

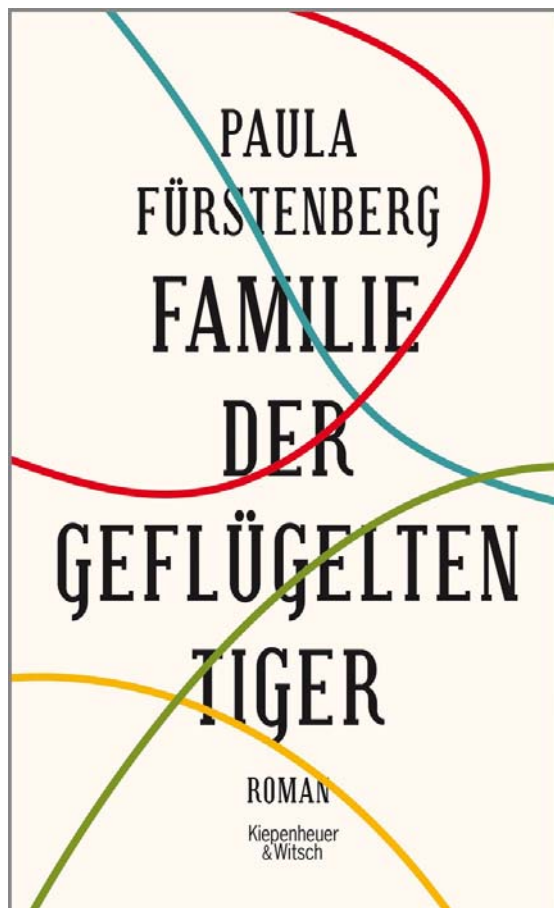
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FAMILY OF WINGED TIGERS **by Paula Fürstenberg**

Novel

Translated by Jamie Searle Romanelli

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Iris Brandt ibrandt@kiwi-verlag.de

Aleksandra Erakovic: aerakovic@kiwi-verlag.de

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The only scar on my mother's body

The hedgehog lay in the washbasin, my mother in the bathtub. She had her eyes closed and her head tilted back. Her ears were underwater, so she didn't hear me come into the bathroom and sit down on the toilet lid. The hedgehog didn't take any notice of me either, floating around in the half-filled washbasin with all four legs stretched out from its body. It was without a doubt the smallest one to have ever spent the winter here with us. All around it swam countless little black dots; some of the fleas were still floundering on the surface of the water. I watched the two bathers and couldn't help but smile.

For weeks now, my mother had been watching the hedgehog not grow any bigger. If he's still that scrawny when the first frost comes, I'm bringing him in, she had announced during every one of our phone conversations, presumably hoping to herself that that would be the case. I consider it entirely possible that, every now and again, she intentionally forgot to put the little bowl of cat food down by the compost heap for him.

I too had looked every morning at the thermometer outside the window of my Berlin apartment, counting the lines above freezing point. Normally I took no interest in the weather, but this winter I was curious about the longer braking distance of the trams and the reliability of the point heating. And so we had made a bet on when the first frost would come, me in Berlin, my mother in Löcknitz. Now the first snow lay on the ground outside and the hedgehog lay in the washbasin inside, and she had won.

My mother opened her eyes and lifted her head out of the water. My gaze fell on the longish scar above where her pubic hair began, left behind by my birth. The white line stood out prominently.

He must barely weigh three hundred grams, I said, nodding my chin towards the hedgehog.

Bodo weighs in at two hundred and seventy, said my mother.

So it's Bodo then, I said, and my mother nodded. She picked up the shampoo bottle, squeezed a dollop into the palm of her hand and worked the foam into her hair, the bathwater sloshing in little waves.

I thought back to all the animals my mother had collected from the surrounding countryside until now. I tried to figure out the principle according to which they received a name or not. When I was little, we had often thought up names for her wards together. Later, I began to just roll my eyes whenever my mother set a new fosterling down on the kitchen table. There had been the limping rat Bertha and the verminous brown hare James, but also a flightless jay and a blindworm poisoned by snail bait that had remained just *the jay* and *the blindworm*. We had hosted hedgehogs on several occasions before, but until now they had only been named *hedgehog*.

Could you dry Bodo off and put him in his box?, asked my mother.

The sense of presumption in her request irritated me. As a child I had loved spending entire Sundays cleaning cages and de-furring brushes. But after my first kiss and that first furtive cigarette in the cornfield behind the petrol station, I had lost my enthusiasm for it, and I then had to spend half my adolescence getting it through to my mother that I would no longer care for her wards. She was the one who brought back the damn creatures, so she would have to look after them too. In any case, I

hadn't wanted to spend any more of my time mixing worm medicine into food or filling little bottles with chamomile tea, and it was at least seven years since I had last done so. I crossed my arms in front of my chest.

I'd like to stay in the tub a little longer, she said, please see to Bodo, just this once.

The image of my mother sitting alone in the kitchen, the hedgehog before her on the table as she tested out names on him, made me sad. Since I had moved out there was no longer anyone to roll their eyes when she made a blunder with the name selection. I went over to the washbasin and immersed my hands in the lukewarm water, which had a spritz of cleaning fluid added to it to combat the fleas. I lifted the hedgehog out carefully and placed him on a hand towel to dry off, then pulled out the plug. As I watched the little black dots circling down the drain, I calculated that it would only be another seventeen hours until I was back in my Berlin apartment, where there wasn't so much as a fruit fly. I sighed. It wasn't even two hours since I had stepped off the train.

It was my first time back in Löcknitz since I had moved away from home four months ago. In the entrance hall, I had been met by a note pinned up alongside the eight postboxes, on which my mother was requesting the neighbours' signatures in protest against the building management's plan to wall in the compost heap. *Save the hedgehogs! Stop the wall!* it declared in capital letters. As I entered the apartment a very familiar smell came towards me, but one which I had never paid attention to until now. On the wall where my mother tended to pin up all the postcards she received, there were no new arrivals. I had pushed open the door to my old childhood bedroom and glanced in, not even the bed had been stripped. Apart from the note in the entrance hall, nothing here had changed.

The water having drained away, I rinsed the remaining flea dots down the plughole and turned my attention back to the hedgehog. I stroked across his back until he unfurled, then turned him over and inspected his stomach.

Your Bodo is a girl, I said.

Is he indeed, said my mother, then I guess he should be called Boda.

I dried Boda off carefully and put her down in the large wooden crate which stood at the ready beneath the washbasin. The crate was lined with newspaper, in one corner was a little cardboard box and in front of it a small bowl of cat food, which Boda immediately busied herself with. My mother looked content and I asked myself whether this contentment was down to Boda's appetite or the fact that, after all these years, she had managed to get me to look after one of her wards again. I sat back down on the toilet lid.

I have seven of eight signatures protesting the compost wall, said my mother.

The Pietreks haven't signed, I said and my mother nodded. The Pietreks were the kind of people who would only sit on their sofa if a plastic cover was pulled over it. In all these years of being our neighbour, Herr Pietrek had only come over once, to borrow some tools. He had gazed disconcertedly at the four un-matching wooden chairs which stood around our kitchen table, collected from other peoples' rejects left out on the street. Since then, on the first of every month, Frau Pietrek had left a little note in our letterbox reminding us when it was our turn to clean the communal stairs.

Couldn't you have a word with them? asked my mother.

Seven signatures will be enough, I said.

Eight would be better, she said.

If only seven of the tenants are against the compost wall, I said, then you'll have to accept that.

No, she said, then I'll have to convince the eighth.

Forget it, the Pietreks can't stand you.

That's why I'm asking you.

The Pietreks can't stand me either.

I'd say it's more that they pity you. For being my daughter.

We looked at each other for a moment. My mother had laid her hands on the edge of the bath to stop her fingers from pruning up. But they looked crinkled regardless. I fought against the impulse to assure her that I didn't consider my status as her daughter to be a pitiable circumstance.

I don't want to speak to the Pietreks, I said instead. And how about you finally get around to looking for a consulting room instead of wasting your time fighting a pile of bricks.

My mother turned her gaze away from me, then tilted her head back and rinsed off the foam. It ran down over her neck and breasts into the water and dissipated. I looked for the scar, but the foam was concealing it.

If you don't care about the fact that this pile of bricks will destroy an entire habitat, then I'll just have to take care of it by myself, she said as she turned off the shower head. For the first time, I noticed the furrows which curved around the corners of my mother's mouth, as if they wanted to put everything she said in brackets.

By the way, there's a message for you on the answering machine, she added.

From who?

Listen to it, she said and pulled out the plug.

I went out to the shoe cabinet in the hallway where the telephone was and pressed the button to listen to the recorded messages.

This is the home of Astrid and Johanna Haller, I heard my mother's voice say, unfortunately we're not at home right now.

She hadn't changed the message, as though I still lived here. The message was from the day before yesterday, received at 16:23 hours.

Hello, this is Jens, said a man's voice, followed by the sound of a throat being cleared. It took me a few seconds before I was able to place the name as my father's. His voice sounded more brittle than I had imagined it to be.

The reason I'm calling, said the voice, may be because of the view from my window. I'm looking out at the wall, which wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary were it not for the fact that I'm looking at the wall from the other side. It's completely absurd that now, of all moments, I should be looking at the wall from the other side. No one's picking up the phone at your place. It looks completely different from the other side. It looks like a proper wall. Words have been going astray recently, have you two noticed that as well? But there are birds sitting in front of the window.

He fell silent for a moment.

The girl can give me a call back, he said.

The answer machine gave me the option of deleting the message, saving the message, or returning the call, for which I had to press 1, 2 or 3. If there had been a 4, offering an explanation for the message, I would have pressed 4. But the machine didn't offer me a fourth option, so I pressed nothing at all and it decided to save it.

I stared at the telephone. For a moment I doubted whether the voice really did belong to Jens. Because it seemed highly improbable that, after not calling for nineteen whole years, he would then have done so the day before yesterday, at 16:23 hours, in order to talk some nonsense about walls and birds. But evidently Jens didn't

concern himself too much with probabilities. And, even more evidently, my mother had been right when she called him a nutjob.

Your father is in the West, she had said, when I had asked as a child whether I had a father too, like all the other children. In the West, it had sounded so endlessly far away, and my books on Indians, of which every last one was set in the Wild West, had confirmed this suspicion, because there were cacti there. I was very disappointed when I realised that the West my father was in was a different West, where there were no cacti and which wasn't even on a different continent. And I was disappointed for a second time when I learnt that this cactus-less West had been easily reachable for a long time already. My mother had told me that my father left on the 4th of October 1989 in order to become a famous rock musician over there. Why hadn't he dropped by for a visit after the Wall fell, I asked her later; after all, the border had been opened just five weeks after he fled. A decision like that can't be reversed, my mother had said, and her answer had made perfect sense.

I tore my gaze away from the telephone and looked at the postcards that were pinned on the wall above it. I searched for the one with the camel in a desert landscape, which hung there amongst many others. Jens had sent it to my mother six months after his disappearance, according to the postal stamp saying either the 3rd or 8th of April 1990; it was hard to make out which. I knew off by heart what was written on the back, but nonetheless I pulled out the drawing pin and took the postcard down from the wall. The woodchip wallpaper was a little brighter on the spot where it had just been. I read the scrawled handwriting: *Dear Astrid, it said, there are more stray dogs in Berlin than there are people, you should see it sometime. Best wishes, Jens.* He had written neither an address nor a telephone number on it, just like he hadn't left a number on the machine now. I held the card up against the light, as though that might make visible some additional lines which I had overlooked until now. I wondered whether perhaps the time had come to treat the card for what it was, in other words a display of extreme audacity which should be either ripped up or thrown away, and certainly not hung in the hallway. But then I decided that it wasn't worthy of that. As long as it hung here on the wall, it was a postcard like all the rest, and that was how it should remain. Besides, I liked the camel, just as I liked all animals that my mother couldn't collect from the Uckermark countryside; as a teenager I had even been into fish for a while. I pinned the postcard back up with the drawing pin and positioned it so that the bright rectangle on the wallpaper could no longer be seen.

I went back into the bathroom and sat down on the toilet lid again. My mother was still sat in the tub, the water had almost drained away.

And? she asked.

And what, I said.

Will you call back?

I heard the last drops of water gurgle down the drain, then everything was still. There were still soap suds clinging to my mother's body and the fine hairs on her legs were standing on end. I had always gotten by without a father before, and I couldn't think why I would suddenly need one now.

I turned out reasonably okay without a father, I said.

My mother laughed and the little bubbles of foam over the scar burst. Then she turned the water on and washed the soap suds from her body.

I am the only scar on my mother's body, I thought, wishing to myself that I had given my father one back then too. Knowing that I had had the measles at two

years of age, I imagined how he would have rushed to get to the pharmacy, how he would have stumbled over and hit his knee on the curb in such a way that his jeans would have been ripped and his knee would have needed at least five stitches. The air in the bathroom was hot and damp now. My mother smiled at me as she climbed out of the tub; the scar disappeared beneath her bathrobe.

I stood up, went back into the hallway to the telephone and looked at the call log. I clicked through some names and numbers, including one with a Berlin prefix which was sure to be my new landline number and which I still hadn't learnt off by heart. My mother hadn't saved it, as though it were just a temporary circumstance that I was living in Berlin now. I arrived at the mobile number that had called the day before yesterday at 16:23, took out my mobile and typed it in. I pressed *Save Number*, wrote *Papa*, then deleted it again. Then I wrote *Father*, looked at the six letters for a while, said the word out loud a few times until it lost its meaning, then deleted that too. Then I wrote *Jens* and pressed *OK*.

District court

Rostock, 3.10.1989

Arrest warrant

The blacksmith and musician BORG, Jens, born on 5.3.1954 in Rostock, resident of Kavelndorf, is to be taken into custody.

He is accused, as singer, drummer and leader of the music group 'The Curly Stockings', of having attacked the political foundations of the GDR by means of subversive agitation. The accused does not sing lyrics during his performances, but instead strings together meaningless syllables, through which he is clearly expressing his opinion that there is no freedom of speech in the GDR. By doing so, he seeks to impose his view on others and to 'incite them to contemplation.'

Criminal offence corresponding to §106 of the criminal code.

He is strongly suspected of this crime, and as there is a risk of repeat offences, the warrant for his arrest is legally justified.

signed Selene
District Court Governor

Fingerprints on the stop request button

I sized up the tram which I would shortly be steering through the city. It was a GT6N, a bi-directional vehicle to which there was no alternative on the M10 route, on account of the fact that there was no turning loop at Nordbahnhof. With its yellow cladding and tinted windows, the tram reminded me of the children's book character the Tiger Duck, thanks to which I had grasped at a young age what an amazing invention the wheel was.

My first tram ride must have been when I was in primary school. There were no trams to be found for miles around in the Uckermark. The closest one passed behind the Polish border in Stettin, where I was always allowed to look at the seaport while my mother was buying cigarettes for my grandparents. On one of our stopovers, a decommissioned tram line was in the process of being reopened. The tram was decorated with garlands and people could ride for free; I had a balloon thrust into my hand and remember thinking that riding the tram was kind of like having a birthday.

Today, however, I certainly didn't feel like it was my birthday; I was nervous, like I always was just beforehand. Sure, I'd been driving regularly for weeks now, but the route was different every time.

With clammy fingers, I groped around in the inside pocket of my uniform for a lighter, but all I could find was my mobile phone, and for a moment I thought of the new number which had been in it for over a week now, undialled. It was a distant thought somewhere in the back of my mind, I thought of that number in much the same way as someone might think of giving up smoking: maybe someday.

Essentially, that was what Jens had always been: a distant thought somewhere in the back of my mind. Other children had imaginary friends or imaginary super heroes; I had an imaginary father. Whenever someone got smart with me at school, I imagined that I could call him whenever I wanted, that he would come and sort them out for me. But at around the same time that my favourite dungarees, made of black corduroy, became too tight for me, so too the thoughts of my father had gradually disappeared.

I found the lighter in my trouser pocket and lit a cigarette. Innumerable cigarette butts lay on the tracks, their length evidence of the increasing wintry cold. The shorter and colder the days became, the longer the butts at the tram stops; countless prevented burn holes in gloves. I too took only a few drags, flicked my cigarette to the others in the tracks and pulled off my gloves only once I was in the driver's cab.

In the front passenger seat sat my driving instructor Reiner, his chin was resting on his chest and he was snoring softly. He always made sure to have a five-minute nap three times a day, a 'final stop sleep' as he called it. Reiner had driven the tram for one circuit and explained the particularities of the route to me, now it was my turn. I adjusted the seat, making as much noise as possible in the process. Reiner woke up and we launched into the dialogue with which we started every one of my driving lessons:

Off we go then, he said.

Off we go then, I said and released the handbrake.

The number 10 tram didn't have its own tracks, so we had to be very aware of cars on the street. The evening before, I had traced along the route with my finger on my map

of Berlin until I knew all the stops and crossroads off by heart. To start with it went slightly uphill, along Bernauer Straße.

How old were you? asked Reiner, jerking his chin in the direction of the window. On our right stood the remains of the border fortifications that had once cut a monumental swath through the maps of Berlin, and which now served as memorial sites.

I was two, I said, adding that I had never sat in awe in front of a telephone, never painted a sunflower for Angela Davis and never chatted with West Germans on wall viewing platforms.

Reiner laughed.

You've seen too many films, he said.

I laughed too, even though I wasn't sure what had amused Reiner so much. Perhaps it was more likely that I had seen too few films, I thought, or the wrong ones. Outside the window the grey concrete passed by, so dilapidated now that the rusty spikes inside it were visible. I knew from the films, in any case, that the inner German border had been built from concrete blocks only in Berlin, and elsewhere from barbed wire and buttresses. If Jens was looking out on a wall that looked like a proper wall, I thought to myself, then he must still live in Berlin.

You won't get home any quicker like that, said Reiner, and only then did I realise I had driven past the last tram stop. I braked and came to a halt just before the Brunnenstraße crossing.

There's no point stopping here, he said.

I'm sorry, I said, I'm really sorry.

In two weeks you'll have passengers on board, said Reiner, sounding stricter now, you'll have to do better than this.

I drove on, trying to concentrate on the tracks. These were the streets and crossings which Jens had preferred to the Uckermark's country roads and paths, and he was clearly still here, in this city. I looked at the facades of the houses passing us by, kilometre after kilometre of them. Houses had always had a calming effect on me. Their walls offered the promise of being able to hide away inside them, with all of one's secrets, stories and inadequacies. I liked their rigidity, their dependable presence.

I had almost completed the first circuit when, at Bersarinplatz, a man hammered on the window. His voice was muffled but audible, he wanted to get in. I looked to the side, to the right outside mirror, and for a moment thought that it was Jens standing there on the platform.

This is a driving school tram, bellowed Reiner.

I saw the shadow retreat, the man was much too old to be my father.

I think perhaps the second green light is long enough to drive on, said Reiner.

I saw the traffic light switch back to red.

Sorry, I said.

The setpoint generator felt slippery in my right hand, the traffic light changed, I drove off. I wondered how I would be able to recognise Jens if he really was standing on the platform, if he were to stroll along the pavement or over the zebra crossing in front of me. On the black-and-white photo which my mother had shown me from time to time, he was lying on the grass with his eyes closed. He had clasped his hands behind his balding head, exposing his thick underarm hair. I was dribbling on his stomach with my baby mouth, behind us stood a zinc tub. It was the only photo of my father and I that my mother owned. I wondered whether I would even be able

to recognise him if I were to see him standing upright and with his eyes open. I tried to age him by nineteen years, to double his chin and draw lines around his eyes and the corners of his mouth. But the picture with the zinc tub in the background stayed in my mind, except that Jens' face had been given some ragged strokes, as though someone had defaced an election poster in a hurry.

I pushed the thoughts away, I didn't want to make any space for Jens here in the driver's cab, which was already cramped enough with Reiner. I looked back at the facades passing by, but now there was no longer anything calming about them. All of a sudden, it felt as though Jens could be living behind every window, behind every door. Every door handle could be the one he clasped in his hand each day whenever he entered or left the house.

After the Wall fell, my mother cut off the cats' whiskers, I said, just to say something.

Reiner looked at me blankly.

So that they couldn't find their way home, I said. It had been her last day as director of the animal home, it was closed down afterwards, she was twenty-eight at the time. She had put the fourteen cats together with three dogs and thirty-one rabbits in a trailer and then released one animal after the other in the Uckermark countryside. My mother said that she had dreamed about the fourteen cats, three dogs and thirty-one rabbits for a long time after that. Now she has a part-time position as a zookeeper in a petting zoo.

Reiner rubbed his hand across his chin a few times.

So, he said eventually, they say the best director of the GDR's biggest shopping centre was supposed to have been Sigmund Jähn, and do you know why?

Reiner inserted a dramatic pause, I shrugged my shoulders dutifully.

Because, as a cosmonaut, he's an expert when it comes to empty spaces!

Reiner laughed loudly at his joke. When I didn't laugh along with him, he swiftly stopped again.

As far as reunification was concerned, the tram drivers got lucky, he said.

Because the BVG, Berlin's transport authority, was the only organisation in the whole of Berlin where the West Germans had to learn from the East Germans, I replied. Reiner had already told me this in one of my first driving lessons.

Exactly, he said contentedly. Because the street tram was decommissioned in West Berlin in '67. By the way, what does your father do?

Before he disappeared, he was a blacksmith, I said. But in nineteen years it's quite likely that he changed his job.

Reiner nodded.

Indeed, he said and looked out of the window for a moment.

The beginning of the end will start in six months, he said then, on the 15th of June 2008. The day will go down in the history books.

Now it was my turn to look at him blankly.

That's the day the first fully automated U-Bahn train will come into service in Nuremberg, he said. It goes without any driver at all. Probably at some point we won't be needed any more.

Reiner stared thoughtfully at his knees, which were straining the fabric of his uniform. I felt the urge to say something reassuring.

But back to your family, said Reiner, your mother must have a boyfriend?

If she does have one, I said, then she's very skillful at keeping him a secret from me.

Reiner laughed.

And what you do in your free time, he asked, do you have any hobbies?

His questions were starting to get on my nerves, but perhaps only because I couldn't immediately think of answers to them. At the same time, I was happy about the fact that Reiner seemed to be in the mood for chatting, rather than just watching my handhold intently.

I collect maps, I said.

Maps?

Yes.

My answer was only half true, because although I had indeed harboured a passion for maps for a long while, recently I had neglected them and only added one to my collection. The box with the maps was still standing untouched in the hallway of my new apartment. You certainly couldn't call it a proper hobby, in any case, and the thought occurred to me that my Berlin life, apart from my training and a small crush on a colleague, was still very much empty. None of my school friends had ended up here. They had scattered all across the world, for internships, community service or studies. Sarah was the only one I still had regular contact with. She hadn't understood my decision. Don't you want to study anything? she had asked. But I hadn't felt any desire to exchange the hard wooden chair of the classroom for an equally hard wooden chair in a lecture theatre. I wanted to do something hands-on and get out in the world, in a major city. Then why don't you become a bus driver or a bin man, my mother had mocked me. The fact that she didn't take me seriously had made me so angry that I promptly applied for all the city transport vacancies from Munich to Hamburg. Yet the longer I waited for responses to come back and the longer my mother and Sarah tried to talk me out of it, the more appealing the idea became of sitting in a driver's cab and moving people around like a puppeteer moves his puppets. So initially I had stayed in the Uckermark to wait tables and get my driving license. Back when the acceptance letter came from the BVG, I had been looking forward to Berlin. But now, while Sarah was studying in Istanbul, dreaming in Turkish and having a ball in the nightlife scene, I was sat here in the tram next to an aging man, thinking about my biological father. I pushed aside the sadness rising inside me and concentrated on the tracks. Reiner looked at me from the side.

You're nervous today, he said.

Just because of the week after next, I said.

And that was true, because it would soon be time for my first shift, where I wouldn't just be driving a dual traction Tatra tram, but also transporting passengers in it. Reiner would sit alongside me for another few weeks after that, and then I would be out on the route alone. I didn't know what unsettled me more: the fact that the week after next I would be responsible for human lives, or the possibility that Jens could be one of my passengers, leaving his fingerprints on the stop request button. With every stop, every circuit and every shift, the probability would increase that the chewing gum on my shoe had previously been in his mouth. Numbers from the theory class whirred through my head: 3.5 million inhabitants, 22 lines with 377 stops across a network of 189.4 km, 250,000 subscribers, 170 million passengers a year, with double traction and a maximum load of 300 passengers per tram, 150 of those being men: I estimated that the probability of having Jens as one of my passengers would, by the end of six weeks of shifts with Reiner, already be over 50%.

You'll be fine, said Reiner, I'm not worried about you at all, you'll be fine.

He crossed his arms in front of his chest and leaned back in the seat.

3

An inventory of my knowledge about my father

Back at home, I spread my map of Berlin out on the floor to look at the route of the number 50, which I would be driving the next day. All of a sudden, the city seemed very small, laid out before me like that. The lack of a centre suggested that it had grown out of a number of villages, producing the kind of cobbled-together cityscape which was typical of many European cities. There were both rectangular and concentric structures, and there were junctions and tangents at which, eventually, my father and I would run into one another.

I stood up and took a few aimless steps, through the hallway and into the kitchen, fetched myself a glass of water and went back. In the middle of the room stood the basket full of washed uniforms that I had forgotten to hang up that morning. I thought of my colleagues, who, when the uniforms had been distributed, had immediately pulled on the dark blue pullovers and stroked with pride the yellow BVG stripes on the sleeves. I had always found that very unique smell that brand-new clothing has kind of nauseating; so the first thing I did was wash everything with a lot of fabric softener. I fetched the clotheshorse and began to hang up the uniforms.

The thermometer outside the window was showing 1° above zero, tonight would bring the first frost. For weeks on end I had eagerly awaited it, but now the expanding mercury in the little glass tube left me cold. Point heating and changes in braking distance were the least of my worries right now. Over and over, I kept imagining how a planned encounter with Jens might unfold. First I saw myself sitting in a cafe for hours on end, tearing sugar sachets to pieces because he hadn't called to let me know that something had come up. Then I imagined how he might offer me the biscuit that came with his coffee and repair the lamp on my bicycle. Even though he was the one who had called me, the sugar sachet version seemed more probable. And when it came to a father with those kind of probability factors, it would be better to not even meet in the first place.

I sat back down in front of the map of Berlin and managed to learn four of the stops off by heart. If I wanted to stay out of my mother's way in Berlin, I would avoid all the zoos and animal parks on the map. If I didn't want to run into myself, I would steer clear of all tram stops. I contemplated what I would need to do in order not to find Jens. Essentially it was very simple: I would just have to find out his daily routes and paths, then I could plan out exclusion zones which I wouldn't set foot in. With the help of the map I would construct a Berlin in which Jens didn't exist. It wasn't a hundred percent guaranteed, admittedly, but it would reduce the probability. In my mind, I made an inventory of my knowledge about my father. I knew his name, his job and his birthday. The same day as Rosa Luxemburg's, my mother had once said, giving me a scrutinizing look as she did so, and I just shrugged my shoulders. The 5th of March, she had said, don't you learn that kind of thing in school anymore?

But that didn't help me very much with defining on the map the area that I wanted to declare an exclusion zone. The only thing that could help me was the wall that he could allegedly see from his window.

I fetched the box containing my map collection from the hallway and spread the contents out on the floor. I owned two terrestrial globes, a relief of the Erz mountains and 127 maps, 93 of which were regional maps that disregarded the curvature of the earth. I took out the new map, still shrink-wrapped, removed the

transparent film and spread out the paper roll next to the Berlin map. It was a print of the Ebstorf map of the world, my mother had given it to me as a moving-in present. For your collection, she had said.

The Ebstorf map was the biggest *mappa mundi* from the Middle Ages. By the time it was discovered in 1830, mice had gnawed through and destroyed two sections of it, including the entire region of modern-day Brandenburg, as well as the Uckermark. This map had always been one of my favourites. It had been drawn by monks who, in creating their depiction of the world, hadn't concerned themselves too much with accuracy. Paradise, Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel featured on it, and Rome was as big as Sicily. Around the edges of the world, the monks had drawn in fantasy creatures in order to fill unknown regions with pictures. On later maps, *terra incognita* would be written here instead. I spent a while searching for drawing pins, found them in a box under the bed and fastened the map onto the wall above my desk. Then I put the two globes on the top shelf and began to sort through the remaining 126 maps which were spread across the floor. I arranged them by scale as well as by region, from North to South. The regional maps I looked through one by one. Amongst them were city maps of Peking and Buenos Aires, Cape Town and Miami. I had never been to any of these cities. When my grandparents were still alive, I had almost always spent the summer holidays with them on the Oberuckersee lake. Most of the maps had been given to me by Sarah, after the holidays. Now 93 regional maps from all over the world lay before me, but ironically the very one I *didn't* have was an old map of Berlin showing the path of the Wall. I tidied the collection away into the cupboard with the globes.

My Internet connection still wasn't set up yet, so I took out the thesaurus and looked up *Berlin Wall*. It said that the border fortifications had been between thirty and five hundred metres wide and equipped with watchtowers, spring guns, barricades and mines. Chatting with Westerners on wall viewing platforms, as they showed in the films, probably hadn't been at all possible. Now I knew what had amused Reiner so much. I closed the thesaurus and searched the map for clues of the former route of the border. At the eastern end of Bernauer Straße, where the remains of the wall stood that I had driven past with Reiner, I recognised wasteland which must have once been the border strip. There were also two other preserved sections of border fortification which were marked as sightseeing destinations and listed in the map key, in Niederkirchner Straße and at the East Side Gallery. That was all I could get from the map. Broken-off streets had long since been reconnected, wasteland rebuilt, watchtowers torn down. The thirty to five hundred metre wide area of over one hundred and sixty kilometres in length had been successfully erased. I picked up a pen and drew a circle around each of the three locations. I drove past two of them daily on my routes.

I stood up and went over to the window, the thermometer was showing zero degrees now. The houses opposite stood there just as silent and unmoving as ever, tightly packed in a row as though they were holding one another up. But all of a sudden I began to doubt whether they really were stable and built according to the rules of structural engineering. There, on the other side of the street, stood row upon row of buildings which were perhaps at risk of collapse, easily destructable by a particularly strong storm or a gentle earthquake. And the longer I watched, the more convinced I became that they were swaying gently in the wind.

I suddenly thought of how Reiner had gazed at his knees when he spoke of the fully automated U-Bahn in Nuremberg. I imagined how the mayor would festively inaugurate the first driverless train, how a red ribbon would be cut and champagne

corks would pop. I pictured myself cleaning out my locker at the depot and taking down the birthday calendar in the break room. I heard the boss asking me what other skills I had. The boss looked remarkably similar to Jens, or at least the Jens I knew from the photo. I heard myself fall silent and him sigh, then Jens pushed a contract for a part-time position as a site cleaner across the table towards me, which I signed.

I resolutely tore my gaze away from the window and looked at the mythical creatures on the Ebstdorf map of the world. I was particularly taken by a winged tiger which was rearing up in front of an attacker. I stared at the tiger for a long time, as though it could tell me why I was feeling so restless all of a sudden. Jens had decided nineteen years ago against having a daughter, which meant that, today, this daughter didn't have a father, just a progenitor. But he was occupying my thoughts as self-evidently as the tiger had wings, and it irritated me that someone who had been away for so long had the ability to turn things upside down with a single phone call. I stared intently at the Ebstdorf map, as though somewhere on it, in very small print, it would say whether I should call Jens back. I mean, perhaps he had a better story to tell than Reiner and my mother, one that would give the houses back their stability. I brushed my hand across the paper of the map. If an encounter were unavoidable, then, instead of being taken unawares on some zebra crossing, I wanted to be prepared for it.

Okay then, I said eventually to the winged tiger, I'll meet him and take a look at him, just this once. And then it will be done.

I took out my mobile phone and searched through the contacts for *Jens*. I stroked my thumb hesitantly over the green button, but didn't get around to pressing it, because at that moment I received a text message from my mother: *Boda 330 grams. How are you?* I laid the phone aside and rolled a cigarette that I could light if I didn't know what to do with the hand that wasn't holding the phone. As I did so, I formed sentences in my mind. Eventually, I pressed the green button.

Hello? said a female voice.

I didn't know what to say; I had only prepared sentences for Jens.

Hello, said the female voice again, who is this?

It's Johanna, I said, I'd like to speak to Jens.

I pressed my index finger against my left ear, even though it was completely quiet here in the room. I hoped for some slight coughing sound or a wobble in her voice that might reveal whether she knew who I was. I thought I heard a chair leg scrape across the floor.

Hello Johanna, said the female voice, this is Antonia.

There was a matter-of-factness in her tone which confused me. I sat down next to the map of Berlin on the floor, and then it came to me. Many years ago my mother had mentioned that Jens had another daughter, she was called Antonia and was a little older than me. I searched for a warm response.

Is Jens there too? I asked, hoping that the little word *too* would let her realize that I knew who she was.

He's sleeping right now, she said, and hesitated for a moment before continuing.

He's in the hospital, she said. He has cancer. It's terminal.

I took my finger away from my ear. I clamped the phone between my shoulder and cheek and picked up the lighter from the nightstand. That didn't sound like a better story. But at least I wouldn't have to tear any sugar packets to shreds in a café when he didn't turn up. Though it seemed he wouldn't be repairing my bicycle either. I lit the cigarette.

He's in the Lazarus Hospital, said Antonia.
I took a drag of the cigarette, still unsure as to what I could say in response.
Yes, I said eventually, blowing out the smoke.
Maybe I should drop by, I added hesitantly.
Ward H3, room 307, said Antonia. Tomorrow?
Yes, tomorrow, I said.

I stood up, knocking the glass with my foot, the water splashed over and ran along the floorboards to the map, soaking into the list of symbols. I took off my woolen socks and mopped the water up with them. The wet socks looked like Limping Bertha's rat babies, which had accidentally come into the world in my wardrobe because my mother had wanted to give Bertha space to roam around. I hung the socks over the back of the chair. Then I sat back down in front of the map. I felt myself becoming angry, and reflected that I should probably be sad instead; after all, the man who was my biological father lay dying. I heard a soft tapping sound at irregular intervals; water was dripping from my socks onto the floor. With the tip of my finger, I searched the map for hospital icons, and searched my mind for someone to blame. For someone who was responsible for the fact that I would now have to prepare more sentences, for the fact that words like 'terminal' existed, and also for the fact that my socks were wet. I felt angry at my mother, who had chosen as my father a man who had made nothing but trouble, then absconded to the West, and now to top it all off had cancer. But where underweight hedgehogs were concerned, she spent weeks on end nursing them back to health, buying them minced beef, lining boxes with newspaper and speaking kindly to them, where *they* were concerned she was responsible.

Finally I found the Lazarus Hospital, it was just two tram stops away from my apartment in Wolliner Straße, and directly opposite the remaining section of the Wall in Bernauer Straße which I had driven past on the number 10 route. I drew a circle around the red icon.

Ministry for State Security
Main Department I

Rostock, 4. 10. 1989

Arrest report

Today at approximately 17:30 hours

BORG, Jens
Born: 5.3.1954 in Rostock
Occupation: Blacksmith
Marital status: Single
Children: 2
Place of residence: Kavelstorf near Rostock

was taken into custody on the main road between
Kavelstorf and Laage, by Goldenitzer Moor.

The observation post, manned from midday, was able to establish at 17:26 hours that the beige Wartburg automobile KZ AH 13-75 was approaching the planned site of arrest. Just like every Wednesday afternoon at around this time, the object was en route to Prebberede, where the cellar used for the band practice is located. Under the guise of a routine traffic check, the Wartburg was waved over to the side of the road. J was unable to comply with the request to provide identification, as he was not carrying his ID on him. He confirmed his identity verbally. The arrest followed. He offered no resistance during the transfer to the ''Hermann'' detention centre in Rostock.

The Wartburg was seized.

The following items were seized from the boot:

1 hammer, rusty
2 splitting wedges
4 drumsticks, 1 of which was broken

The following items were seized from the back seat:

1 acoustic guitar
1 tangled-up cassette, unmarked
1 baby seat, dirty

signed Selene,
Major