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Everybody seems cheerful this morning. I wonder why. Are they trying to lure me into a false sense of security? The trouble with these wretched interviews is that after a while they give me a persecution complex and I think people are conspiring against me. It's not normal to be confronted with one's life at such intensity day after day. I wonder whether these Swiss super-shrinks ever consider that. It's like a Kafkaesque court: the Board has all the authority but no one knows who's given it to them.

'You've let us know you have three siblings,' Bold Miriam begins. 'Perhaps you could tell us a bit about your sister? You've remained curiously quiet about her. What's her name again? Astrid, isn't it? A very Nordic name.'

Oh, dear! Snoopy Miriam thinks she's on to something. Here goes the cheerful morning! These shrinks really are like swine searching for truffles.

'Well, Dr Springer, if you think it might help your investigation I'm happy to talk about Astrid. You want to know about our relationship? How about my starting with her birth? I was thrilled to learn about the baby and when I learned it was a girl I was truly excited.' Ignoring the doctors exchanging meaningful looks, I continue: 'Astrid was born seven years after me in the same Diaconate Hospital. When I was told my mother and the baby were about to be collected by car I raced to the hospital. I wanted to be there when they came out of the building so I could have a first look at my little sister. But when my mother arrived she held a bundle of pink baby blankets in such a way I couldn't catch sight of the newborn. Well, I'd see her soon enough, I consoled myself. In the car I would get a chance to have a good look at her. However, before I could get into the car it started to move and drove away. I ran after it in panic,

down St Mary's Wood Road, St Mary's Lane and Castle Court back into the steep fall of Toosbüystrasse. The streets were all downhill, so I gave myself a chance to be there when the car arrived in front of our house. As soon as I reached our street I saw it had already arrived. Angry tears came to my eyes. Momentarily confused by my blurred vision I stumbled and fell on the cobblestone pavement. When I got up blood was flowing from a cut in my face. The accident made me all the more determined to join the others in their family welcome to my brand new sister.

'On my arrival I was severely reprimanded for being the only one who didn't care enough about the baby to be at home. "And look at you!" my mother scolded me. "Have you been fighting in the street? Your face is covered in dirt and blood and snot! You're disgusting!" Having had another baby hadn't mellowed my mother's attitude to me. I was angry and hurt, but knew it was best not to say anything. Finally my grandmother held the baby in her arms so I could have a good look. I was still very excited. From now on I had a sister! That would make me different, too, more interesting and more responsible. But when I was asked what I thought of the latest addition to the family, I looked around and contemptuously declared: "One more mouth to feed!" My comment caused outrage among the relatives. "You horrible lout!" my mother hissed with a hoarse voice. Peacetime Holger dutifully chased me from room to room until he ran out of breath. I left the apartment and went down to the harbour to one of my secret places where I knew no one would find me.'

'That's a rather sad story,' Dr Leutenegger comments. 'Perhaps you tried too hard?'

I'm startled by her casual suggestion. Could it be I was always trying too hard to relate to my family? The thought never occurred to me because throughout my childhood and adolescence I'd been my mother's prisoner. But on reflection I must admit Dr Leutenegger's remark doesn't seem unreasonable. It was my mother who cursed me on her return from hospital with my baby sister, but it was in response to a callous remark I'd made. How was she to know I'd said it to hide my joy? Perhaps it was also to protect my little sister from the proprietorial violence of a

cruel mother. Our family was governed by a matriarchy of language and violence with no trace of feminine sensibility. My mother used deadly words like a verbal machine gun. I remember returning with Marguerite to the Toosbüystrasse apartment after six years in Australia. On Christmas Eve my mother was still working in her chemist shop. Yet as I got up in the morning I could hear her characteristically shrill voice coming from the living room. As usual she was screeching her displeasure over something. Who was she speaking to? It was long past the start of trading hours. I decided to stay put in the hope she would soon leave. I just wasn't ready to face one of her vicious verbiages. When at last silence returned I ventured to the dining room for breakfast. There was no sight of my mother.

As soon as I poured my coffee all hell broke loose. My mother's voice returned with a vengeance. Although it came from much closer, I had difficulty understanding what it said. It took a while before I saw the birdcage on top of the piano. An excited budgerigar bombarded me with an onslaught of all too familiar words. Yet it wasn't the words but their rapidity and inimical tone that transformed me into a stupefied trance. I was back in my childhood days. Instinctively I covered my head, waiting for the blows. When Marguerite came to join me she wondered why I was shivering and crying. To this day I irritate and frighten Ulrike with my defensive reflexes over wrongly perceived sudden movements.

I suddenly realise I'm no longer responding to Dr Leutenegger's comment. In an endeavour to relate my remarks back to her suggestion I conclude: 'It's scary how you can't get away from things that happened sixty years ago.' As an afterthought I add: 'Perhaps things would have been more civilised if I'd had a sister to protect me.'

'So you really did like your sister, didn't you?' The international celebrity Professor Schwarzenbeck speaks to me as if we were in a kindergarten or a sheltered workshop. I find it easiest to ignore the profound responses my story has prompted.

'That, if you like, was my first contact with my sister whom I dearly loved. Now I'll tell you something about the very last time I saw her, almost a quarter of a century ago. It's a story of life and death. Perhaps the

span of time will assist you experts in neurology to evaluate the nature of my relationship with my sister. I have no way of describing it myself.

‘During one of our European winters my wife Ulrike and I joined Astrid and her family in a small Holstein village to celebrate New Year’s Eve in 1987. In an attempt to re-stage the spectacular fireworks of our Flensburg childhood we spent a nostalgic evening with our hosts and their two young daughters. In what turned out to be a fateful agreement we knew Marguerite would spend a couple of days with us. She still needed to belong. Unusual as it may seem, a strange three-cornered friendship had evolved between us. I was still plagued by what in my mind had amounted to a desertion, although it was clear to both Marguerite and me that our time together had hardly been a marriage. It was my guilty conscience as much as anything that led me to include her in our family festivity.

‘I arrived for the winter semester at the Free University Berlin, in October. While there I decided to bring about a meeting with my mother, now old and not well. Perhaps we could clear the air; I even had secret hopes for reconciliation. But how can you reconcile with someone if you have to pretend you don’t know the reasons for such a passionate lifelong antipathy between mother and son? For me it was enough that my mother would not live much longer. My desire for a belated peace between us was not free from selfishness. I needed to hear from her what had caused her to hate me so much. On a superficial level we had “made up” a long time ago. I had visited her many times whenever I was in Europe, brought presents and invited her to my apartment in Zürich. My mother had attended Ulrike’s and my wedding in Bavaria in July 1986. But underneath the civil behaviour resentment continued to smoulder. Now, to my delight the attempt to make some kind of peace with my mother was met with a positive response. When I rang her from Berlin she agreed to meet me in November at a lakeside hotel in Malente, the small spa-town she and my father had made their retirement home. All I asked was that we should see each other alone. She agreed. For the first time in my life I couldn’t wait to see my mother.

‘To my great disappointment by the time I phoned her to say I was

on my way she had changed her mind. I had reason to believe she would have been assisted in that decision by Peacetime Holger. The following month Ulrike joined me in Berlin. We spent a wonderful December in the still divided city. When we arrived on New Year's Eve at my sister's home Marguerite and a couple of Astrid's friends were already there. The mood was relaxed and friendly, the house filled with the smell of delicious food and the chatter of children.

'As midnight approached all hell broke loose. Suddenly the atmosphere descended into tension and resentment. Perhaps it was the alcohol; perhaps our hosts found the emotional and social challenge of Marguerite's and Ulrike's presence too much to handle. Günther, Astrid's husband, and I were outside, busy preparing the fireworks. Close to midnight my sister started to cry. We all suspected she'd had too much to drink. Marguerite turned stubborn and aggressive. My sister's friends behaved in a peculiar manner. At midnight we let off our fireworks. We had a wide range, including maroons, rockets, a fabulous catherine-wheel and fire-crackers. But somehow the earlier high spirits had gone. The attempt to repeat the performance of our spectacular New Year's Eves in Flensburg failed. When Ulrike went inside the house to refill her glass of wine my sister was on the phone to my mother. Drunk and weepy, Astrid wished her a happy New Year, adding that "Manfred and Marguerite" had come to join them for the celebration.

'The sounds and lights had disappeared into the night. The festive mood too had vanished. Suddenly there was only darkness. We continued dancing, talking, eating and drinking, but nothing could hide the changed atmosphere. Jokes turned aggressive; opinions of any kind were dismissed or belittled. When I said something friendly to Marguerite she barked: "Piss off!" It became difficult to say anything. After a while the party fell silent.

'Ulrike and I were lying in bed wondering what had happened. The answer came the following morning. Marguerite, Ulrike and I went on a foggy, cold and numb walk across the icy fields, trying to clean our minds from the disturbing party the previous night. We could hardly see where we were going. Every now and then we startled a lonely hooded

crow. No other living being seemed awake.

At last Marguerite began to talk. "Yesterday your sister told me something I was not supposed to pass on to you under any circumstances." Although we grew tense, we made no attempt to interrupt her. For a very long time she continued to walk in silence. The fields were partly covered in ice, and the hedges had a skeletal appearance. A milky sky remained soiled with darkness. As we walked on I saw us as three tiny hooded black dots crossing fallow winter soil and was struck by dark foreboding. In the eerie silence I heard gloomy songs from Schubert's *Winter's Journey*.

"Peacetime Holger's son, Sven, has murdered someone. He's in gaol. Your brother does not want you to know about it." Amazingly, even after Marguerite's revelation Ulrike and I just kept on walking. It seemed that morning there was nothing to do but keep going. Like life. The shock numbed us and made us tremble. We were hot and cold. We had become part of the landscape, part ice part stony ground, separated by a hedge of skeletons, part death part life. "That's why your mother wasn't allowed to see you." There was no need to tell us that. When we reached the end of the field we turned around and walked back to the village and the house my sister had made her home.

Two months before the fatal New Year's Eve celebrations at my sister's I had given a lecture at the University of Tübingen. After I left the theatre I was accosted by a tense and confused young woman determined to prevent me from leaving the building. I was about to lose my patience when suddenly she told me she was my sister.

I had experienced disappointment in trying to reinvoke beautiful events of the past, like our Flensburg fireworks. But in fairness I should mention in November that year Ulrike and I, having spent Christmas with her family in Munich, travelled to Flensburg. On 28 December 1987 we attended a splendid performance of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in the Municipal Theatre where I had sung the part of one of the Three Boys thirty-four years earlier. It was an extraordinarily emotion-charged confrontation. What a reward it was to be accompanied by my wife! I never forgot the empty reserved seats for my parents the first night I was

on stage in 1953. The fact that the opera's credible performance on a provincial stage proved so successful in every way soon turned my consolation into triumph. It was, as they say, a night to remember.

'We spent three days in the old hometown where Christmas lights were glowing in the streets like fairytale illuminations. As the half-sister I had met barely a month ago at the University of Tübingen also came from Flensburg, we invited Claudia and her mother for dinner in an attempt to get to know them. One thing about a town in which one has spent most of one's childhood and youth is that so many places are heavily loaded with associations. The first night we took the two ladies to an underground restaurant called The Gnome Cellar. While listening to my half-sister and her mother I kept thinking of my grandfather Marius who had been a regular here, despite his unnerving habit of carrying a hand grenade in his coat pocket. It seemed to me an appropriate symbol of family relations. We had to tread carefully in our conversation to prevent an explosion. The version we were given of my father's 'relationship' with Claudia's mother bore no resemblance to what had actually happened. According to them it was a great love story, whereas in my father's version it was an unfortunate event ironically brought about by his attempt to protect the woman's honour. Frankly, I found both renditions less than credible. It is amazing what convoluted stories people invent, allowing them to adopt a life of fiction. It seems more than anything humans need identification, real or imagined. (I wondered how much of that applied to myself, shrinks or no shrinks.)

'It was after that delicate meeting we took the train to my sister where we planned a re-enactment of my father's old fireworks show. Little did we know what family nightmare awaited us. We had interesting, colourful and strange people amongst our kin, but as far as I can tell never a murderer. It was one of Peacetime Holger's sons who brought that distinction to the family.'



'Is that enough for the time being?' I ask Dr Springer and members of her Board. 'I have another sister story, if you like.' They've been listening

quite intently to my account, but now they're clearly disappointed, or worse. Even Dr Fuessli snaps at me impatiently: 'Please don't start another one of your tales. Do you have an urge to invent a counterperson for every individual you talk about? How many sisters do you have? Or perhaps I should ask: how many stories do you want to tell us?'

Remaining calm, my answer further irritates him. 'I'm merely answering the questions of the Board. I've previously stated to the committee that I have two sisters.'

'And two fathers, two mothers – or do I get the numbers confused? Next you'll tell us you also have two or more lives.' Dr Fuessli's sarcasm is completely out of character. Something I said must have really upset him.

Dr Springer takes over. 'Let me get this straight, Prof: did you say a member of your family is a murderer? Please don't make anything up just to fool us! Murder is a very serious charge. We will of course check the details of your narration and find out whether any of your descriptions are factually untrue. So I'm giving you a chance to take back anything you now disbelieve. If we find you have been dishonest with the Board I'm afraid your chances of an early release will diminish rapidly.'

Talking about family is always precarious, I know. But I don't like to be called a liar, or even just be suspected of not telling the truth. Most of all I don't like being judged by anyone who thinks she knows in advance what really happened. I wonder what it is that makes people decide whether something is likely to be truthful. I've often found the least likely truth is the veritable fact. Perhaps it's lack of imagination or empathy that determines credibility. People are frightened by anything unusual or surprising.

'I suggest you check the *Lübecker Nachrichten* or the *Ostholsteinische Zeitung*. They should carry reports of the trial. Sven Jürgensen is the name of the young offender. He was sent to gaol, of course. As a juvenile his lenient sentence was relatively short. He probably finished his education or learned a trade behind bars.'

Marguerite and I had met Sven, Peacetime Holger's eldest son only once, during a brief visit to my brother's crowded unit in Eutin. After

we left, Marguerite expressed her doubts about the young teenager with characteristic Bernese bluntness: 'I think your brother has managed to turn Sven into a domestic monkey. If he's ever going to make it in life, he'd better leave his father at the earliest opportunity.' At the time I thought her judgment harsh and unfair, but I always made allowances for Marguerite's peculiar Swiss directness. She didn't mean any harm.

'Can you inform the Board how the murder took place?' It is Dr Enright who puts the question to me.

In reply I just smile at him and say: 'I'm not an informer. Your research will surely supply you with the details you're looking for.'

But now the others are interested too. 'Did he murder a member of the family by any chance?'

I decline to respond.

Dr Leutenegger intervenes. 'So you've told us something about one of your sisters, the same one you tried to see shortly after she was born. You said you'd pick an episode from the earliest time and one from the last time you saw her. Do you have a story somewhere in the middle, I mean when you two were on good terms? You liked your sister, didn't you?'

'Absolutely. That's the sad part about it. Apart from the New Year's Eve story I told you I have no idea why she broke off our contact. I guess Peacetime Holger may have had something to do with it. But I don't know.'

They want me to tell a story from the middle, a mixture of good and bad? Let me see. 'I went to visit her in 1967 at the Wörthersee in Austria where she spent the summer holidays with her mother. A notoriously bad and lazy student, Astrid found employment at the *Imperial Eagle* when my mother was running the store. They soon formed a close working relationship. More than that; you could say my mother consciously or unconsciously managed to turn the new shop assistant into her own creature. On the rare occasions when I saw them it was noticeable how Astrid imitated many gestures and expressions of her mother and employer. During my time as a PhD student in Zürich I'd invited both my sister and my mother to come and stay at our apartment for a week or a few days. I took the train to Velden and joined them at their regular

guesthouse not far from the lake. For Astrid and my mother the highlight of the day was the five o'clock dance at the Palace Hotel Velden. I spent most of the days on or around the lake, travelling to Klagenfurt, the birthplace of the poet Ingeborg Bachmann, and at small villages where I had lunch and met the locals.

For the weekend a major tourist event was scheduled in Velden. As part of the usual five o'clock dance the hotel was hosting a beauty contest, the 'Miss Wörthersee Rose'. The title was taken from a well-known German operetta. Mother and daughter were excited. Most of the day was taken up with preparations for the great event. Returning from one of my boat trips around midday, I'd planned to have lunch at the second-last stop before Velden, a picturesque place called Pörtschach. It boasted a beautiful lakeside restaurant. I had seen it from the ship many times and decided to visit it before going back to Zürich. It was a glorious summer day. The food was as good as the restaurant's location. I was sitting on my own at a small table right next to the water when I saw my father and a woman enter the garden. They took a seat on the opposite side but within clear sight of me. I don't know why I didn't just get up and greet them. It was clear they hadn't seen or recognised me. Instead, I drank my espresso and pretended to read a paper. The idea that my father and one of his ladies were spending their holidays barely ten minutes away from where his wife and Astrid had come for the summer took my breath away. Was that deliberate or careless? I watched them as they ordered lunch and a bottle of wine. Both of them were laughing and smoking.

I felt like a spy, or more precisely, like my sister; I was told she had shadowed her father back in Flensburg when it looked for a while as if her parents would get divorced. Now Astrid was getting ready for the beauty contest and one more summer dance a couple of kilometres away. You could see the Palace Hotel Velden from here, and towards the right halfway up a hill I could make out the house where my mother was staying. After a while I rose, paid and walked past my father's table. When he recognised me I said to him in English: 'Always nice to see you, sir,' and moved on. As far as I know he didn't reply, nor did he look after me. I wonder what he said to the woman about me. Was I an old friend from

somewhere, a younger colleague or someone who'd made a mistake?

'When I returned to the guesthouse Astrid and our mother were already gone. After a shower I too got dressed and slowly made my way down to the Palace. It was much more crowded than usual. Men in overalls were busy preparing sound transmission for a radio broadcast. Hordes of young girls gathered outside the hotel. The air was filled with an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement. I paid my entry. Inside I saw Astrid in a flashy cocktail dress sharing a table with our mother and a couple of strangers. I looked around for a seat elsewhere. A beautiful young Italian lady approached me. She seemed anxious and for some reason appeared to ask for me. "Jürgens," she kept saying with a heavy accent, "Jürgens?" I just nodded and said: "Si!" In response she dragged me through the crowd to a table marked Reserved. We spoke in different languages, neither of us knowing who the other was. But the Italian woman at least seemed to think she knew who she wanted me to be. For a while we sat and waited. Then, suddenly, there was upheaval just outside the garden setting. A good-looking man jumped out of a bright red sports car, and scores of girls and women closed in on him, screaming with delight and asking for autographs. Shortly afterwards he and an entourage of young men and women arrived at our table. As soon as the Italian girl recognised the celebrity she turned away from me, rose and stormed into the arms of one of the men accompanying the star. Only when the agent of Udo Jürgens, the famous Austrian-German pop star, came over and explained the situation to me did I understand what had happened. I apologised for having taken the seat of Udo Jürgens and got ready to leave the table. But when Herr Jürgens heard about the misunderstanding he was amused and came up to me and invited me to stay. The Italian girl was a pop singer hoping for Udo Jürgens' mentorship. She was scheduled to perform at the beauty contest.

'When my mother saw me with her favourite singer she looked stunned. I pretended I hadn't seen her. But at the end of the night there was more than a consolation prize. Astrid was crowned "Rose of the Wörthersee" and for that night she was the Queen of the lake. One of the judges, an attractive guy no more than thirty, whose name was Günther

(the same as her future husband), was flirting with her shamelessly. Astrid later told me that he or his family owned a number of prestigious hotels. Needless to say, our mother saw in this immaculately dressed Günther a promising catch. But Astrid didn't want to join him in his suite at the Castle Hotel Velden. All she got out of his attention was a large bouquet of dark roses. I've been told how back home Astrid was nagged for a long time over having missed this 'once-in-a-lifetime' chance. Apparently my sister had already fallen in love with a local Günther in Flensburg, a likeable young man of rather more limited resources and aspirations who had joined the army. They married, had two daughters and opened a driving school.

'I don't believe my father attended the beauty contest in Velden, but it wouldn't have surprised me. The woman he had lunch with didn't strike me as particularly beautiful. I wonder whether she's the mother of the student who accosted me in Tübingen twenty years later. Family relations can become somewhat complicated.'

Right now that's all I want to say about sisters, legitimate or illegitimate. For a while it looks like members of the Board don't want to ask anything, either. I'm about to rise from my inquisition chair when Bold Miriam clears her throat. In her hands the long pencil she's playing with looks like the kind of stick teachers used on children when I was young. My God, am I really retarded? Am I the delight of shrinks, a victim of my childhood? I wish she'd stop manipulating the stick. It makes me nervous.

'How did you feel about your father's betrayal and adultery? Did it affect your loyalty towards him?'

I'm tired and don't want to talk any more. Haven't I said enough for one session? 'I can't answer that, Dr Springer. Not the way I know you would want me to. I didn't judge him then, and I don't judge him now. You're on the wrong path if you think my present mental condition has anything to do with him. He was a sad man, caught in a situation he could not handle.'

'That reminds me. Did you attend either of your parents' funerals?'

'No.'