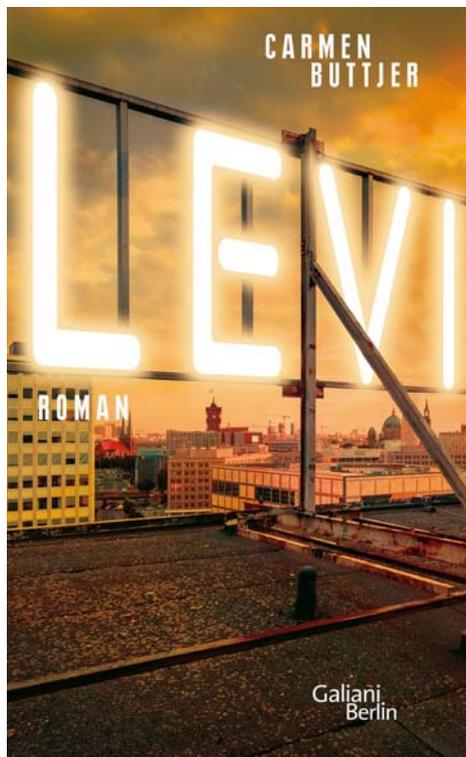


LEVI

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Chapter 1

Bizarre, that's what it was. There was white pollen everywhere in the air. The grains stuck to one another like balls of cotton wool and drifted slowly to and fro amongst the guests. It was a muggy day and at least forty degrees, even though the sun was nowhere to be seen in the sky. Instead it was a dark grey, and the clouds hung so low it seemed they might fall at any moment. More approached from behind, piling on top of the ones that were already there. The t-shirt I was wearing clung to my back. It was the end of the world; not the moment in which it begins.

There were easily a hundred people there, milling around, looking for someone or other. I didn't know the point of my being here, and clambered over the chairs, which were lined up behind one another in multiple rows, in an attempt to get to the back. Their wooden legs creaked as though they were about to break, and I watched them bore into the dry grass beneath my weight. Some black-feathered birds were sitting in the boughs of the trees; they stared as though they were waiting for me. Someone gripped me from behind by the shoulders, and pushed me back to the front row and onto one of the last two vacant chairs. Leaning my elbows against the backrest, I knelt on the chair and looked back. Into the faces now seated alongside one another. I knew none of them, and by that I mean I had seen them before, but knew nothing more

about them. They smiled at me strangely, I half-smiled back. I kept the rest for myself.

Next to me, I recognized the face of the man who was my father. He smelt different to usual, of whisky, or maybe that was coming from the others. When I thought of him, the first thing that entered my mind was how strange he was. It wasn't like that with my mother. She appeared much smaller from the outside than she really was on the inside, and so every time she came home late, I wondered whether she was Wonder Woman without having told me. Her dark brown hair was so long that I could hide her face beneath it, and her freckles reminded me of a galaxy of stars. It was impossible not to think of that. Sometimes she dressed in the same way as my father. His jacket, trousers, and the white shirt too, but buttoned up only halfway, the sleeves rolled up to her elbows and the tie wound loosely around her neck. Like a possibility of him which didn't exist in reality. My father was different. The more time I spent with him, the less I knew about him. Actually, I only knew three things: He was a lawyer, he liked to argue, and he mostly came home only after I had gone to sleep. In the mornings, it was the other way around. Then he was already gone, even though he was still stood in the kitchen. I also knew his address; it was the same as mine.

I lowered my head so far forwards that I could touch my arms with my chin, and heard my father clear his throat. I pretended I hadn't noticed, and he did it again, grazing his hand briefly through the air. Just for a second, no longer. That meant impatience. Two, however, meant irritation; four and five, anger;

and if it were six or seven, and he waved both hands wildly through the air as though he were writing words into it, then he would normally begin to shout too. Things got highly explosive when his hand flashed through the air so quickly that the words could no longer be counted and transformed into an unending text. On those occasions, I think even he no longer knew whether he was furious, annoyed, impatient or something else entirely, and somehow I got the feeling that if he had known, it would have made him even angrier. Sometimes he would just look at me and get angry, all of a sudden, as though he wasn't seeing me at all, but someone else. I heard him say my name; his voice sounded tired and irritable. Like always, then, and so I turned around and stared straight ahead. That's where the urn was.

The dead don't come back. Not ever. Once you're dead, that's it. The itching on my skin began to intensify. First the back of my neck, then the palms of my hands, as though the lines that stretched across my skin from my fingers to my joints had become waves. I scratched my arms, my t-shirt and jacket had become tighter. My forehead itched too, my chin, my ears, it even started to itch between my ribs, and I pressed myself into the back of the chair ever so slowly, feeling these things without knowing what to do about them, and tried to scratch myself; then it was my knees, and when it even began to itch beneath my toes, I leaned forwards as discretely as I could and pulled off my shoes. But still the itching didn't stop. Blue-tinged insects hurtled through my bloodstream, so many that they clogged my veins; the black birds flapped their wings restlessly; my father began to cough. I wondered whether he was feeling the same, and became aware of

my pulse not only in my wrists, but in my neck too, and leaned backwards, further and further back, until my chair was balancing on just two legs. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my father raise his hand, a wide arc, though it could have been a shadow, then he slammed his palm down on the edge of my seat, making me jolt forwards and choke. Now my skin itched all over. Not just on my legs, but on my arms and hands and elbows and back, where it was worst. I knew precisely what would happen if I were to stand up now or tilt the chair back again, and I stayed there motionless, my gaze fixed on the urn, remembering what my father had said to me on our way to the crematorium. In the car. That was the only place where we still talked to one another. When neither of us could get away; him behind the wheel and me next to him.

“What’s that you’re wearing?”

“What do you mean?”

“Beneath the jacket. Where’s the white shirt I laid out in your room this morning? Why didn’t you put it on?”

“It was too tight.”

“It’s the same size.”

Only then had he noticed which T-shirt I had put on. Once black, it had faded to grey in the wash. Emblazoned across it in thick red letters was: *“Another one bites the dust.”* He had braked in the middle of the road. It was either Queen, or missing the funeral.

“Why didn’t you just put it on?”

“I will.”

“When?!”

“At your funeral.”

“Damn it, Levi, look at me ... are you looking at me? And stop winding the seatbelt around your knee, put it on properly. When we arrive, I want you to sit next to me, do you understand? You’re to sit down next to me and stay put.”

Even without looking at him, I had been able to feel that he kept turning his gaze away from the road and towards me as he spoke. Yet I had stayed silent and pretended not to hear a single word.

“That’s the first rule for today ...”

Pollen got caught in my eyelashes, and when I tried to wipe it away, it went into my eyes. Tears ran down my cheeks, and I felt a hand on my back, from someone sitting behind me. Repulsively warm, and moving ever so slowly, it stroked my sweat-soaked back, making me fear I would never be free of it. Not only that, I was afraid that the hands of the others around me would descend on the back of my neck too, and stick to me. Before I knew what was happening, I was on my feet and breaking away from the front row. It was like when a thunderstorm suddenly pushes through the clouds, as though bright light and thunder were flashing through my knees, and as I ran forwards, I remembered the second rule my father had set.

“I don’t want you to touch the urn. Do you hear me? You aren’t to touch it, not even for a second. You can look at it, but...”

Arriving at the front, I grabbed the urn.

“And I want you to stay close by me.”

“You already said that...”

“Three rules, three simple rules, and under no circumstances are you to take off your jacket.”

That was what he had said, and I had understood it, yet I ran with the urn beneath my arm, past the chairs and through the mourners.

Now I was holding it in my arms, it seemed smaller than before. My arms were shaking so much that I would have spilled the ashes had the urn been open, and yet somehow I didn't feel a thing, even when I closed my eyes there was nothing there, the sounds disappeared too. It rained inside my ears. The way they jumped up from their seats in their black suits, they looked like the slowest of animals. The air smelt of grass and sweat, a hand closed around one of my legs, stopped me, pulled me back, I pursed my lips together and screwed my eyes shut, kicked out and wrenched myself free. If I could get to the door of the crematorium at the end of the lawn, I would have made it halfway, or at least a quarter of the way, maybe even just a tenth; I hadn't given it that much thought, it was the only way out. Only when my hand wrenched the door handle downwards did I exhale again. Almost as soon as I was inside the crematorium, everything became cool, and the prickling on my back disappeared amid the grey flagstones my feet were hurrying across. The walls were smooth, the floor too; anyone who slipped up here would keep on sliding. With this thought in my mind, I made it to the steps, through the hall with the columns and out onto the tarmacked driveway. Here, I paused and turned around. The listless animals were still by the columns, yet their footsteps so loud I had thought they were right behind me. My father was running in front of them, coming ever closer and calling my name. Once he was just a few metres away, he stopped and bent over, propping his hands

on his knees. For a second it looked as though there was smoke rising from his suit. When people were sad, they did very different things. Some cried. For so long that they no longer realized they were doing it. Others got really loud or really quiet, angry for a year or two; hid themselves away, drank, ate until they were fat; or moved to a different country. One they had never set foot in before. My father did none of those things, and while he did, I tried not to disturb him.

“What the hell...?”, he gasped for air. “What’s wrong with you? What were you thinking? Can you tell me that for once?!”

He shouted so loudly that all the others stopped in their tracks behind him. I frowned, squinting in the sunlight that was emerging from behind the dark clouds, and looked at him. I could see his spit.

“Do you remember what I said to you in the car, or had you forgotten even before we got here? Did you take in a single word? What’s the point of having ears if you don’t listen?”

That was what he wanted to know, and I didn’t know where to start. There were things I would have liked to ask him too. I had a whole list, and even though there had always been something or other that I didn’t really understand, in the last weeks this list had doubled in size, if not tripled. At the very least. Perhaps it was even five times bigger. But every time I asked him something, he got this look on his face. So I kept the list to myself, and the longer we stood there, the more the air between us filled with the things we weren’t talking about.

“Do you know what you’re going to do now? You’ll come here and put the damn...you’ll put...it...this...” he began, breaking

off again and again as though he had forgotten the rest of the sentence.

As he spoke, he pointed alternately at the urn and behind him. I didn't do it, and as though I had refused out loud, he straightened up and lurched towards me. He grabbed me by the shoulder, making us both fall. So as not to lose the urn, I held it in my arms and let myself fall unprotected onto the ground.

I only realised it hurt when I saw the blood on my knee. It was much thinner than I had imagined, almost like water, had it not been for all the red. It gushed through the rip in my trousers; I wiped the blood with my hand, then the sweat from my forehead, and accidentally rubbed both into my eyes. The world became dark and light all at once. The residue clung to my hand and to my father's shirt. Just like me, he paused for a second, brushed his hand briefly across my knee, until he remembered what he had been trying to do, and tried once more.

"If you take it with you ... if you really do that, then ..." he muttered between his teeth.

"What?! Then what?"

The words tumbled out of my mouth more loudly than I had intended, in a voice I was unfamiliar with, and he looked at me in surprise until his eyes began to narrow into slits. In this moment he hated me, I could see that, so much that I was no longer sure whether he had ever been my age. As I kicked blindly around me, I tried to get to my feet. I followed his gaze, which was fixed on the urn in my arms. I wanted to say something else, but I didn't know what, and I saw that he was saying something I couldn't hear over my own thoughts. It would be good to go back

now, I thought, and ran off. How strange he looks, I thought, and ran on, and how light the urn is. I'm going to fall, I thought, and ran on, I can't keep going, I thought, and ran even quicker. My ears were rushing so loudly that I could no longer hear if he was still behind me and about to catch up at any second. Yet I didn't turn around. Pollen and flies slapped against my face and stuck to my skin. I had forgotten my shoes.

I didn't know where to go, and when you don't know that, you also don't know how long it will take you to get there. I spent half an hour prowling around a bicycle. There were two arguments in favour of stealing it: I was too slow, and a person who's being chased has to be quicker than the rest. The heat billowed up from the asphalt beneath my feet, much warmer than the plastic of the pedals. On the other hand, stealing was forbidden. The longer I thought about it, the clearer it became that I had already done something forbidden; I was the one who had stolen the urn, after all. I didn't want to be a thief, really I didn't, but I would certainly be one if I took the bicycle. After I had strapped the urn to the carrier rack, I leaned forwards and over the handlebars. I stayed like that until I was no longer wobbling, the tyres screeched. The faster I pedalled, the more the wind brought me on course. Cool and light, it brushed through my hair and settled over the sweat on my forehead.

I hated this city. I wanted to live somewhere else, in the desert, in the rainforest, or at the very least in a city by the ocean. It didn't matter which direction I went in, the buildings never stopped. There were always more. Tightly packed in rows, they stood along

the streets. Some were as tall as redwood trees. Sometimes it rained in the south of the city while the sun shone in the north. Down below, however, barely any light made it through; where the people made their way around and shouted at one another. Like birds that were always audible, even when they couldn't be seen. When it was as hot as it was now, the smell rising from the streets was like a swamp. Or how I imagined a swamp, at least. Its surface exuding a swirl of gases and fumes. In reality, I had never been in a swamp, and didn't have the faintest idea what one would smell like. There was also a river, which flowed through the city like a wet multi-lane carriageway. The metro was propelled by wind, which came from somewhere inside the tunnel. Beneath it was where the ocean began. When it rained, the rainwater seeped through the metal struts of the drains and collected below the city. It became visible only on the coasts, where the continents came to an end. When the rainfall was very heavy, strange sounds pushed their way up from below. Like whales' tail fins clapping against one another, or maybe sharks, turning onto their bellies in the warm rain. And when the rain became too much for them, they clogged up the drains with their pointed snouts, causing shallow lakes to form along the street.

I wasn't the only person in this city; there were 3.8 million others living here, of whom I knew none. I also didn't know whether it was really 3.8 million or if someone had miscounted; my world was just the one street. The old building I lived in was halfway down. When I stood in front of the main door and looked up, it seemed to tilt forwards. There was no building to the left hand side of it, and this was unusual. It looked like there had once been

one, but that it had been stolen from one day to the next. There was an empty plot consisting of densely-grown plants, pale sand and crumbled grey stones, from which metal rods protruded, and it was sectioned off from the street by a rusty wire fence. This was plastered with rain-saturated posters, so many on top of one another that I could bore my finger into the different layers without touching the fence behind. Instead, dark beetles crawled out and distributed themselves like punctuation marks across the posters. They were pasted so close together that the run-down swimming pool behind couldn't be seen from the street.

Before turning into the street where I lived, I closed my eyes for a second, breathing in the warm air and pressing my toes against the warm pedals. I was preparing myself to see my father stood in front of the building. Then I breathed out and opened my eyes. There was no one to be seen. All I could hear was Kolja Černý's radio. He always turned it on at daybreak, as soon as he opened his kiosk, and like today let it play the whole day and into the night. Sometimes even after he had closed up the kiosk and left. Mostly he would sit, surrounded by numerous piles of different newspapers, on a white plastic chair in front of his kiosk, and if he wasn't doing that, he would appear out of nowhere on the pavement. Right now he was sat beneath the sunshade, with a face that had forgotten to age. In reality, he was at least sixty already. He wore a straw hat and a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves, the seams of which were stained with dirt. Last winter, he had replaced the straw hat with a red cap and worn another shirt over the first one. He had been born in it. When he was tired, he sat down in front of the shop, took his bundle of keys in his hand,

closed his eyes, and as soon as the keys slipped from his grasp and fell, it was time to wake up. At least that's what he always said. I had never told him that I was the one who picked up his keys after school and threw them on the asphalt again and again until he woke up. Sometimes not even that did the trick, and then I would hurl them against the wall alongside him, wondering whether he was dead. Like me, he had been living here for just a year.

Some of the newspapers in his kiosk had titles plastered across them in languages I didn't know, and then there were the ones with the daily news. 'Rumours', Kolja called them, and whenever he said that he crumpled up the newspaper, only to smooth it flat again a moment later.

"Levi?" I heard him call.

That was me, Levi, and my surname was Naquin. It said so on our doorbell, at least, and my parents had the same name; only their forenames were different. My father was David and my mother Katharina, but I never called them that, and every time someone else did, it felt strange. As though each of them was also someone else, in a place I hadn't yet discovered. Kolja called out to me again, I braked reluctantly. I didn't have time. Really I didn't. I left the bicycle on the path and placed the urn carefully alongside it. Whether Kolja's eyesight was as bad as his hearing, I wasn't sure. He asked me where I had been hiding. Only when he arrived at the question mark did he look up from the newspaper that was laid across his knees. His gaze rested first on my ripped trousers, then on my feet, and he folded up the newspaper before continuing to speak.

“It looks like you’ve had an interesting day. I was thinking about you.”

Before I could even say a word, the expression on his face changed, as though he had just thought of something he didn’t want to remember.

“Today was the funeral, right?”

Without waiting for an answer, he stood up and took one, then two steps; he walked with a limp.

“You must be thirsty. One degree hotter and the beer will explode out of the bottles.”

As he stepped inside the kiosk, he mopped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief and passed the newspaper to me. That’s how we always did it. He gave me newspapers, and I helped him in the kiosk, and as a result we were something like friends. I couldn’t call him by his forename even so, but I knew he was called Kolja. That’s what it said on the post he received. To Kolja Černý. He had no idea I called him that. And yet somehow he knew everything else; he could even read the papers in the foreign languages. This was because of what he had done before he bought the kiosk, but that was a secret he had revealed to no one but me, and even then he hadn’t revealed it because he’d wanted to. It was the only secret I knew about him, even though it wasn’t a proper secret if no one asked about it.

“Are you just going to stand around outside?”

The asphalt was burning beneath my feet. I couldn’t stay, not for much longer, and my father would be back soon, but I fetched the urn and tucked it between the refrigerators. After Kolja had opened the bottle with his teeth, he pushed it towards me over the counter and watched me closely as I drank.

“Had you ever been to a funeral? Before today, I mean?”

I shook my head, and then for a long while we didn't say a word. We just stood there and looked out at the street, at the cars and passing pedestrians, who were bathed in blood red light. As though they were on fire.

“And you?”

“A few times,” he said, and pulled a crate of beer out of the back room, where he stored the merchandise, into the narrow passage beside the counter.

“When was that?” I wanted to know, as he piled two more crates on top of the first. Kolja smiled.

“I've forgotten anything that happened before yesterday. Your mother was a very clever woman, I liked her. Here, you can put these in the fridges. Put them at the back, and pull the ones that are already inside to the front.”

He turned and went back into the storeroom. Before I began to sort and put away the bottles, I stood there for a moment in the cold air that rushed out of the open refrigerator. Strangers' fingerprints clung to the inside and outside of the glass door. A cloying smell rose into my nostrils, and even though it was disgusting, I couldn't stop breathing it in.

“Are you manning the checkout?”

I gave a start, almost dropping one of the bottles.

Chapter 2

The voice belonged to Vincent. He lived in the same building as me, on the fifth floor, one above mine, and I liked him. From the very first moment, as soon as I had read his name, freshly adhered to the doorbell panel downstairs. At that point I hadn't even seen him, and strictly speaking he still didn't know who I was. We had never exchanged a single word, because he wasn't an easy person to meet. Until now I had encountered him just a few times in the stairwell, but he didn't seem to notice me. I wasn't sure why, but every time I saw him I thought of cowboys from the Wild West, and sometimes of Batman. I liked Batman. As though I had invented him myself, and Vincent really did look like him, especially when he was standing against the sun and his silhouette was all I could make out. That's how I usually saw him. From afar. As though I had cut him out of one of my comics with a pair of scissors. He wasn't very tall, but he looked like one of the good guys regardless. If I had to paint him, I would have used only red, orange and yellow. Turning around, I saw him leaning against the counter, in a crumpled shirt with a pair of dark sunglasses clipped into the neck. He looked relaxed, as though everything was okay.

“Is that war paint? The marks on your face?” he asked, and my knee began to burn as though he had ripped off a piece of the skin with his words. I wiped my face involuntarily and looked down at the dirt, pollen and sweat-loosened blood which stuck to

my hand. I had often imagined how our first conversation would begin, but it had never been like this. He bit into the apple he was holding and repeated his question. War paint, yes, perhaps it was, and I nodded, only to shake my head immediately afterwards. I stared at him silently, opened my mouth and closed it again. I couldn't think of a response.

“I like it, especially the red. Do you know what that colour means?”

I shook my head once more.

“It used to be the colour of kings.”

“Is it still?”

“No idea, I haven't worn red for ages.”

He smiled. The next moment, Kolja shuffled out of the back room and squeezed behind the checkout. Vincent took his change and left, while I leaned my forehead against the windowpane and watched as he crossed the street. Halfway across, a bicyclist almost collided with him. He raised his arm, hurled his apple at the cyclist and walked on.

Chapter 3

With the urn and newspapers in my left hand, I crossed the street and pulled the apartment key, which was hanging around my neck on a red band, over my head. Hastily, I turned it in the lock, pushed against the heavy front door with all my weight and let it slam shut behind me. Once I arrived in the apartment above, the first thing I did was look in the fridge. There was nothing in there but light. I closed it again, leaned my forehead against the door and stared at the picture of me: on the beach, with nothing but a bandeau over my ears and a spade in my hand, bent over, lying in wait for fish. I had no recollection of that day; it was like a secret I had of myself and didn't even know.

In the cupboard I found a tent, some rope and an air mattress. I threw everything else I would need into a box, lugged it through the stairwell up to the topmost landing and put it in front of the door that led out to the roof. If there had been a swamp in this city, I would have hidden in it. Not because I wanted to die, but because there were so many ways of dying there that no-one would have followed me: you could get stuck and drown, there were malaria-carrying mosquitoes, snakes and crocodiles. Kolja had told me that. He had also told me that swamps were sometimes doused with petrol by overflying helicopters and set alight. The best hiding places were those so dangerous that no one would want to search in them. No one would find me up here.

Next to the box, I laid the longest knife I had been able to find in the kitchen, and forks and plates. A pillow, a blanket, water bottles, a change of clothes, matches and a flashlight. My hair clung to my wet forehead, the cut on my knee throbbed. Hearing the front door slam shut on the ground floor, I gave a start, holding my breath and swallowing heavily as I leaned over the railings and tried not to make a sound. It wasn't my father this time either. Neither his voice nor his footsteps. Yet I still waited a minute before running back downstairs to get my rain jacket from the apartment. I couldn't think of anything else I could have taken with me, and as the apartment door closed behind me, it felt like I was moving out.

The roof sloped on two sides, while the other two ended like a cliff face before the street canyon. In between was an even surface area that stretched for twenty-three paces. Besides the door to the stairwell, the three chimneys were the highest point. I put the tent up between them, it was blue, and it didn't look right once it was up. One of the struts jutted up into the air, while the tent beneath buckled. I pulled off my t-shirt and wound it around my head like a turban before starting again from scratch. Once the tent was standing properly, I fastened a flag to it, not a proper one with a coat of arms or anything, but a red plastic bag onto which I had drawn a moon. It made a rustling sound in the wind. There were only a few things missing, a catapult and a cable leading across the street to the other roofs, but this would do for the first few nights. After I had blown up the air mattress, I put it inside the tent, it was yellow. Followed by the urn, and the newspapers I had

got from Kolja. I spread one of them out on the floor, its pages stuck to the roof where it had been softened by the sun, and as I followed the sentences, my finger began to bore into the black tar.

First came the headline, then the text. It was about a woman who had been stabbed in the pathology lab, and a corpse that had been missing ever since. About a homicide squad that had taken up the investigations, and was hunting for the unknown perpetrator. Then the text came to an end, as did the page it was on, and I searched for the article which had appeared in a different newspaper shortly after that one. The roof seemed to move, making the letters tip over the next lines.

The dead were completely different to us. They looked like people, but their skin had a different colour and they also smelt different. The eyes became rigid and no longer communicated anything, as though they were empty. The first thing I had learnt about death was that sick animals die, and that as soon as they did they were buried or eaten. Also, their skin was pulled off. From then on, they were no longer animals. The ones that nobody buried became carcasses, but they didn't even stay that for long. They rotted and decomposed until nothing more was left. Not even the bones, as though they had never existed. I had always imagined that people only died once they were old enough. After a hundred years; I considered a hundred to be a good number. My father was still a long way from that, as was my mother, but that hadn't stopped her from dying sooner. That was the next thing I had learnt about death. That no one needed to get old in order to die.

The second newspaper article was more detailed than the first. This time it wasn't just about the police, but about the public prosecution department too. I had already heard those words from my father. The murdered woman had been autopsied. I rested my hand behind my neck, then looked at the urn next to me and tapped it with my finger.

My mother had known everything about death; not only had she been able to find out when someone had died, but also why. She could have autopsied herself. Whenever I had walked through the hospital's narrow corridors to the pathology lab, she was usually sat in a white tunic in front of one of the microscopes, and often she had let me look through it. Beneath it laid grafts and organs, specimens and tissue samples, which looked like spit. Most of them weren't even from dead bodies, but from people who were in beds somewhere on the wards of the other floors, or being operated on at that very second.

The pathology lab was divided up into numerous rooms; the corpses were stored in the first one. The lights there were so bright that if I held my hand up towards the ceiling and into the light, I could see the bones shimmer through my skin. At the end was another room, where there wasn't just a desk, but two microscopes. The two rooms were separated by only a thin wall. My father usually worked late into the night; he came back early only if my mother had a late shift, and continued his work on the kitchen table. Sometimes he forgot and didn't come at all, and then I would go to my mother in the lab. But I had never seen a corpse. Whenever she was autopsying one, I sat at her desk, did my

homework and watched films, Animaniacs or Batman, with my back to the corpse, until she had finished her shift. If I could no longer keep my eyes open, I lay down on my jacket beneath her desk and she told me about animals that no one knew, about forgotten cities, the Moon, films and Pink Floyd.

I ran my finger over the newspaper. Kolya had written something with a ballpoint pen over the last line of the article, meaning that I couldn't make out any of the words that followed. Neither his, nor the ones beneath. Ever since the first articles had appeared, I had read them so often I could recite them backwards, and yet none of them contained what I really wanted to know.

It was so hot inside the tent that I had to lie down backwards. With my head by the opening, where the feet usually go. I looked up at the sky and the wind brushed across my skin. It was still warm, and for the first time that day I became aware of my sunburned forehead. Alternately with my knee. Voices drifted out from the wide-open windows of the buildings opposite, grazing past one another without joining into sentences. Further away, something was knocked over, followed by a noise that I couldn't place. I stood up and walked towards the edge of the roof.

[END OF SAMPLE]