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## **THE ASSISTANT**

English sample translation by Simon Pare

## SUMMER

### 1

The whole thing had been a massive mistake, and Charlotte had felt that in her bones from the start. Even before the massive mistake was made, as soon as she spotted the job announcement, she had sensed that it might be a massive mistake. Charlotte often wondered what might have happened if she hadn't told her mother after she'd spotted the job announcement. Then Charlotte's mother wouldn't have told Charlotte's father, and then her father and mother, or rather her father, wouldn't have persuaded her to apply nor, following a relatively successful casting session, to accept the editorial assistant position at a prestigious Munich publishing house.

'Going in at the top' and 'This is the beginning of your publishing career,' said her father. 'Going in at the top' and 'This is the beginning of your publishing career,' said her mother, who says whatever her father says. Charlotte spends a lot of time on this kind of 'what-might-have-happened-if' trains of thought. *It's a bit like cutting*, Charlotte thinks, wondering whether the pain of cutting mightn't actually be preferable. Still, all those scars. Sometimes Charlotte sees people with lots of scars on their arms, and it drives her completely crazy, but at the same time she's a bit fascinated by how symmetrical and parallel the lines on the arm usually are. Like bracelets. She studies the face that goes with the scarred arm and wonders about the reasons for that scarred arm. Surely not an assistant's job in a prestigious Munich publishing house, she thinks, although . . . Charlotte looks at the face that goes with the scarred arm, wonders if there are going to be more scars or if the final scar is already there, and hopes it's the latter.

## 2

The root of all evil were her daddy issues, Charlotte reckoned. Altogether, it was possible to trace many of the things that weren't working out perfectly back to her daddy issues, and fundamentally perhaps you could trace back many things that weren't working out perfectly in the world to many different daddy issues, Charlotte also reckoned, but so what? In any case, Charlotte had been fighting for ever, with all kinds of weapons and tactics, for her father's recognition, which was granted only rarely and, when it was, very sparingly. So Charlotte learnt at an early age to widen the battlefield and also fight outside the home for the attention and recognition of piano teachers, tennis coaches, professors, managers and other men to whom she looked up for unknown and mostly unthinking reasons.

The interview process felt like a parody of a talent show, ending with a final which didn't even result in Charlotte being declared the winner. Due to some virus or other, the whole farce took place on Zoom and over the phone, and after several recalls and long periods of waiting, she was given the position of second assistant, known as the administrative assistant, even though she hadn't actually applied for that job. She was repeatedly assured that the hierarchy didn't mean anything, and naturally she knew that hierarchies always mean something or else people would dispense with them.

Right at the beginning of her first conversation with the head of HR and the current assistant, who for good reasons – or rather, for one good reason – wanted to take a time-out from being an assistant, it was disclosed to Charlotte that they weren't looking for one assistant but two, who would be total equals and work for the publisher as a team, and Charlotte, understanding the message between the lines, omitted to say that the position of administrative assistant, which she had seen announced, was a no-no for her and for someone with her qualifications. Ultimately, Charlotte was able to convince the two female interviewers of her suitability, and she went through to the next round. She was introduced to the publisher in a Zoom meeting that was troublingly titled 'Administrative Assistant'. The head of HR, whose name was Alexandra Liebig, rang her up twice before this Zoom meeting, addressed Charlotte by her first name and encouraged her in a deep, melodic voice with an endearing trace of a Saxon dialect – almost as if they were already friends – to simply be herself. She mustn't let herself be

unnerved by the publisher, who was a bit eccentric, nor should she forget that for now it was just about getting to know each other. Charlotte was delighted that Alexandra had taken to her so quickly and kindly and believed in her, although it was the hints about the publisher's obviously maverick nature that pricked her curiosity and fuelled a sense of euphoric excitement. She really wanted to meet this man.

In preparation for the interview, she searched for every online titbit about the publishing house and the publisher. The first thing she and many others associated with the Munich publishing house were the brightly coloured tote bags printed with witty sayings, which were in great demand and therefore hard to come by. But Charlotte had of course heard of the publisher before she began her research. Ugo Maise was a well-known figure, although Charlotte couldn't say for sure why she'd heard of him, what his original profession was or how he'd made a name for himself. She had classified him in the back of her mind as an author, a Munich playboy, a 'disruptor' and charismatic entrepreneur. He frequently popped up on TV and in gossip magazines, and Charlotte thought she recalled that he had once been shacked up with that doe-eyed TV host. It was his debut novel *Rocky* that had really catapulted him to fame, a huge hit around the turn of the millennium, and Amazon referred to it as a 'cult book', but she didn't know if he'd been the talk of town even earlier. Whatever . . . the book with an Alsatian on the cover had been a sensation, a bestseller, yet another book that encapsulated like no other the feelings of a generation. It was about a young man who leaves the suburbs behind and heads to Italy, where he loses himself and finds an Alsatian. Together they roam around Italy, like a modern version of the Romantic grand tour but with a dog for company. Charlotte had enjoyed the novel when they read it at school – it had been the only relatively contemporary text. After this surprise hit he had, to the best of Charlotte's knowledge, written no other books, and she had little idea of what he'd been up to since then, other than being a member of Germany's semi-intellectual celebrity set. Now and again she would spot him in the Instagram stories of Paul Ripke, Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre, Olli Schulz and people like that. And she remembered that she'd dipped into a podcast where he was the guest, but had tuned out during the introduction when they were listing all his professions such as social entrepreneur, author, etc. because she couldn't muster any interest for men who should be old enough to know what they really did and wanted to do.

From Googling she found out that for a year after his travels in Italy he had been the editor-in-chief of a short-lived literary magazine, and that he had published another book – a compilation of conversations between him and a German tennis star about life, sex, drugs, food and so on – that had been a flop.

There weren't many interviews apart from that podcast episode, and they were all superficial. As she dug deeper, Charlotte was surprised to find that he wasn't a self-made man but came from a big business family – a confectionery edynasty, and not any old one but Familie Maise, one of Germany's leading brands. The name was familiar to Charlotte of course, but she hadn't realised that Ugo Maise was connected to them, nor that the company made so many of the nation's sweets. Not only had she heard of their products: Carabombs and Toffettes were some of her favourites. Which couldn't be pure coincidence. *Sweet*, Charlotte thought, and *Someone from a confectionery empire must be cool*.

And what a meteoric rise this dynasty had had! At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ugo Maise's great-grandfather, Justus Maise, had founded the Maise Confectionery Factory in a suburb of Munich and started out delivering sweets to local sales men with his two employees. The staff grew, then the Great War happened, then business began to take off again, and in 1928 the youngest son, Ugo's grandfather, Albert Maise, took over the company from his father, Helmut Maise. During the Second World War Albert Maise introduced the somewhat martial-sounding Carabomb, which was Germany's second branded sweet after Storck's One-Penny Giant. Stepping up as the third generation, Karl Maise transformed the company into a transnational corporation.

While Ugo's father launched one sweet after another into the world, young Ugo and his older sisters, Karla and Louisa, went to elite boarding schools in Switzerland and England, and studied economics and marketing and other subjects to equip them for the cutthroat business of selling sweets. As his unusual first name suggested, Ugo had a different mother to his sisters, his father having left his first wife (a biscuit heiress) for a French model. That also explained Ugo Maise's good looks. He'd been a seriously handsome man in his twenties and thirties. Thick blond hair, suntanned skin, a well-defined chin, dark-blue eyes, a mischievous smile. *Like a mixture of Brad Pitt and Johnny Depp*, Charlotte thought as she scrolled through the pictures, and this was one of those moments when she became starkly conscious of how transient everything was. She really must make the most of her youth and the energy and everything she had inside

her before the years began to catch up with her as well, but maybe it was already too late. The guy still looked good for his age, but only for his age.

Around the year 2000, Ugo and Karla let themselves be bought out and moved to Monaco (Ugo) and Canada (Karla), while the eldest daughter started running the company. Louisa Maise explored new markets, entered into partnerships with brands including Wagner, Langnese and Paulaner, and launched products like Carabomb pizzas and a Take 3 Special soft drink. In the meantime, Ugo Maise published his novel, founded an ad agency, invested in several start-ups and eventually – nearly seven years back – bought the publishing house.

And now she was sitting here, hoping to become the man's assistant.

Shortly before the conversation, Charlotte stopped researching, put on her lucky blouse, smoothed her hair, applied a little mascara, sat down nervously at her computer and waited. She had to wait for the publisher for over half an hour, hearing from another assistant every ten minutes by email that Herr Maise was still in a prior meeting. This other assistant must be supporting the publisher in a different area of his life, Charlotte thought, given that the publisher wasn't just a publisher but also an author, a father, a businessman, etc. As Charlotte smiled anxiously at her own face on the screen, adjusting the angle of her webcam and the position of her chair, giving her hair another quick brush, wondering if she might have forgotten one of the publisher's careers, whether he also had male assistants, how many assistants there were in total, and getting the feeling that he must be very important and have a lot on his plate.

The publisher looked older and less charismatic than in all the professional headshots circulating online, but most people whose professional headshots are circulating online probably look a bit older and less charismatic than in real life. The blond, chin-length hair he wore swept back was sparser and lankier than in the photos, his tanned skin might in fact have seen too much sun and too little sun cream, and his deep-blue eyes were also duller, but that might have been the quality of the video. Charlotte noted for the first time that a wide scar ran like a caterpillar across his cheek, and she wondered if it had been covered in make-up or touched up in the photos because maybe he was ashamed of it. The room behind him looked gorgeous – modern, stylishly furnished, spacious, bright, with grey concrete walls and large square windows. It could've been in New York, Charlotte thought, despite having never set foot in New York.

Unfortunately, Charlotte can only remember scraps of their first getting-to-know-you Zoom session, but she does remember that the conversation jumped around and was less about

the job, its tasks and content, and more about personal matters with some amusing chitchat. And she remembers she found him funny. He had a sense of humour, undeniably, although . . . Having a sense of humour means not taking yourself too seriously. Anyway, she found him funny. A fragment of that first conversation between Charlotte and the publisher might have looked something like this (Charlotte refers to the publisher and herself in the following dialogue as 'mu' and 'sch' because an explicit culture of initials reigned at the publishing house, mu in particular loved shorthand, abbreviations, puns and the like, and this story is, after all, a bit mu's story too):

mu: Pretty blouse.

sch: Thank you.

mu: That's the same flowery blouse you were wearing in the photo on your application.

sch: Yes, it's my lucky blouse.

*mu laughs.*

mu: Do you like flowers?

sch: No, not really. Do you?

mu: Yes.

sch: What are your favourite flowers?

mu: Lisianthus.

Charlotte knows nothing about flowers and has no idea what lisianthus are.

sch: Nice.

mu: What's on that card on the wall behind you?

*Charlotte stands up and gets the card she deliberately stuck on the wall just before because she finds it funny. In black letters it reads: 'It is what it is.'*

sch: It is what it is.

*mu laughs.*

mu: You're funny.

With hindsight Charlotte knows that she should have checked out of the show, for example when it reached the rhino bit, but her hunger for validation was strong, especially after making it through the second round of auditions, aka the first conversation with the funny publisher. In any case, at some point the conversation returned to her blouse and somehow

Charlotte came up with a question about what ought to be embroidered on the lucky shirt he didn't yet own and Charlotte could maybe give him. The publisher said, 'I like rhinos.'

### 3

We'll do a little fast-forward now because Charlotte isn't proud of the massive mistake she made, despite sensing from the start that it might turn out to be a massive mistake. And of course it doesn't matter now because what's done is done, and in certain respects it's even good because without this massive mistake, Charlotte wouldn't be a musician now. Maybe Charlotte would have been a musician as a pastime, but she probably wouldn't have become a proper musician, just some small-fry, disposable press officer for a small-fry, disposable publishing house, going on, with a little luck, to work as a music journalist or for a booking agency and, with a lot of luck, studying at the University of Popular Music.

The massively mistaken decision was finally made by daughter and father over salad with strips of turkey and a white-wine spritzer (Charlotte) and pork fillet and mushroom cream sauce on toast, washed down with a large beer (her father). Her mother was there too. They were sitting on a Friday evening in a country pub with a name like any number of other pubs – *The Lamb*, *The Rose* or *The Lion* or something – and the daughter was having a salad with strips of turkey and a white-wine spritzer, the father was eating pork fillet on toast and drinking a large beer, and the mother was eating a boneless turkey steak for seniors, although she was still a bit too young for an old person's meal, and drinking a small beer – but here comes the fast-forward. After just under a week and two more phone calls with the head of HR, Charlotte heard that she was through to the third round, which would be a second Zoom getting-to-know-you call with the publisher. Charlotte was excited and wondered how many rounds there were going to be in total, but fast-forwarding: this conversation wasn't as funny as the first. The publisher was all at sea, glassy-eyed and flushed. He seemed anxious and sickly, told Charlotte he couldn't picture her as an office assistant but somewhere else entirely, and Charlotte didn't mention that she too pictured herself somewhere else entirely. After that, there were several calls with Alexandra Liebig, who kept putting off the decision and appealed to Charlotte not to worry because a decision was due any time now, the publisher liked her, etc. During these days of

waiting that gradually swelled into weeks, Charlotte's birthday came and went, she waited for a call to do the entrance exam for the University of Popular Music, and she talked a lot on the phone with her cousin, who advised and implored her not even to consider the assistant's position. Her cousin, probably Charlotte's best friend, had lived in Munich for a while too and had been very unhappy there, but that's a different story, so let's fast-forward again. Charlotte felt a growing feeling in her head and her gut that the whole thing might turn out to be a massive mistake, and she was half minded to accept the part-time position on offer from the children's and young-adult publisher in Düsseldorf where she was currently working. But the University of Popular Music only took 20 students for their Master's course, and Charlotte was terrified of not getting the call for the entrance exam and being left with nothing but the part-time job. A former classmate, Florentin, who was now the director of a rising (his word) booking agency, had recently asked Charlotte via Instagram whether she might be tempted to join him. Florentin was a little chaotic, but it was always an option. Also, she liked writing about music and contributed the odd article to an online magazine where she'd once done an internship, so she could expand that side. It was all a bit messy, but time would tell. That's what her mother always said: 'Time will tell.'

And then after two weeks Charlotte heard that she'd been chosen for the job of second assistant – the administrative one – even though she hadn't applied for it. She was lying reading by the pond in a park in Cologne when the long-yearned-for call from Alexandra came, and afterwards Charlotte was angry and disappointed. If anything, she wanted to be first assistant to the funny publisher and after deciding on the long way home that she'd definitely turn it down, she phoned her mother. Her mother immediately told her father, and her parents weren't very enthusiastic about her coming second either.

But we need to fast-forward again. Charlotte, who was feeling pretty down because she didn't know what to do next or which path to take, went to see her parents the next weekend, even though she knew from experience that when things were tough, her parents were inclined to kick their daughter when she was down – metaphorically speaking of course, and only with her best interests at heart. Whenever Charlotte was feeling weak and desperate, her parents would tower over her, look down at her and tell her all the things she needed to change in her life. And lying there on the ground, all weak and desperate, she could never defend herself. Anyway, the daughter was having dinner again with her parents at a country pub with a name

like any number of other pubs – *The Lamb*, *The Rose* or *The Lion* or something – and her father, who had obviously recovered from his initial disappointment about her coming second, repeated the same lines he had already said so many times about the post of first assistant: 'Going in at the top' and 'This is the beginning of your publishing career'. Second assistant was going in at the top too, an ideal springboard for a career in publishing, her father knew, because her father knew everything.

Charlotte would work with the first assistant, stand in for her if she was ill or on holiday, and might even be able to outfox her. Charlotte's mother was sitting beside her father, smiling and nodding. Also at the table was the threat of the money stream being turned off if she chose the part-time job and further studies – Charlotte already had a Master's. 'There's only funding for one set of studies,' her father said. 'You gave up playing the piano even though you were good. So why do music now? I don't understand,' said her mother. 'And what do you want to do after the course anyway? Become a musician?' Her father guffawed. 'Too late for that.' 'And do you think Nena or The Beatles went to a pop academy?' 'You need an inner drive.' Every word a quick, sharp stab in her guts. Charlotte didn't answer that it was her greatest dream to become a musician, although it really was her greatest dream; nor did she answer that there were many things you could do after such a course and that she could still learn a lot and that she was also interested in the contacts and getting a foot in the door, but the main thing was the joy it would give her. She didn't answer that her heart beat faster every time she thought of studying – and that wasn't an empty phrase, it really did beat faster when she imagined studying there. Looking at the timetable with modules on 'Personal development in the creative industries' or 'The music business' and briefly indulged in imagining what it would be like to study there, her heart would suddenly beat faster than it had for a long time. *It seems to be my dream*, Charlotte thought, *but maybe I'm projecting too much into it, and now it's probably too late*. She swallowed it all, her tears and the dry strips of turkey, and thought she might as well make a career in publishing, they probably wouldn't take her anyway. And being assistant to a publisher at a prestigious Munich publishing house would be really great, she'd be going in at the top. It would be the beginning of her publishing career.

Charlotte and her parents clinked glasses.

This time, though, we really are going to fast-forward. Charlotte accepted the job, got to know the first assistant in a Zoom call with the title 'mu assistants get to know each other'. The

first assistant, whose name Alexandra wouldn't tell Charlotte – for reasons of confidentiality and because it would allow the two of them 'to get to know each other without preconceptions' – even after she'd enquired several times and then begged, seemed a little scatterbrained, and she didn't appear even to be sitting in an assistant's office. But according to Alexandra she had worked for some mega-famous agencies and start-ups in Hamburg, Milan and even New York. And she was fantastically beautiful. Charlotte knew immediately that she'd seen these delicate features somewhere before and as Ivana confided intimate details about her life, higgledy-piggledy, Charlotte wondered where on earth she had seen these quite widely spaced, slanted, Eastern European, blue, come-to-bed eyes, this straight nose and these full lips before. In a music video maybe? Or more likely she knew them from some advert or a poster. It'd be absurd if she wasn't making money with that face.

Charlotte: I feel like I know your face from somewhere.

*Ivana giggled.*

Ivana: A lot of people say that.

Ivana: I was on Germany's Next Top Model once.

*Charlotte was annoyed she hadn't figured it out by herself.*

Charlotte: Right! In the second or third season. You got pretty far, right? To the final?

Ivana: No, I was kicked out shortly before. I came fourth.

Charlotte: Better fourth than runner-up.

## 12

It could carry on like this for ever. More good news every week. Continue the story with a slight ratcheting-up of the tension while readers gradually start to wonder what all these repetitions are for and whether the whole thing isn't going to run out of steam quite soon. Or else they'll wonder where this story is heading, how mean the publisher is going to get, whether Charlotte might manage to stabilise the relationship or if he's going to lose it completely. Will he touch her?

But why continue the story? Why describe more grotesque situations? Why not just make for the finish line? Charlotte returns to Cologne after being fired the first time. After all, she's realised it's a shitty company. Over and out. Long enough for a novella.

But nobody buys novellas and they're kind of shitty. If anything, then a novel.

So: Charlotte stays on, the story carries on, and it will carry on (more or less) as it has up till now – that much we can reveal at this point. And there will of course be an underlying drama, Charlotte and the publisher will get closer (not physically), Charlotte will grow into her role, the publisher will go madder and madder, overstepping boundaries; there will still be funny situations, but they'll be more and more unpleasant. Maybe this should bring us closer to the present and closer to Charlotte to show what effect all of this has on her. Less detached, even if it hurts.

In any case, it's simply meant to be a well-told story that readers take home with them, to read over supper maybe. While one reader butters a slice of bread, he could ask his fiancé, who's devoured the bestseller in double-quick time and is just raising a forkful of quinoa salad to his lips, something like 'Do you think it's realistic?' or 'Are publishers really that stuck in the Stone Age?' The newly engaged couple, let's call them Tom and Johannes, would talk about the publisher and the assistant, Tom might even defend the publisher in the book for being a little boy with gigantic daddy issues: 'And it's not as if that Charlotte is some innocent little lamb either.' There'd be some back and forth for a while until Johannes raises his voice somewhat angrily: 'It's not really about these two characters. It's about the whole industry, the conditions.'

And Johannes is right. This well-told story, up till now and in the pages to come, isn't only meant to be about the publisher and the assistant. The two of them can't fill out the whole story. It's also meant to be about the company, the publishing house, the many people who work there.

All of them watching how the publisher is totally out of his depth, how he destroys the place and keeps hiring and firing young women and hiring new ones. Might it be slightly amusing for these people as well? Like a Mel Brooks film: *The Assistants*. Would Charlotte find it vaguely amusing if she worked, for example, in the press department and had the occasional chat with the rotating cast of assistants next door? The set: the assistants' office. If they liked Charlotte, the assistants would tell her in confidence funny, absurd or sometimes shocking anecdotes, Charlotte would have a laugh with them and give them a sympathetic or encouraging pat on the back when she clocked off in the evenings and they had to stay on. Would she do anything about it? Charlotte doesn't know, but she does know, or is completely sure, that she would do something about it if she were older or in a more senior position, if she were a mother perhaps or if the assistants were around the same age as her daughters.

But we need to tell things in the right order. Gradually build up the suspense, say a bit more about Charlotte's thoughts and private life, introduce a few colleagues, construct the publishing house.

\* \* \*

To be honest, this story is missing some love interest. It's all wrong, after all, that in this period the only person in Charlotte's life is this middle-aged man who drops her off in his sports car in a side street near the publishing house. It's joyless. Why shouldn't we magic a touch of levity into her life? Unrealistic? Inappropriate? Charlotte isn't receptive to romance? Perhaps. But love is something that just happens, as everybody knows, and it generally happens when someone's least expecting it. Maybe there was not a sniff of a love affair during Charlotte's Munich intermezzo, maybe there were only endless, fruitless Tinder chats. But maybe, just maybe, there was a delicate fledgling romance on the side, which petered out and failed because of Charlotte and the large publishing house. But who could possibly know.

It's obvious that, if we were to magic some romance into our story, it can't be too prominent, wonderful or intense, because otherwise it would supplant or influence the actual plot already in place. It's just a secondary plot strand to bring some temporary levity. And it is bound to make Charlotte happy.

Anyway, the blond young man smiled at her on Friday morning, and it made Charlotte happy.

## 19

Oh, the budding romance we promised has gone completely missing this week. Where's the lovely bear gone? Where is the levity?

Maybe the young man won't just smile at her next Monday but go so far as to say 'Hi'? Or maybe he'll come walking towards her on Friday evening, even though their paths usually only cross in the mornings? Did Charlotte have to nip back to the office that Friday evening, even though she'd already reached the station, because she'd meant to take her work laptop home to finish the layout of the letters, and in fact he doesn't come walking towards her but catches up with her and suddenly there he is walking alongside her and smiling? Could there be such a thing as a fateful encounter after all? Wouldn't that be nice, the kind of surprise that Charlotte truly deserves after the hard week she's had. Or maybe it's Charlotte who catches sight of the bear's blond curls from the back while walking to the station the second time and, grasping time by the forelock in her after-work euphoria, she catches up with him, smiles at him and says 'Hi'?

He's briefly startled, but then he smiles back and says 'Hi' too.

'After-work drink,' he says without a trace of a Bavarian accent and, what's more, without a question mark. Charlotte nods.

They walk down the street side by side in silence. He gestures with raised eyebrows at the park. She nods. Silently he buys two beers at the kiosk, and as they sit down on a bench, he finally breaks the silence and holds out his beer towards her, followed by his warm, strong hand.

'Bo,' he says, and Charlotte says, 'Charlotte.'

*Bo the bear*, Charlotte thinks with a grin. He does look a bit like a bear. Calm, noble, serious.

Bo moved here 10 years ago from North Frisia for the scenery and a job, became a self-employed joiner and makes furniture. At the weekend he usually goes up into the mountains where he's bought a house he's currently doing up.

Charlotte: Where in North Frisia?

Bo: Amrum.

Charlotte: You're from Amrum?

Bo: I'm from Amrum.

Charlotte: That's an island.

Bo: That's right.

Charlotte: Why did you move here?

Bo: Why not? Mainly for the scenery.

Bo: There isn't much in Amrum apart from the sea.

Charlotte has always longed to live by the sea and has set her search filters on HomeScout, which she checks from time to time, to flats for rent in larger towns along the Baltic coast as well as in Sankt Peter-Ording and a few selected North Sea islands. She's gobsmacked.

Charlotte. But why for the scenery when you have the North Sea right on your doorstep?

Bo: I prefer mountains to the sea.

Charlotte considers whether this statement is a red flag.

Charlotte: That statement is a red flag to me.

Bo smiles. It's the third time he has smiled since that first smile that Friday morning and the second smile just now after Charlotte's overtaking manoeuvre, and she is impressed. His green eyes glow like the forest outside the windows of the publisher's house. She studies his youthful, tanned face with its frame of blond curls, his sun-bleached eyebrows above those green eyes, his slightly sunburnt and peeling button nose, his handsome mouth, and at the same time he studies her face. If she had been called upon to describe the face of her Prince Charming, then she would probably have described it exactly like this.

'I like your face,' he says.

Charlotte thinks that this is the most romantic thing anyone has ever said to her.

Charlotte: No one's ever said that to me before.

Charlotte: I think that's the most romantic thing that anyone's ever said to me.

Bo: To me it seems more obvious than romantic.

Bo: Your face is beautiful.

Charlotte: If you don't find that romantic, what *do* you find romantic?

Bo doesn't answer, scratches at the label on his beer bottle and says, 'If I say something like: I sometimes think back to the morning you gave me that cheeky smile with your large, brown, doe eyes.'

How can he just come out with something like that? She has no idea how to reply. Should she confess that she thought of him too, that before going to sleep she has even pictured what it would be like if he spoke to her? And asks her if she'd ever been sailing. And how afterwards they go sailing together – there are so many lakes in the countryside around Munich. How she's unbelievable clumsy on the boat and then it starts to rain . . .

But that would probably come across a little bit psycho, so she says, 'Hell, Bo, you're quite the romantic.'

Bo simply looks at her, very seriously, but with a flicker around the edges of his handsome mouth that forces Charlotte to avoid his gaze. She looks at the water and murmurs, 'Bo the romantic bear.'

And these words make Bo laugh for the first time. She's somewhat startled as she turns to look at him, and his quiet, throaty laugh really is the loveliest thing she has heard and seen for a long, long time.

Finally making him laugh will be altogether the loveliest thing she has experienced in Munich.

Charlotte fell in love with Bo that very first evening in the park. They talked for a long time, although there wasn't so much talking that evening. Charlotte told him about her music, and as the sun set, she wondered if she should rest her head on his strong shoulder, but she wasn't brave enough to, and then when he put his arm around her, she rested her head on his strong shoulder and wondered if everything might actually turn out fine.