

Sample Translation (pp. 9-28)

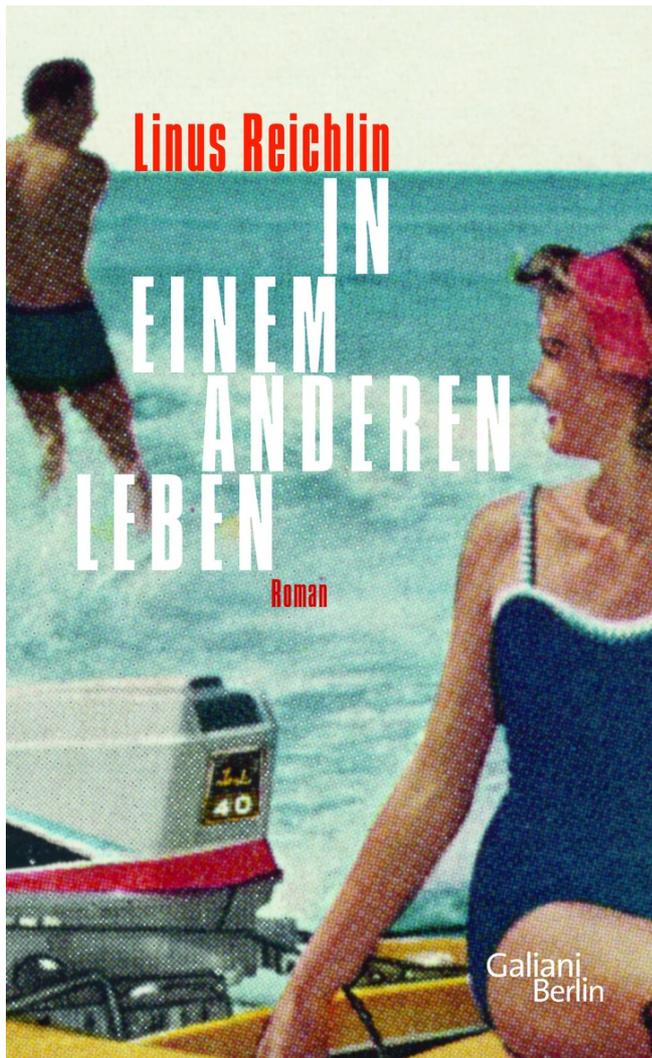
# **IN ANOTHER LIFE**

**by Linus Reichlin**

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It seems strange to me that my parents once met for the first time. Having given me life, they had been there for ever so far as I was concerned. They were there just as much as the sun and moon were there. Yet once upon a time they had known nothing of each other. No particular logic had brought them together, they could just as easily have slipped past each other without ever happening to meet. And I, a mere creature of coincidence, simply wouldn't be here. The whole business could just as well never have happened, and as such it is a small miracle, like all coincidences. My particular miracle took place in a Lake Lugano bathing pool on a warm summer's day in the 1950s. At the Bikini Atoll the heat from the atomic mushroom clouds was ruffling the hair of the onlookers, while Elvis, still a little-known singer, was in a dressing room getting his own hair under control with Brilliantine. So, yes, it was in a swimming pool that my mother first clapped eyes on my father — it was his white swimming cap, she explained later, that made him so appealing. She noticed at once that he smoked a lot — unfiltered cigarettes, one after the other. It was this insatiable craving that really struck her. Plenty of people were heavy smokers in those days, though — and why not: it was the Russians' atomic bombs that posed the only real threat to people's health. My father smoked, swam, smoked, swam, and at some point he must have noticed the small, sunburnt, pretty girl looking at him. She really was very small, one metre fifty, a *bellezza* from the Ticino with hazel eyes, black hair — and plenty of cheek. It was presumably *she* who spoke to him, 'That's one cool swimming cap you're wearing!' — I don't know if they said 'cool' in those days. But I'm fairly sure she made the first move — ultimately a bad one for her, it has to be said in retrospect. She took a fancy to the winsome dissembler on a warm, sunny day with the lake all silver and the birch trees rustling in the wind and just a single cloud in the sky. He probably offered her a cigarette, but she didn't smoke. He might well have claimed that the yacht by the jetty belonged to a friend of his.

My mother already had some experience of life: aged eighteen, she had travelled to America on her own on a freighter. There's a newspaper picture of her departure, as the village she came from in the Ticino took an interest in her upcoming adventure and there was a report about it on the front page of the local paper. The photo shows a pretty young girl, round-faced and with a high forehead, smiling shyly at the camera and clutching a wallet containing her money and passport.

My mother happened to meet Ted Kennedy in America, and danced with him at a party. His subsequent fame caused my mother to focus all her memories of her America trip on this one dance with Kennedy, and on her conviction at the time that he had an apple in his trouser pocket. 'I was so naive in those days,' she used to say,

‘I thought he had an apple down his trousers.’ She described Kennedy as a pleasant but boring dance partner, and a clumsy one at that: he trod on her feet, she said. Whenever I saw Ted Kennedy in the news later on, I was one of the few people who were in the picture about his ‘equipment’. An apple might not sound like anything much, but it would have been enough to father a child — but then it would have been someone else that was born, and not me.

My father was so to speak allocated to me — the boy with the white swimming cap. One year after her return from America my mother was dancing up close with him: he evidently wasn’t clumsy or boring, and he boasted a piece of fruit as well. Soon after their first dance the two of them engendered me on his grandmother’s sofa in a little place by the name of Engelberg. I know that sofa. I sat on it once at the age of four or five during a visit to my great-grandmother’s. I sat on the very spot where I had been conceived, a brown sofa with creaking springs: I can still remember the creaking, the colour, the musty smell.

My parents married young: my mother was only twenty, my father two years older. Scarcely more than children, they entered marriage with precious little experience, and before long there was a baby squawking in its crib. My father had only recently completed his dentistry degree, and young dentists being itinerants compelled to travel to wherever vacancies occur, the couple moved to an anonymous little town on the so-called Swiss Plateau. My father’s boss was from French-speaking Switzerland — from Geneva originally, more specifically from the vine-clad hills flanking Lake Geneva — and his day was characterised by the sound of corks popping out of bottles of very agreeable white wine. In the late afternoon he switched to cognac. After all, he needed a steady hand to guide the bendy needle of his hypodermic syringe down along the neck of the tooth and through the flesh to that particular spot that dentists aim for.

According to my mother later on, it was this man who gave my father his drinking habit. She detested him. I can’t remember his name, but he was the source of everything bad so far as she was concerned. In her view, it all started with him. Though I’m not altogether sure that my father needed a Mephistopheles to teach him how to drink.

One of my earliest memories is of my father swaying. He’s standing late at night in the darkness of the narrow little toilet opposite my bedroom. He turns round towards me and he sways. The swaying and the darkness are both incomprehensible to me. I can see that it’s my father, but I can’t connect him with the frightening movements

enacted in front of me. I can't understand why he doesn't say anything, why he just gazes at me from the darkness within which — as it seems to me — he is attempting to hide. Something's not right with him, and not right with me either: why am I awake at this time of night? Why have I got out of bed when it's so dark? I'm not yet on amiable terms with nighttime, it's still alien to me; perhaps I'm amazed that it's even possible to be awake at such an hour.

You have to get to know your parents, that's for sure. Yes, they've always been there, right from the start — but what do you know about them when you're little? If you're lucky, you don't *need* to know anything about them when you're little: you just feel good without having the least knowledge about them, you feel loved and cared for and all that stuff. 'People with a healthy heart never notice it', a doctor once said to me — and if you're lucky, it's the same with parents. Then your father doesn't stand mute in a dark toilet, swaying as if he were ill. He doesn't stare at you and lose his balance. He's not an enigma to you. There are people who are unlucky enough to spend their entire lives getting to know their parents. It's a process that can remain forever unfinished.

When I was five my parents went on a cruise without me and returned home with the story that at the Captain's Dinner the ship's captain had commented that they looked like Richard Burton and Elisabeth Taylor, and the other passengers at the table had agreed with him. It was a Mediterranean cruise with stops in the various Arab countries, where my father bought curved daggers, and it's clear from the photos that my parents were indeed a good-looking couple: my father quite dashing in a blue blazer with gold buttons, complemented by sharply creased white trousers and white leather shoes, while my mother with her beehive hair and false eyelashes sports a red silk dress and patent Italian shoes decorated with a bow. It's true: my mother does bear a marked resemblance to Elisabeth Taylor, though my father doesn't look much like Richard Burton.

Whatever the similarity, my parents cherished the captain's compliment as proof positive that they they could consider themselves 'elegant'. Their existence as housewife and dentist in an insignificant little town on the Swiss Plateau gave them no sense of fulfilment. A good half of their inner world still consisted of wilderness, of secret jungles, nameless deserts and glittering cities; or rather: the hidden depths of my father's inner being consisted of wilderness, my mother's of glittering cities and cocktail parties. My father longed for rhinoceroses upon which he could plant a triumphant foot; my mother went shopping for potatoes in the small town's market

place with white gloves right up to her elbows and, in winter, a leopard-skin fur-coat — my father would have liked to have shot the leopard himself.

He was an attractive man, what with his strong chin, his large brown eyes, his elegant posture: everything was well-proportioned. He dressed well, his clothes suited him, he had style. Other men in the out-of-the-way township wore trousers and shirts simply to cover their nakedness — but not him: he clothed himself with deliberation in order to achieve a particular effect. He was good at affecting that sea captain's gaze that so appeals to women: he could look into the far distance as if he knew precisely and without a shadow of doubt where his journey was heading — namely to the water buffalos, to the lions and rhinoceroses, to the wilds of Kurdistan, and later to Haiti and the Tonton Macoute. But the journey was all pretence, serving only to deceive other people and, above all, himself.

My father was a homebody, and yet at the same time, as I said, he was filled with a longing for adventure. As a result he filled the house with emblems of adventure. He decorated the living room with ancient muskets, halberds, swords and a bearskin rug. The rug lay in front of his Charles Eames chair; it was an entire pelt complete with head and teeth — and its gaping mouth could be interpreted in contrary ways: you could say that the bear was roaring, or, just as plausibly, that it was yawning.

For a masked ball in the carnival season my parents dressed as Mark Antony and Cleopatra — in other words as Burton and Taylor in their film *Cleopatra*. They won first prize and took it all very seriously. It was a gold-painted banana with 'Banana Bonanza' written on it — being Carnival time, it had to be jokey — and '1st Prize, Masked Ball'. This object had pride of place on the chest of drawers in the hall for a while, until my mother threw it at my father's head. This was the period when they were beginning to row in the manner of their two role models. There was much shouting and slamming of doors. I escaped to my bed and stuffed my fingers in my ears. My mother came rushing into my room: 'Don't be afraid,' she said, 'he won't come in here.' She hid his bottles of whisky in my toy box, stroked my hair, and went off again to slam some more doors.

It would be fair to say that they were most convincing in their Richard Burton/Elisabeth Taylor roles when my father had been drinking and my mother was lambasting him with poisonous insults. Their rowing had a certain glamour: they were raucous, implacable and perfidious, but unfailingly good-looking. My father stood there in the kitchen with his white shirt open and a glass of whisky in his hand,

laughing superciliously while my mother in her pale blue babydoll dress threw torn-up bits of a woman's photograph in his face that she had found in his bedside table.

It occurs to me that I am not giving a chronological account of things. How could I, though, given that I experienced the events of that period as a series of explosions. It was clear that the ingredients of such explosions were always present; it was equally clear that, as so many had already taken place, there would inevitably be others. And when that next explosion occurred, it differed little from the one before or the one before that. In my memory they are all pretty much the same.

It always happened very abruptly. The three of us might be sitting at table after a meal of *risotto con funghi*, talking, say, about the most recent episode of Robert Lembke's 'What am I?' programme — and out of the blue there would be an explosion. All of a sudden she would fling her cutlery down onto her plate, leap up from her chair, and slam the dining room door behind her. He would grin and quote from Wilhelm Busch: 'Direct thine eyes now cellar-wards' — meaning that I should go and fetch him some wine from the cellar. But hadn't he already drunk enough? He certainly had: I could already read the signs by the time I was six, and I became better and better at it as I grew older. But who was I to refuse to direct mine eyes cellar-wards? So I did as I was told, but my mother would stop me and tell me to hide the key to the cellar padlock in my bedroom, then she would shout loudly enough to ensure that he would hear: 'He's done enough boozing for one day!'

The usual escalation of hostilities would then ensue. Shouting. Swearing. Door-slamming. Etcetera, etcetera. I take refuge beneath my bedcovers and stuff my fingers into my ears — wretched ears that I can't close off completely and that register every word of the yelling going on on the floor above.

To recount things chronologically would not reflect reality as I experienced it. There was no progression of events: the same thing happened *over and over again*. When it wasn't actually happening, you were waiting for it to happen. When it did happen, you waited for it to stop. Then you waited for it to start again. The principle of Eternal Recurrence. So even if I thought it was the right way to proceed, I'd have trouble fitting things into a time-line. It wasn't a line at all, it was a never-ending circle. *When* an event occurred was wholly irrelevant to its significance.

Every now and again nothing would happen for quite a long time — so long that I would stop expecting trouble. They were the happy times.

It would perhaps be fair to say that there was an early period and a late period. During the early period the three of us — Richard Burton, Elisabeth Taylor and I — lived in a rented detached house in an insignificant little town. Ah — I'm forgetting the budgerigar. As well as us there was a budgie in the house. It lived in a cage that hung from the living room ceiling, in the spot occupied later by the TV. I used to feed him with Trill budgie food, which was supposed to stop him getting a goitre. I fed him carefully because he was deranged. His cage hung in the living room, after all, and when there were 'explosions' he couldn't hide away in his own bed like I could. He was exposed to the full force of the explosions. His cage was probably also hit by a flying plate or two. My mother did smash a lot of crockery, most of it in the living room, and this made the budgie aggressive. He bit my finger on one occasion. After that I always shooed him onto his topmost perch before opening the cage door, and he would gaze down with his hackles raised while I tipped the health-giving grains of Trill into his feeding dish.

Then TV arrived. It was a brand new invention, and to benefit from it you had to have a 'set'. One day when I came home from school the cage with the budgie had disappeared, and in its place stood a Philips TV receiver. My father had hung the budgie in our '*Empire* room', a room furnished in the Napoleonic style which my mother dusted herself for fear that our cleaning lady might damage the brocade upholstery.

It was thanks to television that we saw the Beatles for the first time. They were standing on the steps of an aircraft waving. I felt straightaway that this had something to do with me. Something to do with my life. It may well be that seeing the Beatles waving made me realise for the first time that there was even such a thing as *my* life. I had never seen a plane before, and I didn't even really know what exactly it was that they were standing in front of. Anyway, there they were at the top of the steps, waving.

They were in suits and ties — but wow, their hair! Just like a girl's! It was the contrast that fascinated me: men's suits, but girls' hair. At Christmas and Easter and on any other special occasion that happened to crop up, my mother would stick me in just such a suit and half strangle me with a tie. I detested those outfits: the trouser material made the inside of my thighs sore, the shirt collar scratched my neck, the tie was too tight; the clothes weren't *my* choice, they were what my mother wanted. But now I wanted something myself. I wanted this girly hairstyle. If I had to wear a suit:

fine — but only with a girly hairdo. The Beatles gave me the inspiration to effect a change, at least within the bounds of the feasible.

We and the TV moved to another, slightly larger town in the so-called *Fürstenland* in north-eastern Switzerland. My father set up a practice of his own there and took on an associate. The budgie didn't accompany us: it had died shortly after being moved to the 'Empire room' and a vista of gilded ornamentation.

We now lived in a rooftop apartment — no longer as Taylor and Burton plus child, but as a 'modern couple' plus Beatle. My father bought a Simon and Garfunkel record, my mother bought jeans. That meant that she had to lose weight. The word 'diet' entered our vocabulary for the first time. She starved herself to the point where she could cast off her Elisabeth Taylor silk numbers and don flares instead. I heard her say the word 'diet' several times each day. My father changed his wardrobe too: out went the shirts and blazers, in came the corduroys and roll-neck pullovers. He bought canvas shoes. He let his hair grow half over his ears — mine was already down to my shoulders. My mother wore go-go boots on her shopping trips, and on the glass table by the combination sofa lay a copy of *Bunte* magazine featuring articles on Gunther Sachs and Brigitte Bardot, my parents' new idols. Although in their hearts still Burton and Taylor, to the outside world they now pretended to be younger than they were and took Sachs and Bardot as their role models, since both were the the same age as they themselves, but with an air of modernity.

On my mother's dressing table stood a polystyrene head on which she had previously hung her brunette mid-length Elisabeth Taylor wigs: it was now adorned with a long blonde one. My mother wore the wig for the first time at a carnival party, and there's a photo of her as Bardot, complete with mini-skirt, excessive lipstick, and the wig with its slightly off-centre parting. She didn't win a prize this time, not even Third Prize: her Bardot didn't work, absolutely no one bought it.

Could well be that they felt a bit alien in this new era that they had somehow managed to scramble their way into. They embraced their Sachs and Bardot roles much as indigenous natives embraced Christianity when they had no other option. And there were numerous good things about this new era. My mother now went shopping in jeans, sometimes even without wearing makeup, saying she didn't give a damn what people thought. But did people give it any thought? No. The other women also appeared in the street in jeans and without makeup. The word 'casual' established itself. When my father was drunk he would listen to 'Bridge Over Troubled Water', a song that was his male equivalent of not wearing makeup. A man didn't have to be hard any more — indeed hardness was positively undesirable. A

man was now permitted to be a ‘bridge over troubled water’ for his wife when there was ‘pain all around’ and ‘tears in your eyes’, when she was ‘weary’ and felt ‘small’.

But at heart my father remained in the big-game-hunter mould. His role as a ‘bridge over troubled waters’ was merely a front. Richard Burton’s melancholy manliness was more his style than the vague version offered by the likes of Gunther Sachs. And my mother, too, was putting on a pretence. She didn’t want to be ‘casual’, she wanted to be desired; she didn’t want to be independent, she wanted to be kept — and not by a man who abased himself. Having her own car was the sole aspect of female emancipation that interested her.

They sat there like a pair of emigrés, my mother on the combination sofa, my father in his Charles Eames chair. They didn’t really have a clue what they were about or why. He drank, and so did she these days, though not as much as him. They would row for days at a time. A quiet period would ensue, followed by some sort of reconciliation. My father started talking about God, and my mother about Mini Coopers. My father put ‘Bridge Over Troubled Water’ on at full volume, my mother wrenched the record from the turntable and flung it from the roof terrace into the front garden, where it stuck up out of the ground like an arrow.

I remember how at fifteen I used to sit in my room on the lower floor of the apartment playing my Spanish guitar — with my thumb, like Richie Havens at Woodstock. You had to tune the guitar in such a way that every fret produced a chord. Richie Havens showed me that you can play a guitar without knowing how to play a guitar. He didn’t impress me, though. He seemed old, I found him unattractive, and, above all, he didn’t tell me anything. Marc Bolan was a very different matter. I really liked him, and he told me something loud and clear: that there could be nothing more worthwhile than turning myself into him. But Bolan only played electric guitar, not acoustic — so I absolutely had to have one myself.

But it wasn’t all that easy to become Marc Bolan in a small provincial town like ours. There was only one music shop, Musikhaus Felix. At least they didn’t any longer just sell accordions, French horns and violins: they had recently started selling electric guitars, or, to be more precise, *an* electric guitar. I discovered it in the Musikhaus window on my way to school one day. It was a pale blue guitar with a white fingerboard, a whammy bar, and a complicated array of buttons. It was expensive. But there was money lying around at home in a drawer in the wall unit that also housed the TV. Once every week my father took a wad of money out of the bank and put it in this particular drawer. The money wasn’t meant for me — but I discovered

after a while that he didn't notice if I abstracted the odd banknote or two. The drinks cupboard built into the wall unit was one reason why he didn't notice. Several times a day my father would fold down the lid of the cupboard and pour himself a glass of White Label whisky. Whenever he did this he would see his face reflected in the mirror that formed the back of the cupboard.

Armed with money from the stash in the drawer I rushed pell-mell to the Musikhaus, the stolen banknotes flapping like mad in my hand. But I was too late: another Marc Bolan had beaten me to it. That's how scarce things were in those days.

It took Herr Felix three months to order in another guitar, and as soon as I took delivery of it I immediately formed a band — also called *T. Rex*, needless to say. T. Rex only required two people: Marc Bolan, and Mickey Finn, who played congas. Mickey Finn's part was played by Roland, my best friend in those days, who knew a bit about music as he learned organ at St. Peter's Church. He could read music, which I rather admired. He only played the organ because his father insisted, and he was well open to other kinds of music. As he owned a set of bongos I asked him if he fancied being my drummer. He said yes.

Right from the start, though, he didn't like the way I used my thumb to play.

'Those aren't chords', he said.

But they *were* chords so far as I was concerned. They certainly sounded like chords, because I'd followed Richie Havens' method of Open D tuning. This meant that if I held down all six strings with my thumb the result was necessarily a chord.

'So how do you propose to play a seventh, then?' asked Roland.

He claimed that there was a seventh in the T. Rex number 'Hot Love' that we were practising. According to him Havens didn't have a clue, which was why no one listened to his stuff any more.

I bought a chord table at Musikhaus Felix, and within three days I had mastered all the chords I needed for 'Hot Love', including a seventh.

Roland sat on my bed with his drums between his knees while I ground out the chords on my electric guitar. As I didn't have an amplifier, all you could hear was his bongos, my singing, and my mother slamming doors. Normally they didn't start rowing until the evening, but you could never be sure. There wasn't really a 'normally'. Doors slammed, and Roland asked 'Did you hear that?'

‘It’s just the wind’, I said.

‘Doesn’t sound like wind to me’, he replied, and cupped his hand behind his ear. There was the sound of something smashing to pieces, followed by a high-pitched, falsetto-like scream. It was my mother. She kept the scream going for quite a while until her voice gave up, what with the note being so high.

‘Was that your mother?’ asked Roland.

‘We need an amplifier’, I said. ‘I can’t play without an amp.’

I ordered a Fender amplifier from Musikhaus Felix, paying for it with money from the drawer.

But the amp didn’t get rid of the problematic fact that Roland had ears. His parents objected to us practising at his house, so we always did it in my room, and it was just a matter of time before he got the full picture. Obviously it would never have made any sense for me to invite anyone to our house, and I had never previously done so — but Roland was a must: I wanted a band no matter what! It was risky, and an act of rebellion, too: I didn’t want them ruining the whole thing.

We rehearsed ‘Ride a White Swan’. Very loudly. I would turn the amp right up, partly because I liked the noise, but also to deafen Roland just in case things kicked off upstairs. He hammered away on his bongos while I bawled out the lyrics, not having a microphone. I liked it most when we kept playing non-stop. Roland would take breaks because his hands were hurting, and then I’d continue on my own until my fingers started hurting as well. I’d then have no choice but to stop, and silence would descend. I would immediately start listening out for noises from upstairs.

Some days, in fact most days, there was nothing. It sounded like a completely normal household — mother doing the cooking, father watching TV. We usually rehearsed on Saturdays, and if they had already started rowing in the morning I would ring Roland and put him off with some excuse or other: I was ill, the amp wasn’t working, and so on. Occasionally it was predictable, but mostly it very much wasn’t. There could be an explosion at any time — there was no pattern that one could rely on. Often it would happen when you least expected it.

So, as I said, it was just a matter of time before Roland learnt the truth. It happened one Sunday afternoon. There was pouring rain and lightning outside, we were playing ‘Ride a White Swan’, we still weren’t very good at it, or at least I wasn’t — and all of a sudden there was my mother standing in the room. She had torn the door open,

without knocking, and now slammed it shut behind her and leant against it with all her weight. She was breathing as if she'd just run a marathon. She looked at us, realising only now that Roland was in the room with me. But she didn't have enough puff to say hello, offer an explanation, or dish up a spurious excuse — which wouldn't have made any sense in the circumstances anyway. I could hear my father approaching, my room being separated from the hallway only by a flimsy partition made of wood and plasterboard which now began to shake as my father drew near to the door — against which my mother was bracing her entire body. She collected her breath and then screamed through the door 'Clear off! His friend is in here with him! They're doing music! Leave them in peace!'

Over the following few weeks Roland invented bizarre excuses to explain why he couldn't come and rehearse at our house any more. He also avoided me generally, as if I were infectious. After a while I found out that he was now playing with other people. When I challenged him about it, he said 'You can't keep time. You're always a semi-quaver ahead.' A semi-quaver?! That was the first time I had ever heard the word. 'Sometimes even a quaver!' he added. And I had 'no feeling for the music', apparently; my playing was 'wooden'. As I mentioned earlier, he played the big organ at the church — a mighty instrument whose bass pipes towered above me when I sometimes came to listen to him playing up on the gallery of St. Peter's Church. He played Bach, Handel and all that lot, his hands flitting around on the manuals while his feet stomped out the bass notes on the pedals. The complexity of his movements impressed me; he played with his entire body, and sight-read the music just as easily as I might read an article on petting in *Bravo*. Coming from him, the verdict that my guitar-playing was 'wooden' was one I took seriously, even if I did throw it back at him by telling him that he was 'just jealous' — a jibe that referred to a girl called Sonja, who had chosen me rather than him and who smelt of milk whenever I kissed her.

So did I really play too fast? A whole 'quaver' too fast? A quaver seemed a lot to me: I obviously *had* been playing much too fast. But surely that could be sorted out, just like the problem with the seventh? I'd learnt the chords okay, so I shouldn't have any difficulty learning how to play them at the right speed, should I? I bought a metronome and, tucking myself away in my bedroom, followed its beat as I strummed away at the songs we'd been practising. In 'Hot Love' the metronome always lagged a fraction of a beat behind my chord. The same thing happened in 'Ride a White Swan' and all the other T. Rex numbers I'd learnt: I always reached the next beat a touch ahead of the metronome. For weeks on end I tried my utmost to synchronise my chords with the tick-tock of the metronome: tick - E major, tock - E

major, tick - A major, tock - A major, tick - E major seventh, tock - E major seventh, tick - B major seventh, and so on. I sometimes managed it, but only briefly: I'd soon fall back into my own tempo.

I began to realise that a tempo was so to speak built in to me. Whenever I played, my inner metronome ticked too fast — always too fast, never too slow. It dawned on me that I would never be able to keep the beat by my own efforts, and that I would always have to get the beat from some other source though even that wasn't going to help me for very long. Even if a drummer had pounded out the beat for me, I would still have run ahead of him, just as I ran ahead of the metronome: the too-fast-by-a-quaver thing was simply inborn in me and prevented me from even hearing the beat whenever there was no metronome to go by. Without a metronome everything sounded exactly right to me, I was absolutely certain I was sticking to the beat. In other words, I was 'beat-deaf'; I was a beat-deaf musician. I couldn't hear something that others could hear without any difficulty. Roland had noticed this; others would notice it too.

I loved music, I longed to be a musician and write songs. But love and longing got me nowhere. I could long to be a musician until I was blue in the face — but the metronome with its tick-tock constantly assaulting my ears confronted me with the reality of my wretched beat-deafness. Turn myself into Marc Bolan?! I could forget it. I couldn't even do pop. There wasn't a single form of music that could accommodate a player who was 'too fast by a quaver'; in music this was a defect that was doomed to remain a defect, no matter what; even in the avant-garde there weren't any 'we play too fast' bands.

Once I realised that my passion for music was rendered plain ridiculous by my 'beat-deafness', I couldn't stand the sight of my guitar any longer. I wanted to smash it to pieces, but I couldn't bring myself to do that. Instead, I took a pair of pincers and cut all the strings, one after another; it felt as if I were severing the tendons of some poor animal.

[...]

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