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author	Sascha Reh
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translated by	Alexandra Roesch
copyright for the translation	Alexandra Roesch

contact

Anke Grahl
phone: +49 69 92 07 87 15
anke.grahl@schoeffling.de

Schöffling & Co.
Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH
Foreign Rights
Kaiserstraße 79
60329 Frankfurt am Main
Germany

www.schoeffling.de

((Synopsis))

AURORA follows two men and a woman fighting their way through a snow storm in an unusual vehicle- a tank - in order to reach a woman in labour on Christmas Eve. Tamara is on board as a midwife. Ole, a journalist, desperately needs a good story. Eric, who is driving the tank, is following his own agenda. After a while, Ole and Tamara begin to doubt Eric's story.

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Tamara looked up. Ole had touched on something. Of course, she wondered whether Eric's strange behaviour might not, after all, have something to do with their … arrangement. The whole thing troubled her. But they had acted properly towards him at the time. Jasper had always been a bit reserved, that was the way he was, but never condescending. Their meetings – there had only been two of them – had been relaxed and even jovial, they had drunk wine, shown Eric the house, successfully acted as though it weren't a delicate matter for them all. They had been completely honest with him, transparent, open in every way: that they were only considering natural conception and that they found the concept of an anonymous sperm donor awful. Both, Jasper and Eric, had nodded sympathetically at the time, but it was probably this issue that Jasper had a completely different take on from the start. The fact that they'd changed their mind in the end didn't seem to be a big problem for Eric; Jasper had still paid him a part of his fee. For his 'loss of earnings' as he'd put it.

‘You asked about my child earlier,’ Ole now said. ‘He’s with his mother. The boy is all grown up now.’

Tamara did not seem particularly interested – anything else would have surprised Ole – but at least she was polite enough to feign interest. That was enough for the time being.

‘Ah. And … do you get to see him often?’

He thought of how Jacob had sat in his kitchen in Copenhagen, at a Formica table that Ole considered to be designer and that Jacob, he feared, probably considered tacky and makeshift, until he was very quickly reminded of the fact that such things were meaningless to Jacob. His condition – which his ex-wife never wanted to identify as such – had turned him into someone who was used to rigid daily routines, who was an expert in computer language and a disaster when it came to interacting with other people. The idea of finding and ‘confronting’ his father – as his ex would most likely have put it – had definitely not been his. He was twenty-one now and probably far more out of his depth than Ole with the situation that he’d manoeuvred himself into. Neither of them had a sense of the pathos that would be appropriate for such a family reunion. The last three days’ dishes were soaking in the sink, and Ole was still wearing the yellow rubber gloves he’d pulled on just before the doorbell rang. He would have liked to have led a life where he either owned a dishwasher or was able to employ a cleaner in dignity. But he didn’t lead such a life.

‘So, this is where you live?’ Jacob had said. He didn’t look the way Ole had always envisaged a person with Autism to look ever since he’d watched Rain Man and Awakenings: buttoned up shirt, dictator-like hairstyle, the parting maintained by his oily scalp, sheltered workshop shoes. Jacob, on the other hand, wore what the young generation wore nowadays, short hair, trimmed beard, discreet brand or no-name clothes, all organically produced. There was no reason whatsoever to recognise himself in Jacob’s features or gestures. In relevant fiction, encounters such as these were often portrayed as highly emotional. But Ole knew that Jacob had Asperger syndrome and that he was probably experiencing the entire event as if through a pair of upside-down binoculars. He himself wasn’t even feeling emotional. He felt like someone who’d been interrupted while doing the washing up.

‘It’s not big, but it’s big enough for me,’ he said. He offered Jacob a glass of water. Jacob didn’t want any. As he didn’t say anything more, Ole added: ‘I travel a lot anyway.’

From the table in front of him, Jacob picked up the box of pills to relieve an over-active bladder and examined it intently.

‘Are you interested in the side-effects?’ Ole asked conversationally. Jacob just looked at him briefly and then back at the box.

‘Your mother will have told you that I work for the paper,’ he said.

Jacob shook his head and slowly placed the pills back on the table. ‘No.’

‘What did she tell you about me?’

Jacob slowly shifted his weight on his chair, as if he needed to let a fart escape. ‘Nothing.’

There was a pause during which Ole failed to come up with any idea for continuing the conversation. His phone rang, he was grateful for the interruption, but it was just a market research company. When he sat down again, Jacob said: ‘By the way, I want thirteen years’ worth of child support money from you.’

Although Ole understood the words and their meaning, he was unable to process them.

Something rumbled, the tank tipped forward at a treacherous angle, as if they were on a long slope. She had completely forgotten where they were, or rather forgotten that she hadn’t known for a long time. She wanted to finally get this whole search over and done with and go home. Jasper would ask her about her adventure, they would drink a glass of red wine together and talk about the coming spring, when she was planning on installing additional beehives, so she could not only sell her honey at the markets, but also offer it to restaurants in Rønne, and expanding the greenhouse to get more sweetness into the tomatoes and perhaps planting some older varieties that the standardized market had long forgotten: Maja, Dester or the ribbed Schellenberg’s Favourite. If she used the entire area available behind the house, on the south side, then she would be able to produce enough to offer them as well. But in order to do that, she’d have to finally dig out the roots of the old lime tree and tear down the derelict shed. She would do all that alone, just as she’d draft her protest against the corn farmers’ use of pesticides or fix the fence of the paddock. Jasper would say: Let someone else do it, and she wouldn’t answer.

‘When I last saw him, he wanted money,’ Ole said.

‘Oh,’ Tamara said.

Ole had also been confused, but only for a moment. ‘Is that what your mother says? Did she send you?’

Without a word, Jacob reached into his cloth bag, pulled out a binder, removed a carefully filed piece of paper out of its protective foil in an excessively ceremonial manner and pushed it over towards Ole.

But he had said: ‘I’m not wearing my glasses,’ without even looking at it.

‘It’s from my lawyer.’

‘And? What does he want, your lawyer?’

‘We’re giving you the option of a settlement payment, otherwise he’ll file a lawsuit against you.’

‘That means you’ll be filing a suit, right? Not him.’

‘The result is the same,’ Jacob said.

‘That’s not how I see it,’ Ole replied.

‘What’s your opinion on the matter?’

‘You heard it.’

‘No, I mean …’

‘Look around you. Who do you think lives here?’

‘You.’

‘Exactly. And do I look as if I could pay you thirteen years of child support?’

Jacob slowly pulled the piece of paper towards him and filed it away again. He put the binder back in his bag and got up. ‘Mother told me that you would say that. We’ll settle it in court.’ He’d already turned towards the door and was attempting to leave, as if all the important stuff had been said.

‘Did your mother also tell you that she didn’t allow me to see you all these years? That she even managed to make me lose custody?’

‘Is that true?’ Tamara asked.

‘Maybe. I don’t know,’ Jacob had said. ‘But you were obliged to pay child support, even without custody.’

‘And what did you say?’ Tamara asked.

‘What did I say?’

He’d said nothing. He’d got up and carried on with the washing up. All the feelings he hadn’t had when Jacob had come in, now rose to the surface. It could have been shame about the fact that he’d denied Jacob’s diagnosis, or regret that this had given his ex-wife reason to believe that he wouldn’t be able to properly respond to Jacob and his needs, or guilt because it was true. Regret would have been appropriate because their relationship had broken down because of Ole’s refusal, sorrow because very few things in life – and writing articles for the local newspaper was not one of them – are of lasting value, and resignation because they’d made it too difficult for him, asked too much of him, compelled him to fail; anger because Hanne had not allowed him to treat Jacob normally, and disappointment because Jacob had not behaved normally; despair because all the happiness and joy he’d wanted to feel was not reciprocated. He could have felt all this. But what he actually felt was anger. Everything that might have been

had now been compressed into a claim for money.

The dishes clattered quietly in the water. The anger had remained and took control of him more and more, anger towards Jacob, even more to his mother, most of all towards himself.

'Out,' he'd said without looking at Jacob again.

Tamara said nothing. When he'd started telling her about Jacob, he'd been completely calm, almost as if he was sharing an amusing anecdote. But now the memories had upset him, and instead of Tamara encouraging him, she was criticising him with her silence.

'What else could I have said? "We can talk about everything?" "Wouldn't you like a cup of tea after all?"'

'I don't know. It might have been worth …'

'It wouldn't have been worth shit,' Ole said brusquely.

Tamara said nothing. She didn't know and couldn't imagine what form her distress would have taken if a child she'd carried, born and raised, whose needs she'd met and abilities she'd encouraged, had turned against her as an adult and reproached her. She sensed that Ole's anger was just his attempt at not feeling helpless.

He wanted to continue, but at that moment they were both hurled sideways; the light went off. The tank had come to a sudden halt. The engine was still running, but clearly out of gear; this noise also died out a few seconds later. Then they were enveloped by complete silence, silence and darkness, as if a kilometre-deep hole in the ground had swallowed them up.

‘Eric? Eric, can you hear me? It’s all dark down here. What’s going on?’

But Eric wasn’t responding. The line seemed to be dead.

‘Maybe a power cut.’ Tamara heard Ole’s words – no longer over the intercom, but rather because nothing drowned them out anymore.

She waited a while and forced herself to breathe slowly. There wasn’t a smidgen of light, anywhere, and no sounds either, she couldn’t even hear Ole’s breathing, as if she were suddenly utterly alone.

‘What happened?’ She was not so much hoping for an answer to her question; she simply needed to hear someone’s voice, even if it was only her own. ‘No idea,’ said Ole. She heard him move, get up, knock something over. His bottle rolled across the floor.

‘What is it? What are you doing?’

He said nothing. She felt him grope his way towards her.

‘What are you planning?’

Suddenly she had his hand in her face. She screamed, he said something she didn’t understand; his hand had already left her face.

‘What are you playing at?’

‘Sorry,’ said Ole. He moved away from her, then she heard him fumbling around at the locking mechanism. It clicked, a beam of light became visible, the wind immediately started to howl and drove snowflakes inside. She could just about make out Ole’s silhouette in the reflection of some sort of brightness that was coming in. Was there a light source out there? She saw some sort of glimmer that pulsated almost jerkily in irregular intervals, but she couldn’t work out what it was.

Ole pushed the door open and looked out. Snow fell almost horizontally into his eyes, he needed a moment to recognise anything. Suddenly it was bright, as though he were beneath strong, forceful floodlights. A noise came from somewhere that sounded similar to welding in a workshop, accompanied by the pulsing returning light whose origin Ole couldn't make out from inside.

'Just a moment,' he said, grabbing his coat. 'I'll be right back.'

He climbed out. The snow was flattened in the rut of the chains, but on either side, it had to be just under a metre high. The edges crumbled like on a coastal cliff during spring tide. Laboriously he cleared a pathway a couple of metres away from the tank. The storm was tugging at his coat, individual gusts were so strong that he had trouble staying on his feet; they whipped icy snow crystals into his face like shrapnel. He turned around, now standing with his back to the wind, and was able to get a good view of the tank, and with it the source of light.

He could not make sense of what he saw.