

# Wolf Haas

# Young Man

A novel

Sample translation by Alexandra Roesch

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# 1

I was four years old when I broke my leg for the first time. My big brother, together with his bigger friends and their even bigger brothers, had built a ski jump. In order to build a ski jump, you organised a shovel and shovelled snow into a big pile. Then you stomped around on it. Then the best skier skied down and jumped the farthest. Then the second best jumped the second farthest. Last one to go was my brother. And then me.

I squatted down to minimise the aerodynamic resistance, letting the air whoosh over your head like the badly placed hook of an overly eager heavyweight boxing adversary. You were boxer and ski jumper at the same time. The higher your speed, the further the jump. That was a clear correlation. I bent my head down so far that I could look backwards between my knees. The world was most interesting when looked at backwards between your knees. But I did not have time to contemplate that. All that mattered was to look up at the right moment. The last possible moment. All I had for analysing the approach to the jump was intuition, audio input and the sensation of the hairs on the back of my neck. And the eyes in the back of my head. I could not let the act of looking up slow me down until that moment when I straightened up and the air would become a cushion that carried me onwards.

But when I did look up I was seized by unforeseen reflections. It was only part of the truth that you built a ski jump by shovelling snow into a pile and stomping around until it was shaped into an elegant ramp for taking off. The other part of this particular truth was shaped into a hole next to the jump. After all, the snow that was shovelled into a heap had to come from somewhere. Right next to the high pile of snow was a deep lack of snow. Right next to the ski jump yawned its shadowy abyss. My gaze, intended to pull me up above the jutting ramp and into the distance, was drawn to the dark pit that was the price we paid for our excavations.

It was two days until my fourth birthday when I came to these conclusions. I, the world-famous ski jumper, sped down the snowy ramp, lifted my gaze, and realised the following: if you give too much thought to the ramp-shaped pit next to the ramp, an invisible hand will grab the tips of your skis and pull them down towards said pit.

Later I came to again in the snowy ditch, crying, wondering at the gawping skiers gathered at the edge of the pit to marvel at me. My screaming must have attracted them. Some of the faces were familiar, others I saw for the first time. Even Tscho came by at a tearing pace and braked hard to look down at me, intrigued. He observed the glittering ice crystals of the powdery snow as they settled on me, and I in turn observed Tscho through the fireworks of powdery snow he had created above me by swerving to brake. Tscho was the best skier outside television and the oldest brother of our jumping group's record holder.

'See if he can still put weight on his leg!' he told his little brother.

Tscho was five years older than his brother, who was six years older than I. He was already doing an apprenticeship. That's why it was understood by everyone around that he couldn't negotiate with me directly.

'He's already tried,' replied his brother, the mediator of my pain.

'And?' Tscho asked after having snorted snot back up his nose.

'No go. He falls over.'

Tscho took off without comment. Either his lunch break was over, or he saw my furious mother come stomping towards us. From the depth of my snowy grave I observed his elegant skating steps which he employed to gather speed even as he slipped his hands into the loops of

his ski poles. According to the grapevine, he already had a girlfriend. And had tuned his moped to go at forty-five miles.

My mother carried me home, the doctor put my leg in a cast, and neighbours and aunts gave me chocolate: *Mars* and *Nuts* and *Milky Way*, but also *Bounty* and ordinary *Milka*. Condemned to immobility by the cast and showered with sweets, I gained weight. Like a boxer moving from featherweight straight to heavyweight without having sent a single opponent to the ground in welter, I displayed a high degree of discipline in eating my way past light heavy and middle weight straight to the top class.

People said: no wonder he always breaks something, he's such a fat little kid. The 'always' part referred to the fact that I marched through the following winters, too, with my leg in a cast. Plastered up from hip to toe, I hobbled through life covered in my schoolmates' autographs and made an interesting discovery. If you have an itch underneath the cast, you cannot scratch it. But at some point, it'll stop anyway.

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## 2

Eight years, four plastered-up legs and a metric ton of chocolate later I started jobbing at a filling station during the summer holidays. I was only twelve, but since I also was a head too tall, twenty kilos too heavy and way too smart for my own good, I filled my red Shell coat pretty well.

I filled diesel into the artic lorries driven by taciturn drivers on their way to Tehran and into the tractor driven by bow-legged farmers, regular into the Ford Escorts of daring trainee craftsmen and into the Renaults of glamorous hairstylists, and super into the brand-new sports cars of drunk innkeepers' sons while their fathers rolled towards the diesel dispensers, gently bouncing along thanks to their grey Mercedes limousines' superb suspension.

I could tell who was a speed-merchant and who was a level-headed driver by the degree to which wasps and flies were squashed against the windscreen. Some of the insects had practically melted into the glass, and you had to scrub until you were blue in the face to get them off. The real expertise of a filling station attendant, however, was displayed in the act of pulling the squeegee across the pane. If this left streaks, it was an embarrassment for all eternity. And if there was water trickling past the pane onto the paint, you could count on being kicked home in a bucket.

I recognised the Tehran drivers by way of the additional fuel tanks. Those guys never knew whether they would make it to a filling station in time. Tscho had exchanged his tuned moped with a 350 horsepower Scania truck. While I filled 400 litres into his tank and 800 litres into the additional tanks, my boss came waddling along and shared an unfiltered cigarette with Tscho, standing right underneath the sign 'Smoking strictly prohibited'.

The boss was the coolest smoker ever, including TV. He held his unfiltered *Austria Drei* cigarette between thumb and pinkie because he had lost the three middle fingers in the war. 'Forgot them in Scandinavia,' he cackled, sounding like a goat, which suited his small, wiry frame and bowlegs. And his bald pate covered in stubbles, which he always ran his hand across when he laughed, perhaps in order to tickle his palm. The pliers formed by his thumb and pinkie were ideal for opening stuck filler caps. Once I had failed to pry such a stuck cap open, and the customer had had a go and got hands and shirt dirty, it was time to call the boss. Just seeing him approach in his fast waddling gait, this little machine in knickerbockers, spread an air of indomitable optimism. This filler cap, too, would submit to the power of his finger pliers. Given how effortlessly he magicked open the cap, it looked a bit exaggerated, the way he leant far back in his typical cap opening position. But this was due to the necessity of keeping the *Austria Drei* dangling from the corner of his mouth as far away from the tank as possible.

In between such emergencies he often disappeared for hours in his house, which was built right next to the filling station. He knew he could rely on me. On my third day he had put me in charge of the money. I was a filling station attendant of world renown, reeling off my mantra of, 'Oil, water, air, all good? Battery all good?' This question, asked a thousand times, soon became like a physical part of me. An automatic vibrating of my vocal chords. The only thing that bugged me, massively so, was the high pitch when I said this as my voice hadn't broken yet. I lowered my voice as much as I could but that only caused problems with a sore throat so that I could barely ask, 'Oil, water, air, all good? Battery all good?'

The customers respectfully addressed me as 'young man'. Apart from those complete morons who called me 'Miss'. How blind could you be to think I was a 'Miss', just because of my hair. It was 1973, after all. Or perhaps it was because of the red Shell coat I wore for work. With the yellow shell right above my heart. I gave this a considerable amount of thought and then realised it was meant as a compliment. I was just too efficient as a filling station attendant to have such a high-pitched voice. The customers had to draw their conclusions. According to one's

best judgment, this attendant could not possibly be a twelve-and-a-half-year-old boarding school pupil with a blond Beatles hairstyle who was just jobbing here for the summer. It seemed far more probable to the short-sighted customer that this had to be a sixteen or seventeen-year-old 'Miss' who was filling the red Shell coat in a promising way. From that perspective, it was a compliment for me.

The boss's goatish cackle never failed to accompany someone calling me 'Miss'. You have to have your hair cut like me, he said, running his hand lovingly across his stubbled pate. Or he just pinched me in the neck with his thumb-pinkie-pliers, in a consoling sort of way, which signified as much as 'forget about it'. The boss was okay.

Once I had knocked off work, I enjoyed the consequences of my parents having been kicked out of their old flat while I was away at school. The new flat didn't get any sun, but it had a bathtub. I wondered how on earth I should have been able to get my hands clean without soaking in the tub for hours. Although the flat was right above the fire station, we never heard the two fire engines below us. But we did hear the siren on the roof above us. Even before it started wailing, there was a rattling noise that only we could hear and that made us break into sweat. During the day, it was bearable. But just before the last day of the holidays the siren went off in the middle of the night, and I sat bolt upright in bed while a drunk motorist drowned in the creek.

Summer was over, and I had to go back to school. The boarding school didn't have a fire station, but it did have a church. I tried to join the singing in the lower registers but couldn't reach that far down. Perhaps something had gone wrong when I'd had my tonsils out. My mother had suffered from constant angina pectoris, and so she had her sons' tonsils removed at the age of three. She herself still had her tonsils. Her throat problems had improved greatly after my operation. I didn't even try to sing in the upper registers. And so, I made an interesting discovery. The smartest thing in life is not to sing at all but just to move your lips.

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### 3

Luckily that year saw the outbreak of the oil crisis. A new type of winter holidays was introduced so as to save oil for heating schools. The energy holidays. I did not have any time off, as during the energy holidays the filling station was buzzing with business. Due to the ludicrous increase in prices, many people didn't fill their tank any more but came all the more often instead. Others filled their tank as soon as they had used up one litre, fearing that soon there might not be any fuel any more.

Snow and cold did not improve working conditions. You had to clean the windscreen faster than the water took to freeze. The filler caps were frozen tight so often that only the boss and his finger pliers could deal with them. My own fingers were well on their way to share the Scandinavian fate of my boss's. Then I would be able to open the filler caps effortlessly, at long last. But no matter how hard we worked, people were ticked off. Firstly, because everything had become so expensive. Secondly because of the car-free days.

Every windscreen was graced with three letters stuck to it. 'MON' for those who had their car-free day on Mondays. 'TUE' for those who preferred making their journeys by foot on Tuesdays. Most people, however, had 'WED'. I thought about this a lot while polishing the windscreens and came to the following conclusion: in times of crisis, human beings drift towards the middle. Surrounded by all the other days of the week, you couldn't go wrong with a Wednesday. Just like during school outings I walked in the middle, because at the rear you could get lost and at the front, a teacher might draw you into a conversation.

The only topic for conversations at the filling station was the fuel price. How high would it still climb? More than six shillings? More than seven? Hardly anyone gave me tips any more, except perhaps for those who still thought I was a 'Miss'. Even though I was thirteen now. Despite the energy crisis, I had grown yet a little bigger and rounder. At school we'd been taught the first law of thermodynamics, and it seemed that in order to balance the energy budget, the worldwide crisis had pushed my physical growth.

'Keep the change, Miss,' those idiots would say and give me two shillings extra. I tried to establish whether there were more of these morons who thought I was a girl amongst the 'MON' drivers than for example the 'THU' or 'FRI' ones. 'SAT' and 'SUN' were the exception anyway. But some people had a second sticker besides the one with their day of the week. The 'S'. Whoever had an 'S' was really important. Special dispensation. If you had an 'S' it meant you were a doctor or a firefighter or just generally irreplaceable. They were allowed to drive on their car-free days. But only on official business! Woe to those who drove on private business, they were fined just the same as anybody else. But there were some with an 'S' that made people say, why does he need an 'S'? What does the director of the tourist office need an 'S' for?, people complained, or the chapel master. The priest, well yes, that was accepted, because of the last rites.

I didn't care about the chapel master. For me it was a particular mystery why Tscho of all people had an 'S' stuck on his windscreen. It was almost ten years ago that Tscho had observed me and my broken leg from the edge of the snow pit. But he still would not speak to me. He would stand next to the diesel dispenser with the boss and smoke while I polished the windscreen of his *Opel Kadett*. He could drive his truck whenever he wanted, that was obvious. But how had he got the 'S' for his own *Opel Kadett*? That was hard to comprehend. Tscho was a cool guy, but surely not someone who had an 'S' dispensation for his *Kadett*. On the contrary. The mayor and the local police didn't think half as much of Tscho as the young crowd in the village did. Especially the female members of the young crowd. Presumably it was owed to his upper lip that the girls were so attracted to him. Where normal human beings' lips just puckered a little, in Tscho's case this was more like a ski jump ramp with a valley in between. That's why

Tscho never had to talk much, his upper lip alone was a question as to whether you were asking for a slap in the face.

However, that was no justification for an 'S', not by a far shot. I suspected an unauthorised 'S'. Tscho would be someone to pull that off. He'd had his run-ins with the police, more than once. Once he had even been caught without a number plate. He was driving a wreck on wheels from the scrapyards, compiled from spare parts, noisily losing fender and exhaust pipe, and had the cheek to tell them it wasn't worth getting it registered for the few kilometres to his garage. The police turned two blind eyes. Me, I had to pay because of the light on my bike. Someone like Tscho went scott-free for driving without a number plate. But I wondered what would happen if he got caught with this unauthorised special dispensation. I had heard that that was equivalent to forgery of documents.

To the left of the sign saying 'Smoking strictly prohibited', Tscho stood and smoked, and to the right of the sign saying 'Smoking strictly prohibited', the boss stood and smoked. They were looking in my direction as they smoked but that didn't mean to say they saw me. They looked into the distance behind me – probably towards Tehran. Or towards the female tourists who hadn't travelled from not quite so far distant countries in order to have a shag with Tscho. Even though it was hopeless to try to hear anything while the fuel pump was in operation, I concentrated so hard on their conversation that the water froze on the windscreen.

So, I had to start the process of de-icing and the horrible task of scraping and scratching. An opaque layer of ice had formed across the entire windscreen, just not on top of Tscho's 'TUE' and 'S', as if the criminal energy exuded by the fake special dispensation had trapped some heat. I gave a lot of thought to correlations such as this.

I leant over the passenger side and started scraping a patch in the middle of the windscreen free of ice, working my way outwards in concentric circles. It was only once I had freed an area roughly the size of a steering wheel that I realised there was somebody sitting in the car. Initially, though, I thought this apparition was just a hallucination. Caused by the cold or by the fuel fumes. Firstly: why had I not seen this person before the windscreen froze over, secondly: how could an unearthly smile such as this even exist? I had never seen such a smile. Or such a face. A face that betrayed, without a doubt, the recognition and appreciation of my dedication to scraping the ice and cleaning the windscreen. That smile empathised with me in a way that made it impossible for me not to empathise with that smile. Well, empathising, that might have still been okay. My life would have continued on a normal path if I had just been empathising. If I had not fallen head over brain in love. But it was too late for that.

Tscho and the boss were just about to disappear into the cramped cash room that we called 'shop'. The shop consisted of one shelf with bottles of oil, and another with spark plugs, windscreen wipers, filler caps and light bulbs. And instead of the freezer box that blocked the way in summer, there now were snow chains next to the table with the cash register. The truck drivers didn't pay cash, however, they just signed their delivery slips, accompanied by the boss's casual 'sign here, please'. I made use of their temporary absence to conclude a contract. Even though just a few weeks ago, after giving the matter extensive thought, I had realised that there was no devil, I now entered into a contract with him by scratching my invisible signature onto the windscreen, just in case. How else should I ever be able to steal this woman from Tscho?

The situation was crystal clear. I said to myself, what is my purpose on this earth, and why should Tscho have everything and I nothing. I was still deep into arguing and signing and scraping ice and staring at the princess behind ice and glass when Tscho left the shop and came jogging over. Tscho did everything at high speed. His regular way of speaking sounded as if he was laying into you, and his regular way of walking was like a running start to jump at your throat.

But Tscho didn't hurt me. I even saw him smile for the first time ever, him and his upper lip. As he approached, his companion, who had only just appeared to me framed in a halo created by the ice-free area, wound down the window, beamed at Tscho and called out to him in that marvellous dialect of two villages down the road: 'Leave a tip for the little Miss!'

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## 4

The energy week went by quickly. Back at boarding school I decided to get rid of all my superfluous kilos by the summer. So that when Tscho's girlfriend came to the filling station again, she would not recognise me. At first. And then she would say, what's up with you, are you ill, you don't look so good, you've lost a lot of weight.

For six months I focused on moving more quickly and eating more slowly. When I started my second summer at the filling station, I was already fourteen. On the first day of the holidays, full of hope, I stepped onto our bathroom scales. I was thirteen years and seven months old and one metre eighty tall. I was taller than my big brother, our mother said, even though he was taller than me by six centimetres. But given our respective age. The scales were orange, a cheerful colour that made me feel optimistic. I sucked in my stomach and hoped for a number below 80. The golden rule. Height in centimetres minus 100. Ideally less than that. However, the cheerful scales were having a bad day and showed 93 kilos.

The needle was unwavering, did not budge a bit. But below the needle, the disk with the kilos was rotating mercilessly. The kilos were spinning at an insane speed as if preparing to launch the disk into the air. The kilos shot up even faster than the price at the fuel pump did, which these days was at a speed that rendered the price illegible.

I was probably in shock, for while I stared at the number 93, a memory from way, way back surfaced. My mother had been given a weighing booklet when I was born. But she had never made any entries. The book was empty, except for one sentence. Somebody had written, in a spidery kid's scrawl, 'The fat pig already weighs 20 kilos.' The perpetrator had never been found.

The next moment, my spirit returned. I told myself something had to be wrong with the scales. Perhaps they were not properly calibrated. Right beneath the needle there was a little wheel, hidden, where one could set them back to exactly zero in case the dial had slipped. But my superbly thorough inspection did not yield anything. The needle rested bang in the middle of the zero. However, the result could also be falsified if the scales were set on a slant, for example because they rested on a joint between two tiles. But the scales did not sit on a joint. Not on carpet, either. Nor on a drop of water. So, based on the principle that hope dies last, I tried various body positions.

Someone had been expelled from boarding school because he had smuggled in an interesting book called *Kamasutra*, which he had then not hidden well enough. I now tried similarly complicated contortions on the bathroom scales. Starting with a slightly adjusted placement of my feet, moving on to random shifts of weight outwards and asymmetrical experiments which quickly resulted in increasingly wonky body positions, until my acrobatic antics finally knocked me off the scales altogether. And yet, all my kamasutric negotiating of the bathroom scales was in vain. If anything, it resulted in 94 kilos.

Compared with my weight, fuel prices had risen only mildly since the outbreak of the energy crisis. Full of determination, I walked out of the bathroom and told my mother: 'I am going on a diet.'

'But,' my mother exclaimed, 'you are not overweight!'

'I weigh 93 kilos.'

Just like the motorists battled car-free days, my mother put up fierce resistance. 'You are not overweight,' she repeated in a suffering voice, 'you are so tall.'

'One meter eighty.'

'Exactly,' my mother wailed. 'That is tall for your age!'

'I should weigh no more than 80 kilos. Better would be minus ten per cent, so 72. And even better minus fifteen per cent! But I weigh 93.'

'Your bones are heavy,' my mother insisted. She wanted to keep her son safe from the pangs of hunger, which she herself had still suffered after the war and between the wars and before the war and during the war and after the war. 'You'll grow out of it,' she wailed.

She used to be more cheerful. But more or less with every kilo I gained, the frequency of her sighs had increased, not because of my kilos but because the heavy burden of life that was piling up on her shoulders and that answered mainly to one name, that of my father. The fact that he had been committed had not improved things. On the contrary – ever since he was gone, she hardly ever left the flat any more. Probably to balance things out. Or to ensure that we wouldn't be kicked out again.

'But you are not eating too much,' she sang in a despondent key, 'it's just your metabolism,' and then she resumed the chorus again: 'You are not overweight. Perhaps a little tightly packed.'

'I have nine weeks of holidays,' I replied, determined to be outright brutal, 'and I will lose one kilo per week.'

'That's impossible!' my mother gasped in shock, 'you'll get ill!'

But my round face vibrated like an echo of what had been said, tremblingly confirmed my words and trumped any and all protest.

I put on my red work coat and threw myself onto my big brother's ten-gear Peugeot bike; he didn't live at home any more, no, the cowardly pig had scarpered at the first opportunity. At the filling station I told the boss's wife that I would not need lunch this summer and found to my surprise that she just nodded her wordless acceptance. I was so energised by my decision that on that day even my eternal question of 'Oil, water, air, all okay?' came across my lips in a more challenging tone. If a customer defiantly claimed that everything was perfectly alright, I not only barked, 'Battery okay?' but added, 'And we have enough water in the windscreen washer system, do we?' and then brought him to his knees with a sceptical, 'Have you had your brake fluid checked recently?'

That afternoon, Tscho came with his truck. Unaccompanied but wearing a wedding ring. That doesn't mean much, I said to myself. It could be someone else. I told myself that there were many possibilities. In order to silence my inner voice, which knew that it could not possibly be someone else, I asked Tscho, 'You're just back from Tehran?'

Tscho gave a friendly wink, but only because the boss was approaching from behind me. He had to wink right through me in order to greet the boss while pulling Persian cigarettes from his shirt pocket. I scrubbed his windscreen and saw, through the open side window, a photograph of my future bride stuck to the dashboard in a small frame. That actually is an advantage, I realised, fuelled by the intoxicated clarity of my current state of shock. She will soon have had enough of him, time is on my side, I told myself while I waited for the insects on the windscreen to soak up enough of the water I had applied with a soft sponge so that I would be able to scrape them off with the hard sponge. Patience is life's most important skill. And anyway, I had to lose weight first.

When I got home that evening, with black hands and 190 shillings in tips, I was ready to take up the battle, to annihilate the resistance my mother would have built up by then: a lethal backache, a headache of barely bearable intensity, a royal angina pectoris, furious demons on the rampage in her sinuses, accompanied by verbatim repetitions of stories I had heard a hundred times before, about people who had mistreated her, a long time ago and an even longer time ago and after the war and before the war and during the war and after the war. All this could only be healed by me continuing to eat with a good appetite.

But I had underestimated her. When I entered the living room, she seemed changed. She looked up from pieces of paper on which she was writing all kinds of useful information she had picked up from the radio and television during the course of the day, and said in a busy sort of tone, 'You could do the „Slim with Us“ diet.'

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## 5

The presenter of the *Us* show had never done my mother any harm. 'He always looks so friendly,' she said. And there was much useful information to be gathered, which she wrote down, ballpoint pen always at the ready. She had also written down the recipe of the week promoted by 'Slim with Us'.

'Half a chicken breast,' she read out, 'but without the skin, with two medium-sized potatoes, boiled in their skin, no butter, no oil, that's not going to taste of anything.'

'No matter.'

'But where am I going to get a chicken now,' she briefly lapsed into her suffering voice but quickly caught herself like an engine that, despite most ominous noises, reignites at the very last moment, and read on. 'Plus some vegetables, steamed, with half a teaspoon of linseed oil. Where am I supposed to get linseed oil now? Can't you start your diet tomorrow?'

'Okay, but as of tomorrow this is serious.'

'That's all such nonsense, this diet,' she started again, just because I had dropped my guard for an instant. 'You just have to move around a bit more.'

'That's no good.'

I knew all the excuses for not going on a diet. Like all good excuses, they were partly true. Partly I was too fat because I didn't move enough (1,5 per cent), partly because of my predisposition (0,5 per cent), partly because my big brother was so thin (1,2 per cent) and partly because I liked to eat: 96,8 per cent.

'As of tomorrow, this is serious,' I repeated. 'Half a chicken breast and two medium-sized potatoes.'

'I don't like going to the butcher's, that man Maier was rude to me once when I was pregnant with you.'

'Then I will buy the chicken.'

'No, I'll buy it,' my mother sighed. 'But where should I get linseed oil? Here in our village you can't get anything.'

'Then we just leave that out.'

'You would prefer to leave everything out,' she protested.

'I have to lose weight! Chicken breast without the skin and two medium-sized potatoes, that's not too bad, I'm not going to starve.'

'And steamed vegetables with half a spoon of linseed oil,' my mother insisted.

'Teaspoon.'

'What?'

'Half a teaspoon of linseed oil.'

'Half a teaspoon,' she protested, full of derision. 'They might as well write: a drop.' She heaved a heavy sigh. 'You don't even know the worst of it.'

'And what's that?'

'Half a chicken breast, that's not too bad. But once a week you fast for a day. That means you have to leave out dinner altogether.' I saw a maliciously hopeful glint in her eye, and when I still didn't yield, she rubbed it in: 'No dinner! Absolutely nothing! Only water!'

'I can do this,' I said but instantly felt hungry. 'I'll just go to bed earlier.'

'And no breakfast the next morning.'

'I'll sleep longer.'

'It means, no food for 24 hours. Just water. Absolutely nothing else!'

'I'll do it on Tuesdays.'

'That can't be healthy.'

'I'll manage.'

'Why Tuesdays?' my mother sighed.

'Just because,' I lied.

It was none of her business that it had been a 'TUE' stuck to the iced-up windscreen behind which Elsa had appeared to me. Elsa. I had asked around. Asked around inconspicuously. But I hadn't counted on such an old-fashioned name. 'Elsa' was a name I only knew from tombstones. It had taken me a few seconds to realise that this was the most beautiful name in the world, even more so than Gabi or Petra.

'So, Tuesdays no dinner or Tuesdays no breakfast?'

'Tuesdays no dinner.'

And she wrote down on one of her blank pieces of paper, 'Tuesdays no dinner, Wednesdays no breakfast.'

Then she went downstairs to the paper bin and rummaged around in the neighbours' and the firemen's discarded newspapers, found earlier recipes from 'Slim with Us' on the teletext pages, put everything in a notebook, used her ballpoint pen for underlining, sighed, made additional notes and sighed and said, 'But you are not overweight!'

And so, it came about that over the course of nine weeks, I lost fifteen kilos and my innocence.