

## PROLOGUE

Don't move! Breathe slowly, so they can't see that you still feel the pain. Pretend to have lost consciousness<sup>1</sup>. Don't feel for your ribs, even if they burn like fire.

Are those boys still there? Is there any shuffling<sup>2</sup> of feet?

There is a rhythm, strong and fast. But it is not outside; it is in my body, beating painfully against my chest<sup>3</sup> and eardrums<sup>4</sup> from the inside. Apart from that it is quiet. It seems to be over. Doesn't it?

Don't move. Breathe slowly.

The ground I'm lying on feels hard and uneven. The concrete paving slab<sup>5</sup> presses my elbow into my side. Exactly the spot where that boy's black leather shoe hit me, though I was already lying on the street. It would help a lot if I could move a bit.

Are they gone?

How long have I been lying here without being beaten and kicked?

There must have been four or five of them. They met me unprepared when I walked around the corner. Was he with them? Was it all a joke for him?

It is quiet now. I'm cold. And there is no jacket left, nothing to cover my bruised<sup>6</sup>, bare arms.

I'll have to hurry home and take care that nobody sees me. They would start asking questions.

But the last thing I need right now is curious<sup>7</sup> people.

The only thing I need at the moment is a hot tub and a wealthy<sup>8</sup> friend.

Or a bank robbery.

1 consciousness – Bewusstsein 2 to shuffle – schlurfen 3 chest – Brustkorb 4 eardrum – Trommelfell  
5 concrete paving slab – Betonfußwegplatte 6 bruised – blau vom Bluterguss 7 curious – neugierig  
8 wealthy – wohlhabend

## CHAPTER 1

“What the heck<sup>1</sup> ...”

Sandra Dingles, the headmistress<sup>2</sup> of Looe Comprehensive School pushed back her chair and stood up. The typewritten sheet of paper in her right hand trembled.

Her hands never trembled, neither when she was making a speech in front of hundreds of students and parents, nor in a council meeting<sup>3</sup> when she had to fight against the closedown<sup>4</sup> of her school and its integration into the bigger community school in Liskeard. It was not her fault that many families had left Cornwall because of the bad employment market<sup>5</sup> in this part of the country. Those children who had stayed here needed a school in the neighbourhood.

And what her children needed, apart from a school in their direct neighbourhood, was definitely not this kind of threatening letter<sup>6</sup>, which made her hand tremble this morning as if she was a hundred years old. But that was exactly how she felt.

“May I have your attention please,” she shouted into the crowd of busy teachers in the staffroom<sup>7</sup>.

“Attention please!”

Sandra cleared her throat<sup>8</sup> and put the letter onto her desk. The others must not see her hand tremble.

“I’m afraid we have a situation.”

She tapped the letter with her finger. When she was sure that the last conversation had stopped and she had the undivided<sup>9</sup> attention of her staff, she sat down and picked up the letter. But she rested her elbows on the table to steady herself.

“As in ‘Houston, we have a situation’ at the explosion of an oxygen tank on Apollo 13?” the history teacher asked.

1 what the heck – was zum Teufel 2 headmistress – Direktorin 3 council meeting – Ratsversammlung

4 closedown – Schließung 5 employment market – Stellenmarkt 6 threatening letter – Drohbrief 7 staffroom – Lehrerzimmer 8 to clear one’s throat – sich räuspern 9 undivided – ungeteilt

## EXERCISE 1

Zeitreise: Setze die folgenden Verben ins Präsens.

1. *written* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *left* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *read* \_\_\_\_\_

“Well, pretty much like that,” Sandra said and frowned<sup>10</sup>. “I only hope that we can avoid<sup>11</sup> the explosion.”

As all eyes rested on her, Sandra read the letter aloud.

“I will cause you and everybody at your school real trouble, bloody trouble. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. You will repent<sup>12</sup>.”

There was silence. You could have heard a pin drop. After a moment somebody started laughing.

## EXERCISE 2

Wessen? Setze die folgenden Begriffe in den Genitiv.

1. *the headmistress* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *the children* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *her house* \_\_\_\_\_

“It must be a joke, mustn’t it?“, somebody said. But he didn’t sound too convinced<sup>13</sup>.

“They can’t mean it,” a female voice could be heard, “Not in the British countryside.”

All of a sudden everybody started talking with their neighbours until Sandra called their attention again.

### EXERCISE 3

Viele: Bilde den Plural der folgenden Substantive.

1. *child* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *information* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *teacher* \_\_\_\_\_

“I don’t think this is really – well – dangerous, you know. Not so serious that we should call the police. That would only support those in the community who want to close us down – you understand. To me it sounds like one of those bad boys’ pranks we all know so well. But on the other hand we’ll have to take steps to make sure that nobody has gone insane<sup>14</sup> and tries to hurt anybody.”

Many heads nodded<sup>15</sup>.

“Exactly!”

“Aye ...”

“Hear, hear!”

“That’s right!”

Sandra put the letter back on the desk.

“Well then ... let’s get everything organised before the kids come in.”