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CHAPTER V

TRUST IS GOOD, CONTROL IS BETTER

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A play for two female voices and a room with a balcony

EGO and ALTER EGO *two voices*

A guide to the symbols used:

/ denotes an interruption by the next speaker

... denotes an immediate continuation of a sentence, without pause.

EGO I always dreamt of seeing all this from above. From the air. This house, my street, the city and this land, this small smudge in the heart of Europe. I look down on it dreaming. From way above. Out of reach.

ALTER EGO You had to weigh up the people who lived here. Who they are, are they reporting on you. With a sentence they could do something to you. Something destructive.

EGO Or they could remain neutral.

ALTER EGO You knew that you had the power to play fate. Everyone knew it.

EGO I've come to terms with it. There's only the remnants.

ALTER EGO Slight remnants of suspicion when new - Well, when I meet new people. Strangers. People showing an interest in me.

EGO Slight remnants, after so many years.

ALTER EGO Two lively young men in a parked car, down there, in front of the door. Waiting men in parked cars.

EGO I feel it between my heart and stomach, not a pressure, more of a fluttering, I could depend on that fluttering in those days. On that inner alarm.

ALTER EGO You can depend on those, those gut feelings.

EGO If I feel that fluttering nowadays I tell myself it's just a memory and I/ laugh

ALTER EGO laugh the feeling away nowadays.



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EGO That summer in the old tenements opposite here the skylights were open, the building was already empty and Karl said...

ALTER EGO ...the rain will get in over there, somebody needs to close it up...

EGO ...but it didn't rain, it was summer and the night was warm, a crackling came from the radio with the words "Houston, tranquillity base here, the eagle has landed!"

ALTER EGO And we celebrate with the windows open...

EGO ...and stand on the balcony with friends, gazing at the moon where the first man walks around.

ALTER EGO And then there's a wind, a warm dry wind.

EGO Space / wind.

ALTER EGO Space wind says Karl.

EGO And we laugh and celebrate both ourselves and the moon landing and opposite...

ALTER EGO ...at the open skylight the moonlight is caught in two round lenses...

EGO ...a four-eyed skylight...

ALTER EGO ...It was binoculars.

EGO We'd all been drinking and Karl says...

ALTER EGO ...look, he's searching for the man in the moon...

EGO ...and we laugh...

ALTER EGO...but the lenses point at us...

EGO ...at our balcony. And Walter says.

ALTER EGO...I'm the man in the moon kids.

EGO A couple of days later Max brings back a note from Kindergarten saying that I should come. I do and the agitated head is waving a piece of paper around and saying that she can tell from our son's behaviour that we're not bringing him up in a socialist manner. What does she mean by "socialist manner", what does she want? And she waves a piece of paper around.

ALTER EGO..."Is this educating him in reality?"

EGO I hold the piece of paper still and see what Max has painted. It's a green house from which smiling people look out. – Yes, well?

ALTER EGO Have you ever seen a green house here?

EGO No, I said, I haven't seen a green house.

ALTER EGO Are green houses a reality?

EGO Reality is grey and has a green crack in it now. – Well, he won't be educated in reality by us; he won't be dragged into the present...

EGO/ALTER EGO ...the GDR hasn't got green houses.

EGO ...and so this child can't paint a green house.

ALTER EGO That was the first warning.

EGO Mummy organises exhibitions, daddy is a freelance illustrator. The child is colour impaired.

ALTER EGO And Granny comes to visit from Tegel and Granny brings toys from the west, Lego bricks and later a model plane to build yourself, but Granny doesn't bring any war toys because she lost two sons in the war. Granny says...

EGO ...soldiers are murderers...

ALTER EGO ...and Max takes the model airplane to school along with granny's sentence and brings home a note that we should come to the head.

EGO If Max doesn't deny his Granny from the west he can't do his A 'levels. I say that I



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see it as a socialist upbringing when my son quotes from Tucholsky in your school.

ALTER EGO And on the head's desk she slams down the collected writings of Tucholsky, published by Aufbau.

EGO Max' Daddy sits at home freelancing, waiting for contracts from state publishers. He's an illustrator. And he puts his gift at the disposal of a society which needs schoolbooks and non-fiction books. Children's books also want pictures.

EGO And the illustrator throws himself into his work, reads and researches and understands the shape and colour of language.

ALTER EGO My husband speaks of the colour of a book.

EGO The scent too. Every book has an atmosphere. Its very own...

ALTER EGO That's enough. And then he chooses, some publishers have a certain scent, their books have their own special atmosphere, he can't take responsibility for this atmosphere, he can't support it and he doesn't illustrate them.

EGO He refused a few contracts.

ALTER EGO And from then on there aren't any more contracts. From state publishers. Nobody tried to talk about it, there wasn't ever any discussion, not a single confrontation.

EGO All quiet and hushed.

ALTER EGO Simply no more work.

EGO Well though, there was.

ALTER EGO Of course.

EGO "How to help myself"

ALTER EGO A few sketches for the Trabant. A do-it-yourself thing.

EGO Ah yes! The Trabant.

ALTER EGO Pretty rare.

EGO There are hardly any cars on the roads; the streets belong to the children.

ALTER EGO The kids play red army against white army and prepare for attack.

EGO They say that suddenly night must fall.

ALTER EGO It's still broad daylight in Mitte. So the children decide somebody has to play the night.

EGO Somebody is the night.

ALTER EGO And they pick the smallest and weakest. He runs diagonally, far away over the large crossing and then he turns around.

EGO He is the night.

ALTER EGO And with even steps he makes a bee-line for the other children.

EGO It's time.

ALTER EGO It seems as if he comes from afar...

EGO/ALTER EGO ...very evenly and lightly...

EGO ...like clockwork...

ALTER EGO ...without hurrying, without hesitating.

EGO The children stare in his direction.

ALTER EGO And before he reaches them even...

EGO ...as one they decide...

ALTER EGO ...not to let night fall.

EGO Yes, and?

ALTER EGO What, and?

EGO and what?



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ALTER EGO Together they ganged up and beat the little one into retreat.
EGO All against one.
ALTER EGO All against the night.

EGO On the street children play red against white.
ALTER EGO I ask Max, my son, which side are you on then.-
EGO The reds.
ALTER EGO What's good about the reds?
EGO The reds are best.
ALTER EGO Why? My son grins.
EGO Because we always win.
ALTER EGO Why?
EGO Because I'm the chief.
ALTER EGO The chief?
EGO I'm Tokei-Ihto, son of Great Bear.
ALTER EGO What?!
EGO We're fighting for the Indians' freedom...
ALTER EGO ...says my son...
EGO ...and it always wins.
ALTER EGO What does?
EGO Freedom.

ALTER EGO Our street is free of cars. A couple of members of the opposition live here. They don't have cars. We only have one familiar car with us in our street...
EGO ...the one with the two...
ALTER EGO The Lada with the two men, on site here. Frequently. And then, aha, you know.
EGO Someone comes into our building occasionally.
ALTER EGO All the way to us on the fourth floor.
EGO But they don't ring our bell.
ALTER EGO They ring opposite.
EGO And my neighbour gets a visitor.
ALTER EGO And the visitor wants to know from my neighbour how they're doing.
EGO And the neighbour says.
ALTER EGO Inconspicuous.
EGO Polite.
ALTER EGO Good neighbours.
EGO The neighbour now has the power to play fate.
ALTER EGO But he doesn't want to.
EGO He wants a good neighbourhood.
ALTER EGO The visitor leaves and the neighbour comes over and says...
EGO ..."One of them came to me again, let's go and look from the balcony."
ALTER EGO And we run to the balcony.
EGO I stare down at the street.
ALTER EGO I want to see what he looks like.
EGO What does he look like?
ALTER EGO The neighbour shrugs his shoulders.
EGO Inconspicuous.



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ALTER EGO We look down on the street and the street is empty.

EGO No Lada.

ALTER EGO Nothing. Nobody. Nada.

EGO He doesn't come out.

ALTER EGO Where's he gone?

EGO And 10 years after the moon landing we're ten years older and in the summer of '79 we're partying on the same balcony with the same people and the night is warm and the children have grown up and we laugh about the binoculars opposite and ask ourselves if the figure behind them is also ten years older...

ALTER EGO ...or do they replace them.

EGO And Karl stands by the record player, he's brought Kozmic Blues...

ALTER EGO ...Kozmic Blues, the record is ten years old and Janice Joplin is long dead...

EGO ...and now in the summer of '79, Karl has at last got the music through friends that fits to this night, to the man in the moon, to the lenses at the skylight and to this space wind.

ALTER EGO And that autumn I get a contract to organise an exhibition in Italy and I fly to Bari in the spring.

EGO ...to the land where lemon trees blossom. And I see my city and my small country from above and we fly over the Alps and land by the sea.

ALTER EGO And the exhibition is a success.

EGO Armed guards sit in front of the locked cockpit on Interflug.

ALTER EGO And on the Alitalia plane the door to the cockpit is open and children are allowed to visit the pilots. That's what I spoke of.

EGO At home.

ALTER EGO I only spoke of it at home.

EGO Just amongst ourselves.

ALTER EGO It was my only trip to the west.

EGO Max is fourteen and discovers that "Soldiers are Murderers". Max skives from certain lessons. He doesn't go to military education lessons.

ALTER EGO He has his reasons.

EGO He can't be held responsible for it, he can't support it, he's against the content of military education lessons.

ALTER EGO I should come to the head. We are not bringing up our son in a socialist manner.

EGO And I don't have any words.

ALTER EGO Max has to leave the school.

EGO The neighbour rings the bell and says.

ALTER EGO One was here again.

EGO We run to the balcony. The street is empty. Maybe the visitor crossed my path at some point. Maybe I would have known him. But I don't know that.

ALTER EGO I never saw him.

EGO And ten years later we're ten years older and in September '89 we're partying on the same balcony with almost the same people and the night is warm.



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ALTER EGO The GDR is going to be forty and is becoming ever emptier.

EGO Devoid of people. Friends disappear. Some get arrested, others leave. Via circuitous routes to the west. They pack their bits and pieces and emigrate. Never to be seen again.

ALTER EGO With and without farewells. There are demonstrations in Leipzig. In Berlin. In Dresden.

EGO And Max isn't there anymore. Max has also gone.

ALTER EGO Left through Hungary.

EGO Max wants to study.

ALTER EGO And Walter believes we'll see him again.

EGO We drink to that and opposite, in the skylight, round lenses become visible and Karl stands on the balcony with binoculars, points them at the skylight and says.

ALTER EGO Forty years are enough. Show yourself you worm.

EGO And a fortnight later Karl has also disappeared.

ALTER EGO Without a farewell.

EGO The first package from the west which I received after the opening of The Wall came from my cousin. And the constitution was in it.

ALTER EGO Colour?

EGO Colour?!

ALTER EGO Every book has a colour.

EGO Black.

ALTER EGO Red.

EGO Mustard.

ALTER EGO I want access to my files. I want to see what's in my files. I say. To all my friends. Because. I think everyone feels the same way.

EGO I think wrong.

ALTER EGO *Those* were farewells. After we said that we want access to our files.

EGO Why can't you leave it alone?

ALTER EGO Why should we leave something alone that has never got moving?

EGO Even Kohl said leave it alone.

ALTER EGO We went on hunger strike and enforced the appointment of a special representative, responsible for Stasi documents. An official authority was formed...

EGO ...and I was amongst its first employees.

ALTER EGO My new work place is the former Stasi emporium in Lichtenberg, Berlin. We occupy a fortress and lose our way in it. House number seven. Long, bright corridors. Main storeys and mezzanines. Numbered confusingly. I go down one staircase from the third floor and come to the fifth floor. I can't work it out. The doors to the rooms have windows at the top so that daylight reaches the corridors. So somebody says.

EGO This is a beautifully designed building.

ALTER EGO Not a single window can be opened.

EGO Fresh air comes through metal air vents in ribbed glass windows.

ALTER EGO So that no gusts of wind can swirl the files around.

EGO It's quiet in the building.

ALTER EGO We ride paternoster lifts and are warned that it's easy to get lost in the



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branching corridors...

EGO ...and amongst the mezzanines.

ALTER EGO We're given strict instructions. For our own safety. Never go further than the visible end of your corridor. We go further. We conquer this place. Step by step. I visit the archives, its heart. And I stand amongst countless files, which ride paternoster lifts. Like us.

EGO And now. Now it starts. We set to. The emporium is deserted when we move in, the rooms are abandoned. Nobody is there anymore. I enter my new office. I sit on a wooden chair with a frayed cushioned seat. On my desk. A tea cup, in which lies a dried out teabag, a wooden ruler and a chewed pencil.

ALTER EGO Somebody used to sit there who drank tea, had a wooden ruler and chewed on his pencil.

EGO And dried flowers at the window.

ALTER EGO A colleague tried to bring them back to life.

EGO He brought the flowers back to life.

ALTER EGO That's how it started. For months I read files and verified things.

EGO Until I knew how they think. How they thought. How they acted.

ALTER EGO Until I knew what I wanted to show.

EGO Until I'd made a picture – and when I'd made the picture I made an exhibition once more.

ALTER EGO I brought something to light.

EGO And at some point I read my file. I expected more. Perhaps I thought they'd know something about me that I didn't know myself. Whatever. They knew how I think, they knew my affectations.

ALTER EGO They had asked the neighbours; is she polite, is she impolite, what does she do on bank holidays?...No, she doesn't hang out a flag, she doesn't take part in any work efforts. She doesn't toe the line. Unreliable. And then there was a comment concerning my flight abroad.

EGO "She is capable of hijacking a plane."

ALTER EGO They knew more than me. About me.