

# **Cordula Simon. How to sleep**

Novel

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*Night:*

*The period between those moments in the evening and morning  
in which the centre of the solar disc is situated six degrees  
below the horizon.*

(Decree of the Federal Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology  
and of the Federal Minister for National Defence and Sport  
concerning the regulation of air traffic 2010

Rules of the air 2010 – LVR 2010 paragraph 2 no. 45)

They would have to get rid of the corpse. They both knew it, Rob probably knew it too, and one could assume that even the corpse must know it.

“But how?”

“The bedcover, wrap the body in the bedcover.”

The soft synthetic duvet was large enough to enfold the entire corpse.

“Now is good, now is ideal, the city is deserted, everyone is watching the meteoroid.” The Event would save them, the Event would save them all, the meteoroid with its momentousness was the saviour they needed. It was almost like it used to be, when work carried on around the clock all across Lightraff.

“The nearest rubbish bins are on the other side of the road, in the small alleyway without a name.” Perhaps the alleyway did have a name, but nobody knew it and there were no metal signs fixed to the buildings. Just the fact that the alleyway was so tiny, so insignificant that it didn’t need a name seemed to make the whole undertaking a little safer.

“No, the ones on the other side of the green behind the house are nearer.”

“Sure?”

“Yes, sure.”

“I mean: are you sure that we shouldn’t just set fire to the corpse?”

“First we put it in the bin, then we set fire to the bin.”

The rubbish bin and especially the bedcover would burn beautifully.

“How about we take everything to the slaughterhouse. Throw it in one of the machines.” Schreiber’s former workplace. In Koslov’s bar or Haye’s office it wouldn’t be possible to turn a corpse into gelatine, just like that.

“Are you crazy? That’s on the other side of town. And how do we get in there? And anyway, all of this... it shouldn’t have happened.”

“All of what? Of course this shouldn’t have happened, but why *all of this*?”

“Lightraff.”

All of that.

“So that’s all my soul consists of?” Koslov asked unenthusiastically, raising his eyebrows and simultaneously drawing his hand away, as the customer on the other side of the bar took a sip of his drink. Koslov wasn’t very keen on people seeking physical contact, but it seemed here in Lightraff nobody could get enough of it, and the customer’s hand had steadily crept closer. Now Koslov nervously drummed his fingers on the wood. It had been a long day. Only a few hours ago, Koslov had wiped the tables, briefly stretched with arms spread wide, and another customer, who had since swiftly scarpered, had taken this as an invitation to hug him, until Koslov roughly pushed him away.

Perhaps the customers were confused about who he was and no longer knew that such interactions were unwelcome in the bar anyway. Perhaps none of them recognised Koslov – he’d had his long hair shorn off the day before and had returned to work with a clean cut. The supervisor had immediately started cursing when he caught sight of Koslov: “Not another new bloody trainee. Oh well, whatever. Can’t turn down free labour. The long-haired idiot who looks like a girl will show you the ropes.” He turned, seemingly to address Koslov, and said to the empty space: “Make sure the new guy doesn’t mess anything up.” Perhaps all the other customers were making the same mistake. The one with the hug was a regular, after all. That must have been shortly after eight. People came to drink so terribly early, and then got so terribly clingy. It must be the shift work that made them all like that: clingy drinkers in search of a dark place in which to hole up. Here it was always night. The bar deserved its name: Darkraff. Every two weeks, there was a party that lasted for three 8-hour shifts, so that all workers and employees had the opportunity to celebrate.

Koslov rubbed his eyes. He wondered whether he should go outside to smoke, or at least to pretend to smoke, but harsh sunlight wasn’t going to help either. The nocturnal glare of the refinery on the city’s outskirts caused the same kind of unease. If only one could hide away somewhere. Koslov had been holding the same cigarette between his fingers for months. Smokers attracted disapproval in Lightraff. The customer at the bar asked if Koslov had a Lightraff account and Koslov nodded – you could prevent an account being set up, but without one you had no access to most of Lightraff’s amenities. You couldn’t even use the swimming pool. The customer declared that sore eyes came from sitting in front of a computer for too long. This led Koslov to shake his head, which in turn caused a cold sensation at the back of his neck because his hair was now short. Koslov hadn’t been in the

internet café for ages. The customer commented that it was good not to spend too much time in front of a computer and bad to have an account at all, as the company then always knew where you were, even though one had nothing to hide of course – this the customer said more loudly – it was none of the company’s business. Koslov was annoyed that someone had just gone to the toilet, as it presented a last resort for escaping from such customers. A bastion. Nobody cherished the moments of solitude in the bar as much as Koslov did. The company always knew where you were anyway: in Lightraff. Even the Lightraff card continuously informed the city authorities of your whereabouts whenever it was used.

Koslov reached for the tray to clear the tables and felt something cold crawl down his leg. He jumped back, reaching for the cold something with alarm and dropping the tray as a result, but the cold something had already completed its journey through his trouser leg: it was a coin. Koslov had a hole in his trouser pocket. It was hard to know how long the coin had been there. It must be a relic from the time when his grandmother sold warm wine and spirits at the cemetery. People still paid with real metal there. Or at least they had done when Koslov moved away. Koslov couldn’t even say how long ago that was. “Another cup of tea, Mrs Manenko?” Koslov still knew how to treat customers from his time at the cemetery. One day was much like any other. Months or years barely made a difference.

Just then, the supervisor entered the bar again. Koslov often wondered what he got up to all day, when he slept and where he lived, as he would come by at all times of day. Sometimes he’d check the accounts, but mainly just the staff, and it made no difference whether Koslov worked from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon, or from four in the afternoon until twelve o’clock at night, or from midnight until morning, the supervisor kept turning up. Koslov straightened up and decided it might be best to look for the runaway coin later. A relic.

The supervisor informed his staff – there were two of them as always – that Happy Hour would soon start. Happy Hour happened three times a day and did not denote a time during which drinks were available at a reduced price, but rather a time during which the workers of Lightraff currently not at work arrived at the bar in greater numbers to get drunk. He emphasised that they should be more vigilant in spotting customers who’d had enough, and that they shouldn’t let them have any more, but should send them home instead. Only a living drinker is a good drinker. Meyer, who was working with Koslov today, asked him how she might recognise when that time had come, and the supervisor pointed at Koslov: “When they start hitting on her over there, that’s when it’s time.” He finished by warning Koslov that it really was time he stopped insulting the regulars, and pointed at the overweight refectory

manager who came here every day after her shift. Apart from the Darkraff, the internet café and the refectory there was nowhere to go in Lightraff, and alcohol was only served here. Koslov didn't understand what he meant at first. Only the day before, the supervisor had said to him: "Stop giving that fat slag so many free tasters." The refectory manager always asked to try everything and then pretended to have trouble deciding. Eventually she'd have about twenty half-measures of spirits inside her before ordering. The supervisor claimed he had never said anything of the sort. Koslov swallowed and the supervisor asked: "Koslov, what's the weather doing next week?" Koslov replied: "The forecast says fine." Koslov always listened to the weather forecast. Without sun you cannot sunbathe. The supervisor headed for the door, picked up the coin from the tiled floor on his way out and left feeling content. Happy Hour could start, and they came, they came in droves, just as Koslov and Meyer were used to. Haye also entered the Darkraff.

## II

Everyone who knew Haye, even fleetingly, knew that he wasn't a man for marriage; everyone apart from his girlfriend Valentina, who had a different opinion on the matter. Valentina, who had got away with joining Lightraff without a surname. "Valentina, like Madonna", she had declared when she registered in Lightraff, and Haye was sorry not to have witnessed the occasion and seen the reaction of the official responsible for registration at that time. Must have been a stupid arsehole anyway, he thought. If he'd been in charge, he would have coaxed more information out of her. Though admittedly, he didn't know much more about her either, even now. In any case, for Haye the concept of making a promise was in itself incomprehensible, never mind one that was supposed to last for the rest of one's life. He certainly couldn't remember many promises that he'd actually kept. Fuck it, he thought, you can always move away. Valentina, however, often managed to get him to promise this or that because he wanted to sleep with her. Not that he was ever very meticulous about keeping his promises. This resulted in theatrical spectacles for the inhabitants of Lightraff: angry scenes in full public view. He was well aware of the rumours about him – that he was a typical good-for-nothing who beats his girlfriend, and that she was of course protecting him. But he couldn't care less about the impression he made on those who witnessed these dramas. He generally felt himself to be in a superior position, mainly because he had an administrative job and the company depended on him. At least that's how he saw it. He wasn't some nobody who had to earn their money with physical labour in the refinery. He was fluent in three

languages and supposedly fluent in a further three, although this wasn't quite the case and luckily was never put to the test.

The Organisational Apparatus, as his department was called, was central to the functioning of the city. His fling with Valentina he mainly regarded as a game of erotic provocation, which in some ways was probably true. He preferred women who occasionally threw crockery at him, only to then skilfully miss him, to the boring specimens. The more energy they invested in their anger, the more atrociously he behaved. Now Valentina had rented a new room in the city so that she would no longer have to share one of the dormitories behind the laundry with her colleagues. She had saved up enough to pay the deposit – an undertaking in which Hays had played a significant role, as she always let him pay for both of them when they went out. Hays also felt certain that someone in the housing department of the Organisational Apparatus must have made a mistake, as the letting out of apartments was a matter for the city. Surely all properties were owned by the city. In any case, this room could only be moved into once it had been painted, and in a moment of weakness, or at least of moderate indifference, Hays had promised to help her. Of course he'd already forgotten this when he first set foot in her new place, and was consequently surprised when she shoved a paint roller into his hand. For Valentina, the promise that Hays would help her meant that Hays would be doing the work by himself. Besides, paint rollers were supposed to be a matter for the repair department. Surely the citizens of Lightraff shouldn't have to get their hands dirty. Hays waved the bottle of wine in front of her and asked: "Where is the bed?" This led her to state that he could obviously read her mind, as the bed also still needed to be lugged into the flat. Not that she had an actual, proper bed. It was a sofa bed that she had bought on the cheap off a colleague who wanted to leave Lightraff but didn't go anywhere in the end, and now presumably slept on the floor. She'd paid for it in Lightraff's own city currency – no, the colleague was definitely not going anywhere. Hays reluctantly took off his jacket, which was immediately commandeered by a black and white cat which proceeded to lick its bottom.

"You have a cat?" he asked. "Since when do you have a cat?" But Valentina didn't answer, as she had already worked herself into a frenzy about the notion that he really was a mind reader. He supposed that he was simply good at guessing in the way that illusionists are good at guessing. The conversation ended with her shrieking that he should stop deceiving her and pretending it wasn't the case, and if he didn't finally admit that he could read her thoughts she was going to cut his throat while he slept, causing Hays to comment on how reassuring it was that they never slept together but only shagged each other. He laughed, upon which she reached into the paint pot and threw white paint at him. She invariably

responded to his taunts. Haye just shook his head with the natural equanimity she sought to rid him of with increasing frequency, and called her perhaps the craziest woman he had ever met. But only perhaps, to which she replied by shouting “Challenge accepted!” She tried to run outside, but he managed to grab her by the shoulders just in time. He shook her as though rattling at a door and kissed her on the neck while she turned her face away. She calmed down again and Haye suggested she could make herself useful and change into some old clothes in order to help him paint. Valentina disappeared to get changed, but didn’t return, as Haye had expected, in a worn-out shirt – he didn’t even know whether she owned such a thing, he had only ever seen her well dressed or naked, even though she had a tendency to destroy her smart outfits in the course of their rows, only to demand financial compensation from him later on. She entered the room in a wedding dress and, while Haye was still wondering where she could have found the money to pay for it, she threw herself onto the floor and declared wailing and screaming that, since he was behaving like this, she would never put this dress on for him, she would rather die. Or even better, he would die. She would finally use the pistol that her father had given her when she moved out. Then she ran around the room as if looking for the pistol, but Haye intercepted her and forced her, still sobbing, onto the floor with the words: “According to federal law, wives who shoot their husbands are not entitled to a widow’s pension.”

He felt her breath hot against his ear: “Then I will kill myself.” Then she kissed him, still in tears, and he was glad to have averted disaster. He pulled down her panties and as she opened his trousers, her hand already reaching inside, she asked: “So you really will marry me?” And he replied breathlessly: “But of course.” Valentina’s cat, whose fur had also been embellished by the paint, slunk around them and, unlike the rest of Lightraff, did not seem surprised that Haye was now engaged.

### III

Schreiber crept into bed. He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He could still feel Koslov's warmth. He heard the coffee cup being set down in the sink and Koslov leaving the flat. There was a time when the warmth of a stranger's body in his own bed would have been repulsive to him. But he was so tired. Already, he couldn't care less. Slowly, lethargically he stuffed an ear plug into each ear. It was quieter in the country. At least that's how he remembered it. Koslov had switched the dishwasher on and then left for work. Had he switched off the Tricof? At least he was alone now. Only once had someone entered the flat during Schreiber's allocated bedtime. Schreiber had forced himself not to open his eyes. Although he couldn't hear any sounds, protected as he was by the ear plugs, he knew that someone was in the room. It must have been Haye, he thought. Koslov would never disturb another person's peace. For that was what it was: disturbing, if something was moving around the room. Except for Rob, Schreiber was used to Rob by now. Rob was so consistent in all his movements, he didn't disturb him. A person, on the other hand, would always disturb him. Only Rob's sound remained unfamiliar to him. A steady whirring, every few minutes, just like the vole deterrents used in the country. They were a pest, those creatures. Before falling asleep, Schreiber also thought about the dirty washing. He would take the box to the automat tomorrow. A very convenient facility. Pity they didn't have anything like that in the country. You fed the dirty washing into the appliance and clean washing came out. A sheet for a sheet, a jumper for a jumper. He counted items of clothing to help him get to sleep. Trousers into the hatch, trousers out of the hatch. Shirt into the hatch, shirt out of the hatch. A privilege enjoyed by the workers of Lightraff. Tomorrow he would be able to sleep in a freshly made bed. He didn't use to attach any importance to this, and it seemed the others didn't attach any importance to it either. Or they didn't have the time to take care of it. Schreiber didn't even know what Koslov did. What was his job? As for Haye, he was sure he couldn't care less whether the bed was made once a week or once a year. Ilse wouldn't like Haye. Schreiber hadn't met Haye very often, but often enough. All of these things he thought in the few moments before falling asleep. Then he thought again about the automat that swallowed his washing. Lightraff did offer many conveniences, despite the hard work in the slaughterhouse. Schreiber liked cleanliness. And he never spilt anything himself. Schreiber had learnt to be tidy, for that was the only way to avoid conflict with others. He had learnt that from Ilse. Ilse had taught him how to conduct himself, and Schreiber instinctively hoped that the others had also received such instruction. Schreiber also only accepted Rob as a

necessary means for maintaining cleanliness. Like the blood wipers in the slaughterhouse. He chided himself. He had resolved never to think about work before going to sleep. He needed to find something nice to think about. Schreiber concentrated on the fact that the next morning he would be able to stand in the shower and wash away the warmth and smell of the bed. There was always plenty of warm water in Lightraff. It didn't bother him that there wasn't a bath in the flat. Baths were over-valued, he thought. When he'd fallen asleep in the bath at Ilse's in the country, he'd often woken up with a start, full of fear that a giant octopus was about to drag him under. Often, the water had gone as cold as the sea. If the water was still warm, he sometimes woke with the same fear, especially if Ilse climbed into the bath with him. Tomorrow he would take the memo foil with him when he left the flat. He would add up how much money he had saved. Ilse would be glad when she didn't have to wear her sister's old clothes any more. Ilse loved fashion. Fashion was changeable. He could buy her a new hat. The Lightraff automats were immune to fashion. If he had reached his target figure for the first stage he would have some good news to give her at the internet café. As he thought about Ilse and the chat room, he finally fell asleep. He immediately woke up again. Hays stumbled through the door. Schreiber forced himself to keep his eyes closed. Hays peeled off his shirt, planted himself in front of the kitchenette at the other end of the room and began a heated argument with the microwave. Schreiber's ear plugs were no match. He sat up and removed the synthetic pulp from his ears. Now Hays directed his anger at Schreiber, drunkenly bawling at him, as previously at the microwave, wanting to know why he hadn't fed the cat. It took Schreiber a few minutes to get through to Hays that they didn't have a cat. A cat, that's the last thing they needed. Hays walked over to the bed, patted Schreiber on the head, said "My bed" and dropped himself down next to Schreiber. Schreiber was outraged. Such an inappropriately intimate gesture. He wanted to reproach Hays. This won't be your bed for some time yet, mate. But then he caught sight of the alarm clock on the bedside table. Schreiber had obviously forgotten to set it. He blushed. Hays was right, it was already his bed. Schreiber felt embarrassed. He always endeavoured to act correctly, not like a country bumpkin. He crawled out from under the cover. This turned out to be difficult, as Hays was weighing it down. Hays snuggled up to the pillow. Schreiber crept into the bathroom as quietly as possible. It had been a gloomy day thought Schreiber as he looked into the mirror. A glance out of the window confirmed the impression – the murky evening light was streaked with grimy fog.

#### IV

The rain poured from the sky as if the latter was feeling exuberantly generous. Koslov shook the water from his windcheater as he entered the Darkraff. A rain-drenched cat was positioned outside the front door. It sat there with its wet eyebrows, so far as cats have any, raised in an expression of sadness because nobody had taken it inside to rub it dry. Lightraff was a largely animal-free city. Nor were there any strays, street performers, beggars or homeless people. Not in the clean, shiny white Lightraff. A road sweeper circumnavigated the cat. The sweeper must have perceived it as a permanent fixture. Koslov looked at the clock: just in time. Everyone knew that if you were down to work with Winter, there was a good chance of being grassed up if you arrived late. Winter shoved the cup he was holding under Koslov's nose. Koslov screamed. The cup contained a huge spider which Winter had just caught. He laughed: "You shriek like the Schulz girl. I wouldn't have thought that of you." He told Koslov that the spider was called Betsy and that it lived here and that he would tell the supervisor that Koslov had arrived late if he harmed a single one of those fat little hairs on its fat little legs. Koslov protested and said he hadn't arrived late, but Winter just laughed at him again. Koslov put an apron on and started to wipe the bar, while Winter held a tête-à-tête with the spider, apparently to brief the spider about the lie of the land here in the Darkraff. This annoyed Koslov even more, as the conversation went on a long time – long enough for Koslov to dry the glasses and arrange them on the shelves, polish the taps, collect up the remaining glasses from around the bar and put them in the dishwasher, and sweep the entrance area. Just as Winter finally showed signs of starting on some work the supervisor entered the Darkraff. He walked up and down along the bar a couple of times and finally said in a loud and stern voice: "Koslov." Koslov, puzzled by the supervisor's odd behaviour, answered "Yes?". What followed was the dismissal of Koslov, on the grounds that Koslov had supplied him, the supervisor, with misinformation and therefore had to be sacked. Upon closer inquiry it turned out that the misinformation had consisted of Koslov passing on the weather forecast, which had failed to come true in line with expectations. Koslov shook his head and expressed a level of disbelief appropriate to the situation, but the supervisor remained firm. In times of staff cut backs, he said, it was every employee's own responsibility to consider their behaviour carefully. Koslov should go home, he ordered. While the supervisor waited for Koslov to hand over his apron Winter betrayed Betsy by throwing her in the sink, followed by soap and vast amounts of water. The only customer in the Darkraff, the one who had recently tried to analyse Koslov's soul, took a sip of his beer

and now looked Koslov in the eye. Just before, he had acted as though oblivious to the situation, perhaps not wanting to attract attention. As Koslov pulled his wet jacket back on again, the customer said: “You I’m not worried about. I’d be more worried if it was Schulz. Though she does always land on her feet, just not the two, more likely on all four.”

Koslov was to go home. That was all that was left of this day. Koslov had only started working in Lightraff because his previous job had required a commute which was no longer affordable after the cost of the fuel for getting to work had risen beyond what Koslov was being paid. In Lightraff you could share a flat in close proximity to your place of work, and there were plenty of jobs. That’s what it had said in the brochure.