

Tupolev 134 (Excerpt)
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On August 30, 1978, amidst heightened security measures outlined in the *European Agreement to Fight Terrorism*, a Polish Tupolev 134 airplane was hijacked with 62 passengers en route from Danzig – Schönefeld to Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin.

As the LOT plane began its descent, the air pirate at the front of the airplane pulled a stewardess up from her seat. He held an 80-year-old Mondial blank gun to her head. In Polish, he ordered the plane to change course and land at Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin.

Reported in Der Spiegel May 21, 1979.

The American officer's smile out there on that huge field, after the tension of the landing, it can't be described.

It can't be forgotten.

It makes you think it's the second coming, he said. And you weren't taught to think that way. But it was so quiet. A silence that even made the motors stop running. The smile took you right in, it penetrated everything in a single moment, but the officer out there couldn't possibly have seen us in the cockpit. It was way above him. He just assumed we could see his smile from inside.

Even the stewardess saw it, though she couldn't move her head. He smiled as if he wanted to wish me, wanted to wish us, good luck. Not even the gusts of wind bothered him, or the roar of the motor.

It could have been your smile, said Lutz Schaper on the witness bench to Katja Siems.

Please answer the question, said the district attorney.

The way you smile when you're absolutely certain of something, said Lutz Schaper, without averting his eyes from Katja.

The way you smile when you're being held responsible by the FDJ for something you didn't do. Had done, he said in 1979, after having lived almost exclusively on oranges for half a year in his cell in Moabit prison.

He said: Out there, that was just a landing strip, concrete slabs and lights to the right and left, but it wasn't just the runway. The officer in his American uniform must also have known that.

A top-notch! A real hit that uniform. I told the stewardess he ought to get a pat on the back for it:

Nice costume.

Fancy pants enemy.

There might have been a lot more people standing around the airplane. I didn't see them, not even later when we got out.

I was exhausted. All of us were exhausted.

And yet, the whole thing didn't last more than half an hour.

Exhausted, but never happier. Can't really remember.

A half-hour. A few kilometers. A stone's throw to Tempelhof. And each time you thought, if you end up in Schönefeld again, you were right back in the armpit of the world.

Last time around I said to myself: fuck it. Armpit's okay. But I'd rather choose it for myself.

Budj wsegda budjet solnze. Born to be wild—sound familiar? said Lutz Schaper. This time to the District Attorney, who waited for somebody to translate the sentence into English.

Just one thing you should know: The runway out there doesn't look any different than in Schönefeld. A few thousand concrete blocks. The American officer made the difference.

A fancy pants enemy.

Back in Gdansk, I told Katja: Don't be afraid, they'll treat us like we're famous politicians. You've got to have a nose for things like that. They teach you stuff like that early on over there.

"Answer the question" said the district attorney.

"No idea. If it hadn't been a toy gun...maybe I would have done it anyway. Ask Katja. For years, all we did was make tools out of raw metal. She knows what I'm talking about! And all the sudden this thought shoots through your head. The thought starts to take shape, like the piece of metal there in the machine in front of you. Then you cool off again. But you've taken on this shape for good. You can't escape. You pace up and down your thirty square meter pre-fab apartment, the bit of private property you're entitled to.

You drink beer and wait for the delivery that never comes. You play skat or go dancing.

If you're use to waiting, it's easy to see why there's so much dancing going on in this country.

The same movies played over and over, pubs closed at twelve, nightclubs were only open on weekends. But you could still fool around. After a while, you started getting this kind of night face. You had to, if you wanted to catch someone by midnight. The women weren't exactly prudes. They were hot at night. A plus for our country.

You'd both get on your Moped and make sure you didn't drive into the arms of the cops.

You couldn't talk. Not with a thought like that in your head.

Can you possibly imagine that?

Not so easy in a country with uniforms that look like costumes right?" Lutz Schaper asked the jurors from the six neighborhoods of Berlin's US sector.

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Katja Siems was twenty-four, when Lutz Schaper pulled a pistol out of his Anorak and got up from his seat as if he was going to the John. Twenty-four when she left, escaped, flew the coop. Her story is true. But how can you prove the truth?

You can try to bracket what isn't true. First the rumors. There were lots of rumors. There was the rumor that the hijacking was a well-organized terror attack. German Intelligence was behind it. They wanted to embarrass East Germany. Or it was the KGB. They hoped to throw off the Americans. Another rumor. Even the CIA was implicated for a moment.

And then, of course, there was the RAF. The rumor about the RAF really stuck for a long time. There were interesting philosophical speculations. They looked for a DADA message because the weapon was a toy gun. Similarities were discovered between Schaper, the prime suspect, and Rasputin, so a direct line could be drawn to the Decabrists.

Sometimes he was just a petty criminal; he didn't like that one much. But still, Lutz Schaper and Kaja Siems were always considered a couple. People obviously can't imagine anything else. It's a mental block. They turned them into a Bonnie and Clyde. Their deed was seen as a sacrifice for love. Some suggested they did it out of fear. Out of greed, jealousy, pity, anger, or revenge—for injured vanity, pride or hope, which of course is only a part of it, a part of that infernal waiting.

In the end there's nothing. Nothing and the question. Where should we go now?

Something Schaper must have asked in 1978, on a windy August day on Track #3. The day that Hans Meerkopf didn't show up. When the waiting wouldn't stop. When something obviously had happened to prevent him. There were rumors about that too.

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Above (p.16)

Don't think I'm making this up.

Believe even less that it happened this way.

"Judge for yourself:" said Lutz Schaper's lawyer and told his client to stand up. "Is this a man with criminal intentions?"

Small incidents play a role, every gesture, each laugh at the airplane and later in the giant airport. That's the information from which Katja emerges. Every news item describing physical characteristics, statements about cylinder heads that the rotary knife had cut too short, coffee or licorice marks on t-shirts make Katja more complete. Until finally she is standing down below, on the second floor, in the waiting area at Tempelhof Airport.

She wore jeans and the cashmere sweater that her special investigations officer from the Air Force in Tempelhof gave her a few months prior to the pre-trial hearing. Snow was falling in front of the window.

But, here inside, the seasons aren't important.

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Way Below (P.91)

Lutz Schaper was thirty-nine. He didn't have to own everything he needed anymore. He was no worse off than anybody else, he was doing fine. He was doing better than fine, considering he'd go to Hungary once a year; that he could afford to go swimming in Lake Balaton, while other people hadn't even glimpsed the Baltic Sea. He had learned to lay cables and change spark plugs; he could clean carburetors and build cabinets. With the money he earned on the side, he could afford a woman once in a while. Sometimes he managed to stay longer. But it usually made him feel shabby. He didn't think the women enjoyed it. They assured him he hadn't hurt them; that his straightforwardness made it pleasant to be with him, they knew where they stood. But deep down, he didn't believe it. He lay awake next to them, saw the orange light from the street lanterns on all sorts of wallpaper, and before they woke up, he got dressed.

Sometimes it was the women who scared him off. They were perched on the edge of the bed and started asking nonsensical questions because they found a run in their stockings. They sat there with their sunken bodies, speculating whether they'd even begun to live, or whether their life was over, or had always been over, and they were only keeping it up for the sake of decency and this time it wasn't any different either.

He liked the odor under their armpits, even the morning after. He could deal with them drunkenly sticking their tongues in his ear as they sat spread-eagle on the barstool boozing it up. He'd even cook for them. But when they sat on the edge of the bed in the morning, he couldn't help them. He didn't think about those things. First of all, they were way out of proportion to his feelings, regardless how passionate he was. And even if everything really was over, and it kept going on for the sake of it, he enjoyed it enough not to spoil the fun.

He hated the demonic intrusions into their faces after the questions, the palpable loneliness they exuded when they stepped out of their stockings, crawled back into bed with him and aimlessly pressed their heads onto his stomach. He knew then, they didn't like him anymore. They needed him and it forced him to stop being honest. He offered them coffee out of embarrassment.

That's why he never felt the need to get married or have children. After you were divorced again, and almost everybody was, you'd have to talk about it. The party functionary would have asked questions. You had to dig into your life, examine it, you had to justify your actions, which was a disgusting thought. If Schaper was silent about his pal's bed stories at the Alten Krug bar, or in the locker rooms, it wasn't because he didn't want to be a show-off. He just didn't want to be bothered.

Maybe he also didn't have anything to say.

There were times when he told himself he'd leave one day. He was only there temporarily and didn't really belong. He did his job, but he was just playing at it, and that protected him from getting worn down like the others. He wore his carnation for May Day, but he had used tin foil and a couple of wires to prop the flower from the inside, making it larger and redder than usual. When a photographer from the local press approached him about it, he had to laugh

because it seemed hilarious that somebody actually took it seriously.

But he also knew he would not leave

He liked watching TV before going to bed, old black and white movies with mostly static images.

He would have liked to have another car, probably a Skoda or Moskvitch, preferably a foreign brand, and his own workshop, where he could spend his Sundays, and he'd drink too much, that's certain.

But what he yearned for was too fleeting, or too old, to be directed at something beyond the wall.

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He had known Katja for about eight years.

And only now, in the late afternoon of August 27th, with the telephone receiver on his shoulder had he realized: when he imagined himself sitting on a Harley, or dressed in Western clothes, it had to have been Katja catapulting him into these images without his even noticing it.

For somebody, who didn't want to delude himself, it was absurd. For somebody like him, it was out of the question.

Next to the jacked-up moped by the pond, he looked at Katja's hands.

They were resting on her knees. They had a rim of dirt under the thumbs. He knew those hands, at least once a day he had them in front of him. During the breakfast break, Katja came over and leaned her elbow on the machine. She watched him finishing the last round at the lathe. When he unlocked the cutter and hung it up in the tool shed, he had to walk past her hands. Katja had talked to him at the pond, while he was wreaking a bunch of creases onto a blade of grass.

"I don't want to live like this anymore." The crunch of sand stirred up from the forest path in his mouth. In front of him the reeds, in back the curtainless windows of the NVA army building and the Simson motorcycle with the handlebar grips that somebody had recently slashed.

Katja was slowly corrupting him.

On August 27th, Schaper took the receiver from his shoulder, a movement somebody must have seen from the gatehouse. He put the phone to his ear. He thought:

Somebody ought to try and match that. To make him feel at thirty-nine as if he was twelve.

And then a guy like Meerkopf got in the way.

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Way Below (P.109)

In summer the air filled with sand and circulated it throughout the city. The air grew heavy, gritty, and in the evening Siems went to bed with sandy feet. During the day the bedsheets hung to dry in the backyard, where the wind ceaselessly drove particles of sand into the moist cloth, and it got denser by the day.

"Careful," said Siems as he plucked a grain from his wife's upper lip before giving her a kiss good-bye. It hardly made sense, since he'd just run his hand through his hair and tiny granules from his scalp caught under his nails.

There was the weightless flight sand; the gusty damp sand that splattered onto asphalt with the rain; the sand lying in playground sandboxes that mixed with stones and broken splinters, bicycle parts, and forgotten toys made of plastic; and the sand that etched strange ice crystal forms on windows. In the forest, sand blended with pine needles.

The sand looked dark, almost black on the football field. From his classroom window, Siems watched the custodian emptying earth-filled wheel-barrows in regular intervals over the field to make the sand harder, so the students wouldn't sink ankle-deep and the F1's, which looked like hand grenades, wouldn't disappear after every hurl. When his colleagues were teaching, and nobody was around looking for a textbook or pencil, it was Siem's favorite place to stand. The classroom was cool. It smelled of coffee. He imagined the city as a giant mill; two

millstones made of concrete, operating day and night. The mill was flexible. You could feed it with anything. But no matter what you used, crushed and pulverized, all that came out was sand.

Whenever Bernd Siems stood at his window, he felt he knew exactly why he was a teacher. It had nothing to do with giving math tips and answers to word problems, or decoding formulas with two or three unknown quantities. For Bernd Siems, teaching had to do with getting out of the sand for a little while, at least with his head.

The sand. That he compared to almost everything. That he sometimes sniffed, though he knew it didn't have a scent of its own. On his way home, he'd take the narrow forest path under the Autobahn. He'd park his bike, take two handfuls of sand from a dune at the side of the road, and smell. He felt ridiculous even though nobody could see him. He tried thinking about something else. But it was a reflex he couldn't resist, and he got off his bicycle every time. And every time, the sand smelled of whatever had been lying near it.

The sand. That he'd have liked to make a required subject for his students. "I think you're the only person around here who's worried about it, and I think you're off your rocker!" said the principal when Siems suggested they start a program in the Young Pioneer Organization to replace the agitators with street sweepers. "We've got a five year plan to fulfill and you come to me with your shenanigans!"

As summer drew on, more and more sand collected in the air. It swirled over gravel pits and under the slack roots of the pines surrounding the city. It perched atop auto ball bearings and on the narrow rubber strip of windshield wipers. It made bicycle gears crackle and balcony plants look dusty, and it fell onto the barracks of the town hall. It penetrated offices where the mayor held his meetings, and mixed with old deposits of sweat-soaked sand that had lain there since the town hall of Ludwigsfelde was an SS barracks. It made the prisoner lists dusty, it clung to the boots of guards as they marched from the city to the forced labor camps, and it stayed there until they returned again. It crept into wooden floors and sometimes a barely perceptible cloud of it floated skyward.

Only the façade had been re-painted with a sand-repellant high polish lacquer.

Sometimes sand blew under the covering of Doreen Siems' cake as it cooled off on the shaded balcony. It stuck to the icing. Tiny grains wedged between the teeth and crunched with every bite, and at night gastric juices decomposed it into something ultimately smaller than a granule. It whirled through the body as it slumbered, making it sluggish even during waking hours. A steady flow of sand particles made their way into the bloodstream, growing into massive dunes that slowed the circulation by the day. By morning, a portion of it would be eliminated through the normal channels, getting flushed into the sewer pipes and then processed by filters. But chemicals proved ineffective. Before summer was over the sand had made its way into the drinking water.

Around this time, the people of Ludwigsfelde started talking about the problem in Saxony, where, instead of sand, chimney soot floated into the sun. Soot was a more fatal affair, and though it didn't crunch during meals, it caused bronchitis and gave people black lips.

You could say that the only thing that connected the citizens of Ludwigsfelde was sand.

Yet only Bernd Siems feared it. At least nobody else is known to have talked about it.

Actually, you could say the sand was never an issue.

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It had its good side, too. One summer Katja and Verona had hitched a ride to the Baltic Sea to go camping. At the beach, they covered each other with sand. The stars stood above them. They poured Baltic sand over their bodies and felt it coolly trickle under their arms and over their bellies and packed it firmly around them. It was night and the beach was pale. Silently, they lay side by side.

They heard the sea which at twilight grew calm, and above all they heard the sand ceaselessly gliding down to their navels, between their fingers, and into the salty hollow of their throats, and it exaggerated the curves of their bodies so much, that, in the end, it made them identical. Later,

Verona turned to Katja and looked at her. Katja laid there with her eyes closed and Verona realized that Katja's beauty surfaced only when she was being gazed at, in the pale light and under stars which the sea ceaselessly washed away.

It was the sand, too, that made it easier to say good-bye.

"I simply bought them, I didn't care if they fit or not, it's totally idiotic."

Verona wore a new pair of Jeans. They stood in the yard in front of Hall 11. The pants flared at the knee and covered her shoes. But for the people behind the windows surrounding them, it was as difficult to distinguish as Katja or Verona's face. The air was too murky.

They would have been talking about a flirt, about a man at the disco the other night. About the weather. About Verona's overpriced jeans. You could hear the shift roll in Hall 11. A curtain blew from one of the windows.

"Don't you think they're too tight? I mean you can see everything. Look at how it bunches up in front. But it was the last pair, it was all they had left. I was too late and got stuck at the end of the line, but at least they're the real thing. Not some fake-o ones. I mean you don't think twice about it, right? Unless you were planning to...you know what I mean." She whispered that part.

"But don't you think they look stupid?"

They didn't hug each other. It would have felt strange. They had never hugged each other, so they didn't hug each other now.

Katja just raised a hand. She smiled and said: "They fit like a glove. You look great. Really. You look absolutely great in them." Then she turned around, eyed the gatehouse as if it was a clear and manageable goal, and walked towards it. When she looked back at Verona a last time, she couldn't see her face in the backlight of the welding station. She saw only the dark silhouette broken by a sparkling hair clip on the side of her head.

Had she been able to see Verona's face, she might have turned back again. In Verona's face, there was no apology, no regret. Just a plea. It was the only time Verona was able to voice it:

Don't go.

Katja waved, in her mind she had the departure time to Danzig, Meerkopf's arrival, a train number and the name Ines. She had the wave in mind, too, which needed to be adjusted for the glances from the office windows around them, especially a certain office window on the second floor that faced the yard. Katja waved as though she were saying goodbye for the weekend. She passed her hand through the air, three short and insignificant times.

Had somebody looked closely, they'd have immediately detected the tension in this casualness. But the party secretary was writing a speech for the Republic's birthday. He didn't have time to stand by the window, and so nobody looked closely.

Nobody except Verona.

Verona saw the precision, the absolute exaggeration of Katja's harmless wave, in this wiping away of air. She saw Katja with her Make-Love-Not-War-T-Shirt, her frame close to the high masts of the toll gate. She was nervous and a bit too cheerful; her right foot kept knocking against her left calf as she walked.

It looked crooked, walking forward and waving backwards. Verona watched Katja go and she knew this wave would never end, that it would become the horizon, that from now on, wherever she went, whatever step she took, it would be along the edge of this wave.

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Below

(P. 151)

(...) "You get on a plane and you think: dream's over. Bye-bye, baby blue," said Schaper. He said: "We put the gun in the purse in plain view. Just a gift. A souvenir from the socialist brotherland."

"Do you mean to say that Frau Siems was involved in the hijacking?" asked the lawyer.

"If Katja hadn't kept smiling - who knows. The way they frisked us, we'd have never gotten it on board. And then we're back on the plane. But not safe yet. Who knows what kind of people they were," said Schaper. "I told Katja. Maybe just people like you and me. They booked the trip of a lifetime, and now they're waiting for the stewardess to stuff some food down their throats. No cause for alarm. No difference to guys like me. Wouldn't have occurred to me, not even in a dream. Me on a plane, packing heat."

"So we can stipulate you were in possession of a gun from the start," said the lawyer.

»Gun, exactly. Me and one of those things under the jacket," said Schaper. "Wouldn't dream of doing it. And probably up to your neck in Stasi."

Under Katja's jacket, he thought. (...)

Katja had turned to the side in seat 12 A, so she could get to the jacket wedged between the wall and armrest. He put his hand on her leg as planned (...) and felt her thigh shaking uncontrollably. She shoved the gun into his hand. But he was the one who stood up. He was the one who walked to the front. He was the one who pointed the gun at the stewardess, and he was also the one who got so nauseous.

"So it was your jacket?" asked the lawyer. »Katja Siems did not incite you to do it? From the very start, you planned the deed alone and executed it without the help of Frau Siems?"

The shoulders shake and the neck and the worst is the head, Katja had said. (...)

The lawyer waited. She was from West Berlin, she spoke German. But she, too, had to wait for the translations because of her U.S. colleagues. If she hadn't had her hand in her pocket, you could have seen her fingers tapping.

"Solar plexus" said Schaper. "And the sun breaks out. We were barely out of the cloud mush. Perfect lighting. Like when you tear off somebody's skin. Down to the bone. A crazy sun. So you gotta see it. Who belongs and who doesn't. The stewardesses always belong. I said that right from the start, watch out for the stewardesses. All of it was infiltrated. The ground crew, passengers, the pilot. But you couldn't see it. Baloney," he said. "Up there, nine thousand something, in this sun, everything was the same. The sun had stripped everything bare, every face. But you couldn't see it in anybody. Impossible to tell. Don't know why. But in this airplane," said Schaper, there weren't just normal people. That you could tell."