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The Position of the Sun  
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My sister lives in a two-bedroom flat in a *Plattenbau*. These days, it is considered trendy amongst creative folk to bunk down in one of these uninspired standardized flats in the eastern parts of town and to uphold the plainness as part of one's own interior design. Mila had gone to a lot of effort to furnish the flat in the way the architect had intended, namely functional, compact and stark. She had purchased delicate bucket chairs and a high-legged sofa produced by the GDR state-owned furniture industry at the flea market. She did not own any heavy, floor-level cupboards, but only shelves and a movable clothes rail, a high-legged, slender sideboard, a delicate table with a height-adjustable chair that also tilted, and the highlight was a bed that she folded against the wall in the mornings and spirited away behind a smooth panel before she took the underground to her fashion studio in the city centre.

In the beginning, when Mila had just moved in, the Lenin statue on the square could still be seen from the window in the stairwell. The monument had since been pulled down. The traffic roared outside. Civil twilight: it was just light enough to read a newspaper. I read the sign in the lift, loading capacity 600kgs or 8 persons, do not use in the case of fire. I read the fire extinguisher's label, only use in case of fire. Car boots slammed shut, the streetlights came on, and down below someone was pushing by an overflowing shopping trolley. A warm gleam lay on the windows of *Kaufhalle* department store, on the rows of shopping trolleys. When it had expired, the air seemed to me to be filled with the glittering of crushed beer cans. Expectantly, I went back and forth in it, as if walking under a lawn sprinkler or through a tinsel curtain.

Nautical twilight: stars discernable up to the third magnitude.

I switched on the stairwell light and in the window saw only myself.

I turned my back on myself and strode down the echoing hallway. Then I came towards myself; I was disappointed, this much I could see. My mouth was pulled into a slightly offended pout; my shoulders were hunched forward, my forever-criticised posture, the posture of unaccomplished things, of fruitless endeavours. Combined with the badly fitting jacket. The

red hair. The deathly pale, slightly pasty skin: it could not be denied that I cut a pitiful, at any rate ridiculous figure; however, this dead-pan expression jarred, a sort of stubbornness on the advance, an incontestability that could not be justified. I could easily be held for one of the residents, I could easily be held for one of my patients.

After the third ring, I could hear through the paper-thin door how my sister pulled a piece of clothing from a hanger. I knew her habits, she got changed several times a day, I could work out that it would not be long now; nonetheless I was already mildly annoyed when she opened the door to me, gave me a kiss, when, not without grace, I handed over the cloth bag to my sister.

Mila took out a fruit, scrutinized it and placed it on the opening of her only, plain, finely striped vase. She wore a self-tailored reform era dress, a mixture of frock and smock, which she used to cultivate an anachronistic sensation of freedom that was beyond me. Part of this feeling of freedom rested upon the fact that she did not spend any money on this sort of clothing.

My sister had made it her business to fleece the family property for clothes that no one wanted any more. For years she wore aunt Sidonia's old hand-me down clothes. Some of them she altered if they seemed too shapeless for her. Where our aunt's heaving breasts had required sack-like baggy tops, she sewed in tucks. From some garments that went over the knee, she tailored mini dresses, or she extended a skirt to floor length using flounces. She inserted sections of completely different, precious materials that removed the frumpiness from the synthetic fabrics held in beige. And in exchange, that was her theory, the aunty dresses ensured a revaluation of values and made the lofty fabrics at all wearable again; clothes that up to then had looked like woollen blankets or table cloths absorbed royalty from the brocade, the heaviness from the velvet, the excessive shine from the taffeta. In her peer group, she was of inconspicuous conspicuousness, dressed according to the fashion of a bygone age, half Russian countess, half *Trümmerfrau*.

Similar practices appeared in the designs for her collection. Mila had received prizes for them. She called herself a fashion designer.

I pulled the pyjama from under my arm and draped it over a chair. Then I sat down, the hard buttons in my back.

On her windowsill stood glasses with broccoli heads that she had brought to bloom like a bunch of cut flowers. Devoutly I lowered myself into the

small yellow blossoms. They were reflected in the dark windowpane and mingled with the city lights.

My sister laid her hand on the nape of my neck, forced me to bend forward a little, and tugged the pyjama from the back of the chair again.

Work first.

She led me into her sewing room and placed me next to the cutting table.

She cut through the worn out elastic. Inserted a new one, let it dangle, the cardboard tag hung on one side and I had to step into the pyjama bottoms so that Mila could measure the correct length. Her narrow, chewed nails fiddled around in front of my tummy and touched my vest. She crossed the ends experimentally – tight enough? – and I was a bit embarrassed about my sausage-like shape. She plucked pins from the cushion on her wrist and marked the measurement, she cut off the elastic, and the rasping of the old scissors hurt.

I slipped out of the flapping skin. A cold draught hit my legs. She took the fabric to the sewing machine.

I stood for a moment in front of the full length mirror surrounded by hat- and shoe boxes in which my sister stored bits of fabric, thread and zips, and looked at myself somewhat helplessly. Behind me, the tailor's dummy, adorned with a feather boa, fixed her blind gaze on me. Mila had pinned a paper pattern to the wall, the map of a mysterious country, on which red and black lines twined around each other, on which dashes and dots crossed paths. I concentrated on the Morse short-short-long line, wanted to follow its curves until the paper rustled and spat out a sleeve or the front of a dress released itself from the perforation.

I was in the process of stepping back into my trousers when the red hair on my calves stood up on end. Mila's cat burst into the room, it was in high dudgeon. I had prudently taken a cat allergy tablet two hours beforehand, so the presence of the animal ought not to affect my health in any way. However, quite to the contrary, my visit seemed to be disturbing the cat, it leaped towards me, stopped short, came closer with stiff steps, arched its back, its magnificent fur bristling, so that its small body doubled in size. It planted itself in front of me and let out a muffled snarl, louder than I considered to be appropriate, especially given the fact that the cat knew me since its childhood. Certainly our relationship was not the best.

Because of my allergy I had avoided the animal, while the cat for its part took pleasure in slinking plaintively around my legs. All the same, today I

had nothing to blame myself for. I presumed that my mere appearance provoked it.

I was standing in my knickers, the cat, however, was fully clothed. It wore a dark blue Zorro cape.

The cat was used to being dressed on particular occasions. Throughout our childhood, I had regularly seen its predecessor in dolls dresses and carnival costumes. Mila continued the dressing-up activity in moderated form with the successor animal. She initially tried out fabrics on the cat that she was planning on using. Slightly bewildered, it always attempted first to shake off the fabric, scratched itself extensively, then forgot the matter. Sometimes it played with a fluttering garment the way that a young cat does with its tail. Test for tear strength, Mila called it, motion study, she called it, she wanted to see how the fabric fell, how it fitted, how it draped when the body went into action.

Now the cat snarled, tugged at the cape, snarled at me and attempted to pull the cape off, hooked its claws and teeth into it, strangled herself in the process and then gave up.

My sister ironed my pyjama trousers. Her cat tumbled around on the floor, spluttering venom, claws displayed, mane shaking.

Deep down I had dreaded this day. I had dreaded the fact that my sister might pull her hair out in a surge of pain; shred the clothes from her body in desperation. But only the cat got upset, she wandered angrily in her earthen garment and bared her teeth. I was to blame, the cat told me; I was to blame for everything.

It is said that animals can take on the feelings of their owner, that a dog, for example, used as a weapon, acts out its master's anger, or that a rabbit, apathetic and emaciated, translates the repressed grief of its owner into action.

Calm down, avenger cat, I said sternly to the cat that jumped into the service hatch and there lay in wait.

With the kitchen grater Mila grated wafer thin strips of bitter orange peel. The fleshless flesh bulged out whitely underneath the outside skin like upholstery stuffing. Mila decorated the froth on our cappuccinos with the zest.

The cat hissed when I sat down at the folding table in the kitchen. It lay sphinx-like in the wall to the sitting room; its forget-me-not blue eyes

registered every sip that I took. The cape had loosened; it fell sideways over its flank and reproduced the guarded flexing of muscles as a play of light. The fabric had a good motion coefficient, rich drapery, that much even I could see

I plucked at the ribbon, took the cape off the cat.

Had I not cared for him enough?

You get too involved, said my sister angrily.