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Sunday's Child **by Jan Koneffke**

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1944/45

[...]

On the 26th the special unit, by then the last German troops in Stettin, had to pull out. They trundled out of the barracks yard in two trucks, in the roaring, rattling, crackling air, under an eerie, fiery red sky full of clouds of smoke. 'Look at that,' Harry nodded bitterly up at the sheets and rags hanging from the houses, makeshift white flags fluttering on sticks and brooms, 'they should all be taken out and shot. Those fucking pigs, when our boys have been shafted defending them from the Bolshevik scum.' They ground round to Parade Platz at walking pace, dodging masonry rubble and fallen gutters, telegraph poles at angles, shot-up railway carriages, bodies of horses and people. Standing next to Konrad, who leant against the side of the truck, feeling hollow and dazed, Harry swore like a maniac and brandished his gun. He only fell silent when a lamppost blocked the road and they jumped out of the truck to clear it out of the way at the double. Suddenly they were surrounded by four squabbling women, 'Cowards! Swine! Don't abandon us!' One clawed at Konrad's uniform, wailing and begging, 'Take me with you, please,' until he pushed her away, disgusted. She fell in the mud and clung to Konrad's leg, letting herself be dragged along. When the convoy moved off again and he tried to pull himself up on the backboard, he had to kick the woman in the face to finally shake her off. 'Bastards! Swine! What's going to happen to us?' cursed a man, half jumping into the truck. Harry rammed the barrel of his gun into his ribs and with a scream he fell backwards into the road.

Pasewalk, Neuensund, Friedland, Demmin. Constantly caught up in heavy fighting, they lost eight men in two days. One of the trucks broke down and couldn't be fixed and as they were transferring the ammunition boxes to the other a low-flying Russian fighter attacked them. It was hopeless looking for cover in the expanse of fields and meadows stretching unbroken to the horizon, and they could count themselves lucky that only two comrades were killed: Atze Klein, the former head chef of the Adlon, who had a box of explosives in his arms – caught by the first salvo of machine gun fire, he flew up into the air with an ear-splitting bang, a lurid fireball in the pale April sunshine, then came down in pieces – and the taciturn guy called Schulz or Schulze, who had an arm torn off by the explosion and bled to death with the other bodies in the ditch by the roadside.

The Russians only made two passes and they hurriedly pushed on, seeking woodland that could afford them more cover against air and ground attacks, Konrad and Harry with the lieutenant in the jeep, leading the way for the truck, which was packed with the seven surviving men and their ammunition and rations. The jeep was roofless, with a blood-spattered windscreen, and Konrad found an indeterminate piece of human innards in a tear in the seat cushion, which he threw onto the road in disgust and horror.

The horror increased at nightfall as they turned onto a highway not far from Rostock. The plane trees lining either side of the road had bodies hanging in their branches, swaying in the wind. He could make out soldiers, half of whom were either children or old men, with handwritten signs on their stomachs and faces torn to shreds by crows. 'I am a red pig' proclaimed a piece of cardboard round a young boy's neck; 'I have betrayed Germany' said another worn by an old man with a blackened, lolling tongue. One man had no eyes. Half naked, his trousers hanging down from his shoes almost to

the ground, a soldier swung from a knotted leather belt, his torso a bloody mess. At a crossroads dangled a woman who couldn't have been twenty; 'Russian whore' he read on the sign. For two kilometres there was a body hanging from every plane tree. Some seemed to twitch as if they were still alive, or as if they were recoiling from the headlights that tore them out of the darkness. Harry, Konrad and the lieutenant sat silent and petrified until the avenue of plane trees abruptly came to an end and Harry, who was driving, thumped the steering wheel and started giggling. His demented giggles grew into snorts of laughter, and hesitantly at first, and then with relief, Konrad and the lieutenant joined in.

The following day, by now one step ahead of the Russian troops, who seemed to have temporarily halted their advance, they stopped to rest at an abandoned estate about ten kilometres from Wismar. They hid the jeep and truck in a hay barn and collapsed onto the downy mattresses in the manor house, which seemed untouched apart from its valuables, gold and silverware, jewellery and money. Sleep had been out of the question for the past few days and all the men passed out, except for Konrad who had drawn the short straw and had to stand guard in front of the building.

And that was the day Sische, the middleweight champion, chose to desert. It was pure chance Konrad noticed him stealing out of the servants' entrance and making a dash for the edge of the wood. He was stomping round the manor house, trying to stay awake, when he spotted the hurrying figure. Konrad whistled to warn Sische, who started and turned back to the manor house without slowing down. The middleweight champion waved his big paw benignly, as if there was nothing to worry about, and winked at Konrad until he disappeared from sight behind a barn.

Konrad stood, irresolute, for half a minute, feeling desperate and furious with the coward who was trying to make him his accomplice. That was what Sische was asking, after all, that he turn a blind eye and not raise the alarm. So, did he run back to the main entrance and resume his post by the staircase as if nothing had happened, feeling hopelessly bitter and torn? Did he lie to the lieutenant with a trembling voice and wretched conscience when Sische's absence was discovered as they set off, swearing he hadn't noticed him make a run for it, a claim nobody thought to challenge – or did he just imagine it?

Did he instead throw away his cigarette butt, run into the house and bang on the door of the bedroom on the first floor to alert the lieutenant? Did the lieutenant instantly order him to wake the others, who gathered in the hall, staggering and cursing, where they were split into three groups of three and sent off in different directions to scour the wood while the lieutenant jumped into the car to cut off Sische? Did it only take Konrad's troop twenty minutes to find the runaway, who had sprained his foot? Did Sische fall to pieces when he saw them, limply letting them disarm him and take him back to the manor? Did he collapse on the steps, bury his face in his hands and sob so silently that only his twitching shoulders revealed his tears? When the lieutenant stopped in front of the manor house with a screech of brakes and strode over to the steps, was he too scared to look up?

He knew he'd committed treason, did he, rasped the lieutenant, treason against his motherland and his comrades? Sische nodded, staring at the ground. Did he know he was a coward who hadn't understood that a German soldier's sacred duty is to defend his country to the last cartridge, to the last breath, no matter what the cost, to protect the German people from the hunger for revenge that was bent on destroying it root and branch? Did he

know he was a shitty little coward? Again he nodded guiltily, without saying a word in his defence. And was he aware, barked the lieutenant, what happened to shitty little cowards who betrayed the soldier's oath? Sische blubbered. Covering his face with his hands, that heavy, broad-shouldered man blubbered like a child, then unresistingly let Harry pull him up off the steps and manoeuvre him along until he was standing against the wall. Did Konrad take part in Sische's shooting? Did he take up position on the lieutenant's orders to aim at the man with his back to the wall, that funny guy, that loyal comrade, who was now just a husk of remorse and shame, staring, head bowed, at his boots? As he tensed his finger on the trigger, did he hear Hartmut's voice in his ear, his piercing, throbbing bass dripping with irony, 'You won't disobey the order, I know. You're a good person and a good soldier, who does his job by the book, and if I was condemned to death for desertion and you were on the shooting party, you'd shoot, wouldn't you? It's your fucking duty as a soldier, isn't it?'

Did he aim like the others at Sische, who slumped onto his knees and then fell forwards onto the gravel, or at the last second did he intentionally pick out a patch of damp on the wall just by Sische's ear?

The boom of guns soon caught up with them again. Lieutenant Holzapfel's special unit was ordered to defend a railway embankment near Dassow with some SS stragglers and three kids from the Volkssturm, an assignment that cost everyone their lives except Harry, Konrad and the lieutenant himself. Forced to abandon the battered lorry, and the ammunition and rations with it, they fled from the Russian army as far as Ratzeburg, which the Tommies were pouring into from the other side. Shooting two motorcyclists, who had been lulled into a false sense of security, they drew the fire of a British tank. A splinter from a phosphorus grenade drilled into Harry's arm, burning

deeper and deeper down to the bone – he stared at his sizzling flesh, horrified – and as they leapt out of the jeep to take cover in a doorway, the lieutenant was shot in the head and killed instantly. Konrad stood by his officer's body in the gutter, threw his gun away and put both hands up, a wholly ineffectual gesture by that stage. He was hit by a bullet fired either by his comrade Harry, who was shooting crazily in every direction, or by a Brit returning Harry's fire.

He had no sense of the bullet boring into his lung and coming out the other side. Konrad only felt infinitely light, as if he was floating and rising from the ground in slow revolutions. Up in the clean air and liberating silence, he was a weightless, spinning golden child.

1945/46

[...]

YOU'LL COME CRAWLING BACK ON ALL FOURS

He remembered Father's delight for the rest of his life, the joy that flared up in his eyes when they met at the garden gate. Ludwig Kannmacher was holding some letters he wanted to post in one hand and an umbrella in the other, which prevented him enfolding his son in a paternal embrace. This clearly came as a relief. Stiff as a board, he allowed Konrad to hug him, shook his umbrella and said in a shaky voice, 'Now, now, son.' Stepping back two paces, he surveyed Konrad from head to toe, paying special attention to his leather coat, which visibly displeased him. 'Anyone would think you were in the Gestapo,' he growled, then turned, pushed open the creaking gate and ushered the lad into the garden. He did not follow – he had made a plan to go to the post office and he was not the sort of man to be unfaithful to a plan – but gestured with his umbrella towards the Papenfuss residence, which was a showy, rather than attractive, building from the mid-1890s. 'Upstairs, first room on the left,' he said, 'and for form's sake make yourself known to Dr. Papenfuss. A man should be familiar with the characters coming in and out of his house, don't you think?'

Their reunion had passed off without incident, a complete contrast to how, with a sinking heart, Konrad had imagined it. He had been convinced that his father would condemn him mercilessly; that he would be scathingly ironic about his enthusiasm of thirteen months earlier and belabour him with his old prediction: 'Who said the war was lost, and had been from the day it

started, when you couldn't wait to join your unit? But oh no, my son's fanatical patriotism made him unbelievably obtuse!' This scenario was all the more painful because it reminded Konrad of how he had been tempted to report his own father for defeatism and incitement to desertion. To have seriously contemplated informing on him (and thus to have toyed with his life in his imagination) wasn't just a crushing source of guilt. It was an eternal, irrevocable shame that doomed Konrad to always feel helpless and inhibited around his father.

Ludwig Kannmacher was above reproach. He had never made the mistake of screaming 'Sieg Heil!' and believing in ultimate victory. When he helped Schlomow from the bank in Schlawe to escape with his family and capital, smuggling his funds out of the Reich in good time until they were safely distributed among foreign accounts, out of the Nazis' grasping reach, that had been a courageous, selfless act. And Father's bravery and his accountant's cunning had earned him six months in a Gestapo jail in Lauenburg.

Oh yes, Ludwig Kannmacher was above reproach. It didn't occur to him to make a big thing out of his arrest. It was enough for the old man to be denazified and officially deemed 'not incriminated.' It went against his accountant's propriety to be compensated for upholding his principles. Moral guilt and ethical behaviour couldn't be chalked up as debit or credit, that was his – entirely untheoretical – point of view (he had little time for concepts and theories). In the subsequent weeks and months when Konrad was living with his parents and sister in Papenfuss's house, he found himself constantly remembering Grandfather Leopold's praise of his father.

The schoolmaster Leopold Kannmacher had been his role model as a child. He loved the frail old man unreservedly, hanging on his every word as he

poured forth stories and pearls of wisdom, his murmuring lips flecked with bubbles of spit and strands of tobacco. And it rankled terribly when his grandfather started praising his father who had suffered who knew what at the Gestapo's hands.

'Your father has courage,' said Leopold Kannmacher. 'He saved Schlomow's family from death and destruction, that deserves our respect, lad. No, Ludwig was never interested in reading Immanuel Kant; he is too down to earth a person to concern himself with philosophy. But in the end, his intrinsic morality made my matter-of-fact son comply with nothing less than Kant's categorical imperative!' 'And what about my courage,' protested his grandson, 'when I have to run the gauntlet in the schoolyard at break and they give me worse marks? And all because of Father, the Jews' friend.'

'That has nothing to do with courage,' growled Leopold Kannmacher sternly, 'that is pure suffering.' Grandfather didn't admit of any negotiation when it came to his categories. Haggling over moral laws as if they were herring was not allowed.

After Konrad's reunion with his father came a very different reunion with his mother, whom he found queuing for the toilet with Silesian twin brothers, who were hopping from foot to foot, desperate to go. Fourteen adults and six children had been compulsorily housed in the regulator manufacturer Karl Eduard Papenfuss's villa. They shared four rooms on the top floor and a toilet and bath along the hall (officially the Germans streaming in from the East were entitled to ten square metres per person). Meanwhile on the ground floor, which he had to himself, Karl Eduard Papenfuss grieved for his wife, who had been burned to death in an air raid on Hamburg. She had only been in town for a day, having gone there

to persuade her parents and sister to move to the country where it was safer. Nothing was left of his regulator factory on the Trave but a burnt-out ruin. When Konrad went into the house, Papenfuss was sitting by the wireless in the living room. Turning round in his greasy armchair, he stared out at the passage, like the set's magic eye. The strains of a big orchestra were thundering out of the wooden box with its burlap cover. 'You're the son and heir,' shouted Mr Papenfuss over the trumpets and clashing cymbals, as if he had never had a doubt about the lad's imminent return, then held out a strikingly childlike, waxy hand to Konrad, who stumbled round the lamp and tea trolley until he stood awkwardly in front of his armchair.

Father's friend had tiny ears, which in the half-light of the living room reminded Konrad of cauliflower buds, and a shiny bald pate framed by fuzzy tufts of hair, in which the living room was reflected: striped wallpaper, glassware, rugs, ebony bookcase and buffet cabinet, and an array of bulbous, slender-necked, dusty bottles displayed at angles on low three-legged little tables, shelves and radiator cabinets that contained all manner of vessels: fishing boats, tankers, ocean liners, icebreakers, inland cruisers and U-boats. Mr Pappenfuss was a gifted model builder, who coped with his chronic insomnia by reaching for the tweezers and glue every night. His days were spent half asleep, and when he despaired at the noise coming from the Pomeranian and Silesian floor, he cursed and turned on the radio.

'Welcome to our sardine can, my boy,' Papenfuss said laconically, with a wry expression, then let his chin sink onto his chest and promptly fell asleep. The toilet on the first floor flew open with a crash as Konrad reached it, panting, and out stepped a young tearaway with a fag and a mop of sandy hair. He stood in front of the twins, fumbling awkwardly with his flies as if the button just wouldn't go into the eyelet. It was obvious from his

mischievous grin that he was just trying to wind them up, but they ignored the cocky character, whose exit was accompanied by a gust of rank air, and rushed into the toilet – even the acrid stench couldn't deter them – to relieve themselves of the acute pressure on their bladders, a task they managed more or less simultaneously.

At first Emilie didn't notice Konrad, who leant against the head of the banister, at a loss and dazed with happiness at seeing her again. She told off the smirking youngster and paced round in urgent little circles in front of the toilet with her fingers clasped over her chest. She had more grey hairs now and was skinny, not that that was exceptional these days, but she still looked strong – or rather, determined to remain confident despite every setback and misfortune.

Mother's confidence was a secret he had never really understood, a survival mechanism, in fact, that protected her from discouragement and despair.

Because she had every reason to despair. It wasn't just the bitter loss of her homeland, which was such an intrinsic part of her, that must have oppressed her. She also worried about Konrad, unsurprisingly, and the sister who'd remained in Pomerania. And day-by-day her confidence was worn down by a husband who didn't show his love (Father considered the fact he was sure of his affections quite sufficient), who was gruff, uncommunicative and internally absent, and by a sister embittered by life who unscrupulously exploited and harassed her. But, despite all this, mother remained the rock against which all the family's conflict and anxieties broke. Unfailingly confident, undaunted, steady – if not plain stubborn – she held the Kannmacher household together.

She didn't just offer everyone in the family support. A streak of dreaminess, or absentmindedness, shone through even in her most practical dealings

which she performed with a sleepwalker's confidence. 'Have you got your head in the clouds again?' Father would grumble, half-seriously, half-jokingly, and wink at Mother as she self-consciously brushed a strand of hair from her forehead. Konrad could never understand what he meant, presuming he was referring to something in the past, before he was born. It suggested a state of mind which, as far as he could see, Emilie had put behind her or was very good at hiding in daily life.

Konrad hesitated to reveal himself. If his mother asked why he hadn't once sent word to say that he had escaped the worst and was alive, he wouldn't be able to come up with an adequate excuse. Oh, it had been cruel, his dogged silence... Suddenly he understood why he had kept silent and hadn't had the courage to get in touch with his family. He felt too defiled by the war to show himself before his mother and sister. He felt a different kind of shame in front of the women of the family, he realised, than he did with his father. To his old man he was a failure who had been swept up by wrongheaded ideas, by a reckless enthusiasm for war and soldiering that only a stupid kid could feel. Unbelievably stubborn, he had considered father's warnings cowardly and treasonous, a mark of sheer blindness and ignorance on his part for which he would have to answer to his old man.

His shame in front of the women, on the other hand, was of a different kind. He wasn't the person he had been before he had left for the company garrison in Kolberg, an immature, vacillating, decent enough little softy from the provinces, a withdrawn, lanky kid. He was returning a guilty man. And he was doing so to two women who could not be purer or more blameless in his eyes. What terrified him was the prospect that his mother and sister would be alienated from him. They would inevitably notice the anguish constraining his behaviour, and that was bound to make them

mistrustful. Would his mother's love shrink when she started to sense what had happened to him? Would she turn away in horror and disgust? Could Helene ever trust her brother again? Could he be innocently and lovingly close to his sister?

Emilie stopped her pacing and looked at his silhouette leaning in the half-shadows. 'Who are you?' she asked in a hoarse voice, 'I don't know you.' And as she said it, she recognised Konrad. With a scream she flung herself at the lad who pushed himself off the banister. 'It's you! Konrad! My golden child,' she exulted and fell into her son's arms which he flung wide with joy and élan, as if she were the child, not him. 'I knew you'd come back!' she rejoiced. 'A golden child doesn't get hurt, does he?' 'I'm completely fine, mother,' he said, taking a deep breath, 'my guardian angel spared me the worst.'

Emilie suddenly pushed him away with a look of horror on her face. Konrad couldn't understand what had caused this abrupt change. He couldn't help thinking it was to do with him. Alarmed, his arms dangling at his sides, he stood in front of his mother as she bit her lip. 'What's the matter, for God's sake?' he asked, a question she refused to answer.

They carried on standing like this in the dark corridor until, looking down at Emilie's slippers (two plush sheepskin-lined slippers from the late Mrs Papenfuss's wardrobe), he spotted the patch spreading across the carpet. At last, with a mixture of relief and sympathy, he realised why his mother had frozen. She turned in slow motion as the twins came out of the toilet. 'Enjoy, Mrs Kannmacher!' they chirped, while slyly looking Konrad up and down.

1973-1977

[...]

MORAL ACTS REPEATED

Konrad spent four years in Bamberg until an opening at Frankfurt University allowed him to take his leave of the city on the Regnitz where he had felt ill at ease and depressed. In June he made preparations for the move and rented a big sunny flat in an old building on Holzhausenpark. The only snag in the lease was that any upkeep was to be at his expense, and, given the amount of work that was needed, it could take between eight and ten weeks.

He spent this interim commuting between Bamberg and Frankfurt, giving the plumbers and electricians instructions and meeting up with his supervisor, Jochen Moosbach, with whom he was planning to write a book. He stayed the night with his lover, Lieselotte, who had studied in Milan for six terms (and was married to an Italian who was generally out of the country) and around nine in the morning took a D-train back to the episcopal city where he had various remaining duties to attend to and his son Ludwig to look after.

One morning as he was sitting on a bench on the station platform, reading the newspaper, a young fellow with sideburns and mirrored sunglasses plumped down next to him. Disconcerted, Konrad held the paper in front of his face. He had the impression he knew the fellow from somewhere. Ah that was it, the lad in the skin-tight denims looking restlessly in every direction was none other than Volker Siefert, the judge's son.

If Konrad remembered rightly, the former student had spent two and a half years in prison for his part in a bombing. The attack on the Israeli consulate hadn't done much damage, as far as he knew (a few broken windows, a couple of burnt-out cars in the courtyard), and Inga and some other comrades had organised a sit-in outside the deanery to force the academic staff and faculty management to call for Siefert's immediate release. Konrad was already teaching at Bamberg when this happened. It put Jochen Moosbach in a terrible quandary. The attack was unconscionable, especially because it targeted Israel and was perpetrated by the scion of a Nazi jurist. But as it involved one of his students with idealistic aims (which, even though wrong, were well-intentioned), it went against Jochen's principles not to stand by him while he was in detention awaiting trial. He ended up antagonizing everyone with his response: the radical student groups on the one hand, who accused him of 'cowardly complicity with the fascist regime' when he emphatically denounced the attack, and his university colleagues on the other, who condemned violence as a political tool (a concept that was too abstract for his friend).

Konrad did not know what the judge's son was up to these days. Silencing his exclamation of 'There's a thing, Volker Siefert!' with a hiss, the lad got straight to the point: he needed a hideout. It was for two or three weeks, he added hoarsely and chucked his butt on the ground when Konrad, anxious and confused, did not reply. It was clear what this meant: Siefert was now of no fixed address, crashing in one place one night, another the next, constantly on the move to avoid arrest. He probably had ties to the Red Army Faction, if he wasn't actually in their ranks, and was on the state prosecutor's list; a terrorist singled out on wanted posters.

His former student had apparently got wind of the empty flat on Holzhausenpark and had been observing Konrad from a safe distance. He wasn't just familiar with the address, he also knew about the renovation work. 'Think up an excuse and call off the builders. It'll only take a couple of phone calls, comrade,' said Siefert, and then looked round at a platform supervisor who'd stepped out of his booth for some fresh air. Catching sight of the gun in Siefert's belt as he turned, Konrad stammered, 'Yes...in principle...that's conceivable.'

'Ah, theoretically,' replied Siefert with scorn in his voice, 'and practically?' Siefert wasn't interested in Konrad's reservations. Other than running water and gas, the building site lacked every necessity from electricity to a mattress. He had no problem sleeping on the floor. 'I don't set any store by comfort,' he pronounced, a dig at the academic who was having his flat done up.

Despite his aversion for the lad who came across as extraordinarily imperious and overbearing, Konrad felt obliged to help. His conscience wouldn't let him throw a former student to the cops. And he even forgave the brat his arrogance. It was partly due to his age, partly his generation who knew that, whatever happened, they would always be morally in the right. Konrad made preparations from Bamberg for Siefert's stay, phoning the handymen from a booth in the station square and arranging, not without tension and friction, for the work on the flat to be put back three or four weeks. He filled two suitcases with blankets, crockery and cutlery, got the train to Frankfurt and a taxi to Holzhausenpark, then went to a supermarket and bought sausages, canned food, coffee, two bottles of spirits, butter and sliced bread, and trudged back to the flat loaded down with six bags full to overflowing. He didn't tell anyone, including his lover and his Hamburg

friends. He would only put them in danger, and he could avoid that by keeping his mouth shut.

Konrad was full of misgivings as to whether his willingness to hide his former student was a mistake. It wasn't just the fear of discovery. If they were caught he'd be in deep shit – shit he didn't want to think about. More troubling was his rejection of an armed struggle that had no popular support and would achieve nothing. He wasn't against violence on principle; where there were circumstances that called for it, violence was justified, but when those conditions were absent, it degenerated into a bloody mistake. It didn't therefore occur to him to endorse Seifert's actions; he was impelled by something else. He was trying to emulate his dead father who had saved Schlomow from death and destruction. This was the spirit in which he wanted to help the judge's son.

The thought of behaving as morally as his father was profoundly liberating. On Friday at 6pm he set off from Lieselotte's house, a bungalow in Seckbach backing onto marshes and fields of sunflowers. Giovanni, her husband, had bought the mid-60s flat roof building so that his 'tedesca' could have a home in her native land.

Konrad's excuse that he had a meeting with Jochen didn't arouse Lieselotte's suspicions. She wasn't the sort to suffer from jealousy, and anyway she was too involved in her doctorate just then to get any crazy ideas. He whiled away a couple of hours in a beer garden in Bornheim, polishing off a plate of ribs, downing a litre of cider and incessantly checking his watch. Finally it came time to pay and head off to Nordend. Siefert was half-an-hour late showing up at their agreed meeting point, a kiosk that was boarded up at that hour. And he'd brought someone, they hadn't agreed on that, a woman who leant against a grey blue power box

about ten metres away from the kiosk. She bowed her head, which was covered by the hood of her coat, to smoke in peace and didn't join in when Konrad hoarsely complained his former student wasn't abiding by their agreement.

'This isn't the army,' Siefert retorted coldly, 'where you have to cram rules and regulations which are then mechanically and doggedly applied. We're guerrillas and we can go back on a decision from moment to moment if it turns out to be wrong or pointless. "What's striking, from a philosophical point of view, is the temporary assumption of autonomy required by guerrilla warfare, which is essentially an ethical and moral process." Have you forgotten that saying, comrade? I haven't.' This response left him speechless. His helplessness was obvious to the judge's son (as well as fairly pompous and comical), and he'd only make it worse if he didn't give in.

Taking a deep breath, he set off and took the two of them to the building in Holzenhausenpark which had two other tenants, a lawyer's family with small children and a student couple in the attic. They didn't meet anyone on the burlap-covered stairs that wound up two stories from the opticians on the ground floor, but Siefert and his companion would have to be quiet if they weren't going to be noticed. They did a tour of the flat's empty rooms, partly filled with building materials, rubbish, stacks of floor and wall tiles, beer bottles, rolls of tape and buckets of cement. When Konrad listed the most urgent precautions, Siefert grunted, 'Leave it, I know about hideouts.' As Konrad started to reply, Siefert's torch flicked up from the gas stove, shining right in his eyes, and his former student hissed in an icy voice, 'Shut your mouth!'

Konrad kept away from the flat as he'd agreed with Siefert. He never found out who the woman was. Perhaps she was the one who needed the hideout most, with Siefert just having the job of finding them a place to stay. It was hard to say whether she was on any of the wanted posters. The little he had been able to see of her face in the darkness, with her hood up, wasn't enough to speculate.

As the days passed in Bamberg a thought began nagging at him. He couldn't be sure if he was simply hiding the two of them or whether they were misusing his place for ends which he neither could, nor wanted to answer for. What if they were planning to rob a bank or plant a bomb? For days he contemplated ignoring the ban and going to his flat to confront Siefert.

He was spared having to put this delicate plan into practice when he received a call from his landlord in the faculty room in Bamberg. Without pausing for breath, the man launched into a frantic, confused description of what had happened in the Nordend flat. The plumbers must have messed up somehow in their repairs because damp patches had started appearing on the ceiling and walls of the lawyer's family's flat on the first floor. Wanting Konrad's permission to go and inspect, the landlord explained in his defence, he had spent an hour ringing everyone he could think of, from the secretary's office to the university administration, without being able to get hold of him, before ending up taking the liberty of going straight to the flat.

In the hallway he came upon two youngsters emerging naked from Konrad's bathroom with soap suds on their backsides. When they saw the flat owner, they ran to their clothes and clutter in the balcony room – that was the first thing he saw, their messy sleeping area strewn with mats and blankets, tattered newspapers, cigarette butts and crusts of bread – and yelled that he

should leave. 'Clear off, granddad or we'll make you!' a demand he obeyed with alacrity.

Seifert and his female comrade apparently hadn't been armed during this encounter. Thank God the landlord assumed they were hippies who'd managed to break into the building, and suggested reporting the trespass to the police for Kannmacher, who he imagined would be detained by university commitments in Bamberg.

Konrad had to force himself to sound cheerful as he reassured the flat owner that the lad he had met in the hallway was a nephew of his from North Germany. He had come to Frankfurt for a couple of days and been stumped for somewhere to stay, though this was the first his uncle had heard about him having a flame in tow. He promised to be in Frankfurt in six hours, and when he stepped out of the taxi at sunset and walked into his flat, it was empty.

Konrad's anxieties soon subsided. It wasn't his fault if his landlord and former student had met in the hall. It was a crazy coincidence, but nothing bad had come of it – in fact, it was to his advantage in some ways. He was off the hook now as far as any obligation to help the persecuted comrade was concerned. And he was no longer in danger of being charged with aiding and abetting terrorist offences.

Konrad expected to get word from Siefert – a letter or note in his Frankfurt postbox, maybe even a call to his department at Bamberg – and he often had the impression that his former student was watching him when he was on the train, or in the station, or in a beer garden.

The savings bank robbery in Schwalbach at the end of October shocked him. When the eight o'clock television news ran two photographs of Siefert (a police records pic and a snapshot), saying he had been identified as the leader of the gang who had stolen the cash to fund terrorist activities, Konrad couldn't eat another mouthful of his steak tartar with onions and egg yolk.

'Wasn't that your student?' Jette asked in their new place in Frankfurt's Nordend, where she and Konrad and the children were all living together again. She was perching on a chair in front of the television, filing dead skin from the balls of her feet with an emory board.

The terrorist had allegedly shot one of the tellers in the neck as he was reaching for the alarm button, without any warning, in a completely dispassionate, calm manner. 'I bet they're just saying that,' complained Jette, 'to distract from his political goals, goals that are completely justified,' and clasped her other knee to her chest. 'You're right,' said Konrad, swallowing hard, then took his half-full plate to the toilet in the hall and scraped the rest of the meat with a splash into the bowl.

At the start of December, when two policeman asked Siefert for his licence and registration in a purely routine check in a Stuttgart car park, he pulled out his gun and shot the first one down. The second scabbled away on all fours, but he followed him between the parked cars, firing constantly, before finishing off the already severely wounded man with a shot to the head. In the afternoon, with two female passengers, he smashed his car into a police station and died instantly of his injuries.

Konrad found out about this the following day, partly from Jette and partly from the newspaper – he hadn't heard anything the previous night, having gone over to his girlfriend's to romp around in the bungalow swimming pool

(and the bungalow bed). He sat on the edge of his bed in his pyjamas, razor in hand, making no attempt to tackle his greying stubble. At nine, when Jette left for work (thanks to Jochen, she was standing in for a librarian in the German department) he pulled himself together and shuffled to the telephone to ask the department secretary for the day off because he was sick, a stressful call that brought him out in a sweat.

Then he crawled back into bed, grabbed the newspaper and read the article about Siefert in peace all the way through. The biographies of the three people who had been shot between Stuttgart and Esslingen, along with a chronicle of terror attacks and general information about RAF, were followed by an extensive account of events in the Stuttgart carpark. The newspaper report called Siefert's murder of the fleeing policeman 'an execution'. At that point Konrad broke into sobs, suddenly adrift and wracked by a pain he had buried out of the reach of his conscious mind. He remembered the boy in Dassow. A canny, sandy-haired little character whose voice was just breaking, he had come up to him to scrounge cigarettes when their unit had reached the railway embankment they were supposed to defend with a few scattered SS and three other nippers under sixteen from the Volkssturm. That night the grubby, happy-go-lucky, quick-witted little tyke – a complete softy, really – had abandoned his post. One of the Volkssturm thugs had noticed and reported his desertion at dawn. Holzapfel set off with Konrad and Witzorek to bring him back. They discovered the lad snoozing unsuspectingly in a bullet-ridden goods wagon not far from Dassow. As Holzapfel wordlessly reached for his pistol and cocked it, the boy woke up. He leapt out of the carriage and took off into the surrounding fields, which Harry put a stop to by shooting at his legs.

Konrad's memory came back in flashes. He could see the sandy-haired tyke lit up by the rising sun as he slumped into the grass. In a trice he had picked himself up and was limping off again, but then was hit by two shots fired by the lieutenant. Falling to his knees, he crawled in mute despair to a ditch at the edge of the field, gasping and spitting blood. When the lieutenant and Harry reached him, he was standing in the muddy water in a mixture of naked terror and denial; one of them pressed his gun to his head.

Konrad no longer remembered whether it was Harry or the lieutenant who had shot the lad in the forehead, and there was no way of understanding why they had done it. They ran back to the railway embankment, where all three of them told the Volkssturm officers the tyke hadn't been anywhere to be found, a lie they hadn't even had to agree on and had convinced themselves was true. The fact he had been too weak and dispirited to talk Harry and Holzapfel out of their madness seemed the worst of Konrad's memories, as he pictured himself leaning against the goods wagon watching, dazed and horrified (the stupor and horror of those penultimate days of the war and the fact he had been only seventeen were no excuse). Sobbing, in slippers, pyjamas and a coat he had ripped off the wardrobe rail, he crouched on the balcony in the December wind, as sheets of rain swallowed up the neighbourhood, and didn't manage to pull himself together until around half past twelve, when he had to think of the kids who came home from school about then.

It took him weeks, months even, to recover from the Siefert episode, which fused painfully with his memories. It had been a mistake offering the judge's son a hideout in his flat in the first place. By helping him he was indirectly complicit in Siefert's crimes, the three totally unjustifiable murders of the savings bank teller and the two policemen in Stuttgart. Worse still: he had

failed absolutely in his attempt to act morally. Comparing himself with his accountant father saving Schlomow's family from the gas chambers had been just blind presumption.

Most devastating of all was Siefert's relationship to his own father, the Nazi judge. Politicized through hatred of this man who had condemned innocent people to death, he had immortalized him by destroying human life in his turn. The only difference between them was the upshot: Siefert senior drew a substantial pension and was still an influential figure in his profession to this day, whereas his son had died a pariah. Buried by a parson in Offenbach amid protests, he had wanted to pay a debt to society and ended up not doing a single good thing in his life. Naturally that didn't stop a flyer appearing in the department threatening revenge against the fascists and the pigs though. When he found it in the gents, Konrad put it in his breast pocket with a mixture of sorrow and disgust.

[...]

END OF SAMPLE