

‘The disappearance of Philip S.’

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They come on the 14th August at around midday. They’re coming for H. He had lent someone his car the evening before. That same night a so called pipe bomb was thrown from this car under a police car. He had been warned that night. When his picture appears the next day on television, he gives himself up to the police. The photo appears in the *Bild* newspaper as well. The landlord gives us notice to quit again when he sees it. Again, Philip S. spends hours with him in his dark office, staring together out of the window at the rubbish bins outside gradually blurring, until they drink to friendship and he cancels the notice. Then we tidy up.

Philip S. and I are now alone. We put a few things back in their place. Then we go to see the lawyer to testify that at the time the bomb flew under the police car we were working with H. upstairs on the layout for the next edition of the paper, not suspecting for a moment that this very alibi would land us in prison. We had put together articles on Vietnam, American imperialism and the Black Panther movement, and stuck garish comic strips, with the word ‘pig’ all over them, in between.

I’m pleased that my son doesn’t have to see what happens next. He’s on holiday with his best friend and family. It’s quite a long trip with a tent- we also got him a sleeping bag, a camping mat, a small rucksack for hikes, hiking boots, a pocket knife and a torch. For a long time we talked over with him whether he should take his piece of knitted blanket on the trip-

a frayed remnant of the blanket which has kept him warm since he was a baby. He holds it between his fingers when he goes to sleep and rubs it gently over his eyelids once they're closed. He decides against it and takes my favourite T-shirt with him, still smelling of *Arpège*. He's still holding the T-shirt, even when sitting ready to go in the back seat next to his friend, but at the last minute, when the car doors are shut, he plucks up the courage to wind down the window and give it back to me. Then they set off. Philip S. and I stand on the corner and look after the small hand waving at us, until the car turns off at the next junction and heads south.

On the 20th August we leave the house in the morning. When we return at midday we meet our neighbours at the entrance and hear that at least 30 policemen have stormed into our block at the rear of the courtyard. We find that both floors of the flat have been ransacked. The video recorders are out on loan at the time and so are spared the fatty black powder which is spread over the whole studio for finger prints. We think about disappearing, hiding out with friends and lying low till things get sorted out, but we feel paralysed and stay, despite the feeling that something is tightening its hold around us.

In my memory, that night is the last one we spent together in the beautiful airy space of the factory flat, though that was not in fact the case. We lie together in the centre of the bed, closer than we ever did again, as if clinging to each other for mutual support. When we hear the bangs on the door at 5 in the morning, we quietly disentangle ourselves. I get dressed without speaking under the eyes of a female police officer: trousers, shirt and jacket, all made of black velvet. It's the height of summer and I grab my winter boots. I pack skin cream, toothbrush, perfume and underwear. I don't know which books to take and so don't put any in my bag. I'm no longer aware of what's going on around me, and so don't know whether Philip S. is packing anything at all.

The people in the house are still asleep as we're led through the courtyard. Philip S. sits on the bench opposite me in the police van which takes us three streets further to the police station in the Gothauer Straße. He's wearing a denim jacket and takes my hand in his. Handcuffs peer out from his sleeves. "You mustn't be scared," he says softly, "they're only trying to intimidate us." I remember to this day that the word 'intimidate' seemed to me too grandiose- as if we had some great thing to hide, a historical deed, and at that moment I was aware that words like that are important for him, that he needs them to hang onto. But the rest of what he says calms me, gives me confidence and makes me feel protected- like he's always been able to do. Then we're led off into the basement, him into one cell, me into another, a long way apart.

It's the stone, I think to myself in the cell, the stone which was meant for the Amerikahaus but fell into the hedge in front. Or it's the windows of the Senatsgebäude, I think. Or the words 'Power to the workers' in red spray paint over the white American limo. Or it's the dark green suede coat that I'd lent my friend C., and then wore again myself without knowing that she'd used it for her dangerous secret activities. Or it's the underground newspaper, lying on the table upstairs with the layout still not finished- yet another edition that will later be banned because it describes the American president as a criminal and a murderer and calls on the soldiers stationed in Berlin to disobey orders.

Philip S. and I are brought separately to the police station at Tempelhof Damm. My fingers are pressed one by one into a brown mass, then twisted and turned right round. A policeman guides my hand as if teaching me to write. Delicate patterns are left imprinted on a plate, patterns which could convict me. You can smell coffee in the corridors.

The judge pauses for a moment when he hears me sigh with relief at the reading of the arrest warrant. It's not the criminal damage, not the arson, not my suede coat- it's not the

incitement to violence against the Allied Command in Berlin and the insulting of the American president. It's something which Philip S. and I have nothing whatsoever to do with. It's the pipe bomb, which on the night of the 14th August, outside a police station, had been thrown from H.'s recently bought car under a police patrol car. It was pure chance that no one was hurt by the flying splinters. Philip S. and I had been arrested on charges of attempted murder of a policeman and explosives offences. They'd added two further bomb attacks, one on the same building we were in, hearing the arrest warrant being read out, and another on a private American car. The bombs, according to the police, are supposed to have been manufactured in the workshop beneath our flat.

I'm driven across town again. In the prison van I sit in a kind of cupboard with an observation slit. It's still morning. I'm in a completely separate world from the life in the streets slowly waking up. The van goes along the Kantstraße, crosses the Windscheidstraße, where my brother lives, and stops in front of a house with a late 19th century façade behind which the women's prison is concealed. Three months ago I brought a crate of books here for the library. I'd been seen by the prison governor. She'd complained that she had no money for books and thanked me. The van drives me inside the prison: three paved courtyards, surrounded by cell wings and high walls of dark red brick. The courtyards extend to a wall covered with ivy on the Pestalozzistraße, each one closed off with heavy iron doors. In the first yard I get out of the van and am handed over to someone at a counter. The property room is just along the way. Pale green walls throughout, washable. In the property room I put my belongings on the table. A wardress stirs a needle round in the pot of Helena Rubenstein skin cream. After she's failed to find a file or any object that I can use to kill myself, I'm allowed to keep it. The perfume too. She takes me to the basement. I shower and wash my hair with delousing lotion. Next to me a young girl is showering. The wardress watches her. It's a prison for young women on the streets. The governor is upset to see me here.

The cell is cold and narrow. If I stretch out my arms to the side I can touch both walls. Prison rules on the door. It's forbidden to look out of the window, set so high into the end wall that you can't reach it, with a slanting windowsill like a light shaft. It's forbidden to call through the window or to wave. It's forbidden to lie on the bed during the day or to sit on it. I haven't got a book. I could borrow my own books but they've been put on the shelves in the meantime and the library is only open on Wednesdays. Today is Friday. The day is too long, too empty and my thoughts are tormenting me. I fold swabs for the sick-bay. I fold a gauze triangle, one after another, repeatedly. I put the folded swabs in a box. It's soon full. Repeating the same hand movements keeps me calm. The repetitiveness of these tasks helps to contain the feelings that well up in me when I think of my child and of my mother who's become so small and frail, so sick.

When night comes I creep under the blue and white checked cover. I'm freezing. The next remand hearing will take place in one week. I've still got time. My son won't be back for another three weeks. I picture him with his friend in the tent and try to go to sleep.

The next morning I hear a woman's voice calling my name from the yard. I push the table over to the light shaft, put a chair on the table and make out a slim figure with fine blond hair doing circuits of the yard far below. I've no idea how she knows so soon that I'm here. She indicates to me that she'd like to get a cigarette to me somehow or other and hides the cigarette in the ivy wall. Then she puts her hand to her forehead and remembers that I've given up smoking. I can't remember why she was in prison at that time. Like my friend C. she too had been in Jordan in a camp for Palestinians and had assisted with medical treatment. When she came back she moved in circles working on setting up clandestine groups on a South American model and, constantly under suspicion, there were always activities which led to arrests. Like my friend C., she had also borrowed clothes from me for various actions. She took something with her which suited the occasion, disappeared, turned

up again, gave it back and disappeared again. The last time I saw her, she said something which Philip S. would say soon afterwards : that we must be ready to separate from our own children if we wanted to create a better world for all. She will live up to her principles, leave her son with her parents and go on her way, which leads her between longer or shorter prison terms back to the Middle East, where she'll be killed years later in an Israeli air attack on a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. The next day she doesn't appear again in the yard. Because she called out to me, she's taken to another prison. I'm sent to the remand prison at Moabit because I answered her with a gesture of my hand.

The cell is in a tower. The tower is built on to the old prison. M.'s cell opposite. Soft and regular, the beats of her typewriter keys penetrate through the wall. Then silence. I try to imagine what she does in the silence. Perhaps she's knitting. The previous week I'd got hold of some wool for her. I don't call out. Our windows aren't next to one another. Hers looks onto the street. Mine onto the yard and a church tower. I am locked in to silence. My own voice startles me. I meet her only once, when she's coming back from her recreation hour and I'm being taken to the yard. Before we're able to hug each other we're pulled apart. The cell is bigger than the one in the Kantstraße, but just as cold, even though it's summer outside. The window lets in more light. Standing on tiptoes I can see outside. Sometimes, looking down from high above, I can see M. She walks, like I do, alone, always in a circle, for half an hour. We're the only women, isolated from the men- they stay locked up in their cells when we're led through the corridors. Behind one of the countless doors is Philip S. But I never see him, not once. Now and then he sends me his love via a lawyer, but otherwise nothing. I hear that he's begun a hunger strike, that he's incited prisoners during the recreation period and has spent two days chained up in a detention cell. Here, within these walls, he leads a different life from me, a man's life. He's testing his role. Seeking out confrontation. Wants to see how far he can go. I'm in a different place. I'm looking inwards

and want to survive, whichever way it turns out for us. My thoughts go only as far as my little boy. No further. Focusing only on getting out before he returns from holiday, I drift off in day dreams and escapist fantasies for hours on end. But all the escapist fantasies end up sometime or other in the dreary life ahead, the game of hide and seek in a string of different apartments with false papers, the constant fear of being found and the lies that I'd have to tell my child.

The judge doesn't release me. It's the 26th August. The intervals are getting longer. 2 weeks to the next remand hearing. I write letters, make plans for where my child could stay if they still don't let me out then. There are too many letters and they're too long. I must be briefer and more to the point, says the prison management, who control every word. I must adjust to staying here for longer, structure the hours, remember what happens each day, take note of what I see when I crane my neck up to the window, when I catch sight of a church roof, framed in the window, wet in the rain, I must not think of Verlaine's poems, which I can't get out of my head for trying, poems he wrote in prison, full of regret and lamentation for his misspent youth. Perhaps I should learn Spanish and take up gymnastics. Follow a routine. No coasting, no killing of time. Make use of the time. Don't just wait. No despair. Sometimes the thought of betrayal comes over me. I know who borrowed the car on the night of 14th August. The key was hanging ready next to the front door. But how will I be able to carry on, if I'm a traitor and shunned by everyone?

Friends have sorted out some clothes from my wardrobe and they hand them over at the entrance gate. The wardress pulls a transparent chiffon blouse out of the bag, a long velvet skirt, a shirt, into which a secret message is embroidered, which she's not noticed, and a white fox fur. Apart from the shirt with the message I can't wear any of the clothes here. Only the fox, which I roll up nose to tail, and place on my pillow to help me get to sleep.

On the 4th of September, my lawyer reports, a piece of our front door is removed and replaced by a different one, at the spot where Philip S. had welded on the bolt. Welding seams, he says, are as legible as handwriting. The piece of welding seam which has been removed is being examined to see if it's been made by the same hand as the bombs which we've been charged with. In the workshop beneath our flat Otto and Ernst produce 12 pipe bombs under police supervision. The bombs will be exploded at a detonation site. Their explosive force is to be compared with that of the bombs under the police car.

On the 5th of September I hear on the radio that's on for a limited time during the day and then turned off, the news that Salvador Allende has been elected as the President of Chile. It's Saturday. On Sunday the radio in my cell reports live from a rock concert on the island of Fehmarn. I have no idea that at that very moment my son, already back from his trip, is sitting in a field in Fehmarn with his father and listening to the music of Jimi Hendrix. In the afternoon it's warm and sunny in the yard. I lean against a wall in the recreation hour.

On the 8th September the judge decides for the third time that I won't be let out. I'm a flight risk, he says. I have no property that could stop me disappearing and no ties as I'm separated from my husband. My child doesn't count. Nor does the bail money which my brother has raised. It's 4 weeks now till the next remand hearing. I've borrowed Kafka's *Schloss* from the prison library. In the nights I'm tormented by the thought that the judge will never let me go.

On the 13th September I'm fetched from my cell. The wardress accompanies me along the long corridor. Barred doors every few metres which she opens with a jangling noise in front of me and locks, jangling, behind me. As if between 2 mirrors, the row of identical bars stretches out to infinity. From somewhere in the far distance I hear a rumbling noise. Then I see my son on roller skates coming towards me through the bars. He's wearing a red helmet

and his long thick hair is protruding out beneath it. He skates round the wardress and his father, who has Musil's *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* for me under his arm, turns again, skates on one leg, backwards, then forwards, turns his head, sees me, rushes over to the last set of bars separating us, thunders against them and reaches his hands through. Before I can grasp them, I'm pushed sideways into the visitor's cell. Then he rolls into the tiny room and into my arms. I'm allowed to hug him once under supervision, but then I have to let him go again. So he carries on wheeling around the table where I'm sitting. He rolls past me very close, just brushing against me, and every time he goes round we touch each other's hands secretly under the table. For 15 minutes the rumbling noise can be heard in the visitor's cell- then our time is up. At the door he turns around again. Why is he wearing a helmet, asks the wardress. "You never know, " my son calls out, already being carried by his skates straight ahead towards the exit and at every barred door, which opens in front of him and closes behind him, he gives another wave. The red of his helmet gets smaller and smaller, the bars merge together and he's gone, with his father, who goes back with him to our factory flat because it's there my son wants to wait for us, for Philip S. and me, nowhere else.

Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften is still lying on the table in the visitor's cell. When I reach out for the book, the wardress picks it up to confiscate it. I can't have it because it's not new, because it's not in the original packaging. A message could be hidden in it, she says, made by pinpricks over individual letters. For the first time I lose control. For the first time I shout and bang on the cell door until the wardress comes and brings me another random book to read. But I don't want just any old book. I want the *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* for the duration of my imprisonment, which is stretching ahead of me without me seeing any end to it- for the sake of its 1600 pages.

I don't know yet that this night will be the last in the cell, my wall adjoining M.'s, listening in silence to her quiet industry. I might have stayed next to her in prison, waiting

even longer for experts to decipher the welder's handwriting on the lid of the pipe bomb and the welding seam on our front door lock, for them to report that they were not identical, were it not for a young female drug addict. One of the chicks, as they call them, one who's always at the centre of the group, the so called Hash Rebels, who roam the streets, attacking people at night. Hardly more than a girl, she becomes my guardian angel. She gives in to the pressure of the Chief State Prosecutor, who makes her promises and questions her, while she, seriously ill, is trying to get off drugs. She says everything she knows, everything she's seen, heard and taken part in herself. I'm not sure whether, being at risk and unstable as she was, she was telling the truth or only remembering the hours she'd spent at my sewing machine making the top to go with a summer skirt with my help. Her evidence sends others to prison or drives them underground, fleeing the clutches of the justice system: her evidence releases us, however, into freedom.

The wardress arrives in the late afternoon. I am to pack my things. It all happens very quickly. Outside it's sunny and warm. For an hour our friends have been sitting outside the 12a Alt-Moabit exit on a flight of steps. My son wheels up and down the pavement and asks for a Cola. I come through the door with a plastic bag containing the white fox fur, my clothes and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* from the Property Room, the bookmark in the same place I'd left it, at the beginning, describing the meteorological conditions of a fine August day in 1913 with low humidity. My son jumps up the shallow entrance steps in his roller skates. The first thing we do is go to the kiosk. Then we sit next to each other in front of the big iron door in the sun and wait. H. is the second one to come out, light footed, pushing his long hair out of his face in surprise when he sees us. Then Philip S. With a box under his arm he stands still on the top step, blinks in the sun and laughs with the confidence of victory. In spite of the hunger strike he's filled out, his hair is shorter and instead of the

wispy goatee he has a full beard that hides his soft mouth. I don't run towards him like the others who've been waiting, but stay sitting on the bottom step.

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