

Karlsbach (Baden)

Part I (of II): a semi-autobiographical account of post-World War Two Germany

by

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Abstract

This PhD submission consists of a creative work, ‘Karlsbach (Baden): a semi-autobiographical account of post-World War Two’, and an accompanying exegesis, ‘Memories of Germany of the 1960s’.

The creative piece is a book-length work of semi-autobiography that depicts a boy, Sacha, aged 12 to 18, growing up in Germany in the early 1960s. This was a time of great prosperity and a well-established second attempt at creating a German democracy, after the first attempt, the Weimar Republic, failed so miserably.

Both the creative work and the exegesis set out to show that the outwardly portrayal of affluence and political stability was not a reflection of reality; below the surface, racism and Nazism still had a strong influence. Many of the adults Sacha encounters – parents, teachers, mentors – were practically immune from criticism, mostly by virtue of their money and influence. As a semi-autobiographical work, the author shows his own experiences of the time, which included emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

The creative work consists of two main parts. The first concentrates entirely on the protagonist’s first day at a new school, using the experiences of that day, and the memories triggered by them, to set the background to his and his family’s life so far. The second part covers the next six years through a series of overlapping stories and episodes which, together, paint a picture of an unhealthy society.

The exegesis puts the historical period of the 1960s in context, including by reflecting on some cultural, social and political matters raised in the creative work – and by using the influence of the novels and film adaptations of the

bestselling German writer, Karl Friedrich May (1842-1912) as supporting evidence for the protagonist's experiences and impressions of underlying racism. The exegesis also offers an explanation of the approach taken in the creative work, including discussion of the shifting narration (between 1st and 3rd person) and an explanation of the use of the term 'semi-autobiography'.

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Karlsbach (Baden)

*Tout ce que je raconte, je l'ai vu, et si j'ai pu me tromper en le voyant, bien
certainement je ne vous trompe pas en vous le disant.¹*

Karlsbach (Baden)

Prologue



Karlsbach, 2003/2004

“Hello stranger!” The voice came from behind him, difficult to hear over the wind rushing through the valley along the river. Somebody who recognized him from his school days, he wondered?

But, as he turned, the young woman impetuously pressing her lips on his was certainly nobody from his school days. She was probably in her mid-twenties, young enough to be his daughter. And, it struck him, biologically at least, almost young enough to be his grand-daughter.

“Ooh, your beard tickles,” she giggled, her voice slightly slurred, then diving back onto his lips after taking a quick breath. She smelled of alcohol; he couldn’t quite work out what it was. Certainly not beer or wine; something sweet. She wasn’t drunk yet, but he had no doubt that she would be before the night was out.

“Let me try,” came a different voice from the dark. Another young woman stepped in to replace the previous lips. Then the throng of young people began to move on, a few of the women giving him a quick peck on the cheek or lips as they passed, and some of the men shaking his hand, or patting him on the shoulder. Eventually, he was alone again on the bridge. He wasn’t too surprised by the incident; after all, it was Silvester – New Year’s Eve – and the whole town was partying.

During the kissing, he clearly felt the bodies of the young women pressed against his own; even through the woollen pullovers they wore to protect from the night’s cold, he clearly felt their breasts against his chest, and their thighs as they pressed against his own. That triggered vivid memories.

A long, long time ago, he had been standing in this very spot in close embrace with Karen, a girl from his high school class. He was taking her home after a party, and this was the darkest spot on the bridge, a dim spot between two street lights. It was probably not really all that dark but, at the limits of reach of two streetlights, a good spot to remain unobserved. The yellow lamps couldn’t be

too bright, so that they wouldn't confuse the navigators of the large barges travelling up and down the river, leaving a couple of dark areas just perfect for an unobserved cuddle; or, more commonly, impatient and urgent groping. It had been a summer's night and still quite warm, the cooling breeze on the bridge adding pleasantly to the experience.

They had lingered for what seemed a long time, especially since she wasn't his girlfriend, just a classmate he had escorted home. The real target of his affections was Sabine, Karen's best friend, a somewhat moonfaced girl with the most amazing almond-shaped eyes. Her curves had held him in fascination from the first day he entered the local high school as a transfer student. She wasn't classically beautiful or pretty, but somehow all her features combined to make her one of the most desirable girls in the school.

He had been doing quite well with Sabine at the party, until they were caught slow-dancing in a darkened room by the party host's mother, who immediately turned on the lights, leaving them both a little too dishevelled and exposed. After the embarrassment of being discovered, they knew that his friend's mother was now keeping an eye on them, and it seemed wise to keep a little distance. Eventually, Sabine started to dance with one of his friends and, around midnight, she left for home with him.

Normally, Karen would have gone with Sabine; usually, they were inseparable. But on this occasion, Karen stayed a little longer. "Sacha, you'll walk me home later," she said to him after a while; he wasn't sure whether it was a question or an instruction. But clearly, she had decided to invite his attentions. And, with Sabine gone, why not? In fact, he had wondered at the time why he had paid so little attention to Karen over the years: she was a very pretty girl who certainly didn't live in Sabine's shadow. So, why hadn't he ever had an amorous interest in her? Somehow, she had always been a friend, not a possible girlfriend.

As he stood on the bridge all these years later, he regretted not pursuing Karen. What a missed opportunity.

He looked towards the southern side of the river where a steep path wound its way upwards towards where Karen used to live. Once they had reached her home, he had expected a quick goodnight kiss as reward for escorting her home. Instead, she walked on, taking his hand to pull him along, leading him just

a little higher up into a side street. There, at the intersection, stood a bench, probably for residents feeling weary on their way to even higher destinations. There was a street light just behind the bench, but apparently that was turned off at midnight. Still, they could see each other perfectly in the bright summer's moonlight.

Karen patted the seat next to where she had positioned herself, and he joined her there. They kissed. Then, to his astonishment, she took his hand and placed it on one of her breasts. He had, of course, touched plenty of breasts before – they were usually the main targets of attention in amorous fumbles – but he had always assumed that this was just something girls permitted. Karen was the first to show him that there were times when a girl actually wanted to be touched there.

Initially, he was so astonished that he just kept his hand where it had been placed, motionless, not knowing what he was supposed to do next. Karen laughed quietly, even while their lips were locked in a kiss, then cupping the back of his hand with her own palm, guiding him in how to squeeze, how to press it against her chest, moving it around. Then she took his fingers and straightened them out to make his hand flat. With that, she guided his palm gently back and forth across her hardened nipple.

He didn't need any further instruction. And, when he eventually moved to touch her other breast, she used the opportunity to unhook her soft cotton bra and open the top buttons of her blouse to allow him full access to her naked flesh.

Why had he never followed up on this? Standing here in the dark, he couldn't think of a single reason that made sense.

His gaze turned to the hills on the northern side of the river, almost exactly opposite Karen's house. There stood the once so modern home of the Abler family; his mood instantly turned gloomy. He'd always had a lot of fun there, but at what cost? The house stood dark, almost menacingly. There was no party there tonight. He wondered who lived there now: not the Ablers, they were long-dead.

He crossed the road to the other side of the bridge, now looking westward. Somewhere in the hills above the town stood the city hospital, where his mother now lay. He had come home to spend time with her, but had dared to visit his other family in Paris for a couple of weeks. When, on a whim, he

returned a few days early, he discovered his mother sick as a dog with a self-induced illness. Even though a diabetic, she had gorged herself on bars of chocolate, chocolate cake, and chocolate mousse; the strange thing was that she didn't even like chocolate. So, why? It almost seemed as if she was making herself sick on purpose. He had telephoned for emergency medical service. After a brief examination, the doctor called an ambulance and, in spite of her protests, had her transported to the hospital. There, she suffered a series of strokes and a heart attack that night, which would undoubtedly have killed her had she not been so close to medical care.

Since then, during occasional lucid moments while he visited her, she alternated between praising *that special mother-son bond* that had brought him home just in time to save her life, and berating him for not letting her die that night; if he had, all her struggles would be over now, and she wouldn't continue to live on as a lonely old woman.

She'd be heavily sedated right now, completely unaware of the fireworks that were already lighting up the night sky as well as creating an irregular battle-sound that echoed through the valley, multiplying the noise of each detonation. Traditionally, the fireworks were to welcome the new year at midnight, but, as always, there were plenty of people too impatient, or too drunk, to wait until then. Ever since nightfall, there had been sporadic bursts of fireworks, increasing in frequency and intensity as midnight approached. Already the streets were littered with debris from these explosives set off by most families, and by morning there would be a foot-high level of rubbish in the inner city, and children combing through it for unexploded devices with which to annoy the hung-over townspeople even before daylight.

He looked over the side walls of the bridge, down to where the water swirled in waves and circles just behind the pylon. It looked so inviting even in the middle of winter, as if to lure an observer to jump into a welcoming softness. There was a wire fence, crowned with barbed wire, reaching outwards from the bridge's side walls, evidence that he had not been the only person to notice the river's call; and he had certainly noticed it more than once when he was young.

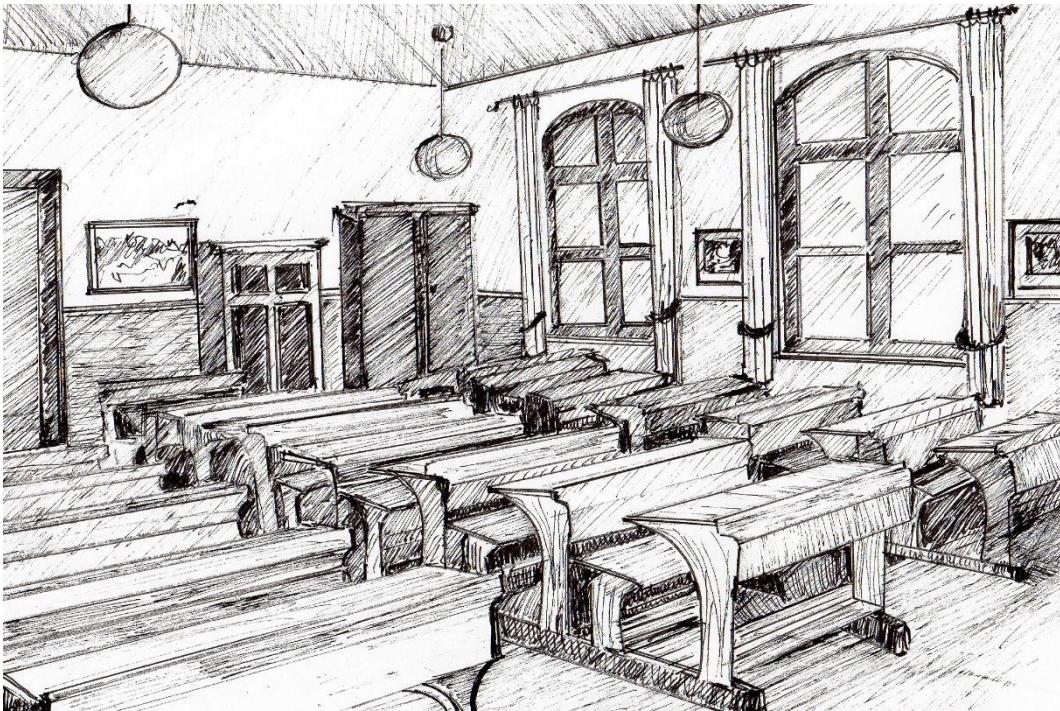
It was a relatively mild night, but here on the bridge, with the icy wind sweeping through his hair, he was beginning to shiver. He zipped up his leather

jacket, the only thing he wore over his shirt, but that didn't help. He felt the cold as much from within himself as from the outside.

With a last glance at the anchored barges and the fireworks being released even from them, he turned towards the town. He'd go to his favourite café at the market place where there would be celebrations for others like himself who had no family, and who felt too gloomy to accept an invitation to a party where everyone would be entirely too happy and too inebriated.

Karlsbach (Baden)

Part I



A New Start, Part I – Götterdämmerung

Arrival (1960)

Sacha Rotschild stood by the rather dirty green wall next to the door and waited. He put on what he hoped to be an enigmatic smile, but he had no idea what impression it really made; his fear was that he just looked stupid.

He stood and waited while before him the classroom gradually filled with pupils. He became increasingly uncomfortable as he felt the glances of the growing group of boys and girls while he continued his faltering attempts at looking nonchalant, avoiding eye contact, just staring into the distance as if something interesting was happening at the railway station he could just see through the windows.

This class sounded different from any he had been part of before. In Freiburg, from where he had recently arrived, he had spent four years in a segregated primary school: the boys were taught in one part of the building and the girls in another. At break times they saw each other through a fence that kept the two genders apart; he didn't really notice much difference, except that the girls always seemed a little less energetic, but a lot noisier, than the boys.

Sacha, being more on the calm side himself, and ignorant of what made a boy different from a girl, initially wondered whether he wasn't being taught in the wrong side of the building. Occasionally, while looking through the fence, he wondered whether he didn't really belong there; a question which also arose thanks to his given name, which, subject to spelling, could also have been that of a girl. He raised this issue once with his mother but, after an extended period of mirth on her part, and some teasing that he might indeed be in the wrong part of the school, was assured that there were ways of avoiding such mistakes in education, and that he was indeed in with the correct group in Primary School.

In the fourth class, he had passed his entrance examinations, which allowed him to go to the *Kepler Gymnasium*. This came as something of a

surprise to him, since his mother was generally very critical of his abilities, and had predicted that he would probably end up being a “*Ritzleschieber*”,² which was a word she made up for the people who, armed with a special scraping tool attached to a long handle, walked the length of the tram-tracks, removing the debris that accumulated in them.

Sacha had resigned himself to becoming such a tram support worker; in fact, it didn't seem a bad option. It was an outdoor job, you got a bright, weather-fast uniform, it seemed to give you plenty of time to think, or to whistle tunes, or to watch the events in the city, or to have chats with your colleague who was cleaning the parallel track; all activities in the *Ritzleschiebers* he had observed from the vantage point of his apartment on the fourth floor, as those workers passed his home in their work. From up there, he could also observe the triangular area in front of the building: a left-over space where two roads came together which nobody seemed to know what to do with. It would have made an ideal spot for a public garden, or even just some grass, except that the area was accessed by delivery trucks in the morning, so that no plant-life would have a chance to establish itself. So, it was mainly used as a play-area for children, or as an occasional parking spot for the very few private cars on the roads in the post-war era: mainly cars driven by doctors, high officials, the super-rich, and by foreigners.

On the ground floor directly below Sacha's apartment was a butcher's shop which, apart from meat deliveries, received large slabs of ice every day, with which the cold-rooms maintained their temperature. Two burly men had special metal tongs with which they grabbed the blocks of ice and shuffled them into the butcher's, often swearing at the weight and the narrow entrance through which they had to manoeuvre them.

The best job on the ice delivery cart was held by a third man, a skinny young lad who would not have enough strength to help carry the ice, but who was in charge of the huge horse that pulled the cart. The cart itself was a large white wooden air-tight container for the ice, with a board at the rear which served both as step and as a seat for the delivery men between stops.

At the front of the white container was a proper driver's seat, like on old-fashioned carriages. While the ice was shuffled in, the skinny man would put his

whip into an empty milk-tin which had been attached especially for that purpose, then jump down to pat the horse and speak to it, and sometimes feed it. He showed real affection for the animal, which always turned its head towards him, flicking its ears as if trying to understand his words. When the delivery was completed, he jumped onto the cart again and gently nudged the horse with the whip, which was all it took to get the cart moving slowly towards its next stop.

Sacha often thought that being this horse-handler would also be within his capabilities, even if he was too stupid for anything else, and too weak to carry the ice.

Next to the butchers was a grocery shop which received frequent deliveries, but they came in trucks, and Sacha wasn't sure whether, with his apparently limited intellectual capabilities, he would be able to learn the necessary skills to drive one of them.

In spite of his mother's dire predictions, he had passed his entrance examinations to high school. While his primary school had been segregated, his high school was completely single-sex: there were no girls there. So Sacha had no experience with coeducational schools at all. As a result, he really wasn't quite sure how he felt about this new class, which was divided about equally between the genders. He really didn't know how to react to the stares of his future classmates, particularly those of the girls, accompanied, as they were, with the whispers and giggling so common amongst girls in the Quinta.³

Despite being the centre of attention, nobody actually came forward to talk to him, to make his first step into the group easier. Since they were in a small town, they all knew each other – most had known each other for their entire lives – and while a newcomer was a bit of a curiosity, they really knew as little about how to deal with him as Sacha did about joining a new school.

If only the teacher would come, but he was late today.

Somebody briefly entered to complain about the excessive noise. He was a short, burly, red-faced man who eyed Sacha suspiciously, wondering why he was standing there, but who obviously wasn't curious enough to find out, and left again. The din, which had died down as soon as the teacher entered, built up again, and as it reached a new crescendo, suddenly died into absolute silence.

With military rapidity and precision, everyone at once stood in place, next to their benches.

The cause of this lightning transformation was a relatively slight, gaunt-faced man with a lot of stringy greyish-blond hair who rushed in, slightly stooped, eyes firmly fixed on the ground in front of him as he sped to the teacher's desk. There, he placed his large briefcase upright in front of himself, as if he needed to establish a barrier between himself and the standing masses. He sat down, stooping even lower, so that he could neither see, nor be seen directly.

The pupils looked at each other. There were one or two suppressed titters, a little restlessness and foot-shuffling, but they remained standing in place, waiting for what was to happen next. Eventually, the teacher adjusted his overly large, horn-rimmed glasses, then peered around as if he only just realized where he was. He stood up again, mumbled something in a thin voice that was probably a greeting of sorts, to which the class responded in unison with a loud "Good morning, Doctor Götter."

The teacher sat down, the class remained upright. He quickly rose again and, with a gesture of a Roman emperor in a Hollywood movie, decreed them to be seated, before he hid again behind his briefcase.

Sacha wondered whether he should make himself known to the teacher, but the shaking of the heads of a few students close to him seemed to suggest that it was unwise. So he continued to stand and wait. He had abandoned his smile in favour of an attentively serious expression, and stood stock-straight, shoulders back, to make a good first impression.

Eventually, after an eternity of silence in which the teacher shuffled papers, he started to call the roll. Each student in turn responded with a loud "here", and when there was an absence of an answer, the teacher pointed randomly at somebody and asked where so-and-so was. This, almost inevitably, led to "I don't know" responses, except in one case, where the teacher was reminded that so-and-so had been on the sick list for about three weeks now.

Finally, the teacher packed away the roll book, then stood up, textbook in hand. This was the first time that he seemed to notice Sacha. He looked at him with wonderment, then adjusted his glasses, as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

“You,” he finally bellowed in a voice that contrasted starkly with the weak, wispy tone he had used up until then, “why aren’t you in your seat?”

Sacha was taken aback at being shouted at in such a way. “I haven’t been given one yet,” he finally stammered. “I am new here.”

“Don’t lie to me, boy,” the teacher shouted, visibly enraged, the veins on his forehead instantly raised. “Do you children think I am stupid, or something? Do you think that you can play these infantile games with me? Go to your seat, before I lose my temper!”

Sacha briefly wondered what this man would be like if he lost his temper, but felt far too intimidated to know what he should do next. Escaping through the nearby door was one option, but then what?

One student timidly raised his hand.

“What do you want?” the teacher shouted at him, putting unusually heavy emphasis on the word ‘you’.

“Please, Herr Oberstudienrat⁴ Doctor Götter, he really is new,” the boy said after jumping to attention next to his seat.

“How dare you contradict me,” Götter thundered. “I have seen him here for the whole school year now, so don’t you tell me this nonsense about him being new. And if I say he is not new, then he is not new: is that clear?”

The student who had dared to speak up quickly sat down again. But a second later, he was up again, when Götter demanded to know “that boy’s” name.

“I don’t know,” the student replied, “he’s new, we’ve never met him before.”

There was some suppressed giggling in the room; apparently making such a statement blatantly contradicting the teacher was very daring.

“What’s your name?” Götter now demanded of Sacha.

“Sacha Rotschild,” Sacha replied, and the teacher dived behind his briefcase again to consult the roll book. “You do not exist,” the verdict finally came.

The same boy raised his hand again, and when called on with a gruff “What do you want now?” asked what the *non-existent new boy* should do about sitting down. Götter’s face went visibly redder, approaching purple, and his mouth

opened and shut a few times like a that of fish, but no words emerged. Clearly, he was speechless at this audacity!

While trying to find an appropriate response, he pointed towards an empty bench at the rear of the classroom, and Sacha, quite bewildered now, but encouraged by the nods from the same students who had indicated for him to stay quiet, made a dash for the safety of that bench, glad to get far out of the teacher's reach.

Still, that wasn't as easy as he had hoped. The classroom was overcrowded, with three rows of benches and very narrow passages between them. The rows went so far forward they nearly reached the elevated platform of the teacher's desk on one side, and a fold-out blackboard on the other.

Götter was standing at the very juncture of two rows of desks and the platform, making it impossible to enter the narrow passage towards the desk that had been allocated to Sacha. As he approached, Götter observed him intensely, with no indication that he was willing to yield the vital access to the passage.

Sacha was too panicked now to care about anything but getting away from the centre of attention. So, without contemplating the wisdom of it, he stepped on the teacher's platform, went around behind the teacher's desk, and entered a very narrow passage between windows and desks.

A few audible gasps told him that he must have offended against some protocol, but Sacha ploughed on along his narrow way between wall and desks to reach the allocated seat, along the way stumbling over his fellow pupils' schoolbags in an undignified manner.

The benches in this classroom were unitary constructions, a narrow wooden board to sit on, and two separate small writing areas bolted on in front. These writing tops lifted up for a small storage area underneath. Bench and writing area were so tight that one could not stand up in the contraption: there was just enough space to sit, and Sacha, who was quite tall for his age, had some difficulty sliding into position. But he did so as quickly and as quietly as he could.

Eventually, and still unable to respond in any way to the vocal student's earlier daring, nor having come to terms with Sacha having brazenly committed the cardinal sin of walking on the teacher's platform during class time and being near the sacred teacher's desk without permission, Götter stormed out of the

room, raising a new murmur in the class. Some of the students congratulated the outspoken boy for his actions, while the two girls sitting in front of Sacha turned around and explained that this was the elected class spokesperson, and provided clarification of the faux pas he had committed by taking the path he had.

The girls introduced themselves, but Sacha immediately forgot their names, far too agitated at having been the cause of this commotion on the first day and in the first session in his new school. At that point, he wished his parents had never moved to Karlsbach.

“He’s having one of his bad days,” one of the girls explained. “You have to get used to his behaviour.” Apparently, he had been a tank commander in Rommel’s Africa Corps, where he had eventually cracked under the pressure of his responsibilities, the hot weather, physical exhaustion, and a few too many kill-or-be-killed experiences.

For teachers to be slightly peculiar was, of course, nothing new to Sacha, nor to anyone else at that time. Many a war-damaged individual, with both physical and mental disabilities, had sought refuge in the public service. And, at the time of the *Wirtschaftswunder*,⁵ anyone with the right qualifications could teach.

So, Sacha was quite used to the weird behaviour of some teachers. He had originally encountered it in the first grade of primary school, where Herr Schmidt, a teacher of Religious Studies, was in the habit of threatening children that he would “smash my violin over your brain-box until you scream to high heaven”⁶ as a means of encouraging them to sing more sweetly.

Schmidt had been a career soldier. Coming from a long line of military men, it went without saying that the young Schmidt would follow the same path. He had risen through the ranks, serving for a number of years as a Sergeant, and was finally trained for, and promoted to, the ranks of the officers. He had gotten there by hard work, giving and obeying orders, and using his natural abilities and intelligence towards the advancement of his career. He was promoted on merit, not because of political connections, not because he came from nobility, not because of the sometimes questionable system of field promotions during the war, but because he had deserved it.

As a soldier, he'd had the respect of his peers and his subordinates, and while the superior officers were sometimes not quite as convinced of his value as he was himself, they looked on him as reliable and capable of getting a job done.

Schmidt's world had collapsed with the end of the war. He had never given a damn about politics, and one system of government seemed as corrupt to him as any other, so he didn't care whether his *Führer* had won or lost, or even whether his country had. What he did care about was that the structure, the order of his regulated life, was pulled from beneath him, leaving him floundering and helpless in a civilian society.

In desperation, he turned to God and religion. He perceived the two as separate entities, not necessarily interlinked; God and the Church represented a new hierarchical structure into which he could fit, and religion replaced the army's traditions of ethics.

As everything in Schmidt's life, he tackled his new-found ambition with all his might; he gained his teaching qualifications while still training to be a pastor, and soon found himself in schools, teaching Religion. He loved his job and saw himself as a warrior for God, drilling salvation into the young minds and bodies, so that it would (or at least should) become second nature to them, just as army life had been second nature for him. Just as his soldiers had marched in perfect unison, with nobody out of step or even lagging by the tiniest margin, his pupils were going to believe in step, sing with a single voice, and make the church their Regiment, their family before all other families.

When Sacha encountered him, Schmidt was still relatively new to teaching. Some who had had him in later years said that he mellowed a little with age, but only just a little. He was still occasionally prone to hitting a child over the head with a large Bible. No such restraint in Sacha's time: Schmidt had still been full of unabated missionary fervour.

Sacha himself was, at least in part, instrumental in curing him of some of his harsher methods of discipline. Schmidt was fond of punishing the boys by hitting the palms of their hands with a long wooden switch that could strike the skin with the impact of a whip.

Punishment with the switch was a well-rehearsed ritual. The boy to be punished had to step in front of the class and hold out his hand, palm up, at

shoulder height. He had to stand at the correct angle to the class, so that everyone could see his hand. Schmidt would then place himself in such a way that he could make sure that all paid attention while he raised the switch way above his head, took careful aim, and let it drop with full force. Woe befell anyone who, at that moment, either lowered his hand or even dared pull it back to avoid the blow.

The dangers of reacting thus were twofold: firstly, any attempt to avoid the pain would lead to an increase in punishment, whereby a single stroke would become two, two would become three, and so on; and secondly, there was a risk that the switch would catch the victim on the fingers, rather than the palm, which was even more painful.

Sacha, being a quiet and obedient boy, didn't suffer this punishment very often, even though the ritual was enacted at least twice each lesson. Sacha was also quite stoic, firmly believing that all suffering would be rewarded eventually. So he took his punishment quietly and without outward signs of emotion.

Truth be told, he provoked the punishment, at least on the first occasion. Feeling a bit of an outsider, being punished like everyone else made him more part of the group in the eyes of the others. So, when called upon to hold up the hymn-book for Schmidt, and after having been warned not to let the book drop below the teacher's gaze, Sacha deliberately allowed it to sink on several occasions.

It wasn't difficult to commit that offence: the book was heavy, and holding it high over one's own head was really difficult, particularly since Schmidt started over and over again as he was never quite satisfied with the singing. The task was all but impossible for some of the smaller boys, and everyone dreaded the call to act as living music-stand. And while it was easier for Sacha than most, because he was taller than the others, it still looked quite natural when he gradually lowered the book a few times. That was important: he didn't want to look like somebody who deliberately drew punishment on himself, nor did he want the teacher to think that he was deliberately defiant.

As anticipated, he received the desired punishment and the associated sympathy of his classmates. The exercise was successful.

But on a later occasion when he was punished it wasn't deliberately provoked. In fact, it wasn't his fault at all: another boy had whispered something

to a neighbour and Schmidt, whose hearing had suffered as a result of excessive artillery noise, wrongly determined the culprit to be Sacha.

Sacha took his punishment, but not as stoically as before; this time, he was upset and angry. He had an over-developed sense of justice, which had something to do with his upbringing, as Sacha's mother was very exact in determining the blame to be apportioned whenever something went wrong. This was mainly done to establish that the fault was never her own. And, while Sacha had learned through this process that his presence, indeed his very existence, often contributed to problems – for instance, if a plate slipped from his mother's hands during washing up, it was inevitably because Sacha had distracted her by being in the kitchen – he also had a very acute sense for those few occasions when he truly could *not* be blamed for something.

In his anger, he didn't properly pay attention to the ritual, and instinctively pulled back as the switch approached, with the result that it hit him on the knuckles of his fingers, which caused excruciating pain, and so he was forced to hold his hand out again, to receive two more strokes for trying to avoid the first.

By the time Sacha returned to his seat, he was in tears. Not, as his classmates thought, and with which they thoroughly sympathised, because three strokes of the cane was quite a heavy punishment for a seven-year old boy, but because of the anger and frustration at being treated so unjustly, and having no power to prevent it.

He spent the rest of the Religion class sulking and contemplating what, if anything, he could do for revenge. Telling his mother was not an option: her attitude was that if you got punished by a teacher, you must have done something to deserve it, and that teachers were well trained in pedagogy to know appropriate forms of punishment. The concept that a teacher might act inappropriately, or, heaven forbid, unjustly, didn't register with her. Indeed, to suggest so was a clear sign of not accepting responsibility and not recognizing your guilt, which, in turn, was justification for additional punishment.

Besides, anything was good that would toughen you up for the life ahead, and a bit of punishment, even if unjust, would do no harm in the long run. And let

us not forget that a bit of unjustified punishment was simply a small compensation for all the occasions on which punishment was deserved, but not received!

A year or so earlier, Sacha could have spoken with his grandparents, who were fiercely protective of him. But they had moved away because of his grandfather's new job. Besides, talking to them might have been difficult too: Grandma got easily upset due to her high blood pressure, and he didn't want to cause that; and Grandpa, who was hard of hearing and – in the eyes of those who didn't know him – a very gruff and loud man, would probably get Sacha into even more strife in the long run if he came to the school, as even an attempt to speak calmly with the teacher would be interpreted as shouting at him. Since Grandpa was a large and intimidating man, his loud voice would not have been taken as a sign of deafness, but as aggression towards a teacher who, after all, was a legitimate representative of the power of the State.

Challenging the authority of a teacher, while not exactly criminal conduct, was nevertheless seen as shaking the very foundations of the order on which a healthy society was based. Naturally, that sort of behaviour had to be crushed, and it would be by continuing to demonstrate that it was within the school's legitimate powers to punish a pupil if the school deemed it appropriate. In other words, Sacha would have to prepare himself for a great deal of punishment over the next few months in a reassertion of the school's rights.

Reporting the teacher within the school was out of the question: no adult in the educational system would ever take the word of a child over that of an adult, and particularly that of a teacher.

Sacha had heard that there were child protection agencies, but according to his mother, these were people likely to come and take children away to a sort of children's prison if they didn't behave properly. So, even if he had known how to contact them, which he didn't, they were not a realistic option for support either.

Sacha's thoughts of revenge and retribution meant that he wasn't paying attention at all. As a result, when called upon to recite a Bible verse that had been rehearsed in the previous session, he didn't even realise that Schmidt was calling on him. Schmidt interpreted this as indolence, which, in turn, earned Sacha another caning. At that point, the bell went, and since Schmidt was in a hurry, he postponed the punishment until the beginning of the next session the following

week. “That will give you time to think about your sins,” Schmidt stated as he left the room.

Sacha’s grandmother was a woman skilled in all manner of home-pharmacology and chemistry. This wasn’t merely a throw-back to the old housewives’ arts, but a skill revived and developed due to circumstances. In her lifetime, she had gone through the privations of the first World War, followed by a time of political instability and hyper-inflation, where just about everything was difficult to buy. Then, just as things got a bit better, the Great Depression threw everything into turmoil again.

After Hitler took power in 1933, it took a while for things to improve economically, so there were only a couple of years during which she was fairly well off. But she wasn’t one of the more privileged of the Third Reich; her husband, although a genius in his own field, lacked the skills to exploit his abilities for financial gain. He had a good job as a Master Electrician, but he did work far beyond his role, inventing and designing, then giving his plans to others who got the credit.

Moreover, her husband stubbornly defended his views on Communism, which wasn’t wise in Hitler’s Germany. He only got away with it since those who knew him considered him a bit odd and detached from reality, and because nobody in power really took any notice of him. He was lucky to work in a sanatorium and hospital deep in the Black Forest,⁷ an area far enough from the political centres that he was just an obscure individual in a remote part of the country. Still, his insistence on listening to Radio Moscow on the shortwave radio he built himself exposed all of his family to very severe danger, and earned him the enmity of his daughter, Sacha’s mother.

Most people who knew of his political leanings imagined that he believed in Communism because he had what people thought to be a Russian surname: Bosarev. But that was wrong on many counts. He was convinced by the philosophies of Marx and Engels, and didn’t particularly like the interpretation given to them by Stalin. What was more, the Bosarev family allegedly stemmed from courtiers of the Tsar, and therefore wouldn’t have had an intrinsic liking for the Communists, even considering that they had to flee some time before the end of the monarchy in Russia due to a disagreement with the Tsar himself.

The truth was that Grandpa Bosarev had read many political books, including *Mein Kampf*, and had found his own way to Communism, not due to any of the reasons imagined by those around him. Because of these circumstances, Sacha's grandmother didn't have the contacts and connections to get the scarcer goods available to those in the know.

And due to the shortages during the Second World War and the early years afterwards, Sacha's grandmother had drifted back to the recipes and formulas taught her by her own grandmothers. As a result, she could mix up soap, medicines, fragrant oils, poultices, and goodness knows what else from ingredients that could be found in nature, or which were more readily available than the refined products.

When Sacha was four years old, an incident occurred that had stuck in his memory. One day, when his grandfather returned from work, he discovered with horror that his wife's hands were bruised all over. When he asked what on earth had happened, Sacha's grandmother just laughed. She had used one of her solutions for something or other – Sacha couldn't remember what – and, as she explained, that made her hands very susceptible to bruising. "It will be gone by the morning," she said, perhaps just a little optimistically, or perhaps to allay her husband's concerns.

Contrary to what he was continuously told by his mother, Sacha was a gifted child in many ways. For one thing, he was a mathematical prodigy, capable of developing algebraic formulas by observation of the facts, rather than by having to be taught. But the one thing that was quite exceptional, even far beyond his mathematical genius, was his memory: he rarely forgot anything. And on this occasion, he not only remembered the incident, but also what liquid his grandmother had been using.

This came handy for his plans of revenge on Mr Schmidt. He put a small quantity of that material into an old perfume bottle and, on the day of his next Religion class, he took it with him. He hid it in his socks, since his mother was overly fond of checking what he took to school, and he managed to sneak it out of the apartment.

At school, the next problem manifested itself: getting the thick liquid out of the bottle. Turning the bottle upside down achieved nothing; the liquid was too

thick to flow out and just congregated at the narrow neck of the bottle. But with a bit of patience, taking the whole morning break, by rubbing the bottle opening continuously across his palm, enough liquid was smeared onto his hand that he could reasonably hope that it might have some effect. Of course, he wasn't quite sure what that effect would be, but at least he had made an effort to put his plan into action.

It nearly came to nothing. As the class started, and as Schmidt commenced in his usual fashion, it soon became clear that he had forgotten the promised punishment. Under ordinary circumstances, that would have been occasion to rejoice and to lay low, and Sacha was quite tempted to leave it at that. But, not forgetting his anger from the previous session, he was determined to get his revenge, or at least attempt to, even if it caused him pain. So, he raised his hand and, when called upon to speak, reminded Schmidt that he had not yet received his punishment.

"You are really quite a stupid boy," said Schmidt, startled and immediately reaching for his switch. Then he thought about it. "No, I take that back," he added, which caused a murmur of surprise amongst the pupils, since teachers never corrected themselves or each other, as to do so would challenge teacher infallibility. "You show great strength of character for one this young," Schmidt continued. "You are to be congratulated. You know you deserve your punishment, and you want to take it like a man! Well done. Under the circumstances..."

It was obvious that Schmidt was about to issue an amnesty, but having gone that far, Sacha wasn't prepared to give up now. So, while Schmidt still contemplated the most appropriate action – he had never encountered this situation before and was genuinely confused – Sacha stepped to the front and, to the amazement of his fellow pupils who thought he lost his mind, assumed the punishment position, and held out his hand. This pretty much forced Schmidt's hand, and he compromised, promising only the one hit as a reward for Sacha's bravery and honesty, which was no compromise at all, since he had only ever been told of one hit, but Sacha wasn't about to debate the issue. Still, for that one compromise hit, Schmidt didn't hold back, and it smacked across Sacha's palm with full force.

Sacha returned to his seat with his left hand firmly squeezed under his right armpit to relieve the immediate pain; Schmidt always hit the left hand, so that the right hand, the one with which pupils were to write even if naturally left-handed, would not be impaired.

Gradually, the sting in Sacha's hand was replaced by a rhythmic throbbing. At first, there were no obvious signs beyond the standard red mark, and Sacha thought he had attracted this avoidable punishment for no benefit at all. But as the lesson progressed, the hand did begin to discolour and swell up. What is more, because of the uneven administration of the solution, the effects were equally uneven, making the result look even more frighteningly discoloured and swollen.

"Excuse me," he dared to interrupt Schmidt, raising his hand to gain attention. Schmidt's immediate reaction was to thunder away at Sacha for speaking without waiting for permission, but when he saw the raised hand, one could see a near-faint overcome him.

Obviously, it wasn't the frightening look of the hand itself that caused this sudden weakness in his knees, but the realisation that this was the very hand that had been a perfectly normal rosy pink at the beginning of the class before... well, before...

Schmidt rushed to Sacha's side, then practically dragged him to the Rector's office. There was no school nurse or first aid officer – there never were in those days – but the principal and his secretary had a kit with which they treated the most common schoolyard injuries. But this situation was too much for them, and Sacha quickly found himself rushed to the nearby university medical centre. In those days, this involved a teacher being seconded to take the injured child by car to the clinic, which was an unexpected bonus for Sacha: he loved riding in cars, but seldom had an opportunity to do so, and this was probably only the third or fourth such trip of his life.

Sacha couldn't really enjoy the journey. Having been drilled into believing, or better *knowing*, that everything that went wrong was his fault in some way, he was now consumed with guilt. He imagined that he would end up at the police station, and then prison, for the prank he had played. His only possible salvation lay in not confessing unnecessarily. Of course, he would never actually

lie: his upbringing just about made that impossible. However, he had learned not to answer questions which weren't expressly put to him. So, as long as nobody asked him directly whether he had contributed to these injuries himself, he might just be able to get away with it.

Throughout the journey, he was in near-panic over the consequences of his actions. He had not thought about possible outcomes other than that Schmidt would see a bruised hand, feel a bit upset like grandfather was with grandmother, but that everything would settle down quickly, hopefully with the added bonus that Schmidt would be a little gentler in future.

As Sacha was close to tears, not because of any pain in his hand, but the throbbing pain of his conscience, the accompanying teacher consoled him by holding Sacha tightly to himself.

The teacher was Herr Schatulla, who happened to be Sacha's favourite; a maths teacher who, unlike some of the others, was not only friendly towards him, but actually praised him frequently for his quick mind and mathematical abilities. In fact, Schatulla had gone so far as to make a hand-written *Certificate of Merit* for Sacha: not an official document (no such certificates were issued to pupils at that time as it wasn't considered wise to allow children to get too "big-headed" over their own achievements), but a spontaneous act by a teacher who felt that this obviously shy and unhappy child ought to have *some* encouragement in life. The "Certificate" was written on a nice piece of parchment-like paper, in calligraphic script and, to make it appear more official, the eagle on the back of a 1-Mark coin had been traced and shaded with pencil, making it look like a seal.

At this point, the trust he felt for Schatulla nearly made him confess his crime, but every time he thought of saying something, he didn't know how to start: he didn't want to say anything that would lose him the obvious support from this teacher. So he kept quiet. The fact that he was known to be almost pathologically shy when around adults also helped. Later, when asked questions by the examining doctor, the accompanying teacher automatically answered on his behalf, pointing out that "the boy doesn't speak much".

Sacha felt nearly as tongue-tied now, at double his former age, while he sat as the one outsider amongst all the pupils who had a level of familiarity with each other. Some seemed marginally interested in him, and, as he sat alone in his

bench, they came for brief conversations of the “where-are-you-from?” variety then quickly dashed back to their seats in anticipation of the teacher returning.

The two girls in front of Sacha were now busy talking. The bench directly to his right was unoccupied, and the one in front of that was occupied by two boys who seemed to have taken an instant dislike to him, mimicking the way he sat, the way he moved, the way he furtively glanced around the room. He pretended not to notice, looking out the window, and concentrating on picking up snippets of conversation from around the room.

At that point, a teacher entered. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a matching wide head, which displayed all the signs of annoyance. He marched to the teacher’s desk, glanced at the roll-book, then called Schulte (the class spokesperson) to the front to get a brief summary of what had been going on. Sacha couldn’t hear the details, even though there was a hushed silence in the room, with everyone interested in the drama unfolding. But Schulte and the teacher communicated in whispers. That it had to do with Sacha was obvious, because Schulte’s gesticulations made it clear where Sacha had stood at the beginning of the class, where he was now, and the path he had chosen to get there.

The teacher shook his head in what appeared to be disbelief: was it that he couldn’t comprehend how Sacha could have dared cross the teacher’s platform?

Eventually, the teacher gesticulated for Schulte to return to his seat, pointed at Sacha and said, “I’ll talk to you in the little break,”⁸ then turned on his heel and marched out again.

The fact that Sacha had caused major upheaval just by appearing at school didn’t surprise him – he knew from his mother’s frequent reminders that he caused problems merely by existing – and this was just further evidence of how right she was about everything.

A New Start – Part II

Picking Mushrooms

Soon after the departure of the second teacher, Oberstudienrat Götter steamed in again, eyes fixed on the ground a few feet ahead of him, nose twitching his horn-rimmed glasses up and down, heading straight for the teacher's desk. Once there, he picked up a textbook and finally started the lesson, in what little time was left for it.

It wasn't until then that Sacha finally discovered that this was a class in German, one of his favourite subjects. Unfortunately, the activity on hand was to read aloud, something he didn't enjoy, as he always felt shy of speaking in front of others unless he was absolutely certain of his ground.

In reading, he was anything but certain; it wasn't until a couple of years later that it was discovered that his apparent dyslexia was based on nothing more than poor eyesight. As it was, he had to read word by word, which made his reading lack fluency, and mispronunciations common as he frequently lost context.

Götter started with a pupil at the other end of the room, making each read a paragraph, then moving on to the next. In this order, Sacha would be last in line, and he hoped that the bell would ring before it was his turn. Not only was he scared of making a fool of himself with the first public contribution in his new class, but he wasn't even able to get an idea of what text he might be faced with, since he didn't have any of his school books yet.

No matter how much he prayed for a reprieve, the succession of speakers brought his turn ever closer. Occasionally, there seemed a chance of a sufficient delay, when a student was forced to read a second paragraph because the first was too short, which usually led to brief comments or protests, all summarily dismissed with an imperial wave of Götter's hand. These objections came not only from the pupils who had to read more than they thought their fair share, but also from the others who had counted ahead to the paragraph they would have to

read, and who now had to prepare a different one. But none of the delays proved sufficient to save Sacha.

“Lend Rotschild your book,” Götter instructed the girl in front of Sacha when she had finished her turn. This startled Sacha: after the declaration of his non-existence earlier in the session, he didn’t expect Götter to know, let alone use, his name with such apparent familiarity. But Sacha wasn’t given time to think about it. He suddenly became far more distracted by the close physical proximity of the girl who stepped next to where he now stood. Given the cramped conditions of the classroom, this led to a level of physical contact which he found disturbing. In holding the open book in front of him with one hand, while pointing to the paragraph he had to read with the other, she not only leant into him, but actually pressed quite firmly into his arm. He could feel the heat of her body, and her softness, against himself, even the roundness of her breast against the back of his arm, which temporarily made him lose his emotional equilibrium, with his physical one in not much better shape.

A bolt of electricity seemed to go through him as his hand touched hers, and he took in her perfume while he accepted the book from her. While he mechanically read the paragraph without thinking about it, he couldn’t help but be aware of the continued presence of the girl next to him who, while she was now a little further away – as far as the very limited space permitted – still remained standing close to him in readiness to take back her book.

She was an attractive girl, with a somewhat round face framed by long brown hair, some of which was held together at the back with a rubber band. She wore no visible make-up, though her lips seemed perhaps a little too red and too glossy to be completely natural. Her eyes were large and pretty, her fashionably long and highlighted eyelashes adding to their attractiveness.

In this distracting peripheral view, Sacha couldn’t help but notice that she wore a blue denim skirt and a blue sweater which, as was fashionable, displayed her bosom, quite large for a girl this young, as one elongated protrusion, rather than as individual mounds. Her small and delicate hands, with which she kept wiping the hair from her face, distracted Sacha even more as he continued reading, without having the slightest idea what the passage was all about.

Luckily, it was a fairly brief paragraph and he got through it without, apparently, making a fool of himself. As soon as he was finished, the girl retrieved her book and, flashing him a quick smile, sat down again in front of him, leaving him to contemplate the futility of a rubber band holding back a strand of hair amongst a whole flood of free-flowing ones.

Götter completed the session by telling the class to read the rest of the story, and to get ready for a *Nacherzählung* – a regular exercise during which a teacher told a story which students then had to retell in their own words – during the next session. With that, he carefully screwed the top on his fountain pen and placed it in his shirt pocket, placed his book and the roll-book back into the separate compartments of his briefcase, then locked it just in time to effect a quick exit as the bell indicated the end of the session.

Sacha sighed in relief. The first session was over... only about ten million more to go before he graduated from high school!

The two girls turned around again to chat with him, and he loved being their centre of attention for the moment. The pretty girl's companion was equally attractive, but in a different way, with slightly more chiselled, more angular features. While the one girl could be described as *rounded* in so many ways, the other seemed more *pointy*. Sacha was aware of the inadequacy of this summation, but that's how it struck him at that moment.

"Geo next," said the angular one, rolling her eyes.

"You don't like Geography?" he asked.

"Geography is fine," answered the round one, "but Miss Toadstool,⁹ the teacher..."

Sacha wondered how, after Götter, any teacher could inspire such a comment. He didn't wonder long: just at that point, she entered. At first, he couldn't actually see her, as she was obscured by his fellow students standing to attention. But when she stepped on the platform at the front of the classroom, he couldn't help but be astonished by her looks.

She was an oddly shaped woman, almost rhomboid in appearance. She had very wide hips, rather narrower shoulders, and a relatively large head, which gave the appearance of a gradual tapering from the hips to the top of her high hairdo.

Below her hips, she appeared to have massive thighs, to judge from the pressure they exerted on the fabric of her skirt, but relatively thin lower legs. Clearly, her stockings couldn't cope with this rapid decrease in diameter from top to bottom, as a result of which they hung crumpled below her hemline.

What completed her odd appearance was her unusual manner of walk. Unlike most solid people, she appeared to walk very daintily, placing one foot in front of another, like catwalk models do; her gait was probably the only thing she had in common with fashion models. This balancing act was only possible since she wore what could only be described as "sensible shoes", and there was little doubt that her anatomical structure, combined with her almost mincing walk, could only have led to disaster if she had worn any sort of heels at all.

Miss Pilcz immediately commenced her lesson, from which Sacha concluded that roll-call was only done during the first session of the day. She began by describing the geological and geophysical features of the Jura (a Central European mountain range). To illustrate her lecture, she rolled down a huge map from the top of the blackboard, in the process presenting her backside to the class, including a very clear view of the crumpled stockings and, as she reached up, the bottom parts of some form of under-garment: a display which brought forth a number of titters.

Clearly angered, Miss Pilcz now sought revenge by randomly calling on students to repeat some of the points she had made thus far. This is where Sacha's good memory came in handy – he wasn't at all afraid to be called on, because he could have repeated word for word what the teacher had said – although it struck him that to do so with this apparently fairly ill-tempered teacher might be counter-productive. Still, no matter how much he raised his hand, he was never called on to answer any of the questions. In fact, as he quickly noticed, Miss Pilcz never called anyone raising a hand, but only on those who didn't, and then she mainly called on the girls.

"Don't bat your eyelids at me, little girl," she said to the one nicknamed *Hazelnut* by the others, when she failed to get a correct answer. "That might work with my male colleagues, but it doesn't cut any ice with me. I know they let you girls get away with blue murder."

Was this why the round-faced girl had rolled her eyes when she mentioned this teacher?

“I’m not a little girl,” *Hazelnut* complained, but not loud enough for Miss Pilcz to hear, or maybe just not loud enough to make her react to it. She really was one of the littler amongst the girls, but she probably resented it more as a reference to her stage of development than to her physical size.

Sacha became interested in the teacher-pupil interaction here. He was on safe ground because he knew the answers, which allowed him to experiment on how to play this teacher. At first, he just didn’t raise his hand to the questions, but that didn’t make her call on him. Next, he tried looking out of the window, as if bored: that earned him a rebuke, but he still wasn’t asked to answer any questions. So he tried to look furtive, looking at the desktop, occasionally glancing up to the teacher, then quickly down again, sometimes glancing sideways at other students, but quickly back to his own desk... and it worked. He managed to convince Miss Pilcz that he didn’t want to be called on, and as a result, he was.

“You, the new one,” she said, pointing at him. Sacha stood up and obliged her with the correct answer. Miss Pilcz looked at him. Sacha stood his ground and waited. Miss Pilcz continued to look at him intensely. Sacha waited, and felt amused; he wasn’t generally an assertive boy, but he had his moments when he enjoyed getting the better of an adult, even if that was associated with costs to himself. What would be the price today, he wondered?

Miss Pilcz still just stood there looking at Sacha. It was almost as if one could hear the wheels of an engine grind in her brain. There were a few murmurs amongst the pupils; everyone knew that something was happening here, but nobody was quite sure what it was.

“Sit,” Miss Pilcz eventually said to him, then continued the lecture she had previously interrupted for her bout of interrogations. Sacha sat scared, as usual, that he had done something wrong, but also satisfied because he had the feeling that he had done something significant, even though he didn’t know what it was.

A New Start – Part III

A Question of Religion

The rest of the first day at Sacha's new school passed in a cycle of highs and lows. First amongst the highs was that the threatened "*I'll talk to you in the little break*" turned out to be quite benign, with the class teacher merely apologising for not properly sorting out Sacha's enrolment, and hinting, albeit ever so gently (for it wasn't the done thing for a teacher to be critical of a colleague), that Götter's outbursts weren't necessarily to be taken all too seriously. "He has suffered a lot...", was the somewhat vague explanation.

But just as this load was off Sacha's mind, he was plunged headlong into the next low: he re-entered the classroom after the break to find all his classmates gone. In his anxiety over the audience with his teacher, he had failed to notice where they had disappeared to.

The problem was where to go from here. He had no money to take a train to his grandparents. Plus, he was convinced that long before he reached the safety of their home, he would be arrested by the police sent by his mother and stepfather, either to be hauled ignominiously back home or to be thrown into jail. His mother had often enough told him about these children's prisons, the reform schools where unruly children were taught discipline, and where he would discover just how good his life at home was by comparison.

In fact, Sacha was frequently told how well off he really was, if he only were to realise it. Prince Charles, for instance, with whose life his mother frequently compared Sacha's – not only because they were of similar age, but also because of her own unfulfilled regal ambitions – really had it tough! He had to be fluent in at least four foreign languages by age twelve, he never had any time to play... in fact, Prince Charles pretty much had to work from dawn to dusk performing his royal duties, even as a child.

Well "even as a child" himself Sacha questioned his mother's sources of this information. He couldn't quite believe her stories, particularly the one about

no time for play. In fact, at one stage when there was a fierce debate about the value of a desired Christmas present, he dared suggest that if Prince Charles expressed an interest in an electric train set, there would probably be donors only too happy to provide him with an entire layout, rather than him having to negotiate whether he could get a locomotive of his choice instead of the cheapest model proposed by his parents. Sacha thought the fact that the preferred model had lights was a sufficient advantage over a basic model which didn't have that feature, particularly since the difference in price was roughly that of two loaves of bread.

His reference to Prince Charles nearly lost him the argument. Questioning parental belief systems was never advisable in his home: if mother said that the moon was made of green cheese, then it was, no matter what anyone else might think, or even what any book might say. Still, for once, he won that round, and the wish for a locomotive with lights was granted, probably more because his mother was worried about never hearing the end of the matter than because she believed that there was merit in his viewpoint.

The reason there was any discussion at all on this issue was that there was a strict two-presents-per-annum rule as far as Sacha was concerned. He could get a present for Christmas, and one for his birthday. The mere thought of receiving a present at any other time of the year was just too outrageous even to contemplate. Why on earth would he think that he warranted any more? After all, parents had to cope with the expenses of bringing up a child *without any real assistance from the state*, and the last thing children should expect was to be rewarded for their existence by receiving presents. *The mere thought of it!*

Not surprisingly, Sacha's world was thrown into turmoil when one day, out of the blue, his little sister received a present *for no reason at all!* It was a rubber *Bambi* deer, roughly twenty centimetres high, which squeaked when squeezed. His sister received it because her parents had seen it in a shop and had thought the 2-year-old might like it!

When he questioned why his sister received a present when it was neither Christmas nor her birthday, he was told that "she is just so cute" that her parents just couldn't help themselves but spoil her a little. So, at age eight, Sacha learned that there was yet another significant difference between himself and his sister:

she was “cute,” in addition to being a girl, and had two parents – a mother and a father – while he only had a mother and an emotionally distant stepfather.

Also relaxed in his sister’s case was the ten-toy rule: the hard-and-fast and never actually clarified, let alone justified, decree that no child was entitled to own more than ten toys at any one time. The only reason he ever became subject to this rule at all was that he also received presents from his grandparents on the two standard occasions per year, and not necessarily just one each time. Undermining his mother’s authority, over which there were many arguments, they actually dared give him two, or even three, presents on each occasion!

So, a rule was instituted that once he had surpassed ten toys, he would have to select the ones to be given away to “children less fortunate than himself”. Sacha had never actually met any such children, but he was told that the orphanages and reform schools were full of them, and that even amongst the children living with their parents in the “poorer areas of the city” there was a plenitude of such unfortunate children.

Long and hard negotiation led to an agreement that certain types of toys could be grouped together to count as one: all parts of his constructor set, for instance. A dispute over whether stuffed animals were to be counted individually or as a group was never really resolved, as a result of which he usually kept the number of such animals to two: a dachshund called *Batzi*, and a little bear called *Petzi*.

If he could not make up his mind which was his least favourite toy to be given away, a selection would be made on his behalf, and there was no appeal against that decision. “You should have made up your mind when you had a chance” was the lesson to be learned. The toys to be discarded were usually the *least educational* ones, or the ones which, in the opinion of the adults, were no longer in an acceptable condition; one greatly beloved stuffed dog fell victim to this judgement even though (or perhaps because) it was Sacha’s favourite sleeping companion.

Being a boy, he was not allowed to cry over the loss of his beloved toy dog. To do so would have invited punishment which, in all likelihood and parental tradition in such matters, would probably have led to *Batzi* and *Petzi* also being taken away. To make sure that he was sufficiently stoic about “taking it like a

man,” his parents checked several times in the following nights, just to make sure he wasn’t displaying any grief after bedtime over his lost companion.

On occasion, when the ten toys rule was to be enforced again, his own choices would be overruled if, in the never-to-be-questioned views of the adults, he had made the wrong decision. The definitions of *right* or *wrong* were never forthcoming; they were apparently so *obvious* that explanations were not only unnecessary, but the mere asking for the underlying reasoning was an insult to intelligence.

All these sacrifices on behalf of “the less fortunate” did not actually contribute to Sacha seeing himself as one of the world’s more blessed children. So, standing outside his empty classroom in Karlsbach, contemplating his option of flight, it wasn’t the first time that another escape route via the railway system came to mind. The train station was only a couple hundred metres from the school, and he could be there in no time at all. Right at the beginning of the platform the trains were still going at high speed, certainly fast enough to kill anyone falling, or throwing himself, under the wheels. It wasn’t all that unusual for Sacha to contemplate this option; no matter how much easier his life was than that of Prince Charles, Sacha just wasn’t quite convinced that it was worth the effort to keep going with it.

The alternative to these *flight* options, whether to safety or into oblivion, was to *fight*. ‘Fight’ in this situation would mean to overcome his own feelings of worthlessness sufficiently to approach an adult, even such an elevated individual as a teacher, to ask him where he was supposed to be. On this occasion he was saved from having to make the decision by the return of his class teacher.

“I am sorry,” the teacher said, startling Sacha, since these were words usually demanded of him, and certainly not to be expected from an adult, especially not twice in the same day, “but I forgot to give you a timetable.” With that, the teacher handed over a sheet of paper listing his classes. And there it was: Monday morning was *German (Oberstudienrat Götter)*, *Geography (Fräulein Pilcz)*, then *Little Break* and *Religious Education (by Denomination)*.

The teacher looked over Sacha’s shoulder at the sheet, pointing to the third 45-minute session for the day... and then, to Sacha’s utter surprise, apologized yet again!

“I am sorry,” he said in a drawn-out manner, as if he wasn’t quite sure what to say next, but then followed it up with, “I don’t actually know what we do with pupils of your faith during RE.” He rubbed his chin as if that might help him find a solution to the problem.

“Are there no Protestants in this school?” Sacha asked, surprised, and somewhat amazed how easily he was talking with this teacher.

“You are Protestant? I thought you were...” The teacher didn’t finish the sentence, and Sacha knew why: it was still a taboo subject. Without further delay, he was taken to the Protestant RE class.

Whether Sacha was actually Protestant was a somewhat debatable issue. At two days old, he had been baptized Catholic to honour his father’s religion. During the early years of his life, when he was brought up by his grandparents, Sacha was most influenced by his grandmother, who was a devout Catholic, but who had been excommunicated in 1920 for marrying a Protestant. As a result, Sacha’s grandmother substituted frequent religious radio broadcasts for her inability to attend Mass, and Sacha grew up with this preaching as a background noise to his play.

At age seven, by which time his guardianship had been taken over by his mother and her new husband, he was enrolled into the Protestant RE classes at school: the religion of Mr Drexler, his new stepfather. After a few months of such religious training at school, Sacha once made the mistake of declaring an interest in attending a church service; from the windows of their apartment, he could see the faithful stream towards the Catholic church around the corner every Sunday, and he was curious what they were doing there, all dressed up.

To his surprise, his mother agreed to take him to church. To his even greater surprise, she didn’t take him to the church around the corner, but to the Protestant church, which involved either a trip by tram, or a very long walk. It seemed like a lot of extra effort, considering there was a church right next door. But since he attended Protestant religious training at school, perhaps it wasn’t all that surprising, even though Sacha didn’t quite grasp what difference it would make.

When Sacha's mother said that she was '*taking him to church*', this turned out to be the literal truth: she took him *to* the church, waited to see him enter, then left again.

She didn't consider herself a Christian. She had no sympathy with the Catholic Church, which had caused her mother such pain, and she certainly didn't see herself identifying with anything her father was associated with, so that she couldn't be a Protestant either. So, in her own youth, she had professed to being "*deutschgläubig*",¹⁰ which essentially meant that she got free sessions when others went to their RE classes.

Sacha was given the return fare for the tram and a *Groschen*¹¹ for the collection plate and left there to 'enjoy' church. Instead, he found the experience exceedingly boring. In a largely Calvinist tradition, the church was sparsely decorated, the pews were hard, the minister's sermon excessively long and distant, the occasional hymns unfamiliar, the prayers different to what he had heard on the radio... the whole experience was disappointing.

But sitting there with his thoughts drifting reminded him that he had actually been in church once before. It was when he was about four years old. A famous Cardinal had been visiting Freiburg; Sacha vaguely recalled that it might have been the Cardinal of Paris, providing a service to some of the French military personnel. Amongst the invited were Sacha's uncle and aunt: his mother's sister, who had married a French serviceman, the best friend of Sacha's father. His grandmother wasn't invited, but due to the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see such a senior Church official, she had nevertheless sneaked in with Sacha. Being excommunicated, she took a pew right in the back, away from the invited congregation.

Sacha couldn't remember whether the service was in Latin or French. At any rate, he couldn't understand a word of it. Towards the end, the Cardinal and his entourage chose to leave the large church via the front entrance, instead of the rear, as Sacha's grandmother had expected. Her escape route was cut off as the procession made its way towards the exit, young priests waving incense containers at the front, then more priests, then His Eminence.

Sacha's grandmother tried to fade into the background, moving further away from the centre and bowing deeply. Most of the procession had already

passed when the Cardinal noticed the elderly woman and the young boy hiding in darkness. Much to the consternation of his entourage, he retraced his steps until he was at the pew in front of the one in which Sacha and his grandmother were, and came across to these odd members of the congregation.

He exchanged a few words in French with grandmother Bosarev; Sacha later discovered that he asked the old woman why she was hiding away, and after being told that she had been excommunicated for marrying a Protestant, he gave her words of consolation, telling her that the Church had moved forward since those days. He then waved towards one of the junior priests and instructed him to bring Holy Water, with which he marked the sign of the cross on Sacha's forehead, blessing him in the name of the Holy Trinity.

It was an odd adventure for Sacha, not only because the gloriously dressed man came to speak to them, but because he saw how happy it made his grandmother. Still, what he remembered of the sermon wasn't any more exciting than this one, because even though there was much more ceremony associated with it, he hadn't understood a word of it, which made the experience quite tedious, except for the last section, where he had briefly become the centre of all attention.

Not surprising after these two church experiences, Sacha decided that attendance at weekly services wasn't of any interest to him. He considered it a failed experiment, and a lesson well learned. To his astonishment, he was told early the following Sunday to get dressed for church. He declared that he had no interest in going again but was informed by his mother that when you go to church once, you then have to go all the time.

This took Sacha aback; it seemed like one of those rules of which he really should have been made aware before his first visit. "You didn't ask," his mother said almost gleefully when he dared to point that out. "You can't blame me for not knowing something when you don't find out first!"

Even at age seven, and knowing that parents in general, and mothers in particular, are entirely infallible and could never stoop to lying, he simply didn't believe that there was any such law, church-based or otherwise, compelling a one-time visitor to turn into a regular.

What annoyed him most was that church services were on Sundays. He attended school six days a week, although only half a day on Saturdays, so that Sunday was the only day without immutable commitments... until now. Henceforth, every day of the week contained obligations. And that wasn't the last of his surprises. Next came the announcement that he would be expected to walk to church and back. The way went past his school for about as much distance again, about three kilometres each way: quite a way for a seven-year-old boy.

And finally came the biggest shock: the Groschen for the donation plate was to come from his own money. Officially, he had very little money of his own, just the odd coin he could find lying in the street or was, very occasionally, given by an adult. Ten Pfennigs could buy you an ice cream, or other valued treats; it was a lot of money he was expected to donate from his own funds.

As always, there was no debate on the issues here; they were so decreed, and therefore they were thus. Simple. Even the idea of *not* making a donation was considered such an unspeakable crime that it wasn't worth consideration.

In fairness, it must be pointed out that Sacha, although timid and lacking in self-confidence, did have limits to his compliance. In fact, he had perfected the art of never lying – well, hardly ever, at any rate – while never actually answering any unspoken questions, a lesson clearly learned from his mother, thus allowing adults to continue under misapprehensions if they didn't ask the right sort of questions.

This subterfuge developed from necessity. Sacha's mother and stepfather weren't exactly poor, even though they tried to portray themselves as poverty-stricken. Both of them felt that the State owed them a great deal for the losses they had suffered as a result of the Nazi era and the war.

So, their choices in spending what money they had become rather odd. As little as possible was spent on the children: they really were a responsibility of the State... After all, as parents, they were doing the State a favour by bringing up the soldiers and nurses for the next World War.

All education and everything needed to assist it, down to the last pencil or clothes worn to school, were, in the eyes of the Drexler family (the name Sacha's mother had acquired by re-marriage), to be government funded. The fact that this led to untold embarrassment for Sacha as he was sent to school in rags,

and without the required school supplies, was of no concern to them: they fought for a higher goal, their victory over the State! If their son had to suffer as a result, then so be it. There are casualties in all battles, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Instead of spending their money as most other parents did, they spent theirs on such things as books. Reading was what the *intelligentsia* did with their time, and since they saw themselves as part of an intellectual elite – after all, they both suffered from Tuberculosis, a disease they claimed to be due to the fact that intellectuals chose to buy books with their first incomes after the war, instead of wasting money on food – they spent their time reading.

Books were treated as the highest prizes of civilisation. Each book purchased was ceremoniously covered with protective plastic sleeving, custom-made on each occasion, and never to be removed under any circumstances. A book, after having been read ten times, was still to look as it did when it was brand-new. The idea of actually marking a book, such as writing notes in it, was one of the great crimes against humanity. Those who did such unspeakable things were vulgar buffoons, who didn't deserve such a piece of art as a book. This applied as much to paperback pocket-books as to leather-bound volumes, their favourites.

Then there was a never-ending supply of patent medicines and other forms of quackery that money had to be spent on. This ranged from a Naturopath telling Sacha's mother that her period-related headaches were due to the amalgam in her teeth and that the best solution was to have *all* her teeth pulled, not just those poisoned with amalgam. Naturally this advice was followed, and, when she was barely thirty years old, all her teeth were replaced with a set of dentures.

Equally naturally, when this didn't solve the problem, she was told that the poisoning of the body had already progressed too far, and that other remedies were required. Much money was needed for those "other remedies," even though none worked any better than the radical removal of her teeth.

On the less extreme end of the scale, all manner of dietary supplements were purchased to keep the children healthy. This started with cod-liver oil which, although available in capsule form, had to be taken by the spoonful in liquid form,

even though it tasted absolutely vile; somehow, the lack of evil taste associated with capsules was equated to a lack of effectiveness.

Sacha fairly early in life arrived at the conclusion that his parents derived some sort of pleasure from causing him pain or discomfort. Watching him shudder in disgust every time he had a tablespoon of cod-liver oil forced into his mouth seemed to be a source of enjoyment for them, particularly since it was in such a “good cause.”

When his grandmother was still on the scene, he would be given a small square of chocolate to get the taste out of his mouth, even though that didn't actually work. But as soon as grandma Bosarev was gone, so was the chocolate, *as it wasn't healthy for the child to eat chocolate.*

Then there were tins containing iron supplements – which actually appeared to be super-fine iron dust – and a calcium supplement that tasted like dry sand, and which left the mouth dry for hours; no amount of liquid seemed to remove the substance as it clung to the tongue and the roof of the mouth. In fact, it seemed to repel any liquid, including saliva.

And so it went on. At one stage, Sacha was forced to eat eight spoons of supplements of this nature, one tasting more foul than the other, before he was allowed to get his breakfast. That, in turn, consisted of dry porridge-flakes with some cold skim milk. It was called *muesli* but had absolutely nothing to do with the pleasant mixture of fruit and nuts and cereals that later became associated with that name.

For a long time, there was no escape for Sacha. Survival meant consuming this all but indigestible diet, because he had no discretionary spending that would have allowed him to secure alternative foods while at school or while playing outside. Nor were any of the other foods in the house available to him; they were for the adults, whose nutritional requirements were apparently so different that they could safely eat bread-rolls with butter and jam for breakfast, even though that was poison for a young boy. But Sacha did find solutions to some of these problems. Nothing could save him from the morning ordeal of food supplements and dry-as-dust cereals, but he did manage to find ways of adding variety to his diet.

It started when Sacha's stepfather took a box of old clothes to a junk yard. The box was full of woollen garments (the Drexlers wouldn't lower themselves to wear clothes made from such inferior materials as cotton or, heaven forbid, any of the new man-made fibres), but the dealer wanted to classify the contents as *mixed rags*, which attracted a lesser price. A discussion ensued as to what certain raw materials were worth, and Sacha learned that wool was not in particularly high demand, but that scrap iron was.

And so he went into the scrap iron collection business. While his parents thought he was out at play, he went to bomb craters and dug out lumps of iron and transported them to the scrap monger's yard. This activity was exceedingly dangerous – there were still plenty of unexploded bombs and dangerous munitions to be found. Frequently, there were live rifle cartridges and once even a live hand grenade amongst the things he dragged to the yard on a cart he had bought from his first profits and which the scrap dealer allowed him to store at his yard near the airport.

This activity was also quite illegal: all that iron belonged to somebody, and just collecting it wasn't encouraged, even though there was a huge shortage of raw materials. Probably because of this shortage, most people looked the other way when they saw a little boy dragging a cart with scrap iron. Or perhaps it was that nobody thought that a child that young would be doing this without parental instructions.

And the activity was extremely detrimental to Sacha's health. By the age of nine, he had given himself a heart problem by putting too much strain on himself during those vital years of growth.

But above all, the activity was lucrative: Sacha had money beyond his wildest dreams, with which he indulged his main two hobbies. First amongst these was seeking out more substantial food than he received at home. He ate all manner of delicacies he would never otherwise enjoy, but in particular he soon became a connoisseur of sausages from vendors around the city of Freiburg. In the main railway station, he was prepared to pay the price of a platform ticket to get access to one particular seller who offered the most delicious Bockwurst (at the time, one had to buy a ticket just to get to the railway platforms, which made the purchase of a sausage there expensive). On market days, there were fried sausages

at certain stands around the Cathedral, and he knew exactly which were the most delicious and which best avoided. And in the centre of the city, at the Bertoldsbrunnen, there was a shop where hot Viennas could be bought with a serving of potato salad...

His second hobby, and the one that was probably more significant in the long run, was going to the movies. It was Sacha's favourite form of escapism. His parents did take him to the cinema every now and then – perhaps once or twice a year – when there



One of Sacha's earliest outings with his grandfather

was a film they considered educationally worthwhile. Those under consideration included wildlife documentaries and, very occasionally, films that would teach Sacha about how tough *the world out there* really was: films depicting children living in abject poverty, or being abused by their parents, or preferably both. The basic message here was to reinforce what Sacha considered to be the *Prince Charles Mythology*: the idea that Sacha was better off than just about any other child in the world.

He wasn't a virgin to the sheer entertainment value of the movies; as it so happened, he had inherited his love for the cinema (or perhaps learned it) from his grandfather. Opa Bosarev was an ardent movie-goer. What's more, he genuinely loved his grandson and enjoyed spending time with him, looking forward to his baby-sitting sessions.

He shared with his grandson all the childlike pleasures he had never really outgrown himself. It started when Sacha was still very small, when Opa would take him to the *Amerika-Haus*¹² and read Disney comic books to him. Comics were frowned upon at home, because, *as everyone knows*, there is no such thing as a talking animal, and especially none with speech appearing written in a bubble. The concept was just too ludicrous and educationally unsound.

But Opa didn't care; he was quite happy to share a bit of educationally unsound fantasy with Sacha. He read out the words, giving them different voices depending on the character, and remembering them from one session to the next, so that Mickey always sounded the same (albeit nothing like his movie original). Opa also explained each picture, pointing to special features like a character's hat rising into the air as a sign of the wearer's astonishment, and so on.

Unfortunately, this was a short-lived pleasure, as the librarians at the Amerika-Haus believed that their reading rooms were to remain in absolute silence, even when there were no other readers present. That rule, plus grandfather Bosarev's loud voice due to his deafness, earned them several warnings, and finally a ban.

Actually, it wasn't just the reading aloud which caused this; there was also a strong element of disapproval by one particular librarian towards all Germans. Clearly of German descent herself, she frequently made pointed remarks towards visitors of the centre, trying to direct them to newspaper articles that showed how great things were in America, and how laden with guilt the German population ought to be. There was something peculiarly American-looking about this woman, even though her near-perfect German made it clear that it was her native tongue, albeit somewhat curtailed in scope of expression due to years of neglect while in a foreign land. She looked old to Sacha, much older than his mother, perhaps slightly younger than his grandmother. Her hair was peculiarly styled, standing up high on her head in a permanent wave usually only seen in magazines from the other side of the Atlantic, and coloured very unnaturally. Her glasses were oddly angular and drawn up to points at the outside of the frames, reminding Sacha of a comic-book bat. Altogether, she looked frightening to Sacha: a figure of demonic authority likely to revisit him in nightmares someday, he imagined.

On the day he finally earned his ban, Opa Bosarev had asked, probably with justification, why she had chosen to be a librarian in the first place, and one representing her new country in what she obviously considered enemy territory, if she so hated the concept of libraries as such and being amongst hated foreigners on top of it. The question was caused by the woman shouting at him in German, which became ever more laced with American expressions as she worked herself

up into a frenzy, about how ‘*all you Germans*’ were apparently so inconsiderate as to go to a library to read the magazines instead of buying them in a paper-shop, so that the American authors could earn the income they were entitled to. The resulting ban probably came as no surprise to Opa.

This, in turn, led to a battle between father and daughter at home, because Opa started to buy the *Micky Maus* comics to read to his grandson at home. Sacha’s mother forbade her son’s mind being filled with *this sort of rubbish*, but for once grandfather Bosarev, who usually went along with most things to keep the peace, defied his daughter and kept sneaking the comics into the house. Sacha’s mother, in turn, was limited in how far she could push her objections, because at that time she was still quite ill, spending much time in hospitals and at a sanatorium, so that she depended on her parents to look after her son.

When Opa Bosarev was no longer in Freiburg a few years later, Sacha managed to continue his indulgence in comic books by making a subscription his one-and-only requested Christmas present. He didn’t actually receive the subscription, but an undertaking that his parents would regularly buy him his comic book; an undertaking which, although associated with much blackmail and regular disapproval, was generally kept, although there were occasional denials merely to prove that it was at their absolute discretion to do so.

However, even that undertaking eventually turned into one of those ‘*learning experiences*’ that seemed to be part of Sacha’s young life. For Christmas of 1956, when Sacha was eight, he once again requested his annual subscription to *Micky Maus*, but was told that he was getting a little old for it. Still, after much argument, his parents relented, stating that next year they would have to have a serious talk about it; after all, he would be nine by then.

As it turned out, the regular purchases suddenly, and without warning, ceased six weeks later, in February, when Sacha turned nine. When he inquired that week whether the comic book had been bought, he was told that he wasn’t going to get it any longer; after all, the agreement was that he would stop reading this rubbish when he was nine. Sacha tried to point out that the Christmas present had been for a one-year subscription, and that a one-month supply of comics was hardly a fair Christmas present, but this was an argument for which his parents

showed absolutely no understanding. And when he reminded them that the other part of the deal was that they had agreed *to talk about it again* next Christmas, he was told that his parents' recollection differed from his own, and that obviously the recollection of the adults was to be taken as the correct version...

Back when Opa Bosarev still lived in Freiburg he regularly took Sacha for walks. With the visits to the Amerika-Haus no longer on the agenda, he began to take Sacha to the cinema instead, where they saw movies for sheer entertainment, rather than educational value. There was an unspoken pact between grandfather and grandson that such visits were their secret. If questioned at home, Sacha would report on where they had walked, what they had seen, whom they had talked to, but always leaving out any information relating to the cinema visits. This was how he learned not to answer questions that hadn't been specifically put. He would not have lied, but the truth he told wasn't necessarily the *whole* truth.

These excursions with grandfather were always a pleasure for Sacha. Apart from being taken to the movies – sometimes to see films especially selected for his enjoyment, sometimes those that had a more adult appeal – there were always certain treats in store for him. In particular, Opa Bosarev indulged in two types of sweets, one of which was sticky sugared dates, the other little cones of desiccated coconut flakes, which came in white, pink, and brown. The different colours were meant to indicate flavours, but they couldn't taste the difference. Whenever Sacha was out with Opa, these treats were shared perfectly evenly: for each one eaten by Opa himself, Sacha received one as well. That made Sacha feel taken seriously; he was treated as an equal, even though he was a child holding his grandfather's hand.

All this contributed to Sacha's love for the cinema. So, when he no longer lived with Opa and Oma, and these visits to the movies stopped, or at least were again reduced to a once-in-a-blue-moon educational enterprise, he spent much of his hard-earned money on going to the cinema. His favourite films were those showing faraway places. It didn't matter whether it was a romance, or crime stories, or Westerns: as long as the action took place in America, or France, or Britain, or Italy, and as long as it showed a world that was different from his own, he was fascinated by it. So, from very early in his life, Sacha sought escape from

the world he was in, and especially from the world that was dominated by his mother and stepfather.

As part of that escape, and clearly influenced by advertising, particularly that in the cinemas, Sacha commenced smoking at a very early age. It was the *cool* thing to do, the thing that brought one closer to emancipation from parents, where you could make your own decisions, where you could leave your parents' world behind and escape into the great big world beyond the horizon. Standing at the window of their apartment in Freiburg, Sacha could see past the *Bundesstraße*,¹³ past the ancient cemetery, past the airport in the distance to a foggy outline of mountains far, far away. In reality, the Vosges mountains, were only about forty kilometres away but they were on the other side of the Rhine, in a different country: in France.

And beyond that, undoubtedly, lay another world, with a different horizon, beyond which were different people and cities again. Sacha didn't really care how different that world was, as long as it was different, and as long as it was away from where he was now!

His first adventures in smoking involved a cigarette called *Bali*. There were many reasons why this was his first. For one thing, there was the name – *Bali* – which conjured up a tropical island perpetually warm and sunny, with Cocos Palms and happy people, as he had seen in the cinema advertising. It was about as far away from Freiburg as one could get, on the other side of the globe, which added to the attraction. Equally importantly, the smallest pack contained only three cigarettes. This was important for several reasons: firstly, the price-factor (even though Sacha earned well with his scrap iron collecting, cigarettes were still expensive); and, more significantly, the size.

Sacha lived in a world without privacy, at least for children. While there were many places in the apartment that were strictly off-limit to children, he had absolutely no right to privacy at all. Parents, in their absolute discretion, had the right to search or investigate anything associated with him. That meant that a packet of cigarettes had to be consumed in one session, and three was probably the limit for that. Alternatively, the remaining cigarettes had to be hidden somewhere outside the apartment, but of course there was no guarantee that any

valuables thus hidden would still be there when occasion arose to search for them again.

One technique of secreting items was to find out who in the apartment building was on holidays, and for how long. During the time of their absence, one could go to the attic, where each household had a storage space surrounded by a wooden enclosure: a sort of lattice fence too tall to jump, too weak to be secure, but generally accepted as an indicator of terrain not to be trespassed upon.

This wooden latticework could be used to tape belongings to: one could easily tape a pack of cigarettes, or even an envelope of money, so that it couldn't be seen from the outside. But, of course, it was risky to use such hiding places when the family was in residence, because any visit to the attic might reveal the contraband to them.

The problem with *Bali* cigarettes was that they were made of very dark tobacco, probably better suited to the experienced smoker than a seven-year-old beginner. So, when Sacha became more proficient at finding hiding places, he switched to *Peter Stuyvesant*, which advertised itself as having the "*Duft der großen weiten Welt*" ("the aroma of the great wide world"). They were advertised showing glamorous people in smart settings around the world: New York, London, Paris. It was the sentiment that hooked Sacha; the flavour was secondary.

In spite of cigarettes, cinema, and supplemental food, Sacha never quite exhausted the money earned from his scrap metal business. The *Groschen* to be donated to the church wasn't really a great imposition on Sacha's finances, nor was it too difficult for him to pay for the tram if he chose to take it instead of walking. But his parents didn't know that, and it outraged Sacha that they, imagining that he had only access to very limited amounts of money, expected him to make the sacrifice himself, especially for church, attendance at which was against his wishes.

It was, of course, all part of his parents' way of '*teaching him the value of money.*' This all started at the age of five, when his grandparents made the mistake of giving him a Five-Mark coin so that he could buy himself a toy of his own choosing. Instead of being allowed to spend the money, it was decreed that this was a wonderful opportunity to learn how saving was beneficial. It was explained to Sacha that if he put the money in a bank, he would receive interest,

and then could withdraw more than he had deposited. This, of course, sounded quite appealing. So, with great ceremony, he was taken to the *Sparkasse*,¹⁴ forms were filled out in his name, but requiring his parents' signatures for any withdrawals, and he was given his savings account book in which any additional deposits, and, most importantly, the interest payments received were to be recorded.

About a month later, a long time later for a five-year-old, Sacha asked whether he could now withdraw the money, plus the extra received for putting it in the bank, so that he could finally buy himself that birthday present for which the money had been intended. His mother just laughed at his youthful impatience: he would have to wait much, much longer before he could get his money again. In fact, the minimum period was two years, at which point, with the two percent interest he was getting, he would have earned two whole *Groschen* in addition to his original money.

Sacha was stunned. At that young age, a year is a long, long time to wait, and for that he would get his original money plus the price of an ice-cream cone? He had indeed learned a valuable lesson: *never* save your money, because you miss out on the gratification of a new toy in favour of the highly questionable benefit of buying it after inflation had pushed up the price...

He learned a follow-up lesson years later, when he remembered the account and was told that it had been closed, and the money had been spent very wisely on his behalf, to buy schoolbooks.

At the time of his '*valuable learning experience*' related to going to church, he was tempted to ask his mother whether he could take the *Groschen* for the donation out of his savings account, but he thought better of it, as such a dig at parental authority was bound to be seen as impertinence and could only lead to punishment. So he left for church, walked down the road to the cemetery entrance, the first tram stop beyond his parents' view, and took the tram to the city, where he went to the cinema for a matinee. There was little choice for those Sunday morning performances, but there was a Western, and watching the good guys shooting it out with the bad guys definitely made '*going to church*' bearable.

There was, of course, a slight problem when he came home and was asked what the sermon was all about. But he had rehearsed his answer in

anticipation, quoting in some detail what had been the subject of RE class that week. He got away with it, because his parents weren't actually interested in any religious content and just wanted evidence that he had been obedient.

So, through the coincidence of having acquired a Protestant stepfather and the consequent enrolment in Protestant RE at primary school, and having attended perhaps two or three Protestant church services and only one Catholic one, the Catholic-baptized Sacha Rotschild was told by his class teacher where the Protestants had gone for this second session of his first day at school in Karlsbach.

A New Start – Part IV

Antecedents

After *Religion* came *Sports*, which was a double session straddling the lunch break. This arrangement wasn't popular, not even amongst the sports-minded, because nothing was valued more than the two break-times: fifteen minutes at morning tea, and thirty minutes at lunch. These were times to catch up and, on Mondays, allowed students to bring each other up-to-date on events over the weekend. It was also where trades were made for hints on homework, or where last-minute corrections were made, or other people's homework surreptitiously copied.

Therefore, it wasn't surprising that the pupils meandered, rather than moving with purpose towards the gym. The sports teachers – one for the boys and one for the girls – had little control over this movement, particularly since two or three parallel classes were involved in order to increase the numbers for more worthwhile competitions. After making some initial efforts towards speeding up the process, the teachers gave up and openly flirted with each other, rather than paying attention to the mass movement. That drew some attention from the students since the boys' teacher was easily old enough to be his colleague's father; she seemed barely out of school herself.

The trip involved moving along the *Bahnhofstraße* past a church, then at an angle towards the river near which the Stifter¹⁵ Primary School's sports hall was located, which they had to use because the high school was so overcrowded that its former sports facilities had long ago been converted into classrooms.

Some of the Protestant students now made an effort to communicate with him, making him feel less isolated than he had felt at the beginning of the day. In the *Religion* class, the pastor had taken the time to introduce him to the others, giving him an opportunity to say a few words about where he had come from, what his interests were, and so on. Sacha found that "opportunity" rather embarrassing. Knowing, as he did, how utterly insignificant he was, and how

completely irrelevant to others was anything that was of concern to him, he far preferred to stay quietly in the background than be the centre of that sort of attention.

But the pastor had insisted and, in a kindly way, guided him through the ordeal. Pastor Kemp was in charge of the local congregation, and as an experienced minister as well as a qualified teacher, he knew how to ease a new member into the group. So Sacha spent the way to the sports hall chatting with some of the others who, in turn, introduced him to some of their Catholic friends, so that he began to feel a lot more comfortable in his new environment.

All this came to an abrupt end after their one-and-a-half-kilometre journey to the Primary School. There, the sports teacher approached him with a gruff: "Where is your sports kit? Are you too stupid to bring it on Sports Day? Don't you know you aren't allowed to wear street shoes in the hall?"

Sacha, now somewhat emboldened by the quick acceptance amongst his fellow students, and due to the righteousness of his cause, managed, "It's my first day at this school, and nobody told me that we'd have Sports today."

"Oh, one of those!" retorted Mr Eckert, the teacher, dismissively. And, with that one sentence, he had set the scene for their relationship for all of Sacha's remaining years at the school. He had taken an instant dislike to the boy, and, having had that sort of experience a number of times in the past, Sacha heartily and equally reciprocated permanently. Sacha had wanted to make a fresh start with PE in Karlsbach, but that was no longer going to happen now.

Sacha had loved Sports right from when he first attended primary school. In the second class, he was one of the better pupils to be selected for a demonstration of sporting activities in schools at the time, which was organized for some dignitaries and researchers. But this love of physical activity came to an end late in the year in which he turned nine. It had already been a momentous year in many ways, but it came to a climax in November during a PE class.

Sacha had just climbed a short rope. This was something he always had problems with because he had poor technique: either he would get the hand-movements right and forget to clamp down with his legs, or he would get his legs right but somehow not get them properly coordinated with his hands. But on this occasion he had finally mastered it, when somebody took him in a bear-hug from

behind. It had to be the teacher, or another adult, because none of the others would have had enough strength to squeeze him that hard around the chest. Even then, Sacha wondered how the person managed it because up on the rope he was well above the reach of even an adult. Sacha assumed it was some sort of joke, some horseplay he had not previously encountered, but whoever it was seemed not to know his own strength. “Let go,” he shouted a couple of times, then he blacked out.

He came to his senses briefly, lying on the wooden floor, a taste of blood in his mouth and very sore lungs. Several adults were standing over him, and he could hear them talk in the distance, but couldn’t make out what they said. Then he blacked out again.

The next time he awoke, he was in a hospital bed. His mother was there and, for once, she actually seemed concerned, rather than shouting at him for having done something stupid. That would probably come later; his mother usually acted very kindly when others were present. It was part of her strategy *to sort things out in the privacy of one’s home, which was so much more dignified than resolving disputes in public.*

Sacha was released from hospital a week or so later, but simply to be transferred into his mother’s care. Having been a highly qualified nurse, she was given permission to look after her son at home. Sacha often wondered whether that choice had been made because it was cheaper that way, or because she thought she could actually do a better job herself.

Sacha spent another three months in bed. After his “episode with his heart”, he developed in quick succession measles, then mumps, then whooping cough, all of which left him generally very weak and with a permanent heart problem. Officially, it was a heart valve problem brought on by a growth spurt.

This illness had momentous consequences. For one thing, while he was in hospital, his parents apparently took the opportunity to go through all of his belongings to see which ones were suitable for *a child in his condition*. Sacha didn’t quite understand the logic of this, but he lost his football, which wasn’t any great loss, since there were increasingly fewer places where you could actually kick around a football when you lived in an inner-city apartment and when

everyone who could afford it wanted to buy a car, or a motorcycle, or, at the very least, a moped.

A few other equally meaningless toys fell victim to this purge, which was associated with a re-enforcement of the ten-toy-rule, but nothing of any great value to him was lost.

But in the process of these searches, Sacha's secret stack of money was discovered. At the time, it was a modest twenty-four Marks and sixty-five Pfennigs, and Sacha considered himself lucky that it was a (for him) relatively small amount due to his having indulged himself in recent times in a gondola-trip up the *Schauinsland*¹⁶ and a couple of books.

Still, he was interrogated, even in his state of illness, from whom he had *stolen* this money. That it couldn't be from them was clear, because they always knew to the last Pfennig how much there was in their wallets. Sacha had often been falsely accused of taking money, but the discrepancies were eventually resolved. Naturally, this didn't lead to any parental expressions of regret for having accused him falsely but it led to the accusations ceasing, because they had almost always been disproved.

However, even if Sacha hadn't stolen from them, he had to have stolen that money from somebody, and his parents demanded to know *before the police came knocking at their door*.

In his weakened state, Sacha confessed the truth: that he had earned the money by collecting scrap iron.

"Don't lie," came the predictable response. Every time he said something his parents found difficult to believe, their first response was to accuse him of lying. He normally didn't bother to argue about it since it was pointless to do so. But on this occasion, because of his weakness, Sacha actually did offer some evidence, telling them where they could find his cart, if they only chose to look there, and where he had sold the scrap, if they wanted to ask.

They wanted to, and they chose to; they found the cart, and they were told by the scrap merchant to get fucked when they attempted to question him about buying scrap metal from a little boy.

The latter wasn't conclusive but convinced Sacha's parents that this sort of response was likely to come from a person buying scrap from children. That,

combined with the physical evidence of the cart, convinced them. For once, they actually seemed to make the connection between their own stinginess and their son's overworking himself to earn some pocket money, and incredibly, as far as Sacha was concerned, they actually seemed to feel some guilt.

The next hurdle came when Sacha was questioned on how much he was earning that way, and what he had been spending his money on.

The simple fact was that such questions couldn't be answered truthfully. If he had admitted just how much he had earned per week, there was every likelihood that he would have been told that with so much spare money he should have made a contribution to his own upkeep; after all, they couldn't be expected to sacrifice themselves on his behalf if he had *that* much to throw around. Furthermore, he had wasted his resources instead of being sensible and saving. In fact, he probably would have lost his Christmas and birthday present entitlements as a way of teaching him a lesson that he should have spent his funds more wisely.

And that was of course another problem: just what had he spent his money on? He certainly couldn't tell them that he had been buying cigarettes, because the advertisements made him dream about being far, far away from them and their *educational* outlook on everything he did. Nor could he admit to regularly going to the cinema instead of church. Reform school would have been all but inevitable for that crime.

Contrary to what his parents apparently thought, Sacha wasn't a complete fool. He had long anticipated the possibility of discovery and had a carefully thought-out explanation which involved carefully selected phrases that established a truth of sorts. Everything he would say would be true, but it would not be the complete truth.

This included to admitting to four Marks per week by talking about a single transaction, rather than his overall income stream. This was far below his real earnings, but within a range of acceptable indulgences. That would include roughly one Mark for his weekly comic book, nearly two Marks for a cinema visit once per week (of course, not including Sunday Matinees, which were cheaper, so that claiming the higher afternoon prices automatically excluded any church-time related suspicions), and the rest would explain the cash he had on hand. He

appeared to be very frugal and saved much of his money: clearly a trait that deserved respect, not censure.

Surprisingly, his parents believed him. Probably because they assumed that in his drugged state he would be incapable of lying much, which was probably a correct assumption had Sacha not been so well prepared from before he even became ill.

Their decree on the matter was, as usual, an educational one. Having all but admitted a mistake by not giving him any pocket money at all, they now declared themselves willing to remedy that situation, and to give him 1 Mark per week. With that money, he could make a choice: either continue to buy his *silly comic books*, or save up his money, which would allow him to go to the cinema once every two weeks. When it was pointed out to them that associated costs, like tram fares, would make a cinema visit every second week impossible, he was told that he could only go every third week, which was quite enough.

Sacha couldn't help but feel that it really wasn't quite enough, considering that other families, including his own grandparents, had by now bought TV sets, and that children in those homes could daily see the great wide world, but he knew better than to debate the issue. Similarly, he resented this either-or choice of indulgences, not even taking into consideration his need for more enjoyable food than he received at home, but that issue too had to be left for the moment.

One thing was certain: his source of income to date had dried up, because after his parents' visit, he wouldn't be able to show his face at the scrap merchant's again. And that was quite apart from the fact that his cart had been confiscated and he had been given strict instructions never to engage in this particular money-making activity again. Even the family doctor had been dragged into that decision, and Sacha was told bluntly that he could kill himself by doing physical labour at this level at his age. Of course, neither the doctor nor his parents knew that this wasn't something Sacha feared.

When Sacha became well enough to go to school again, the 1 Mark per week pocket money did indeed commence. He was promised an increase every birthday after the original decision had been reached, but since that birthday came

in about three months, that was considered far too brief a time for the 1 Mark a week era to come to an end.

Naturally, the twenty-four Marks and sixty-five Pfennigs were never seen again.

After that episode, Sacha's health improved only gradually, and by the time the family moved to Karlsbach, Sacha was still very underweight and prone to illness. More importantly, his love for PE was gone. The first time he entered a gym again, he was struck by panic, with all the memories flooding back. He had never managed to shake the association between those typical smells of gyms – that mixture of sweat, chalk, cleaning materials, and goodness knows what else – and his memories of nearly having the life squeezed out of him.

He had wanted to make a fresh start in Karlsbach, but the smell of the sports hall, and the PE teacher's dismissive remarks, sealed the fate of that resolve.

But there was another reason why Sacha disliked Sports classes even when he enjoyed sports itself, and that was that he was circumcised.

To understand the logic of Sacha's circumcision, one has to understand the way Sacha's mother thought and the complex relationship she had with him.

Margareta Bosarev had always been a rebel. But she was quite unlike the heroic rebels of the cinema, with whom she liked to identify, or the monarchs portrayed in UFA¹⁷ films, with whom she liked to identify even more. The causes she championed seemed less important than what she was rebelling against, which led her to some questionable life choices.

It all began with a deep resentment she felt towards her father. That wasn't entirely his fault, but he represented his whole side of the family. The Bosarev family had had a glorious past, but no present. Some ancestral Bosarev had, apparently, been a courtier in St Petersburg, but had blown it all by getting into a dispute with the Tsar. This, according to Margareta's logic, was entirely unforgivable: he should have known his place and accepted it! *He should have kept his mouth shut!*

Even as one of the lower nobles, that ancestor was at least a nobleman, which put him way above the common folk to which he reduced himself and his family by giving up his position and fleeing to Germany. While at the court there

would have been at least a chance to advance, perhaps through recognition of merit, or through marriage, or simply through loyalty, but once out of the inner circle, he condemned all who followed – and that meant Margareta – to being common like everyone else.

What's more, in Margareta's youth, nobility had been abolished as such, which in practice meant that those who had titles could carry them without fear of losing them, without obligations, but with all the privileges of status still paid to anyone who could use a title of any kind. *That* was what Great-Great-Grandfather, through his obstinacy, had thrown away: *her* birthright!

She had never met this ancestor, and she didn't know what the dispute was about, nor did she ever make any effort to find out; it didn't matter. Nor, for that matter, did it matter how they came by the lost title in the first instance: perhaps as a result of bribery and corruption? Perhaps through backstabbing and deceit, which was a common way to advance in the Court of St Petersburg? All that was important was that he had failed in protecting her status in life.

And that was only the beginning of the sins of Bosarevs.

When Great-Great-Grandfather Bosarev fled from Russia, he managed to bring with him enough jewellery to start a major textile trading company in Nuremberg. The business flourished, and the wealth of coming generations seemed assured, until disaster struck. This disaster came in form of Margareta's Grandmother Olga.

Margareta's Grandfather Bosarev had, perhaps in his own attempt at regaining some of the lost status, married the youngest, and most spoilt, daughter of another Russian nobleman. She came with a generous dowry and entry to all the right circles in Russia, which also opened many doors in Germany. But her ability to spend went far beyond the resources she brought into her marriage. Her entire dowry went on a single tiara which she fancied for a ball, and which, after the ball, she gave away, together with her ball gown, to a friend who had fallen on hard times, and who had nothing new to wear for the next ball.

Olga Bosarev's wastefulness was legendary. Through it, she managed to ruin her husband's business and drive him into an early grave: he died at a relatively young age of a heart attack, which many saw as quite literally a broken heart over the loss of his trading empire.

At the time of bankruptcy, Margareta's father was still a young man, who had only just married. Because the house which Grandfather Bosarev had given the young couple after their wedding was part of the bankrupt business, they ended up having to share the last real estate left: the house in which Olga Bosarev resided like a queen without a court. With nobody to do her bidding, and with ever fewer items to pawn or sell, she turned Margareta's mother into her personal servant, cook, housekeeper, and cleaner all in one.

Margareta vaguely remembered those days when she, as a child, was constantly admonished to remain silent in order that her grandmother wouldn't be disturbed. She vaguely remembered having to curtsy when approaching the old woman, and having to back away from her, rather than walking away as one would with anybody else.

All of that happened very early in Margareta's childhood. In fact, it wasn't really clear how much of what she remembered was real, and what was based on imagination, because her father had taken the young family away from Nuremberg and into the Black Forest, where he had found employment as electrician: at that time, one of the better jobs to which one could aspire as it required much scientific knowledge and practical skill. Indeed, it was more a form of engineering than of trade.

In fact, Margareta's father was something of a genius, who invented things to overcome any given problems, who could solve problems and design solutions where others had long given up. And he could do all that with the limited resources available to him in an impoverished post-World War One Germany.

Yet Margareta resented that she was the daughter of a mere employee, not of an employer, as her father's ancestors had all been. She blamed her father for this, even though the loss of family wealth could hardly be placed at his feet.

The only real accusation that might have had some merit was her father's inability to profit from his own genius. He was a technician and a scientist, but he had no brain for business, so he just did his work without ever being aware that others took his ideas and turned them into wealth and recognition.

If that was an unforgivable sin in Margareta's eyes, his Communist leanings sealed his fate as far as his daughter was concerned. Far from siding with

those the Communists had butchered in Russia, far from seeing the damage done to his own class, he actually saw the merit of Communist philosophy, of each giving according to his abilities, and each taking according to his needs.

Margareta was definitely *not* egalitarian. And since she couldn't be better than the rest of society by virtue of a recognized title and associated status, she became attracted to the concept of the "master race", which, at least, put her into some sort of elite. Even better, it was a philosophy opposed to her father's.

She had all the

attributes considered desirable by the regime. In spite of her foreign name, her *Ahnenpass*¹⁸ established that she was of Aryan lineage to a surprising extent: the Bosarevs had originally come from Germany, and that they had carefully intermarried only with others of similar origins.



Margareta shortly before World War Two

Also, she looked the part. Physically fit, with rosy cheeks and long hair in plaits, often rolled up neatly behind her head, she looked like a poster-child for the German youth that the Führer desired. She was intelligent but accepted the need for discipline and, as a result, was completely obedient. No wonder she not only fitted well into the BDM,¹⁹ but actually thrived in it. She gained status and volunteered to join the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* as soon as she could (the RAD was a female equivalent to the armed forces but restricted to non-military support duties).

In the process of joining the RAD, she volunteered to accept a *Not-Abitur* (a high school diploma without examination which also involved skipping the last year of schooling). She kept this personal history hidden from Sacha. According to her version, she got her Abitur as a prize-winning student, and she loved to show her son some of her carefully selected school reports which indeed showed very high grades and equally good teacher comments. That one could read

between the lines to recognise the political comments in the teacher praise was something she carefully avoided mentioning.

Ostensibly, these regular demonstrations of her own scholastic achievements were meant to act as an incentive for Sacha to do better at school, but he suspected that it had more to do with her desire to demonstrate his inferiority than with anything else.

Margareta volunteered for one assignment after another. When there was a shortage of nurses, she volunteered to become one, and was promptly given elite training. When there was a shortage of firemen as the war progressed, and whole city blocks were set alight by incendiary bombing, she volunteered to spend her spare time as a fire fighter. In this way, she drifted into being, rather than designed to be, an active supporter of what the National Socialists stood for. She received public accolades for her devotion to duty, particularly since her combination of intelligence and sense of obedience made her very good at what she did.



Margareta during the war

Her big awakening came in February 1945 with the bombing of Dresden, where she was stationed at the time. Involved in the evacuation of patients and the subsequent fight against the fire, it suddenly dawned on her that the war was over, no matter what assurances came from the *Gröfaz*.²⁰ She awoke as if from a trance, beginning to think about, rather than merely accept, what was likely to happen next.

Aged twenty-two at that time, she could be held only marginally responsible for her part in the last five years of the war. But she did realize that, in the heat of the moment, this logic wouldn't necessarily save her, and that the collection of medals and award-certificates she had received over the years could make her look rather more devoted to the Führer than she really was.

So, she set about to reinvent herself as quickly as possible. With her place of work destroyed, she sought to escape to the West, away from where *der Iwan* (a disparaging nickname for the Russians) was going to be, and back

towards her own *Heimat*²¹ in the Black Forest. She briefly contemplated getting rid of her Nazi medals and references but decided against it. They might still come in handy, because strictly speaking her escape could have been interpreted as desertion.

With a couple of close girlfriends, and few possessions, she hiked home. They travelled mainly on goods trains, which was highly illegal, but by that time order had broken down so much that the trains were filled to the brim with the homeless, soldiers on the way to nowhere, refugees from the Russians, and many others.

In Freiburg, where her parents now lived, Margareta discovered to both her horror and delight that her parents had been anything but good Hitler supporters. Her father, completely disregarding what it could have done to her career, actively supported a number of Jews. He kept a treasure box for a jeweller who had fled to Switzerland; in it, apart from his tools, was apparently a fortune in raw and polished diamonds. He also participated in hiding and feeding a number of others who hadn't managed to escape. Margareta's mother didn't share his anti-Nazi sentiments, but saw a Christian duty in helping unfortunate Jewish citizens, which made her wholeheartedly support her husband.

It briefly occurred to Margareta to probe a little more deeply, because while the existence of the box was quickly revealed to her (probably to test how she would react), its actual location wasn't. If she knew where it was, perhaps she could bribe her way through Switzerland into America. She had heard of others doing that. And besides, the owner was probably dead anyway.

But she quickly abandoned that idea. It would have been too risky a venture and, while she disliked her father, she didn't want anything to happen to her mother. And even her dislike for her father wasn't great enough to want to see him get into trouble with the authorities.

Her parents were quite safe in revealing their secret activities to her because, short of reporting them, there was nothing Margareta could do about it. And she wouldn't report them, because that could reflect badly on her: she might not be believed if she insisted that she knew nothing about it. So, her silence was assured.

The main reason they told their daughter of their pro-Jewish activities was that they needed to explain their daily visits to a half-ruined building not far from their home. There, her services as a nurse were urgently needed because there her parents, and a couple of other like-minded people, kept alive a Jewish refugee.

The woman had been there since December 1944. A month earlier, heavy bombardment had destroyed many parts of Freiburg, and many citizens fled to the countryside, leaving the city only half populated. That meant that the woman's hideout in the country was suddenly occupied by its rightful owners, leaving her dangerously exposed, since even this late in the war there were plenty of believers still prepared to report a Jew. Her supporters brought her to the city and into a damp, cold ruin of a building, in which she continued to hide, supported by the Bosarevs and a few likeminded friends.

Her health was poor. She was weak from hunger and sickness and, so close to the end of the war, she was at risk of dying before she could finally be freed. This is where Margareta's delight at her parents' activities came in; for her, this woman represented an opportunity to demonstrate her humanity, and how she really was on the correct side of the new political situation as it would be quite soon. That the war was over was obvious to even the most ardent of war supporters. Unless the Führer could employ a secret weapon, which was the only hope a very few still held, this war was lost.

The Bosarevs secretly listened to the Allies' broadcasts, marking down on their atlas which parts of the continent were now occupied by them. In the race between the Soviets and the Western Allies, the Bosarevs, like everyone else, hoped to be conquered by the West, from whom they expected better treatment. They were relatively certain to be in the right occupation zone, unless the allies had a strategy: perhaps to let the Soviets take Austria and southern Germany, and the Western Allies the North?

But the progress they mapped in the atlas gradually reassured them that this was unlikely to be the case. Still, what would happen when the allies came? Would there be a final battle for the city? How many would die in the process? And how should they act themselves? Hide? Fight? Flee?

All the time, Margareta busied herself looking after her Jewess, as she called the unfortunate woman in spite of having been the last to join the group of helpers. She cared for her in any way she could with the limited resources available to her. She found her fresh bedding and clothing, and even managed to get her some soap and other supplies. But mainly, she relied on ancient herbal remedies.

She also, quite genuinely, sacrificed for this poor woman, whose suffering was beginning to reach Margareta's heart. She shared her own meagre rations, talked with her, listened to her stories, and genuinely shared in her grief for her lost family and friends; all people who, up until the peak of Hitler's excesses, had thought they were simply German citizens like everyone else.

Margareta genuinely began to question her own role in what had happened. She could see how she had blindly contributed to the suffering of such people, but she couldn't accept guilt for having been misled by those in power. In her view, she had been a pawn, not an officer.

For Freiburg, the war ended on 21 April, when French troops marched into the city. The feared final battle didn't eventuate, because the German garrison commander withdrew his troops,²² thus saving additional bloodshed.

The population waited in anticipation. They feared reprisals after the German terror in occupied France and the treatment of the French forced labourers in Freiburg. But there seemed to be discipline in the ranks of the occupiers, and few on the German side wanted to provoke anything else.

Margareta awaited the outcome of developments in the company of her parents, *her Jewess* by their side. The woman didn't seem to appreciate what was going on; she was in fear because the Bosarevs had taken her from her shelter and brought her to their own home. There were other people there, including Margareta's aunt and uncle, and Margareta's girlfriend: too many strangers for this woman, who hadn't seen more than one or two people at a time for several years. She wasn't quite sure why she was there. She could understand the words – that the French had come and were taking the city – but she couldn't quite appreciate yet that this was the end of her torment.

Margareta's carefully constructed plan came to fruition. As soon as she could, she donned her nurse's uniform and took her new Jewish friend to the

French authorities and explained the situation. Her own language skills came in handy here. She implored an officer to give the sick woman medical treatment and, to her astonishment, her request was granted, and the frail woman taken away to a field hospital.

Margareta offered to help. The officer quickly sized her up: she appeared to be a trained nurse, seemingly not a Nazi since she had cared for a Jewish woman, and with good French language skills. She was hired.

Her plans at self-rehabilitation progressed. She worked hard in her new job and was popular with her patients. This probably had a lot more to do with her being a healthy young woman of twenty-two amongst a lot of injured soldiers who hadn't had much female contact in a very long time, than with her abilities. But it didn't matter. They liked her, the German girl who spoke such good French, albeit with a cute accent, and as a result, they accepted their condition more readily.

The doctors liked her as well, because they knew that she would follow orders carefully and precisely, and that she was reliable. The fact that she was prepared to flirt with them was just a bonus.

Margareta knew that many saw her as a traitor; young women fraternising with occupation forces were never popular. But she didn't care; she had decided on which side her bread was buttered and followed through on her plans.

Her own isolation was overcome by involving her girlfriend Emma, one of the nurses with whom she had escaped from Dresden, and her sister Ilse in her new life by getting them jobs with the occupiers as well. And, as her own father was unemployed after the collapse of the former infrastructure, he too was given a job by the military administration. This was not quite as easy, because her father spoke no viable French. This came as a great surprise to nobody but him.

Gunter Bosarev was an exceptionally intelligent man, but very unworldly. Part of this distance from reality came from his poor hearing: even with a hearing aid, his hearing was not very good. In the final days of the war, when even he was drafted into service, he was quickly dismissed again, because, while standing guard, he was nearly run over by a German tank, the approach of which he had failed to hear even in the silence of the middle of the night. So, he

was dismissed as being more of a burden than a benefit in national defence. The fact that he had failed to hear the tank because he was far too deep in thought to pay attention to his military duties was something he was smart enough not to reveal.

Because of his deafness he often withdrew into a world of his own, a world of thought and imagination. While he was good at lip reading, and had enough hearing to conduct normal, although loud, one-on-one conversations with other people, he had difficulties hearing in groups or over distances. This made it difficult for him to attend lectures. But his drive to learn more was insatiable: if he saw something and was interested in it, he had to understand it. So grandfather Bosarev was a large consumer of correspondence education and of “teach yourself” books. And amongst the many things he tried to teach himself was the French language.

The pronunciation of the foreign words came from the phonetically written pronunciation guides. The problem was, of course, that never really having heard any words pronounced properly, the phonetic alphabet was merely a symbolic representation of something he only knew symbolically. So, his French was completely incomprehensible to anyone but himself.

That he could have asked his wife never occurred to him. Her own family had come from the German speaking part of Switzerland and, as was often the case with people of this background, she spoke not only perfect French but had beautiful pronunciation. Still, that was not something that registered with Gunter. So, when introduced to the French officer in charge of employing civilian workers, he made a complete fool of himself by trying out his language skills. But he got the job anyway, because he repaired in record time – and with exceptional skill – the electrical installations in a hangar that was going to be used as a service building for military vehicles.

In fixing the electrics, he not only showed great analytical skill in tracking down the faults, but also imagination in improvising solutions with limited resources, and presenting a final product that was not only effective and safe, but which far exceeded expectations. So he got a job, even though nobody understood his French, and communications mainly had to take place in writing.

Having surrounded herself with friends and relatives in the service of the occupation forces, Margareta considered herself relatively safe from the consequences of her former actions. But she hadn't quite reached her goal yet. She needed a way out of Freiburg and into a better world. Therefore, Margareta's next plan involved marrying an occupation soldier, so that she could exchange her German citizenship for another one; in the process, she would erase her former history. She dreamt of going to America, where she had aunts and uncles, or to South America, where it seemed perpetually sunny and beautiful from what she had seen in the movies, or to France, and preferably to one of its colonies; she thought that she could easily play the mistress of the house surrounded by native servants.

She continued to work particularly closely with Jewish patients. She had genuinely arrived at the conclusion that they were no different from anyone else, a discovery that had started with the Jewish woman her parents had aided. But she did believe that Jews were more likely to be wealthy. And besides, being close to Jewish patients proved just how non-Nazi she really was.

Still, the denazification hearings did not leave her out, and her story that she had been merely a "*Mitläufer*" (an unthinking follower) didn't seem sufficiently convincing. Judgement against her was a fine of twenty percent of her salary for the next three years, and she was put on probation.

It became clear just how important a marriage to a Frenchman would be to wipe the slate clean. So she continued to be friendly with the foreign soldiers, particularly those who were Jewish. Not surprisingly, she found her ideal man. He was a member of the elite 2^{ème} DB,²³ he was nice, he was intelligent, his family had a business in North Africa, and he was Jewish; and Margareta genuinely fell in love with him. The only problem was that the deprivations of fighting in West Africa, North Africa, and the European campaign had left him with tuberculosis, a disease with a slim chance of cure, and an alternative of quick death.

It went through Margareta's mind that marriage to this man was essentially a win-win situation: if he lived, she had her husband and a ticket out of her past; and if he died, she still gained French nationality and perhaps a war widow's pension.

She felt uneasy about these thoughts, because she loved him and wanted him alive, but one had to be practical, as these weren't times for too much sentimentality. She hoped for at least enough time with him that he could take her to his home.

They planned their life together. They were going to get married the following year, when he would be able to take her to his family. She looked forward to it; he described them as nice, hard-working people who loved nothing more than family. He, the eldest, was their favourite. To show Margareta some of the pleasures that were in store, he spoilt her with some of the Algerian products available to the soldiers. Rich red wine, dates and figs and, most amazingly, oranges of a size, flavour and juiciness she had never imagined possible.

Their time together was limited by her duties and his illness, but they savoured each opportunity to be together. Often, they simply sat, ate a baguette, cheese and fruit, while drinking wine, listening to music and making plans. But occasionally, their activities went beyond merely spending quiet time together and the inevitable happened: Margareta found herself pregnant. When honest with herself, she had to admit that there may, at least subconsciously, have been an element of design in this *accident* ... it was sure to seal their relationship.

And it came as predicted. As soon as Sacha Rotschild heard of his fiancée's pregnancy, he insisted on a wedding at the earliest possible opportunity: no child of his was going to be born out of wedlock. It wasn't until the wedding was being arranged that Margareta finally discovered that her soldier wasn't Jewish at all, as she had always assumed; in fact, he was Catholic. He was not particularly devout, but strongly enough to insist on a church wedding.

On discovering this, Margareta was rather taken aback; she had set her mind on marrying a Jew and now discovered that he wasn't one at all. She wasn't really sure why it had become something of an obsession with her to marry specifically a Jewish man, but it had.

Circumstances had rather taken her choice in this matter. She now pretty much had to marry her non-Jewish fiancé if she wanted to marry a foreign soldier at all; the only other alternative was to bring up her child as a single mother, which would have destroyed all of her plans. Still, she loved this man so that his

only flaw – his lack of adherence to a faith that would permanently prove her open-mindedness – was soon forgiven.

They sought, and received, his commander's permission to get married, even though marriage to local women was not encouraged. A military chaplain was seconded to conduct the ceremony, and they were soon married in a quiet ceremony in a hospital chapel. Few guests were present. Sacha Rotschild was accompanied by his friend and wartime comrade Georges, a man whose life he had saved several times during the fighting, and who had been his saviour on an equal number of occasions. His commander was present, which was slightly unusual, but that was all on his side. Margareta was accompanied by her girlfriend Emma, her sister Ilse, and by her parents.

The occasion was a joyous one. Margareta was genuinely happy to become Mrs Rotschild: she was in love *and* she had gained her ticket out of the mess in which the war had left her. Her parents were pleased for her, particularly since both had worried about her political leanings when she was younger. Ilse was pleased because, apart from attending her sister's wedding, she could also be near Georges, a handsome young man to whom she had been introduced by Sacha, and whom she was going to marry soon. And Emma was happy, because this wedding gave her hope as well.

The happiness of the event didn't last. The first blow came when Margareta's deteriorating health, originally thought to be a symptom of her pregnancy, finally forced her to be thoroughly examined. It was discovered that she, too, suffered from TB.

As the doctors had feared, the excitement of the wedding, the news of his wife's illness, his fears for his unborn child, and the enforced separation because of Margareta's own hospitalisation, proved too much stress for Sacha Rotschild. His illness worsened rapidly, and three months before the anticipated birth of his child, Sacha Rotschild died from tuberculosis.

Margareta was traumatized. Her husband, the man whom she had truly grown to love and admire, was no more. And with him went all her plans for a happy future and her plans for escape from the confines of her life and her past. On top of that, she was pregnant, and ill with the same disease that had just killed

her husband. She became obsessed with her health, her child; but mostly, she obsessed about her lost husband.

It was not surprising that she named her son after his father. But that just brought back all the grief for her lost love, and she determined that she would turn her son into a living monument to his father; he would be just as kind and gentle, just as strong and brave, just as smart, just as...

In fact, he could even be that much more than his father. He could gain that one quality that his father lacked, that of being Jewish. It took a good deal of effort, but she managed to convince a rabbi to conduct a Bris by not exactly telling him the precise circumstances of her situation and background, and he put down her lack of knowledge of Jewish ritual to having missed out on a proper Jewish upbringing during the Nazi era.

In her grief, in her weakened state, and in her obsession, Margareta didn't really think it through. She didn't realise that a Bris is not the Jewish equivalent of baptism, and that she couldn't convey a religion, let alone a race, on her son simply by performing this ritual. And so it came that Sacha's Bris was, in fact, nothing more than an entirely pointless circumcision.

And so it also came that in a post-war Germany, where children were still taught that this is how one recognises a Jew, Sacha Rotschild Jr ended up with the outward sign of a race and religion about which he knew nothing other than that many people still hated it.

And that is why he disliked all activities where he was forced to expose his genitals to others, such as during the communal toilet visits in primary school, where it escaped him why they all had to stand in a row to pee against a wall on command.

He equally hated the ritual of changing into, and out of, sports clothing, during which it was difficult not to expose oneself.

While he had been aware of being different *down there* for most of his life, he became particularly aware of it, and acutely embarrassed by it, at the youth camp where, at age nine, he had lost his virginity.

Due to their young ages, the children were not considered capable of looking after their own ablutions to the satisfaction of the adults. Because of this, there was the ritual of the communal shower every second evening during the

week, as well as on Sundays. On these occasions all children, first the boys and afterwards the girls, were herded into the showers where they had to strip naked and stand in a line, one behind the other, to be called one by one into one of the four shower cubicles.

Because the line was long, and space in the waiting area limited, the children had to stand quite close to each other. And, as Sacha discovered, even though his fellow campers were mostly still sexually immature, there was something of a pseudo-sexual obsession amongst them. As a result, one of the more popular annoyances perpetrated by the more socially inept members of the group was to shove the child ahead in the line, so that he would be pushed into the back of the child standing in front of him. This was then followed by taunting that the child just pushed was obviously a *homo* who was trying to stick his dick into the next boy's bum.

The game was hated by most, but relentlessly pursued by some with a reputation of being street kids. It sometimes came to near fights, which would attract the attention of the supervisors who would bring order into the ranks again, at least for a little while.

It was during this sort of horseplay that Sacha first heard remarks about his somewhat different genitals, but, as embarrassing as it was to have attention drawn to his most private parts, he tried to ignore it.

What made matters worse, though, was the showering routine itself. Each shower area was an elongated, tiled enclosure, with a small area for changing and drying off for people entitled to do so in privacy, and the shower itself more deeply inside the narrow room.

Of the four supervisors, the children preferred Hannah, the eldest of the women. Basically, she just stood in the outer enclosure, watching to make sure that the children washed properly. She seemed rather bored with the whole procedure, which suited the children just fine, because they could get on with quickly washing themselves and escape to the safety of their fully-dressed state as soon as possible. Hannah remained in her nurse's uniform, which would get wet from all the splashing, but which kept her as the authority figure to whom the children were accustomed.

The other three supervisors were young women in their twenties. All three of them attended the public washings in their bathing suits. Two of them, Gabriele and Karin, were generally considered okay as they tended to wash the younger children but let the older ones take care of themselves.

The one that none of the boys wanted to encounter in these circumstances was a young woman called Magdalene. She was usually one of the more popular supervisors: a bit younger than the others, more fun-loving, a happy girl whom one could easily get to giggle, and often prepared to go along with a bit of a prank.

But here in the showers, she was universally disliked. Her biggest problem was that she was completely hands-on; she washed the children herself, regardless of age or maturity, and no matter how capable a child might have been of looking after himself.

She placed herself right into the narrow shower area with each boy, which was a little disturbing, because boys whose sexuality had already awoken found it awkward to have this near-naked curvy young woman standing so close to them for so long.

She always started by washing the hair. After quickly wetting it, she would pour copious amounts of shampoo into her hands, then massage it into the victim's skull with great force. Sacha found this procedure very confusing. On one hand, he quite enjoyed, somewhat embarrassedly, the quite large, wobbling boobs in front of his face as she raised her arms to massage his skull; and on a number of occasions this sufficed to cause that familiar tingling in his groin that was the precursor to something he really didn't want to happen just here and now. But on the other hand, the claw-like grip with which she scratched across his scalp acted as a welcome, albeit painful, distraction to what was happening lower down.

The washing of the body followed along similar lines of firmness, by which soap was massaged into arms, chest and legs, then literally scraped off by hand, as if water alone couldn't remove it. Much of this was generally a blur, because the poor quality of the shampoo used and the ineptness with which Magdalene washed the shampoo out of Sacha's hair usually left him blinded for a little while.

Consciousness of his surroundings usually returned towards the end of the procedure when he had to lift a leg and rest the calf against Magdalene's slightly raised upper thigh, so that she could not only wash his foot, but also make sure that the space between each of the toes was thoroughly cleaned. After that, the process was repeated for the other foot. These awkward manoeuvres led to close physical contact beyond that within Sacha's comfort zone.

Throughout this washing of the feet, Sacha always felt particularly exposed. Bent slightly back to keep his balance, his leg wrenched upwards and outwards, his genitals felt particularly naked and exposed, just dangling in Magdalena's full view. The closeness of his foot to her crotch, the way her tits swayed as she bent forward in her labours, and that stirring in his groin returned with full force.

Still, what probably caused him the greatest discomfort was the knowledge and anticipation of what was to follow: a routine which he knew even before it was first applied to him, because it had become a main talking point amongst the boys in the dormitories at night.

Magdalene always followed the same pattern. While a boy's leg was still returning to the ground from her upper thigh, she would practically lunge at his genitals, wrapping her hand around whatever parts she could grab and pulling the boy closer to her. Usually, due to the overly hot water of the shower, a boy's balls would hang there freely to be easily grasped by Magdalene.

At that point it wasn't uncommon for a boy to let out a yelp, from the sudden pain and from being startled again and again each time it happened. That would usually lead to titters amongst those still waiting in line, and comments like *she's got another one by the balls*.

The act of Magdalena pulling a boy closer to herself seemed rather odd, since it could probably have just as easily been achieved through verbal communication or a non-verbal sign. In the other booths, Hannah never acknowledged the boys' small screams in any way, but Gabriele and Karin obviously knew what went on, because they would giggle or raise their eyes on such occasions, indicating both amusement and a recognition that it probably was not the most essential of communal shower activities.

Magdalene always commenced the thorough cleaning of the genitals by creating plenty of soap lather in her hands. Then, taking the tip of the penis between thumb and forefinger of her left hand with her little finger daintily extended to indicate the delicate nature of the operation, she would cup the boy's scrotum with her right hand in order to vigorously massage the soap into the skin. In the process, she not only squeezed his testicles very hard, but also rolled them around in her hand, making them press and rub against each other in a way that magnified the pain to maximum effect. This went on for some time, with any attempt, even if involuntary, by the boy to withdraw from the tormenting hand being rewarded with a sharp tug until he was back in place.

When she was finally satisfied that the boy's sac had been thoroughly disinfected, she pulled the boy around by the balls until the hot water cleaned away all soap residue. To make sure that no traces remained, she would twist and turn the bag until it had been thoroughly rinsed from all sides.

The boys often debated whether Magdalene was just a stupid cow who, because she was a girl, had no idea what it felt like to have your nuts pulled and squeezed, or whether she knew what she was doing, and just was a sadistic bitch. Yet another theory was that this behaviour was just another one of those leftovers from the war where anything that caused pain or discomfort was seen as giving strength of character and to toughen you up for the next conflict. Although hotly and frequently discussed, the boys never reached any consensus on this issue.

Next in the cleansing routine, Magdalene paid attention to the penis. She would concentrate on pulling back the foreskin until the head was completely exposed in order to wash the area underneath. The fact that Sacha, due to his circumcision, had no area hidden under a foreskin did not prevent Magdalene from pulling back hard on his penis skin, even if that didn't expose anything more.

Next, she rubbed soap into the organ with similar vigour with which she had previously treated the scrotum. She rubbed her right hand firmly back and forth on the shaft, from as far back as possible right to the end of the glans and then back again, while holding the loose skin back at the boy's body with her left hand. Soaped up as her hands were, this produced the exact sensations the older

boys knew from masturbating, while introducing the younger boys to sensations they had never known before.

Sacha found this acutely embarrassing. Being manipulated in this way by an attractive young woman in such close proximity could only result in making him erect and, on one occasion when Magdalene wore a particularly clingy bathing suit that allowed Sacha to clearly see her full breasts with their erect nipples before his eyes, it only took a few seconds for his arousal to go to the next level and reach its logical conclusion.

Sacha dearly hoped that, with all the soap suds and the steam from the hot shower, Magdalene had not noticed, but there seemed little chance of that. When she finished off her cleansing ritual by giving him a light slap on his sac, something she had not done before, he wondered whether that was an unspoken acknowledgement that she was perfectly aware of what had happened. Or, even though it didn't hurt too badly and certainly not in comparison with the ball-massage she gave him before, was the slap meant to be some sort of punishment? Had she actually intended to smack his nuts to teach him a lesson? Or was it just a meaningless coincidence?

That particular session ended as usual with a brief exposure to freezing cold water when the hot water was temporarily turned off. Apparently, this switch from hot to cold was healthy and invigorating; all the shower supervisors did it. It hadn't escaped the children that the supervisors themselves made sure that they were not near the water when it turned cold.

When a pat on his bottom indicated that it was time to get out, he quickly dashed out to the table with the towels, and quickly dried himself, dressed in great haste and left the shower area to find a place to be alone, because he was sure that everybody, adults and boys alike, knew what had happened.

Sacha analysed every comment made to him, and every unspoken signal, for days afterwards to see whether there was any irony to indicate that they were aware of his shameful orgasm, but if anybody did know, they didn't let on. Not even Magdalene behaved any differently towards him, rekindling the hope that his accident had gone unnoticed. But it left Sacha disturbed by the experience, embarrassed and humiliated, and it made him very wary of getting changed in public.

With this background, and the health problems he experienced later that same year, Sacha developed a thorough dislike for PE classes. That, and Mr Eckert's arrogant remarks during the first class, made certain that nothing came of Sacha's original attempt to give Sports classes another go.

A New Start – Part V

Not Again...

The first day dragged on, but finally the last lesson arrived: according to the timetable it was Ancient History. To everyone's surprise, Götter steamed in again, once more displaying his oddly jerky walk, eyes fixed on the ground about half a metre in front of him. Strangely, after all the impressions of the day, all the names Sacha was expected to remember, all the directions to various rooms which he had already forgotten, there was something comforting, almost familiar, in this teacher's strange entrance. As expected, he once again created the *Great Wall of Götter* with his briefcase. He called the roll, although he had already done so earlier in the day; Sacha suspected it was a way to kill a little time. To his surprise, Götter read out Sacha's name in the correct alphabetical place, indicating that the teacher had updated his roll book during the day. The surprise wasn't how organised the strange man was, but the familiarity with which he read out *the new boy's* name, so that Sacha almost failed to respond with the called for "present".

Herr Adalbert, the History teacher, was indisposed. "I could, of course, teach you Ancient History," Götter assured the class. "I dine with Plato and exchange poetry with Catullus," he continued, apparently to reassure the students but only succeeding in baffling them. "But I don't want to interfere with my colleague's lesson plan; therefore, we will discuss current affairs."

The class became restless as Götter, still hidden from view, began to read an article from *der Spiegel*.²⁴ Listening to an unseen speaker addressing complex issues of world affairs with a muffled voice in the last session of the day when everyone was tired and weary wasn't everybody's cup of tea.

Sacha began to find this human oddity entertaining, particularly when Götter began responding to the general unrest by hurling strange invective at particular students; one, apparently, was a *turbid cup*,²⁵ another *insanity's juicy prey*,²⁶ and yet another an *empty head with whipped cream and cherry on top*.²⁷

Sacha was so distracted by these weird expressions, and the fact that a teacher was throwing them around as if they were an ordinary part of everyday communication, that he nearly missed Götter asking him a question.

“Yes, you, the Jewish kid,” came another call from the teacher.

“He’s Protestant, not Jewish,” some of his classmates called out before Sacha could react. It was clear that calling somebody Jewish was considered an outrage, since the students wouldn’t otherwise have dared challenge a teacher’s statement this openly.

“Sorry,” Götter responded, “I mean the French kid.”

Sacha tensed. References by teachers to his nationality had never been good. It usually meant some sort of racist comment was to follow. Sacha became flushed with anxiety and Götter clearly recognized his mistake.

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” Götter said in what appeared to be a conciliatory tone, although it was a little hard to tell with him. “The French are a great nation with a rich history. Your people were the only ones for whom the *Wehrmacht*²⁸ had respect. Just look at it: we had problems hanging on to occupied France for three or four years because of the Resistance, while our own *Operation Werwolf*²⁹ is³⁰ so ineffective that we are still occupied fifteen years after the invasion by foreign troops. We have always been very good at following orders and fighting wars according to a grand plan, but the French have always been better at adapting to changing situations and, if necessary, fighting in small, independent units, rather than having to rely on orders from central command. This has been the advantage of the French military, especially since Napoleon. And all of that in addition to the great culture and philosophy of enlightenment we got from your people. Never be ashamed of your heritage, be proud of it. Anyway, how do you pronounce that word?”

“What word?” Sacha was sure this flood of positivity was merely meant to cover the faux pas of calling him *the Jewish kid*, but he had forgotten why he was called on in the first place. While one of his classmates was sent to bring him the newspaper from which Götter had been reading, Sacha quietly cringed at having been exposed as a hated foreigner again; this sort of outing by a teacher had led to taunts and bullying in the past, and his hope of making a fresh start without having his nationality playing a part was dashed now.

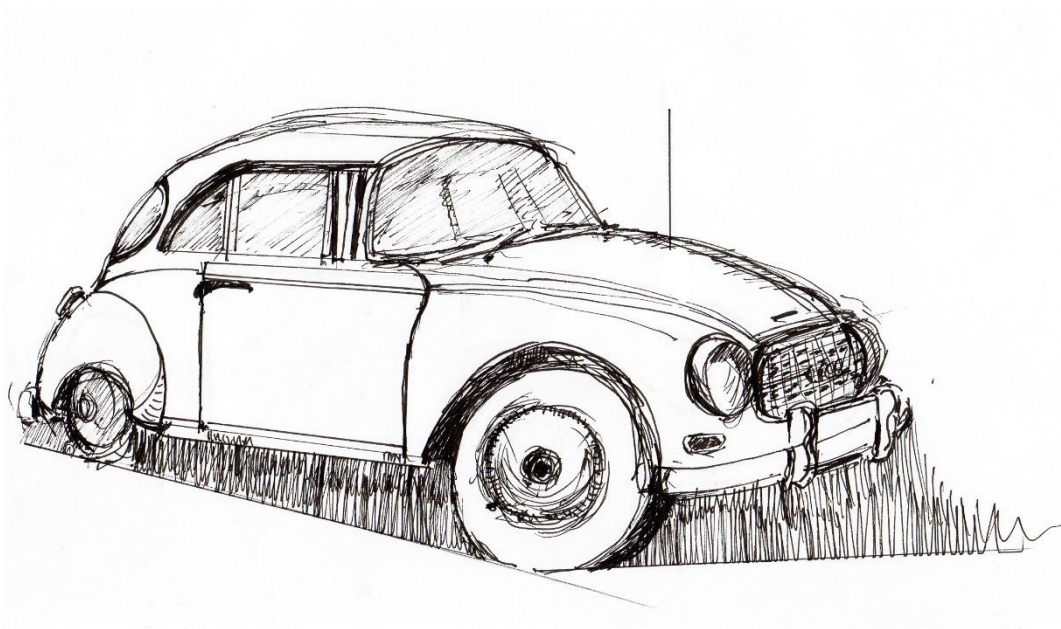
“So, how do you pronounce that?” Götter repeated when the girl with the newspaper finally reached him; the word just above her thumbnail was *guerrilla*. Sacha shrugged; he had never seen this word.³¹

“Like gorilla?” he ventured to suggest. Götter pointed to the newspaper and then his desk in what was obviously an instruction to return the paper. Once it was back in his hands, he continued to read a story about Fidel Castro while Sacha wished he could blend into the furniture; he felt as if the others now glanced at him suspiciously, because he had once more been exposed as a foreigner.

Eventually even this class ended, and with it what had seemed an interminable day at the new school. Sacha got ready for the torrent of taunts he would have to endure on the way out, but nothing happened. Most of his classmates just disappeared as quickly as they could, while others actually took care of him, making sure he knew how best to catch the bus home. In the process, they introduced him to other children, their friends and siblings, loading Sacha up with even more names he would immediately forget. But Sacha was happy; he had survived the first day at the new school, had been outed without any obvious ill-effects – at least not yet – and he discovered that most teachers are crazy no matter where you go to school. Overall, not such a bad day!

Karlsbach (Baden)

Part II



Breaking Point (1961)

I could always tell when it was one of those days, and today definitely was one of those days! In spite of my ability to sense the tension in the air, I could not quite work out on what this recognition was based. Today everything appeared to be normal, or at least as normal as things ever were around home. My mother had one of her migraines and had gone to bed. Beatrix, my youngest sister, was playing quietly somewhere; she was usually quite clingy and followed me around whenever I was at home, but she got used to giving me some time for homework in the late afternoon. While I was occupied with that, she amused herself somewhere away from me.

I worked at the very small kitchen table. It was bolted to the floor, making it awkward to slide onto the small L-shaped bench attached to the wall. This arrangement was necessary because the kitchen was so tiny that pieces of furniture could easily turn into obstructions if not fixed in place. My stepfather was sitting at the smaller end of the L to my left, and Ingrid, the older of my two sisters sat on a stool at the other end, doing her homework.

I wanted to write an essay for German, but that wasn't to be. Instead, my stepfather had suddenly taken it into his mind to help me with Latin. That, sadly, had become an all too frequent event, where my time was wasted with endlessly repetitive quizzes on vocabulary, including conjugations and declensions, cases, and whatever else he could find in the book. Reading from the text was, in fact, the only way he could help, since he had long forgotten any Latin he might have learned himself.

Latin was my Achilles heel: the only subject in which I performed poorly. I couldn't help feeling that the excruciating boredom associated with these mind-numbing vocabulary exercises, sometimes for hours at a time, was exactly why I found the subject so unappealing.

These tutoring sessions were a complete nuisance, particularly on a day like today when I had no Latin homework, but plenty for other subjects. The only thing this was going to achieve was to make my real homework suffer.

As a form of mental self-defence, I had developed an ability to reduce the attention I paid to my stepfather's voice; I likened it to dimming the lights to where I could just see what was going on, and using a minimum of power in the process. I managed to give answers to the drills while thinking about other things. Today, I was organizing the contents of my German essay while mindlessly repeating lists of words. It was all routine, but I couldn't shake that feeling...

"Lego, legis, legit, legimus, legitis, legunt," I rattled off when instructed to conjugate *legere*.

I followed that with "ogel, sigel, tigel, sumigel, sitigel, tnugel" when told to do it backwards: not original, but sufficiently obscure to get a laugh at school.

Shit, shit, shit... I had fallen victim to my own smart-arse tendencies! I developed this ability to conjugate backwards to annoy my teacher, who routinely demanded that we knew things '*forward and backward*'. Playing such games wasn't all that smart, because teachers rarely demonstrated a sense of humour, and it often got me into trouble. But I did it anyway because it kept me, and sometimes my fellow students, amused during boring classes.

But if it was stupid to do this at school, it was playing with fire at home. One of the many areas my parents took very seriously was our education. After all, as they frequently pointed out, how would we get good jobs to support them if we didn't do well at school? Of course, I was also frequently told that I would never amount to anything, but that apparently just proved that I had to work twice as hard to make anything of myself.

"I have told you seventeen thousand three hundred and eighty-five times not to be facetious," my stepfather shouted. Ridiculous exaggeration was one of his habits. Unlike other people who might use terms like '*millions of times*', he often used very specific numbers, and never the same number twice. If he had had any sense of humour, one could ascribe the exaggerations to that, but as I had never managed to discover such a sense, this odd quirk always remained a mystery to me.

And that it wasn't meant as a joke was perfectly clear from the accompanying action: I wasn't surprised when the knuckles of his fist smashed into my forehead. While it wasn't something that happened often – maybe once or twice a year – I half expected such a reaction after my faux pas. It was my stepfather's way of '*drumming some sense into my under-sized and undeveloped brain*'.

I checked my forehead for blood, but on this occasion the skin wasn't broken. It had happened a number of times when his wedding band hit just right. On the first occasion that blood ran into my eyes, he seemed genuinely remorseful, and actually apologised, contrary to the parental code of infallibility. But this rare bout of guilt didn't prevent the continuation of this particular educational reinforcement.

One good thing was that after this impertinence, my stepfather had lost interest in assisting me. He told me to be fluent in everything from page 212 onward of my Latin text by the next day, when I would be quizzed on it. I nodded then forgot about it: it would have taken me more than a day just to read the indicated third of the book, let alone remember it all. Besides, by tomorrow the matter would be forgotten. But at least I could get back to my real homework now.

Ingrid had looked up during the altercation, wondering what was going on. She couldn't understand what I had done wrong, nor why her father reacted in this manner. But she was used to his moods, and just resumed her exercises without comment. Sadly, raising her head had drawn her father's attention, and ire, which was never good. It was almost inevitable that she, as a witness to his outburst, would receive some sort of punishment for not minding her own business.

"Did you eat your pretzel at school?" came the unexpected and practically meaningless question. What was she going to say? That she only ate half of it and threw the rest away? She'd have to be an imbecile to admit something like that, even if it had happened.

"No," she responded, clearly without giving it enough thought. "I bought some Rose Pictures instead."

I was startled and astonished. What on earth was she doing? Buying Rose Pictures instead of using the fifteen Pfennigs to buy a pretzel for lunch was tantamount to stealing from her parents. 'It's the X-rays,' I thought, then immediately chided myself for thinking of this stupid family myth. It stemmed from when our mother was pregnant with Ingrid. Before our family doctor knew about it, he sent her for chest X-rays. She, with her medical training, should have known how important it was to tell him about the pregnancy, and she received a thorough dressing down when he finally discovered it. He shouted at her that the X-rays could damage the child, perhaps affect its brain function.

It was true that Ingrid was a disturbed child with some very unusual behaviours. And her parents blamed that on the X-rays. But medical science had moved on, and it was pointed out on many occasions that there was no likelihood of Ingrid having suffered damage from that particular X-ray examination. Instead, her odd behaviour was much more likely due to our mother not feeling capable of looking after a baby, which is why Ingrid was put into a children's home for well over a year immediately after her birth.

It was a dreadful place. I remembered visiting Ingrid once, finding her in a huge room crowded with cots. When we first arrived, she seemed bewildered and frightened. Even though I was only seven years old at the time, I was allowed to pick her up to cuddle her. After that, she didn't want to be placed back into her cot and practically fought to stay in my arms, grasping my shirt to hold on. As we left, she sat on her blanket, crying uncontrollably, reaching up with her arms to be picked up again. The image of this poor baby begging for some human contact haunted me.

I was not allowed to see her again at the home, because it was too upsetting for her. And even her parents only visited her a couple more times while she was there.

When she was finally brought home, she had already developed her peculiarities. She was incapable of looking anyone in the eyes, she was nervous and twitchy, given to early forms of masturbation, and she was constantly frightened and insecure. And even I, as a child, understood why she was that way. But for her parents, the X-rays were a far more palatable explanation than their own unwillingness to look after the child when she needed it. Nor did it help

Ingrid to feel more secure that she was frequently told that she was an accident, an unwanted child.

Whatever the causes, I was baffled by the stupidity of admitting her crime. I could never understand the fascination younger girls had with these Rose Pictures: little printed relief pictures of roses which were bought in small packets and then traded in school yards. Regardless of whether buying these pictures made sense, admitting to the misappropriation of lunch money was just sheer folly.

After a minute of silent contemplation, during which both Ingrid and I dared to hope that the matter might have passed without the expected outburst, her father suddenly jumped up and, with a speed of which I had thought him incapable, he lunged across the small table to slap Ingrid's face very hard. And this time, the wedding ring had an effect: her skin split, and blood ran down her cheek. She looked up in fright, her eyes filling with tears.

"Don't you dare make a head," her father snarled.

'Making a head' was one of the worst crimes we children could commit. But even after having heard that expression all my life, I still didn't know what it actually meant. Did showing fear after being hit in the face qualify? Apparently. In fact, just about any facial expression could provoke extreme annoyance in parents, as long as they interpreted it as something they didn't want to see; and that was called 'making a head'.

But what exactly was Ingrid's expression meant to be at this point? What was considered acceptable under these circumstances?

While I was still shocked by the ferocity of the verbal attack, my stepfather was on his feet and around the table, dragging Ingrid from her seat by her hair. He did so by grabbing a braid of hair tightly attached to her scalp.

This braid was ridiculous. Ingrid's hair really was far too short to be twisted into this shape, as a result of which it ended up so tightly pressed against her skin that it caused a skin rash. This was treated every night with an ointment which apparently caused stinging pain; in the morning, her scalp was washed and the braid put back in place to cause new irritation. Somehow, my mother's medical knowledge didn't suggest to her that the best cure for this problem wasn't

the application of a painful tincture, but letting the scalp breathe by ending the daily hair routines.

The hair style was so ugly that it made Ingrid the subject of much ridicule and bullying at school. One day she ended up in hospital for three weeks when, in an attempt to escape her tormentors, she was knocked down by a motor cycle. Still, as soon as she could go back to school, the braid was recreated. And today it served as a convenient handle by which to drag her off the seat. Once that was achieved, my stepfather changed his grip to a virtual claw-hold on her head, raining blows on her back with a fist. For a moment, I was frozen in horror. I wanted to intervene, but simply couldn't; thirteen years of indoctrination that children had to honour their parents had had their effect.

... and thirteen years of indoctrination that parents were always right, no matter how incomprehensible their actions.

... and thirteen years of indoctrination that children who spoke out against their parents would end up in Reform School, a sort of children's prison in which there was nothing but harsh discipline, work, sleep on a bed of straw, with bread and water as the only form of sustenance.

It took seconds for the series of blows to end as my stepfather exhausted himself, but it seemed like an eternity. Now, with his hand still firmly in Ingrid's hair, my stepfather's wild glances around the kitchen suggested that he was searching for some object, perhaps a stick or belt, with which to continue the punishment.

I felt trapped. Physically, behind the bolted table. And emotionally, not only because of my upbringing, but also because of my stepfather's 'get out of jail free card': his history as a victim of war.

Most of the time, I got on reasonably well with him. He was basically a kind and considerate man who meant well for his family, and helped others, especially those who were left wrecks by the war. He had personally suffered more than most. Wounded several times while at the Russian front, he had fallen into the hands of the Soviets. Because of his injuries, the field medics had removed half his rib-cage on one side, and several ribs on the other, as the shattered bones were beyond repair. It was makeshift surgery conducted by enemy medics who had no sympathy for the foreign patients in their care. Because of the

lack of hygiene in field hospitals, and the poor nutrition in the camp, it wasn't long before tuberculosis attacked his lungs. That left him weakened to the point where he was a drain on the resources of his captors. After four years of showing no improvement, one Russian soldier, in frustration, finally smashed his rifle-butt with such force into my stepfather's back that his lower spine was fractured, and his pelvic bones smashed to pieces. In this condition, more dead than alive, he was finally put on a train and shipped to Western Germany, where he could become a burden to the West rather than to the Soviets' allies in East Germany.

When his train reached its destination, the allied soldiers receiving it weren't sure whether he was still alive. They shipped him to a local hospital where, even though badly understaffed and underequipped, the doctors managed to revive him. Later they removed most of his lungs, which had been destroyed by TB.

Then his real suffering began. Because of the improved nutrition after years of hunger and physical neglect, his body now began to rebuild body mass quite rapidly. In the process, it trapped thousands of small bone fragments still floating around his body. When he was a little stronger, his body entered a phase where it attempted to expel all the debris by driving the fragments through the flesh by means of a build-up of white blood cells around them. But since there were so many fragments, it became an almost never-ending task of cleansing the numerous sores all over his torso. Every day his dressings had to be replaced at least twice, and his wounds, some as long as twenty to thirty centimetres, which had no chance of healing over even after all these years, had to be drained of the large quantities of pus his body constantly produced.

This physical turmoil was, not surprisingly, accompanied by excruciating pain. Nobody could touch him without causing more pain, which pretty much prevented any physical demonstrations of affection between him and his two daughters. His injuries were considered so severe that he wasn't expected to live much longer. To make things worse, he had become addicted to his medication, which affected his personality. He had been classified 185 percent war invalid, an almost unheard-of level of recognised disability. To cope with his pain, he was taking large quantities of painkillers, mostly opiates: it was the only way he could make it through each day.

There was no doubt that my stepfather was suffering unimaginably. And that was the reason why just about any of his actions had to be excused, no matter how irrational, bizarre, or unacceptable under other circumstances. And if I raised a hand against my stepfather, I could quite literally kill him. But I also knew that what I was seeing here was wrong and couldn't be allowed to go further.

"Stop it now," I implored my stepfather, "that's enough!"

My stepfather flashed at me with wild eyes. "You are next!" he screamed, clearly no longer in control of himself. I was horrified that I had made things even worse for Ingrid; it now looked as if in his rage her father was going to smash her face against the table.

"Enough!" I shouted. Things were spinning towards disaster, and in spite of my upbringing, in spite of any fear, I simply had to do something. Jammed behind the table, the only quick way out was across it. My schoolbooks and homework flew in wide arcs as I scrambled across with no idea what to do next. For a moment, it flashed through my mind that I was going to get into trouble for treating school things with such lack of care, as books in general – and schoolbooks in particular – were sacred objects.

My stepfather still had his hand in Ingrid's hair and was shaking her, her body limply following the directions in which her head was pushed and pulled. Instinctively, I went for his hand, grasping one of my stepfather's fingers and pulling it back until he let go of the hair. I saw him reach for something but didn't wait to see what it was; I grasped my screaming sister around her waist, dragging her out of the kitchen and into the combined living-room and bedroom, slamming the door behind us. I carefully placed Ingrid on the couch: the poor child was in spasms, as if she was having a seizure, and I hoped that it was just the excitement of the moment, as I had no idea what to do if it was anything worse. Only when her spasms finally subsided did I become conscious of her terrified screams, which gradually turned into uncontrollable sobs.

Eventually, I became aware of my own state, the speed and power with which my heart was pounding, and I remembered my heart problems of a few years ago. If I collapsed now, there would be nobody to protect my sisters. I tried to stay focussed even as my head felt as if it was exploding with the worst headache I had ever experienced. My vision blurred, but I had to stay alert.

Beatrix, who had observed our hurried entrance, now cried as well, afraid of what was happening. She stumbled to me to be picked up and comforted. I felt a huge responsibility, and I wasn't sure I was up to it; I had no idea what to do next. There was no lock on the door, and I expected my stepfather to burst in at any moment, perhaps armed with some weapon. I sat between my sisters, trying to calm them while preparing myself for the next chapter in today's saga.

But nothing happened.

At one stage, I heard my mother get up and join her husband in the kitchen. Nobody had left the apartment yet, and since there wasn't a telephone, I was sure that the police hadn't been contacted. But I fully expected to be arrested sooner or later for my rebellion, and for what would inevitably be seen as an attack on a disabled war hero.

But still nothing happened. I almost congratulated myself on predicting this disaster: I had known that it was going to be one of those days!

Or had I provoked it myself?

I pondered that for some time but kept coming to the conclusion that conjugating a verb backwards in a literal sense, while undoubtedly not taking parental authority seriously, did not justify the attack on Ingrid.

After an hour or so, both girls had calmed a little. Ingrid, who liked reading, was seeking escape in the fantasy world of one of her books, still jerking with a spasm from time to time and sobbing occasionally. Beatrix quietly played with a doll, frequently looking at me with a frightened expression, checking that I was still keeping her secure. Both sat tightly pressed against me, making it impossible for me to move.

Maybe two further hours had passed when the door suddenly opened and my stepfather entered the room. Ingrid whimpered and cowered into the couch behind me, while Beatrix climbed on my lap for safety, her arms tight around my neck. I would have preferred to have my hands free, but I couldn't bring myself to push Beatrix away. But my stepfather merely walked to a bookshelf and got some reading material, which he took into the parents' bedroom, leaving the door open as he exited.

My sisters and I looked at each other. We certainly hadn't expected this. I took the opportunity to go to the kitchen to see what state it was in. To my

surprise, I found my school books neatly stacked on the table, with Ingrid's homework equally neatly arranged next to it. My mother was busying herself with dinner, which was also unexpected since she usually left it to me to prepare a meal for the family when she had a migraine.

“Have you finished your homework?” she asked.

“N-no,” I stammered, surprised that this was her first topic of conversation.

“How is anything ever to become of you, if you are so irresponsible?” she chided me now. Again, I was baffled: had I neglected my responsibilities this afternoon?

I took the school things to the living room, where Ingrid and I got on with our homework in what was left of the daylight. I had to tolerate Beatrix on my lap, which made writing an essay doubly difficult, but since I couldn't really concentrate anyway, it probably made little difference. Sometime later we were called for dinner, as if nothing had happened.

The incident was never mentioned again.

Interlude

A Trip to the Cinema (1962)

“Get up!” It took Sacha some effort to let his mother’s voice penetrate his consciousness, even though she had shouted. This struck him as unusual, because commonly her threats tended to be uttered nearly inaudibly. She must have been trying to wake him for some time. “Do you have a test at school today?”

“No, no test,” he stammered. At least none that he would have counted. “Well, there is Maths,” he added for safety.

“All is lost,” his mother sighed with exaggerated exasperation. “If you are starting to wag school for Maths, then your fate is sealed. You might as well leave school now and get an apprenticeship; it would save a lot of money.” It was a typical black-or-white knee-jerk hyperbole. “You’ll never amount to anything!” she added.

He could barely hear her. Why was the music so loud? Where did it even come from? The family had a nice *Nordmende Turandot*,³² and he had added a record player, but neither was capable of producing the clarity and volume of sound that filled his head.

“Where is the noise coming from?” he asked.

“What noise?” was her response. The astonishment in her voice seemed genuine, mixed with a touch of suspicion: clearly, his mother saw some subterfuge on his part.

What radio station was this? It seemed to play in quick succession a series of his least favourite songs, clearly and loudly. How did so much music fit into the brief period since he awoke? Sacha felt his mother’s hand on his forehead. “There is something wrong,” she said, still sounding angry. “What did you do?”

She disappeared for a moment to return with a thermometer: oddly, the one for oral use; normally, she preferred the anal thermometer, probably as a

deterrent to getting sick in the first place. Or perhaps she just enjoyed the humiliation she could inflict on the children in the name of medicine. Not today.

“Over 40,” he heard her say, even though he was unaware that any measurement had taken place. “I’m calling Dr Renner.” Sacha fell into a deep but troubled sleep. He heard his mother telling him time and again how he had no future. What apprenticeship did she have in mind for him? And why did this dreadful music continue to dominate his mind even in his sleep?

Whenever the noise subsided a little, nightmares took over. They contained non-specific terrors – a sort of blackness that threatened to flood him – but then he was distracted again by the music. He vaguely remembered the presence of the family doctor. He couldn’t remember speaking with him, or being examined. He was given some pills, but they had no effect; at least none he could discern. After that he fell back into night terrors, occasionally interrupted by brief moments of lucidity when he awoke drenched in sweat, only to restart the cycle. And all the time the unknown music source played *Schnulzen*.³³

After much time – it was probably a few days – he began to recognise a pattern. Whenever his dreams took him towards the darkness, the music increased in volume and he was driven away from the danger zone. The music continued to play even after that, but the volume receded to a more tolerable level.

It was clear he was going crazy. He knew there was no music, no matter how clearly he heard it, and no matter how it drove him to distraction to be bombarded with these dreadful tunes. And he knew that his mother was right: there was no future for him.

Sacha wasn’t sure whether it was these realisations or just the passage of time, but both the fever and the music receded over the next few days; what was left was a big gap in his memory. Trying to fill in the blanks became less painful, but remained unsuccessful: he couldn’t remember a thing about the events that had made him sick.

As he lay in bed, aware that he was in the way since his illness had converted the family room into a darkened sickroom, he tried to approach the problem by tracking back. What was the last thing that happened during that night before he awoke with the music in his brain?

His mind was a blank.

And what was the last thing he remembered from before that night? This thought process made him recognise that he was looking for something that happened at night, so not at school.

But school was the only thing that came to mind. He had almost gotten into trouble for not paying attention in an English class – he avoided it through a luckily guessed answer – because he had been thinking about going to the movies that afternoon.

Progress!

Sacha saw himself in a train to Heidelberg. He'd gotten out at the *Karlstor* station and had meandered through the old part of the city until he found a cinema showing a Peter Kraus³⁴ film. He remembered feeling annoyed by the film because one of the main characters stated something he knew to be very true: in this society, you didn't even count as a full human being until you had a car.³⁵

He should have known better than to watch this film; he didn't have much time for Peter Kraus anyway. Not only did he frequently play the roles of over-privileged young people, he actually personified that type in real life. His success as a rocker and actor made him an object of desire for hordes of teenage girls and equally large groups of business people selling him all the luxury of which most in Sacha's age group could only dream.

Sacha left the cinema feeling angry and cheated by life; there seemed little point in struggling to get ahead, because the best jobs were automatically given to those whose parents could pull strings, regardless of whether they were best qualified.

He went to a hotel and had a few beers. There, he got into a political discussion with some university students who didn't realise just how young he was, which made him feel better about himself, even though it didn't do anything to disperse the gloom hanging over his future. They discussed who was most likely to start World War Three: megalomaniacal Americans or paranoid Soviets feeling encircled by US-led alliances. In the end, they decided that even crazy Soviet leaders were more predictable than American zealots. A few beers later, they had moved on to discuss the reality, or otherwise, of ghosts...

But could a bad movie experience have caused him to have a mental breakdown? Hardly!

Probing further was becoming difficult again. Not because of the beer, but because he seemed to be approaching the black spot of which he was so clearly terrified. But Sacha pushed on.

It had become late, too late to catch a train home. Taking a taxi was out of the question: too expensive. This left only hitch-hiking. This was not a good option; most young people had negative experiences of it, from sexual advances to religious nuts trying to convert their captive audience and, as had happened to his school friend Michael once, a driver who took him straight to the next police station, because hitch-hiking was illegal.

But nothing bad happened on this occasion. He got a lift from an American officer who was travelling to Stuttgart and wanted to make several stops along the way, including in Karlsbach. Perfect. What is more, Sacha enjoyed the ride in the large American cruiser.

Their conversation was difficult, with the American's knowledge of German as poor as Sacha's skills in English, but they had fun trying to communicate about the music from the local AFN station playing on the car's radio.

They arrived sooner than Sacha expected. He declined the driver's offer to accompany him to the hotel room for a nightcap – an invitation that made him feel uneasy – and went on his way home.

And this is where Sacha hit a major mental block. He remembered nothing after the declined invitation. Had he perhaps accepted it and something happened to which he couldn't face up?

He struggled for some time with this thought. Had he gone up to the room with the American? Had something happened that he was now blocking from his mind?

He soon became aware of the vicious circle he had gotten himself into. If something had happened that led to a blackout, trying to remember it was more likely to increase his psychological self-defences than allow him to penetrate them. He decided to put his probing aside and hope for a spontaneous recovery of memories at some later stage.

It was another two weeks before Sacha was finally allowed to return to school. Not that he loved school all that much, but being at home was worse, as

his mother firmly believed that if you were too sick to go to school, you were also too sick to enjoy yourself. By sheer luck, the day he returned to school commenced with a double Mathematics class, always an easy start to a day for Sacha. It didn't even worry him that there was to be a major test on quadratic equations, a topic he had entirely missed due to his illness. Dr Kupfer offered Sacha to do the test at some future date since he was risking his perfect record if he attempted the test unprepared, but Sacha was prepared to risk it: unlike his parents, he wasn't obsessed with the concept of a perfect score.

At first, Sacha panicked when he saw the paper, particularly in relation to the questions which showed an answer and asked the students to track back to the original equation. But then, quite suddenly, he *saw* the solutions: he simply saw the components of the equations and, from that, he could deduce the formulas the others had studied in his absence. After that, the rest was easy; he solved the problems with such speed that he was the first to hand in the paper, even after double-checking his answers when he felt a little insecure about finishing first.

Dr Kupfer looked at the paper and, something he never did, marked it on the spot; within a couple of minutes, Sacha had the test back in front of him, with a large 1+ in red attesting to a perfect result. There were a few red marks where he could have shown more of how he arrived at the solutions, but the teacher obviously made allowances for his recent absence from class.

"Do you want to catch up on this one as well?" Dr Kupfer asked and gave Sacha the test he should have done the day he got sick. Sacha breezed through it at record speed and handed in his second test. Admittedly, he was the last in class to finish today, but he still finished before the end of the double-period.

As Sacha left the room after this unexpected success, he realised that, during this intense concentration on Mathematics, another memory had returned: he remembered running towards the town's police station in the middle of the night. He remembered how flustered he had been, wanting to reach the station as quickly as he could, but hardly making any progress, as if he was running against a strong headwind. Eventually, when he got there, he found the station closed for the night. There was a notice indicating the opening hours, and a telephone number for a regional police station, perhaps in Heidelberg or Heilbronn, that

could be contacted at other times. But the nearest public telephone was in the railway station, which was closed for the night, and he couldn't think of any telephone booth close by.

That's when Sacha's memory ended again. He had tried to get to the police station, but didn't know why, nor what he did after his futile run into town.

Into town?

This was clearly a hint. Something must have happened between the town centre and home. That ruled out anything involving the American and his hotel room in the centre of the business district.

There were three ways to get home from town: the upper way through the forest, the lower way through the valley, and a dingy path along the small river. He wouldn't have gone through the forest; it was far too dangerous. Only a few weeks ago a young couple had been attacked by a group of thugs who had beaten up the young man, then forced him to watch as they stripped his girlfriend and felt her up. Apparently, they had no intention of raping her, they just thought it would be fun to humiliate both of them.

The lower way was the most sensible one. It was a main road, best lit, clean, but also the longest option. What is more, even that way wasn't perfectly safe at night; there were too many – mostly unemployed – young bullies roaming around trying to pick fights with just about anyone. Sacha constantly carried a Finnish hunting knife in his anorak, just in case he had to defend himself. It was an impressive piece of hardware but probably worth more as deterrent than as an actual weapon, because it was neither sharp nor pointed enough to do much damage.

Weighing up the relative dangers made it most likely that Sacha would have taken the river path that night, mainly to save time, and because it was so dark that few people ever hung around there.

Sacha decided to retrace his steps after school. But when the time came, he barely made it a few hundred metres before he had to return to town to take the long way; he simply couldn't face going any further along the shortcut.

But why?

That night, the knowledge of why he couldn't go that way suddenly came crashing back into his mind. He awoke with a start with a horrible image in his

mind: a group of people beating somebody. His memory was eerily silent, but he vividly saw the shapes... men and women, a group of maybe ten or more – he couldn't really judge how many there were as they were just shadows in a moonlit field – all in a frenzy of violent activity. In Sacha's mind, the action ran like a broken film projector, sometimes unrealistically fast, interspersed with freeze-frame moments of startling detail that seemed to get stuck before his mind's eye.

Sacha needed to talk to somebody to make sense of what he remembered. But at three o'clock in the morning there was nobody there for him. He didn't dare wake his parents, and even if there had been a telephone in the apartment, he wouldn't have known who to call.

By morning, Sacha's mind was threatening to collapse again. His mother was in a particularly foul mood – she had one of her migraines – and his stepfather was taking painkillers by the handful, which never made him a suitable partner for a serious conversation.

Perhaps he could telephone his grandparents? But since his family had no phone, he had never bothered to find out how his grandparents could be reached. They worked with his aunt and uncle at a French military sanatorium near *Wildbad*, but he would have needed to speak French to get the office there to connect him. So that wasn't an option.

Dr Renner? No, he would just diagnose a relapse, prescribe him more medication and make him stay in bed again. A teacher? Which one was sufficiently trustworthy and prepared to give of his time?

Sacha struggled through the day, feigning interest in classes but trying to fly under the radar of teacher attention; luckily, he was experienced at that and managed to get through the school day without undue attention.

But then what? What was he to do next?

Without knowing how or why, Sacha ended up at the police station. It wasn't far from the school, *near* the path he might have taken home, but not *on* it.

It was an unassuming building, pretty much like any of the local administration offices. A left-over from the early twentieth century, with thick brick walls hidden under a sand-coloured covering that made it look dirty, no matter how well it was maintained. Solid dark brown shutters flanked every

window, seemingly permanently anchored to the walls, although they could probably be closed in case of emergencies, such as during a war alert.

If the outside was uninspiring, the interior was positively dull and depressing, consisting of a small, dingy room divided in half by an old wooden counter behind which a single uniformed officer stood reading the newspaper. He looked up as Sacha entered. It was difficult to tell whether he was annoyed at being interrupted or glad for the distraction: his expression could be interpreted either way.

“Good day, young man,” he greeted Sacha in a friendly enough way. “What brings you here today?”

Sacha wasn’t sure what to say. In fact, at this point he felt silly for having entered the station at all. What could he report? Some vaguely remembered incident that may or may not have happened?

Another man, obviously an officer in plain clothes, came from a back room and joined them at the counter. He smiled at Sacha. “I know you, don’t I?” he said. “Yes, you are the kid who sometimes does his homework at the *Hirsch*,³⁶ aren’t you? You really shouldn’t go there, you know, it’s a pretty rough place.”

“Oh yes,” the uniformed officer chimed in. “I remember you as well: you are the young man who brought in a twenty Mark banknote you found in the street!” He turned to his colleague. “Remarkable honesty, most kids would just have pocketed it.” He turned back to Sacha. “But that’s not why you are here. We gave you that banknote when it wasn’t claimed.”

“I think I saw something that should be reported,” Sacha finally got out. “A bunch of people beating up somebody...” He struggled for words again.

The two officers looked at each other. “I don’t think he’d be here if he wasn’t serious,” said the uniformed one. The other one opened a door in the counter and invited Sacha to come inside, motioning him to a back room.

It was a typical office, with a couple of desks full of paperwork, filing cabinets, and a small round table that looked like it might serve the officers at mealtimes. The plain-clothed one guided Sacha to a chair, then reached for a couple of bottles on a shelf. “*Fanta*?” he asked, “or *Afri*?”³⁷ He opened both bottles and placed them on the table and brought three glasses. Sacha briefly

wondered who was looking after the front counter while they were back here, then concentrated on what to say.

“Just start at the beginning,” the uniformed officer said encouragingly once they had all settled around the table, a glass of cola in front of Sacha. He took a quick drink: his throat felt dry and he needed just a little extra time to get going. Then he started to talk about going to Heidelberg to the movies, talking politics with some students, hitching a ride back... At one stage, it looked like one of the officers wanted to hurry him up, but his colleague put his hand on his arm and stopped him from saying anything, so he turned his attention back to the notebook in which he was writing.

And finally it poured out of Sacha... how he had walked along the narrow path along the small river in the dark and the rain, until he heard a commotion in the distance. He slowed down to ascertain what was happening when the clouds opened up a little and he saw in the moonlight a group of people not very far ahead. He now heard the angry shouting of voices, men's and women's, adding another dimension to the horrifying images he had remembered earlier. And the screams of agony of somebody not only in pain, but clearly in fear for his life. The screams sounded more like the fearful bleating of an animal than human sounds.

Sacha began to cry. The plain-clothed man put his arm around his shoulder and pulled the boy close to himself, speaking soothingly to him. The uniformed officer watched open-mouthed, as if he was astonished by what he was hearing.

Eventually, Sacha continued to release the flood of memories that suddenly overcame him. He described how he watched as the victim's arm and leg were broken by the blows from what seemed to be iron bars, and how his limbs bent in directions in which no human can bend. He described the horrifying screams and how they eventually turned into something like gurgling, before stopping completely. He described how parts of his body still appeared to twitch even after there seemed to be no life left. Finally, he described how the crowd of attackers dispersed, a couple of them dragging what was obviously a mangled corpse away from the scene.

It took both officers a little time to compose themselves, as they had clearly been affected by Sacha's descriptions. Eventually, the uniformed one asked if Sacha had understood any of the shouting: what had the people been so angry about?

Sacha tried hard, but it took him a moment to realise why he hadn't understood anything: it wasn't just that everyone was shouting at once, it was also that it wasn't in German! But what did it sound like? Not Italian as he had heard from most of the guest workers around town. Not Polish or any other of the Slavic languages; he knew what they sounded like.

"Turkish, maybe?" the uniformed officer suggested, "or Greek?" Sacha shrugged. He had no idea what those languages sounded like. Whatever language it was, he hadn't come across it before.

The officers asked him a few more questions, like why it had taken him so long to report the matter. "Well, I guess I can understand that," said the uniformed one when Sacha described how he had been sick as a result of his experience.

Sacha noticed that the more the officers became convinced that the people spoke an unknown language, the more disengaged they became.

"You did well," said the plain clothes man finally and gave Sacha's shoulder a squeeze. "You can leave it to us now." He then enquired who Sacha's family doctor was, and tried to telephone Dr Renner to explain that he had one of his patients at the police station, and that he was very upset. But the doctor was out on his rounds and couldn't be reached.

The policeman finally told Sacha he was going to drive him home in the police car. Sacha wasn't thrilled by that. What was his mother going to say? But the officer insisted that he wasn't going to send Sacha on his way in the state he was in.

"Turkish?" the uniformed officer asked his colleague as he was on his way out with Sacha. His colleague shrugged his shoulders, but then nodded. And with that, Sacha caught a glimpse of the uniformed officer pulling the pages of notes from his book and tearing them up as Sacha was ushered out of the building.

“What has he done?” his mother shouted angrily as she saw Sacha at the front door with a police officer showing his identification pass. “Nothing,” the officer calmed her, “but I need to talk to you for a moment.”

Sacha was sent to the living room while his mother talked to the officer in the kitchen with the door closed. After a while, the policeman left and Sacha’s mother came into his room. “You’d better go to bed,” she said quite gently, which surprised Sacha. “The policeman has notified Dr Renner and he’ll probably come to see you later.” She assisted Sacha in making up his bed, which normally she never did.

Dr Renner insisted that Sacha stay home for another week and that he take another set of tranquilisers during that time. Sacha slept during most of that week, still regularly waking up in fright, but too dazed to dwell on it. Eventually, he allowed the black hole in his memory to return and stopped trying to throw light on it. It was easier that way.

Interlude

That Special Bond (1960)

Sacha's mother strongly believed in the peculiar mythology of a special bond between a mother and her son. This was particularly strong during the early years of Sacha's life when he was expected to play the role of his deceased father in many aspects of his mother's life, to the point where her own mother more than once suggested to her that there was something quite odd in the way Sacha was expected to play the role of his mother's male companion.

Sacha's mother consulted him on all major decisions and paid particular attention to his emotional reactions, as if they represented complex analyses of given situations. Thus, all her male friends had to be approved by her son. She was a good looking woman and, with the improved nutrition after the war, turned quite curvaceous: in her late twenties, even at a time of a huge surplus of females in the population, she never had problems finding a suitor. But if Sacha indicated a dislike for any new friend, he was dropped immediately; his mother believed him infallible when it came to judging the true nature of a stranger.

She similarly consulted her son on all other important matters, even relating to her work or plans to migrate to America. The fact that he was only a toddler at the time made no difference to her faith in his opinions.

This 'special relationship' only waned with the arrival of Sacha's stepfather and the continued deterioration of her health. Yet Sacha was never really replaced by his stepfather; instead, his mother became more self-reliant in her decision making and ended up believing in her own infallibility, rather than relying on Sacha's.

From time to time, Sacha's mother tried to revive this magical bond with her son. To Sacha's never-ending confusion, these episodes could occur in parallel and contrast with anything else that was happening at the time.

For example, in 1960, the year the family moved to Karlsbach, Mrs Drexler developed an interest in attending the series of Edgar Wallace crime-

mystery movies so popular in that era. When Sacha once expressed his love for these films, his mother declared that to be something they could do together from now on.

Sacha wasn't unhappy about that. For one thing, his mother was prepared to pay for the cinema tickets; and, for another, in her company he was able to attend movies to which, due to age restrictions, he really shouldn't have been admitted. But in evening sessions, accompanied by his mother, no cinema proprietor even asked about his age, let alone prevented him from entering.

Where things became quite confusing for Sacha was when a new Edgar Wallace movie appeared during times when he was in a punishment communications lockout. Films were only shown for a few days at a time since, with three cinemas in town and a continuing flood of new offerings, the turnover had to be quite rapid. To Sacha's astonishment, visiting the cinema then turned into a time-out from what else was happening. Even during a time of communication freezes, a visit to an Edgar Wallace showing could turn into an amiable experience where feelings even approaching something like love were occasionally expressed.

What is more, they could actually communicate on these occasions. Early showings usually ended in a visit to a café where, over coffee and cake, the film was analysed and flaws discussed. Or, if it was a later showing, these discussions would be adjourned to take place at home, usually the following day. Once the film was thoroughly dissected, the mood at home returned to whatever it had been prior to the interruption: anything from dispassionate cohabitation to outright hostility.

It was through these experiences that Sacha first came to suspect that there was something not quite right with his mother's mind and moods. He occasionally suspected that she had a split personality. Then, on other occasions, he simply thought that she received some sort of pleasure from these strange mind-games.

Whatever the reasons for her behaviour, these sudden changes didn't help him feel any closer to his mother, or any more secure at home.

1962

Aus der Traum³⁸ & New Friends – Part 1

It was a warm September afternoon. I had come to town to see *Der Graf von Monte Christo*³⁹ at the *Beli*,⁴⁰ but the scheduled film hadn't arrived in time and they repeated an episode of *Liane*, a German movie series about a girl lost in Africa more than twenty years earlier when she was a small child. When explorers eventually discover her, she has not only grown into a beautiful and strikingly blonde young woman, but has also somehow managed to become chief of a local tribe.

To me, this had always been a mildly amusing Tarzan adaptation which served as an excuse to show large numbers of topless young African women and a white woman who managed to keep her obviously naked breasts well covered, either by her own long hair or by any other objects the film-makers could spirit between them and the lens. I probably had to be glad that Liane's nudity was mostly implied, because while any number of African breasts could be shown with an admission age of twelve, we would have had to be sixteen if Liane had shown more of herself. It had been fun to watch so many semi-clad or naked young women, even on particularly grainy black-and-white film stock, but the novelty wore off after this became one of the default replacement films whenever something went wrong with a planned screening.

So instead of sitting in the cinema, I stood, as I often did, leaning against a lamp-post, watching the traffic in the *Hauptstraße* (Main Street as a street name, or the main street of a city). This was my go-to activity whenever I had a little time to kill between duties or appointments, and in particular when I didn't want to spend money on anything else.

The *Hauptstraße* was a perfect location for car-watching – in spite of its

overly promising name, it was actually a fairly narrow roadway made even tighter by a lack of parking restrictions, forcing two-way traffic into such a narrow channel that any larger vehicle, whether truck or tractor, or even the occasional cruisers of the American occupation soldiers, slowed the traffic flow to a mere crawl, perfect for me to take in every detail, or to observe with fascination any model I had not previously seen live.

As so often, I was completely absorbed in my observations, practically entranced by them, when I noticed in the distance how the driver of a large black limousine assisted an elegant middle-aged couple into their car. They had emerged from the *Großfürstliche Hof*, Karlsbach's premier hotel, where the richest of spa-guests stayed while visiting the allegedly healing springs of the district, and where international stars made their home while entertaining these rich spa visitors.

The chauffeur saluted as he closed the door – which struck me as odd as I assumed that salutes should be offered at the first moment of an encounter – then took the wheel and steered the large vehicle slowly into the traffic. They gathered a little speed, but then, quite abruptly, stopped right in front of me, as if the passengers had just detected me. One of the tinted windows opened and the occupants looked at me. “Yes, it is he,” the woman said, then the window closed again while the driver rushed around the limousine to open the door. Both of the well-dressed people alighted and approached me.

“Don’t be alarmed” said the tall, fair-haired woman, “but it’s time you knew us.” She seemed to struggle for words and the slightly greying gentlemen took over. “There really is no easy way to do this,” he said, “so let’s just be blunt: we are your parents.”

My heart leapt with excitement. Being adopted had been part of a fantasy that I had developed over many years. Most recently, I imagined that one day, entirely unannounced, my parents would show up and turn out to be wonderfully warm people as well as super-wealthy. They would explain that I had been given to a host family to learn humility and poverty, so that their enormous fortune wouldn’t let me become big-headed and unsympathetic towards those less fortunate. I often thought that I must finally have earned enough karma points to be released from my years in foster care.

Of course, this wasn’t reality, but for a brief moment I continued my

fantasy, envisaging a future in luxury in some distant and far more sunny place. Just at that moment, a black-and-white flash passed me; a smallish dog ran into the traffic right in front of me. I saw as it hit the side of a slowly moving Oldsmobile, making contact right behind the front wheel arch. It bounced off and was thrown back between a couple of parked cars, directly towards me. I was abruptly torn out of my dream, especially when I realised that the dazed animal was about to make another foray into the traffic. I instinctively dived forward, giving no thought to my landing, but managed to catch the dog as I crashed to the ground, hitting my head against a parked car's towbar, screaming in pain while clinging to the animal in my grasp.

I was dazed, with a searing and throbbing pain in the back of my head but, still purely instinctively, I succeeded in holding onto the surprisingly strong dog. I had somehow managed to grab her hind legs with my left hand and, with the right one, I scooped her up by her chest, pressing her back against myself. I was in a rather precarious position, lying on the ground with my head not far from the passing traffic. Luckily, a couple of pedestrians rushed to my assistance: one man pulled me by my feet towards the footpath, back between the parked cars, then helped the other man who was reaching under my arms to lift me off the ground.

"Well done," said one of them when they had gotten me upright again. At first I thought he was praising his fellow rescuer for their cooperative efforts, but when he slapped me on the back in a friendly gesture I realised he meant me. One of the men checked my head as the other brushed me off, while I still held on to the dog. She struggled vehemently, but was in no position to reach me with her mouth or her claws.

"Yes, that was a fine job," said the second man. "This isn't your dog, is it?" I shook my head, still too dazed to speak, and immediately regretted it as the pain shot through the injury on my head again. "You better get somebody to look at that," he said, then returned to the subject of the dog. "Do you know where it belongs?" I nodded. "Do you want us to help you get her to her owners?"

"No thank you," I said, having finally found my voice again. I felt embarrassed having taken up the time of these complete strangers, and felt very self-conscious having attracted so much attention to myself. "I know where she

belongs,” I added, “I’ll take her home.”

They said a few more words of praise, patted me on the back again, then I was alone with the dog, who was still struggling wildly. I could feel her heart racing under my palm, and I started to talk to her in what I hoped were reassuring tones. “I’m much stronger than you,” I said, “and you can’t get away from me. So you might as well calm down.” I realised how silly this was, but it probably didn’t matter what I said, as long as I sounded reassuring. I soon ran out of things to say to a strange dog and ended up just repeating the word *calm* as if it were a mantra. And whenever she put a slight pause into her struggles, I praised her with a *good calm*: not exactly dialogue worthy of the language of the poets and thinkers,⁴¹ but it was good enough when talking to a dog.

On occasion I wondered whether I actually was stronger than the dog. She put up a huge struggle, from time to time twisting her whole body while wildly snapping around with her teeth. Comparing her weight with the sacks of potatoes I carried from the basement to our apartment once a week or so, I judged her to weigh close to ten kilos: not a large dog, but more solid than my first impression had suggested. She was a sort of short-haired Fox Terrier, perhaps with something else in the mix. Her fur had a white base, with large overlapping black circles, giving almost equal prominence to both colours. Her face was mainly brown, then changed to black from eye-level up, with an almost perfect white flame at the centre of her forehead, and light brown markings over both eyes that looked like eyebrows. She was sufficiently unique that I was almost, although not entirely, sure where she belonged: at the *Hof Galerie*.

This was a set of shops and galleries which could only be accessed through an archway leading into a courtyard surrounded by studios and workshops on all four sides. The centre was grassed with a single deciduous tree in one corner, and was rather peaceful since the surrounding buildings kept out the sounds of the town, creating a quiet oasis not far from the small commercial hub. I wasn’t sure whether all the shops, galleries and work areas belonged to the same owners, or whether this was a cooperative venture, but even though one had to know where it was to find it, since there were no obvious signs on the outside, there always seemed to be buyers and visitors to the exhibitions and shops.

I had spent some time in the courtyard and the adjacent buildings in the

past, especially on one of four benches surrounding the tree, because I enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere and the interesting, and often daring, exhibits. I also liked it because I was sure never to find another high school student here, as it wasn't the sort of place to which my school friends were drawn. The people working in the complex always seemed friendly and patient, and never even questioned what a young teen like myself was doing there, even though I clearly was not in the market for any of the mostly expensive works of art. I had occasionally bought a book or magazine, but that wouldn't have justified my frequent presence.

And this is where I was sure I had seen this dog before. She usually lay in a bed made up for her near one of the gallery windows, where she slept and, occasionally, sat up to look around at what was going on. Even more rarely I had seen her walk around the gallery, as if she was making a security inspection, only to return to her base afterwards.

I had never seen her tied up in any way, but she never seemed to stray outside the quadrangle of the complex. I learned the reason why she might have fled in panic as I carried her into the courtyard: just near where the dog's bed normally stood in the window was now a giant hole, with debris spread all around. At a glance, I assumed that a delivery truck had backed into the window as it tried to turn around.

The dog had gradually calmed down as I carried her towards her home. As I walked through the archway, she started shaking quite violently, causing me to fear that she was going to panic again and do herself harm, or that she was working herself up into a heart attack. I carried her to the gallery on the opposite side of the square, as far away from the broken window as the small area permitted.

"Oh, Alexia," a woman shouted as I entered that part of the gallery. I knew her to be one of the sales consultants for the more expensive art pieces, but I didn't know her name. She came rushing towards me as quickly as her very tight, very shiny, and probably very expensive, red dress permitted; she looked like somebody at home in a Hollywood movie magazine rather than an inhabitant of a small town in southern Germany. She lifted the dog from my arms and pressed her against herself, the dog's head resting on her shoulder. It looked like she was holding Alexia like a baby about to be burped. Clearly, the expensive dress was of

no concern at this moment.

“I am sorry,” she now said, smiling in my direction, “I didn’t mean to snatch her from you. But we were all so worried about her. Herr and Frau Abler and the rest of the team are out looking for her. They just left a few of us behind in case Alexia returned.” To be honest, I was quite happy that she had relieved me of the dog, because my arms were in pain from having carried the struggling animal through town.

The woman kept patting Alexia on the back. Alexia seemed at ease now, resting her head on the sales lady’s shoulder. I could have sworn she even sighed.

The woman pointed towards a chair near her desk. “Please sit down,” she invited me. “The Ablers will be back any moment, and they will want to thank you personally. I am sure they will pay you a reward.”

I instantly felt uneasy. Did she think I brought the dog back for a reward? Did I look desperate for money? I felt somewhat insulted and also embarrassed; maybe the dirt from my dive onto the road made me look like a beggar.

Or maybe I just felt ill at ease for getting such attention. It wasn’t something that usually happened to me. I was more comfortable being ignored, or even with being barely tolerated, than with people telling me that I had done something right.

“No reward necessary,” I said, as I started backing out of the gallery. “And I really don’t have time to wait: I have to be home soon.”

“Then leave your name and address,” she suggested.

“No, thanks,” was my less than intelligent response. I checked one last time to see that Alexia seemed at ease where she was – she turned her head to look at me as I backed away, then returned to resting on the woman’s shoulder – then I pretty much ran out of the gallery, and out of the complex. The town’s usual noises hit me as I exited the quadrangle on my way to the railway station, where I had left my bicycle chained to a post.

1962

Aus der Traum & New Friends – Part 2

On my way home, I revisited my fantasy. What would my dream parents have turned out to be: industrialists? Aristocrats? Figures from literature? They didn't look like movie stars.

I usually let my fantasies develop spontaneously, and I would surprise myself by who my *real parents* would turn out to be. Today, I hadn't progressed far enough to know their back-story: all I had was their looks and that, obviously, they were wealthy. I felt sorry that I hadn't had a chance to find out more about them.

When these fantasies originally commenced, my demands on my dream parents were a lot more modest. All I really wanted were parents who were – I tried to put it into words while riding my bike home – less insane! I wanted a mother who could actually feel and express love, as I had seen amongst some of my friends. I knew of some other strange parents, but I was sure that mine were the champions of weirdness.

My mother assured me that all she did was out of love, but I found that hard to swallow. She believed that being tough on me was the greatest demonstration of love she could give me, because she was preparing me for a much better future; and that tough love had to be reinforced in ways that I saw as pure psycho-terror, while she saw it as exactly the opposite.

I was currently going through one of these demonstrations of love: I was being punished with a total absence of communications for a period of fourteen days. During such times, my mother would, with perfect consistency, refuse to communicate with me in any way, and about any topic, that wasn't essential for the functioning of the household. She could give me orders or instructions, criticise my work, and she would even call me to dinner on the occasions she prepared it herself. But there would be no greetings, no banter, and no exchange

of general information; nothing non-essential.

So, when I came home today, I would not be acknowledged whatsoever, not even any questions about where I had been or what I had been up to. At least that was what I hoped for. The alternative would be communications of a negative kind if I hadn't done all of my chores or hadn't done them to my mother's satisfaction.

I was pretty sure that I was safe, but I could never be certain. I went through a mental checklist: I had started the day by cleaning out the furnace of the boiler that provided heat and hot water for our apartment. I had taken the ashes to the cellar and brought back coal and briquettes. I had built a fresh fire with paper and kindling and a few coals on top. Once it was thoroughly alight, I had added the rest of the coal and settled the briquettes of compressed coal dust on top, which would keep the boiler going throughout the day and evening.

I then had my morning shower, got dressed, and woke Ingrid. While she got dressed, I had stored away all my bedclothes and converted my bed back into a couch. Then I strapped down all my sister's bedclothes and lifted up the fold-down bed into a cupboard structure. In that way, both beds disappeared during the day, and our bedroom was turned back into the family living room.

I then got Beatrix out of my parents' bedroom, bathed her, dressed her, and fed her. I burped her, played a little with her, then returned her to her cot. I then made breakfast for my older sister and myself: it consisted of what my parents called muesli, but was really just a bowl of wheat flakes with milk, which almost instantly combined into an excellent glue. To make the stuff at all edible, I mixed it with some honey, so that it would at least have flavour. Then I brewed a can of fresh coffee so that it would be ready for my parents when they got up. By then it was 06:30, and I had to rush to get to school for my first class at 07:10.

The reason I was currently in a communications blackout was because my mother had insisted on seeing the results of my latest Mathematics test. I wasn't worried about it, because I had received a One-Plus,⁴² but I soon discovered that I should have been concerned.

"How many others got a One-Plus?" my mother asked.

"Only one," I responded.

"So, why didn't you get a One-Plus-Plus?"

“There isn’t such a grade,” I said, baffled. She had gone through the German school system and knew perfectly well that it didn’t exist.

“There is no One-Plus either,” my mother countered with impeccable logic. “The grades only go from One to Six, and a One-Plus is just a teacher’s way of saying that you got one hundred per cent, and not something merely close to it.”

Okay, so she did know it. So, why the One-Plus-Plus?

“You are supposed to be a mathematical genius,” my mother continued. “You should be able to work out more efficient ways to arrive at the answers.” She pointed to all the calculations shown in the test.

“We are required to show our work,” I explained. I could often see an answer without making any conscious calculations at all, but teachers insisted that I, like everyone else, show all the steps between problem and solution.

“Well, you should be able to come up with more efficient ways of doing it,” my mother insisted.

“Are you saying I should invent a new form of Mathematics?” I asked.

“Don’t talk back to your elders. You have just earned a week of no communication!”

I was stunned. Firstly, she hadn’t answered my completely sincere question: was she seriously expecting me to invent a new, more efficient form of Mathematics? And secondly, was I really being punished for not getting a One-Plus-Plus which was, as far as I knew, a grade never given by any teacher anywhere?

“Make that two weeks,” she said, “for making a head.”

Despite my fantasising about wealthy parents, I was destined to spend the rest of my school years in an apartment so small that it could have fit comfortably into any one of the rooms of our former home in Freiburg: in fact, even the kitchen in Freiburg was larger than the entire apartment in which we ended up. This was originally intended as temporary accommodation for a couple of months, but now it was our new home without any hope of reprieve.

The tiny bedroom in our apartment was just large enough for my parents’ double bed, a wardrobe, and my youngest sister’s cot. My older sister and I had to sleep in the living room, which was barely large enough for a table, a couple of

small cupboards and convertible couch. My sister's bed, when folded up, was the size of an elongated bookshelf, but once both beds were made up, there was barely room to walk between them.

The bathroom, kitchen and larder were equally tiny. It was difficult to move in the bathroom because of the large hot-water tank attached to the ceiling and wall; the kitchen had just enough space for the boiler, a small stove, and a mini-refrigerator, plus a small sitting nook that could only be accessed by all of us if we filed into place in proper order. A small cupboard behind the door left only enough floor space for a single person to walk at a time. This was how I ended up with many of my morning chores, because even if either of my parents had been willing to help, there wouldn't have been enough space for us to work together.

I no longer felt a need to restrain my fantasies. None of it was ever going to come true anyway, so there was really no point in merely wishing for parents who acted less insanely. In fact, I might as well aim for the sky in my dreams: my real parents were not only going to be loving and mentally healthy, but they were also going to be wealthy and famous. On occasion, they were industrialists, then again famous writers or artists, movie stars, members of the aristocracy, or any combination of these.

I wondered again what today's parents would have turned out to be, if they had had time to introduce themselves properly.

1962

Aus der Traum & New Friends – Part 3

The night after the dog rescue I experienced a horrifying nightmare. In it, Alexia hit the car just a moment earlier, and I saw her being caught up, mangled and torn up by the wheel. The dream was as if in slow motion, with all details graphic and in full colour.

I woke up with a start, finding myself sitting upright in my bed, drenched in sweat, with heart pounding and gasping for air. I tried to calm myself by remembering what had happened, but the terrifying images returned again and again. And, unlike practically all other dreams I had ever had, this one didn't fade away. Usually, within seconds of waking I could only remember the nature of a dream, not its details, but this one stayed with me.

I tried to return to sleep after I had calmed a little, but there was no hope of that happening: every time I closed my eyes, the dream was rerun like a movie before my eyes. It only stopped by me opening my eyes again, which was odd since the room was completely dark, and what I saw with open eyes was the same as with closed ones. I put the experience down to the drugs I had been given the previous evening.

When I had come home, my mother showed no signs of recognition or acknowledgement, as expected. However, when she noticed the back of my head, she apparently saw an emergency that required a small deviation from the punishment rules.

“Sit,” she ordered, pointing to the kitchen chair. She examined my head then gave me a few tablets from my stepfather's huge collection of drugs. “This will take your pain away.”

I took the tablets. While I had little confidence in the motivations behind most of what my mother did, I trusted her in medical matters: she was always very correct and professional when it came to those.

Oddly, the pills didn't reduce the pain. In fact, if anything, they made me more aware of it, but I simply didn't care any longer. It reminded me of a gas I had been given at the dentist's, leaving me fully aware but no longer concerned about anything the dentist did.

I contemplated this issue of feeling less compared with feeling more but not caring, and, in the process, lost track of what my mother was actually doing. I remembered the feeling of some disinfectant – maybe iodine? – but only later became aware of the fact that she must have shaved a small section of my head and that she had apparently stitched it.

"Finished," she said at the end of the procedure, and returned to her other activities without paying me any more attention. Why didn't she ask what had happened? What if I had been hit over the head by a criminal and should be taken to the police to report it? For her own reasons she obviously didn't care what had caused the injury, only that it had been attended to.

Sleep eluded me for the rest of the night, and I went through the next day in a state of semi-consciousness. The following evening, I was totally exhausted and desperately looked forward to sleep. But, instead, as soon as I drifted off, the nightmare was back. This wasn't exactly the same nightmare. Some details had changed, and I wasn't even sure the dog being torn up in front of my eyes was Alexia. On this occasion, the car burst into flames and the dog, which was still struggling even though it would in reality have been dead long ago, finally burnt to death. I only managed to get a little fitful sleep at times when exhaustion completely overpowered me, but the vivid dreams were ever present.

I went through several weeks of this, every night seeing dogs horribly killed before my eyes. Even though the details changed, they merely added to a huge store of frightening memories, all of which had a habit of frequently intruding into my everyday life.

Once, after my punishment period had expired, I tried to talk to my mother about it, but I soon learned that I shouldn't have. "I know what this is about," she said angrily. "This is one of your nasty ways of complaining that you won't get the dog we were going to have in the new apartment. You surely must be the most selfish person in the world. Instead of showing appreciation for all we do for you, you can only ever complain. I wish I had given you for adoption as a

baby!”

After that, I was sent to Coventry again for a fortnight. And I wished she had given me up for adoption as well: I couldn't imagine adoptive parents turning out much worse.

But, oddly, that conversation helped. It made me aware that I probably wasn't merely grieving the near-loss of a dog I barely knew, but that I was grieving all the dogs that had been lost in my life.

Like my Steiff⁴³ *Waldi* Dachshund, which had been my earliest sleeping companion. He had been taken away because he was “worn and disgusting”. Even as a very young child I agreed that he was worn – I never accepted the disgusting – because I loved him so much and wanted him to be with me whenever I went to sleep. But to no avail. He was, apparently, worn and disgusting and therefore had to be thrown into the garbage.

When I later tried to rescue him from the bin, I was punished for being disobedient: I now was not going to get a replacement. That was the second dog I lost.

Eventually, I got two other dogs: one from Uncle Robert, and one from my grandparents.

Uncle Robert was a Vietnamese soldier in the French army, a close friend of my father's whom he had introduced to Aunt Emma, a friend of my mother with whom she had fled from the Soviets to safety in Freiburg. There, she had stayed with us for nearly ten years, which suited my grandparents, because accommodating both of their daughters as well as Emma meant that they had met their obligations to give shelter to the homeless or refugees, which all people with spare room had to do after the war.

Emma and Robert were a de-facto couple for several years; he asked her to marry him on a number of occasions, but she always rejected him because of his religion. He believed in a variety of deities to whom he occasionally built shrines, which Emma found ludicrous. She insisted that he had to become Christian, which he couldn't do. After a particularly nasty altercation about his “funny gods”, he requested a transfer back to Vietnam, where he apparently disappeared to join Ho Chi Minh.

Emma was left behind with a son of my age – with whom I was brought

up as brothers by my grandparents – and another pregnancy which Robert didn't know about. After the birth of the second child, a girl named Yvonne, she was given for adoption; apparently, she went to a doctor's family to Paris. At that point, it was decided that all memories of Robert had to be eliminated.

Robert had given me a beautiful and quite large stuffed dog called *Doro*. It was too big to take to bed, but just the right size to sit on a bedside cupboard to guard over me at night. Apparently, it brought back memories of the now disgraced Robert and, without explanation or discussion – there was no need to discuss anything with mere children – *Doro* was taken to be burnt in the kitchen stove. He was too large to fit through the opening and was torn to pieces right in front of me, and the pieces thrown into the fire. I was told that I was ridiculous and acting like a little girl because I dared to cry when this happened. I was four years old at the time: clearly too old to cry!

And the last dog that was taken away because it looked a little worn was going to be replaced by a new one – it was my Christmas present for that year – but in the end, I received a *much better present*, warm clothing, and the idea of a stuffed dog was taken off the table as being far too childish for a boy of eight.

Whenever I dared complain that warm clothing was not really a Christmas present, particularly when a different one had been agreed on, I was told that I was unbelievably ungrateful, and that I'll be happy in "the next war" when I'll have the warm clothing and not a useless toy.

I was sure that it was all of these unresolved losses, and probably many more, as well as broken promises, that caused my season of nightmares. The longer my sleep deprivation continued, the more desperate I became. And since I couldn't talk to anyone about it – a lesson firmly learned by now – I tried to find alternative solutions. I started taking some of my stepfather's medicines in the hope that one among them would turn out to be sleep-inducing. When that didn't work, I took different combinations of tablets, experimenting with potential outcomes. Since some of the packages had the highest levels of warning printed on them, I knew that I was taking risks, but I really didn't care; if I died, I wouldn't know about it and therefore wouldn't care. In fact, death seemed a more and more desirable solution to my problems.

I became increasingly depressed, couldn't talk to my parents, had no

means of reaching my grandparents, had increasingly more problems at school, particularly with a new teacher, Dr Sturm, was almost constantly in trouble at home for breaching new rules – apparently, our cramped living situation required new rules that had to be strictly enforced, even if nobody had ever been told about them – and my workload at home and at school became unbearable. Death really seemed quite a reasonable option.

Just before Christmas, I had enough of the situation, and rebelled. I reminded my parents that I had heart problems a few years earlier when I overworked myself, and I told them quite bluntly that I was heading the same way again. I also told them that I had written a letter to my grandparents, explaining how I felt, and that if something happened to me, they would know why.

My parents' initial reaction was, predictably, unmitigated anger. They threatened to beat me, put me into a reform school, take away all privileges, and so on. To their surprise, I just laughed – timid little me had reached the end of the line.

“You want to hit me?” I shouted. “Go right ahead, you might as well. You’ve done everything else to make my life miserable. And if you hit me, I’ll have evidence of how you treat me.” My parents, literally, were open-mouthed by my explosion. “And you want to send me to a reform school? Go right ahead, it can’t be any worse than this place. And I’d probably even have a bed of my own. And as for your privileges, fuck them, that’s what I think of them!”

They were stunned. I had never talked back to them, never had a temper tantrum, never disobeyed them. In fact, the worst I had ever done to date were some minor, passive-aggressive acts of disobedience.

I expected to be in major strife for challenging their authority; in fact, I fully expected to be beaten, something they rarely did. But I must have stunned them so much, they couldn’t come up with an immediate punishment. “We’ll have to talk about what we will do to you,” my mother said, and I was dismissed for the day.

The following day, a Friday, was the last school day before the Christmas holidays and we broke up a little earlier than usual. I came home expecting the worst but, instead, found my grandmother there. She had come to spend Christmas with us; this wasn’t in itself unusual, but a little odd in view of our

limited space, as she had to stay in a nearby guest house.

I don't know whether my letter had anything to do with her visit: she didn't say. But she immediately hugged me when I came home, the first sign of affection I had received in over a year. She ran her fingers through my hair as she used to do when I was little, and I immediately felt better than I had in months.

That weekend, my sisters were given some games to play in the kitchen, and I was called to a family meeting in the living room. My parents sat on one side of the table, and my grandmother demonstratively sat next to me, putting her arm around me.

"We have discussed your case," my stepfather commenced, "and perhaps we are expecting a little too much of you. After all, you are still a young child and can't be expected to have common sense."

I saw my grandmother raise her eyebrows, and the tone of the meeting seemed to change at once. In the end it was agreed that my parents would ease up on me and give me more time to myself. They were also going to look for a room somewhere in the neighbourhood where I could be by myself, sleep with some privacy, and do my homework without all the distractions of a busy household with two younger sisters.

I wasn't convinced that any of this was going to happen: I knew how big the gap between promise and implementation was. But at least it was an acknowledgement that there was a limit to the expectations that could be placed on me.

The next few days were peaceful. Christmas was traditionally a time of cease-fire in our family when my parents made a special effort to play the generous and benevolent heads of the family, albeit with limits to the generosity: after all, it was unfair on us children to give us the idea that we could ever receive something for nothing.

My nightmares continued. Night after night I saw at least one dog brutally killed before my very eyes, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. Nor could I get used to it. My sleep deprivation was making me lose weight, even though I was already underweight for my age and size, and I became ever more jittery.

I don't know how the idea came to me, but one morning I finally knew

what I had to do. I took my bike and headed for the *Hof Galerie* to reassure myself that Alexia was alive and well. As I entered the quadrangle, my heart instantly sank: Alexia's bed wasn't by the window where it had always been. She had either been moved or something had happened to her; I almost didn't want to know which because if she really had died, I was sure I would never shake the nightmares. But there was hope that she was fine, and I finally accepted the risk of certainty over suspicion.

I scanned the large showroom as I entered it, but I couldn't see her anywhere. My mood fell even lower. But then Alexia saw me. From the dark rear corner of the room, as far away from the window as possible, a black-and-white shape came bounding towards me and I was thrilled beyond belief. She was obviously okay.

She approached me in large leaps until she was only a couple of metres away. At that point, she lay on her belly and, just using her front legs, started to drag her body slowly towards me. It was the strangest mode of dog movement I had ever seen. But when I crouched down and held out my hand, she returned to more normal movement, wagging her tail madly as she reached me.

"What on earth," I heard a voice from the distance say, then saw Mr Abler rushing towards us. "I am sorry," he said, "she never bothers our customers."

"She isn't bothering me," I assured him while pulling Alexia a little closer to me, hoping to prevent Mr Abler from attaching the lead he had in his hand: I don't really know why, but I didn't want her to be locked up because of me. Quietly, I said "calm" to the dog, and she instantly sat down next to me, still wagging her tail as if sweeping the floor behind her, otherwise perfectly quiet. "Good calm," I told her.

I was astonished. I had only had contact once with this dog, and that was over three months ago, and that wasn't under the best of circumstances. It surprised me that she even remembered me at all, let alone greeted me as if I were an old friend. And I was even more astonished that she remembered my command; I certainly hadn't expected her to remember what it meant since it couldn't have been all that obvious the last time. I'd been taught at school that dogs had a memory of no more than two weeks, but clearly that wasn't correct.

Mr Abler also seemed perplexed; at that point, we were distracted by a woman rushing into the gallery door. “That’s the boy,” she shouted a couple of times out of breath, pointing at me. As always in such situations, my first reaction was guilt. Only then did I recognise her as the sales consultant from the deluxe gallery on the other side of the courtyard. My fear diminished somewhat. I still wasn’t sure whether I was being accused of something, but was hopeful that her behaviour didn’t mean that.

“Oh my dear,” came the voice of Mrs Abler from the back of the room, “you are really the young man who brought our Alexia back?” She rushed towards me, initially with hand outstretched, then changing to take me into a tight embrace. Despite wearing thick winter clothing, I could feel her warmth. “Please come and sit,” she said pulling me after herself to the desk. Alexia trotted along, still wagging her tail.

I was deposited in a chair usually occupied by the wealthier clients who warranted the personal attention of the Ablers. Mr Abler joined us after bringing me a cup of black coffee, pushing a tray with cream and sugar in my direction. I suddenly became aware of his slightly odd appearance, looking taller than he really was because of his very slim body topped by a large, angular head with receding hairline. I judged him to be in his mid-forties, but his clothes were more those of a younger man, slacks and turtleneck.

Mrs Abler was clearly much younger than her husband. She was a startlingly beautiful young woman with a face reminding me of Françoise Hardy’s: assertive but pretty, with expressive eyes. She was wonderfully curved which I didn’t have to imagine, as to my surprise, I realised that I sat in the middle of an exhibition of artistic black-and-white photographs in which I recognised several of Karlsbach’s residents, all nude. The largest photo, in my direct view, was of Mrs Abler standing upright, bent slightly forward while leaning on a short Roman column.

“We have a reward for you here,” Mr Abler now said. “We’ve been keeping it ready just in case we had an opportunity to meet you.” He reached into the drawer of the desk and came out with a wad of banknotes which I instantly assessed to be 500 Marks. He held the money out towards me. “This is with our thanks; you can’t believe how important our little Alexia is to us, and we were

frantic when she got scared out of the building.”

Having heard her name, the dog suddenly came to life, trying to work out why she was being talked about. Not getting any specific instructions, she started jumping up on me. “Stop that!” Mr Abler said sternly, but she took no notice.

Without thinking about it, I gave her my default instruction – *calm* – and she instantly sat back down.

“How did you do that?” asked Mr Abler. I just shrugged my shoulders as he pushed the money towards me again.

“No, thank you,” I declined as politely as I could, although it was difficult. As I had been brought up to believe that children had no entitlements and should therefore accept gratefully anything that was offered, it was almost a reflex action to accept. What is more, 500 Marks was a lot of money: about as much as I might hope to get in pocket money in the next four years, and more than three times as much as my favourite sports bike cost. I was sorely tempted: I could just take the money and never return, and nobody would ever need to discover how mercenary I had been. Besides, I didn’t want to appear rude for declining an offered gift.

But I remained strong; in the end, I couldn’t justify to myself taking money for perhaps having saved this poor creature’s life, particularly since it hadn’t even been a conscious act on my part.

“Please do take it, it would make us happy if you did,” Mr Abler tempted me further, literally waving the money before my eyes. I declined again. He slowly placed the money back into the drawer. “Well, rest assured of our eternal gratitude,” he said absent-mindedly, something obviously going through his head. He looked at Alexia lying quietly next to me on the floor, then looked at me again.

“She really likes you,” he started, “and you clearly have a way with her. She never goes near anybody in the shop, and she would certainly not obey any stranger, yet here she is, treating you as a friend, and obeying you, even if I haven’t worked out yet how you do that.” He paused for a moment, looking at his wife. “I have a proposition for you. Since the incident, Alexia has been very sensitive to sudden noises, and we are reluctant to leave her home alone when we have to be away overnight. How would you like to become our babysitter for her? You could spend the night at our house when we go away, just to make sure that

she is okay. It would make us feel much more relaxed.”

“What a great idea,” added Mrs Abler. “And you could even come over on Silvester⁴⁴ and look after her while all the fireworks noise goes on. What do you say? Naturally, we would pay you.”

I was astonished. These people had only known me for a brief moment, and now they offered me to look after their dog in their own home while they were away? I had never experienced such a level of trust. They offered me twenty Marks per night. Here was an opportunity to earn quite a lot of money by doing practically nothing, just keeping a little dog safe. Of course, I accepted; I couldn’t take money for rescuing Alexia, but dog-sitting was a legitimate way of earning something.

“I’ll have to ask my parents,” I said, and depression instantly overcame me. They were unlikely to agree. Except that they had just agreed to give me more freedom, and if I asked them while my grandmother was still visiting, they might just feel compelled to.

“Of course,” Mr Abler said, giving me a business card. “They can come to see us here; or they can telephone us on this number.”

“What’s her name?” my mother asked when I put the question to her. I wondered whose name she meant: Mrs Abler’s? I didn’t know her first name. Perhaps it was on the business card? I hadn’t given her the card yet, but why did it matter anyway?

“The girl you want to spend a night with?” my mother now added, realising I didn’t know what she meant.

I still didn’t quite get it; well, I did, but I thought I had to be wrong. She simply couldn’t see this as a ruse to spend a night with a girl somewhere. But she did! And I was embarrassed. Not because my mother thought this, but because I had a mother whose first instinct was to see some ridiculous deception in what I was proposing. My fantasy of normal parents quickly flashed through my mind.

“Don’t think I won’t contact them,” my mother said when I passed her the business card. “This is your last chance not to get publicly shamed.” I felt like storming out, but I didn’t want to ruin what little hope I had. When I didn’t respond, she took the card and went to our neighbour, Mrs Baliek, whose husband was principal of a small primary school and therefore had to have a telephone at

home, a rarity at the time.

When my mother returned, she passed the business card back to me and said “You can go.” I was dying to know what had been said, but the subject was evidently closed, and I wasn’t going to jeopardise the outcome by opening it again.

I passed the Silvester test – for that is how I saw it – with flying colours. When I arrived at the Ablers’ home, I was greeted with great warmth and friendliness. A party was in full swing at 8 pm, and I was immediately introduced to guests as “our hero” who had saved Alexia. That earned me a round of applause from the already slightly inebriated crowd, after which I was asked to retell the events of the rescue a number of times while being introduced to various couples.

Alexia added weight to the Ablers’ exaggerations by greeting me with great affection as soon as she noticed me. Again, I was amazed that the dog apparently saw something in me that I couldn’t quite understand, but she refused to leave my side and, on occasion, even managed to convince me to pick her up and carry her around, which she seemed to enjoy a lot.

As midnight approached, the usual fireworks noise commenced, and the smoke and smell of gunpowder hung heavily in the air; the *Wirtschaftswunder* allowed nearly every family to contribute at least something towards the colourful light shows and the general din.

“Is there a quiet place I can take Alexia,” I asked Mrs Abler when I noticed the dog becoming ever more agitated by the flashing lights and sharp noises.

“Oh dear,” she said, “I haven’t even shown you your room.” She took me by the arm and led me towards a small but rather ornate staircase. We had to squeeze past party guests and I was once again given an exhibition of Mrs Abler’s body. She wore a white, almost translucent top through which her nipples clearly showed themselves, especially as they were fully erect by the cool air occasionally breezing through the overheated house. Her breasts swayed freely and were a distraction not only to myself, as I noticed by the uninhibited gazes of other party guests. She also wore tight white jeans which, although not quite as transparent, still made it obvious that she wore nothing beneath them, not even hair. Her nude photo came vividly back to memory as we made our way to the

top, and this time I received the added benefit of close physical proximity, as she was frequently pressed right up against me. I was glad to have Alexia as a distraction, a legitimate object of my attention.

“Here we are,” she finally said as she swayed and bounced herself towards a door on a landing at the top of the stairs. It opened into the most beautiful bedroom I had ever seen: an A-framed room, obviously right under the gable, entirely colour coordinated in light wood with a large single bed, a nightstand and cupboard, and a desk with bookcases. There was a radio and a record player, and a bookshelf with scattered magazines. The room seemed unused; it lacked the lived-in feeling of a previous occupant.

“There is a great view from here,” she said, pushing me closely in front of her towards the window. And indeed, I could see right across the river to the entire town and all the activity there. “It’s really quiet when you keep the window closed, but that’s up to you; just try and keep Alexia from getting too disturbed.”

Alexia had immediately made herself comfortable on the bed, and was just as quickly shooed off by Mrs Abler, who pointed towards a dog-basket made up for her. She jumped into it and curled up; clearly, she knew the rules.

“Come down anytime,” Mrs Abler added. “Or you can go to sleep. We’ll try not to disturb you.” She pushed me towards the door and showed me two other doors on the landing, one to a small kitchen where I could make coffee or tea, and the other to the top bathroom; apparently, they had put everything there that I might need. She then pointed to a cupboard with spare bedding, towels and *stuff*, whatever that was.

With that, she gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and left. Alexia listened carefully as she made her way down the stairs, then jumped back on the bed. I looked through the magazines, mostly art-related, which didn’t surprise, but also *der Spiegel* and other current affairs publications, which I loved to read. But I wasn’t really up to heavy literature and just flicked through a few richly illustrated international art publications. I then watched the fireworks for a while.

Close to midnight, there was a light knock at the door; I nearly missed it over the noise of the fireworks. I opened the door, noticing that Alexia was lying in her basket again.

“Nearly New Year,” Mrs Abler said, clearly under the influence of

alcohol now. “Did you want a glass of this?” She held out a glass with a handle that reminded me of a small beer stein, filled with steaming aromatic mulled wine. I accepted it gratefully. It was a tradition in which I had participated since I was a young child, although, of course, initially in much smaller quantities.

“Thank you,” I said, then pointed at her watch. “It’s nearly time. Shouldn’t you be downstairs?”

“I am exactly where I want to be,” she said, winking at me. And, as the church bells started ringing in the New Year, and the fireworks reached a crescendo, she put her arms around me and gave me a very long and deep kiss on the mouth.

Mrs Abler was a very beautiful woman, certainly well under thirty, and easily within the age range of women about whom I had sexual fantasies. As she pressed herself against me, I could feel all of her body in great detail, and was, of course, instantly aroused. And she knew it, as I realised from the way she moved her crotch to increase my pleasure – or discomfort – even further. I couldn’t help but wonder where Mr Abler was, and what he would have thought about this.

Eventually, she broke the clinch, quickly gave the bulge in my pants a stroke, and then left with a wink and a “have a nice sleep, maybe dream of me”. With that, she was gone, and I was confused.

It took me a while to settle down. Alexia was back on the bed, and after a while, I fell asleep, even though the party sounds continued to drift up.

The following morning, I awoke when Alexia jumped off the bed and lay down in her basket again. Shortly after that, there was a knock. I finally recognised the pattern: Alexia jumped off the bed when she heard somebody climb the stairs. What a perfect early warning system, I thought.

The person at the door was a middle-aged woman dressed like a cleaner. “Mr Abler wondered if you’d like a cup of coffee,” she said, handing me a breakfast tray. “There is cream and sugar cubes in the kitchen. There are freshly warmed towels in your bathroom when you are ready.” She curtsied and left.

Warmed towels? And why would an adult woman curtsy to me? It also struck me what a fortune it would cost to employ a cleaner so early on New Year’s Day, but I assumed the Silvester mess had to be cleared up somehow.

I drank the coffee and ate a fresh bread roll – heaven knows where it had

come from – took a shower and got ready to go downstairs. I called Alexia, but she just stood at the top of the stairs looking down at the next step or two – obviously, she had trouble negotiating the stairs – so I picked her up and carried her.

“Happy New Year,” Mr Abler said as I entered the living room, then burst into laughter. “You realise she conned you,” he said, pointing to the dog. “She runs up and down those stairs all the time. It’s her indoor exercise. Whenever there is a new person in the house, she pretends she can’t come down.”

Once more, I was astonished by this dog; was it really possible for an animal to think so strategically? I had never heard of that. Or was she just exceptionally clever?

“Yes, Happy New Year,” Mrs Abler now chimed in, getting up from the couch to give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Clearly, Mr Abler was aware of his wife’s flirting. The Ablers seemed perfectly normal this morning, no signs of hangover, and dressed in their arty business clothes as usual. The living room was spotless; there must have been a whole cleaning crew to restore it this quickly.

“Will you spend the day with us?” Mrs Abler asked me now. I thanked her for the invitation but said that I’d better get home. My grandmother was still visiting, and I also didn’t want to push my luck too far with my parents so early in our newly agreed relationship.

I bade farewell, was hugged and kissed again, had my payment pressed into my hand and made my way home across the bridge and through the town littered with the debris of last night’s celebrations. I felt a little guilty about having taken the money; after all, I had spent most of the evening as a party guest, and when I finally took Alexia upstairs, she showed little sign of nervousness. Then I rationalised accepting it by thinking that the dog might have been a lot more nervous if I wasn’t there. And I had spent quite a lot of time there. Even though it had been much more enjoyable cuddling up to a real dog, and occasionally to a real woman, than being at home, maybe I had earned the money just by being there.

1963

Aus der Traum & New Friends – Epilogue

Lexi became an ever more important part of my life over the next months. I visited her at the gallery as often as I could, even though a detour through town quadrupled the length of my cycle ride home.

Whenever I could, I took her for a walk to the river which always gave her particular pleasure. When she saw me, she greeted me enthusiastically, then stared at her lead, then at me, then back to the lead, to tell me what she wanted.

I also dogsat her three out of every four Wednesdays, when the Ablers had regular out of town commitments. After a while, a sign of *Sacha's Room* appeared on the door at the top of the stairs.

Most rooms in the Abler home had signs. There were frequently visiting artists from around the world, and labelling the room made sense for those not familiar with the layout, especially since the house was significantly larger than I originally imagined. There were large living areas, as well as workrooms for artists, a pottery workshop with a kiln, several painting studios, and so on. What interested me most was the photographic studio and darkrooms, which the Ablers encouraged me to use.

I saw it as a sign of friendship when the top room, or actually the whole top floor, became dedicated to my visits. The Ablers told me that I was free to visit at any time, even when I wasn't there for Lexi, as they knew how limited my space was at home.

I liked the Ablers, not only because of their kindness to me, but also because they always treated me with respect, almost as an equal; they accepted me as an adult, not as a child. But I liked them even more because of their obvious love for Lexi. They spoilt her, cuddling her whenever she came near, even picking her up to carry her around. And they were constantly on the lookout for pretty collars or dog toys. While Lexi couldn't have cared less what collar she wore – although she saw the collar as an integral part of herself and got upset every time

it was taken off for any reason – she did take advantage of her large collection of toys to keep herself amused; there was no ten-toy limit here!

Over the next few months, my involvement with the Ablers increased. “What do you know about the hit-parade?” Mr Abler asked me one day. Well, I was a regular listener to Hanns Verres and the *Schlagerbörse*,⁴⁵ a cult radio program⁴⁶ listening to which was one of the few things we often did as a family, and I tried to catch the Süddeutsche Rundfunk’s *Schlagerskala* as often as I could; I also listened to the very modern-music oriented *Radio Luxembourg* and American Forces Network (AFN), which always played the latest hits from the USA for the occupation soldiers. Having the radio on in the background, even though frowned upon at home, was nevertheless one of the more tolerated vices. More importantly, popular music was a major topic at school, and I had a good idea what was popular amongst my peers.

“We are trying to expand our record section,” he added when I looked puzzled. “So far, we only have classical music, but we want to offer pop and jazz as well.”

When I indicated an interest in both areas, we made a deal: I would make a few selections from the samples sent by the record companies, and we’d see whether those sold better than the ones I hadn’t picked.

And they did; my selections tended to sell quickly, while most of the others had to be returned to the distributors. And with this demonstration, I earned a new job looking after the selection of records to be stocked for the youth market. Miss Baumgartner, a formidable middle-aged woman dressed in formal business attire, her hair usually in a tight bun on top of her head, who had an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of classical and orchestral music, continued to make the selections in that area.

Initially, I thought she disliked me for intruding on her territory, but I soon discovered that this was just her general demeanour; underneath, she had a wicked, and often quite dark, sense of humour, which she regularly shared with me. She taught me the art of the casual comment containing hidden meaning to others in the know, or double-entendres that she delivered in such a way that listeners thought she must not have known what she was saying.

My overnight stays at the Abler home also increased. Initially, I was

invited to a few dinner parties and soirées, always on the pretext of keeping an eye on Lexi. I couldn't help but feel that this was a mere excuse, because nothing ever happened to her. Just as in the gallery, Lexi pretty much ignored people to whom she didn't personally relate and, eventually, just took herself off to sleep. Whenever I was there, she automatically retreated to my room and waited for me there.

With the increasing contact, I learned a lot more about my new friends. I realised that they were capable of having tremendously heated arguments about art, literature or what flowers to plant in the garden, but they never argued about the things that caused tension in my home, such as money. I assumed this was because they had plenty of it, although I couldn't ever work out where it came from. Still, at the prices they charged for some paintings and sculptures, they probably didn't have to sell a lot.

Early one morning, Lexi indicated that she needed to go outside. It was my own fault, because I hadn't taken her out before going to bed. I got dressed and took her to the back door. There, as I opened up to let her out, I discovered that Peter and Gabi – we had progressed to first names by now⁴⁷ – sat in the living room. To my horror, they were stark naked.

What shocked me wasn't so much their nudity; I grew up in a household where privacy was limited and nudity part of the experience. Also, my mother had taken me a number of times to public saunas – it was one of those things she continued to do with me even as we drifted apart emotionally – and I was used to seeing naked people there.⁴⁸ My problem here was that I seemed to have surprised them in a private moment. Clearly, after returning from their out of town engagement, they just wanted to relax by themselves, and there was normally no expectation that I would come downstairs and surprise them.

I pretended not to have noticed and joined Lexi outside, which I didn't normally do. Once Lexi was finished and headed for the door, there was no excuse for me to linger either, and I headed back inside, hoping that the Ablers had withdrawn to their own rooms.

But that was not the case; they still sat in the same positions as before but, to my relief, now dressed in bathrobes. I feigned surprise at seeing them, and greeted them on my way through to the stairs. I noticed the quick smile flashing

across their faces; they knew I had seen them, and I suddenly felt even more embarrassed.

“Come, sit!” Peter said, patting a chair near them. I really had no excuse not to accept the invitation.

“Okay,” he then continued, “our secret is out: we are nudists. The meetings we go to every Wednesday are gatherings of fellow lifestyle enthusiasts, where we get together for dinner and chats. I hope you weren’t too embarrassed seeing us; we really didn’t think you would come down this late.”

“And don’t pretend you didn’t see us,” Gabi added, winking at me. “The look of shock and horror on your face was priceless. But we don’t want you to feel uncomfortable, so it’s up to you. If you can’t handle us being naturists, we’ll make sure you don’t ever see us undressed.”

“No, it’s okay,” I said automatically. I was instantly returned to my role as a child who had no right to be critical of anything adults did. Also, I really wasn’t worried about nudity; my problem here was that I hadn’t been prepared for the idea that they might enjoy life without clothing, though I wasn’t surprised at their lifestyle choice, as it seemed to fit in with their alternative views.

“You don’t have to join in,” Gabi assured me, as both of them took off their robes in front of me. I wasn’t sure how to react to this: embrace the situation with enthusiasm? Express my discomfort in spite of what I had just said? Reason that it was okay for them, but that I’d rather not be involved? I feigned tiredness and retreated to the room on top of the building, and the comfort of lying next to Lexi whose affection for me seemed so simple.

Over the next weeks I gradually became accustomed to the increasingly frequent displays of nudity around the Abler home; not only they, but many of their visitors felt quite comfortable without clothes. I was never pressed to join in, nor did anyone object to my remaining covered. After a while, I no longer paid attention to who was wearing anything and who was not.

I always slept in the nude when staying with Lexi, because it felt so much more sensuous than wearing night-clothes. At home, with a sister’s bed very close to mine, I didn’t have that luxury. Still, whenever Lexi wanted to go out at night, I continued to get dressed, even when I didn’t think anyone else was at home.

Eventually, especially after only rarely meeting up with anyone on these

night-time trips, I became too lazy to dress for such brief excursions to the garden door. I moved to just wearing underwear, then only underpants and, finally, I just couldn't be bothered any more. When I finally, and unexpectedly, encountered the equally nude Ablers one night, I got a fright purely because I didn't realise they had already returned from their trip; our mutual nudity no longer concerned me.

On my way upstairs again, I became aware of how I had changed since meeting the Ablers. Half a year earlier, I had felt much more insecure about myself, barely capable of looking an adult in the eyes. Now I felt more self-assured, both here and in relation to other adults such as teachers, and strong enough to express my own views. My fantasy of meeting alternative parents appeared less frequently, as did nightmares of any kind.

As I settled back into bed with Lexi cuddling up to me, I wasn't quite sure whether I could be proud of myself for these changes, or whether they all depended on my association with the Ablers. If I ever reduced my involvement with them, would I return to my former timid self?

1963

Trip to Munich (with Consequences)

I drank deeply straight from the bottle. Quickly, at first, to quench my thirst, then more slowly, to savour the taste – *Martini Rosso* vermouth from a large bottle. I loved the sweet, spicy taste, and enjoyed it afresh again and again by cleansing my palate with pickled green olives between gulps. I also loved what the drink did to me, mellowing my mind and calming me.

“Okay,” Mr Abler finally said laughingly as he reached for the second bottle, “we aren’t savages, let’s drink from a glass. It’s really nice over ice!” We had kept up with each other so far as we passed the bottle back and forth.

It had been a stressful day. Mr Abler picked me up early so that we could have a comfortable journey to Munich, where he intended to buy artwork from an exhibition. The trip was anything but smooth; as it turned out Mr Abler was a terrible driver on the Autobahn, never quite certain when to move in or out of the passing lane. All along, he made pleasant conversation, while I wished that he would pay more attention to his driving.

It was almost inevitable that one over-ambitious lane change nearly led to an accident, when Mr Abler pulled out directly in front of a Mercedes 220 SE travelling at top speed. The emergency breaking sent the Mercedes sliding all over the road, nearly clipping the VW we just tried to pass, and allowing Mr Abler to demonstrate considerable skill in avoiding all the chaos he had created in the first place.

The narrowly avoided disaster led to the Mercedes nearly forcing us off the road shortly afterwards. An altercation was only avoided when, luckily, a police car showed up on the horizon, convincing the Mercedes driver to step on the accelerator again before we had come to a full stop.

There was a saying in Germany at the time that some cars⁴⁹ came with a built-in right of way; I had to think of that at that moment, because even though

Mr Abler was clearly at fault in this situation, the other driver really did travel far too quickly on a hilly and curvy section of highway.

I wasn't surprised when Mr Abler pulled off early to stay at a hotel overnight. Nor was I surprised when he took a double-room instead of two singles; even though he was wealthy, in my mind it made better sense to take the much cheaper option of a single room.

"Paragraph 175?"⁵⁰ the desk manager asked when he noticed who was going to share the room.

"He's my step-son," Mr Abler responded, as he handed over our identification documents – his *Personalausweis*⁵¹ and my French passport. It was obvious from our different names, addresses, and nationalities that the step-son claim was not credible. I noticed that the clerk separated the two identification papers into two envelopes, writing different room numbers on them, while deftly slipping the banknote that had lain between the two documents into his sleeve. I wondered how Mr Abler knew that a bribe was likely to be accepted here, or was it common practice in hotels? I also couldn't help but notice that the rental of a double-room plus bribe was actually more than two singles would have cost, but while it registered in my brain, I didn't give it any further thought.

After an evening meal in the hotel's dining room, we went to our room and showered off the day's travel dust, then dressed in pyjamas. We chatted about school, about the business, about art, and about politics. That is when Mr Abler opened the bottle and we began to drink, still very thirsty even after a beer with dinner. It was a potent drink, particularly in these quantities, making me soon feel light-headed. Mr Abler also seemed to relax, forgetting the stress of the day.

At one point during the evening – we were well into the second bottle by then – Mr Abler simply reached into my pyjama bottoms and pulled out my penis. "I was curious whether you were circumcised," he said. "Probably too tight for peeing when you were a baby?"

I agreed. It was the easiest excuse for a circumcised penis if I didn't want to explain my mother's insane attempts to turn me into a Jew to clear her Nazi conscience.

I wasn't taken aback by Mr Abler's move. For one thing, I expected for some time that I would eventually have to pay a price for all the attention I was

receiving from the Ablers. And for another, I learned some time ago that some people seemed to be interested in my genitals, even if I couldn't understand why.

It first started with Frau Doktor⁵² Tischler, a widow in her fifties, who had a strange fascination with my love-life and encouraged me to join her on holidays in the south of France, where I would be able to swim in the nude and really "air my genitals" – an offer I never accepted even though my parents thought it a great idea for me to spend the summer with such an *educated lady*.

Then there was Arthur, a middle-aged doorman at the *Großfürstliche Hof*, who bought me cups of coffee and genuinely impressed me with his ability to create poetry in the style of Schiller and Goethe. Sometimes we went on long walks where he hinted at his interest in my *forbidden zones*, but he never went beyond that. And then there were innumerable drivers who picked me up as a hiker and tried to touch my crotch, although I always managed to evade them or, at times, threatened them to keep their hands to themselves.

Maybe because of my experiences with inappropriate touching at holiday camp, I was now prepared to set limits. But these became a little blurred just at the moment. In my intoxication, feeling obliged because of what the Ablers were doing for me, and because I genuinely liked them, I was really confused. Had I led Mr Abler on? Was it really my own fault that I found myself in this situation? In fact, was I guilty of breaking some law by letting Mr Abler think I was available to him? In the end, I made it clear that there was to be no anal contact and, for as long as I knew Mr Abler, he respected that limit.

By morning, in spite of my hangover, I had rationalized the night away. After all, what had happened? Mr Abler had fellated and masturbated me and then masturbated himself while encouraging me to cup his scrotum. My ejaculation had felt stronger than anything I could remember achieving myself, so the experience wasn't unpleasant. Besides, we both were drunk, and if I was guilty of leading him on, I had probably gotten off lightly.

We left late, giving our heads a little time to clear. But then the journey continued very pleasantly, albeit still dangerously, with stimulating conversation.

Interlude

The Trainee Lover (1962 – 1964)

“I’ve decided to train you to be a first-class lover.”

Sacha was startled by Mrs Abler’s unexpected pronouncement. He was sure he misheard. The implication of what he thought she said was too bizarre to be real. They had had sex on only two occasions, both of which seemed satisfactory –an almost instant orgasm for himself, as one might expect from a boy of fourteen, followed by a much longer repeat session which seemed to gratify her.

He sat at the breakfast table dressed in nothing more than swimming trunks. Even wearing those, he felt over-dressed; Mr and Mrs Abler were, as usual, completely nude, but Sacha wasn’t yet sufficiently at ease to go that far.

His discomfort was heightened because Mrs Abler was sexually a most alluring woman. Uncommonly for the era, she shaved all body hair, which made her sexuality inescapable, from her long and slender legs, to her exposed sex and athletically firm buttocks, to the gentle curves of her belly and back, the latter a perfect elongated S-shape.

But he was most fascinated by her *tits*, as she called them – a word he would not normally dare use, as it seemed disrespectful. Not surprisingly for a boy of his age, they seemed flawless to him, quite large, perfectly rounded at the bottom, and tipped with delicately detailed light-pink nipples.

What fascinated him most was that they seemed to have a life of their own, as if separate entities from their owner. They were subject to the laws of physics and quite distinct from the body’s consciously controlled activities; in the pool, they floated in water in the opposite direction to the swimmer’s movements, and, most significantly, they seemed to shake and throb even when Mrs Abler sat perfectly still. “It’s my heartbeat that makes them jiggle,” she explained as if it were the most natural subject of conversation when she caught him glancing at her. Sacha was embarrassed at having been caught no matter how discreet he had

tried to be, but he couldn't help wondering whether she hadn't set him up, knowing perfectly well how her appearance would affect him.

The training itself commenced so slowly that Sacha wasn't even aware of it. He frequently went to the cinema with the Ablers, often travelling to the bigger cities to see the latest hit movies that would take a while to make it to Karlsbach. Almost without him realising it, the movies became ever more adult, even including sex education films that had become popular at the time.⁵³ Although German attitudes to nudity and sex were very relaxed, these films were usually shown late in the evening, open to those over the age of eighteen; still, the Ablers never had any difficulties bringing him along. Sacha wondered whether that ease of entry involved gratuities, or whether cinema ushers just didn't care. Since he enjoyed all of his outings with the Ablers, he never questioned this aloud.

Of course, only a minority of films was overtly sexual, but over time they added up, and their messages were incorporated in Sacha's interactions with Mrs Abler. She gently pointed out when he went wrong in their lovemaking, reminding him of what the experts had explained. She also gave him biology lessons, using their own genitals to demonstrate. Most of all, she paid attention to the etiquette of intercourse: the woman was always to be considered first, her orgasm to be guaranteed, before a man was allowed to feel release.

Sacha wasn't sure how he really felt about this. On one hand, he lived what he imagined was the dream of all his friends: sex with a stunning woman, and a real one at that. They wished out loud what they wanted to do, and sometimes with whom, ranging from girls at school to Brigitte Bardot and other popular entertainers. He didn't participate in these discussions because he could neither admit that he was physically involved with a well-known woman of the town – not that anybody would have believed him anyway – nor did he really feel at ease pretending that he had no idea what it would be like to make these fantasies come true.

On the other hand, this dream was increasingly turning into a nightmare. No matter how much the Ablers justified their free love approach by what they called *the new morality of the 1960s*, something seemed basically wrong with making love to a woman while her husband was downstairs, even if that husband knew about it.

More importantly, making love gradually turned into sex-by-numbers, where there were far too many rules to remember, far too many steps to follow, and far too many obligations for spontaneity and fun. At age fourteen and fifteen, this was too complicated for him, and by the time he turned sixteen, it had become so routine that it no longer was difficult, but by then it wasn't much fun either; at times he even had to fake an orgasm to bring a session to an end.

What kept him going was the closeness and love he felt in his interactions with Mrs Abler, because even though very demanding, she was also very gentle with him, hinting rather than complaining, praising him when he did something well, and looking at him with eyes that were often filled with tears of joy.

Sacha also enjoyed seeing Mrs Abler's face display ecstasy, and the secret language they developed between themselves, including the signal she gave him when she was satisfied and that it was now his turn. But he wasn't sure whether he ever reached the level of expertise she originally envisaged. She neither commented on that, nor did he have any comparison from sex with other women; he just continued trying to improve with each session.

1963

Incident in the Forest

I stumbled along the forest road, along ridges, avoiding the corrugations and puddles. The ridges were hard, clay-like, often with sharp edges that I could feel even through the thick soles of my shoes.

More falling from foot to foot rather than actually running, orderly thought only gradually returned. I became aware of the odd zigzag pattern I was taking. This odd movement reflected the turmoil of my mind.

I remembered my confusion of a couple of years previously, but that didn't help. If anything, it made me wonder about my mental stability. I had nearly lost my mind then, and it seemed to be happening again.

So, what exactly had happened? I tried to remember yet, at the same time, tried to banish the memories.

I wanted to stop, to look back towards where it had happened a kilometre or so down the road, but I couldn't. I wasn't worried about being followed, because I knew I could outrun them. They were old people, probably in their forties. Physically, they were no threat to me.

But somehow that made things worse. How could I have let it happen? I continued my stumble towards home while trying to remember not what had happened, but how it had started.

"Boy," she had called to me, beckoning me to join her a little way off the forest track, up amongst the darker, moss-covered trees. "Come here, boy." I didn't know her, but I had seen her around town, often drunk, usually dressed in rags. Sometimes she muttered to herself, or shouted obscenities at people she apparently liked, offering sexual favours in exchange for a drink or a cigarette, or for free.

Most townspeople found her embarrassing; a crazy woman who might have been damaged in the war, or who couldn't cope with the new society. Police usually moved her on, when they saw her, and occasionally they arrested her

when somebody complained. She never really made a fuss, just went along laughing to herself, as if she saw a joke in the situation which escaped everyone else.

She wasn't homeless: her clothing changed regularly and was fairly clean, even if in careless repair, with patches over worn or torn parts of her skirts or blouses.

"Come here," she had called again, distorting her face in what was probably a smile. I had wondered if she had lost something in the dark amongst the trees and wanted my younger eyes to help her find it?

Something warned me not to go to her assistance, even though it had been drilled into me at home and at school to always obey the instructions of any adult. I had the feeling that she wasn't alone, even though I couldn't see anybody else. Finally, I dismissed the thought. I didn't think an adult would want to deceive me. So I approached the woman to find out what she wanted.

My instincts were right: she wasn't alone. There were two men with her, hidden behind the only two tree trunks thick enough to cover them. One was a Hungarian guest worker I vaguely knew; I had never seen the other, but thought he was probably another of the foreign workers who lived in the barracks-like accommodations of a construction company for whom they worked.

My pace increased as I continued stumbling towards home, as if I could even now run away from the danger. Obviously that is what I should have done. But then, at that point I hadn't known I was in danger.

I quickly discovered that things weren't right. I was still acknowledging the Hungarian's greeting when the other man suddenly gripped my shoulders. "What the hell?" I demanded, but the grip didn't allow me to move. This man was strong. Not surprisingly, if he was one of the construction workers shovelling rubble all day.

The woman deftly unbuttoned my trousers and, with a practiced hand, reached inside to pull out my genitals, gently arranging them above the elastic of my underpants. When done, she withdrew a short distance to admire her handiwork. Then she leaned against a tree, and lifted her skirts to expose her heavily hair-covered sex.

“Wouldn’t you like to stick your little man in here?” she cooed, then lubricated the middle finger of her right hand in her mouth, stroking it back and forth a few times in what was clearly an allusion to the sexual act. She did this with an expression that was probably meant to be sexy or flirtatious, but which just looked off-putting and odd.

“Right here,” she croaked, as she now stroked her finger along her sex, then gradually worked it inside herself. At that moment, I became aware of the Hungarian standing by my side now, who began to stroke my penis with one hand while masturbating himself with the other.

Everything was surreal, as if in a dream. I was firmly held in place by one man whose grip I could feel on my shoulders and whose knee seemed pressed into the small of my back, while the Hungarian stroked his penis and the woman fingered herself: at this very moment, I was close to losing consciousness because I had trouble processing what was going on. And all the time the two people I could see were talking to me, while the man behind me didn’t utter a sound.

“Doesn’t that make you hard?” the Hungarian asked nodding towards the woman.

“Wouldn’t you like to stick your sausage into me?” she followed up.

“Imagine driving deep into her until your balls slap against her cunt.”

“Yeah, boy, you can do it right here, lie on top of me, push it into me...”

This back and forth continued, while my mind drifted between hyper-alertness and tuning out.

“Oh look, he’s just a little boy, he can’t even get it up,” I heard the Hungarian laugh as he pointed towards my penis. He then concentrated on masturbating himself to a quick ejaculation. The woman guffawed both at my lack of response and the Hungarian’s climax. “Look, his dick is puking,” she repeated, over and over.

Suddenly, it was all over. The woman and the Hungarian disappeared, my shoulders were released, and I was alone.

Dazed, I rearranged myself and my clothing, and started running. Mindlessly, I ran from the scene of my humiliation and it took some time before I was aware that I was running back towards the town and the police station.

I suddenly stopped. Why the police station? What was I going to do there? I remembered having threatened that I would report the incident, but my captors had only laughed. "They wouldn't believe a boy when the three of us tell the cops that you are lying," the Hungarian had taunted.

Would the police dismiss me? And besides, what was I going to have them charged with anyway: Rape? That would be nonsense: I hadn't been raped.

"What happened?" they would ask me, and I would be too embarrassed to tell them; I wouldn't be able to find the words to express how mortified I had felt.

"Why didn't you run away?" they would ask. "The little pig loved it," one cop would say to another in a voice that sounded like the Hungarian's, laughing and pointing his finger at me. "Admit it, you wanted it to happen," another would shout. In a jumble of thought, I turned from accuser to accused.

And maybe they were right, these imaginary cops. If the man behind me had a knee in the small of my back, then one of his legs was raised off the ground. If so, then he wouldn't have had a firm footing, especially not amongst the roots of the tree. It should have been easy for me to free myself and run away.

Why hadn't I done that?

In fact, did I somehow initiate the event? Did I bring it upon myself? Did I do something to provoke the adults into singling me out? After all, why just me?

No, I had better not go to the police or I'd just make the situation worse: maybe they'd charge me with something like leading these people into temptation. And besides, I remembered my last experience with the police, which they might hold against me as well.

I was relieved to have thought this through before making an even greater fool of myself. That is when I commenced to stumble again, this time towards home, zigzagging oddly along the path, my movements reflecting the path my mind was taking.

Gradually, I began to wonder whether any of what I remembered had actually happened, or whether I was just imagining it. It seemed so unlikely, so unbelievable; perhaps I was having another mental breakdown?

Eventually, even this mode of travel brought me home. As I climbed the stairs to the building's front door, I began to look forward to talking with my

parents. I was sure that just talking was going to help sort out my mind. I unlocked the front door and ran up the single flight of stairs to our apartment, taking two or three steps at a time. A sense of relief overcame me as I turned the key: in a few moments, I would sort things out.

I found my mother waiting for me. Without a word of greeting, she beckoned me to follow her. She took me to my cupboard, the place where all my private possessions had to be kept.

“Look,” she said, as she opened the two small drawers. Inside, I found all my small possessions neatly placed in boxes, not in the jumble I had left them.

“Look,” she said again, as she opened the double-doors underneath. And again, I found all my books and papers neatly stacked in piles according to size. Not according to subject, as they had previously been, but according to size, with my large Mathematics book next to the large History book, the small book of mathematical tables next to the Latin Vocabulary Primer and the Catechism. The books were arranged from tallest to smallest, not according to any logical connection with each other. Again, I felt dazed as if I had received a blow to the head.

“What have you done?” I stammered.

“What you should have been doing” my mother responded, with a heavy emphasis on the word *you*. “I have tidied it up for you. I don’t expect to have to do it again!”

“Where are my clippings and notes?” I asked with fear in my voice. I couldn’t see the newspaper cuttings I had carefully collected over the last half year which were going to be the basis for an end of year school essay project.

“They made good fire-starters,” my mother replied. “You are too old to keep stupid little magazine pictures.”

There hadn’t been any pictures, only articles which might have had pictures on the reverse side. And there were copious notes from articles that couldn’t be cut out. All were gone. Months of careful reading, of collecting information, of spending spare time on this school project when I could have done things that were a lot more fun.

All gone!

“I haven’t heard a thank you yet,” my mother demanded. “And don’t you dare be a girl about this,” she added angrily, as she saw tears welling up in my eyes.

I went to the bathroom. While my mother stood outside accusing me of being ungrateful for not appreciating all she ever did for me, I looked through my stepfather’s medicine cabinet. From amongst the dozens of packets of tablets, I picked a couple of his heart medicines and emptied the pills into my hand. Then I swallowed the lot, washing it down with water from the tap. I carefully flushed the empty boxes down the toilet and, hoping for some quick result, preferably that my heart would stop, I re-joined my mother.

“Thank you for tidying up my cabinet,” I said to her, as I poured her a cup of coffee, then one for myself. I sat down at the kitchen table with her and waited.

Interlude

The Evil Side of the Family (1963)

Sacha was more than surprised, and quite apprehensive, when his mother announced that it was time to meet his family in Paris. At first, he thought she was trying to get rid of him. He had always been warned about possible kidnap attempts by his evil relatives in France who would take him away so that, as soon as he turned fourteen, they could put him to work. But the more he thought about it, the less likely this scenario seemed.

For one thing, he was already fifteen. And his status in the family had recently been elevated, because he was now a major contributor to the family income. This wasn't due to his outside earnings, but because his mother had received notification from the French consulate that there was a substantial amount of money to be claimed by her. Sacha had been declared *pupille de la nation*,⁵⁴ and with that came a pension to his care-givers.

This was not only a welcome addition to the family budget but also made a family dream come true, the purchase of a car.⁵⁵ They had always dreamt of having an *NSU Prinz*,⁵⁶ but with the unplanned arrival of Sacha's second sister, that was no longer realistic, as it was too small for two adults and three children, especially with luggage. But the family couldn't see any way of saving up for a larger car.

As it turned out, the back pay on the war orphan's pension was enough not only to buy a medium-sized car, but even one of the more exceptional models amongst them. In line with his stepfather's esoteric taste, the family ended up with an *AU 1000 S Coupé*.⁵⁷ It was sometimes called *a poor man's Goddess*⁵⁸, but couldn't quite shake its associations with the now abandoned *DKW* brand. It suited his parents' self-image of understated⁵⁹ noblesse to have a car that was truly exceptional, even though most people didn't realize it.⁶⁰ Perhaps it was the new car that inspired Sacha's mother to make the long journey to Paris, an excuse to give it a good run.

As it turned out, the trip was surprisingly pleasant. Sacha's mother turned back into the caring and even loving person she had been when he was very young, when she looked at him as an ersatz husband: she consulted him on all matters, from route taken, to meals and accommodation along the way. In fact, she even let him drive the car for a while on some country roads – a skill he had acquired due to the Ablers – even though it was highly illegal for a fifteen-year-old boy to take the wheel.⁶¹ Sacha had merely hinted that he could drive the car and she had offered to let him do so, instead of questioning his abilities as usual. Whenever she spoke with anybody – hotel clerk, or waiter, or whoever – she showed pride in introducing him as her son, instead of being annoyed by his very existence. Sacha wondered whether his mother realized that while he spoke no French, he understood the language, a skill he had picked up holidaying with his cousin's family for several years.

If the journey itself was unusual for Sacha, their arrival turned it surreal. They left the car in one of the suburbs at the home of a colonel his mother knew from her days at the *GM*.⁶² They spent the night there, being feasted as if they were long lost friends, which made Sacha wonder what relationship had existed between his mother and her former boss, and what the officer's wife thought about it.

The next morning, their host drove them to the *18^e arrondissement*,⁶³ where one of his aunts lived. Because of traffic and lack of parking, their driver had to leave them quite abruptly. Sacha felt somehow abandoned and with a sudden panic at what was going to happen.

Finally, after only a brief wait at the concierge's, he met the first of his *evil relatives*, aunt Solange. She reminded Sacha of Edith Piaf, tiny, with a round face, spritely in spite of a leg injured during the war. She practically threw herself at Sacha, hugging and kissing him again and again, then finally embracing Sacha's mother with great warmth. Sacha had difficulty following the onslaught of words and expressions, but it was clear that she saw in him an image of her dead brother.

After a quick telephone call, other members of his family arrived in rapid succession: first his grandparents, two stocky people in their sixties, then three aunts with their husbands, and finally an uncle who came alone. All remarked on

how Sacha reminded them of his father.

The family was obviously close, whether related by blood or marriage. The youngest aunt, only in her twenties, brought along her baby, which she breastfed frequently and quite openly in spite of the many relatives crowded into the small apartment. They paid much attention to each other, to the parents, and to Sacha and his mother. They seemed much less formal than the family to which Sacha was accustomed, and there wasn't a hint of the animosity he had expected based on his mother's stories. In fact, Sacha's mother, who thought she would be treated as a vile German who took a son and brother away from them, was instead treated as a welcome addition to the family, and seemed as surprised as Sacha.

Over the next two weeks, the family spent as much time together as they could, crowded into his aunt's small apartment. They shared meals, played cards in surprisingly animated fashion, and never stopped talking, including Sacha in everything. One of his uncles by marriage took a particular interest in him, assisting him when they played cards, joking with him, trying out what little German he knew on his nephew. He even gave the boy his World War Two fighter pilot's leather jacket, a sacrifice of a valued souvenir that astonished Sacha.

But most of all, Sacha basked in the adoration of his grandparents. His grandmother encouraged and complimented every effort he made to speak in French, and frequently hugged and kissed him for no apparent reason. His grandfather took him to some of the sights in Paris, especially the museums, the Eiffel Tower, and *Étoile* with the *Arc de Triomphe*. He spoke as little German as Sacha spoke French, but that didn't stop him from expressing pride in the places they visited, nor from telling Sacha about



Sacha's early attempts at photography, which became his first profession after completion of high school

his father and his childhood. Occasionally, the old man's voice broke a little as he wiped away a tear while he put an arm around the boy and pulled him close.

And frequently, his grandparents urged him to work hard at school so that he could make a career for himself by going to university. One of his aunts, who



worked at the Sorbonne, even made plans for Sacha to live with her when the time came, so that it wouldn't cost him anything, and she could give him a lift every day.

Initially, Sacha soaked up all the attention, but after a while, the holiday became fatiguing. He was used to being on his best behaviour at all times, which was no different from being at home. But here he was also the centre of so much affection, which was completely unlike anything at home, and from which there seemed no escape for a little

solitude. It wasn't just the attention from his family that exhausted him, there were also all the new impressions and experiences of just being in Paris.

The city was just so... so Paris, a living, three-dimensional cliché of itself. Wherever he looked, he was reminded of what he had read and seen in pictures of the city. But, instead of photos of art nouveau *Métro* signs, he really saw them with their enamelled print and wrought iron frames and settings. The *18^e siècle architecture* was both pretty and impressive, intermingled with buildings much older and much younger.

And some of the structures were astonishing. When Sacha first saw the Eiffel Tower, he was in awe at its sheer size and, at the same time, amazed at how delicate and fine it seemed with its lattice work.

Wherever he went, jukeboxes and radios played Piaf and Vartan, Aznavour and Halliday.⁶⁴ And, to remind him of Mrs Abler at home, Françoise Hardy's *Tous les garçons et les filles* was still a hit. The music he heard included

songs about Paris itself, which struck Sacha as odd: a city celebrating itself?

Even the art in the streets and galleries became overpowering to him. Here were three-dimensional statues in colour which he had known all his life as black-and-white photographs, and even the paintings had not only height and width, but also depth: he could see the artists' brushstrokes, the ridges and valleys formed by the paint, creating patterns of light and shade changing with the direction from which he viewed them.

At night, he slept by an open window, which not only allowed a breeze to soften the stifling heat that kept him awake, but also allowed the noise to flood in from the street a level below the apartment. When he sat up, he could look down into a bistro, opened right up for the same breeze, with small, round, wrought-iron tables on the pavement outside. People sat in and around the place, some eating, all drinking *Eau de Vichy*, or *Dubonnet*, or *Pernod*, or a *Petit Rouge*,⁶⁵ or any number of other colourful drinks he couldn't recognize. On all of the tables was something to eat: bowls of olives, hors-d'oeuvres and, in some cases, filled bread rolls or couscous dishes.

Sacha was fascinated by the vast variety of people he saw. Europeans freely intermingling with Central or North Africans, Arabic people from the Middle East, Asians and, very occasionally in this café, typical tourists who looked bewildered by the din of people apparently arguing about everything. Sacha could hear only fragments of conversations but recognized politics, sports, and even music and the arts amongst the topics. Heated though these arguments were, they stopped suddenly when it was time to leave, with participants shaking hands or embracing as they parted, just as they had on arrival.

But Sacha wasn't surprised to see this mixture of people – Paris was the largest conurbation in Europe, and one would expect it to be cosmopolitan. But he was astonished by the ease with which they all intermingled, especially since he had been so marginalized as a child – even though he looked, spoke and behaved like everyone else – simply for possessing a foreign passport. It reminded him of how Hitler had looked down on the French as decadent because they allowed colonials to not only enter parliament, but even made them part of the government.

Sacha could vividly feel how this city inspired Hemingway and Henry

Miller, Dali and Picasso, and so many other artists and musicians from around the world.

When the holiday came to an end, Sacha was both sad and relieved. Sad, because he had felt loved here, even though he hadn't previously known anyone on this side of his family. But there had also been such a flood of new impressions that he yearned to return to normalcy, no matter how humdrum it was.

On the way home, he was tempted to question his mother on why his family had been so misrepresented in the past. But he didn't. He didn't want to spoil the still warm interactions. Nor did he want to find out that he had missed something, and that in fact they had been evil throughout their visit, but he had been too stupid to notice.

Oddly, his mother seemed to glow from the attention and acceptance received; she was the chosen partner of their son and brother, which made her a part of the family. There was no hint of resentment towards her, even though she had been part of the nation that had caused his death. Sacha wondered if they might have treated her differently if they had known the extent of her former devotion to the regime.

At home, the cordiality between Sacha and his mother didn't survive long. It continued for as long as there were stories about their holiday they could tell excitedly, but once those were told, things returned to normal. Life at home was tense: Sacha was expected to contribute even more to the running of the family in gratitude for the holiday, and he was expected to do well at school because now, apparently, he was going to go to Paris for his university education. For Sacha, none of this meant much. He continued to do his duties and to find warmth and recreation in his interactions with his school friends and the Ablers. Most importantly, he continued to enjoy the unquestioning love of Lexi, whom he had missed terribly during his time away.

Emancipation - Part I (1963-1964)

It started with Birgit-the-Swot.

Birgit was a chunky girl whose hefty features made her less than attractive. But nobody held that against her. We all had our own body image issues, so that we weren't likely to point the finger at others.

Or maybe we were just a particularly tolerant group. This became obvious one day when Prince Valiant (School Director Tapfer: *tapfer* is the German word for brave) came to our English class to tell us that Armin Zwiebel would be joining our class.

"You all have seen Armin around school," he said with his usual sombre face – he always looked as if he had just bitten into a particularly sour lemon ("the perfect face for an undertaker," we used to joke). "He has a rather unfortunate deformity, but you are absolutely forbidden to talk to him about it, or to tease him because of it."

He was correct: we all knew Armin. He was actually two classes above us but, according to Prince Valiant, it was thought best that he got a fresh start by putting him a couple of years back. "He has difficulty coping with his school work," we were told, "and it would be nice if you could all assist him in various subjects." He mentioned Maths as one of those areas where help might be required, and pointedly looked at me at that moment.

Armin's 'deformity' was an exceptionally large head, particularly in the cranial region, tapering down towards more normal proportions towards his jaw.⁶⁶ Popular rumour was that he was suffering from *water on the brain*, a theory apparently supported by his inability to do well at school in any consistent way: he frequently showed flashes of brilliance, but then had problems dealing with more elementary concepts.

"Imagine what his mother went through," mumbled our teacher, Mrs Collins.⁶⁷ Valiant briefly glared at her with his most disapproving of expressions, and Mrs Collins turned red, looking at the notes on her desk with obvious

discomfort. We surreptitiously glanced at each other wondering what that had been about – none of us understood what she meant – and why the Director was talking to us about Armin. We really weren't likely to make fun of him at any rate; it just wasn't the sort of thing our group did.

In comparison with Armin, Birgit came off quite well in terms of looks. Her problems were not so much her features but what she did with them. Birgit had, without doubt, poor fashion sense. Of course, there were many of us (myself included) whose appearance was dominated by how much our parents were prepared to invest in our clothing. And again, there was almost universal understanding for this. But Birgit's problem wasn't money; she had plenty of that, as she frequently demonstrated. Instead, her issue was that she dressed as a well-to-do grandmother might, with plenty of unstylish patterned knitted cardigans over frilly blouses with innumerable pearled buttons, and heavy, large skirts which accentuated her size even more. Her footwear was almost universally inappropriate as she tried to balance on heels that were higher than allowed at school, and which provided no protection in rain or snow. These fashion faux pas earned Birgit a good deal of derision since they were self-inflicted rather than due to force majeure.

Her response was to seek affirmation from others, and in particular from our teachers. Not only was she an absolute swot, but she tried to ingratiate herself with teachers in every conceivable way. She was the only student who regularly brought presents to teachers, usually claiming that there was an overabundance of a particular titbit in her home. And she was the only one who still laughed at jokes we had all heard so often that they would make us yawn – or groan. She always volunteered to do any jobs, like cleaning the blackboard, even before teachers had asked.

It was obvious that some teachers found her annoying. But most not only put up with her over-eagerness but actually encouraged it. This, in turn, made Birgit even less popular with her fellow students.

But Birgit had a response to that; she made it known that she was quite happy to share her always well-prepared homework with a select group of students. The price was not money, but inclusion. In exchange for her willingness to let others copy her work – or, on occasion, to even prepare separate homework

for them – she expected to be included in girl-talk during breaks, and to receive invitations to parties. Even if she deigned to accept only a limited number of such offers, it made her feel powerful and popular to decide with whom she might share a lunchtime conversation, or whom she might honour with her presence.

I looked at these events mostly as an outsider. I was neither interested in including her in any of my break activities, nor did I have to woo her for favours, as my own ability to supply maths homework, or to assist others in working out their own, placed me in a privileged position. I needed to make sure that I didn't become a male version of Birgit, but since I could never be accused of being a swot, there was little chance of falling into a similar category. And as far as party invitations were concerned, I never organized any of them, so that the question of inviting her, or not, was a moot point.

But I did observe her activities, as I observed those of most of my fellow students, out of personal interest. It amused me to observe them playing their social games, and to see how effective, or not, they were in achieving their goals. One of my observations in relation to Birgit led me to the conclusion that teachers seemed to grade students like Birgit without actually weighing up their real performance or accomplishments.

Assessment was an ongoing process in our school. In most sessions of practically all subjects, grades were noted down for each contribution made by students. Naturally, we tried to see what the teacher wrote after we finished any task. Usually, that was relatively easy, except with overly secretive teachers, like Oberstudienrat Götter, who hid his grade book behind his ever-present briefcase security wall. But most teachers seemed unaware that we were quite capable of seeing what they wrote, particularly since, in most cases, only a single-digit number was entered into the book. When a teacher didn't write anything, we took it to mean that it was an ungraded activity.

Grading was done on a numeric scale, from 1 to 6,⁶⁸ of which the first four were considered a pass, and the last two as fails. Some teachers added intermediate steps,⁶⁹ and Dr Laika, a Classics and Ancient Languages teacher, even added the grades 7 and higher⁷⁰ to his repertoire, which made it very difficult to arrive at a desirably low average.

One day, out of curiosity, I began observing what grades Birgit was getting, and I noticed that Mrs Collins actually wrote down a grade before Birgit had even finished her reading. So, when the activity was over, nothing more was written down; our assumption that some activities were not graded was incorrect. I began to pay closer attention first to Mrs Collins, and then the other teachers, and soon learned that many grades were entered without any reference to student contribution. I began to realize that grades were allocated based on reputations, rather than what we really did.

I put this theory to the test. The next time I was called on to read something aloud in English class, I didn't allow myself to be distracted by finding the correct passage but watched Mrs Collins as I stood up next to my desk. And I wasn't disappointed: a grade of 4 (barely passing) was noted down before I even commenced.

The text to be read was a travelogue by some famous Englishman who had visited Germany during the previous century. To test whether Mrs Collins was even listening to me, I started making some random word substitutions, like every time the word *German* appeared, reading it as *Geranium*. There was no reaction from Mrs Collins. A couple of students sniggered, demonstrating that they were paying more attention than the teacher.

After a few times of making the same 'mistake', the class fell even more silent than usual. Obviously, it became clear to my fellow students that I was doing this deliberately, and that it wasn't a mere error, as the word German was used so frequently in our English classes that we all knew how to pronounce it correctly.

"He keeps saying..." Birgit piped up when I read it incorrectly again, but her sentence ended in an *oof* sound when Sabine elbowed her in the ribs; but still there was no reaction from Mrs Collins.

The next time, Birgit was ready and jumped up from her seat before any of the others could stop her. "Mrs Collins," she shouted excitedly, "he keeps on mispronouncing the word German!"

"Really?" Mrs Collins finally looked up from her book. "Can you say the word for me please?" she asked me. I did, pronouncing it correctly. "You are not

rolling the *r* enough,” she critiqued, which probably had more to do with the exaggerated American pronunciation she taught, than what I had actually said.

“But Dr Tetscher said that this is how I should say it,” I countered.

Mrs Collins sighed. I had, deliberately, touched one of those intra-faculty sore spots that were easy to exploit: the ongoing war between those who believed in academic purity – and were convinced that English had to be spoken as heard on the BBC – while others believed that the future of German trade lay with America, and therefore we should speak the way people do there. In reality, this was a pseudo-argument, with the true underlying issue being whether they had picked up English while in British or American prisoner of war camps. Few, if any, had actually studied English at university. It was questionable whether the teachers really knew the language all that well, which was probably why Mrs Collins hadn’t even noticed my mispronunciation.

This divide-and-conquer approach was, of course, well tested but, sadly, only worked well with teachers of English. The other faculties seemed more united or, at best, we’d get a promise that the teacher would check a disputed issue with the colleague.

One area where there were huge differences in teachings, but little mutual consultations or respect between colleagues, was in History and the Social Studies subjects. There was an official policy by the Ministry of Culture⁷¹ on how these subjects were to be presented, but most teachers added their personal interpretations. These ranged from local pride⁷² to various ways of dealing with the recent political past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the dealing with the Nazi era, was a huge topic in Germany at the time). Still, most teachers stayed within the accepted general guidelines on how recent history was to be interpreted. An exception to that was Theo. We didn’t actually know his given name, we only ever knew him as Dr Storm. We called him Theo after Theodor Storm, the 19th century German writer and lyricist, some of whose works we studied in German classes

Theo was a brute of a man who never quite made the transition from army sergeant to civilian. He took great delight in verbally, and even physically, abusing students, in the process adding as much public humiliation as he could

inflict. He quickly took a dislike to me, which lowered my grades in both German, a subject in which I was quite good, and Latin, with which I always struggled.

I was not sure what he had against me and, foolishly, tried to improve the impression I was making on him, but without success. I saw this as important since Theo, like most teachers, wrote down their grades for student performances long before there was any evidence of how well we were doing. In the end, I gave up; nothing I did seemed to improve his disposition towards me.

What is more, I had taken a very strong dislike to him as well, not because of the negative way in which he treated me but because I became very suspicious of much of his teaching. Being probably the most politically aware student of my class, I was frequently amazed by what he was teaching. He spent one German class to teach us the first stanza of the *Deutschlandlied*,⁷³ which had been banned since the end of the Second World War because it was closely associated with the philosophy of the Nazi regime.⁷⁴ But that didn't stop Dr Storm from giving us a completely benign interpretation of the banned stanza and urging us to know it in spite of the ban "enforced on us by the Occupiers". Many believed him, but I was sceptical.

My cynicism increased when he spent a History class reinterpreting the Holocaust. "It is impossible," he thundered, "that six million Jews could have been killed in the gas chambers. It would require far more manpower than was available in the Empire."⁷⁵ What is more, there weren't even six million Jews in the whole of Europe, let alone Germany." He felt that a far more realistic number of victims was 300,000, including political prisoners, Gypsies, homosexuals, and "some Jews".

"Of course," he told us with a great display of earnestness, "even a few hundred thousand people are far too many, and the gas chambers should never have been built. But the six million Jews are a pure invention of the allied war propaganda machine! This lie is designed to make us feel guilty of our heritage instead of being justly proud of it!"

My question of how his estimate could vary so radically from that we saw in all the literature, including encyclopaedias and history books, was dismissed with a simple comment: "Were you alive at the time? I was! Therefore,

I am much more likely to know the facts than you possibly could, no matter what *Schundliteratur*⁷⁶ you may have read!”⁷⁷

And, to complete my negative impression of Theo, he proudly announced one day that he had joined a new political movement, the NPD, an ultra-right party.⁷⁸ He urged us all to investigate the sound policies of this organisation and to encourage our parents to join the movement to get the country back on its feet.

Wandertage (hiking days) were always a welcome distraction from routine school days. We never quite fathomed the reasoning behind these irregular excursion days, but suspected that they had a lot more to do with housekeeping tasks in the school than with making us healthier, particularly since school sports were part of the examinable curriculum, and an odd day away from school was unlikely to add much to the weekly Sports classes.

Sometimes, we would literally go for an all-day hike, which most of us found exceedingly boring and pointless. Still, we could chat with our friends, flirt with the girls: usually, we could only do that outside of school time, and we didn't spend enough time as a group to pursue any amorous intentions with classmates; but on a hike, where there was literally nothing to do but walk and talk, there was a lot more mingling than usual.

Far more popular than seemingly aimlessly walking around the countryside were outings to specific locations: a bus trip to one of the many castles or monasteries; a train trip to visit some famous cathedral; and so on. Not only were such outings more interesting as there was something to see at the end of the journey, but also because even the strictest of teachers tended to be a lot more relaxed. They usually turned a blind eye not only to our visiting beer gardens for lunch, but also to the quantity of alcohol we consumed there. In fact, some of them joined in, making sure that nobody went too far by directing activities elsewhere when it looked like drinking might become an end in itself.

It was on one of these more relaxed outings, a visit to the Frankfurt Zoo to meet its famous director Professor Bernhard Grzimek,⁷⁹ that Theo sidled up to me and put his arm around my shoulder in a friendly gesture. That, in itself, was startling since nobody had ever seen him display any affection; in fact, the only time he had ever touched a student to my knowledge was to hit or punch him.⁸⁰ More startling yet was the tone in which he spoke to me. “I really don't have

anything against you personally,” he stated warmly. “In fact, you are in many ways quite a likable and clever young man. It’s just that students with your background shouldn’t be taught in a German school at the taxpayers’ expense. It’s nothing personal.” With that, he pulled me slightly towards himself in something approaching a friendly hug, then let go to catch up with a group of students a few meters ahead of me.

“What did Theo want?” Michael asked me with astonishment as he joined me.

“I haven’t a clue,” I said, then relating Theo’s exact words to me.

“Because you are French?” Michael wondered out loud. “But aren’t your parents German taxpayers?”

“Or maybe he thinks I’m Jewish,” I suggested, the thought only just striking me. Maybe that’s why he had reacted so stupidly to my questioning his Holocaust denials.

Michael stopped in his tracks. “Surely not,” he said. “I thought that old rumour was long dead.” After a moment, he added: “What are you going to do about it?”

“What can I do?” I shrugged. Theo could easily deny having said what I had just heard from him, and in a conflict between a teacher and a student, the teacher’s word was automatically taken as the truth.

Sadly for me, at the time I didn’t realise that the sudden appearance of Theo in Karlsbach was the result of a *Strafversetzung*,⁸¹ a form of punishment that suggested serious misconduct in a prior position. As Dr Kupfer, one of my Mathematics teachers, pointed out some time later, this was actually an occasion on which my word would likely have carried more weight than I had thought.

As I didn’t know any of that at the time, I was left feeling both confused and depressed. And, oddly, I also felt happy and vindicated. I had always thought that the poor grades I received from Theo were overly harsh when compared with those given to my fellow students.

I sat down in a beer-garden to think this out over a *Mass*⁸² beer. Michael joined me in sympathy and, to my surprise, we were soon surrounded by a large part of the class. Some were there in support, they told me, even though they didn’t know what had happened. Some others were there simply because their

friends were, probably not even guessing that there had been some sort of incident. Only a few, including Birgit-the-Swot, continued the official zoo itinerary.

And so, the outing to the zoo ended in general merriment caused by the beer. In the bus on the way home, a pad from one of the girls' bras made the rounds, with everyone trying to guess whose it was without being too obvious. We not only checked out whose bust was smaller than usual but also whether one of the girls was perhaps lopsided, since only one of the paddings was handed around. My personal guess was that it was a spare, particularly since some of the girls participated in the comparisons and guessing games, instead of showing sympathy for a fellow member of their own gender. But it didn't really matter; we were busy finding excuses for swapping seats with others so that we could gradually work our way through the entire bus, which was enough of a fun activity in itself to keep us occupied for the entire journey home.

Theo sat at the front of the bus with Dr Laika, also not known for having much patience or a sense of humour, yet, oddly, neither of them said a word about the constant, and not particularly travel-safe, activities behind them. As best as we could judge, they just ignored us by pretending to be engaged in some important discussion which, to our amusement, they conducted in Latin.

Emancipation - Part II (1963 – 1964)

Now convinced that success in class depended on status, Michael and I spent the next few weeks analysing how reputations were built. In some cases, the answer was quite simple, like with Wolfgang, one of our close friends: he was a very dedicated worker; not brilliant in any subject, but always well prepared, with homework done and even knowledge gained through extra readings always readily at his disposal. For him, homework was an escape from working in his father's plumbing business; it was in his own interest to spend as much time as possible on his schoolwork.

Some of the rich kids had tutors on standby who were called on at the first sign of losing touch with a subject. Of course, that didn't help those who were entirely without innate skills, and they tended to drop out over the years to continue their education in one of the few very expensive private schools. But tutoring was a great support for the average and above students wanting to remain in the top percentiles. Although unfair to the rest of us, I actually didn't mind it much, because I benefited greatly from these arrangements, being one of the tutors frequently called upon. Initial contact was usually the result of teacher recommendation, but my reputation also spread amongst the parents because I was quite successful. My special emphasis on relating abstract concepts and formulas to concrete examples, and on concentrating on the connections between the formula and the result instead of rote learning of rules, quickly made me known as *the boy to go to* when Mathematics was a problem. Occasionally, I even tutored students in classes above my own, even though I first had to learn the formulas myself. In return, I was usually paid ten Marks per hour, five times what my parents were prepared to give me as pocket money for a week, and sometimes I even received bonus payments when one of my students got a good test result.

Oddly, my parents continued to pay me my meagre weekly allowance even though they were aware that I easily earned multiple times that amount. As

best as I could work it out, they did it so that they could never be accused of leaving me without financial support. And naturally, I accepted the payment every week, even though I had to feign profuse gratitude for something that barely made a difference, because rejecting freely offered payment could be interpreted as rejecting *all* kinds of payment henceforth.

“What about Werner?” Michael asked as we sat at the *Lido* ice cream parlour discussing how reputations could be influenced. It was already a cool late-summer’s day, but we wanted to take advantage of the establishment’s offerings a few more times before it closed for the winter. I always thought it odd that the *Lido* closed in mid-October displaying a notice to come back in late April when it would reopen for the summer season. Why didn’t they change into a café during the colder months of the year? Or sell roasted chestnuts? Or the seasonally popular ginger bread? It seemed odd to leave a shop in a central location closed for half a year. We suspected that it had to do with the owner being an Italian who preferred to spend the winter in the much more pleasant climate of his homeland rather than put up with harsh German winters, not to mention the depressing darkness of the transition season.

“Good question,” I said, poking a long ice cream spoon into a *Lido Spezial*. Michael was indulging in an *Ananas Becher (Pineapple Surprise)*. Both dishes were practically meals in themselves, but to us they just represented summer and the tourist season where the town was full of visitors who seemed to bring a sense of happiness to a place that could be depressingly dark and wet-cold when the summer sun had given way to grey clouds.

“I think Werner’s parents might have something to do with his good grades,” I suggested.

Michael nodded. “Running a business selling hi-fi equipment and television sets wouldn’t do any harm,” he said, referring to the open secret that people in positions of power, which included teachers, rarely paid the same price for luxury goods as ordinary citizens. “And maybe even cash,” he added.

We often wondered about the source of wealth of some of our teachers and suspected that bribes were not out of the question. It was, of course, difficult to judge people’s wealth in the post-war era, particularly when some individuals received compensation payments for wealth lost in the war. But it did seem

peculiar how some who had arrived as penniless refugees could, within a very few years, show wealth that seemed beyond the reach of most families. Like Herr Redlich, an Art teacher and church choir master, who had looked particularly bedraggled when he was first seen in Karlsbach, but who had since built a substantial home guarded day and night by a couple of large black dogs that reminded us of the animals of which Hitler and his colleagues seemed so fond. He drove a Mercedes 220 SE, a car that was well above what one might afford on a teacher's salary. We rarely saw the car because his home was located in a beautifully wooded area overlooking the Neckar Valley, close enough to the new high school so that Herr Redlich could easily walk to work. Ironically, "Redlich" is an old-fashioned term for "honest".

The new school was a modern palace of glass and steel, showing off the *Wirtschaftswunder* at its highest point. It finally had enough space for all the students and even capacity for expansion. It also had such amenities as an assembly hall where we could hear proclamations without having to stand in the playground in bad weather, and there was even a canteen. Each of us was made responsible for our half-table and a chair in our homeroom, and we had to report immediately if somebody defaced either, or we would personally become liable for any damage done.

There seemed to be a particularly good mood amongst staff and students after our move to the new building. In fact, grades seemed to improve for most of us, even though we weren't sure whether that had to do with student enthusiasm or teacher joy over the new environment. Michael's question about Werner reminded me of that time.

"I think there is also a halo effect," I said. I almost had to laugh aloud at the way Michael raised his eyebrows in puzzlement. "If some event raises your status for whatever reason, there will be follow-on effects in related areas," I explained.

"Oh, you mean like you getting advanced status for the sciences because you are good in Maths?" he responded. Not flattering, I thought, but correct. I wasn't surprised that he recognised that I wasn't anywhere nearly as good in the sciences as I was in Maths, but I was astonished that he had understood my halo theory in spite of my poor explanation.

“So,” he added, “because Werner has represented the city in rowing regattas, he gets bonus credits in all his subjects?”

I nodded. “It’s obvious he gets good marks in Sports, even though he isn’t really all that good at anything but rowing,” I said.

“And hammer throw,” Michael interjected. “I guess he is good in most things involving upper arm strength,” he added.

I wasn’t sure whether rowing really had to do with upper arm strength; I suspected it involved a lot more of the whole body. But since rowing, like tennis, was one of the sports reserved for the rich in town,⁸³ I had no first-hand experience.

“More to the point,” I returned to the topic, “because his name is in the papers every now and then, the powers-that-be tend to smile on him quite generally.”

“It’s a shame we aren’t in the Soviet Union,” Michael contributed to this train of thought, “or you could represent us in the Maths Olympics and maybe that would make you immune to Theo’s attacks...”

The more we discussed the halo effect, the more convinced we became that it influenced much of how we were graded. As Michael suggested, my own reputation in one subject gave me an easy ride through related ones, but didn’t help me in the foreign languages.

“And how do we improve our status without money?” Michael asked. We devised strategies of how to build on the limited resources available to us.

“Never be called on first,” Michael started by stating the obvious. Some teachers only seemed to grade an activity if the first student they called on lived up to his or her reputation. If one of their favourites did poorly, or if a student they disliked performed well, there was every chance that the activity would remain ungraded. “I think being third or fourth is best...” He was right; by the time teachers had heard a couple of students read or translate something, they seemed to lose interest and were no longer paying close attention.

“Unless there is a general call for an answer from any of us,” I stated the flip-side to the rule. It helped an established reputation to be first with a right answer. We discussed the strategies for being selected after a teacher’s concentration started to flag. We discovered that we had independently of each

other worked out the psychology of teacher-manipulation: looking furtive, for example, and trying to avoid eye-contact with a teacher was a sure way to make them think we were not prepared. And that, in turn, was the best way to be called on, as teachers liked nothing more than to demonstrate how little we knew. So, with several teachers, the trick was to look at them confidently in order not to be called on first.

Carefully prepared facial expressions indicating boredom, keen interest or even fear could also influence teachers, but one had to make allowances for individual differences. A few teachers tried to encourage those with enthusiasm for a subject, while others were more likely to pick on those who didn't show promise. With new teachers, we had to learn their peculiarities so that we could use them to our advantage.

A reputation could be changed on the basis of this type of class participation, but it took time, since we had to overcome the prejudices some teachers brought towards us. A more direct way was to gain better grades in tests because most of those were marked according to standard answers, although even there we came across pretty blatant discrimination – ten spelling errors in a Latin test for me meant a failing grade, while the same number from one of Theo's favourite students were excused as a misunderstanding of what was asked for in the test. Once, Martin, who, like myself, struggled in Latin, challenged Theo on the fact that Brigitte, one of the teacher's favourites,⁸⁴ had the same number of errors as he. Theo immediately changed her grade from a 2 to a 6, thus making sure that Martin drew not only the scorn of Brigitte but of the whole group. I thought it quite a clever move, perfectly in line with Theo's character, which assured that no student would ever challenge his biased marking again.

Since tests were so important, we developed strategies for cheating, carefully adjusted for each teacher and subject. Subterfuge and red herrings were the key here, like the timely dropped book of a co-conspirator which distracted the teacher long enough that a friend could quickly look up an answer or could have a key word flashed by a neighbour.

Monika, one of my closer female friends, once entrusted me with the secrets of her cheating strategy. On days where she might need a little 'memory help' during a test, she wrote key words on the inside upper seam of her dress.

She then controlled access to her secret library with her shoulders: pulled back, or standing upright, pressed the seam against her chest, hiding the evidence of cheating. But seated for an exam, she could hunch forward, opening up a gap to allow her access to key terms, formulas, or whatever else she had pencilled in. “A little limited for space,” she admitted, “but perfectly safe, because no teacher would dare demand to look down the front of my dress.”

“But what if a teacher walks past during the test?” I asked. “You don’t always know when a teacher is near.”

“That’s why I wear my lucky bra,” she said with a wink. “I’ll show it to you next time I wear it.”

True to her word, she allowed me a glance down the front of her dress the next time she wore her special underwear. The bra was a work of art, delicately lacy, black, and slightly padded, capturing anybody’s attention who might chance to see it. Not only was it attractive in itself, it also lifted Monika’s not particularly large breasts, putting them on display as a bikini top might. “So, did you see what was written in my décolletage?” she asked with a giggle. Naturally, I had not. “It works even with the female teachers,” she added and winked again.

I wondered why she had been so willing to expose herself to me in this way since, in my experience, girls were very shy about letting anybody glimpse their underwear, even though they willingly displayed much more at the swimming pool. More significantly, since that revelation I became aware, and suspicious, of many unusual movements and behaviours during tests, even though I never managed to work out whether these meant anything other than a need to stretch.

My own strategy was to rely on Sun Tzu’s theory of misdirection. I would write something, usually mathematical formulas, on my lower arms, just covered by my sleeves. Inevitably, with the movements involved in writing during a test, the area above my wrists would become exposed, convincing hapless teachers that they had caught me out. And, while no teacher would ask to look into a girl’s dress, they had no qualms demanding that I roll up my sleeves to expose the allegedly illicit notes. I usually made a meal of doing so, carefully removing my cufflinks, then slowly folding one cuff upwards, then the other, and

so on, all the while observing the teachers. I enjoyed their anticipation, and their discovery that the notes had nothing to do with the test. All the while my real cheat notes were on pieces of paper underneath the page on which I was writing; pressing hard on the page allowed me to see the notes below, but even the slightest relaxing of paper tension when a teacher was near would make the cover sheet seem opaque again, a technique that also worked with some textbooks. Preoccupied with the notes on my arms, and how they might after all relate to the test, the teachers were never aware of what I was actually doing.

While everyone did what seemed necessary to get good grades, one unwritten rule amongst us was that we could not advance ourselves at the expense of a class-mate; to do so was clearly against the code. You didn't have to like everyone, but you had to show loyalty to each other in the battle with the teachers. Which was, of course, what made Birgit-the-Swot so unpopular: she frequently broke that rule, always feigning innocence, claiming that she wasn't aware that she was harming anybody. Most put up with her behaviour, albeit grudgingly, because she was such a willing source of high-quality homework, and few of us were like Wolfgang-the-well-prepared.

I wasn't one of Birgit's customers, not only since I could readily trade with others myself but, more importantly, because I thoroughly disliked her. Not only was she a swot, she was also a snitch: every day, she would give her mother a detailed outline of what had happened at school. Since she lived near my home and my mother frequently met Birgit's at the shops, I was frequently in trouble because of this mothers' mafia and Birgit-the-snitch.

I rarely went home right after school, because there were better places for doing my homework. Even at the beer garden near our school, generally considered a disreputable place, I got fewer interruptions than at home. It almost seemed as if the daytime drinkers had come to accept me as one of their own, even though I didn't interact with them beyond the casual greetings common in such a place. Because of these delays on the way home, my mother was frequently well informed about my test results, or any disrespect I might have shown a teacher, long before I got home. Even the *Geranium incident* made it to my mother's ears that way.

Michael, too, had been an occasional victim of Birgit's overzealous displays of being a know-it-all and, since he lived near me, his parents were also on her jungle drum path. He therefore had no difficulty agreeing when I suggested that we had to give her some of her own medicine. But how? We had to trick her into revealing her ignorance about something.

To do so, we set up an elaborate plan which we implemented when she was due to read out a paper about the Thirty-Year War. "Who was emperor during that period?" Michael asked her during her presentation, pretending to need the information for his notes. "Ferdinand II," she triumphantly announced after shuffling through her papers.

"But only for part of it," I said, making a point of not having to consult a textbook or notes first. "It started under Matthias and ended under Ferdinand III," I added, before Herr Helmuth, our History teacher, was able to comment; he just nodded agreement.

"I knew that," claimed Birgit.

"Why didn't you say it then?" Michael countered, making a point of erasing the misinformation in his notes to replace it with the correct list.

"Nobody can be expected to remember all the emperors," Birgit said angrily.

"I can," I teased her and, before the teacher could stop me, rattled off the names of all emperors and their years of reign, from the Carolingians to Wilhelm II.

"Well, anyone can rote learn that," she said after a moment's baffled silence.

"Perhaps," Herr Helmuth said, "but fact is that Sacha did it and you didn't." Michael and I secretly nudged each other. We had succeeded in taking Birgit down a notch in the eyes of the teacher. Naturally, we never admitted that this was a setup, and that I had indeed spent most of the weekend rote learning the tedious list, and that I would have forgotten it a few days later. In fact, at that point it seemed like an awful lot of effort for a small victory over the class swot. But it proved, as we had worked out in our Lido session, that it really didn't matter what anybody knew, only what impression could be made on the teacher.

Emancipation - Part III (1964 – 1965)

“How dare you!” Theo thundered at me. “How dare you put me into this situation. You couldn’t possibly imagine how much agony it costs a teacher to rob a young person of a year of his life! But you left me no choice!”

Begrudgingly, I had to give him credit for his skill at turning what was basically his act of spite towards me into my responsibility. I thought of myself as being quite good at manipulating the system, but I had just been taught a lesson by a master.

“Not a bad result,” our class teacher, Herr Schwarzwald, said earlier that day as he handed out the report cards⁸⁵ for the year. “Just one little blemish...” The *blemish* was my 6 in Latin, which meant that I had to repeat the entire year, even though my other grades were quite good, probably the best they had ever been.

I had spent much of the year concentrating on how I could improve my status in several subjects. Of course, I could just have worked very hard, giving up my leisure activities in order to emulate the more conscientious of my fellow students. After a brief moment of contemplating this as a possibility, I rejected it. For one thing, as Theo had made clear, it really didn’t matter what I did, I was going to be judged negatively by one group of teachers. Another reason was that the only areas in which this might have helped me was in the subjects on which I really didn’t want to spend any extra time: the foreign languages. In Maths and the sciences, I could cruise through school all the way to matriculation. The Social Sciences, especially Civics, were subjects I loved, and in which I had such a personal interest that I already did far more than necessary; even there, my success depended on which teachers I had, since I was a favourite of Professor Bergwart, and condemned in advance by Theo whom, unfortunately, I had in Geography. Which really only left the foreign languages, and they bored me to tears.

Most of the time, I felt that I was not in control of my status at school and that it was merely a matter of circumstances. Amongst these, my French nationality had always weighed heavily against me in a Germany that saw in France its arch-enemy; some of our teachers called it *the 1000-year War*.⁸⁶ Having often been singled out as a representative of the hated enemy nation, even though I spoke no French and had no more links to France than many of my fellow students in the south-western parts of Germany,⁸⁷ I noticed a distinct change in the early 1960s. It started with differences in the rhetoric of German and French governments and led to the first-ever visit of a French President to Germany,⁸⁸ a historic event of enormous political and social consequences. And with the *Élysée-Treaty*⁸⁹ in January 1963, I quickly reached the status of a welcome guest in the country. This helped my grades a great deal, except, of course, with Theo and his friends, who resented the dropping of the old animosity. The only good he saw in it, so he told us during one History class, was that “the next time we won’t have to fight a war on two fronts; we can finish off one side before we take care of the other”.

As I realised when my grades improved that year, this was just another example of the halo effect I had discussed with Michael. Because of my nationality, my grades had been below what they should have been, and now I felt, at least in some subjects, that I got grades above what I really deserved. Still, I didn’t challenge my suddenly elevated status.

I knew that I was doing poorly in Latin, not only because of Theo’s prejudice towards me, but also because I really didn’t like the subject. Still, I did enough to make sure that I didn’t come bottom of the class. I took Arnold Zwiebel as a reference point, keeping my average well above his; I was convinced that, after having brought him down to our class, no teacher would dare fail him this year. So, as long as I scored better than he did, I was safe.

As it happened, Arnold wasn’t the worst in class either. There were at least three others whose average was lower than his. As a result, I felt untouchable: not even Theo could afford to fail half a dozen students in one class. But none of my calculations mattered to Theo; as he had told me, “students with my background shouldn’t be taught in a German school at the taxpayers’

expense,” which justified giving me the only failing grade in class, regardless of where I stood in the rankings.

My parents’ reaction was entirely predictable: essentially, I was grounded for the rest of my school days, and once again I had to study two hours of Latin every day until I passed the *Abitur*.⁹⁰ Neither decision even lasted the school holidays. Being grounded was as annoying to them as it was to me, since we lived in such a cramped environment. The Ablers came to my assistance, offering me “my room at the top of the stairs” as a permanent home, where I could live, have space for my homework, and be under adult supervision. My parents accepted, because they liked the Ablers.

There remained the deep sense of shame my parents drilled into me on a daily basis. According to them, I was the first and only member of our extended family ever to repeat a year of school which proved, in addition to the almost criminal extent of my laziness and a complete lack of responsibility, that I was the least intelligent person ever in the history of our family in all of its ancestral directions.

I thought it wise to put up with the insults for a while, but eventually they so annoyed me that I challenged my parents to make up their minds: either I was too stupid for school, in which case it didn’t automatically follow that I was irresponsible and lazy, or I possessed the latter qualities, which implied that I wasn’t intrinsically too stupid to cope with school.

Their reaction surprised me: they were simply baffled and, for once, didn’t have an instant response. They seemed to recognise that if I really was so completely lacking in intelligence that I had no chance of ever passing at school, there was little point in the extra two hours of Latin a day. And if I was merely unwilling to do the necessary work, then there was a flaw in their logic regarding my lack of intelligence. I left them looking at each other, clearly unable to decide which was the better insult with which to motivate me to do better in future.

The arguments proved moot at any rate. For one thing, life soon returned to its normal routine; if there was any change at all, it was that I actually ended up with more freedom than before, because I had an officially sanctioned reason for spending more time with the Ablers. And the possibility that I spent that extra time largely between the sheets with one or the other of them, instead of diligently

devoting all possible effort to improving my grades, was not recognized or not acknowledged.

A much bigger problem than how I spent my time was school itself. Since I repeated the year, I should have had a head start in just about all of my classes since the curriculum was fixed. But, as I soon discovered, ‘the curriculum’ appeared to be a flexible instrument and its interpretation entirely up to each teacher. I soon discovered that I wasn’t learning the same again, but entirely different ‘facts’, presented in the same subjects but by different teachers. This even extended to Mathematics, where we suddenly had much more practical problems to be solved rather than the older method of teaching rules and getting students to apply them without establishing any relevance to reality.

I probably should have felt resentful of this ‘new maths’ approach since it was along the same lines as I used to tutor fellow students. As a result of this new approach, my customer base began to shrink, and my income and status as a maths-whiz began to dwindle.

I was increasingly bored at school having to go over the same curriculum I had passed quite well the year before. I was particularly annoyed that Theo was again my teacher in Latin, and that he was still determined to get me out of the school; if I failed Latin a second time, he would have achieved his goal, and the way he was engineering things, it looked as if he was going to succeed. This, of course, made all my effort in the other classes less than worthwhile, as it didn’t matter how good I was in all the other subjects if I twice failed in a *Hauptfach*.⁹¹

Given the futility of education in these circumstances, I became particularly frustrated with the different interpretations of facts as presented this year, compared to the explanations I remembered from the previous. As a result, I rapidly developed a reputation for being a ‘difficult student’, constantly questioning what was taught. I would get into lengthy debates with teachers, challenging them whenever I sensed a weakness. Soon I learned to anticipate hot-spots and prepared for them. When Herr Schultheiss, a particularly pro-American History teacher, talked about how the US had unilaterally won World War Two, I was ready for that statement.

“Do you mean through their supplying war material to the Allies, or do you mean through military victories of their own?”

Herr Schultheiss was baffled but, eventually, claimed that it was their military genius that ended the war. “And what role did the Soviets play?” I continued to probe.

“They didn’t play a major role at all,” was the response, and the one I had expected. I used this opportunity to outline the theory that the war was actually won by the Soviets, and that, despite practically being invited into Germany to prevent a complete takeover by the Soviets, the Americans were struggling to reach their predetermined locations even though the German defenders in the West were war-weary and ill-equipped.

This started an ongoing discussion that went on for weeks, taking up part of every History session. On each occasion, both the teacher and myself would arrive with further evidence to support our viewpoints, which actually made History one of the more interesting subjects for me. Even though Mr Schultheiss and I disagreed vehemently, the intellectual challenge was fun, and having engaged a teacher so fully gave me a sense of power.

The response amongst my fellow students was split; the majority enjoyed observing the battle between one of their own and a figure of authority, cheering me on and encouraging me to keep it going. I was under no illusion that this was purely support for myself; it was most likely an attempt to make a generally boring subject a little more palatable.

But support wasn’t unanimous. There were some, the swots of this new group, who not only resented that I was distracting a teacher from the appointed curriculum, but also that, because of the attention I received, their own status as *best-in-class* was difficult to maintain. Nor did all the teachers react as positively to my challenges. For some, it was unheard-of arrogance on behalf of the student body that one of them should question a teacher, let alone engage him or her in an intellectual debate; clearly, it was the students’ job to sit quietly and be taught, the opportunity for which should make them grateful, not encourage them to question the wisdom of their academic betters.

“The Nazis would have known what to do with people like you,” was the response to a number of questions I put to Dr Wegheißer, a German language teacher whose pronouncements about the superiority of the German language over all others simply begged for challenge. He was particularly down on English, a

“peasant-language that had brought linguistics down to the lowest common denominator by all but abandoning grammar, having no recognisable rules of pronunciation and such a minimalistic vocabulary of its own that the vast majority of its words were borrowed”. But even the vulgar English language was, allegedly, still far superior to the *guttural grunts* of the natives of Africa and the Middle East.

I thanked Dr Wegheißer for his pronouncement on how the Nazis would have seen me, and informed him that it made me convinced that I was on the right track.

On rare occasions, I felt sorry for the teachers who had to put up with me. I was under no illusion that I was, for the most part, a challenge to authority which must have made their lives difficult. But my sympathy for them was limited. I was convinced that they had, in me, created their own Frankenstein’s monster by permitting Theo to conduct a personal vendetta against me based on my heritage, whether real or imagined.

And I was angered even further when Herr Hauptmann, one of my favourite Mathematics teachers, revealed that I needn’t have gone through the boredom of a repeat year. “You should have come to me,” he said when, to his astonishment, I was back in the same Maths class he taught me a year earlier. “These things can be fixed... maybe for the price of a washing machine, or something similar. I understand you have some contacts when it comes to home electronics; that would have done it!”

I was stunned. “You mean that he could have been influenced to change the 6 to a 5?” I asked. He nodded. “It happens all the time; some are less amenable than others, but Dr Storm is well known for his wish list.” After that conversation, my sympathy towards the victims of my behaviour became extremely limited.

A Letter from Frau Kilosz (1964)

“I think, I’ll have the Vienna Coffee,” I said, folding the menu back together to indicate to the waitress that I was ready to order.

“One Vienna, please,” I said to the elderly waitress in a ridiculously short black skirt, light-beige silken blouse and white pinafore with ruffles that made her look like she belonged in a movie comedy, rather than in a real café. “A small pot.” Michael raised two fingers as a *ditto*.

We had timed our arrival badly. Karin, the waitress in whose section we sat and who was the main reason for our frequent visits to the Victoria Cafe, was just trying to explain to an elegant American lady why some of the wines had *lieblich*⁹² (lovely), others *trocken* (dry) next to them on the wine list. The guest seemed genuinely interested in who decided that some wines were lovely, but struggled with the concept that a liquid, like wine, could be dry. Much of the back and forth had to do with Karin’s relatively poor mastery of tourist-English, and the lady’s equally weak German skills.

We watched as our substitute waitress teetered away, stockings with crooked seams adding to the wrongness of her uniform. We gave each other a glance; neither of us thought much of the changes introduced by the new owner of the small café and bakery, whose attempts to make the place more attractive to tourists were clearly based on ideas that just didn’t fit in with Karlsbach.

All of the waitresses looked silly in this uniform, not only the older ones. When some of the younger servers found time to chat with us, they complained that the outfits made them look like prostitutes, while the older staff withheld comment, but tried to save what dignity they could in the circumstances. Some left, but most put up with it, at least for the tourist season, since the foreign visitors staying at the *Kurfürstliche Hotel* across the road were known as big tippers, often paying in dollars instead of Marks, apparently not caring that the waitresses could exchange them at the rate of four to one – the regular bill, plus

ten percent tip, multiplied by four, of which the waitresses only passed the menu price to the boss, made them put up with a lot, including loud-mouthed guests, silly questions, and ridiculous outfits.

We once pointed out to Karin – a tall, dark-haired and well-proportioned beauty who was well out of our league, but who didn't mind flirting with us – that the uniforms fitted in with the rest of the recently introduced décor: garish faded Mediterranean land- and seascapes that had nothing to do with the local fare on offer, and over-the-top chandeliers that were far too large for the modestly sized rooms.

And while the uniforms suited the general clatter of the café's design, they were not just ugly and didn't fit well, especially on some of the younger waitresses whose full breasts stretched the blouses to the point of making them all but translucent, which didn't escape our notice. "I know what you boys look at when you think I don't pay attention," Karin told us, "but I sometimes wonder what sixteen-year-old boys actually think about when they ogle me." She winked, straightened up in a way that made her chest threaten to burst the tautly stretched material, and walked off with an exaggerated wiggle of her hips and a suppressed, but clearly audible, giggle.

I offered Michael a cigarette. "Ah, *der Duft der großen weiten Welt*,"⁹³ he said, imitating the advertising we heard so often in the cinema while he gave me a light. It was this slogan that started me on Stuyvesants; somehow, it gave me hope that somewhere there was a world different from the one I experienced here.

Michael pulled my English text from my briefcase and got started on our homework, while I glanced at the Mathematics assignment. Once finished, we reversed the process, using each other's work as a guide.

"God, this *Wobbledagger*⁹⁴ translation is boring," he sighed after a while. "And he is supposed to be the greatest in English literature?" He went into a little rant about the superiority of Goethe and Schiller.

Just then, our coffees arrived. "Sorry I wasn't there to take your order," said Karin, "but I was stuck elsewhere." Then she frowned as she tried to find a clear space on the small table on which to place our cups and pots of coffee, crème and sugar. The owner disliked high school students doing their homework in his café, since we supposedly "cluttered up the place" and didn't spend enough.

But he tolerated the two of us since we were regulars, and because we seemed to look more like uni students from Heidelberg than local lads.

“Why are you hiding a letter addressed to your mother from a Doctor Kilogram in your Latin book?” Michael suddenly asked while sipping his steaming hot coffee.

“Kilosz,” I corrected him, instantly put in a bad mood by the sight of the envelope I had taken from our mail-box on my way to school this morning.

“Who on earth is this Vera Two-Pounds,”⁹⁵ Michael continued undaunted, “and why does she write to your mother?” He let his fingers glide across the gold embossing of the return address on the envelope. “She must be rich,” he added, admiring the linen-textured stationery and felt the stiff contents through it.

“Kilosz,” I repeated absent-mindedly.

“Oh, is she that woman who is going to turn you into a prince?”

I sighed. “Yes, that’s the woman my mother is consulting to confirm that her family was part of the Tsar’s court. I have no idea what Dr Kilosz would know about it, since my mother’s family came to Germany long ago, but she claims to have records going back centuries, which is what my mother is after.”

“Your mother’s family?” Michael asked, “isn’t that also your family?”

“You know, I am adopted,” I said automatically. Michael raised an eyebrow.

“You aren’t really adopted, are you?” Usually, he was almost certain he could tell when I was serious and when not, but sometimes even he was confused by my straight-faced delivery of what could be the most outrageous of stories.

I sighed. “You know my mother,” I said. “Can you really imagine I share genetic material with her?”

“Well, she is different,” Michael tried to be diplomatic. He didn’t really mind my mother; she struck him as exotic, not really from this world, or at least not from this part of the world. She always spoke a meticulously correct *High German*,⁹⁶ unless she condescended to put on a dialect to communicate with one of the locals, both of which gave her an air of arrogance he hadn’t encountered elsewhere, not even amongst the wives of the *nouveau riche* generally considered to be the most stuck-up people in town.

She also dressed well, even within her limited means. Her outfits were brought to their best effect by simple but appropriately elegant accessories; complete but understated, as was considered elegant.

Along with this style and arrogance came some outlandish theories which few people would have been prepared to express. One particular story that permanently stuck in Michael's mind was about a tribe of African natives who, according to my mother, were genetically predisposed to having particularly low-hanging scrota dangling at knee-level. It apparently took the wife of a German missionary to introduce them to clothing with which to gather up these offensive attributes of their maleness, and to hide them in a way that a decent white woman would not feel offended.

The story stuck in Michael's mind not only because of the acute exasperation he could see in my face at hearing this obviously made-up story, but also because of the ensuing argument, in which I pointed out that it was genetically unlikely that these people could have survived in the African jungle with their most sensitive organs so exposed to danger. My mother countered that this was why they were still bushmen while we were cultured.

What struck Michael most wasn't the topic itself, which was odd enough, but that genitals were so openly discussed in my household. His mother would never have admitted to Michael that humans had reproductive organs, unless there was a medical basis for doing so. She most certainly would never have discussed a low-hanging scrotum in everyday conversation, and absolutely not in front of his friends.

"Why did she tell us this story?" he asked me later.

"It's her way of telling us that she thinks Germans are superior, and that women are more cultured than men. The missionary might have saved their souls, but it wouldn't have occurred to him to make these guys hide their balls so that a white woman isn't offended by them."

Since then, Michael analysed more carefully what messages came from my mother, and he had to agree that her attitudes were so different from mine that it seemed odd that we were related. Also, there was no physical resemblance between us, so that it wasn't completely out of the question that I was adopted.

“I suppose we both have pretty weird parents,” Michael said. “Yours may be odd in some ways, but mine aren’t much better.”

I looked at him with puzzlement; was he trying to make me feel better, or was there something about his parents of which I wasn’t aware? I had always found them to be very friendly and inviting, encouraging me to stay for dinner, even to go on occasional outings with the family.

Michael called Karin over and asked her what had happened to the cigarette-dispenser that used to stand in the corner.

“Roberto didn’t like it,” she said glancing at the owner. “Too many people came in just to use it without buying any food or drink, and it disturbed the ‘quiet ambience’ of the place!” She giggled. “We now sell them from the counter. What do you want?” She took a deep breath: “*Bali, Benson & Hedges, Camel, Dunhill, Gauloises, Gitanes, Gldenring, HB, Juno, Marlboro, Mercedes, Milde Sorte, Overstolz, Peter Stuyvesant, Reval, Reyno, Roth Hndle, Winston?*” She listed them so quickly that we weren’t sure whether she had rehearsed this or whether she was just making up the list. We didn’t even know whether some of these existed, although it was possible that special brands were ordered for the hotel guests across the road.

“*BH*, ”⁹⁷ said Michael, “and a *Stuyvesant*,” he added, looking at the crumpled remains of my packet on the table.

“One *HB*,” Karin said pointedly with raised eyebrows, “and one *Peter Stuyvesant*!”

“Do you realise we are paying the normal price plus ten per cent for service?” Michael asked, only just realising the real reason for the disappearance of the dispenser. I shrugged again; I had worked that out but was too lazy to go to the tobacconist just to save the tip.

The choice of cigarette was a significant issue of style amongst students; it represented who we were, or wanted to be. Michael’s *HB* and my *Peter Stuyvesant* were middle-of-the road, usually chosen for taste or for personal reasons, *Marlboro* was the brand of those who wanted to present a tough-guy or -girl image, while other American brands such as *Camel* or *Lucky Strike* indicated a preference for the imagined American way of life. Brands associated with France, like *Gauloises* and *Gitanes*, indicated intellectually rebellious or artistic

leanings, while *Dunhill* or *Benson & Hedges* were smoked by would-be James Bonds. Traditional German brands were associated with working-class allegiances and played a very small role in our school society. Occasionally, students smoked flat Turkish cigarettes or exotic Russian ones, but that was seen as affectation in our group.

"I can practically read your mind," Michael laughed when we returned to the role of parents in our lives. "But they aren't the friendly people they pretend to be. For one thing, they make me completely responsible for Eddy,⁹⁸ and every time he does something wrong or gets a bad grade, I get punished. They withhold *my* pocket money if they are dissatisfied with *his* grades, they ground me when he comes home late, and they yell at me just about every day for something or other he has done." He played absent-mindedly with the envelope from Dr Kilosz, as if he had forgotten where we were. "And you wouldn't believe the pressure they put on me to become successful," he continued. "They've got it all planned out: by the time I am 35, I must earn enough to allow them to retire."⁹⁹

"I didn't know that," I admitted. "But at least they aren't violent."

Michael agreed that we were both lucky in that regard. I sometimes felt that being beaten seriously would be easier than my step-father's feeble attempts at physical discipline and my mother's psychological torture, but there were quite a few of our school friends who might disagree.

"Like Armin," Michael suggested. "The number of times he *accidentally falls down the stairs, or runs into a door!*" Armin often arrived at school with a swollen face and various injuries; at one stage, he had a broken arm from one of these *accidents*. In Sports, he was particularly good in gymnastics until he broke his arm, which spoke strongly against being so clumsy at home.

"Or Wolfgang," I added, who had suffered a number of concussions from blows to the head. More and more names came to mind. Basically, most parents believed in discipline and their right to achieve it in any way they chose, and there really wasn't anything any of us could do about it; parental authority seemed beyond question, as far as we could see.

"All this discipline must be a German thing," Michael contemplated. "Remember that Freddy-film¹⁰⁰ we saw a few weeks ago?" I gestured that I remembered the film but couldn't yet see what he was leading towards.

“Remember that school teacher who kept getting in arguments with his wife for being overly strict with his younger son? He excused it by saying that he does it out of love.”¹⁰¹ I nodded, even though I had never thought of that film as a realistic portrayal of modern society.

“Have you ever noticed that it’s only the boys in our class that get punished?” Michael now asked. “You sometimes hear one of the girls complain that she didn’t get a dress she wants, or that her parents didn’t allow her to go to some show, but you never hear of them getting really punished.”

I thought about it and had to agree. The pressure of expectations was clearly on us boys, and parents seemed a lot more reluctant to punish high school-aged girls than boys. And it wasn’t as if only boys did things worth punishment: several girls we knew had been caught shoplifting. Listening to their banter at school, we knew that they got up to many other misdeeds we could never get away with.

Just then, Karin passed our table and I called her over. “We’re just discussing why girls don’t get punished by their parents or by teachers,” I explained. “Any ideas why that is so?”

“It’s the breasts,” she said. “They give us immunity.”

Michael raised his eyebrows. “You flirt with your fathers?”

“Don’t be disgusting,” she responded, shaking her head in disbelief. “You guys have the weirdest minds!”

“Sorry,” Michael apologised, indicating with a hand-gesture that he expected additional information.

“It’s like this,” she explained. “As soon as boobs are visible, our parents become aware that hormones are active. From that moment on they never really know when we have *our days*, or when we have that emotional time just before, or when hormones are doing anything else to us, especially if we occasionally burst into tears for no apparent reason. So they mostly leave us alone and put up with nearly everything. We really have to push hard before we get a reaction.”

“Is that why you are always so emotional?” I asked her with a wink. She playfully smacked the back of my head. “With your boobs, you must have gotten away with murder,” I added, looking right at her ample chest. “Ouch,” I said when she smacked me again, “not always the same spot.” She smacked me a third time,

again in exactly the same spot, then moved away with a little skip, to give us another good view of her bouncing breasts.

“If you were a few years older,” Michael said, “you could have her; she really likes you.”

I sighed. “Yes, I know.”

“Or if you had a car,” he added. The comment was a little redundant, because you had to be eighteen to get a driver’s license, so that I would be old enough for her anyway. But I knew what he meant. A car was the shortcut to many a girl’s heart... or body. We often marvelled at American teen movies, and how so many high school students seemed to have their own cars. This was certainly not the case in Germany.

We thought of consulting Karin for another insight into the female psyche to understand why having a car was so important, and because we would gladly use any excuse to spend a little more time with her. But just at that moment, there was a commotion at a table near us: an elderly woman had poured coffee onto her cake plate instead of into her cup. Even though both Michael and I had seen it, we couldn’t comprehend it; it was as if she did it completely unaware of her actions. The shock of coffee splashing all over the tablecloth seemed to wake her from a trance.

We were impressed with the speed with which three of the waitresses were on the spot to clean up the mess, and even more impressed with the café owner for whom we usually didn’t have much respect, but who was immediately on the scene to calm the old woman. “Don’t worry,” he said, “accidents happen. No harm done. Nothing was spilled on your dress, and the tablecloth is easily replaced.” He held her hand in one of his, gently patting it with the other.

All the while, the waitresses stripped the table, put on fresh linen, replaced the vase of flowers, and, as if by magic, a new pot of coffee and a fresh plate of cake arrived. Within seconds, everything looked as if nothing had ever happened. “Don’t worry about it,” the café owner said when she asked for a bill, “today’s visit is on the house. Just sit back and have a nice afternoon with coffee and cake.” With that, he and his entourage disappeared and the incident was over, with other café guests returning to their conversations, trying to avoid looking at the scene of the accident again.

“Wow,” Michael said with admiration. “Do you think they rehearsed that? I’ve never seen such a smooth operation.” I agreed; maybe there was more to the new owner than merely bad taste and a wandering eye, or hands, for the staff.

“So, what are you going to do about this letter from Dr Thousand-Gram?” Michael returned to the *leitmotiv* of this afternoon’s session. “Are you going to hide it from your mother?”

I had actually thought of ‘accidentally’ losing the letter to avoid my mother going through one of her tedious bouts of feeling depressed for not holding the position in society to which she imagined her heritage entitled her, and her acting all superior the next moment because, even if nobody else recognised it, she simply *knew* how far above the rest of society she really stood.

“No,” I said, “I’ll give it to her tonight before I go to bed. With any luck, she’ll get most of it out of her system before I see her again after school tomorrow.”

In fact, I was going to spend the next evening at the Abler’s, which would give me another day’s grace before being confronted with whatever mood my mother was in by then. But I kept my overnight stays as dog-sitter a secret, even from Michael, because my relationship with the Abler family was too complex to understand fully even within myself, let alone in terms which I could explain to others.

Interlude

Big Brother I

Truth, Consequences and Just for Good Measure (October 1964 – February 1965)

“Sacha could find out for us.”

Sacha lay on a worn beach towel, eyes closed, enjoying the late summer. The sky was bright blue, decorated with big white clouds floating past at high speed, which meant a change in weather could be expected. As long as he felt the sun’s rays touch his skin, he felt slightly too hot, as if a sunburn was likely, but when they were hidden by a cloud, the temperature was a little too cool, making him look forward to the return of the warmth.

The threadbare beach towel was a source of embarrassment. The wealthier amongst his school friends always brought brand new towels to the public pool, still fluffy with fashionably bright colours, while his was thin and bleached from a few seasons of visits. It wasn’t of major concern to him, but it was one more example of how stingy his parents were, which made him self-conscious and ashamed of not living up to the standards of his group.

“Sacha could find out for us,” he heard again, this time with a little more emphasis, making him finally take notice. He had no idea of the subject of conversation; he had been far away in thought. The voice behind the question was Angelika, one of the more popular girls in class. As he opened his eyes, he noticed that only Jutta, Karen and Doris were still present; the others had gone for a swim.

“Find out what?” he asked with little interest; it probably was some detail of home work.

“Whether Peter has two or just one,” said Doris.

“Two or one what?”

The girls giggled, then tried to explain in a roundabout way that they were speculating on how many testicles Peter had. Sacha raised himself onto one of his elbows and looked at his classmates; he didn't know whether he had understood correctly, but the fact that two of the girls visibly blushed made him suspect that he had indeed understood. He became distracted observing that Jutta was not only turning a deep red, but that her blush started at the top of her face, rapidly moving down to cover her entire face, then neck, eventually her upper chest where the colouration finally disappeared into her bikini top.

"What?" he said, more to gain time to think of an intelligent response rather than because he was still uncertain.

The girls had regained enough composure to explain that all the boys clearly seemed to have two "eggs" in their swimming trunks, while Peter only showed a general rounding that suggested that his were either lying one behind the other, or that he only had one.

"You must be joking," Sacha finally said. "I am not going to spy on Peter."

"Oh, come on," Karen complained. "You are sort-of one of us..."

"Or like a big brother," Jutta added.

Sacha grunted something they didn't understand and went back to enjoying the sun.

On the way home, Sacha nearly ran into the back of a car that suddenly stopped in front of him; only the excellent brakes on his *Vaterland*¹⁰² bike, and his quick reflexes, prevented an accident. The reason for getting into this situation was his distraction caused by the afternoon's incident. Initially, he felt quite proud that he enjoyed this level of trust amongst the girls, but the more his subconscious mind churned it over, the more aware he became that there were darker implications here.

Naturally, he was pleased that some of the girls saw him as someone in whom they could confide. The more he thought about it, the more examples came to mind where girls had turned to him for advice, at times with issues that surprised him. There were several who had asked him what to do when they had boyfriend problems, others asked him about how to make parents understand them, and one had even asked him how to deal with the mood swings associated

with her premenstrual stress. Out of these, and many other, issues brought to his attention most usually over a cup of coffee after school, the last surprised him most – after all, what would he know about such matters – but it was the boyfriend questions which now really concerned him. This type of question suggested that the girls saw him as a trustworthy friend, but not as a potential boyfriend himself. This is what led him to think about the reasons, and that distraction, in turn, caused the near accident.

Had he not followed all the rules Mrs Abler had taught him about being a desirable friend and lover? Had he not shown the girls a lot more respect than was common amongst boys of his age, and had he not paid a lot more attention to their feelings and wishes?

Sacha couldn't tell at what point it became obvious to him that he had made himself available as a big brother, but had never really shown a girl that he was interested in her. Following Mrs Abler's rules about not wanting to impose himself on a woman had been taken as a sign of disinterest in personal relationships. It was suddenly clear to him that years of indoctrination about putting the woman first had made him unable to communicate his own feelings towards girls of his own age; maybe he was what an adult woman was looking for in a lover, but that was definitely not what the girls of his own age wanted. Here, the daredevil, the bad boy, the rich kid, the boy who had joined one of the many rock groups that mushroomed at the time, the athlete, and even the class clown all had an advantage over the polite, thoughtful friend.

Sacha felt guilty about seeing the girls in his age group as superficial and childish; he was sure there were some who looked for more in a boy. But these girls probably suffered from the same inability to communicate their wishes as he did. Were any of the girls who consulted him on trivial issues really seeking to establish contact? Were they making the first move even though that wasn't the norm? He didn't know, nor could he have responded to such overtures if she wasn't more obvious, and he couldn't justify making assumptions that favoured his cause.

"Oh my god..." Mrs Abler's response was limited, but seemed genuine; she was obviously shocked by what she heard. It had taken Sacha a few weeks to raise his concerns about his inability to relate to girls of his own age. He almost

abandoned his revelations when he saw her reaction – after all, the woman’s feelings should come first – but, for once, he decided to persist. His situation couldn’t change if he didn’t speak about it and, unfortunately, the only person with whom he could discuss it, the only person he trusted enough, was the very one who caused his problem in the first place.

“We’ll talk about it as soon as I get back,” Mrs Abler finally said. “I really must go now!” She wore a pretty short white dress and beneath it, as Sacha felt when she pulled his head to her heart, a soft bra, which, for her, meant that she was dressed formally, something she only did when she went to a business meeting. The dress was far too summery for this time of the year, but it fit perfectly with the new, and very pretty, white *Karmann-Ghia*¹⁰³ convertible she had recently purchased. This was a car that suited her far better than the rather stodgy Opel the Ablers had shared to this point. Oddly, Mr Abler had no interest in driving the sporty little car, but Sacha accepted every offer to accompany Mrs Abler on her trips and frequently got an opportunity to drive it himself, although only away from the main traffic since a surreptitious driver-change was all but impossible if they were ever stopped by the police.

Mrs Abler gave Sacha a last kiss and repeated her promise to find a way to help him communicate better with girls of his own age; then she was gone.

Sacha spent a particularly pleasant afternoon with Mr Abler. They synchronised sound with an eight-millimetre holiday movie, a technically extravagant undertaking involving high quality *Uher Report* tape recorders that recorded not only the sound but also a synchronisation pulse with which film projection was controlled, assuring perfect picture and sound coordination. This really mattered only when the person commentating was shown on film doing so, which was something Mr Abler did deliberately and frequently to show off his technical expertise. It was also something Sacha loved, as he enjoyed playing with technology that was far beyond the budget of most people.

Towards evening, they discussed whether they should wait for Mrs Abler before organising dinner, but then decided to go to one of the town’s better restaurants to celebrate a successful film synchronisation. Mrs Abler could join them when she came home, and a note was left to tell her where they had gone.

But Mrs Abler didn't take up the extra chair they reserved for her. Nor was she at home when they got back from their meal.

"Stay for the night," Mr Abler suggested when Sacha got ready to cycle home. "I've got a bit of a bad feeling and would rather not be alone."

Sacha stayed. Sometime later, they had sex in Sacha's bed, then Mr Abler went to his own bedroom to sleep. Sacha was joined by Lexi and finally dozed off.

He awoke with a start early in the morning; it was still dark outside but he could see the outline of Mr Abler standing next to the bed. Sacha wasn't sure whether he was dreaming; the person in front of him seemed like a ghost trying to communicate with him. Then he was gone.

Sacha got up, still wondering whether he had imagined the visit. He went downstairs to find out what was going on and discovered Mr Abler at the dining room table, staring blankly into the distance. As he approached, Mr Abler pulled him closer, making Sacha sit on his lap, which was most unusual.

"She isn't coming back," Mr Abler finally said. He put his arm around Sacha and held him tight. "She's dead." Sacha went numb.

The funeral took place quite soon after the car accident. There were plenty of witnesses who reported that Mrs Abler had simply failed to stop, as a result of which the front of her car had slipped underneath the overhanging trailer of a truck that had halted in front of her. She was travelling with such speed that parts of the trailer slipped into the passenger compartment of the little car, and a load of iron tubing dislodged from the trailer buried the rest of it.

There were lots of questions about how this could have happened. Mrs Abler hadn't been drinking, nor was there any indication that she had taken any drugs. The police were very suspicious of Mr Abler not telling them whom she had visited that day, and Sacha was also questioned on that point. It was difficult to explain that both Mr and Mrs Abler frequently went on buying expeditions without necessarily informing each other of what they were up to; both of them had a good intuition on what would sell, and they trusted each other implicitly to make the right decisions.

“Did she have an affair with anybody?” The police’s question startled Sacha. He didn’t know how to answer that. He thought about it for a moment. Did she have lovers? Yes, definitely; he was one himself. But did she have an affair? Sacha always thought of an affair as a secret liaison, something a husband or wife didn’t know about, and that was not the case here.

“He wouldn’t know,” one of the officers said to the other. “He’s too young for that sort of thing.” Sacha knew better than to respond to that, but he was happy that he was taken to be of limited value as a witness. He was asked what he had been doing at the Abler’s that day, and he explained about synchronising a film. They seemed to accept that young people liked to play with modern technology and left it at that.

At the funeral, Sacha felt nothing but guilt. Was he responsible for Mrs Abler’s death? Had his earlier revelations distracted her, causing the accident?

He also wondered about what she had been doing in Heilbronn. Did she really have an affair? Nobody had contacted the Abler’s company about any sales or purchases; so, what had she been doing there?

Sacha dismissed that thought. The Ablers knew about their separate love lives and never had any objections: it was part of *the new morality*. And, so he thought, he simply liked the idea of an affair because it distracted from his own guilt.

He also felt guilty for not telling Mr Abler about his last interaction with his wife. He couldn’t imagine that it would help Mr Abler to know about it and, having just lost one of the major figures in his life, Sacha didn’t want to lose another.

But most of all, Sacha felt guilty about how he remembered Mrs Abler. Throughout the funeral, he couldn’t shake the image of the last time they had made love. In his mind’s eye he saw vividly how she lay in front of him, her breasts running towards her shoulders with every thrust, then back again as he pulled back: a wave movement that reminded of the tides.

He scolded himself about the inappropriate nature of his thoughts. He tried to remind himself that this was a mutilated corpse in the coffin; he hadn’t actually seen her, but Mr Abler hinted at how horrific an image it was to see the

remains of his once beautiful wife. He wanted to spare Sacha's feelings and didn't go into any detail, but Sacha's imagination filled in the gaps.

Sacha wondered what exactly was being buried today. Naturally, there had been no viewing of the deceased due to her injuries in the accident, but what had actually been placed in the coffin? Had her body been reconstructed from all the parts found at the scene? Had somebody laid a dress on top of the reassembled body? Surely there was no way to put her properly into any sort of garment. Or were the various body parts just thrown into the coffin, the lid closed, and now they just slid or rolled around in their dark container? What about the bodily liquids? Were they just sloshing around the coffin?

Again Sacha reminded himself of how inappropriate his thoughts were. How about remembering her as the proper, albeit flirty, businesswoman who influenced the art scene not only in town, but parts of the whole south?

The funeral was restricted to close friends and family only, but a large group of people had shown up. As he scanned the crowd, Sacha recognized some of the people from the Ablers' parties, and he assumed that many others were acquaintances from their out-of-town gatherings. A few others were trade suppliers and some local artists.

Suddenly, Sacha was shocked to see his mother amongst the mourners. Of course, his parents knew the Ablers; after all his years of association with them, that was inevitable, particularly in a small town where most people knew each other, at least by sight. They also had some business dealings with each other. But why was she here? She certainly didn't belong to the Ablers' inner circle.

Worse yet, at the end of the funeral, Mr Abler sought her out and asked her to wait while the other guests gave their condolences and left. Sacha was asked to take Lexi home while Mr Abler was going to have a chat with his mother. "You are such an insightful young man," he explained, "I am sure your mother's solace will be helpful to me at such a difficult time."

Sacha wasn't at all delighted by this development. He had deliberately kept his family life and his associations with the Ablers separate. He wasn't worried about any intimate secrets being shared; after all, Mr Abler had a lot to lose if his affair with a boy well below the age of consent became public. But he

was worried that his mother might find out just how much money he had earned over the years and might want him to contribute to the family budget. And he was worried that his mother would find a way to drive a wedge between Mr Abler and himself, putting an end to what had become a convenient and lucrative association for Sacha.

Over the next few weeks, Sacha became ever more concerned by the ongoing liaison between Mr Abler and his mother. She was now a frequent companion on Mr Abler's nights out at concerts and especially at a number of carnival costume parties. She justified accompanying Mr Abler because he no longer had anyone to take to such events. Her husband, due to his war injuries, rarely accompanied them on these outings, even though he was always invited.

Naturally, both of them were very discreet in what they revealed to Sacha about these outings, but given what he knew about Mr Abler, and suspicious of his mother's particularly good mood lately, it was inevitable that he began to wonder whether the two were sexually involved with each other. While he wasn't particularly close to his stepfather, he still thought that his mother having an affair was quite inappropriate. As a result of these developments, his own friendship with Mr Abler began to suffer.

"I don't think she is just looking for attention," Mr Abler agreed as Sacha pointed out Lexi's odd behaviour. She stood at the top of the stairs trying to take a step down only to pull her paw back each time.

This wasn't her game where she pretended to be stuck at the top of the stairs in the hope that somebody would carry her down: that was a way of getting attention and being cuddled. But what she did today didn't look like that. Something was really wrong.

When Sacha picked her up to carry her down the stairs, she clung to him as if she was afraid, all the while whimpering quietly. When Sacha sat down on the couch, she lay across his legs and went into a fitful sleep.

Only two weeks later, Sacha sat in a special waiting room at the veterinarians with Lexi in his arms and Mr Abler in a chair next to them. Mr Abler had picked Lexi up from the floor, but after only a moment's hesitation had passed her on to Sacha.

Lexi pressed herself against Sacha, looking up at him with frightened eyes. She had a tube attached to one of her front legs which the vet had inserted before he brought them to the special waiting room. Sacha, who was brought up to believe that it was a sign of shameful weakness to show emotions, for once found himself unable to control his feelings. Here was a mere dog, yet his best friend in the world, looking at him wide-eyed, begging him to help her, yet he was powerless to do anything. All he could do was to hug her while they waited for her to be murdered.

Sacha cursed the moment at their last visit here when they had made the appointment for today. Couldn't he have pushed for a different date? One a week from now? Or even a day from now? A few hours later? He would have given anything to postpone the inevitable. He knew she was in a lot of pain; the cancer had already progressed so far when it was diagnosed that she was beyond her life being prolonged, even with the strongest of pain killers. And the last thing Sacha wanted was to extend her agony. But maybe just an extra hour or two? Even if she was drugged and no longer recognized him, at least he would still know her, feel her warm body next to himself.

In his thoughts, Sacha cursed that moment when he had first met her. If he hadn't been there, hadn't saved her, he would never have known that wonderful love, loyalty and companionship she had shown him, and without that, he would never have known what he was losing now. Better to have loved and lost? Bullshit!

But as soon as he thought it he tried to erase these thoughts from his mind. Lexi had meant so much to him, had even saved his own life a few times when he felt suicidal and only his thoughts of seeing her gave him something to look forward to. He really wouldn't want to have missed out on all the love he felt for her, and which she showed him.

Lexi winced in pain as she looked around to the door when the vet joined them. "Ready?" she asked. Sacha wanted to shout out how much he was not yet ready, but that jerk in her body caused by her pain told him that the time had come. The vet injected some clear liquid into the attachment to Lexi's leg and, with a last sigh, she went to sleep in Sacha's arms.

Big Brother II

The End of an Era – April 1965

After a funeral for Lexi, which Mr Abler had only arranged for Sacha's benefit, there was a time when the two of them felt particularly close. But Sacha soon discovered that Mr Abler was telling his mother a lot more about Sacha than he was comfortable with, and that his mother was doing likewise. A few comments in passing convinced Sacha not only that he was the topic of conversation far more often than he wished, but that both his mother and Mr Abler received pleasure from hinting at how much they knew about him.

He felt thoroughly betrayed by both of them. He wasn't surprised by his mother's behaviour; in fact, he expected it from her, which is why he hadn't wanted the two of them to get too close to begin with. But he was very disappointed with Mr Abler, whom he thought a friend.

When confronted by Sacha, Mr Abler just laughed it off. It suddenly became clear to Sacha that it had been Mrs Abler who had treated him as an adult – perhaps too much so – but that Mr Abler didn't take him that seriously.

There was nothing Sacha could do about his mother, but he didn't depend on Mr Abler as much as the older man seemed to think when he pointed out to Sacha how much he earned through his association with Mr Abler's business.

That conversation was the last one Mr Abler ever had with Sacha. Sacha simply switched to tutoring as his main source of income and, while that wasn't as much as he used to get from the Ablers, it was plenty for his personal needs. He did a few odd jobs for businesses around town and soon had a new life.

A few weeks after splitting from Mr Abler, Sacha heard from his mother that Mr Abler had been diagnosed with bowel cancer and very much wanted Sacha to visit him. But Sacha still felt so betrayed that he couldn't bring himself

to visit Mr Abler, even later when he was in hospital, and when the messages transmitted by his mother became more urgent.

In the end, Sacha no longer knew why he wouldn't see his former friend. But with the death of Mrs Abler and of Lexi, and with the alliance between Mr Abler and his mother, Sacha felt that so much had passed that he could no longer return to anything resembling his former situation. A chapter in his life had come to an end and he saw no point in reviving it.

Interlude

At the Altenstein (1965)

The *Altenstein* was one of the oldest taverns in the district, existing in its present appearance for well over 250 years. Although frequently repainted in the original style – yellow, with a string of cartoonish medieval pictures of heroic deeds by local knights and clergy, with nearly-black wooden beams criss-crossing its façade – it could no longer hide the architectural shortcomings of its original half-timbered design. The main beams which once ran horizontally and vertically now sloped at odd angles that gave the building a very unsound impression, even though modern architecture had propped it up to meet present-day safety standards. It was this old-fashioned, pretty, but flawed appearance that made the establishment a financial risk to anyone who took it on. Many tried, every time with fresh ideas and enthusiasm, but all eventually failed to get enough trade to make it worth the investment or effort.

The current owner's gimmick was good traditional food at reasonable prices, which is what made Sacha a semi-regular here. He particularly liked the *Badische Wurstsalat*¹⁰⁴ with a large and roughly cut slice of sourdough bread, his usual meal when he was here to do his homework.

The interior was kept according to tradition in booths, each with a U-shaped bench and a slightly oversized table, which made sliding into place difficult, but once seated, the closeness of the tabletop lent itself to writing, which Sacha did, or for playing cards, which is what most patrons came for. In fact, there was at least one *Stammtisch*¹⁰⁵ on any day at just about any time. The booths promoted an unjustified sense of privacy, which encouraged drinkers to express vociferously much they would not normally dare say aloud.

"Can you read in this light?" the surly landlord wheezed as he placed food and drink on Sacha's table at a safe distance from his books and papers. He shuffled off with a shake of his head, not expecting a response. He might have

been friendly or concerned, Sacha thought, but what Sacha heard was his mother's "how can you be so stupid as to read in here..."

The room really was dim. There was no chance of much daylight reaching the tiny windows of the ancient building as it stood in the old part of town where structures were high and roadways very narrow; little light ever penetrated these canyons. Moreover, the windows had colourful crusade-themed leadlight images in thick stained glass, and iron grilles outside to prevent vandalism, which filtered even more of the few rays which might have penetrated the interior. There were plenty of naked lights bulbs, but the dark wooden beams absorbed much of the yellow light they produced.

Yes, reading was difficult here, but not for Sacha. He had unusual eyesight. In fact, all of Sacha's senses seemed stronger than those of his peers. He could listen to sounds of such low volume that his parents didn't realize when, contrary to house rules, he listened to music on the radio after lights-out.

And there was the problem of him overhearing conversations when he'd rather not be distracted. Such as right now when the card players in the next booth told each other war stories and how they would have won if they had been in charge instead of the idiot officers. The topic of conversation at the moment was that, as ammunition got scarce, they could no longer put a bullet into the head of each fallen enemy they came across, just to make sure he was really dead. Apparently towards the end they had to check first before they wasted another cartridge. They did so by kicking each victim between the legs assuming that if there was still any life in him, he would respond to that. This saved precious ammunition.

Sacha couldn't see them, but their voices sounded rough, like older men who had smoked too much throughout their lives. The conversation struck Sacha as particularly offensive because the men were amused by their kills. They took great pride in relating ever more disgusting stories of cruelty and mass murder, and while Sacha didn't believe much of what was said by his drunken booth neighbours, he thought it revolting that even some of it might be true.

Even more annoying was the shouting associated with the card game. They played *Skat*, a German game Sacha never really understood, with a set of traditional cards with which he wasn't familiar. The game involved a lot of

bidding and taking of tricks, all of which required much rasping lung power. The reason he couldn't follow the game was that he was never taught to play it. As far as Sacha's parents were concerned, it was entirely too plebeian, with better people playing Rommé, Bridge or Canasta; preferably the latter, as it was considered modern, elegant and classy... *salonfähig*!¹⁰⁶

He tried to concentrate on his books again while picking at his food, but found it difficult with the racket near him. As he took a sip from his *Mass* of beer, he thought that the landlord should probably have been more concerned about his ability to read after drinking this amount of strong beer, rather than the limitations imposed by low light.

But it wasn't the beer, poor light, noise, nor anything else in the room that made him look up after each paragraph with no idea what he had just read; the main reason for his lack of concentration today was the letter he had just received and which distractingly peeked out of the top of a History book into which he had placed it as a bookmark.

The letter was the result of an action he had taken when it became clear that he would never master *das große Latinum*¹⁰⁷ without which he could not study Law, his dream subject for university. His strengths lay in maths and the natural sciences, but they didn't interest him, because they presented no intellectual challenge. He could have devoted himself to the higher mathematics that would test the best of minds, let alone his, but to what end? To solve some theoretical problem which, maybe three generations of scientists later, might lead to a practical result? Sacha was far too impatient for that. No, he wanted to be a lawyer, to engage others of equal ability in debates that would lead to a concrete outcome in a court case, to win justice over financial greed, or perhaps vice versa; Sacha wasn't into it for reasons of morality.

Because this dream seemed dead already, Sacha lost interest in most of what school could offer him. He had proven to himself that his grades were largely unaffected by the quality of his work.

Sacha began to contemplate alternatives. A career in the Arts, perhaps? He was a good photographer and had a number of photos placed with stock agencies, from which he received a small payment every now and then. And he

could write easily and quite well. Perhaps he could become a journalist? But even there, university soon looked essential.

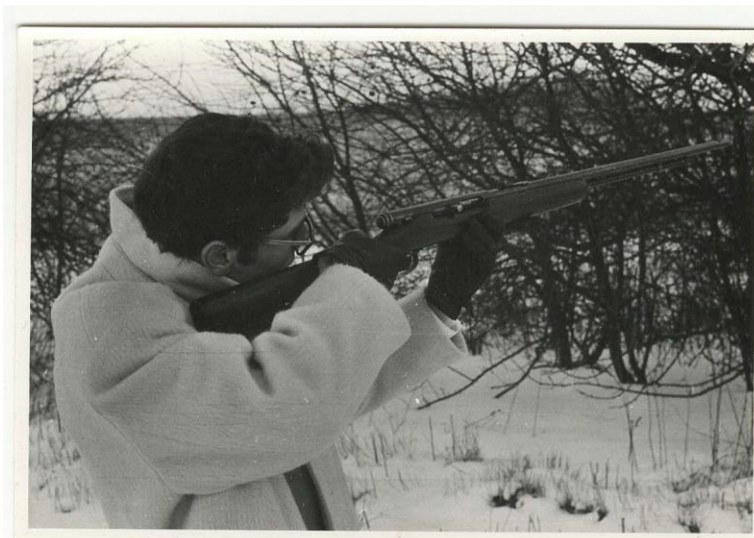
Eventually, he arrived at the conclusion that his biggest problem lay with his present school. He had gained a reputation from which it was difficult to escape. Whether it was justified could be debated. Clearly, he was the victim of a group of teachers, mainly Dr Storm. Sacha saw himself perfectly entitled to be affronted by the insults, the Holocaust-denials frequently presented because Theo assumed Sacha to be Jewish, and much else of what this teacher said, including the frequent barbed comments in his direction and the thinly disguised threats. And he was also entitled to be angry that this teacher had some followers in the faculty who joined him in making Sacha's life difficult, although not to the same extent as Dr Storm.

On the other hand, Sacha knew that he had deliberately chosen to respond belligerently rather than, as was expected, adopting a low profile and trying to make peace with those in power. In fact, he deliberately and consistently provoked Theo by doing such things as handing out leaflets for the *DFU*¹⁰⁸ near the school gates. Even if he were old enough to do so, he would never have joined

the far-left *DFU*, but he volunteered to assist it because his teacher of Religion, Dr König, one of his favourite teachers and a woman who was a very passionate anti-war activist, was a member.

Sacha also wrote to Adolf von Thadden, one of the leaders of the world view promoted by Dr Storm, and received a good deal of

information materials from which he quoted some of the more extreme statements to Theo in class. Theo's response was that von Thadden had never said these things or had said them in jest,¹⁰⁹ but Sacha achieved the effect he was after with his provocations.



Target shooting - a hobby condoned as part of Sacha's preparation for becoming a soldier one day soon

Sacha justified many of his actions through his strong conviction that silence had led Germany into the Nazi dictatorship, and that it was up to every individual, including himself, to prevent this from recurring. If there was one thing he had made his own from German History, it was not to accept injustice silently. He had been deeply influenced by Pastor Martin Niemöller's¹¹⁰ often repeated quote, in spite of having lost his belief in religion.

Even if his dealings with school lay at the bottom of his problems, his parents were unlikely to let him go to a different one, perhaps in Stuttgart or Heidelberg, or any other city more cosmopolitan than Karlsbach; which, in Sacha's view, would have been just about every city. They were old-fashioned enough to believe that you can succeed anywhere as long as you apply yourself.

The thought of a more cosmopolitan location immediately opened up a new opportunity; after all, what city could fit that description better than Paris? He could live with his family, and...

At this point, that particular alternative also became hazy. For one thing, he would still be geographically far too close to escape his parents' influence. And, besides, his Parisian relatives were very keen on education; who could tell whether they might not be just as controlling?

He put the Paris option aside as a possibility of last resort, but what he really needed was a complete break from his family and school. If he were a little older, he could go to the Army, but that wasn't an option yet. Besides, which Army? The *Bundeswehr*,¹¹¹ where he could at least understand the commands? That seemed unlikely since he wasn't German. The French Army, where it would take him months to adapt to a language of which he had only rudimentary knowledge? That didn't sound all that promising either. Besides, he wanted to get away from being subject to the arbitrary control by people in authority, and he was escaping into the armed forces? Dumb idea!

Eventually, he found a solution by accident, when he read on the school notice board that several organisations were looking for candidates to be exchange students to America for a year. This looked like a viable escape plan. The USA was far enough away that neither his parents nor his school would have influence, and even though he would be subject to his host family's control, that had to be more relaxed than here.¹¹² Besides, the pamphlets indicated that host families

were carefully vetted to make sure they were compatible with their overseas visitors.¹¹³ In all likelihood, the family would have a teenager of their own, who could become the visitor's brother or sister for the year, help with integration into school life, and so on.

Sacha applied. He got two glowing references from teachers. One came from a Mathematics teacher, who described him as possessing "extraordinary abilities". The other was written by his Civics teacher, who described him as "very mature, reliable, and a pleasure to be with".

The latter carried particular weight since it came from a *Gymnasialprofessor*,¹¹⁴ whose letterhead also identified him as *Head of the Classics Department*, which qualified him as a language teacher, from whom one of the references had to come; Sacha knew that it probably meant a teacher of English, but that wasn't actually specified. He also knew he was bending the rules, but he felt little remorse considering how many regulations had been misused to disadvantage him over the years; he was angry and rebellious enough to feel justified in what he did.

Today's letter was an invitation to an interview-camp for shortlisted students in Frankfurt. Since this was a school-sponsored project, permission was automatic from the school; it was considered an honour that Sacha had gotten this far. His parents' agreement was also a given. To Sacha's surprise, they had accepted his proposal of an overseas year without objections. Perhaps it was a way for them to gain breathing time in the not overly friendly family relationships, or to create extra space in their overcrowded apartment. Or maybe his mother was genuine when she said that all she wished was for him to have a better life than she had, and she saw America as a place where that might happen.

Sacha was both excited and worried. Naturally, he was concerned that he might not do well at the interviews. But what if he did succeed in making it all the way to America? How would he cope given his appalling language skills, of which his teachers constantly reminded him?

Sacha tried to drag his attention back to the Altenstein, in the hope of getting at least some of his work done. The occupants of the next booth were now decrying the valour of the German officer class. If they were to be believed, when capture by the Soviets looked likely, the field officers would immediately swap

tunics with one of the fallen soldier since *der Iwan*¹¹⁵ would always inspect a prisoner's epaulettes to determine whether they were the soft ones of a lower ranked soldier or the stiffer ones of an officer. If the latter, the wearer was killed instantly, even if he was an ordinary man who had simply helped himself to an officer's coat to prevent dying from the cold.

Once again, the noise from the *Stammtisch* distracted Sacha and, to avoid blaming his inability to concentrate on this, he cursed the acuity of his hearing.

After his loss of Lexi, the time previously occupied by Mrs Abler, and his split from Mr Abler, turning school into a source of amusement was no longer enough to occupy Sacha's time and mind. He added to his extracurricular activities by taking photographs of friends who had started a rock group, and writing press releases for them. He quickly discovered how easy it was to get published in the local and regional press when providing print-ready copy and pictures.

He also enjoyed collecting the entrance fees at his friends' appearances in pubs and district halls, because he soon discovered that *front of house* was where a lot of interesting things happened. He was encouraged to *accidentally* forget to hand out a ticket from time to time; Sacha wasn't quite sure whether it had to do with taxation or whether the room rental was based on tickets sold, or perhaps even the entertainment license for the day was based on ticket sales. He didn't ask, nor did he care. But he soon learned the tricks of this form of creative accounting. There were individuals he sometimes let in at half price if they were short of money, and they never expected a ticket. Then there were larger groups where one person collected everybody's money in advance to speed up proceedings, and who was inevitably satisfied with a bunch of tickets, even if they were fewer than the members of the group. Or there were larger groups to whom Sacha gave a discount, for which they only expected a few token tickets. They only needed them if they wanted to get back into the venue after leaving for a while, and then only if the ticket seller didn't remember them, but as Sacha remembered just about everybody, nobody worried much about tickets. Everyone was happy with these arrangements: the band, because the official head count was lower than the real one, and the guests, because they saw Sacha as a tolerant

doorman, which encouraged them to attend future events where he kept attendance.

Beyond holding the cash, the cashier's stand also served as safe deposit location for all manner of items visitors thought they might lose in the dance hall. Sacha took control of many a girl's purse, occasionally some young man's wallet, and quite a lot of jewellery the owners claimed to be valuable. Sacha accepted it all with an automatic disclaimer of responsibility.

Sacha was fascinated by the less common items he was asked to hold, like flick-knives owned by would-be gangsters claiming that they might get tempted to stab somebody if he looked at their girlfriends. Clearly, they were just showing off with the ownership of such weapons, especially since no serious possessor of a weapon would ever admit to having it, let alone surrender it.

There were the numerous packets of condoms handed in by hopeful young men. Sacha always knew that they were not going to be used since any couple actually planning to use prophylactics usually hid them in the secret cavern that was a girl's purse.

There was only ever one object handed in which seriously concerned Sacha, and that was when the town bully – a *rocker* known for knocking people out of his way regardless of age or gender, and who frequently sought fights with kids of Sacha's age, particularly when he was backed by his own mini-gang of losers – gave him a loaded revolver for safekeeping. Sacha accepted the weapon before realizing what it was, then regretted doing so; there now was a .38 snub nose with his fingerprints on it, and the owner, complete with entourage, had disappeared into the dance hall after, surprisingly, handing over the correct payment. For once, Sacha was confused at what he should do. Such a weapon was not only highly illegal but also quite scarce in regional Germany; the last thing he needed was one in circulation that could be traced to him. When there was a lull in the inflow of patrons, he carefully wiped it with his handkerchief, the activity carefully hidden in the drawer, but he had no experience with wiping off fingerprints and didn't know whether he did it correctly. He was also worried that he might accidentally touch the trigger, as he had no idea what effort it would take to discharge a shot.

Just at that moment, Sacha's attention was drawn to a young couple in passionate embrace in a corner of the ante-room. The young man's back was towards Sacha, one of his hands up under the girl's blouse, mauling her breasts, while his right hand pushed up her skirt, pulled down the top of her panties and was now busy deep inside them. What fascinated Sacha most wasn't the scene itself – these things happened often enough – but that the girl was looking right at him throughout this activity. As she spread her legs a little to give her companion easier access, she winked at Sacha and smiled broadly. It was clear she was putting on a show for his benefit. It distracted him sufficiently from the gun that he forgot what his legal obligations might be or whether the loaded cartridges were real; he just left it in the drawer and ignored it until it was reclaimed, at which time Sacha just opened the drawer and let the young hood take it, making sure that he left no fresh fingerprints.

One ability Sacha found handy in most of these activities was reading the faces of those he dealt with. He got on relatively well with the town bully and his gang, at least as well as anyone could, because he could judge how far he could push his luck with them. He didn't show fear, as many others did, nor did he provoke them. He tried to stay out of their way but when verbal exchanges were inevitable – usually precursors to a physical altercation – he knew how to deal with them with sufficient humour that they were left more perplexed than angry. That gave Sacha an unusual status in that group's eyes; they frequently engaged him in banter, but were far less threatening than in most cases.

It was this same ability that kept him from getting into too much trouble at school. While challenging teachers was always unwise, he managed to do so just enough to get a certain amount of grudging acknowledgement for his achievements in engaging them intellectually. Added to that was his general quirkiness which many teachers found confusing or even entertaining. That ranged from responding to any teacher by calling upon a deity for assistance to speaking in made-up words,¹¹⁶ which took teachers aback for a moment.

A few weeks after his last visit to the Altenstein, he was back there for another meal of *Wurstsalat* and a *Mass Bier* in order to celebrate receiving notification that his interview in Frankfurt had been successful, and that he was one of the chosen few to spend a year in America. On this occasion, he was served

by an elderly woman who was just as grumpy as the man previously; Sacha wondered whether it was the gloomy nature of the locale that influenced people working there.

Sacha pondered that his success at the seven-day selection camp might have had something to do with the Americans thinking he was Jewish. Over the years, so many people had thought of him as a Jew that Sacha began to wonder himself, even though he knew where his mother kept her *Ahnenpass*.¹¹⁷

It was one of Sacha's quirks that led to this misunderstanding by the American hosts of the camp. When Dr König started a class in Biblical Hebrew, Sacha had joined. Not because he had the slightest interest in reading the Bible in its original form, but because he liked the teacher and she needed a certain number of participants to start the class. Sacha never learned any Hebrew, but he did learn the Jewish alphabet, which he practiced by writing his notes in it: ordinary German words, but using the Hebrew script. He automatically did so during the camp, where his hosts thought he was writing in Hebrew. He assured them that he wasn't, but they imagined it might be interesting for his future American classmates to learn from an exchange student what it was like to be Jewish in modern Germany. So, for once, it actually worked in Sacha's favour that people thought of him as Jewish, even though he felt quite embarrassed about accidentally misleading the Americans.

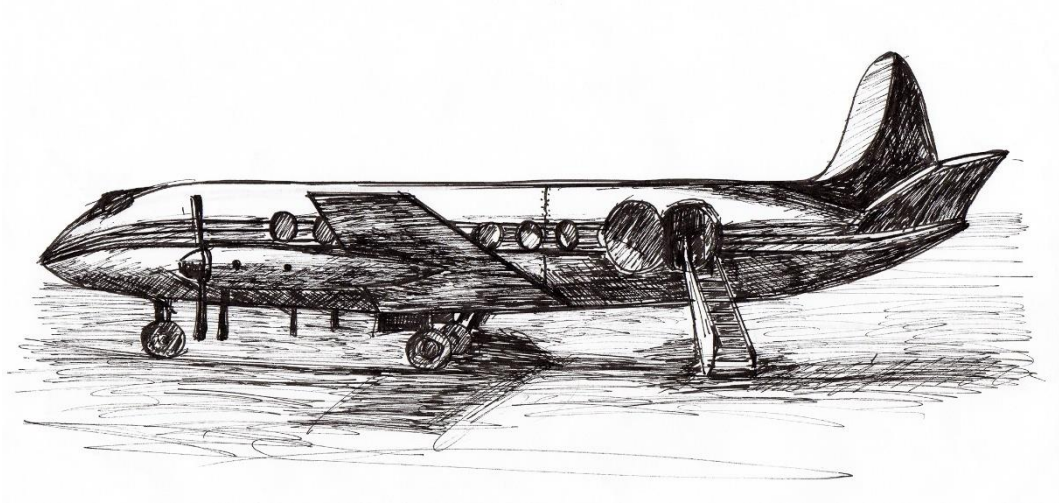
A year away was not going to solve all his problems, of course. He would have to return to Karlsbach to finish his education. But Sacha promised himself that it would be a year to contemplate his options. Who knew? Perhaps he would come home to find that his reputation had faded, or that there were new teachers and that he'd be given a fair chance in Latin after all. Alternatively, maybe his parents would then let him go to school in Heidelberg.¹¹⁸ Or maybe the Paris option could be revived. And, if all else failed, he would have made contacts in America and could possibly return there. Maybe there was even a way of never returning from there?

What still worried him most was whether he would survive the entire year in the USA. "He'll be back in less than three months," his school's Principal wagered his parents; "with his language skills he has no hope."¹¹⁹

This visit turned out to be Sacha's last to the Altenstein. Soon after, the current owners threw in the towel and the place went, once again, into receivership. From what he heard much later, this time the tavern remained shut for several years before another owner could be found willing to take financial risks with this establishment.

Karlsbach (Baden)

Epilogue



Reset Everything to Start Again

The last months in Karlsbach sped past Sacha. Every week there was something to do in preparation for his departure – get documents in order, immunisations, health checks, and, to his surprise, his parents were generous and took him on numerous shopping trips for a whole new wardrobe, which included items he was sure he would never wear, such as hats popular mostly among salesmen of that era.

He also had to go through the intensive training provided by the exchange organisation, preparing him for life in America and the differences between American and German teenagers. One of the titbits passed on to all exchange students was that American girls shaved their legs, which, apparently, was not done in Germany. It was a detail that baffled Sacha, since the barely visible soft hairs on his female friends' legs hardly seemed worth the bother of a regular shave, but as it didn't affect him personally, he gave it little more thought. More important to him was that apparently only hooligans, especially *Latinos*, wore a moustache in America and that his therefore had to go. It was the first time he'd heard that Americans saw Spanish-speaking people as a separate race, and it didn't escape him that his mentors made a connection between that race and criminality.

At the end of July, the annual six-week school summer holidays began. Sacha was taken aback when a larger than expected number of teachers went out of their way to bid him farewell; he was flattered, since such teacher–student interaction was neither common nor encouraged by the school, but he wondered whether some of them weren't just making sure that he was really leaving – he



Photo-Booth picture
strip from the time
when Sacha defied
schoolrules with his
moustache

imagined the collective sigh of relief in the staff room that the school's most troublesome student was finally going to become a different faculty's problem.

A few days later, Sacha attended a party organised to celebrate the holidays, as well as a goodbye to him; it was to be held amongst the building materials of the still unfinished future home of one of the band members. Sacha arrived early with Michael to create a bit of clear space in one of the rooms, so that they could at least dance without falling over builders' tools. But somebody had beaten them to it. A large downstairs area had been cleared completely and cleaned, a few trestle tables had been set up covered with starched linen tablecloths, and a stack of folding chairs stood in a corner. A hi-fi unit was set up, and stacks of records were available. There was a table with beer glasses, cases of soft drinks, and bottles of alcoholic drinks. There even were streamers spread around to create a festive atmosphere.

Michael and Sacha were both astonished and left with little to do; they assumed it was the son of the building's owner who had done this excellent job of preparation. The chairs were quickly unfolded and placed around the room, after which they wondered what else they could set up. After a brief discussion, they agreed that the only thing left to do was to place the glasses on the trestle tables ready for the visitors. Then they decided to prepare a welcome drink for everyone. They expected somewhere between a dozen and twenty of their friends, allowing for a few partners, and so, to be on the safe side, they filled two dozen beer glasses with brandy – not

completely full, of course, only about half of each glass was filled; they didn't

want to overdo it. Still, after this burst of activity, there was still an hour until the others would arrive.

They put on a Rolling Stones album and then, out of sheer boredom, and to Mick Jagger's complaint about not getting any satisfaction, Michael and Sacha each emptied one of the glasses. After that, instead of refilling them, they moved on to the next two glasses, and the next two ...

Neither of them was aware of the others arriving. In fact, neither of them later remembered much at all about the party. Sacha woke up at one stage, just in time to watch Michael run head first against a brick wall, apparently imitating something he had seen in a movie; after the impact, Michael stood still for a moment, still bent at the hips, then fell sideways to the ground.

Sometime later, Sacha woke up in an upstairs room where his friend had placed him onto some sort of matting to allow him to sleep. They had locked the door to keep him safe, which only briefly slowed down Sacha's attempt to re-join the party. The room was not yet completed – the ceiling still had to be added. At the top of an unfinished wall lay a plank across a stairway and onto the parallel wall of a room on the other side of the stairs. Sacha took this escape route, walking, in his drunken state, along a plank with nothing but sheer drops on both sides, and “guided by God”, as others said later, actually made it safely to the other room. The door wasn't locked, allowing him to return to the party, startling everyone there. He arrived just in time to hear one of the girls complain about feeling cold and, ever helpful, he picked her up and placed her atop a wood-stove – an act that went down in school folklore, recalled even fifty years later at the wake for one of the band members.

A few days later, Sacha's parents and sisters left for their annual holidays in the marshes of Northern Germany. With the excitement of new adventures ahead, Sacha wasn't much affected by seeing them go — even though it might, perhaps, be for the last time ever — except for parting from his little sister, who seemed to sense that she was losing her primary carer and protector. She clung to her brother with all the might she could muster and, eventually, had to be placed in the back of the car, crying and screaming. This image haunted Sacha for years to come.

Yet another week passed, with Sacha indulging in all his favourite foods and activities. Then, finally, the day of departure arrived. Michael accompanied Sacha to the airport in Stuttgart, arriving quite late, so that their farewells were quick and superficial, even though they had been best friends for a number of years.

Sacha waited in a separate room set aside for the group of people on this special charter flight to the USA. There were a few exchange students he knew from the preparation camps, some Americans returning home after a year in Germany, and a group of mostly elderly passengers who belonged to some sort of travelling club. The anticipated time of departure came and went, but they continued to sit in the bleak room, getting ever more anxious.

Sacha found himself sitting next to Sandy, an American teen returning to Flint, Michigan, after a year in Munich, who had managed to acquire a thick Bavarian accent in what little she said in German. Since she preferred speaking in English, they struggled making conversation, but they had fun doing so, which helped pass the time.

Two hours after departure time, a guide arrived instructing everyone to board a bus, which would take them to a hotel where they would spend the night. No further explanation was offered, no matter how much the students asked for one or the adults demanded one.

The hotel was cheap motel-style accommodation that didn't look promising. A person from the exchange agency awaited the students, allocated them their rooms and, eventually, brought them all together in a dining room for explanations. "Nothing to worry about," she said reassuringly, "the plane was just held up in Ireland with an electrical fault that has to be repaired. We'll go back to the airport in the morning." Some toiletries were distributed, since all luggage was safely stored away at the airport where it had already gone through Customs procedures, which apparently meant that it couldn't be retrieved. Unhappiness quickly spread through the group when it became clear that there wasn't even a change of clothes to be had, let alone any books or other entertainment packed in the suitcases. Leaving the hotel was strictly prohibited, so they couldn't even buy anything.

Sacha got together with Sandy and they made the best of the situation, listening to a radio and drinking beer. Visiting each other's rooms was strictly prohibited, but they found a quiet place in one of the lounge rooms where they could talk and flirt.

The following morning, everyone was awoken quite early with the message to get ready as quickly as possible – no time even for breakfast – to be on the bus by seven-thirty. They only just made it in time, fearing the plane might leave without them.

They needn't have worried; they spent the rest of the day in the dank waiting room again, occasionally getting some stale sandwiches and soft drinks, but otherwise without anything to do. By early evening, it became clear that the plane wasn't going to arrive, and the whole group was shipped back to the hotel. Eventually, a message arrived that the plane was in London with hydraulics problems.

The following day, the group didn't even go to the airport. Apparently, the plane was now in Hamburg and had to have an engine repaired. The group became increasingly disgruntled. There were discussions about what sort of charter airline this plane belonged to anyway, and besides, what sort of plane left for an overseas trip from Stuttgart, a relatively minor regional airport? Some saw this as *fishy*.

Apart from these considerations, many of the students became distinctly uncomfortable about being in the same clothes for several days, with no opportunities to get fresh ones. They took to handwashing what they wore, but found little enthusiasm for that because it meant being locked in a hotel room with nothing to wear until the clothes had dried. The hotel offered some dressing gowns, but few of the teens were prepared to be seen in these threadbare garments wearing nothing underneath.

Another night passed and, this time after a leisurely breakfast, the group went back to the airport on day three of their twenty-four-hour journey. And this time, the plane arrived – eventually.

Sacha was stunned when he first saw it. He was no expert in aircraft, but he thought it to be a Vickers Viscount, the type of plane that was used for inter-city hops in America, not for transatlantic flights. What is more, the hull had a

dark strip running around it vertically just behind the wings, which looked like the plane had been welded together from two parts. Surely not?

The passengers were herded on as quickly as possible – first the adults, filling the plane from the back, then the students. Sandy clung tightly to Sacha's arm, so that they ended up allocated to adjacent seats. Sacha was given a window seat, which he offered to Sandy, but she preferred not to look outside for fear of getting travel anxiety. Sacha briefly contemplated that there shouldn't be much travel anxiety left after all their waiting, but quickly settled down in his seat.

Eventually, all were aboard – in fact, about sixty passengers more than normally travelled in this type of plane, and one passenger more than the seating available. The extra traveller, a scrawny American boy on his way home, had to sit on a foldout seat in the aisle at the back of the plane, one of those seats intended for flight attendants during take-off and landing. Not only did this seem like a less than comfortable location to spend the next twelve hours or so, but it was amongst the old people, far away from his friends.

There were mixed feelings amongst those aboard when the plane finally started its engines – spluttering unhealthily – and then taxied to the runway. Almost surprisingly, it took off, making Sacha feel exhilarated by the g-forces pushing him into his lumpy seat.

In the air, Sacha eagerly anticipated looking down on Europe as it passed below, hopefully recognising some of the geographic features he had learned about. But he quickly discovered that his learning wasn't going to be tested today – the window next to him quickly fogged up, unlike any other window in the plane.

"Ooohh," came a prolonged howl from a boy in the row behind him.

His neighbour added, "That means that the outer window isn't airtight, and if the inner one comes off, your head will be sucked right out of the plane, and your body will get stuck in the window, until it's finally torn off ..."

"Sit down!" came the firm instruction from a middle-aged woman with overly large horn-rimmed glasses and short, straight, blonde hair that reminded Sacha of the pictures of concentration camp guards he had seen in history books – although they wouldn't have worn a flowery dress, not even a long, shapeless one. She was the supervisor of the group of exchange students, and was clearly capable

of maintaining discipline, although seemingly annoyed that she had to do so. “I won’t tolerate this sort of nonsense,” she finished off before disappearing again to wherever her seat was located further back in the plane. Sacha was disappointed that his window seat didn’t allow him to see anything, but not overly concerned about his safety; at least not at first.

As the plane climbed further into the sky, the temperature in the interior decreased rapidly. The flight attendants distributed ugly brown blankets to everyone, uncomfortably scratchy and much too thin to preserve body heat. Sandy lifted the arm rest between their seats and scooted closer to him, so that they could share their blankets while keeping each other warm. They covered themselves up to their necks, then began rubbing each other’s skin to create warmth, which quickly transformed into a make-out session. Sacha was quite happy with the climate that had led to this unexpected activity, but did begin to get concerned when one of the attendants started sticking insulation tape at various places of the cabin walls where air was escaping through tiny holes.

The flight was supposed to take well over a dozen hours for the first section, but the plane landed much sooner than that. There were no announcements, but eventually the word got around that they were in Ireland, and that some of the luggage had to be transferred to another flight because the plane was overloaded. They had used too much fuel and wouldn’t make it across the Atlantic with what was left. Because refuelling was required, everyone had to leave the plane.

Sandy and Sacha went to a small airport lounge where they ordered Irish coffee, even though not quite sure what it was. By the time it finally arrived, they were called back to the plane so that they still didn’t know what changed an ordinary coffee into an Irish one. There was some swapping of seats for friends to sit with each other, but nobody wanted to be next to the dodgy window, so Sacha’s place seemed reserved for him. He was happy that Sandy chose to join him again even though some of the other Americans asked her to sit with them.

The next leg of the flight passed without incident, but the freezing cold and the regular covering of leaking holes in the walls became rather disconcerting. Eventually, the plane arrived on US soil, apparently in Boston, although neither

Sandy nor Sacha were quite sure because they came to a halt far away from any buildings.

Most of the group of elderly travellers left here. Sacha observed one of them, a tall, overweight man, fall to his knees and kiss the ground near the bottom of the mobile steps. Glad to be back in America? Or happy just to have survived this flight?

The departing passengers were bussed away and some refuelling took place while the rest, mainly the group of exchange students and a small number of seniors, were taken in another bus to an office where their visas were checked – rather casually, as it seemed to Sacha – and then they found themselves back in their seats.

As the engines were fired up, one of them, the closest one on Sacha's side, had difficulties getting started. Eventually, all engines were turned off again. A small team of mechanics arrived, and got to work standing precariously on a mobile platform. One of the workers was in uniform, looking very much like one of the men he had seen going into the cockpit in Stuttgart – surely, the cabin crew didn't work on an engine?

Eventually, they got the malfunctioning engine to turn over. The other three were restarted and they were on their way again; this time for only a short flight to Detroit.

Half an hour into this part of the journey, the flight became very bumpy; they had drifted into a thunderstorm and the plane was tossed, dropping suddenly then regaining altitude, with scary sideways thrusts from an invisible power. The creaking of the fuselage was quite frightening, making even Sacha finally question the safety of this aircraft.

"Where's the emergency exit?" one of the American boys shouted, laughing hysterically at what he thought was a clever joke. A woman in the back of the plane didn't find it funny; she panicked and ran down the aisle screaming, while looking for a way out of the plane. It took the combined efforts of all flight attendants to catch her and calm her enough to strap her back into her seat.

In Detroit, Sandy parted from Sacha. She briefly took his right hand, held it palm-up to represent the shape of the State of Michigan, and pointed out where her home was located and where Sacha would end up in Lansing. She was sure

they would meet again sometime for school competitions and sporting events. With that, she gave him a quick peck on the cheek and ran off, clearly excited finally to re-join her own family.

With that, Sacha was left alone to start a new life in the New World. And this is where Sacha's life began to be difficult.

Karlsbach (Baden)

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Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Unvergessene Weihnachten Band 3	36 Zeitzeugen-Erinnerungen 1914-1994	2006	Zeitgut	Berlin	9783866141223
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Unvergessene Weihnachten Band 1	38 Erinnerungen aus guten und aus schlechten Zeiten 1918-1959	2004	Zeitgut	Berlin	9783933336736
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Deutschland - Wunderland Neubeginn 1950-1960	44 Erinnerungen aus Ost und West	20035	Zeitgut	Berlin	393333618X
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Halbstark und tüchtig Jugend in Deutschland 1950-1960	48 Geschichten und Berichte von Zeitzeugen	2002	Zeitgut	Berlin	3933336171
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Lebertran und Chewing Gum Kindheit in Deutschland 1945-1950	55 Geschichten und Berichte von Zeitzeugen	2005	Zeitgut	Berlin	3933336236
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Nachkriegs-Kinder Kindheit in Deutschland 1945-1950	67 Geschichten und Berichte von Zeitzeugen	1998	Zeitgut	Berlin	3866141114
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Kinder des Jahrhunderts	Fesselnde Geschichten des Alltags aus mehr als	2004	Zeitgut	Berlin	3933336686

		1000 Erinnerungen 1914-1960				
Kleindienst, Jürgen (ed)	Unvergessene Schulzeit Band 2 1945-1962	33 Erinnerungen von Schülern und Lehrern	2005	Zeitgut	Berlin	9783866141018
Klimov, Oleg	Russland	Erbe eines vergangenen Imperiums	2005	Braus	Heidelberg	389904150x
Klugermann, Günther	Feuersturm über Freiburg	27. November 1944	2003	Wartburg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	3831313350
Klugermann, Günther	Oh je, wie die Zeit vergeht! Geboren in den 50ern	Als die Haare länger und die Röcke kürzer wurden	2007	Herkules	Kassel	3937924221
Klugermann, Günther	Waisch noch? Band 1	Freiburger Geschichten aus Wirtschaftswunderzeiten	2007	Herkules	Kassel	3937924116
Klugermann, Günther	Waisch noch? Band 2	Geschichten aus dem Freiburg der 60er und 70er Jahre	2006	Herkules	Kassel	3937924485
Köhler, Werner	Freiburg i. Br. 1945 – 1949	Politisches Leben und Erfahrungen in der Nachkriegszeit	1987	Freiburg	Stadtarchiv Freiburg	3923272219
Koop, Volker	Besetzt	Amerikanische Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland	2006	Be.bra	Berlin	3898090698
Koop, Volker	Besetzt	Britische Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland	2007	Be.bra	Berlin	9783898090766
Koop, Volker	Besetzt	Französische Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland	2005	Be.bra	Berlin	3898090647
Krenz, Tobias	ADAC Typenhandbuch	Deutsche Autos 1945 bis 1970	2011	Heel	Königswinter	9783868524833
Kühbacher, Ingrid	Sie lebten in Freiburg	Erinnerungen beim Gang über den Alten Friedhof	2006	Schillinger	Freiburg	9783891550571
Kumpfmüller, Hans	Vergessene Österreicher	Bilder aus Transkarpatien	2006	Molden	Wien	3854851642
Kurze, Peter	Kleinwagen der Fünfzigerjahre	Innen größer als außen	2008	Delius, Klasing	Bielefeld	9783768825115
Kurze, Peter	Bewegte Zeiten: Kleinwagen der Fünfzigerjahre	Innen größer als außen	2008	Delius, Klasing & Co	Bielefeld	9783768825115
Kurze, Peter & Schrader, Halwart	Bewegte Zeiten: Luxuswagen der Fünfzigerjahre	Komfort und Klasse	2013	Delius, Klasing & Co	Bielefeld	9783768836890
Land, R & Possek, R	Fremde Welten	Gegensätzliche Deutung der DDR durch SED-Reformer und Bürgerbewegung in den 80er Jahren, die	1998	Christoph Links	Berlin	3861531720
Lescott, James	50er Jahre	Jahrzehnt in Bildern, das		Parragon	Bath	9781407521220
Longerich, Peter	Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!	Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945	2007	Pantheon		9783570550410
Maechler, Stefan	The Wilkomirski Affair	A Study in Biographical Truth	2001	Random House	New York	0805211357
Maier, Katharina	Berühmtesten Dichter und Schriftsteller Europas, die		2007	Marix	Wiesbaden	9783865399144
Maischberger, S & Unger, J (Eds)	60 x Deutschland	Die Jahresschau	2009	Nicolai	Berlin	9783894795115
Mann, Golo & Müller, Konrad	Konrad Adenauer		2001	Gustav Lübke		3785704453
May, Karl	Old Surehand	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		386667225X
May, Karl	Old Surehand 2	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		3866676050
May, Karl	Old Surehand 3	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		3866676069
May, Karl	Winnetou 1	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		3939048682
May, Karl	Winnetou 2	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		3866672063
May, Karl	Winnetou 3	(Audiobuch)	2006	Radioropa		3866673337
May, Karl	Schatz im Silbersee, Der	Erzählung aus dem Wilden Westen	1952	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	378020536X
May, Karl	Winnetou 1	Karl May DVD-Collection 1 (Der Schatz im Silbersee/Winnetou und das Halbblut Apanatschi/Winnetou und sein Freund Old Firehand)	2005			
May, Karl	Old Surehand I	Reiseerzählung	1949	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	3780205149
May, Karl	Old Surehand II	Reiseerzählung	1949	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	3780805157
May, Karl	Winnetou I	Reiseerzählung	1951	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	3780205076
May, Karl	Winnetou II	Reiseerzählung	1951	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	3780205084
May, Karl	Winnetou III	Reiseerzählung	1951	Karl-May-Verlag	Bamberg	3780205092
Moritz, Rainer	Und das Meer singt sein Lied	Schlager von Sehnsucht und Ferne	2005	Piper	München	3492244750
Müller, Henrik	Wirtschaftsfaktor Patriotismus	Vaterlandsliebe in Zeiten der Globalisierung	2006	Eichhorn	Frankfurt a.M.	3821856238

Naumann, Günter	Deutsche Geschichte	Das Alte Reich 962-1806	2007	Marix	Wiesbaden	9783865399281
Naumann, Günter	Deutsche Geschichte	Von 1806 bis heute	2008	Marix	Wiesbaden	9783865399403
Niehuss, M & Lindner, U (eds)	Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung – Band 10	Besatzungszeit, Bundesrepublik und DDR 1945-1969	1998	Reclam	Stuttgart	9783150170106
Norddeutscher Rundfunk Hrsgr.	„Mein Kriegsende“	Zeitungen aus Niedersachsen erinnern sich	2005	Schlütersche	Hannover	3899937112
Obermayer, Horst J	Dampflokomotiven	Regelspur	1995	Weltbild	Augsburg	3893508198
Obermayer, Horst J & Deppmeyer, J	Reisezug-Wagen	Deutsche Bundesbahn	1995	Weltbild	Augsburg	3893508198
Pelizaes, Ludolf	Kolonialismus, der	Geschichte der europäischen Expansion	2008	Marix	Wiesbaden	9783865399410
Piper, Ernst	Kurze Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus	Von 1919 bis heute	2007	Hoffmann & Campe	Hamburg	9783455500240
Podewin, Dr Norbert (ed)	Braunbuch	Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik und in Berlin (West)	1968	Das neue Berlin	Berlin	3360010337
Podszun, Brigitte	Die Autos der Wirtschaftswunderzeit		2000	Podszun	Brilon	3861332442
Porombka & Schmundt (Hrsg.)	Böse Orte	Stätten nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung – heute	2005	Claassen		9783546003803
Reichel, Peter	Erfundene Erinnerung	Weltkrieg und Judenmord in Film und Theater	2004	Carl Hanser	München	3446204814
Rettelbach, Bruno	Am schönsten hat's die Forstpartie	Erinnerungen 1945-1967	2006	Zeitgut	Berlin	3933336886
Rickling, Matthias	Tintenklecks und Hitzefrei		2010	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	9783831320325
Rudolph, Wolfgang	Oh je, wie die Zeit vergeht! Geboren in den 40ern	VW Käfer und ein Traum von Freiheit	2007	Herkules	Kassel	3937924213
Sanz, Wilhelm	Aus dem Reichtum der Dichtung 1	Dichtungsgattungen	1987	Österreichischer Bundesverlag	Wien	3215010593
Sanz, Wilhelm	Aus dem Reichtum der Dichtung 4	Die klassische Dichtung Österreichs, Der Realismus	1989	Österreichischer Bundesverlag	Wien	3215010674
Sanz, Wilhelm	Aus dem Reichtum der Dichtung 3	Rokoko, Sturm und Drang, Klassik und Romantik	1988	Österreichischer Bundesverlag	Wien	3215010658
Sautter, Udo	Deutsche Geschichte seit 1815: Daten, Fakten, Dokumente	Band 1: Daten und Fakten	2004	Francke	Tübingen	3772030173
Schabert, Tilo	Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird	Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit	2002	Klett-Cotta	Stuttgart	3608942572
Schmale, Wolfgang	Geschichte der Männlichkeit	In Europa (1450-2000)	2003	Böhlau	Wien	3205771427
Schmidt, Norbert	Landleben in den 50er und 60er Jahren		2010	Wartberg	Gudensberg-G.	9783831323487
Schmidt, Norbert	Heuduft, Kirmes, Flaschenbier	Landleben – Die 50er und 60er – Das war unsere Zeit!	2005	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	3831316090
Schrahe, Stefan	Oldtimer, Klassiker aus 6 Jahrzehnten	... und was sie heute wert sind	2012	Heel	Königswinter	9783868526349
Schwalbe, Klaus (ed)	Konrad Adenauer und Frankreich Rhöndorfer Gespräche 1949-1963	Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung zu den deutsch-französischen Beziehungen in Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur	2005	Bouvier	Bonn	9783416030755
Seeling, Mathias	Antisemitismus im Deutschland der Nachkriegszeit	Antisemitische Skandale & ihre Rezeption in der Bundesrepublik nach 1945	2007	GRIN	Erfurt	9783638769358
Seiffert, Rachel	Dark Room, The		2001	Vintage Books	NY	0375726322
Steininger, Rolf	17. Juni 1953	Anfang vom langen Ende der DDR, der	2003	Olzog	München	3789281131
Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland	Deutschland-Österreich, verfreundete Nachbarn	Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung im Haus der Geschichte der BRD, Bonn, 19. Mai bis 23. Oktober 2005, ...	2005	Kerber		9783938025185
Storz, Alexander F	So rollten die Fünfziger	Unterwegs im Wirtschaftswunder	2012	Motorbuch	Stuttgart	9783613033955
Storz, Bernd	Wir Jungen der 50er und 60er Jahre		2010	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	9783831323463
Storz, Bernd	Wir sind die Jungen der 50er und 60er Jahre		2004	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	3831314551
Stumpp, Gerhard	Reisegrüße aus dem Ländle	Baden und Württemberg in alten Postkarten-Ansichten	2006	Jan Thorbecke	Ostfildern	9783799501729

Tscheulin, D K & Großnotekamp, D	Freiburger Straßen der Wirtschaftswunderzeit	Die Motorisierungswelle der 50er und 60er Jahre	2005	Herkules	Kassel	3937924353
Tüngel, R & Berndorff, H R	Stunde Null	Deutschland unter den Besatzungsmächten	2004	MSB Matthes & Seitz	Berlin	3882218096
Van der Gieth, Hans-Jürgen	Leben und Alltag in den... Fünfziger Jahren	Unterrichtsmaterial für die 8. bis 11. Klassen	2002	BVK	Kempfen	3932519191
Verenkotte, Clemens	Das Ende der friedlichen Gesellschaft	Deutschlands Illusionen im globalen Krieg	2005	Droemer	München	9783426273647
Vetter, K	Eisenbahn der 60er Jahre	Dampf-, Diesel- und Elektrotraktion in Ost und West	2008	GeraMond	München	9783765470981
Vetter, Klaus J (ed)	Eisenbahn der 50er-Jahre	Wiederaufbau und Nachkriegsblüte in Ost und West	2006	GeraMond	München	3765470732
Volle, Henning	Bergrekord am Schauinsland	Geschichte des berühmten ADAC-Bergrennens 1925-1988, die	2009	EK	Freiburg i. Br.	9783882558951
Voßkamp, Wilhelm	Roman eines Lebens, der	Die Aktualität unserer Bildung und ihre Geschichte im Bildungsroman	2009	BUP	Berlin	9783940432421
Wackwitz, Stephan	Neue Menschen	Bildungsroman	2005	Fischer	Frankfurt a.M.	9783596166961
Wallace, Diana	Woman's Historical Novel, The	British Women Writers, 1900-2000	2005	Palgrave	NY	1403903220
Weber, Gustav	Curiosa Germanica	Unbekanntes Bekanntes von Adel bis Zeitrechnung	2006	Herbig	München	9783776624939
Weber, R & Wehling, H-G	Geschichte Baden-Württembergs		2007	C H Beck	München	9783406558740
Weinke, Wilfried	Verdrängt, vertrieben, aber nicht vergessen		2003	Weingarten	Weingarten	3817025467
Welzer, H & Moller, S & Tschuggnall, K	Opa war kein Nazi	Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis	2002	Fischer	Frankfurt	3596155150
Wensierski, Peter	Schläge im Namen des Herren	Die verdrängte Geschichte der Heimkinder in der Bundesrepublik	2007	Spiegel	München	9783442129744
Williams, Charles	Adenauer	Der Staatsmann der das demokratische Deutschland formte	2001	Gustav Lübke	Bergisch Gladbach	3785720750
Wisser, Horst	Stadtleben in den 50er und 60er Jahren		2010	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	9783831323470
Wisser, Horst	Milchbar, Schupo, Tanzcafé	Stadtleben – Die 50er und 60er – Das war unsere Zeit!	2005	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	3831316104
Wodarz, Corinna	Unser Spielzeug der 60er- und 70er-Jahre		2010	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	9783831325184
Wodarz, Corinna	Unser Haushalt	In den 50er und 60er Jahren	2006	Wartberg	Gudensberg-Gleichen	3831316155

Karlsbach (Baden)

Endnotes

¹ First sentence of *Beau Geste* by Percival Wren, available in many editions, e.g. Stellar Editions (March 6, 2016), ISBN-13: 978-1987817508. The book is written in English, but this first sentence is in French. Its translation is: *Everything I tell you, I saw it, and even if I might have seen it incorrectly, I certainly do not try to deceive you by telling it to you.*

NB: This quote is pertinent to the way I have approach secondary sources: The endnotes serve as a source for additional information for any reader, particularly one with little background knowledge in German history or culture. They are meant to be ignored when the reader is satisfied with his/her understanding of a statement or description, but which can be consulted when endnotes are indicated in the main text and the reader is interested in additional explanations or information.

I chose endnotes instead of footnotes in order to avoid disrupting the flow of reading for any reader who isn't interested at all in the additional information, or who only occasionally wishes or needs the endnotes. For similar reasons, I rejected endnotes at the end of individual chapters to avoid an awkward search for where the endnotes are kept. As indicated above, the endnotes will, ideally, be in a lift-out section to be consulted (or not) as the reader wishes.

In many cases, URLs are listed in these endnotes to provide additional information for interested readers. This material isn't essential to the story told, but provides context or background to those not familiar with the topics discussed (mainly German history or current affairs of the era).

² Something like "crack-scraper".

³ The *Quinta* was the second year of high-school (and year 6 including the four years of primary school). The traditional, and rather old-fashioned, naming of classes in Latin led in reverse numerical order towards matriculation. The lower high school (*Unterstufe*) consisted of 3 years, beginning with the 6th (*Sexta*, the entrance year to high school), via the 5th (*Quinta*) to the 4th (*Quarta*). From then on, each class number was divided into two years. So, middle school (*Mittelstufe*) commenced with the Lower 3rd (*Unter-Tertia*), and went via the Upper 3rd (*Ober-Tertia*) to the Lower 2nd (*Unter-Sekunda*). Similarly, upper school (*Oberstufe*) was divided into Upper 2nd (*Ober-Sekunda*), Lower 1st (*Unter-Prima*) and Upper 1st (*Ober-Prima*). That made for a total of 13 school years (assuming no year had to be repeated). Schools in Germany have now abandoned this nomenclature, as well as having reduced schooling by one year, so that the normal schooling through high school now lasts twelve years (through classes 1 to 12).

⁴ Literally, this means Senior Educational Councillor; it was a senior teacher's title in that era and, unlike in some other parts of the world, some German teachers insisted on being addressed by their full titles as well as by name.

⁵ The "German economic miracle", a period of unprecedented economic growth and wealth in Germany in the 1950s and 60s; as a result of a booming economy, there was such a shortage of workers that educational authorities couldn't be too selective when it came to employing teachers.

⁶ „ich werde euch die Geige auf dem Hirnkasten zerschmettern, bis ihr gen Himmel schreit“.

⁷ An institution that became famous in the late 1980s through the television series *Die Schwarzwald Klinik*.

⁸ In der "kleinen Pause".

⁹ Her name was Pilcz, which is close enough to the German word for mushroom (*Pilz*) which, naturally, was changed into a nickname of *Toadstool* by the pupils.

¹⁰ A pseudo-religious movement during the Nazi years, an anti-Christian belief system vaguely based on the Aryan-Nordic folk beliefs.

¹¹ A dime (a colloquial term for a 10 Pfennig coin).

¹² This was a Cultural Centre to provide information, and some might say propaganda, about America; one of its features was a large library which, apart from books, included daily newspapers in German, with articles of American achievement (and Soviet failures) highlighted for the readers. Also present was American culture in translation, including copies of the German *Micky Maus* magazine, which published Disney comics in German.

¹³ Federal Road No 3 – it wasn't anything special, except that it was a road that carried a lot of the interstate road transports, a never-ending stream of heavy trucks passing all day and most of the night.

¹⁴ Savings bank.

¹⁵ Named after *Adalbert Stifter*, a famous painter and author of the 19th century.

¹⁶ The *Schauinsland* is a mountain just outside Freiburg. It can be reached by taking a tram to the end station, then a bus, and then a gondola which glides high above the ground to the top of the mountain. This day-trip was quite expensive.

¹⁷ UFA is an abbreviation for *Universum Film AG*, German's largest film studios in the early 20th Century. Like many companies in Germany (such as MAN, NSU, BASF, DKW, BMW, and so on) the company was mainly known by its initials, with many Germans having no idea what these initials stood for (in some cases, like DKW, nobody seems to know even today what these letters stood for). In some cases, like HANOMAG, most people didn't even recognize that it was an acronym.

¹⁸ A genealogical document establishing that the person had no Jewish ancestors (see sample at <http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1323300>, last visited on 17 February 2016).

¹⁹ *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, another organisation known more by its initials than by its proper name – Margareta always referred to it in the plural as *Bund Deutscher Mädels* and got very upset if somebody inadvertently used *Mädchen* instead of *Mädels*.

²⁰ *Gröfaz* = *Größte Feldherr aller Zeiten* (the greatest military commander of all times); a term, allegedly first created by Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, originally semi-official but later used almost exclusively ironically (see <http://www.enzyklo.de/Begriff/Gr%C3%B6faz>, last accessed on 17 February 2016).

²¹ Literally *home*, but often meaning a lot more than that to people who have a particular attachment to the place where they were born.

²² The story goes that many lives were saved as a result of the efforts of an ordinary, but very brave, Freiburg woman, Philomene Steiger, who, at great risk to herself, convinced the military commander to spare the population, and his own men, these unnecessary last sacrifices. While her heroic deed is historically documented, it isn't really clear whether it was her intervention that influenced the military commander's decisions, or whether he had received orders to withdraw, or might even have reached that decision himself (see, for example, <http://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg-nord/philomene-steiger-die-jeanne-d-arc-von-herdern--110901801.html>, last accessed on 2 February 2016).

²³ An elite and highly successful regiment of the Free French Forces, founded and led by *Général Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocq* (or short: General Leclerc). The unit's track record was legendary, and ranks amongst the most successful of the Western Allies (see, for instance, <http://liberation-de-paris.gilles-primout.fr/la-preparation/forces-en-presence/la-2eme-division-blindee>, last accessed on 18 February 2016).

²⁴ A well-known and influential German political news magazine.

²⁵ *Trübe Tasse*.

²⁶ *Du bist des Wahnsinns fette Beute*, as odd an expression in German as it is in English, but with a more interesting musical ¼ time rhythm (du **bist** des **Wahnsinns fette Beute**).

²⁷ *Ein Hohlkopf mit Schlagsahne und Kirsche obendrauf*.

²⁸ Generic term for the German armed forces, but usually meant to refer to the armed forces in World War Two. Today's armed forces in Germany are the *Bundeswehr*.

²⁹ *Operation Werwolf* (German) / *Operation Werewolf* (English): failed attempt by the Hitler regime to create a resistance movement in Germany to fight the allied occupation forces as the Free French Forces and the French Resistance Movement had resisted the Germans (see, for instance, <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/operation-werwolf-nazi-plan-create-commando-force.html> (last accessed on 20 February 2016)).

³⁰ What struck Sacha as odd was that the teacher referred to *Werwolf* in the present tense, as if it still existed in 1960.

³¹ Nor did Sacha realize that it was actually a Spanish word, so that there was no reasonable assumption that he should know it any better than Oberstudienrat Götter did.

³² A radio receiver, considered as close to state of the art as his parents were prepared to pay for at the time.

³³ Tearjerkers, soppy music, overly romantic love songs.

³⁴ A popular teen idol at the time, a rocker whose songs were often promoted through musical interludes in usually very superficial entertainment movies (a form of *music clips* before they existed as such).

³⁵ The film was *Die Frühreifen* (the Precocious Ones), in which the main characters tried to establish their identities in spite of parental oppression and the inequalities in society.

³⁶ A hotel near the school.

³⁷ *Afri-Cola*, a popular soft drink at the time.

³⁸ The End of the Dream.

³⁹ *Le comte de Monte Cristo* (The Count of Monte Cristo) – actually a 1961 movie, but it took a while for major releases to make their way into suburban and country cinemas.

⁴⁰ *Berg Lichtspiele* Cinema.

⁴¹ *Das Land der Dichter und Denker*, allegedly said by Wolfgang Menzel in 1836.

⁴² The German grade system ranged from a 1 to a 6, equivalent to a scale of A to F, but it made for easier calculations of a grade point average – with 1 being the best possible GPA, and 6 the worst.

⁴³ A famous brand of plush toy animals.

⁴⁴ New Year's Eve, a special day of celebration in Germany

⁴⁵ Literally a “bourse for hits”, because it was broadcast by the Hessian Radio (*Hessischer Rundfunk*) from Frankfurt, the home of Germany’s most significant stock exchange.

⁴⁶ Not least because of moderator Hanns Verres’s often odd and entertaining sense of humour, such as his final statement of each show, “*Und wenn Sie Freizeit haben, hüpfen Sie!*” (“and if you have some spare time, hop”), which caused many listeners to seek meaning where there simply wasn’t any.

⁴⁷ A big step in German society at the time; only close friends were on a first-name basis, and it was practically unheard of for young people to address their elders so informally.

⁴⁸ Germans are generally very relaxed about nudity, and it was (and still is) very common in public saunas for nude males and females of all ages to use the facilities together; sauna etiquette didn’t demand gender separation, nor any covering up in each other’s presence.

⁴⁹ Usually referring to just about all late model Mercedes cars, as well as the bigger BMWs and Opel Kapitans. Oddly, the saying was rarely applied to sports cars, but almost exclusively to ostentatiously big cars.

⁵⁰ A German law (§ 175 dStGB) that existed between 1872 and 1994 which made male homosexuality illegal.

⁵¹ An ID document carried by all Germans.

⁵² She never went to university but, as was common at the time, the wife automatically became entitled to her husband’s titles, whether academic, civil, military or otherwise, which she could keep even after his death.

⁵³ They basically were a way of bringing pornography to mainstream cinemas at a time when pornography itself was still banned. There usually were a number of mostly very unattractive Scandinavian “experts” in white lab coats explaining the sexual functioning of the human body, intermingled with actual demonstrations by young, attractive blonde actors, ostensibly in real-life scenarios.

⁵⁴ War orphan (literally *ward of the nation*).

⁵⁵ Given the difficulties his step-father had with coming to a settlement of his compensation claims for his lost family assets in Poland, it seemed unlikely that the family would ever scrape up enough money to buy a car.

⁵⁶ A small entry-level 600 cc car, bigger and more solid than the microcars common at the time (like *BMW Isetta*, *Messerschmitt* and other cabin rollers, or the *Goggomobil*), but well below lower-end middle-class cars (like the *VW*, *Ford Taunus 12M*, *Opel Kadett*, and the like).

⁵⁷ The Auto Union (AU) was the successor to the traditional, but now less popular DKW when that marque became jointly owned by Volkswagen and Daimler-Benz. It was the forerunner of what we now know as the Audi (a name to which the factory changed after Daimler-Benz sold its shares to VW, ending the somewhat uncomfortable association between two car makers trying to gain access to the popular medium-sized range of cars (Mercedes looking at a market below its traditional one while VW was trying to move up from the people’s car image).

⁵⁸ After the Citroën DS 19/21 range of cars which was even then, nine years after its introduction, still considered the most hyper-modern prestige car on the market.

⁵⁹ This was a trend at the time; there was an era where one could buy a larger Mercedes without the model identification badges, so that one wouldn’t be seen to be ostentatious; unlike the British equivalent of this “reverse snobbery”, where one might drive *only* a Bentley instead of an almost identical Rolls Royce, the un-badged Mercedes was actually more expensive than the badged version.

⁶⁰ It was indeed exceptional, with front-wheel drive at a time when practically all German cars were rear-wheel powered, a 2-stroke engine when all others used 4-stroke power plants, aerodynamic body when a boxy, American style was popular, automatic clutch (*Saxomat*) at a time when only big cars had enough power to run an automatic transmission (with only one exception, the DAF), four forward gears when three were usual, bucket seats when medium-sized cars normally had a front bench, panoramic windows both front and rear, luxurious interior and instrumentation, some of which it shared with Mercedes models, and so on.

⁶¹ The minimum age for getting a driver's license was eighteen.

⁶² *Gouvernement Militaire*, the French military administration in Freiburg.

⁶³ Near the *Sacré Cœur* basilica of Montmartre.

⁶⁴ Edith Piaf, Sylvie Vartan, Charles Aznavour, Johnny Halliday.

⁶⁵ Which, contrary to some opinions, simply meant a small glass of red wine, often a strong dark drink from Algeria, not a specific type of grape.

⁶⁶ Which is why *Zwiebel*, his real family name (and the German word for *onion*), was a particularly unfortunate name for him, since Armin's head was somewhat shaped like an onion.

⁶⁷ Not a German name – she married an American soldier after the war and kept his name after their divorce, because it assisted her in getting a job as English language teacher.

⁶⁸ A 1 stood for *sehr gut*, meaning *very good*, and a 6 for *ungenügend*, meaning *inadequate*.

⁶⁹ Such as 2-, 2-3 and 3+ as steps between a 2 and a 3... these were then calculated as 2.25, 2.5 and 2.75 respectively when an average grade was worked out.

⁷⁰ Since there were no such grades in the official grading scheme, he indicated them by writing down a 6 and adding a number of underlines; so, a 6 counted as a 7, a 6 with a double underscore as an 8, and so on – a friend once got a 6 with a quadruple underline which was counted as a 10.

⁷¹ *Das Kultusministerium*, which was, at the time, in charge of all Education.

⁷² Many teachers were refugees from other parts of the former German Empire, and they frequently put heavy emphasis on the achievements of their home territories; some others, the local teachers, continued to display a lack of respect for the northern part of Germany; a Bavarian teacher in particular was fond of referring to anyone he disliked as a *Saupreuss* (Prussian pig), whether that person came from the former Prussia or not.

⁷³ The *Song of Germany*, the third stanza of which is the official National Anthem of Germany.

⁷⁴ It is the part of the *Deutschlandlied* that includes the words *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Germany, Germany above all) – this whole stanza has been banned since the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany.

⁷⁵ He frequently referred to Germany as *das Reich* (the empire); he claimed that he was referring to the traditional name of Germany as *das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation(en)* (the Holy Roman Empire of Germanic Nations), which was the medieval name for the loose confederation of thousands of small states making up the Central European region at the time (see, for instance, <http://www.uni-muenster.de/FNZ-Online/recht/reich/unterpunkte/nation.htm>, last accessed on 17 August 2014); however, that begged the question of whether people weren't more likely to associate the term with the far more recent Nazi *Dritte Reich* (Third Reich/Empire).

⁷⁶ Pulp fiction, garbage literature.

⁷⁷ *Holocaustleugnung* (Denial of the Holocaust) is actually illegal in Germany, and Dr Storm was on very questionable grounds using a school class to discuss his attitudes; even under the laws protecting the freedom of speech, he was unlikely to have gotten away with this, had any adult taken action.

⁷⁸ The *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* was frequently accused of being neo-Nazi; several attempts have been made by German authorities to ban the NPD over the years since its founding in the mid 1960s - in February 2016 another attempt to ban the party commenced.

⁷⁹ Something of a popular hero at the time, particularly famous for his wildlife conservation work as well as making the Frankfurt Zoo one of the most significant animal parks in the world.

⁸⁰ Girls were subject to less verbal abuse than boys and were never physically assaulted by him.

⁸¹ A “punishment transfer”, a disciplinary action very rarely taken against a permanent public servant.

⁸² A large glass, often seen in images of the Munich Oktoberfest and similar; originally, it was to contain exactly 1.069 litres of beer to a marked line, but in more recent times it has become a 1-litre glass.

⁸³ The Rowing Club was a very costly organisation to join, not only because of the advanced, and very expensive, equipment they used, but also because they maintained a luxurious club house where non-active members could compete in ostentatious displays of wealth, such as showing off that one had the newest or most expensive car, the most ostentatious jewellery, and so on. The Tennis Club served a similar purpose, although it seemed more directed towards creating an exclusive environment in which parents could find suitable partners for their pampered teenaged children.

⁸⁴ For the record, Brigitte was not the same person as Birgit-the-swot – similar names but recognized as distinctly different in German (e.g. like *Jean* or *Joan* in English).

⁸⁵ Actually, a perpetual reports-booklet that accompanied a student throughout his/her school time. In it, yearly reports were added, signed by the parents, and the booklets then returned to the school for safe-keeping.

⁸⁶ Referring to the origins of German-French enmity in the 9th Century when Charlemagne’s former empire was split into three parts, the Eastern of which became Germany (The Holy Roman Empire), the West of which became France, and the Centre became the domain of Lothar II, creating the name *Loth(a)ringen* (Lorraine). It was said that the Eastern and Western empires (Germany and France) have been at war over the control of the Lorraine region ever since.

⁸⁷ An area that had many cultural and traditional links with France, including a strong influence of the French language on the German spoken in those regions

⁸⁸ The visit of President de Gaulle meeting Chancellor Adenauer on 4 September 1962 (see for instance http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/vor-50-jahren-begann-die-deutsch-franzoesische-versoehnung.932.de.html?dram:article_id=219226, link last checked on 24 August 2014)

⁸⁹ The German-French Friendship Treaty of 22 January 1963.

⁹⁰ University Matriculation examinations.

⁹¹ A major subject – in contrast, failing in minor subjects had little long-term consequences, but the major subjects, like Mathematics, the Sciences, and Languages, had to be passed.

⁹² Sweeter styles of wine.

⁹³ “*The scent of the great wide world*”, the advertising slogan of Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes, later changed to *Geschmack* (the taste of the great wide world).

⁹⁴ Shakespeare.

⁹⁵ In Germany, a pound (*Pfund*) is 500 grams, thus two pounds are one kilogram.

⁹⁶ There is an absolute standard for the German language called “High German”; its spelling and pronunciation was traditionally and legally according to “The Duden”, dictionary society, a legally recognized arbiter on all matters relating to the German language (see for instance http://www.jstor.org/stable/3531328?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents – link last checked on 17 March 2016). Its status was challenged with the *Neue deutsche Rechtschreibung* (new German spelling introduced in 1996) – see for instance <http://www.tastschreiben.de/p0600010.htm> (link last checked on 17 March 2016), but reinstated, albeit non-exclusively.

⁹⁷ A childish, but common, play with the brand name HB – BH is the abbreviation for *Büstenhalter* (brassiere).

⁹⁸ Michael's brother Eduard, who was two years younger, completely spoilt by his parents, and so lazy that he barely made it through school, even though he wasn't unintelligent.

⁹⁹ They were successful in planning his future – by age 35 he was a very accomplished stock market trader worth a fortune; I don't know whether he shared his wealth with his parents to make their dream of early retirement come true.

¹⁰⁰ “Freddy” (Freddy Quinn) was Germany's top pop singer at the time who (like Elvis Presley) featured in many movies that served as vehicles to present his singing talents, often on equally inexplicable bases as modern Bollywood films.

¹⁰¹ The exact quote is: *Ich habe unseren Sohn genauso lieb wie du, und gerade darum mache ich es ihm nicht leicht* (“I love our son as much as you do, and that's exactly why I am so tough on him”). It was spoken by *Studienrat Gerber* (Peter Lühr) in the 1957 Hans Quest film *Die große Chance* (see, for example, http://www.filmportal.de/film/die-grosse-chance_2d5a27a126c741558c79aca5ec5f71ee) (accessed on 14 April 2014).

¹⁰² Although the name sounds like something that might have been popular in Nazi Germany, the *Vaterland* product name actually goes back to 1906, well before the Nazi era, and even before there was a united Germany as we know since the end of World War One.

¹⁰³ The Volkswagen *Karmann-Ghia Typ 14* was a parallel model to the standard “Beetle”, sold directly by VW (rather than the Porsche, which was sold and serviced through separate, albeit at times overlapping, dealerships). Due to its more sporty body and somewhat tuned suspension, together with always carrying the most powerful VW engine available at the time, it was something of an in-between step from VW to Porsche, the latter of which was, at the time, still largely a tuned VW rather than a sports car in its own right.

¹⁰⁴ A local delicacy, a salad made of strips of a local sausage, specific cheeses and pickled cucumbers marinated in a dressing of herbs and spices according to a traditional recipe.

¹⁰⁵ A German tradition where drinkers meet regularly at the same set time and day of the week and at a specifically reserved table to drink and, most commonly, play cards, while discussing all manner of common interests (for example, a hobby if they belonged to a particular club, the football results, politics, and so on).

¹⁰⁶ Acceptable in the best of salons, socially acceptable.

¹⁰⁷ This was a higher certification in Latin, requiring the study of Latin usually from years 7 to 13 at high school; *das kleine Latinum* (the small Latinum) was granted after studying Latin to year 11, and passing with a grade no lower than 4 (on a 1 to 6 scale).

¹⁰⁸ *Deutsche Friedens Union* (German Peace Union), a small left-wing political party ostensibly concerned with promoting peace, but said to have had links to the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands / Socialist Unity Party), the East German Communist Party.

¹⁰⁹ It might be true that he said some of these things in jest as he had a reputation of using humour to his advantage.

¹¹⁰ The famous, but controversial (because of misrepresentation) quote:

*„Als die Nazis die Kommunisten holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Kommunist.
Als sie die Sozialdemokraten einsperrten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Sozialdemokrat.
Als sie die Gewerkschafter holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Gewerkschafter.
Als sie mich holten, gab es keinen mehr, der protestieren konnte.*

This is the version of the speech Sacha knew which does not mention the Jews See <http://www.martin-niemoeller-stiftung.de/4/daszitat/a46> (last accessed 05/12/2015) in regard to some controversy as to what he actually said.

This is a frequently quoted English version:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

It is unlikely that he originally mentioned the Jews since he was arrested in 1937, before the mass campaign against the Jews commenced.

¹¹¹ The name of the German armed forces after the creation of the FRG.

¹¹² Sacha naïvely based this assumption on the many American movies and TV shows flooding the market at the time – perhaps not the best points of reference.

¹¹³ Another premise that proved questionable. Sacha initially ended up with a family who, apparently, looked on an exchange student as a sort of *au pair* who would look after their six- and four-year old children.

¹¹⁴ A very senior grade amongst teachers, rarely reached by anyone, and then usually only by someone who was exceptionally well educated and experienced to the point where he/she would have been close to retirement.

¹¹⁵ “*the Ivan*”, the Germans’ derogatory term for Russian/Soviet soldiers.

¹¹⁶ An unusual but relatively common feature of the German language is that new words can be created by combining existing words. For example, the official term for motor car is *Kraftfahrzeug*, which is a combination of *Kraft* (power/ed) and *Fahrzeug* (vehicle), whereby the latter is already a compound of *Fahr* (travel) and *Zeug* (in this case *equipment*). One can circumscribe just about anything in German through a combination of relevant expressions into a single word, which is what gives German the reputation of using enormously long words – in reality, they are simply a string of ordinary words combined into a new one.

Sacha developed through years of practice an ability to create new words in this way. Teachers couldn’t exactly forbid him to do so, even though most encouraged him to use simpler and more established expressions instead, even if that created overall longer sentences.

¹¹⁷ *Ahnenpass*, or *Arierpass*, or *Ariernachweis* was a family tree established by the Nazi regime to document who was of “pure Aryan blood” (see many sites found by searching “Ahnenpass” or the other terms). It was a racist document all Germans had to have if they wanted access to various careers, services, and so on. Since the Jewish religion is passed on through the mother, Sacha couldn’t possibly have been a Jew since his mother had official proof of a complete absence of Jewish ancestors as far back as records could be found.

¹¹⁸ Coincidentally, that was exactly what Sacha’s parents did with both of his sisters. Clearly, Sacha wasn’t the only one with problems at the *Gymnasium Karlsbach* which, while they didn’t accept it initially when he had problems, his parents finally recognized when both his sisters had similar issues (in some instances merely because they were related to Sacha).

¹¹⁹ As it turned out, Sacha needn’t have worried. He left for America in August of 1966 and, after a placement test by his school there, was put into the final year of high school (year 12, even though he had only just commenced year 11 in Germany). By Christmas of that year, he had reached all the academic requirements to join the *Honors Society* (including a B average in all his classes), demonstrating that it was his school in Germany that had persistently stifled his progress in foreign languages even though he turned out to be quite gifted in that area.

In fact, the only subjects with which he had difficulties in America were Mathematics and the Natural Sciences, because Americans used different terminology. The teachers didn’t seem to recognize Latin names for the elements, and long divisions were done in a completely different way so that in tests, where he had to show his work, the teachers couldn’t follow the European methods he used. The numbers were written differently – when he wrote the number one, teachers interpreted it as the number seven (1 vs 7), and where he wrote a seven, teachers saw it as the letter Z (7 vs 7). Even the symbols for division and multiplication were different (“/” and “x” vs “:” and “.”), and decimals were separated by a full-stop rather than a comma (“.” vs “,”). Teachers didn’t use the metric system, forcing Sacha to learn American weights and measures, translate them into the metric system to work with, and then translate them back into the American terms.

As a result, Sacha suddenly came close to top of the class in such subjects as World and American History, English Composition, and he was on the school’s “Forensics Team” that placed in state-wide competitions, and he was a major contributor to literary magazines, but his grades in the science subjects dropped well below the top marks he was used to.