

Heinz Strunk

THE GOLDEN GLOVE

Rowohlt

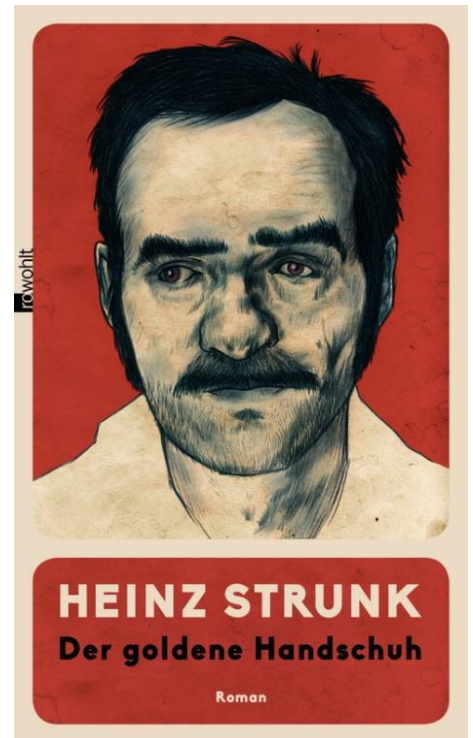
fiction

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Fantastically dark, brilliantly funny and excruciatingly tragic, Heinz Strunk's latest novel is the first to eschew his trademark autobiographical style. But this is still archetypal Strunk. The name of his terrible hero is Fritz Honka, a name that still resonates chillingly with anyone who grew up in 1970s Germany. Honka was a serial killer of women, came from the lowest social strata and became infamous during his sensational trial in 1976. A pitiful figure, Honka was psychologically and physically scarred by the abuse and violence of his youth, and would pick up his victims in "The Golden Glove", a notorious Hamburg drinking den. Strunk's narrative dives deep into an infernal night world of alcoholism and derelict housing, whose inhabitants seem robbed of their humanity by a desolate life which knows no kindness.

Told with huge energy, great historical precision and profound compassion, this is a disturbing portrayal of a world in which both a notorious killer and his unhappy victims were well known in the courts. Yet the trajectory of this story also bisects the world of the wealthy and powerful, like the family of a shipping magnate living in the lush suburbs overlooking the Elbe river; these are great houses home to much wealth but little generosity. Finally, rich and poor meet in a murky dive off Hamburg's Reeperbahn, a melting pot of alcohol, sex, misery and crime. And they all yearn for happiness, right to the end.



"Heinz Strunk is the holy trinity for the new literature that offers both suffering and comedy."

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

- **Over 100,000 copies sold since publication!**
- **Winner of the Wilhelm Raabe Literature Prize 2016.**
- **A popular and critically acclaimed novel.**
- **Will be made into a movie in 2017.**



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Writer, musician and actor **Heinz Strunk** was born in Hamburg in 1962. His book *Meat Is My Veg* sold half a million copies, and became the basis for an award-winning audio book, a play and a feature film. Many of his subsequent books have also become bestsellers.

Heinz Strunk
THE GOLDEN GLOVE**English sample translation by Angus Baigent**

An ice-cold day in February 1974, three a.m. For the last twelve hours, the crooked little man with the dented face and huge hands has been sitting on his favourite bar stool at the short side of an L-shaped counter. He is talking at his neighbour.

“I used to know this woman, I loved ‘er. She was gone one day, but I know she’ll be back ... she always smelled so good ... really something, that was ... all that perfumed flesh, I’ll be thinking about it till the day I die. The mole on her stomach and everything ... but if she saw me like this. You can’t drink enough to stop you caring ...”

His neighbour is known as The Corpse. His real name is Helmut Berger, which is also the name of a famous German actor and currently the Best-Looking Man In The World. His eyes are half-closed, you never know if he’s listening or not. He’s asleep more than he’s awake. His thighs are raw because he pisses himself so often. Sometimes one of the staff gives him a shake to see if there’s any life left in him. The Corpse was inside for 13 years, for murder. Someone asked him once what kind of murder it was. “With malice aforethought,” he replied, and everyone laughed.

The Crooked One murmurs on. “... then she says, I want to fuck you, because of your face. I want to break it with my cunt or my arse ... look around you, there are as many arses in the world as there are faces, some round and nice, others flat as a postage stamp or like burst sacks of gravel. We’ve all got an arse... funny, that... everyone’s got an arse, the normal ones, the crazies... The mad ones have the same thoughts as normal people just that they’re safely locked up in their heads and can’t get out. Your head’s sealed off, nothing goes in, you’re stuck with it your whole life, a lake with no river running into it, a dead sea. Take Rudi, he had thoughts us normal people can’t understand. He used to say he’d have to cut off the eleventh finger so that they don’t multiply in heaven and there’d be space left for his granny, but no one knew what he meant ... crazy, eh? ... I dream about living one day that’s worth a whole life. When your time comes, it comes, cry all you like, but you’ve got to die. But for now, just laugh.”

The Corpse doesn’t react. The eyes are sunk so deeply into their sockets that they almost disappear there. He dealt quite well with his first ten years in prison. But then things suddenly went downhill, each day seemed as though it was fifty hours long. The Corpse decayed so quickly, you could watch it happening, watch him dissolve right in front of you. His face and body withered, his hair thinned and his nails went brittle, he lost almost all his teeth, his interest in the world seeped out of him, drop by drop. And then he destroyed his stomach, with rectified spirits. Now he’s got ulcers with more ulcers on them. If it weren’t only used to describe dead bodies, the phrase “mortal remains” would exactly describe The Corpse. So would “life weariness”.

Some of them sit here for twenty, thirty hours at a time. Once, someone sat here motionless for two days and nights. He was dead, and they hadn't noticed because the shifts had swapped. He's sleeping himself healthy, they all thought. On the third night, someone fell over and accidentally pulled him down with them. Just as well, or they'd only have discovered he was dead when the rats started gnawing at him. Died and rose from the grave on the third day. Now that's a story for you, a legend.

Owner, barman and manager of "The Golden Glove Bar" at number two, Hamburger Berg, is the four-time German and two-time European lightweight boxing champion Herbert Nürnberg. Herbert is behind the bar almost every day. He's an attraction, a VIP, people come here to just to see him. He can tell a lunatic from a maniac from a nutcase, a loudmouth from a thug and a thief from a murderer. He can tell if someone's pocket is full of money or stuffed with a gun.

The Golden Glove has been open around the clock, 365 days a year since 1962. There's an area at the front and another one at the back. Three tables at the back, four at the front. On the right of the front door there's an L-shaped bar counter. The toilets are in the cellar.

The Crooked One's lungs have already rasped their way through sixty Sheffield cigarettes, his chest has sunken in with all the smoking, he's drunk a litre of *Fakeo*, a mix of Fanta lemonade and korn schnapps, in equal parts. Now he's in that bleary-drunk state where it feels like your head and thoughts are smothered in grease and glue. And he's tired. He goes to the back, to The Mouldies, to sleep for a bit. The Mouldies aren't called that for nothing, they really look it. The Crooked One holds his skull in his hands like a melon that's been split open, before laying it down on his elbow. He's unconscious the instant his head touches his arm. When sleep comes, it's sudden and short. He never sleeps longer than an hour.

He wakes up when a Mouldy tries to take off his shoes. He's already got the left one off, and is plucking around at the laces on the right one, all he has to do is pull the shoe off. How thick can you get? They're as crooked and broken as the Crooked One himself, no one else can ever wear these, ever. Once someone took his shoes off when he was asleep, took a shit in them, and put them back on. At this time of night, pretty much anything goes. Half-asleep, he lashes out and kicks the Mouldy, who loses his balance and in the process of trying to steady himself cuts open his hand on a piece of broken glass that's lying around. A jet of redcurrant-coloured blood shoots out. He wipes his bloody hand in The Crooked One's face and disappears somewhere right at the back. The Crooked One picks himself up and goes back to the front of the bar. Instead of The Corpse he finds Norbert the Soldier sitting there.

"Fiete, what do you want to drink? I'm buying."

The nickname "Fiete" is The Crooked One's new nickname. He can't remember who gave it to him and why, but he's never had one and he's very proud. Fiete sounds nice, smart even. A narrow smirk darts across his features, he doesn't dare to smile because of his skewed face. He feels like he's special. A nickname – even though "Fiete" is, as a common northern German male first name, a second-class nickname – a badge of honour. First-class nicknames include: Ritzen-George, Ritze being a topless bar nearby, as well as meaning 'crack'. As in 'fanny'. Dieter the Baldy. Erni the Nose, Harry the Bulgarian, Schnapps Willy.

“I asked you a question.”

Fiete would prefer to pass on Norbert the Soldier’s offer, as in return he’s forced to listen to one of Norbert’s infamous and infinitely long monologues. But he doesn’t dare.

“Fako.”

He’s called Norbert the Soldier because he was in the Waffen-SS. He became a POW in April 1945 and switched from there directly to the Foreign Legion. At the time the Foreign Legion was badly depleted and recruited men from the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS who were offered the chance to avoid the POW camps. Norbert was stationed in Indochina between 1948 and 1953, and after leaving the Legion he never got back on his feet. He quickly lost any jobs he got, as a docker, night watchman or navy, mostly because of alcohol. For the last few weeks he’s been working as a bin man. Since then he drinks a bit less because he has to get up so early. But it’s a long fall from the SS to collecting rubbish, and today he’s really fed up. He got an aluminium crutch and hit his ankle with it until it swelled up. He always does that when he needs a sick note from the doctor. “I know that’s self-mutilation but I don’t care. If I was to sew up my own arsehole, that’d be my choice, wouldn’t it.” Now he can get wasted for a whole week.

“Do you want something?” asks Herbert.

“What?”

“Don’t say say, ‘what’, say, ‘I beg your pardon’. DO YOU WANT SOMETHING TO DRINK AS WELL?”

Norbert is hard of hearing and wears a hearing aid. Someone fired something right next to his ear during the war.

“DRINK!?!?”

He plays with the cable running from his hearing aid down the side of his neck. Herbert wanted to change his name to Hearing Aid Norbert, but Norbert wasn’t having any of it.

“DRINK!?!?”

If there’s one thing Herbert hates, it’s being ignored. He’s often threatened to bar Norbert, probably the worst thing that could happen to him. Just the thought of it produces thick, glistening pearls of sweat on Norbert’s forehead. He breaks out in a disgusting rapist’s sweat. He’ll never get to know women in any normal way again. He can’t even sleep with the tarts any more after he mistakenly beat one of them up. “Mistakenly” is a bit rich, of course, but it really was a mistake. The story did the rounds and since then no one will sleep with him. Need makes him resourceful. As often as he can, he pushes himself around pedestrian precincts, department stores and train stations, wherever there’s a lot of people jostling into each other. He literally pushes himself around, he doesn’t wear any underwear and rubs his hard cock through a round hole he’s cut into a bright yellow oilskin jacket against any women he can find. It only takes him a couple of seconds before he shoots his load. Then he imagines the woman getting home and her husband, boss or parents confront her about her clothes being covered in semen. His rancid old semen. A red hot fantasy, I’m sure you’ll agree. But that’s Norbert for you. A right little pervanimal. He was almost caught a few times, but then he put on his ‘Total Idiot’ expression, a kind of harmless astonishment, he’s brilliant at it, looking harmless and astounded at the same time, it’s his speciality.

Norbert throws a ten-Pfennig coin onto the floor and says to a woman who somehow ended up here with her boyfriend, husband or acquaintance:

“There you go, you can use that next time you need to piss. It’s all you’re worth.”

Just like that. Then he throws a fifty-Pfennig piece on the floor.

“No, wait. I was wrong. That’s what your worth. But not a Pfennig more.”

The woman’s friend is a whole head taller than Norbert, but hasn’t got the hardness, resolve and, most importantly, the nerve to defend himself. You can see it straight away.

“One day she was a little girl, and one day she’ll be dead, but right now she’s here.”

“Come on, we’re going. This is below us.”

“I was wrong again. You’re worth nothing, d’you hear me? Dust in the wind! Nothing!”

The get out as quickly as they can. Good thing, too. Broken nose, quick as you like.

After some hard fights on the way up, Fanta Rolf has risen up into the second tier among the area’s pimps. He thinks it’s only a matter of time before he’s right up there at the top. He dreams of getting a slice of some major action, where the real business goes on, where the territory is divided up, away from the day-to-day drudgery of the small-time pimp. For that he needs to keep a clear head, and that means not a drop of alcohol and never touching drugs. He likes drinking Fanta, and now it’s his nickname. He’s from a little backwater in the Black Forest. When he came to Hamburg he looked a right goofball. He slowly turned into the archetypal pimp, with a walk like a cockerel on steroids, long hair, tailored suit, golden rings and a Rolex Submariner or Day Date. He copied it all from the arseholes that he overtook on his way up. They’re same ones who ripped him off and laughed at him when he was new in the game. Most of them landed back in the gutter ages ago, the poor, stupid arseholes. Take Samba Eddy, for example. These days, Samba Eddy is only called Edgar. He was one of the major players before ruining it for himself. Alcohol, drugs, excess, couldn’t get enough of anything that was going.

He was one of the best-looking men on the scene. The tarts were queuing up to work for him. Some weeks he earned 50,000 Deutschmarks. Although he looked like a model, he was of the particularly mean, ruthless and conniving sort. A pretty boy, brutal yet with bags of sex appeal. Erotic attraction in its most simple, compelling form. It was the coke that did it. How stupid can you get? He wanted to prove to himself that the charlie couldn’t touch him, that his will was stronger, stronger than his enemies, stronger than the drug, stronger than anything. But this time he’d picked the wrong fight. The coke ruined him in just a few months, it drove him mad. His emotions withered and turned horribly cold, he was at the mercy of his insatiable appetites and couldn’t do anything about it. His nerves were taut day in, day out, his blood burned, the marrow melted in his bones while his brain boiled, evaporated and trickled away. He beat up prostitutes and then forced them to lick the dirty soles of his shoes. In the toilets at the “Salambo” he grabbed a man and pricked him, that meant that he stuck a knife up his anus and then turned it very slowly, like in slow-motion. Then there was that night in the “Hong Kong Club”. Eddy was loaded up to the eyeballs, and in his cocaine-fuelled paranoia felt insulted by a harmless joke made by some poor sod, broke a beer bottle on the bar counter and rammed it into his neck, the splintered glass dug its way inches into his flesh. He was lucky to get away with a two-year sentence.

But that was the end. Now he lives in a tiny flat on Hamburger Berg, waiting. The walls are covered with photos and newspaper clippings with the faces of his enemies, both real and imagined, so that he never forgets them. The ones he couldn't find any pictures of he's drawn in felt tip on the wall from memory, their names almost illegibly scribbled underneath. Transparent, hazy hours rush by, one after the other. He lived like an animal and is going to die alone. Until that day comes, he sits every day in the Golden Glove, around people he wouldn't even have bothered beating up in his heyday, drinking the dregs from other people's beer bottles Indian beer.

That would never happen to Fanta Rolf, ever. Pride comes before the fall. Be friendly on your way up, you'll see them all again on your way down. And they all come down eventually. Something like that, anyway. And they're right. All the sayings, idioms and catchphrases aren't so stupid after all, he thinks, they're all too true. If you abide by them, not a lot can happen to you. The smart-arses can shit words of wisdom as much as they like. Fanta Rolf's trademark is his soft voice that harbours an undertone of incredible aggression. Took him years to get it right. Whenever he talks in that special, soft timbre, all muted and casual, you know it's about to kick off. His big advantage is that he's got nerve. It's like he's got no pulse, as though he's stone dead. You've either got it or you haven't, like quick reactions or punching power. Most people end up losing not because of the circumstances or bad luck, but because they don't have the nerve.

Fanta Rolf's passion is HSV football club, his Jaguar E-type is his pride and joy. Right-hand drive, an original imported from England. His right-hand man is Lutz, who follows him everywhere. A little gnome with puffed-up cheeks and a bell-shaped torso, a coin pimp, the lowest of the low. Before Ralf took him under his wing he was one of the 'crabs', the poor sods hunting around for victims to rip off, roaming through the bars and clubs near the Reeperbahn.

No one's put any money in the jukebox for an hour. If no one else puts any money in, Herbert usually does it. But today he can't be bothered, there aren't enough punters in. Fiete and Norbert clink glasses, then Norbert gets started. "Peter, my army mate, had his legs broken so often that he couldn't walk so long that his calves just withered away ... but even though there was nothing they could do for him he wasn't allowed home ... he was just a piece of human rubbish, where the worms and rats burrowed around ... the bit around his eyes looked like the earth under a flat stone crawling with woodlice, beetles and centipedes ... they still sent him back to the front, and then they got him, bad, shot his head off, he didn't have a head any more, just a hole on top of his neck with blood in it, bubbling around like jam cooking in a pot ... just mush, you couldn't tell what it was. There was clotted blood everywhere ... the blood soaked the ground..."

This goes on for about ten, fifteen minutes, until he goes quiet in the middle of a sentence and sinks into a thoughtless delirium. His experiences during the war have indelibly etched themselves into his brain, he's being eaten up from within by his own memories. A ghost, defeated and left behind, that knows only its own madness, the tough, old, dirty Nazi blood running through his veins.

The “Glove” is a good place to meet women, a lot better than bars like “Lehmitz”, “The Tail Light” or “Elbschlosskeller”. Fiete can’t be picky, he’s been beaten up, maltreated and crushed too often for that. He’s got no hope of getting any women his own age, they remain unreachable, inscrutable, unpredictable. As long as he can remember, he’s been with older women, proper grannies, some of them. He’s stopped caring, if he had to he’d take an amputee or one with three arseholes.

Wednesdays are tough, you never know where there’s something going on and where there isn’t. Some Wednesdays it’s packed, sometimes it’s empty, no one knows why, not even Herbert, who usually knows everything. Fiete is in a bad way, he’s in a miserable mood, he feels lonely. The jukebox is playing “A Tear Goes On Its Travels” by Salvatore Adamo, it’s Fiete’s favourite song.

*A tear goes on its travels
It’s travelling over to me,
The wind blows it over with the clouds in the air
And I know it comes only from you.*

The woman who comes in, teeth chattering with cold, is short. Her thin, grey hair oozes down the back of her owl-shaped skull like dirty shaving foam. Her scalp is bald in several places. She stands there as though she’s been switched off, blankly peering into space, half-frozen and expressionless. She could be fifty, or seventy. Like Norbert the Soldier, she’s got that peculiar expression you see on the generation that lived through the war: ancient, grey, worn. Her age is indiscernible, antediluvian, probably. Under her coat she’s only wearing a pinafore, a horrific blue one like the ones cleaners and charwomen wear. The longer you see her, the more disgusting she looks, especially if you’ve been drinking alcohol, sometimes it can have the opposite effect. You can’t even imagine what she must have looked like once, as a *woman*.

Fiete motions to Anus. Anus’s real name is Arno, they all call him Anus, then everyone laughs. He doesn’t know what it means, but he laughs, too. Fiete wants Anus to bring the woman a drink. Fiete can tell in a split-second that she’s got no money to buy anything. Homeless, dispossessed. She’ll be thrown out if she doesn’t drink anything, that’s the rule in here, and it’s freezing outside. Buying them a drink, that’s Fiete’s tactic. Anus tells the women who bought them their drink and they shuffle over to say thanks.

“I’m Gerda, just wanted to say thank you. What’s your name?”

“Fiete.”

“Oh, right.”

“Cheers.”

“Down the hatch.”

Gerda’s gaunt mouth is working to stem the flood of her spittle. A Droolie, so-called because they can’t control their saliva production. The alcohol corrodes their brains, corrupts their nerves and at some point their spit starts running out the corners of their mouths. Erna, Inge, Herta, Ilse. The other Droolies, as broken as they are, still use a bit of make-up. Lipstick, eye shadow, rouge. Not Gerda. The jukebox is playing “Don’t Cry” by Heintje.

*Don't cry
When I have to go,
Don't think about it, that day is still far away,
The sun will shine again tomorrow,
For you and me, just as beautifully as today.*

Exactly that won't happen. Not ever. Fiete scratches the label off an empty beer bottle and scatters the scraps of paper across the counter in front of him.

*Don't cry
Because the years pass too quickly,
And because your boy will grow up one day,
Think of the years we have before us,
Forget about the day that we will part.*

When she hears "Because your boy will grow up one day", her eyes start watering. Fiete can imagine why, but he doesn't want to know.

*Don't cry,
If I have to leave one day,
Oh, don't think about it, the day is still far off,
The sun will shine again tomorrow,
And for a long time roses will grow in front of your door.*

What roses? Gerda is crying. What a beautiful song. It's hard to conceive how much women like her idolize Heintje, the boyish singer. As Fiete lights her fag, she farts. She drinks faster than he does, which turns him on. That, too! He wonders what it'd be like pushing up Gerda's pinny.

Their little tryst is almost sabotaged by Gisela, who comes into The Golden Glove on her rounds just about every day to look in on everyone. Check up on them. Look in at them. Gisela is a major in the Salvation Army, whose HQ is at number 11, Talstraße, just a couple of houses down the street. She's a year older than Gerda, but looks ten years younger. Or fifteen. At least. Everything that went wrong for Gerda went right for her. Or went differently, rather. She was one of the last people to flee from the East before the Wall went up, and ended up at the Salvation Army instead of at The Golden Glove. It could all have turned out very differently for her, in her former life Gisela was an atheist. Then one night He came to her. It's her mission, given to her by God, to look after the poor sinners on her patch on the north side of the Reeperbahn. Poor sinners, that's literally what she thinks. Like many converts, she takes her religious belief extremely seriously. Her faith is as simple as it is unshakable, she's convinced that you can never fall further than into the open hand of God. She doesn't know if she's ever actually, permanently converted any of her sinners, but none of the people who hang around here feel bothered by her. She's got this way of not foisting herself on people, she can tell when she's allowed to sit down next to someone, when her advice is asked for and when it's not. The barmen all welcome her in, not least because there's never any fights as long as she's there. What she hates is when people call her things like "The Angel of St. Pauli". It's too much, she thinks, she carries out her work as best she can, no more, no less.

The very first time he was at The Glove, he tried to score with Gisela, who happened not to be wearing her uniform that day. After she passed up on the obligatory Fako, Fiete, drunk as hell, said something pretty foul-mouthed to her. That was too much, even for Gisela, she really had to pull herself together. That was the last time she went out without her uniform. Later he apologised to her, which Gisela gave him a lot of credit for.

She looks around. Fiete ducks his head down and tries to make himself even smaller than he already is, he's only one metre sixty-eight. At least he's got enough self-respect to make him ashamed to be seen here, with this ghoul, by Gisela. Gisela, of course, sees exactly what's going on, if there's one thing she does know about, then that. Herbert puts a cup of coffee in front of her, they always have a brief chat, then she goes through to the back, to the Mouldies. Thank God, Fiete thinks, she hasn't seen me. Gisela always sees everything, of course, she just pretended not to see him.

She'll not stay at the back long, time to go. He asks Gerda if she wants to come home with him. She seems to have waited for him to ask and agrees immediately. Go outside and wait, he says, turn right down the Reeperbahn, fifty metres, I'll be out in ten minutes. Gerda scrambles laboriously from her stool, takes her bag and creeps out. He's ashamed to be seen by Herbert - and even Anus - leaving with someone like her. Fiete finds one Mark sixty in his trouser pocket and orders two double Korn schnapps. Down in one. Two doubles to cloud his vision. Outside it's bitterly cold, but the Droolie will wait, he's forgotten her name already. It's not like she has anywhere to go. All she's got is that thin coat and the pinny. But if she wants to come along, she'll have to put up with the cold.

An icy wind, no one can survive that for long. It's two-and-a-half kilometres home on foot, about half an hour. At least twice that, with the Droolie in tow. Where's she got to? Gone? She can't just go, women like her don't just leave. He searches and searches, finally he finds her near a sausage stand a stone's throw away, if the wind blows the right way now and again you get a nice breeze of warm bratwurst.

Gerda can't go on. She's had it. Fiete's pissed off because she didn't wait where they'd agreed, but now for a change Gerda's the one who's had enough. A residue of anger scraped up from somewhere, every living thing has it, for emergencies. Fiete calms down and they head off.

There's not a word said on the way. He doesn't think of offering to take her bag for her, he's not being cruel or impolite, he just doesn't think of it. Gerda's arms feel like they're about to pop out of their sockets. Every few seconds she switches the weight from one arm to the other. She doesn't even have a tether to get to the end of. Her lips have dried out, yellow saliva stuck to the corner of her mouth. Silky-soft rain begins to fall in intangibly thin fibres, a drizzle without raindrops, soon she looks like a drowned mouse. She falls over twice on the way. It's taking even longer to get home! He's scared that he won't be able to get up if he helps her get to her feet. She looks like a beetle. A dung beetle, a cockroach. It's starting to get light. They walk through the thin, pale morning light, through Altona, past the broken-down motorbikes, broken bicycles, broken pipes. Almost everything is broken, kaputt. Past dirty, corroded, flaky outer walls, shattered window panes, enamel name plates rusting away, peeling paint, unplastered walls, until they get to number 74, Zeistrae. Fiete's flat is on the third floor, under the roof.

It stinks abysmally. Gerda has never smelt anything like it, and she's come across a few stench in her time. A mist of damp, rotting carpet, stale piss, filth that condenses out of the air, dead animals, rats, mice, birds, there's got to be a cadaver of some sort in there somewhere. By now Fiete feels stone-cold sober again, he pours two glasses of Fako and goes for a piss. The toilets are in the hallway outside. Gerda looks around. The flat is very small, 18 square metres, two rooms, separated by a cooker unit, a tiny kitchenette with blue tiles, a rusty cooker, on the right a fridge with a coffee machine and a green bucket standing on top, some brown shelving, the top half open, the bottom half behind closed doors. Air freshener. Seven cans of "Patrizier" spray with pine scent, five packets of air freshener, white or yellow, also pine-scented. The walls are plastered with pin-up photos cut out of pulp soft porn mags, *St. Pauli Nachrichten*, *Praline*, *Neue Revue*. In the living room, an armchair and a sofa from different suites. On the sofa two large dolls and several soft toys. The animals seem astounded, staring at her. Giraffes, bears, lions, dogs. Living room table covered with three tablecloths, thin red metal legs, probably a garden table. Opposite, a cupboard, chest of drawers, radiogram, rubbish, dirty clothes, pans, metal tubes of the kind you get glue or toothpaste in all bent out of shape, squeezed empty or rolled up. The floor in the kitchen full of litre-sized bottles, six or seven, with three or four smaller ones standing in front of them. In the bedroom a bed with a mattress that's half ripped open. A washing line with a red dress and a cloth hanging off it. Mouldy curtains that sag off the walls, a smeared mirror with a line of small blood spatters above it. Linoleum floor, carpet in the living room, might have been white once, all the semen, spilled drinks, cigarette ash, drops of urine and who knows what else have condensed to a sickly, morbid shade of something. The dirt has soaked in so deep, no soap, no detergent in the world can ever get rid of it. This flat will continue spewing filth until the end of time. Fiete puts "A Tear Goes On Its Travels" on the record player. His eyes are glassy with emotion, that's how much he loves the song. Carry on pouring out the drinks until the bottle's empty. Then he says, "You have to squash the roaches before they disappear between the cracks." Gerda nods. There's nothing she can't put up with, her indifference is so strong she can rot away even though she's still alive. But here, between the dirt and the rubbish, amidst the stench, she's suddenly overpowered by a sense of horrific, hopeless despair. She's scared, even though she's already been frightened by anything that can frighten her.

Fiete puts "A Tear" on seven times, the eighth time he trips and smashes into the corner of a cupboard. Dislocated shoulder, might be broken, probably is. It always breaks there. He prods it. No, it's nothing, after all. Another fifteen minutes, he wants to stay sitting there for fifteen more minutes, it's difficult to get to bed. Even when everything is already over, he doesn't want to go to sleep, that's when he sometimes feels good. Gerda sits frozen like a puppet, her limbs half-paralysed, she doesn't dare ask if she can lie down. Now she's fallen asleep. Fiete's eyes keep on falling shut. He shakes Gerda, she wakes up with a start, in terror. Real terror. My God, she thinks, where have I ended up this time?

"Let's go to the other room."

Her smell trails behind her like tiny threads. She lies down on her side and is immediately unconscious. Fiete pulls up her pinafore, just like he'd imagined it.