

## **Pola Kinski Kindermund**

**English sample translation by Jenny Piening**  
(pp 60 – 67)

It is a hot day in late summer. My friend Michaela and I are enjoying an afternoon at the open-air pool. We roll around in the grass, lounge on our blanket and whisper about the other people. Occasionally we muster the courage to jump off the three-metre diving board. Hordes of other children are waiting at the kiosk to buy *Bratwurst* and chips. We join the queue to buy a Capri ice-cream. We don't have to wait long, as the queue for ice-cream is shorter than the one for chips.

A man keeps walking in front of us. He is old, with shoulder-length grey hair, his body is shrivelled from decades of sunbathing and he is wearing nothing but a purple G-string. Between the folds of his wrinkled stomach, his bellybutton is adorned with a pink hibiscus flower. He flaunts himself, strutting back and forth in front of us and winking. We turn away. He seems to like this, comes closer, talks to us, becomes more persistent. We run across the lawn past the sunbathers to our towels by the bushes. He follows us. When we turn around he disappears behind a tree. We feel uneasy – our day at the pool has been ruined. We gather up our belongings and are just about to leave when an announcement blares from the Tannoy: "Can Pola please come to the ticket booth!" I am startled for a second, but then follow the loudspeaker voice as if I were remote controlled. I forget all about my friend and the strange man. Suddenly I am facing my father. He hugs me fervently, pulls me by the arm to the exit and thrusts me into a chauffeur-driven limousine. I feel ashamed in front of all the other children and don't look out of the window.

In the car he showers me with compliments in his usual cloying manner: "My angel! My darling child! My baby doll! I was just passing through Munich and had to see you!" He wants me to put on something pretty – we'll be having dinner with his agent later. So we drive home. My mother hands me my First Communion dress with the matching white jacket. Nobody asks me whether I want to wear it or even if I want to go. Before I have time to think, I am sitting next to Babbo in the car again, and we speed off.

I am bored at the restaurant. Babbo and his agent talk excitedly about my father's meteoric career and future film projects, but I cannot share their enthusiasm. I mull over whether Mama loves my little brother more than me and whether she is thinking about me now. The agent goes into raptures over the delicious meal – "by far the best I have ever tasted" – then tries to ingratiate herself with me: "Tell me, sweetie, would you like to be a little film star?"

I don't feel like answering. The woman doesn't seem to know that for some time now I have been paying for board and lodging at my mother's and step-father's house with the earnings from my film roles. Babbo strokes my face as if I were a lap dog and laughs absent-mindedly. The agent turns her attention somewhat sulkily to her ice-cream sundae, and I imagine what it would be like to go away with Mama – far away, just the two of us.

Suddenly my reverie is broken by the sound of my father yelling. I am dragged out into the street and try to understand what has happened. He rants, bellows, hurls

abuse at the restaurant owner and waiters. Clearly something had not been to his liking. His agent is suddenly in a dreadful hurry, she gushes her goodbyes and totters off into the early evening.

My father cannot control himself. They're all morons, arseholes and imbeciles, he tells me. The vein on his forehead is bulging dangerously; hopefully it won't burst. I really want to go home now, but he has to return to his hotel immediately to make an urgent phone call. He acts as if it was a matter of life or death. I prefer not to ask what it's about. The limousine cruises through Maximilianstraße, the shop windows and façades glisten in the evening sun as if they had been polished for a party. The chauffeur comes to a halt in front of a glass palace. Four Seasons Hotel is written in gold letters above the entrance. Two men wearing dark uniforms and looking almost like ships' captains except for their top hats, rush up to the car, pull open the car doors, and bow down low. Babbo does not let them help me out of the car; only he is allowed to do that. Then he rummages through his trouser pockets, pulls out a bundle of banknotes and stuffs them into the men's expectant hands as they raise their hats.

I feel lost in the huge hotel lobby. Everywhere people are lounging on sofas and in armchairs. They look as if they don't know what to do with themselves and would rather be somewhere else. The lift glides upwards. I watch the very young bellboy in his red uniform. The lop-sided Camembert box on his head looks silly. Despite being fastened beneath his chin with a gold cord, it has slipped over his left eye. With his nose in the air, he concentrates self-importantly on the lift buttons as if he alone were responsible for making the lift move. He does not acknowledge my presence, but gives me a wink from under his hat as I walk past him.

Babbo pushes open the door to his *salon*, which looks like something out of a fairy tale. The heavy sea-green curtains are pulled shut, but the setting sun has seeped through a crack, making everything in the room glitter and gleam: the pictures on the walls, the wood of the furniture, the window and door handles, even the light switches and electric sockets. Open suitcases, clothes, scarves and shoes are scattered all over the floor. The vases look as if they might break under the weight of the roses and lilies, and I am repulsed by their heavy, pungent smell. Babbo shows me his treasures, lets me touch everything. Then he gently takes my hand and leads me towards the raised bed, which dominates the middle of the room like a throne. I make my way to the bed with difficulty, wading through the soft pile of the carpet as if through a swamp. Babbo lowers himself onto a mound of cushions without letting me go. He pulls me closer, presses my hand onto his trousers. I can feel something hard underneath. I immediately pull back my hand, feel repulsion welling up in me again. He kisses my ear, sniffs my neck, breathes quickly and agitatedly. I feel strange. One by one, he slowly undoes the buttons on my dress, slips the straps from my shoulders. The dress falls noiselessly to the floor, light as tissue paper. He doesn't take his eyes off me. With an anguished expression he pulls down my knickers and they fall on top of the dress, a white heap covering my feet. I stand in front of him, naked. His lips are quivering, I can feel his warm breath on my skin, he pulls me up onto the bed with him. I am frozen with fear. I try to slip away from him but he grips me tighter. His firm tongue travels over my chest, my stomach, he spreads my legs with his head. I open my mouth wide, I scream, but no sound comes out. The tongue becomes more demanding, more brutal, it hurts. I lie there, rigid. His breathing becomes louder, he groans wildly. I feel nauseous. Everything around me is silent and black. My body is numb; I am dead. I pass through a mirror into the sea. I am

the youngest daughter of the Sea King, I am following the blue fish, on the trail of the mysterious seashell. I can move quite quickly with my fish tail. My long hair trails along the seabed.

I am jolted back to reality as I feel my knickers being tugged hastily back up, my dress being pulled over my head and my jacket being thrown over my shoulders. Today I am wearing my First Communion dress, the symbol of purity.

He pushes me towards the door, then pauses again, his hands resting heavily on my shoulders. I become even smaller under the weight, he looks into my eyes and holds my gaze. He makes me swear not to tell anybody about what has happened, or he will be sent to prison. "Do you hear what I'm saying – never!" he orders. He shakes me. From somewhere far away I can hear the hammering of his voice, but it has nothing to do with me. Now I am being hurried into the lift, then into the waiting car. I feel as if the film is running backwards.

Back at home I don't say word, don't answer. I can't. I sink into my bed, into sleep, fall into a dark abyss, fall, fall ...

Pola is lying on the railway tracks, dead. Pola is kneeling beside her, peering into her face, concerned. Pola walks past her, looks at her calmly and earnestly, then disappears.

The next morning my mother tries to wake me for school, but I won't get up. Nor do I get up the next day. My mother is concerned that I may be seriously ill. I only come round again late in the night. I try to work out where I am. Carefully I open my eyes. Everything around me seems alien, unreal. I feel as if I am inside a glass ball. Then I come to a decision, push back the covers and stand up. I grab the dress and the jacket that are still lying on the floor next to my bed. Through the crack in the door I listen to make sure nobody is in the hall. As thin as a shadow I dart into the bathroom and lock the door. I have to hurry. I take a pair of nail scissors out of the draw, kneel down on the cold tiles and begin to stab holes into the scrunched up jacket and dress. I stab at it full of rage, frantically. I am pure hate. Only when I am sitting in front of a heap of shreds and tatters do I finally feel redeemed. The symbol of purity is mine no longer.

Somebody rattles the door impatiently. In a panic I scrape together the shreds of fabric, wrap them up in a towel that I tie up into a solid ball and say that I will be right out. As the sound of the footsteps fades, I turn the key in the lock, push down the door handle and listen to make sure the coast is clear. With the bundle of fabric pressed to my chest, I slip into my bedroom and stow it in my satchel. Then I go back to bed.

The next day I leave the flat earlier than usual. I get on the bus that takes me to school but remain sitting when we reach the school and continue to the final stop. I've never been here before. A group of high-rises – green, purple, yellow, blue and pink – rises up in front of me. The colours are faded. As I count the storeys to twelve I have to lean my head back further and further. My gaze moves down the rows of identical windows like a lift and rests on one of the over-sized numbers painted onto each of the houses. The entrance gapes like a ravenous mouth beneath it. Rows of bins are lined up on the forecourt. Almost all of them are overflowing with rubbish that spills onto the ground. I look for a bin with a shut lid, take the clump of fabric out of my school bag and sink it into the stinking mass of rotting trash. As the lid snaps shut, I am overcome by fear and run until I reach the bus stop. Five minutes until the next bus. The entrances to the buildings occasionally spit out men, women and children, who move in my direction

like robots. Never in my life have I so longed for a bus. Finally it arrives and takes us into the city. I get off at the stop "Heilig Blut". My goal is the church on the other side of the street. It doesn't look particularly inviting with its unadorned grey façade and its angular tower. Only the deep blue of the three windows adds some colour. I push open the iron door with all my might and dive into the cool interior that tastes of incense and wax polish. For a moment I absorb the silence surrounding me. A man is kneeling in the first row, lost in prayer. I bob briefly in front of the altar where I imagine God should be, then turn left to one of the confessional boxes. Before slipping inside I look around to check that nobody recognises me.

The tiny room envelops me like a blanket. I want to stay here and wait for Father Oberbauer, even if I have to wait all day and all night. The priest gives religious education classes at school – and he is a kind man. I will confide my secret to him alone. There is a little window in the door of the confessional box and I peep through the curtain: I can see Jesus hanging on the cross, the crown of thorns piercing his skin, his head sunk down onto his blood-smearred chest. The figure is menacing, as are the figures of the saints on the wall. I almost expect one of them to start crying bloody tears. A halo appears to blaze up. I immediately let the curtain fall.

The clergyman must have sensed that I desperately need him, because it isn't long before I hear the familiar swish of his vestments. A little window in the wall in front of me opens, and through the wooden bars I recognise his eyes with their steadfast gaze: "My child, what brings you here? What is on your mind? Tell me, how can I help you?"

I open my mouth to speak but a trap door suddenly slams shut in my throat, iron and merciless. Not a single word emerges. I can't talk, I'm struck dumb. The warm voice of the priest doesn't reach me anymore. I slip out of the confessional box and run out of the church. From this moment on everything is forgotten. What happened in the hotel doesn't exist anymore. It never happened. The door remains shut. Everything is locked inside my soul. Feelings and emotions disperse like odours.

Even later on, when I go to confession, I never remember what happened.