Ingo Schulze

The Righteous Murderers

320 pages

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What turns an upstanding bibliophile into a reactionary . . . or a revolutionary? A disturbing tale about all of us.

Norbert Paulini is a highly respected antiquarian books dealer in Dresden whose shop attracts booklovers searching for treasures and like minded people. As times change and customers grow rare, he continues to defend his position. But Paulini is suddenly transformed into an irascible dogmatist and accused of taking part in xenophobic riots.

This brilliant piece of sleight of hand turns the story on its head. Is Paulini a reactionary or a revolutionary, a tragic figure or a murderer? Ingo Schulze pulls the rug out from under us in virtuoso fashion. How can a reader and booklover become a right-wing criminal? This is storytelling at its most ingenious and disconcerting.

Ingo Schulze is one of the most renowned authors of his generation. His debut *33 Moments of Happiness* (1995) was enthusiastically received; individual stories were published in the New Yorker. *Simple Stories* (1998) was a spectacular success and became curricular reading. *Peter Holtz - His Own Account of A Happy Life* – has been hugely successful, featured on school syllabuses and has been made into films. He has won numerous German and international awards including the

Joseph Breitbach Prize, the Leipzig Book Fair Prize, the Peter Weiss Prize, the Premio Grinzane Cavour and the Bertolt Brecht Prize. His works have been translated into more than 30 languages.

Praise for *The Righteous Murderers*

The Righteous Murderers asks the right questions about our time […] extremely exciting — Denis Scheck

Ingo Schulze […] has presented what is perhaps the most important German-language book of the year. — Linn Penelope Micklitz

In a brilliant way, Ingo Schulze tells us about our country these days and pulls the ground of certainties from under our feet. — Buch-Magazine

In this fabulous novel, Ingo Schulze undertakes nothing less than a search for clues of his own possible guilt. -- Volker Weidermann — Der SPIEGEL

Long Summary

The first and longest of the three sections of The Righteous Murderers treats the life story of an antiquarian bookseller in Dresden, in the GDR and after reunification. The style is old-fashioned, with a nostalgic, almost fairy-tale tone. There is a first-person narrator, but the "I" is used so rarely and obliquely that it reads mostly as a third-person account. As in a fairy tale, strong expectations are established, and the reader is lulled into a false understanding of the character and progress of the story: a seemingly ageless eccentric booklover of the utmost integrity, Norbert Paulini is an incorruptible aesthete who knows his customers' wishes before they do, insists on quality, and arranges everything in his life in the service of his vocation. Business becomes more difficult with the advent of reunification, Paulini's wife is revealed to have been a Stasi informant, Paulini is forced to work at a discount grocery: once again, it seems a familiar tale, if consistently told with an allusive subtlety that begins, as the section goes on, to make the reader pay closer and closer attention, on the alert for meaning in the seemingly banal, on the hunt for clues. The section ends with Paulini, now exiled to the provinces and attempting to adapt to the age of internet commerce, accused of lying to cover up a xenophobic attack perpetrated by his son. The section breaks off in the middle of the policeman's allegation, indeed in the middle of his sentence.

The second section is written in the first person in a simpler, more contemporary style that still has a distinct literary tone. Here it slowly becomes clear that the first section is the attempt of the narrator, a writer named Schultze, who shares certain biographical details and (almost) a name with Ingo Schulze, to write the life of Norbert Paulini as he knew him. In his younger days, Schultze belonged to the so-called "Paulini circle" of intellectuals and artists attached to the bookstore and

is now in a romantic relationship with Lisa, one of Paulini's former shop assistants and closest associates. Schultze has become increasingly obsessed with the figure of Paulini and jealous of the possibility that he and Lisa were romantically involved—which Lisa strenuously denies. Schultze plans the book as a kind of exorcism and proof of love to Lisa, but during the writing Lisa becomes increasingly distant and the relationship ultimately breaks down. The section ends with a vitriolic confrontation between Schulze and Paulini, in which the latter mocks the writer, threatens him against publishing his book, and makes clear that he and Lisa not only were, but are, deeply involved. Purist values gleaned from high literature are suggested to have reached their ugly conclusion in Paulini's arrogance, cruelty, and—it turns out—rabid xenophobia.

The third section, told in the first person by Schultze's editor, begins with the revelation of the deaths of Norbert Paulini and Elisabeth Samten (Lisa), who have fallen from a mountain peak near Paulini's home in an apparent accident. The editor tries, but cannot suppress her suspicion that Schultze was to blame. Schultze addresses the issue head-on and denies involvement before she can even bring it up, and suggests Paulini was the author of Lisa's death and his own. The narrator is morbidly fascinated by the story, and visits both the site of the death and Paulini's shop, in an attempt to get closer to the truth. She has a chilling encounter in which she is wordlessly threatened on a lonely road by a motorcyclist dressed in a Wehrmacht helmet and death's head T-shirt—possibly Paulini's son. She speaks with Juso Livniak, the Bosnian assistant to whom Paulini has left the business and asks about his and his wife's experiences of xenophobia, and his opinion of Paulini's fate. Livniak defends Paulini and accuses Schultze of murdering the pair.

In The Righteous Murderers, less is certain with every turn of the page. Readers who are charmed by the style and substance of the first section quickly find that the mirror has been turned upon them. The same game of sympathies won and lost repeats in the second and third sections, keeping the reader on constantly shifting ground and demanding her precise attention. It is Schulze's great achievement to have crafted a text in which questions ultimately loom larger than the narrative, however gripping it may be. Is this a cautionary tale of the dangers of pure aestheticism? A sympathetic parable of the consequences of capitalist arrogance in the wake of German reunification? A tale of obsession and misjudgment? A metafictional mystery? One constantly has the feeling that one is being led away from rather than towards the heart of the matter. Schulze is a master of subtle language and storytelling; above all he is courageous for trusting his readers to follow his subtleties, and guiding them towards a satisfying literary experience amid deeply unsettling and unresolvable themes. It is a testament to Schulze's integrity and authorial vision that he dares to engage the most pressing moral and political questions of Germany today without offering answers or solutions.

Extended Sample Translation

by Anne Posten

Chapter I

In the Blasewitz district of Dresden there once lived a bookseller who enjoyed an unparalleled reputation on account of his books, his knowledge, and his reluctance to bow to the expectations of his time. It was not only locals who sought him out; not only in Leipzig, Berlin, and Jena was his address jealously guarded, indeed, voracious readers traveled even from the Baltic islands of Rügen and Usedom to visit his shop. They subjected themselves to hours-long journeys by train or automobile, slept on friends' air mattresses or took cheap lodgings, only to begin their voyages of discovery at ten on the dot the next morning, voyages which lasted, broken only by a two-hour rest at midday, until six in the evening or sometimes long into the night. With ladders they scaled the heights of the uppermost bookshelves and read whole chapters perched on the rungs before climbing down and kneeling, as if sounding out the linoleum, to inspect the spines on the bottom shelf. For it was above all in the nether regions that the searchers expected to find the works which might become the very center of their worlds.

Other antiquarian bookshops might offer a wider selection, with more rarities in roomier quarters. But those who came to Brucknerstraße in Dresden-Blasewitz, pushed open the iron gate, passed hedges and garbage cans to reach the front door, pushed the wobbly white button next to the placard modestly announcing "Antiquarian Books," waited patiently until the door clicked open, climbed the standstone steps to the second floor, and finally grasped the bright aluminum doorbell labelled "please turn," aspired to more—namely admission to the realm of the famous antiquarian Norbert Paulini.

Norbert Paulini resembled a sexton or a museum porter when, protecting the crack of the door with his body, he would eye the visitor over the rim of his spectacles and, with his "Can I help you?" embarrass or even degrade him to the rank of an

unauthorized party ignorant of the password. Did the lord of the books not recognize him? Had he forgotten their shared conversations?

Anyone who managed an answer was allowed to enter, those who harbored the wish to simply "have a bit of a look," just as much as those wondering whether a translation of Thucydides might have come in recently.

"Greetings," Norbert Paulini would then answer, calling his guest by name or at least offering a hesitant "Mrs…" or "Mr…" at which the visitor would immediately prompt him. Nodding, the bookseller would repeat the name like a term that had, for a moment, inexplicably escaped him.

Depending on weather and season he would indicate the coat rack or umbrella stand and stride hastily away, only to return momentarily with several books bound by a rubber band and topped with a slip of paper bearing the name of his interlocutor.

"There might be something here of interest to you," he'd say, transferring the rubber band to his left wrist and secreting the paper in the pocket of his blue-gray smock. Swiftly he would explain his motives in adding this or that work to the desired title. In the process his palms and fingers would caress the books, nestling them or gently stroking their wounds, be they tears in the dust jacket, separated spines, or dented corners. He would lay down one book after another, the fingertips of his right hand tirelessly working to keep the books at an equal distance from the edge of the table. "Perhaps one of these will interest you," he would repeat, excusing himself. Left alone with the books, people rarely turned down his suggestions. An empty wallet was never an acceptable excuse. Any patron was allowed to take his books home immediately, after the arm of the ancient cash register had been pulled and the outstanding sum noted on a slip of paper. But as soon as he had written it, Paulini not infrequently crumpled the note before his guest's very eyes and silently placed the desired book on the stack of those paid for. He was deaf to the protests of those who could not countenance such generosity. Norbert Paulini knew what was good for one. What difference did a few coins more or less make?

Whether the books lived in Norbert Paulini's three best rooms or whether he had taken up residence with the books could not be determined. The books and the bookseller lived together by day and by night, and since a copse of maples stood before

the street-side windows and the house was shaded by a great chestnut that stood in the courtyard, seasons and times of day dissolved into a semi-darkness that always justified the use of a reading lamp.

But Norbert Paulini could also grow stern, even merciless, if a visitor should incorrectly replace a book that she'd leafed through, or leave it lying atop the others. He insisted at all costs on the observance of his order. Order alone protected the books from unfindability, which is to say, from disappearance. Order was also the prerequisite for Paulini's sixth sense. He possessed the gift of detecting the slightest change in the order of the spines out of the corner of his eye. Should the pattern of the spines be disturbed, he would instantly find the site in question, and could have named the author and title before the book even landed on the counter. Sometimes he was already prepared with further recommendations. Twice he had commanded a would-be thief to return his spoils, citing the full bibliographic details of the purloined book. Some believed he had supernatural powers or scanned the rooms furtively for hidden mirrors.

It was tempting to take Norbert Paulini for an old man. But those who looked beyond his antediluvian spectacles and the involuntary tonsure that flashed from the back of his head, enclosed by curly dark hair; those who did not attribute the broadness of his shoulders and the strength of his arms to the cardigan under his blue-gray smock; those who took umbrage neither at the pleats in his pant legs nor at the heavy orthopedic footwear in which he crisscrossed the rooms; and those who were not led astray by his manner of speaking, which owed much to the written word and bore hints of the Saxon dialect, but rather looked Norbert Paulini directly in the eye as I did back then, would catch sight, beneath the costume, of a young man, of whom no one could imagine that he had ever been any different or that he would ever change in the future.

Chapter II

Even in his infancy, Norbert Paulini lay among books. His mother, Dorothea Schuller, who was raised in Kronstadt in Transylvania and had fled the chaos of war with her family to land alone in Bad Berka near Weimar, subsisting in an unheated room in hopes of the resurrection of the Bauhaus, met her future husband Klaus Paulini in 1949 in the Park an der

Ilm. The determination of his approach, his good manners, his pleasantly firm handshake and his name induced her to move to Dresden on his behalf and marry him. Klaus had completed an apprenticeship as a lathe operator and worked in an enterprise in Dresden-Rieck. In March 1951, Dorothea Paulini was granted permission to open a bookshop with an antiquarian section. She rejected the offer of her father-in-law, a locksmith who had retrained as an engine driver, to give her a hand financially, thereby alienating him. Old Paulini, a man very much subject to his own humors, left Dresden not long after without informing his family of his destination.

Dorothea Paulini's bookshop on Hüblerstraße, just a stone's throw from Schillerplatz and the bridge known as the Blue Wonder, flourished from the first day on. Her husband had bought her a two-wheeled bicycle trailer with which she could carry out her acquisitions. For Dorothea Paulini there was no distance too far when she was offered the right books. Now and again Klaus Paulini, who was, to his wife's great sorrow, not himself a reader, would make purchasing tours himself on Sundays or evenings, and he would even pitch in something from his wages when money was short.

Dorothea and Klaus Paulini were optimistic. There were to be no more wars. Their contribution was to invest in books. Every pfennig they could spare was dedicated to acquisitions. Nothing altered this policy, even when Dorothea fell pregnant.

In June 1953, Dorothea Paulini gave birth to a boy—and died a few days later of undiagnosed septicemia. Agnes Paulini, née Abel, took in her grandchild, as she had promised her daughter-in-law in such a case she would. No one knows why Klaus Paulini elected not to seek a successor for the bookstore but rather declared himself willing to pay off his wife's credit, holding on to the vast majority of the books, most of them still in boxes and crates.

Was it that he couldn't bear to see a stranger behind Dorothea's cash register? Or was he unable to part with the dream of serving as assistant in a clean and quiet profession instead of consigning himself to a clamorous machine that seeped into his body day after day, from the soles of his feet to the roots of his hair, blowing the stale breath of lubricant-saturated air in his face? Or did he in fact, as some later claimed, wish to keep his beloved wife's books in safekeeping for his child? Assisted by workmates, Klaus Paulini bundled the many books and few bookshelves off to Brucknerstraße, where Agnes

Paulini lived in two rooms on the second floor of a building styled by the landlady as an "urban villa." The books, for which there was sufficient space neither in the cellar nor in the two rooms, were stacked in quadratic blocks in the ample hallway. A carpenter had already been commissioned to prepare wooden slabs: the stacks of books were to be made into tables. But these "altars" had to be swiftly dismantled in view of the structural circumstances of the building, to the great relief of the family of Silesian refugees who inhabited the other three rooms on the floor. Klaus Paulini sold the bedframes, much to his mother's dismay. From then on, the mattresses rested on books. Even the newborn's bassinet was mounted on a base of the same material. What could not be absorbed by the bookshelves grew up in dense stacks along the walls. It looked as if the inhabitants of the rooms had been seized by a bout of panic buying, only instead of canned goods or sacks of sugar and flour, it was books that they hoarded. The cash register sat enthroned upon the sewing table like a self-important dignitary.

Chapter III

Klaus Paulini had agreed to take on shift work, which wore him down. He found little rest at home. This he blamed on his son who, as he claimed, was capable only of being loud. Agnes Paulini nonetheless declined to put her grandson in a nursery, as her son urged. Instead, she went on long outings with the pram and later, once Norbert could walk, took him on strolls through Blasewitz and Loschwitz or along the Elbe. Sometimes the tours extended to the city center, where herds of sheep grazed on the meadows between the Old Market Square and the main train station. Norbert Paulini loved when his grandmother parted the animals' sticky, dirty fleece like tufts of grass so that he could see and feel how clean, light, and soft it was underneath. She taught him to pray before going to sleep and wanted to have him baptized, but his father forbade it. To do such a thing in secret would have taken more courage than she had.

One day when Agnes Paulini accidentally knocked against the foundation of the bed while tucking in the sheets, a number of books fell at her feet. She tried to fit them back, but one was left over, as if through some miracle the building blocks had multiplied. She opened it, more out of embarrassment than intention, and no sooner was it open than

she found she had begun to read. Agnes Paulini would not have been able to pronounce the names, yet she quickly understood that the book concerned the love between a former tutor, now to become a priest, and the mother of one his charges—a story out of the mists of time. When her son returned home, he found his mother reading aloud. Of course the boy didn't understand, she said in response to his query, but her voice had a calming effect on little Norbert. When Agnes Paulini finished the book three days later—she had skipped a few pages every now and then, when things didn't seem to be getting anywhere—she realized that she had started with the second volume. She pulled the mattress away and left no book unturned until she was holding the first volume in her hands.

From that day on she read slowly and loudly, which soon led her grandson to accompany her prosody with a humming of his own, or to pick up and repeat particular words, continuing sometimes until Agnes Paulini fell silent or the meaning of syllables melted into sounds. Now on walks Norbert Paulini would often point to a house, a street sign, a bush, and say: drumbeat, deciduous, pitchfork. Agnes Paulini would correct him but had to accept that her efforts came too late. The next day he once again pointed to yield sign and repeated "deciduous." It even sometimes happened that Agnes Paulini would gesture to something and whisper "pocketbook," Norbert's name for the hat worn by the landlady, Mrs. Helen Kate. This term was not exclusive to Mrs. Kate, but neither could it be applied to all ladies' hats in general.

The only outings that Klaus Paulini undertook alone with his son led to his wife's grave. There, father and son walked hand in hand, but in silence. After they had pulled the weeds from around the grave and watered the flowers and then stood a while, unmoving, Klaus Paulini would begin to speak. How hard he found life without her, how the night shifts tormented him, but they needed the money, how every time when she read his cards, Mrs. Kate claimed to see a woman at his side, one who was already quite close by. But regardless of what he said about Norbert, whether he praised him for having quietly watched a team of painters for hours as they renovated the stairwell of the "Villa Kate," or for not crying when he got his hair cut, or whether he criticized him, because he got up early and didn't possess the skill of speaking quietly, Norbert Paulini always burst into tears as soon as his name was spoken, and the Paulinis always returned home in a foul humor.

A few months before Norbert began school, Agnes Paulini was sent to the hospital. Her grandson lived for the days when they would visit her, in the meantime subsisting under the perfunctory care of Mrs. Kate and his father. When the latter refused to take him along to the hospital, Norbert ran into him at top speed, taking Klaus Paulini by such surprise that he stumbled and fell down.

Since Norbert Paulini was not accustomed to sleeping alone, his father, when not working, lay beside Norbert on his grandmother's mattress. In one of these nights Norbert was awoken by a noise and thought his grandmother had returned. But the breathing was different. It wasn't the light snoring that resembled a hum, almost a purr, interrupted every now and then by little clicks. Norbert was at the light switch in the blink of an eye.

Klaus Paulini woke with a start. "Overslept?" he asked, blinking. He looked at the alarm clock and then at his son. Without his grandmother, Norbert Paulini seemed alien even to his father.

Night after night now, Nobert was torn out of sleep without knowing what it was that resounded between his ears and the walls, and clattered and buzzed in the vase and amid glasses in the cabinet. Only the books were silent. He took one and opened it, but without his grandmother it remained mute. He threw it away in rage. It landed on one of the stacks of books and remained there, as if it wanted to continue sleeping in precisely that position in precisely that place.

Some nights Nobert thought he heard voices, though his father had a night shift and Frau Kate was long gone. He flicked on the light in the next room. There it seemed as if the pieces of furniture had been shocked mid-conversation into silence, freezing in the positions they'd held when he surprised them. Even the curtains played along. If he only waited long enough, the furniture would start to totter and the curtains would open and close, revealing themselves to be living beings, no different than himself and everyone else.

Suddenly he heard the streetcar singing around the curve at Schillerplatz. The sound stretched comfortingly across the night sky. His grandmother would hear the same sound and think of him. Norbert saw the driver sitting erect as ever and studiously

attending to the levers. She was there for everyone, all through the night. But he was the only one to whom she nodded. He was to get in, she would bring him to his grandmother.

Chapter IV

When Agnes Paulini died, the good Lord left Norbert Paulini as well. His father wanted to hear nothing of God, Mrs. Kate didn't see it as her job, and when he asked in school he was met only with laughter.

The meaning of school became clear to Norbert Paulini when the first-grade classes were taken on a special bus to the new public swimming pool. After the swimming lessons, the little flock of swimmers to which he had been assigned marched to the "three meter," as the woman in blue gym shorts, white track jacket, and whistle called the high dive. One by one they climbed up, walked down the board, and jumped.

"I don't want to jump," Norbert Paulini said truthfully.

"Just get up there first," the swim teacher encouraged. He was happy to scale the high dive and enjoy the view of the pool. She followed him rung for rung.

"But I don't want to jump," Norbert Paulini said. He bent down as if worried his head might hit the ceiling. The diving board ground the soles of his feet like sandpaper.

"Now jump," said the instructor, barring his retreat. Her long toenails moved threateningly in his direction.

"I don't want to," Norbert Paulini repeated. "It's too high."

Distantly he heard the voices of his classmates, who were already getting dressed. The water no longer smacked at the sides of the pool, it lay flat and calm.

"I don't want to!" he screamed. He had looked down for the first time. Below him gaped the tiled blue-green abyss.

"No!" he cried—as something pushed him. He wanted to embrace the sandpaper. What the swimming teacher cried echoed back from every side. He screamed anew at the sight of the abyss and no longer knew up from down. Everything gave way, tipped, fell on him, with him, down, a slap on the back, a slap on the face…

The swimming teacher's legs were scratched and her neck adorned with welts; water dripped from her hair, her track jacket, her shorts—her flip-flops were gone.

Norbert huddled at the edge of the pool, a wildness in his eyes that caused his class teacher, armed with band-aids and towel, to recoil. Nonetheless it was she who finally managed to open his trembling fist to expose the whistle.

From then on, his classmates took it upon themselves to avenge the swimming teacher. Lessons themselves weren't so bad. But there was the walk to school, and there was recess. Above all, there was daycare after school. He didn't want to be there. But where did he want to be? He had defended himself, he alone had defended himself and defeated the swimming teacher and even captured her whistle. But who could understand that?

For a few blissful moments on the walk home he could forget his grandmother's death. In those moments he dreamed there was someone waiting for him, that he'd come home and find everything ready, supper in the kitchen and the heat on in the bathroom.

But now it was Mrs. Kate's bell on the ground floor that he had to ring. Mrs. Kate was short, but her tremendous bun and the high-heeled shoes she wore even at home made her diminutive stature hardly noticeable. To the boy, everything about Mrs. Kate seemed large: the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the bosom and buttocks. If her face hadn't taken on a permanent expression that suggested she was about to sneeze or had smelled something foul, she might even have been thought pretty.

Her guesthouse, the "Villa Kate," consisted of three rooms on the ground floor and four spartan chambers under the roof. After the departure of "the Silesians," one of their rooms on the second floor was annexed to the boarding house, another was given to the Paulinis in return for tolerating guests in their bathroom and lavatory, and the smallest henceforth served as a storeroom. Breakfast and supper were served in Mrs. Kate's living room—she always stressed the "and." On the evenings of odd days she served fried eggs. Mrs. Kate, Norbert knew from his father, had the ability to procure things that others could only dream about. Mrs. Kate knew everyone in Dresden. She had even gotten her hands on crocus bulbs from the West for the graves.

It was also thanks to her intercession that Norbert was freed from attending daycare. He did his homework at Mrs. Kate's, and accompanied her when she did the

shopping or “ran errands.” His duties included setting the table for supper, of which he also partook when his father worked the night shift.

Sometimes Mrs. Kate even “dispatched” him to bed, which still consisted of a mattress on a knee-high pedestal of books. For him she did something which she drilled into his head must never be revealed, for it was their secret. She would start by fiddling with her bun, taking out pin after pin, then pausing for a moment—and letting her hair cascade down like a waterfall.

Norbert Paulini was allowed to catch the dark strands, to lay them across the pillow, and press his cheeks to them. Then Mrs. Kate was ready to read him one of the fairy tales he liked. To his disappointment, however, she always ended at the same spot.

Part II

I first met Paulini on a summery evening in September. I was seventeen, and I’d just spent three weeks of my summer vacation working in the sculpture wing of the Dresden State Art Collection. My first task under the instruction of the archaeologist Scheffel had been to turn two heads of Athena millimeter by millimeter in a little sandbox, so that he could photographically document the characteristic similarities of the sculptures. Over lunch in the canteen, Scheffel had suggested study of the ancient languages—Latin and Greek—described them, really, as indispensable for anyone who, like me, had an interest in literature. I had chosen classical languages at the Kreuzschule—though anyone familiar with the way things were in those days will understand that this was rather decided for me than a free choice of my own.

Scheffel held his eyes nearly closed as he spoke, intensifying thereby the already nervous fluttering of his eyelashes. “But that would be fantastic!” he cried after every point in his argument. His full, downright wanton lips lent every word a vivid emphasis that had the effect of making them very memorable.

At the start of my second week, Scheffel had requisitioned me for an inventory of the library. With one of those long narrow card catalogue drawers before him on the desk, he called out titles and authors, adding the call numbers to distinguish a new or expanded edition of the same book. I stood on a ladder and had to report the book as

present, on loan—in which case there was a file card in its place—or missing. The work progressed at a snail's pace, because Scheffel couldn't help constantly enlightening me on authors and books that it would well become a classicist to know. For him it was quite decided that I would apply to Jena and begin my studies there after graduation and military service. I passed down book after book, and the stack that I was to borrow grew to a tower.

On my last day, Scheffel suggested we address each other in the informal and invited me to a lecture by a philosopher and classicist who had become famous in the GDR for his translation of Sophocles, which was published as part of the "Library of Antiquity" from Aufbau in Weimar. His other works were largely unavailable in the East. The lecture was titled "Antisemitism in Luther, Nietzsche and Marx"—nothing secret, Scheffel assured me, but also not open to the public, an intimate circle, he said, and his lips curled into a smile of pleasure. He gave me a scrap of paper with the date and address, then asked for it back and added "Second floor! Antiquarian Books!," carefully furnishing each word with an exclamation point.

The last stretch of my way to the Kreuzschule, after I got off the number 6 streetcar at Schillerplatz, ran parallel to the very Brucknerstraße to which Scheffel's note directed me. I recognized the "Villa Kate" from the faded gothic lettering on the façade. I was surprised to find that there really was a "Pension He. Kate" on the ground floor. The outside door was held open by a brick. I walked up to the second floor and turned the doorbell. A young woman, a bit older than I, offered me her hand.

"Lisa," she said, and invited me to enter.

As if I had said "Open sesame," I entered into a world of books, walls of books! They formed an honor guard to welcome me into the great hallway. A janitor in a blue-gray smock was arranging a hodgepodge of chairs into rows. It seemed to me that the big, high rooms were actually lined with books, so perfectly were the bookshelves fitted to the walls. I had seen more books at one time only in the reading room of the Saxon State Library. But here they were more beautiful. Were they better cared-for, the covers brighter? Was it the lack of dust that gave the impression of familiarity, or had each book here really found a reader?

It smelled like the symphony before a concert. The scents of perfume and coffee mingled with that of oil paint, as if a picture had just been hung before the paint was even dry. In the kitchen, where most people had gathered, smoking was allowed.

An older man came out of what was undoubtedly a bedroom. A behemoth of an old cash register seemed to serve a mostly decorative function. And when I asked for the toilet, I found myself in a bathroom with toothbrushes, shaving things, and all sorts of tubes. None of the many hand towels seemed intended for guests, at least not obviously so. I was in doubt as to whether the place really was an antiquarian bookstore.

I tried to stay near Elisabeth and her friend Marion without actually speaking to them. More than the age difference, it was their seeming intimacy with all of the guests that separated us. They were greeted like daughters or granddaughters, yet seemed the undisputed mistresses of these rooms. They were the ones who gave instructions to the man in the smock.

Finally I spotted Scheffel next to the scholar, to whose slow steps my mentor had adjusted his gait. Scheffel waved me over.

The scholar took his seat and positioned his manuscript on the table before him, the upper righthand corner of the pages bent upwards slightly. He clicked the reading lamp on and then off again and pushed it a bit farther away. The guests hurried to find seats, as if playing musical chairs. Scheffel began meanwhile to introduce me to the scholar as a future classicist, praising our recent work together. He didn't precisely lie, but his telling positioned me as the glorious protagonist of a bildungsroman. Not knowing what to ask or say, I started, as my father had suggested, to offer the scholar my Sophocles to sign—but the dust jacket stuck to my left palm so stubbornly that I had to peel the ivory paper from my skin like a band-aid. The trace of my embarrassment, which passed without remark, can still be seen as a rippled oval in the middle of the red-framed ivory cover.

Unbeknownst to me, I was one degree of separation from Jaspers and Heidegger, Viktor Klemperer and Günther Anders. Proust, too, had first been made available in the scholar's German, before Benjamin and Hessel had taken over in the second volume.

I turned around, the signed book with the disfigured dust jacket under my arm—and looked out at an audience where a longhaired man in a short leather jacket was just making his way into the second row, to drop into the last available chair.

Above it all perched the janitor on the library ladder, his head bent forward between his shoulders as if he feared it might otherwise hit the ceiling. With a flurry of waves and gestures he directed me to the cash register. I then found him suddenly beside me, and he pointed to the table—I was to sit on it. His narrow, pointy noise protruded between his chubby cheeks.

Two hours later, as the first guests were already leaving, he handed me a book.

"In this country the Kaegi grammar can only be found at antiquarian bookshops. I recommend, therefore, the purchase of this copy—the condition is passable, as you can see—should it not already be in your posession."

I had only coins and my monthly transit pass with me.

"Give us a look!"

I dumped my coins in his outstretched left hand. With the other he picked them out again one by one, closed his fist around them and used his index finger to type the sum of three Marks, sixty-three Pfennig into the monstrous cash register. Then he pulled down the arm, the cash drawer sprang out, and he distributed his winnings among the compartments, like a mother bird feeding her chicks. Without sitting down, he filled out a receipt, stamped it, and handed me the calligraphed slip. According to this deed, the Abbreviated Greek School Grammar, Adolf Kaegi 1896, 6th edition, was the property of a certain "Stud. phil." who bore my first and last name. With that paper, I was suddenly raised to the rank of patron of "Antiquarian Books Dealer and Bookshop Dorothea Paulini. Norbert Paulini, prop.," who therewith thanked me in written form for my purchase.

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Of the story of Lisa and me I wish to include only what is relevant to Paulini. But that is ultimately a minor constraint. Though it was a long time before I could

understand or accept it, our relationship was a ménage à trois from the outset—and it grew more so with every passing day.

With Lisa, I saw myself and the world differently. I was surprised by the ease that came along with having a woman at my side who understood how I'd grown up, to whom I didn't have to apologize for having been happy back then, who knew what it meant that I'd done only a year and a half of military service, who knew what a Subbotnik was and why I'd always worn a sweater over my FDJ shirt and so on and so forth. But it's just just a matter of details. I should say: a woman who was free of the natural contempt of the West for the East. Over time I had gotten to used to this contempt—which could also be called the Western superiority complex—without even realizing it. It was like background noise, something taken for granted. And for those of us who experienced it, it made no difference that we were only a link in the chain of contempt, which continued on eastward and southward. More abstractly, I could say: Thanks to Lisa, the ground beneath my feet lost its slope. Lisa enabled me to walk tall again.

Sometimes, Lisa told me, she had worried—as had Paulini—that I might go too far in destroying the East in me.

"Too far?" I asked.

"You want success in the West too, so you have to make concessions, right?"

Did I make concessions? Had I already grown blind to them? Did Lisa see me as one of the puppets she always spoke of, people who were always ready to jump at the slightest scrap of attention, who when they spoke, automatically addressed a Western audience without even being aware of it?

In her eyes, Paulini was the one person who stood up to it all, the upstanding tin soldier. Lisa even read me the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, in which the toy soldier who has only one leg because there wasn't enough tin falls in love with a paper ballerina, attracted by her linen skirt. Because one leg is lifted so high, the tin soldier sees only her other one and believes she is like him. The upstanding soldier falls out the window and is swept away on an odyssey: he's eaten by a fish and then ends up on the very same table in the very same apartment that he started from, only to be thrown into the fire along with the ballerina, where they die together.

"Most importantly: He can't be any other way! And that's what makes him so lonely and forlorn."

Paulini, who, unlike Lisa, surely suspected me of "East-Suicide," would see me with fresh eyes now that I was with her. The idea pleased me; I felt downright relaxed.

Lisa now visited him considerably less frequently. He had Livnjak now anyway, and Julian was long-since grown. Nor did Lisa fail to mention how displeased and unjust Paulini could be about the fact that she so rarely showed her face. In one of our conversations I learned that for years Lisa had vacationed with the Paulinis, father and son. You can imagine how my heart skipped a beat.

"You were together, in one room?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," Lisa said.

"You were in the same room at night? Did you sleep together?"

"Are you jealous?" she asked and smiled, it seemed to me, with satisfaction. Everyone, including her parents, and especially Paulini's ex-wife, and above all Gräbendorf—had been accusing her for years of being in a relationship with Paulini.

"The idea is so absurd," she said. "We don't even joke about it anymore."

It must have been the end of August or early September, before Lisa's mother's first operation, when I finally suggested to Lisa that we go to Sonnenhain to visit Paulini. "We can take him out to dinner!" I added.

"Why do you want to hurt him?" Lisa asked, staring at me as if the color of my eyes had changed.

Her answer and her look gave me a pang. It's a hackneyed expression but also the most precise description of what I felt. There was a pang in my heart. Why do you want to hurt him? You have no idea what meaning this sentence was to hold in my life from that moment on.

"Why do you want to hurt him? Do you think it's any fun for him to see a happy couple prancing around right in front of his face?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, "Doesn't he know?"

"What do you want? To crow over him?"

Is that what I wanted? I did have to admit to feeling a certain satisfaction at the idea of appearing before Paulini with Lisa. It confused me.

"So he wants to go on vacation with you again or even live with you," I summarized.

"What's with you?" she asked. I felt, in fact, that something had collapsed inside me. Without noticing it, I'd sat down at the kitchen table.

"It's very flattering that you assume all men are dying to live with a fifty-five-year-old woman. I wouldn't rub my happiness in anyone's face, not even a mutual girlfriend's. Is that so hard to understand?

I don't remember what else we did on that terrible day, but the next time I was in Dresden, Lisa suggested an outing to Saxon Switzerland, and I was convinced she'd changed her mind and wanted to visit Paulini with me. Only once we were on the road did I understand: we were going hiking.

Lisa needed no trail maps, no guide. These cliffs and woods were her garden. When we encountered someone, she greeted them with "Ahoi," the way I'd heard it said in the High Tatras in my youth. The loveliest moments were when Lisa wrapped her arm around my neck so that I could follow the line of her finger to see what she was pointing at. Between explanations she kissed me without letting me turn my head. As her pupil, I had to repeat the names of the cliffs and plateaus which, I noticed for the first time, formed a kind of canyon landscape, except that it was green and alive and crossed by the Elbe, which literally gleamed in the evening sunlight.

I had begun to live for these islands of intimacy, never knowing when they might appear, when we might reach them. Then all questions fell silent: what was to become of us, whether Lisa would ever move to Berlin, whether I would ever return to Dresden.

As if it were a landmark like any other, Lisa pointed to Sonnenhain and Paulini's house. His great window even flashed in the sun, as if it were the glowing center of the world. I could hardly bear her chatter about Paulini. It made my throat tighten. Didn't she notice? Should I ask Lisa to be more critical of Paulini? Or even give her an ultimatum: confess our relationship to Paulini or it was over between us? In my darkest moments I

wondered why were had to go traipsing around Saxon Switzerland, of all places. Did she perhaps want to be near Paulini, but didn't dare to go to him while towing me in her wake?

On a hike over the "Hinteres Raubschloss" to the Goldstein overlook, my agony and ecstasy gave birth to the desire to write about Paulini. And whether you believe it or not, I could feel it immediately in my bones: Here lay salvation! Just drafting a few sentences in my mind was enough to make me feel light and free, but above all, in control. Every book idea brings some degree of relief, but in this case, there was something else as well. It had become downright necessary for me to write about Paulini. It was the only way to get clarity about him, about who he was and how he saw the world. It was my way of coming to terms with Lisa's Paulini-mania. I need no longer be passive. I could turn the tables. I would make something out of it. And on my own terms. I wondered why I hadn't thought of it sooner.

Lisa immediately noticed my change of heart. I was in such a good mood all of a sudden, she noted.

"Am I usually such a grouch?"

"Not exactly, but I like you much better this way!"

Writing about Paulini was obviously the thing that I could do for Lisa and me. It was odd to sit at the desk in her attic apartment conjuring up a Dresden from before my earliest memories. Lisa had told me some things about Paulini's childhood, about his grandmother, whose photograph stood on his nightstand to this day…Of course one didn't necessarily have to have slept with a person to be familiar with his nightstand.

Lisa's telling was so vivid that I often felt I had to simply record her words. At the same time, I would have to invent some things, even if I knew everything about Paulini, down to the last detail. Otherwise the coherence would remain in my head, rather than on the paper. To quote one of Paulini's favorite lines: Poets must lie. Plato himself had lied, Paulini had always added, otherwise we wouldn't have his dialogues.

My story would depict Paulini as a great reader who, as a result of his nature and passion, becomes a bulwark against everything that threatens us booklovers, across eras and systems. Whose loyalty to his desires and convictions stems the tide that erodes us, hollows us out, year after year, that sweeps us away, and which will one day leave

nothing behind of all that we believed we were living for. Without the Paulinis of this world, would we not be lost?

Part III

I learned of the death of Elisabeth Samten and Norbert Paulini fairly late. Odd, really, that no one had thought to mention it to me, when I was the one who had brought in the manuscript. To this day, Schultze has kept the real names—except for Lichtenhain, which he turned into Sonnenhain. He'd even referred to the place as Sonnenhain in our conversations, it now occurs to me. At the very latest, someone at the publishing house should have said something when Ilja Gräbendorf's obituary appeared in the Literary World. They usually keep abreast of such things. Schultze thought I already knew, and then ended up screaming at me over the phone: "They're dead! Didn't you know?"

I apologized and then apologized again. I almost offered him my condolences. Tears are always an argument.

Schultze and I are on familiar terms. After he'd told me his Paulini story, including his heartache with Lisa and all the back and forth, I'd suggested we switch to the informal, which pleased him, I think.

Of course I didn't ask him what the deaths would mean for his manuscript. After his last encounter with Paulini on Lisa's birthday, he'd found what he'd written problematic. He'd written an homage to the wrong person, the wrong person entirely. It wasn't easy to get him to keep working on it. But in the end, I was able to convince him that everything that he saw as problematic about the text actually made it stronger. Precisely because he had been so convinced of the need to write a tribute to Paulini and hadn't had any inkling or, shall we say, had had only an inkling of the latter's betrayal, what he had written thus far was utterly useable! Now instead of the three or four final chapters he'd planned, he'd just have to write three or four different chapters, in which he'd incorporate his recent experience. This was the only way for the story to become a novella, and it would be a novella for our times! It was a perfect set-up, why didn't he want to take advantage of it? Now what he had already described conventionally—which skilled

readers would have already sensed a distance to on account of the exageration of the conventionality—would become bait, a trap for the smug intellectual, the reader who idealizes booklovers per se, who is ultimately forced to realize to his dismay where contextless aestheticism has led him. Basically, I said, things couldn't have turned out better if he'd set them up himself—as far as the artwork was concerned, at least, leaving aside for the moment the personal bitterness with which he'd have to pay for his masterpiece.

Of course I also asked him whether he was afraid, whether Paulini's threat had scared him off. It would have been understandable. Schultze wouldn't hear of it. And I wasn't to tell the publisher or anyone else, he insisted: he wanted his "confession," as he called it, to remain just between us. I wasn't exactly pleased to be the only person who knew about it. I advised him not to take Paulini's threat too lightly, and to be careful.

Paulini and Lisa weren't found until seven days after their deaths, by climbers at the foot of the Goldstein overlook. Both bodies exhibited injuries that were apparently typical of a fall from a great height. The police thought a tragic accident was most likely, but they were exploring all angles, according to the articles, which all seemed based on the same press conference. One of the two victims must have gotten too close to the abyss. The second person had met his or her fate trying to assist the first. The bodies were found only two and half meters apart, and both were at a roughly equal distance from the cliff. A double suicide couldn't be ruled out, according to the police, but based on the current information, it was deemed unlikely. I don't know who they asked, but it certainly wasn't Livnjak, which I can't understand. And of course I'm asking myself why I'm wasting my time worrying about such things when those who are paid to do so don't. Schultze had mentioned the Goldstein overlook, but he had also mentioned other mountains and cliffs, so it didn't necessarily mean anything. A tabloid had dug up an older couple from Neukirch in Saxony who had been at the Goldstein overlook on the May weekend in question and who were happy to let themselves be photographed. They claimed to want to clear their consciences. During their ascent on the Sunday in question they had heard screams, three, four, one after another, screams of fear, a woman and a man, that much was clear, not cries for help, or they would have hurried and tried to do something. And then right afterwards it was quiet again. They'd thought maybe it was kids,

they scream for no reason, just because, high spirits, that kind of thing. After the descent and a rest at the Zeughaus they'd driven straight home. "Have we committed a crime?" the man was quoted as saying.

The media—the regional media, that is—spoke of a tragic accident. Soon the obituaries began to appear, honoring Paulini as an antiquarian bookseller of great distinction, who since 1977 had defied the challenges of various societies and systems, always championing the right of his readers to read what they wanted to read. The Dresdner Neuesten Nachrichten asked several acquaintances for personal reminiscences. Two of them ended critically. One, from Marion Häfner (in Schultze's version she is Lisa's friend with the eternally girlish face) opined not only that resignation and self-doubt had been Norbert Paulini's closest companions in the last years, but also spoke of "unyielding severity and intolerance." Unfortunately, she did not care to specify further. The other text came from Peter Scheffel, who called Paulini a "great reader" whose holy halls he had steadily visited over the years. Paulini's comments, however, had become increasingly unbefitting of an intellectual who had been a lifelong adherent of Enlightenment ideals, for which reason Scheffel had broken off contact with Paulini just a few months before, but in light of the tragic accident of his death, he wished to remember Paulini with gratitude. Though I hadn't doubted Schultze's depiction, I was nonetheless pleased to see it confirmed by other sources. A short appreciation appeared in the Börsenblatt, which placed Paulini's birth ten years too early and so dutifully and erroneously reported on his childhood during and immediately following the war. Then of course there was Gräbendorf's "A Farewell to My Readers." Without Schultze's description of the early dispute between Paulini and Gräbendorf, I wouldn't have understood the essay's epigraph, attributed to Calvino: "I read, therefore it writes." Presumably Gräbendorf hadn't gotten any other opportunity to rub it in the face of Paulini, "the pure reader." The fictitious letter drew connections between important moments in its author's life and those of Paulini, ultimately reaching the conclusion that Gräbendorf and Paulini, despite worshipping different literary idols, were united in two fundamental convictions, Paulini as a reader, Ilja Gräbendorf as a playwright and essayist. The first came from Novalis: "Poetry is the true absolute real. The more poetic, the more true." The other: "There is nothing more important than living in freedom!"—whatever he meant by that.

Lisa's colleagues placed a death notice for her in the same issue of the Sächsische Zeitung in which the one from her family appeared. Under her name and the dates of her birth and death was the line: "Lisa, we miss you," and the names of the mourners.

This much I was able to gather in the days following Schultze's call.

I informed our publisher. He encouraged me to look after Schultze. When I called Schultze again a week later, I was prepared.

I had thought about what version of the deaths of Paulini and Elisabeth Samten could best be integrated into the novel. In any case, it would give the novella a double ending. But he would have to be the one to bring it up, not me. The deaths also considerably minimized the danger of a lawsuit.

Schultze was happy to hear from me. He didn't just say so, he really sounded it. He too had been invited by the Dresdner Neuesten Nachrichten to write something about Paulini, but had declined, saying he wasn't able do so at the moment. Not even the two deaths had brought the release he so longed for. On the contrary. The feeling of defeat, according to Schultze, was now irreversible. He had gone neither to Lisa's funeral nor to Paulini's.

"And how are you doing?" I finally asked. "Are you able to work?"

He didn't have to force himself to work, he answered. Work was the only form of concentration that allowed him to think about Lisa and Paulini on his terms. When he wrote, they were characters. That helped a lot. Socializing, reading, or watching television didn't help to distract him. He didn't like to leave his apartment, so the working conditions were downright ideal.

When I asked him whether I could leave his Paulini in the brochure for next season, he said he didn't know.

I can't explain what happened next. We'd hung up. Only then did I hear him say: "Not even the two deaths brought the release I so long for."

Not even the two deaths brought the release I so long for. But had he really said that? If I have a sixth sense, it's hearing the vibrations and undertones that go along with a sentence like that. And hadn't I wondered about the hiking trip he'd taken

after his last encounter with Paulini? I had even interrupted his report, his “confession” at that point to ask about it. Why had he subjected himself to such proximity?

I looked at my phone as if it could offer me an explanation. I was actually determined to call him back. But what could I have asked?

Did I really think I could see what no one else saw? Me, the Westerner? Or was I the only one who knew that he’d traveled to the area? And why had he told me? Are editors bound to professional secrecy?