him the spray anyway.

Marian had only met Selin once before, a year-and-a half before that day in Carolina’s living room. The young doctor had personally delivered two prescriptions to what must have been her favorite patient, but she was short on time and so had passed on a tea, which Carolina had made specially. Selin had described the function of the newly prescribed medicine so clearly and so comprehensibly during her brief stay that Marian had the feeling

that she must have pragmatic, life-affirming answers to questions that weren't directly related to health.

"Is it better to spray it in your hand first, or straight onto your forehead," Marian spread the cream onto his hand without waiting for Selin's answer.

Selin: "Your eyes remind me of Carolina."

Marian: "That might be a projection. I don't look much like her."

Selin: "I think you look a lot like her."

Marian: "Thanks."

Marian found it embarrassing to have said thank you. He had never felt especially attractive when he was young. It had only become clear that there were some women and some men who were drawn to him after all when he was in his early twenties, though he always assumed that had more to do with his friendly demeanor than with his face. Marian assumed he had developed his passive, waiting manner simply by imitating his mother. Though his passivity was accompanied by substantially less mystery and glamour than his mother's, so he tried to compensate by being exceptionally polite.

"Carolina talked about you a lot," Selin said, dropping the sun cream back into her jacket pocket. "Maybe we'll have a chance to talk more later. I'm grateful to have been invited."

"Thank you for coming."

Punctually at 7:30, Marian's father stood on the deck of his ship, which had once been used as a commercial party-liner, waving in a way you definitely might think was too cheerful. But it was almost unthinkable for anyone to reproach Marian's father. As the host of the *ARD-Tagesthemen*, he had accompanied a more-or-less educated audience of millions through the nightly news of the years between 1997 and 2014. The effect of the news on him personally had always been palpable. If you looked at it reasonably, Milo Coen might well have been the secret crush of two to three, maybe even five to six million German-speaking women, as well as eight-hundred thousand gay men, though that might have been an underestimate. Milo's appearance wasn't immaculate, but it was definitely charismatic and the vestigial melody of his Rhein dialect was a welcome relief from the sterility of other news anchors. Although he was widely adored, Milo Coen had never stopped loving his ex-partner Carolina—his son Marian was convinced of it. She certainly wasn't the person he'd spent the happiest times of his life with, but she was the person he associated with the most intense feelings. Such an absolute attraction like with Carolina—Milo had confided to Marian after the latter's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday— he had never experienced before Carolina and he'd never found it again after. Marian had found the conversation, which took place in a Thai restaurant, to be quite unpleasant; it brought back childhood memories of the troubling sound of his parents breathing when he was on his way to the bathroom at night. But his father's confession that Marian's mother, and not the mother of his half-siblings or some affair, had been his biggest crush made Marian

secretly proud. He was the unplanned result of an immense attraction between two people who seemed like glamorous opposites— the unapproachable fashion icon of the late 70s and the friendly face of the nightly news in the 2000s. They were constantly arguing, but they'd truly been drawn to each other.

Carolina's neighbor Irma was supposed to spread her ashes in the water. It had been Irma who called Marian on the third of June. Marian had been in bed, dreaming about the oral exam in the high school history course he was taking in his early forties. In the dream, Marian seemed to have clear command of an enormous body of knowledge regarding 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century history, which he used to produce various connections to the present. His examiners, one of whom was actually his landlady, laughed enthusiastically. But when Marian was ripped out of this dream by the ringing of his iPhone 13 Mini and read the name Irma C, he was immediately wide awake. Marian had occasionally telephoned Irma when he couldn't reach his mother, but she had never called him on her own. When she told him that his mother's GP had estimated the time of death at 11:30 the previous evening, Marian immediately felt a deep sympathy for Irma. Although she and Carolina had lived wall-to-wall in nearly identical apartments, Irma often seemed more like an old housekeeper than a confidant of the same age. Irma was proud of her formerly famous neighbor and although Carolina only sporadically accepted her invitations to brunch, Irma was constantly doing her shopping, bringing her

books and newspapers, and sending her links to relatively interesting stories on the radio. Marian, who was always trying to encourage his mother to enjoy the remainders of her popularity rather than dismissing it sarcastically, thanked Irma for her expressions of consolation and expressed his consolations in return, very sincerely even, before ending the call.

On his father's ship, it occurred to Marian that Irma might have led the life of a butch lesbian if she'd been born a few decades later. A woman with silver hair and notably bulky shoes who was capable of sincerely admiring others. Marian caught her eye. Irma nodded at him, friendly and deeply sad at the same time.

They had discussed the use of music for a long time. Angelika and Willem from the Agentur Mayalisa, which had represented Carolina until the very last, had been in favor of music, along with Marian, who had reminded everyone that Carolina practically always had something on at home, even if he knew that was largely to distract from her tinnitus, which had grown worse with age. The first tones of the Schumann piano concerto that Marian had selected from his mother's MP3 library silenced all of the conversations and the silence of the guests, who were lined up holding their bouquets in molded plastic chairs, brought back the sadness that had overcome him at his kitchen table a few minutes after Irma's call. Sitting in front of his breakfast (a bowl of organic oat flakes, Aldi granola, and almond milk), he had felt like an abandoned first-grader. And now Marian was unsure whether the tone of his speech, which was jovial for a few stretches, was really



appropriate. Piet, a freelance copywriter who was Marian's co-author and momentary best friend, had said that it would depend a lot on the way it was read and had suggested that Marian make a test recording with his phone so that he could listen to himself in different moods, as though he were a part of the audience himself. "How would the sun of the deceased fashion model come across to you if you heard him reading these sentences on the Wannsee?" Piet had asked, unusually formally. Then he pruned Marian's notes down quickly, turning them into neat sentences that were supposed to help Marian come to terms with himself and his emotions. When he had listened to the recording a few hours later, Marian had been happy with his intonation. He now regretted not having listened to the recording a second or third time. He had found his speech alright in one single mood and quite possibly simply because he didn't want to think about it anymore.

During his speech, which he read from a tablet he had bought especially for that purpose, Marian's voice failed twice. "When my mother came to see my recently renovated kitchen not all that long ago, she sat at my yellow metal table and said, 'an elegant clown cooks in this room.' My mother's praise was always understandable as criticism. It was only over the last few years, since we started spending a lot more time together in 2020, if you want to be precise about it, that I learned to accept this special form of praise. I sometimes even thanked her. Actually, it's fine to be an elegant clown. If it took me until I was in my late thirties to properly

recognize my mother's praise, it seems possible that some people here may never have noticed that Carolina meant something in the most positive sense possible. I hope no one suffered too much from my mother's sometimes strict eye. But I also hope being constantly misunderstood didn't cause my mother to suffer too much."

When he came to, "constantly misunderstood," Marian's throat closed so tight that he had to take a break. He took a drink and gazed out at the Wannsee.

"At the age of forty-one, I can honestly say that I am—despite some irritations—mostly still a fan of my mom. I might sometimes have wanted more unconditional support and less skepticism, fewer implicit demands from her. Under conditions like that, which might be understood as conducive to mental health, I might have become a more relaxed person. But I don't really have anything against the person I have become. I learned very, very much from my mother. She was an inspiring person. And I know that she inspired most of the others on this small ship, too. She sometimes said things she later regretted, though she never properly apologized for them. She sometimes underestimated her own authority. I think she wanted to forget who she had been far too often. I criticized her for it enough myself. The distant, icy mother and her possibly hypersensitive son. That it is entirely possible to like one another in the middle of a fight is something I had to learn."

Marian's voice failed a second time at the following passage: "Dear Mama, I would like to thank you in every form." He had actually only ever called his mother 'Mama' in rare moments, but at a few very personal moments he had, up to the very end. He wanted a moment like that for himself, for the audience, and for his mother now, at the end of his speech. Marian swallowed. He was happy that you could see he was holding a tablet and not just his phone. A few years earlier, people had said tablets had no future, but that had clearly been nonsense.

"You're still a part of us all, but you're an especially big part of me. I will hold the balance of your sayings, your thoughts, and your opinions, which were sometimes so contradictory, and I will cherish them. I will draw strength from them for a long time." Marian looked up from his tablet after that sentence and focused on his guests for three seconds. "And none of us will ever forget the grace and the aura that I consider to be your spiritual legacy."

Marian nodded at Irma, who stood up and approached the railing of the ship. She held the sand-colored box that contained Carolina's ashes in both hands and let Marian open the cap, as they had agreed. They had never rehearsed the procedure. Marian resumed with his cheeks wetted with tears for a last time when the ashes had fallen into the lake, which happened much faster than he had pictured. "I would like to thank you for your openness to this ritual. It feels sadder than I had expected, but I hope that we'll still manage to have a nice time on this former party-liner, which has

always been a place for celebrations as well as at the *Balhaus Kopernicus* later. For Carolina.”

They hadn’t decided on the order of the condolence hugs in advance, but it felt as though it were mandated. First the neighbor, who stood directly next to Marian, then his father, who came out of the Captain’s cabin, then his sister and his brother and his sister-in-law, followed by a person who showed up by surprise, whose name Marian had forgotten, and who he didn’t want to hug. Then Marian’s good friend Sergej, then his ex-girlfriend Franca, who he didn’t really want to be hugged by either. Nobody said anything. They were wordless hugs on a lightly swaying ship.

From the west shore of the Wannsee to the Ballhaus Copernicus was an easy walk. The few guests who were there by car offered to drive the elderly, but the elderly were especially eager to enjoy the blue hour on foot. Multi-colored bouquets were being carried along the path toward the ballroom, set in front of a bright green meadow in the brightest month of the year. Marian took a few steps to the side to watch the group from a distance. He counted twenty-eight bouquets full of spring flowers and Easter lilies, saw outfits in muted colors—blazers, shirts, long dresses—and there was an orange-blue evening sky. Marian wished his mother could see a drone shot of the scene. Though where she was now, they might have something even better than a drone shot.

Six round tables had been set in the ballroom, surrounded by vases that had been prepared for the bouquets. A chandelier hung from the ceiling, slightly off level. It was pompous, but probably not valuable and Marian's mother had praised it frequently. ("So long as that chandelier hasn't tumbled to the ground, West Berlin is still intact.") The first course was an opulent salad, with a choice of either feta cheese or smoked tofu and cashews. It was followed by a tuna steak with grilled vegetables or a soy steak with grilled vegetables. Carolina had largely abstained from bread, rice, potatoes, and pasta in the evening since her thirtieth birthday. Marian had adopted the same approach to nutrition for most of his life, but he'd still never really been thin. He had understood early enough that body types were genetically predetermined and that diet and exercise could only change the details— the somewhat wider hips of his silhouette had begun to remind him of his grandfather Valentin by the time he was nineteen. That was why he had focused on clothing in the broadest sense— materials, colors, cut. It wasn't as though everyone with every body type could wear everything, of course. But with clothing, accessories, make-up, and jewelry, transformations were always possible, at every age and in any state, without diets or surgical interventions. And although Marian had had to give up on studying fashion— he had gotten rejections from London and Antwerp— he had turned back to clothing after a rather annoying Masters in Curatorial Studies, which had come after Art History and Sociology. Dealing with fashion struck him as much more worthwhile than dealing with art.

They talked through the whole dinner, as though to make up for the long silence on the lake. Marian, who had put Sergej and Anna next to himself, alternated between ordering Negronis and ordering Vodka-Sodas. He didn't drink as often as he used to, but he handled it better. His father was at another table, very far away, but Marian still heard his voice more clearly than all of the other voices. It was difficult for him not to listen when his father was speaking, but at least what his father was saying wasn't embarrassing. Nobody complained about Marian disappearing into his phone from time to time over the course of the evening. Piet asked him via text how he was feeling and whether everything had gone reasonably well and Marian wrote back in detail, in an almost cheerful mood. He asked Piet how it was going, to which Piet answered quickly and succinctly: "Running a temperature. Okinawa Sunrise, Season 2."

A playlist Marian had made was on, mostly music from after 2020, which must have been new to most of the guests. No one danced. But Selin the GP said she liked the choice of music a lot shortly before leaving the late dinner at 1:00 am. She said she would be really happy about a link to the playlist. Marian found it hard to imagine a better compliment. "We could follow each other on Spotify, if that's not too pushy. Even though no one actually does that," he said, noticing that he actually was pretty drunk. Selin said she didn't use Spotify; she used iTunes and then she hugged Marian goodbye. He resolved to celebrate the anniversary of his mother's death with annual dinners like this from that point on.

The group would get older and older from year to year and the average age would increase. But it was important to keep an eye on all of these people who were loosely associated with Carolina Flanders.

The last guests left the Ballsaal with Marian just as it was starting to get light outside. There was dew on the meadow and a fresh breeze was blowing.

»You'll liberate yourself from the prison of your own neverending  
friendliness in the medium-run. «

\*Piet Fellbach

## KENTING BEACH

When Marian was asked how he was doing, which happened on a pretty much daily basis for the first three weeks after the funeral, he made an effort to think about the question anew before he answered. To Piet he said, after a brief hesitation, that he was, “feeling normal.” He knew the answer must seem especially strange, but he absolutely wanted to avoid pretending with Piet. Marian felt normal because the most obvious symptoms of mourning had already played themselves out. He didn't feel a need to cry any more, he wasn't unmotivated, he didn't lose himself in memories constantly. When Piet asked whether normalcy was a good thing or a bad thing for him, Marian said, “I think I feel more normal than I ever have before.” It seemed to him as though his moods now fluctuated less strongly than before. As a result, he perceived himself as being more at peace and he found it easier to focus. Because it seemed to him that it would be typical to get distracted, he tried to avoid distractions. He made fewer plans, saw fewer people, stopped going out. He renounced both intoxication and excessive entertainment. In the months and years before, when



Marian had still regularly met his mother for lunch or dinner at rather unpopular spots in West Berlin, he had had difficulty not going out. He visited multiplexes and art house cinemas, openings, Michelin-starred restaurants (rarely), quaint pubs (frequently), fast food joints (constantly), expensive bars, dive bars, parties at ateliers, film premiers, gallery dinners, *transmediale*, post-student apartment parties, small discos (for a few hours), big clubs (for up to nineteen hours), the aperitif evenings of parents his age, Hasenheide raves of twenty-somethings, sometimes even theater premiers. The less an event seemed to suit him, the owner of the Kenting Beach boutique, the more he had enjoyed going.

His mother had sometimes asked him what he'd been up to recently and then he'd been able to report and judge and it seemed to him as though he was being examined by his mother in those moments. Marian was sure she would have noticed, even in her final weeks, if he'd been dishonest with her, if he'd simply pretended to have visited an event to keep her entertained. Once, it must have been in 2016, he had tried to tell her about the Berlin-Biennale, which he had only walked through quickly. Carolina remarked on his report by saying, "that's what a couple of your smart-ass friends thought. Not you."

In the U7 between Neukölln and Schöneberg, for the weeks after the funeral, he did his best to pay attention to the people around him rather than to his phone. Marian took stock of people and tried to speculate about their life stories. He tried to see himself as a part of Berlin society rather than as a part of a group

of around 2000 people who had similar preferences. Once, a man stood up from his seat in the U7 to inquire aggressively whether Marian was a pervert. Marian excused himself. He hadn't wanted to stare, he had simply forgotten his phone at home. "Get a life," the man said, and sat back down. It was unpleasant for everyone. Maybe— the thought came to Marian as he stared at the subway floor— the disappearance of his mother marked the beginning of the normal period. It would probably be the longest part of his life but would seem to pass the most quickly.

Carolina Flanders had hardly appeared in public over the past few years, which may well have been responsible for the fact that news of her death was spread in a more elegant manner than Marian had feared. There was a color photo from 1982 that was shared more than any other. It showed Marian's mother in a dark-blue ski suit on the summit of the Zugspitze, smiling, her hair pinned back, and wearing non-reflective sunglasses that allowed a glimpse of her narrow eyes. It was one of the less iconic images of the period, but definitely one of the nicest. Marian was glad that he was never linked in the Stories and TikToks commemorating his mother— he didn't want any condolences in his DMs. He wanted them even less at his boutique, which is why he'd had Anna step in for him for longer than ever before. He'd been friends with Anna, who was 37, for nine years. She'd been working for Kenting Beach for six years. She had dark hair and she was four centimeters taller than him. In his absence, she had managed the business by herself and although

she was the mother of a three-year-old and was therefore often sick, she had produced the highest monthly revenue of the last two years during those summer weeks, as Sergej the accountant emphasized. She'd also put together Newsletter Nr. 29, which had ended up being one of the best newsletters.

The day of his return was a Saturday in July—oppressive heat, the late afternoon sun tumbling into the entryway and the area around the window, Marian was wearing sunglasses with transparent temples, which they had for sale at Kenting Beach. He asked Anna, who he was about to relieve from her 11:30-15:00 shift, in a somewhat sheepish tone, “did you have the feeling that more people came into the store because of the news of Carolina’s death?”

Anna, who was dressed completely in white— a shirt from CG+’s unisex collection and a pair of men’s jeans from Dropspot—, said, “maybe for the first few days. It was mostly women I’d never seen here before. A lot of them were looking for gifts for their partners. Or it was girls who liked to dress masculinely. I didn’t negotiate with anyone, but I did make an exception for customers I know you especially like. Jeremy and Lucas, for example. They both bought jackets from Maison Special.” At that moment, Anna smiled and then Marian smiled, too. He loved Maison Special. “Everyone praised the selection. I think you just did a really, really good job with the purchasing this year.”

After Anna had hugged him goodbye, Marian stood alone in the afternoon sun of his boutique and looked around. The shirts, t-shirts, and longsleeves of the summer season hung at a slightly exaggerated distance from one another, so that every piece seemed like something special. That pre-worn hung alongside new clothing with equal respect and at a somewhat grotesque price discrepancy was one of the basic ideas with which Marian had conceived of the store. When customers remarked about it (“Why do those shorts cost 240 euros more than those shorts?”), Marian sometimes said, “it’s fashion,” with an exaggeratedly serious face, only to break into a smile and explain the high-quality materials (Mohair, Viscose, Alpaca), expensive locations (Italy, France, Belgium), and limited editions in which some labels produced their clothing. (“This is the second to last vest in a 48 in Europe. The only other one is in Amsterdam, or at least it was as of yesterday.”) And he also often said things like, “This T-shirt would have been just as expensive in 2013, taking inflation into account. You can have it for 40€ today,” although the price tag said 45€.

The air conditioner Marian had installed in the second year cooled the interior to 23 degrees Celsius, so that people who came in a little sweaty from outside wouldn’t feel as though they needed to put on a jacket but would still sigh with relief. Cool weather was a No-Go for Marian. Aside from that the actual Kenting Beach in South Taiwan where Franca had taken maybe the best pictures ever of him was warm the whole year. Taiwan was also the place where Marian, on the return trip with Franca, had visited more

menswear's boutiques than ever before. Admittedly, he only actually wore three of the eight pieces he bought there when he got back to Berlin, but he still liked remembering the shopping trips through Taipeh, Kaohsiung, and Taina. He felt like every piece had only cost the equivalent of 40€ and none of them were available in Europe. Taiwan, Marian would say today, was the early peak of his relationship to Franca, who had been more patient than anyone ever had with him before at the menswear shops.

After the first few hours back in the store were quite lonely, with only two customers whom Marian didn't know and who disappeared quickly— the first because he got a phone call, the second because the high prices obviously made him nervous — a woman in her thirties with a dyed red pageboy cut entered the store just before closing. Marian was relatively certain that he'd seen her with a different haircut at Suburban Embassy. The customer might have sensed that he had a thing for women who dressed like teenaged boys and she might have felt uneasy under Marian's gaze. He tried to watch her less and finally sold her two cheap pieces— a rust-colored silk shirt that had been produced by C&A in the middle of the 2000s and a heavily-washed, gray-streaked Skrillex shirt. "Those are two really nice articles," Marian said as he folded the shirts into crepe paper, smoothed the small package with his hands, before finally sliding it into a mint green Kenting Beach bag. "Enjoy!"

On the way out, the young woman stopped by the rack of international soccer jerseys, turned around again and asked, “what’s your team.”

Marian hesitated. “I don’t have a team at all. But I like jerseys.” Truthfully, Marian had worn soccer jerseys very rarely in his life, namely during a soccer tournament at the Langenfelder Gesamtschule (the royal blue jersey of class 6c) and then again during a vacation in Scandinavia when he was in his early thirties (the white away jersey of the goalkeeper of the L.A. Galaxy, a soccer club in the US.) That there were jerseys for sale in his boutique came down to a long-established trend. It wasn’t due to his own personal preferences at all. The customer had probably seen through Marian’s calculations immediately and would never take him seriously again. She smiled quickly. Then she left.

“You have never talked so much about some customer’s disparaging smile,” Piet said in the back seat of a Bolt Taxi later that night, “she must have been some bombshell.”

*Some bombshell*— although Piet was almost ten years younger than Marian, he sometimes pulled out 80s expressions like that, which made Marian feel like Piet really should have a podcast.

“She’s a bombshell in her own way,” Marian said, making it clear that he was using the word *bombshell* for the very first time. “But I’m probably just crushing on her to distract myself.”

Piet had known who it was about for ages, “So did you send this Selin your playlist?”

“Two nights later,” Marian said. “She liked the message. That was it.”

When Piet was around, Marian had the feeling that he didn’t have to hold anything back, he could say whatever went through his head. Piet would listen carefully and then express his opinion so unfiltered and openly that it sometimes really hurt. Right at the beginning of their friendship they’d had discussions about the split with Franca that Marian remembered finding incredibly painful but also incredibly liberating.

“She hasn’t even thanked you for the playlist?” Piet asked. “That’s tough.”

Marian and Piet found it remarkable that they had never had a fight, despite their openness. Piet had once drunkenly said that this rock-hard honesty in communication was the best thing Germany had ever produced and that international conventions of politeness had been destroying this quality for years. Marian didn’t really share this opinion. He’d always found the internationalization of Berlin to be a major win, but he still accepted Piet’s argument.

When the Bolt taxi arrived at the main entrance of Guilty Terrace, near the Gesundbrunnen subway station, Marian searched through his pants pockets for change. A few weeks earlier, Piet had expressed his skepticism that the 10% extra that Marian had always paid per app previously really landed completely with the ride share

provider. Marian choose a two-euro coin, which shimmered brightly and felt mirror-smooth between his fingers, as though it were brand new. The driver was nearly ebullient in his thanks.

Marian was secretly disappointed by his circle in the three weeks after the burial at sea. They all seemed to take his claim that he wanted to distract himself less for a while completely seriously. Anna, Franca, and Sergej offered to come by for a tea or go get an ice cream sometimes. Colin and Lucia asked if he needed anything from Frischeparadies or from the Markthalle. Adam and Nile let him know when they bought movie tickets. But no one, no one at all except for Piet, who he had only known for two years and three weeks, demanded that Marian set his resolutions aside and go out. The first two times, Marian declined politely, then he accompanied Piet to performances on two evenings in a row. At the first, a very large amount of text was read very quickly, in English— Marian had difficulty following— at the second, gaunt people made dancing movements to mostly spherical music through an off-space before warm applause broke out among an audience that seemed as though 95% of them knew each other. For professional reasons, Marian mostly paid attention to the costumes at the performances and found that they still relied far too heavily on sportswear. If Marian had stayed in the visual arts, he could have equipped performances with the fashion he liked personally, as well as with the rough opposite of that fashion, which is to say, with hard ruptures. He hadn't seen any ruptures at either of the



performances. Although Piet was loosely befriended with the performers, he criticized the acts on the second evening vehemently saying, “It’s about time Berlin’s expats free themselves from the prison of performance art.” Piet loved formulations that used the word *prison*. People sat in the *prison* of their vanity, in the *Prison* of authenticity, or in the *Prison* of an old rental contract. The image always worked. Every milieu, every nation, every attitude, even every goal that had been held for long enough could be described as a *Prison*. Marian knew that Piet sometimes excused himself later for remarks he made in irate moments. He often seemed to get angry to remind himself that he didn’t want to come to an understanding with the state of the world. Marian generally found Piet’s rage entertaining, even when he was of a different opinion. It reminded him of a time before turning twenty-five and it was as though Piet wanted to bring back a form of productive unrest that he had lost, at the latest, in the twilight years with Franca,

Guilty Terrace was a jazz club that didn’t play jazz and it had only existed for a year-and-a-half. Piet and Marian had only been there once before, on a slow evening, but Piet wanted to give the location a second chance; it definitely had potential. And a large crowd had, in fact, now gathered on the smoker’s terrace in front of the glass windows of the club. Smoking was becoming a thing again in general, Marian had heard someone say about the new twentysomethings which had made immediate sense to him.

The movement towards Not-smoking and Not-drinking accompanied by the simultaneous consumption of psychedelics and designer drugs needed to be grounded somehow and that grounding just might require a beer and a pack of filters. In front of Guilty Terrace, Marian heard loud male laughter and penetrating tones of American voices, which gave him the feeling that he was on a trip to Toronto or Vancouver and that was a new Berlinfeeling, which he definitely liked. “Let’s go!” Piet said and went inside.

Two screens had been set up on the low stage and there were three CDJs standing between them, though no one was playing them at the moment. Marian let Piet order him a Cola with sugar and since he so rarely drank Cola with sugar, he promised himself a little high. It was served in a soft plastic cup with such an unusual number of ice cubes that Marian was reminded of North America again. He wasn’t even sure whether disposable cups like this were even legal in Berlin bars anymore. He pressed it in with his fingers a little, so that the cola rose with the ice cubes and Marian had a warm feeling in his stomach. “I’d like to travel somewhere sometime soon,” he said.

The smokers came back inside whooping and applauding as soon as a dark-haired woman stepped up to the CDJs. According to Piet, she was a left-wing Berkeley student who was spending her summer in Berlin and posted almost daily statements criticizing Germany, mostly focused on the dating scene, the contradictory statements of Chancellor Brinkmann, and Berlin’s transit system.

The woman from California was DJing in a crop top and was visibly pregnant. She played, “Say it Right,” by Nelly Furtado from around 2008 as an intro and followed it with very straight Techno, which was either very modern or from the ‘90s, then Limp Bizkit from the early 2000s and a K-Pop band who Piet named immediately, though Marian couldn’t remember it. Towards the end of her thirty-minute set, the Berkeley student demanded that the audience come on stage and perform karaoke with her, to “Mama” from the Spice Girls and a bunch of people went and hollered along, although they certainly hadn’t been born yet when ‘Mama’ was written. Marian drank a second ice-cold Cola and was rather moved by the events. It clearly wasn’t about deconstructing old pop music, which would have been modern ten years earlier. It was just about having the best time possible. “The energy is good,” Marian said. “Totally,” Piet answered.

Standing around sober at events for much younger expats was a mode Marian definitely liked. Piet expressed his praise, too—he’d especially liked the escalating karaoke moment. The two of them stayed at Guilty Terrace until the very end, the next shows were all similar to the first, with conspicuously stylized people at the CDJs, playing music you might know. A willingness to be carried into harmless emotions predominated and Marian shared it. He hoped he would never lose it, no matter what dark turns either his personal situation or the whole state of society might take. During the break, Piet and Marian squeezed their way onto the smoker’s terrace. They didn’t want to smoke, but they wanted to

see a little more of these kids, who they took to be a new wave of English-speaking expats, at a point in time where they really wouldn't have thought that twentysomethings would still want to move to Berlin. A woman who spoke with an Australian accent complimented Marian's Monica-Spicer cargo pants. "Are those originals or Pandabuy?" Marian wasn't exactly sure what Pandabuy was, but he knew he was wearing authentic Monica Spicer. "I've ordered these trousers for my store in Schöneberg." It couldn't be entirely precluded that the Australian he was smiling at as he smoked was fully twenty years younger than him. "What is Schöneberg," she asked. Marian explained it to her patiently and Piet asked her about Pandabuy, probably because he could tell that Marian didn't want to question her himself. The Australian, who worked in gastronomy in Melbourne and was on her annual holidays in Berlin, showed Marian and Piet the current Pandabuy selection on her phone. It was mostly banal logo sweatshirts and clunky sneakers. To order well-made replicas of European designer clothing from China, you had to get in touch with a Pandabuy agent and ask for his catalog. There was a money-back guarantee in case the goods didn't make it through customs. As he looked at the very trendy and largely tasteless designer goods, Marian asked himself how often he had tagged teenagers as the children of the superrich when they were really just shrewd Pandabuy customers. Were these young people, who procured prestigious clothing from China at laughable prices the new punks? "Good thing you don't sell any of these labels at Kenting Beach," Piet whispered,

overlooking a sweatshirt that Marian had absolutely had at his boutique, though at eight times the price.

On the last day of his first full week back at work, Marian hung a printed photo on the door leading to Kenting Beach's warehouse. The image, which he'd taken with his iPhone 13 Mini, showed him with Carolina the previous October, during their last expedition together. Marian, because the evening light was good, had stretched out his arm and taken a selfie so spontaneously that Carolina only noticed at the last minute, just in time to look at the camera. The few people who would encounter this photograph because they would look behind them at the register on their way to the warehouse—Marian or Anna or some future sales person—would be able to deduce from the picture that Carolina, even at an advanced age, had been a vision, that she'd taken excursions on completely normal trains, and that Marian actually did look like her in some way. The print impressed with its vibrant, digital colors and when Marian had looked at it for long enough, he thought he could sense the way that his phone had painted with untold thousands of Pixels in a style that presented reality as slightly excessive, the way Apple users on average wanted to see it. It was also the most recent photo of Carolina Flanders and her son, and it would be that way for all time now.

It had been busy at the front of the shop, but not much had sold. The good thing was that a new crowd seemed to have discovered the boutique—pretty young people, under twenty-five, mostly simply dressed. Potential future regulars, who still hesitated

at the decisive moment. (“Could you maybe hold this for me until tomorrow morning?”). Unfortunately, he hadn’t spotted a single Pandabuy-Punk in Kenting Beach all week long and he asked himself if he could do anything to reach those kids. An enormously chatty mother was looking for wedding outfits for her grumpy teenaged sons and a retiree who had just moved to Berlin was looking for a comfortable blazer for the Opera— nothing sold in either case. Marian felt during both discussion as though he had been gone for much longer than just four weeks, as though the business had just run itself, mindlessly and with no elan, though that was about to change. As he unpacked a box with fall goods shortly after closing (four matcha green fleece jackets in sizes 46 to 52), Marian asked himself if he should put together a newsletter that implied to the people around him that he was back in his store and was again open to invitations and links to parties. Marian rarely went on the offensive, but when he did, he generally got what he wanted— at least he came to that conclusion during the three quiet weeks after the burial at sea. If his wishes were going to be granted, he would have to name them and that was rarely easy. When Franca had asked herself and him during COVID 19 whether raising a child together might not be an option after all, a lot of images he liked shot through Marian’s head, but he also had arguments to talk his girlfriend out of her vaguely formulated wish. It was only a few weeks later when Franca was given a generous exhibition grant and informed him of her decision against a child and the reproduction of traditional roles, Marian felt a brief twinge, which he initially interpreted as disappointment, though

during a long conversation with Piet about a year later, he decided it had been relief. Retrospectively, he was even proud of Franca's decision. She went her way doing exhibition design and Marian ran Kenting Beach by his own rules and he was happy he no longer had to consider Franca's advice (make it a priority to check the manufacturing conditions of all labels; offer as much unisex as possible; hire someone to do the TikTok marketing). Still, he regretted having recently described the last two-years of their relationship as a *Twilightstate*. If he had said it aloud at some point, he would take back his words retroactively, like Piet sometimes did. But luckily, it had only ever been a thought. He thanked Franca for her offer to get an ice cream with him in a short message, even if it had now been four weeks. Then he wrote an iMessage to his half-brother Colin, who got a similar thank you, as well as an offer to look after the twins again if he and Lucia needed. He texted Nile and Adam that he would like to see an innovative blockbuster, but since there were no innovative blockbusters being produced, maybe they should go get something to eat instead. ASAP. He cancelled plans with Piet to go to a rave in Oberschöneweide. Marian didn't feel like a rave or like Oberschöneweide. And then he wrote his mother's GP a message:

“Hey Selin, I've been thinking about the jacket you had on at the Wannsee a lot. It was absolutely immaculate on you. Could you tell me who made it? I really should recognize that kind of

thing on sight. But it's been a puzzle this time. I hope you're well!  
With best wishes from the Kenting Beach storage."

[END OF SAMPLE]