

シズルマテン



隻影のベルツルト

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Beatrix Brehme
ベアトリクス・ブレーメ

「たとえば……うう」

今度はアイリスの耳の裏を指先で擦るベアトリクス。

「ちょっと、ベアト……やん！」

アイリスの、先ほどとは趣が異なる、甘い悲鳴が響き渡る。

Jürgen Bernhard
ユルゲンベルンハルト

耳の裏……！

なんてフェチな場所を攻めるんだ！

Irishina Bernhard
アイリスディーナベルンハルト





「私と付き合いなさい、**ユルゲン・ベルンハルト**」

「まったくよ。だから、**貴方に罰を与えてあげる**」

「罰？　おい、お前、何様のつもりで——」
戸惑う俺に、ベアトリクスははつきりと口にした。

Schwarzesmarken

Bernhard in Shadow 1

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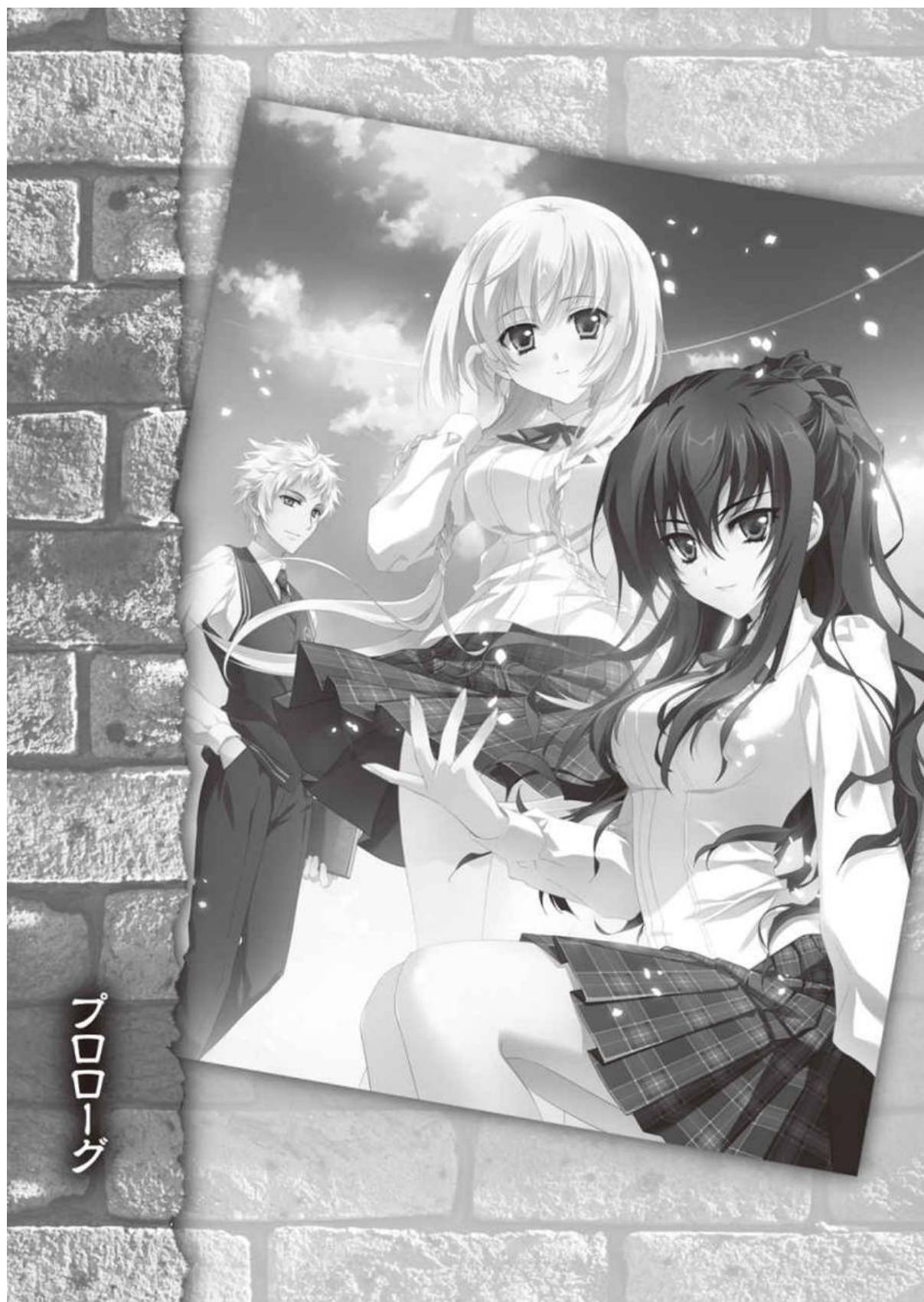
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Prologue

First of all, allow me to say this.

If you're listening to this audio for the first time, you're either the smartest person I know or you're the craziest.

I guarantee it. Without a doubt, you're a freak.

Think about it, this monologue is inside my grandfather's grave. In other words, it's hidden in a place where only people from the Bernhard family can visit.

I take my hat off to the fact that you took the trouble to dig it out. I don't dislike people with such a professional and humanistic temperament.

Besides, it was my heart's desire too. It makes me joyous that there are people who are willing to listen to my story, which was collected before the BETA trampled down on the freedom of our fatherland.

I've been to many countries, but in the end, I love this one the most.

The traditional streets, the hustle and bustle of the marketplaces and the tranquility of the parks. It is a city full of filth and deceit, - but still a place where people live with little happiness and trust.

If I were to list the things I dislike about it, I could go on until tomorrow morning, but I could also list the things I like about it more. Maybe it's called the law of two against one.

... Oh, and if you are listening to this and you are an employee of the **Stasi** ⁽¹⁾ – I'd like to express my condolences. After all, about 70% of what I'm about to say and do will be bad-mouthing you guys. I think it's better from a psycho-sanitary perspective if you don't listen to it, except if you are a mashochist.

Also, if by any chance the first person listening to this is someone I know...

If that's the case... let's not think about it.

If it's after everything is over, it won't be necessary to listen to it, and if it's not, my willful ramblings will be of no comfort to you.

Will - yes, this is my will.

This is the last will and testament of **Jürgen Bernhard**, A Colonel General of the **DDR** ⁽²⁾ (Deutsche Demokratische Republik) and the **NVA** ⁽³⁾ (National People's Army)

By the time you are listening to this, I will probably not be around. I'm pretty sure I'm going to be killed. Not by the BETA, but by human hands. Forgive me, but I think that's what's going to happen.

I think I'm the only one who knows what I thought and what happened. But you wanted to hear that story, so you looked for it, didn't you?

You must have had a hard time. Without an accurate understanding of the inner workings of the dissident movement [\(27\)](#), you would never have traced that fragment of me. I'm sure you have reached that point, and that you're a kind and brilliant explorer.

That's why it's fine. This is a scenic item. A truth only the victor can receive.

I'll let you know. What did I sacrifice and what did I gain...

It's a bit long, and I've trimmed off the parts I don't want to talk about. Give it the appropriate supplementation from your brain. That's the least you could do if you had the brains to find it.

And perhaps, if you have the same wish as I have. Or, if you are listening to it after everything is over. If that's the case, please go and put an end to all this bullshit. I am sure my comrades, who are no longer with us in this world, would want the same thing.

In any case, if we don't change the way this country is now, all that awaits us is an unprecedented tragedy.

The damage caused by beings from a different star cannot be measured by ordinary human knowledge. I've seen a lot of deaths on the muddy, swampy battlefield. Maybe I've seen too much death.

I believe, therefore, that it is worth risking my life to avoid it.

...oh, I'm sorry. My sister told me it was time for tea.

I'll turn off the sound of the recording for a moment. Today is the first time in a while that we're both at home. Aren't you jealous that I'll be able to spend my afternoon tea with the finest and most beautiful golden-haired girl?

In addition, there were homemade cookies. I can't give these up even if someone offers me a lot of money. It's a privilege that only I, her brother, can enjoy.

— Maybe I should have cherished this kind of time more.

She's going to be a good girl. She is someone who can bring happiness to everyone around her. I hope that even after I'm gone, she'll be able to stay true to herself. I don't want her to live her life the way I did.

And for the record, if you touch her, I'll kill you. If you lay hands on her for fun, I'll peel off the skin from your whole body -- oh, I'm already dead, aren't I?

You can go ahead and talk to her all you want, but she has an eye for people. She's not an easy woman to fall for. I'm sure she'll pick the right man.

A good man....

In the end, I didn't really understand. What should I do to establish myself as a human being, and how can I survive as a man? Perhaps I have made a betrayal that cannot be undone or justified with words like unfair and unreasonable.

Let's stop.....

It's easy to complain about your personal situation, but the people who have to listen to you are probably just fed up with it. I don't want to look unsightly either.

One should talk only about what they have to talk about.

Later then ...

Come to think of it, the regular evening moon seemed to be a full moon.

A lovely dazzling moon. It was enough to make me forget the infestation of the BETA that is everywhere.

[History 1968~2001]

The young people of today may not be able to imagine that there was a country called East Germany in the center of Europe, and many people lived there.

But, it certainly was, and we spent our everyday life there.

Although it was never rich, there weren't any wars, only harmony and peaceful days.

It's not something I can talk about loudly, though. It's our generation that robbed young people of a peaceful future."

[Citizens of East Germany in 2001]

It's only now that it's normal, but for a few years after the war, everyone thought Germany's division would not last long. One day, the United States and the Soviet Union would reach an agreement and Germany would start over as one country, but that wasn't it. I never thought that the border between East and West Germany would be closed, followed by the construction of the Berlin Wall ⁽⁴⁾ and the complete division of Germany.

At the beginning of the Cold War ⁽⁵⁾, Churchill ⁽⁶⁾ said 'The Iron Curtain has been lowered on the European Continent.' He said something along these lines, and that's exactly what happened. My relatives are also in East Berlin and we haven't seen each other in more than 10 years. I don't know what kind of life they are leading"

[Citizen of West Germany in 1971]

[The German Democratic Republic] – DDR/ Deutsche Demokratische Republik

The Democratic Republic of Germany was established after World War II in an area occupied by Soviet forces in eastern Germany, commonly known as East Germany. It was built as a socialist state modeled after the Soviet Union. It was the most economically developed of the Soviet Union's star nations, with a planned economy that led to heavy industrialization and agricultural collectivization.

However, the country was at odds with the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany, which was established in the Anglo-American occupied area of western Germany. In the early years of the country's foundation, many of its people fled to the more prosperous West Germany.

For this reason, in 1961, the East German side built a wall in Berlin, which was divided into East and West (See World Setting).

["World History Glossary" Government Official, 1972]

"Stories about the time aliens were discovered on Mars?" Well, it was a festive event! At that time, the whole world was in a frenzy of spacecraft development. Humans reached the moon, and a large space station was built in satellite orbit... Anyway, it was lively back then. There were rumors that the U.S.

and Soviet Union would start a nuclear war during the Cold War, but we were still excited to see mankind heading for the frontier of space.

The apex of that boom was when the unmanned Viking 1 spacecraft found what appeared to be life on Mars! That was amazing! Mankind was not alone in the universe! I also used to collect illustrations of octopus-shaped aliens.

It's been ten years since then, and the space development boom has subsided considerably, but I'll never forget the excitement at that time. Many astronauts were born in our country. It made me proud.

[Interview with an East German citizen, 1986]

Life while studying in East Germany was not as bad as I had heard beforehand. Daily necessities were inexpensive, security was good, and neighbors were kind. I was impressed that this was indeed a socialist [\(7\)](#) country, a country of workers. However, there were many disadvantages. The number of daily necessities was small, and it was difficult to obtain electronic appliances. You can't get a car unless you wait 10 years after you place an order. It's beyond imagination to buy a new one, and a friend of mine I met at university said that he has been using the same private car at home for more than 20 years.

I was also scared of the secret police department called the State Security Service or Department of National Security (**Stasi**). I was told that The Stasi was taught to crack down on the ideas of the general public and to monitor the rebellious humans of the East German government. It seemed that foreign students were also targets of surveillance and inducements, and among Japanese students, there were people who were rumored to have something to do with Stasi, so we kept away from them.

[Recollections of a Japanese person who studied in East Germany in 1976]

[The Moon is Hell]

[Commander-in-Chief of the U.N. Moon Army – commenting on the Moon War]

"What were you doing on April 19, 1973?"

"Honestly, I don't remember."

At that time, I was still a child and went to the Integrated Science and Technology School. I enrolled in a kendo dojo on the recommendation of my parents. There was a Japanese teacher nearby, a Shoshaman [\(8\)](#). He lent me some protective gear for children. That was my treasure. That's why I practiced almost every day. My arms were not so good before, but they are useful in fighting now.

So, in a sense, war has begun for me before I realized it. I was prepared for East Germany to become a battlefield before I knew it. Thanks to that, I don't think I'm particularly unhappy, but ... If you were born a while ago, it would be different.

I wonder how it felt to see the peaceful world that had continued up until then become more and more insane, and eventually turn my hometown into a battlefield. I wish I had asked Sister Pham and the Captain about that.

[Interview with an East German TSF Pilot, 1983]

Jürgen Bernhard
ユルゲン・ベルンハルト

アイリスディーナより5歳年上の兄。
妹のことを溺愛しており、放課後にな
るとプールに行き、アイリスディーナ
の練習風景をいつも観察しているほど。

第一章 ユルゲン・ベルンハルトの逡巡



Chapter 1: Jürgen Bernhard's Hesitation

1

The first time I heard the girl's name was when she was preparing breakfast as usual.

"Hey, the performance you are impressed with ..."

I asked as I turned on the stove to make a pot of red tea. Next door, my sister is cutting cheese, bacon and black bread. Breakfast is always like this. It's a standard breakfast in Germany, and according to my parents, people in the west eat the same thing.

"Yes. It is a child of the same year at the school that I transferred to last month. The class is different, but —"

My sister uses her accustomed technique to sort out the ingredients. She was wearing an apron on top of her summer uniform, and the imbalance between the two gave her inexplicable eloquence. It's been a blissful morning. My beautiful sister is the best!

"What is it with those eyes, Nii-san?"

My beloved sister's glances hit me.

"Oh, this is..."

"Are you going to make a fool of yourself with every joke?". it's useless, isn't it?"

"What nonsense is that? I am always serious, okay?"

"The other day, you looked at the mix of summer clothes and aprons, and you spoke highly of them for more than five minutes, didn't you?"

"Of course. There is no man who doesn't feel fascinated by the combination of a beautiful girl's uniform and apron, especially in summer clothes. A beautiful girl wearing an apron reminds me of Aphrodite, which is invigorating. I can even see it up close. I thank God. God's best, he really has an aesthetic sense. "

I wouldn't mind rewarding him if he was right in front of me.

"Please take the jam out of the refrigerator, and the plates from the cupboard."

The story about how pure and sublime my love for my sister was has been brilliantly ignored. Heartbroken as I become, I took out the jam with deep disappointment, did as I was told, and lined up the tableware for two people on the desk

All the dishes were beautifully decorated with flower patterns. It's Iris' hobby, but somehow I like it too. My sister has a good sense.

Iris -- Irisdina Bernhard.

She is 13 years old, five years younger than I am now, which is 18. She is my blood-related sister.

To me, Iris is like...If I were to use a metaphor, you could put her in your eyes and it wouldn't hurt. More than just a common metaphor, for me, It's no exaggeration to say that Iris is an essential part of who I am.

The blonde hair tied up in braids, the white facial complexion, and the blue eyes that looked as lovely as a young lamb. I am deeply grateful to God for allowing me to spend my ordinary life in this way.

She is one of the top students in her grade in terms of academics and has excellent athletic skills. Well-liked not only by her classmates but also by everyone in the school. She is a very well-behaved younger sister who seems too good for me.

In case anyone misunderstands, I'd like to state that these are genuine feelings I have for my sister as an older brother, and I've never had any other feelings for her. Now and in the future.

Maybe.

Well, hypothetically speaking, if Iris was to get a boyfriend, I would have to fight him. I'm relieved to see that there are no signs of that happening at the moment. I don't want to shed as much unnecessary blood as possible. I don't want to turn a hypothetical story into a hunting story.

"So, how amazing is that child's performance?"

"It's kind of... like really sharp, or I would rather say, bloodcurdling"

"A sharp performance ... You mean it's like how sharp bodybuilders are? They always cheer on them and say: Heey Senpai, You are cutting it!"

Iris pouted and protested only with an expression on her face, it's really cute, but seriously speaking, I can't imagine how to use the word "sharp" as an adjective in the sport of diving.

The ten-year integrated school that Iris attends - and that I attended until the year before last - requires students to participate in club activities in the seventh grade. Iris took advantage of this and joined the swimming club.

At the swimming club, Iris was practicing as a member of the diving team. Whether it was the result of her own efforts or her natural talent, her performance was excellent right after she joined the club, and she was selected to participate as one of the representatives in the regional competition in Berlin two weeks later.

The diving event itself has been adopted as an Olympic event for both men and women since before World War II, and Japan has also been making efforts to train athletes. Iris was also selected because of her athleticism, but when it comes to the athletes that Iris highly appreciates, it's a little difficult to imagine just how skilled they are.

As I was thinking about it, my cautiousness rose to a small level, and I casually inquired.

"So, what's the child ⁽⁶⁸⁾'s name?"

"..... What are you going to do with that information, brother?"

"What? Do I need a reason?"

Iris looked at me as if she were looking at dirt. It gave off a very cold atmosphere.

"Then I won't tell you,"

I couldn't help it, so I decided to change the way I asked.

"I'm worried about you, I thought something strange might have come near you... A sharp cut in a swimsuit is a lascivious thing, isn't it?"

"What needs a sharp cut (9) is YOUR behavior, and since we're on the subject, can you please stop coming to observe me? I've heard rumors that there is a strange person who goes there to admire female students in their swimsuits."

"Wait, I'm not a weirdo. So don't take away the only thing that makes my life worth living."

"Please don't make it your sole reason for living."

"I'm a graduate, too, so there's no problem."

"I think I'll quit the club."

"I'm really sorry"

I apologized. If I do that, she will let me see her again.

I really want to avoid being hated. Besides, I've already found several ways to sneak behind Iris's eyes and see the club activities.

Iris sighed and went back to her story.

"It's sophisticated and beautiful. I can't believe she is the same age as me." Iris continues, while arranging the cut ingredients on the tabletop.

"There is no hesitation in the form, the movement is strong. The success rate of difficult performances is also high, and seniors are also pleased to have a once-in-a-decade talent like her."

Diving -- or to be exact, High diving is a 10-meter platform diving from the side of the pool. The time to land in the water is 1.4 seconds, and the competition is based on the splendor of the performance within this short time.

Athletes must overcome gravity, control their bodies, and act decisively. Of course, it is not only necessary to have simple skills and muscle strength, but also mental fortitude.

However, Iris loved this competition. On a side note, my sister is very talented, especially in her aerial posture, which is breathtakingly beautiful.

The diving performance of a schoolgirl whom Iris evaluates as "beautiful" -- there was something frightening about it.

After pouring a cup of tea and confirming that breakfast was ready, Iris happily continued as she took off her apron.



"In this competition, I'm going to pair up with her in synchronized diving."

"Synchronized diving?"

"Synchronized diving is an event that has only recently been introduced, where two people work in pairs to perform a dive. Not only are you evaluated on the perfection of your performance, but also on the synchronicity between the two of you"

"I'm actually a little nervous," Iris continued.

"I'm not sure if I can match her performance. I'll have to practice more."

Iris glanced at the clock on the wall, saying so, and snapped her palms cheerfully together.

"Well! I have morning training, and Niisan's not on vacation either. Let's finish breakfast and go to school!"

After we finished breakfast and cleaned up, we promised to go shopping together after school and set a meeting place.

"As usual, in front of the school gate -- then, Niisan, stay away from the indoor swimming pool."

We opened the front door together.

"It doesn't have to be a tour, does it?"

"What are you thinking?"

I reply with a smile to Iris's nice smile.

"Maybe I'll swim, too."

"I'll report you to the police as a suspicious person."

"Good luck with your morning exercises."

"Yes, Then, I am off"

"Ah! Wait a minute. What's the name of your partner from earlier?"

Iris looked a little surprised.

"You still haven't heard it properly, have you?"

Iris loosened her mouth as if to say, "I understand," and then told her name.

" -- Brehme. Beatrix Brehme."

Then Iris bowed her head politely, shook her bag in her hand, and then left the gate in a well-behaved manner.

"Beatrix, or"

If I remember correctly, the name means the bearer of good fortune.

In spite of the meaning, many women with that name have led unhappy lives. In my mind, I recall the lives of some royalty and nobility. Infertility, premature death, bereavement...it's not a gorgeous thing.

In any case, there's no point in dwelling on useless things endlessly. I'll go to school without skipping a beat.

On the street right in front of me, I could see people commuting to school sparsely.

The Pankow district [\(10\)](#), where my house is located, is one of the most expensive residential areas in East Berlin, where the people who pass through the streets are elegant and the trees and buildings are well maintained.

Berlin is the symbol of Germany, which was divided into East and West by the war. Just as the country was divided, Berlin, the capital, was also divided into East and West. If we were not aware of this, our daily life would seem to be peaceful and uneventful.

Suddenly the morning sun broke through the clouds, and I squinted, holding my hand over my forehead.

Overhead is a clear blue sky characteristic of early summer. White clouds flowing west underneath. It may get hot again this summer.

"Now..."

As I walked slowly, I loosened my uniform tie and muttered, but I have almost decided what to do from now on.

I recalled the previous conversation - Iris seemed happy at first glance, but I had read between the lines that she was actually having a problem.

If she was just happy to have Beatrix as a friend, Iris would have mentioned Beatrix's personality first. That's what she always did when she described her new friend to me.

But this time it was different.

All of what Iris told me was how great Beatrix's performance was.

In other words, this probably means that Beatrix and Iris are still in a situation where they cannot be called friends.

Iris joined the swim team half a year ago - originally, the situation of being selected as a representative athlete in such a short period of time would have been exceptional, but Beatrix has been standing in the same position as Iris in a much shorter time than that.

But it's not because Iris is unable to stomach this that she is not friends with her. Iris respects Beatrix and is not jealous of her. She is that kind of girl.

Above all, she is pleased to be able to compete at a high level. She has no sense of humbleness towards her competitors. I've been challenged by her for years, and I know that better than anyone.

From there, the story is simple.

There is a problem between the two of them, and it is highly likely that Iris alone cannot solve it.

Of course, this is just my gut feeling, and there may be no problems at all.

But I didn't want to neglect anything about Iris. Iris is the only family I have.

It doesn't matter if I'm misunderstood a little. I should grasp the situation and do what I can. So, if I've made up my mind....

"Anyways, let's go to school."

I exhaled loudly, shouldered my bag in my right hand, and started walking towards the nearest station.

[Monday, May 22, 1972]

It was morning in East Berlin, a divided city in the German Democratic Republic (DDR). A morning where the reality of being on the front lines of the Cold War between East and West is on the other side of the coin, but where peace can still be felt.

This is how a new week began for me and Iris.

The Danziger Integrated ⁽¹¹⁾ School that Iris attends is located about five kilometres away from the Pankow district where we live. The two-year high school I attend is also located nearby, so when I have to do something, like shopping for food, I usually go to the integrated school to pick up Iris, who comes home late from club activities.

That afternoon, after class, I declined the invitation of my close friends and headed for my old alma mater.

I passed through the main gate and headed for the indoor pool, which was located a short distance away from the simple architectural style school building.

Normally, I would enter the pool straight from the front in order to enjoy Iris's reaction, but this time I planned to enter through the back gate and look around from the gallery on the second floor.

I passed a few juniors and teachers that I knew and exchanged greetings with them. It seems that my going into and out of the pool has already become a famous story, so they didn't seem suspicious.. Well, I guess it's partly because I've talked about how much I care about my sister countless times while I was in school. In addition, the fact that I graduated at the top of my class must have given me credibility.

Danziger was one of the lower-ranked integrated schools in East Berlin in terms of academics, but it was focused on training athletes and had excellent facilities for that purpose. Many students are recommended to go on to high schools for physical education, and some of them have participated in the Olympics in the past. The swimming club that Iris belongs to is no exception to this rule, and I've heard that they provide a high level of guidance.

Incidentally, Iris and I didn't go on to the 12-year extended senior high school because we spent a lot of time abroad due to our father's work, but many people from integrated schools go on to university, so I'm not that concerned about it.

Soon after, I arrived at the second floor gallery of the indoor pool. As soon as I reached the gallery, my senses were refreshed by the unique atmosphere of the indoor pool: the pungent smell of chlorine that stimulates the nasal cavity, the moist air that surrounds the room, and the cheerful shouts of the swimmers and their instructors.

I rested my elbows on the railing surrounding the gallery and peered into the pool below. Dozens of students in swimsuits were either practicing in the pool or warming up by the pool.

Iris was easy to spot.

A 10-meter diving board painted white. Iris was standing slightly behind the top of it. She was about to jump into the water.

I followed Iris' every move with my prized 2.0 ⁽¹²⁾ naked eye vision.

Her body was tightly wrapped in a swimming suit. The simple black swimsuit accentuates the snowy whiteness of Iris's skin, and her blonde hair, braided into a bun, is hidden by a white rubber cap.

Iris exhaled loudly, and with a gorgeous gait, she jumped from the jumping platform.

With her knees stretched out at the crossing, she folded her body like a shrimp, rolling forward two and a half times before extending herself - splashing slightly and entering the water with a knife-like sharpness.

Two and a half-forward somersaults in a shrimp shape - not a performance of low difficulty.

According to what I heard, in the diving competition, the water entry without splashing is called "no splash" and it gets a high score.

Iris swam toward the handrail of the swimming pool, turning around in the water, bending her body stiffly.

"Fantastic...As expected of my sister."

I couldn't help but feel my cheeks relax. This is the fruit of hard work and talent. I'm sure the aerial sensation must be innate. If it wasn't for that, she wouldn't have been selected for the national team over her seniors, not even half a year after she started the diving competition.

After getting out of the pool, Iris was talking with her instructor about something. Her expression is serious. I was happy to see that my sister had found something to devote herself to other than schoolwork and housework.

From what I could see, the relationship between Iris and the other members of the club seemed to be going well. The club members were praising Iris after she finished talking with her instructor. I could see that Iris was also smiling happily.

I suddenly felt a strange presence and looked away from Iris.

A girl was standing on the 10-meter diving board where Iris had been standing a few minutes ago.

Her appearance was - how should I say it - the complete opposite of Iris. Her hair was deep black, reminiscent of a dark night. Her swimming suit is a chic blue-based design. Her physique is slightly larger than Iris's, and her breasts, which are suppressed by the swimsuit, are nearly bursting at the seams - and every inch of her body is well-trained. It's hard to believe she's in the same grade as Iris.

"Beatrix Brehme....."

I naturally spoke the name of the girl I had heard for the first time this morning. I'm not sure, but I didn't think it was strangely wrong.

I couldn't take my eyes away from the girl standing on the diving board. Her figure is beautiful, yet glamorous. She looked like a snow queen carved out of an icicle by a rare master craftsman.

Beatrix stood at the top of the flying board with a tense air, took a breath, and leapt with superb form.

She did two and a half front somersaults in a shrimp pattern - the same as Iris' performance - but higher, faster, and more beautiful than Iris'.

A moment later, the entire pool erupted in a collective roar.

If the situation had been different, I might have screamed as well.

The dive was spectacular, but especially the entry was perfect. Beatrix slid herself into the water with almost a perfect no-splash. Even Iris would have found it difficult to enter the water with such a small splash.

The dive was too beautiful, too free of hesitation. It was like...

"Suicide by drowning"

I rolled my eyes at the unintentional muttering that came out of my mouth.

Yes, Beatrix's performance was not even remotely human.

It's not like a machine, but her consciousness was completely unified, and there was no sense of extra thoughts. It was as if I was flying to kill myself - a feeling that I had to end it all.

I felt a cold sweat on my back and realized that I had been holding my breath. It was as if I had seen something I shouldn't have - and I thought it was no wonder Iris was attracted to it.



Iris smiled and talked to Beatrix who had risen from the pool. But Beatrix, with a slight glance, passed by her. Iris still seemed to call out, but Beatrix ignored even that and went away. The abandoned iris seemed to droop her shoulders.

"A Pair between these two"

My brow wrinkled. It's not that Beatrix's attitude bothered me. I knew from Iris's conversation this morning that the two of them were probably not on the same page. That's why I was there today, to check it out.

But it wasn't just "not on the same page". It was blatant disregard - there is a deep rift between the two.

I looked it up during class and found that evaluation of conformity was essential for synchronized diving. The most important thing is to perform exactly the same as your partner. If so, why were Iris and Beatrix paired up?

It's true that Beatrix's skills are tremendous, but if she's not willing to compromise, there's no way to be in sync. If they were not going to be able to coordinate their moves because their partner was Iris, they would be better off pairing her with someone else, even if their skills were inferior.

I'm not sure that the leaders of this club are so incompetent that they don't see the disadvantages of pairing Iris with Beatrix, which makes this decision all the more puzzling.

I feel a pain in the pit of my stomach. Someone's will is intervening in the unnatural arrangement of people. It's a common story in this country.

As if to affirm my imagination, While the other members of the club called out to Iris to cheer her up, Beatrix just threw a complicated look at them and refused to approach them. It was as if there was a taboo that could not be ignored, but could not be touched either.

I made a face that I would never show Iris - a face that looked like it was choking on a bitter bug - and turned my gaze once again to the diving board.

Beatrix was once again standing on the diving board. With her back turned, she made a spectacular leap and turn - and no splash. Voices of admiration echoed indoors.

"..... what a nice ass."

I was genuinely impressed and also slightly disgusted, but in order to hide it, I muttered about the scene that had been burned into my eyes.

An hour later, I met up with Iris at the school gate. Iris had just finished her club activities and her hair was somewhat damp. Her expression was as cheerful as ever.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. So, where are you going today?"

"Let's go to Haro in Pankow. I want to buy not only groceries but also some household goods that are out of stock."

"Got it."

Haro was the closest state-run supermarket to us. You could find it anywhere in East Germany. It had a relatively large selection of goods at low prices, and for ordinary people like us, there was no better ally. I remembered my father telling me that one of the few advantages of East Germany was that groceries were cheap.

As we started walking to the nearest station, I said to Iris as if I had remembered.

"I might be home late tomorrow, so go ahead and finish your dinner."

"Are you working part-time again?"

"I'm going to see those people."

The moment she heard the word "those people," Iris's expression hardened. It was only for a moment, but I didn't miss it.

"I understand. I'll make a delicious dinner for you tomorrow."

"Please"...that was all I could say.

3

The next day - after class, I took the train to Greifswalder station ⁽¹³⁾.

The Weissensee district ⁽¹⁴⁾, where the station is located, still retains its old streets thanks to the fact that it was spared from the war.

Unlike the streets of housing complexes that have been built in recent years, the scenery is still pleasing to the eye, but I put on my hat and tried to avoid eye contact with the people passing by as I headed for my destination.

The Department of Psychiatry at the Greifswalder General Hospital - the waiting room, isolated from the general public, is filled with the families of patients. The faces are familiar, but no one bats an eye at each other. Everyone had a somber expression on their face, as if they were ashamed to be here.

After completing the formalities almost in silence, we were ushered into a special visiting room. It was a small room with a linoleum floor and grey walls. Every time I come here, I feel like I'm in a prison visiting room. A few minutes later, a middle-aged man, accompanied by a staff member, sat down on a chair on the other side of the room, which was separated from here by an acrylic panel.

"You look well, Father,"

I pried open my lips, which seemed to have been closed with glue, and called out through the transparent wall.

Faded blonde hair, skinny cheeks, blue hospital clothes, drool marks on the chest. His eyes wandered about across the linoleum floor.

The receptionist had told me that he had been treated for a seizure about two hours ago, so I didn't question it.

"I'm fine over here. There are no problems whatsoever."

Knowing that there was no answer, I continued to talk. "My grades are going well, I don't have a cold, and I'm eating well. Cleaning is also done properly, so you don't have to worry about anything at home."

My father, half-awake, was shaking his body in a steady rhythm. He wobbled and swayed - like a broken doll. Eventually, my father began to mutter in a low voice. It seemed to be a mixture of German and Russian, but I couldn't make out what he was saying because he was whispering so quietly.

"Dad, you're misbehaving."

I was about to hand him a handkerchief when I realized that I didn't have the means to do so. The acrylic shielding had a small hole in it for phone wires, but it was not big enough to hand him an item.

This is where my father is kept. My fingertips trembled as memories of the good times with my father suddenly came back to me. But I told myself that this was an essential step for my sister's safety, and I looked at my father again from the front.

My father was a severe alcoholic.

He drank like a bat out of hell, lost his identity, and became violent.

When he sobered up, he wept over the traces of his actions and vowed to be a good father. But it didn't work.

Day after day, week after week, his condition worsened, and the doctors euphemistically pointed out other addictions. So I had no choice but to put my father - Joseph Bernhard - in the hospital.

Several years have passed since then, but my father's mental illness has continued to worsen, and now he can't even hold a proper conversation. The only reason why Iris and I are still living together is because of my father, who has fallen to that level.

I continued to talk to my father unilaterally for the next half hour, and when the staff told me that visiting hours were over, I left my seat.

"Well, I'll be back,"

There was no reply to my farewell.

As I left the hospital, a black car pulled up in front of me as if it had been waiting for me. It was a Wartburg ⁽¹⁵⁾, one of the luxury cars of East Germany. I had always loved cars and airplanes since I was a child, and I could almost always guess the name of any East German-made vehicle just by looking at it.

Without saying hello, I opened the passenger door and sat down. The driver was a man of a similar age to my father. Unlike my father, who was dressed in a hospital gown, he was wearing a well-tailored suit.

The sound of seat belt clasps signalled the car to drive away from the front of the hospital.

An hour later, I was at a café near FriedrichStrasse ⁽¹⁶⁾ (Friedrichstraße) station in the centre of East Berlin.

The café, which had been in operation since before the war, had a gorgeous interior, perhaps because of its location. Even the cup of coffee I ordered was made from an antique. FriedrichStrasse station is the first stop for travellers from the west, including West Berlin, which is why it is lined with stores that seem to be popular with western travellers.

I warmed my palms with the heat from the cup and tried not to make eye contact with the woman sitting in front of me.

"So..."

The person in front of me opened his mouth as if in a hurry.

"What's going on with you lately? and How is Iris?"

The deafening voice was annoying, so I decided to answer as boringly as I could.

"There's nothing unusual, Miss Daum (Frau Daum)."

Truth be told, I didn't find any pleasure in talking to the person in front of me, nor did I actively want to talk to her.

"Well... I hope so,"

The answer came back, sounding somewhat hollow.

Melziedes Daum. That's the name of the woman in front of me -- the one who used to be the mother of me and Iris. Seven years ago, the four of us were a family.

After a few minutes of uncomfortable conversation with my mother, who now had a different family name, I opened my bag and placed a stack of papers on the desk.

She took out an envelope and placed it on the desk, "Looks like your schoolwork is going well. So, here's this month's amount. You don't have to return the extra."

I quickly tucked the envelope into my pocket without nodding. I don't want to say thank you, because I'm aware that I deserve it. But when I thought that I was being blessed with money like a beggar, I felt an uncontrollable irritation. The coffee I poured into my mouth to disguise my emotions did not taste good, and the well-tailored clothes my mother wore made me hungry.

Perhaps she had purchased them at one of the many luxury stores in the centre of East Berlin. Or maybe it was an innerwear store that dealt in western goods - in any case, it must have been acquired in a place where Dad would never stop by again.

"Iris, I heard she joined the swimming team."

"You know a lot. I knew you were watching us."

"Stop saying that"

"Saying What?"

I answered without making eye contact. Outside my window, I see a crowd of people hurrying down the street. I'm sure they're all going home for the holidays.

"...you went to the hospital today, didn't you? Your Father, how was he?"

My clenched fists under the table hardened.

"If you want to know, why don't you just see for yourself?"

"I can't meet him"

"I suppose so. I wouldn't recommend it either, because if you show up, Dad might have a seizure."

I was at my wit's end -- I stood up silently. My mother stood up in a hurry and called out to me.

"I will escort you. I will call a car. I will even pay for the train, isn't the fare insignificant?"

"No thanks. I've already asked Mr. Boltz."

"Well, ..., I'll be going now."

My mother paid the bill and walked quickly out of the store. I nodded my head and continued with a twitchy smile on my face.

"Take care. Give my regards to your husband."

I was being sarcastic, of course. My mother knew that - and she waved at me with a blank expression, as if she was used to it.

"So, how was your day?"

An elderly man holding the wheel in the driver's seat -- Jan Boltz -- asked me as I sat silently in the passenger seat of the Wartburg.

"By the look on your face, I shouldn't have to ask."

"As usual, I showed her my report card and account book, and she gave me money for living expenses. That's all."

I replied in a somewhat strained voice. I'm indebted to Mr. Boltz, so I don't want to be too cavalier about it. But after the ceremony, my heart was in a whisper.

"I want to get my hand on a job, as soon as possible, so I won't have to meet the people I don't want to meet"

"I think you should continue higher education. Joseph ought to wish so"

When Mr. Boltz mentioned my father's name, it was harder to rebel. He is a friend of my father's and has taken care of me since I was a child. If I went against him, I wouldn't be able to face my father.

"I guess it's her way of making amends. You should accept her. You may no longer be family, but you are still her blood-related son."

"I understand what you're saying - but I'm not convinced."

Iris is not allowed to see her father. My sister looks very much like my mother, just like how she did when she was younger. And as unpleasant as it sounds, What happens when they see each other? Iris and I know exactly what happens when they see each other.

"It's just a way to pay for her guilt. It's all about self-gratification."

My father set up the gun that destroyed our family, my mother loaded it, and I pulled the trigger. The victim is Iris... I'm not blameless, but if it weren't for my mother's inappropriate behavior, none of this would have happened.

"All she has to do is send me the money. She doesn't have to force herself to meet me."

"If you're saying that her behaviour is a form of self-satisfied atonement, then maybe that includes being abused by you."

Mr. Boltz's view was surprising. It had never occurred to me that my proud mother met with me every month in order to be abused. I tried to put that view on the chopping block, but - I withdrew it.

"...Mr. Boltz is deceived by her outward appearance." I said

"Maybe so," Mr. Boltz shrugged. If my mother had been a woman of truly auspicious character, she would not have betrayed my father who was hard at work.

My father was a diplomat. I don't remember much about him, but it seems he was on an elite course and was assigned to many countries, including the Soviet Union. Thanks to this, I can speak six languages in simple conversations. I can get along with strangers in a reasonable way, which is a quality I acquired during that time. However, living abroad did not bring only benefits to our family.

My father was a very busy man, and was inevitably away a lot. During this time, my mother had an affair with one of the embassy officials in East Germany, because she was lonely or something.

One day, my father found out about my mother's affair, and our family fell apart.

It's a simple story that can be found anywhere. It could even be considered a template.

Divorce is not an uncommon occurrence in East Germany. As a socialist state, equal rights for men and women are the national policy, and therefore, there is a generous post-divorce assistance system, mainly for women.

As a result of the divorce agreement, my mother gave up her parental rights and forced my father to take care of us. My father tried his best to rebuild his life, but the shock of the divorce caused him to turn to alcohol, and he quickly developed physical and mental problems.

When my father lost his diplomatic position and was hospitalized for severe alcoholism, my mother informed me that she had married a new man. It was a clear indication that she did not want to take me and Iris in.

My sister and I, abandoned by both our parents, were left to live alone with our only remaining asset, our home, the state's guarantee, and our mother's forced living expenses.

I had thought about going into a state-run shelter, but I didn't want to raise the white flag to my mother, who was the cause of the family's breakup, and more importantly, I had no intention of leaving Iris. In addition, I wanted to avoid confronting the young Iris with the reality that her parents had abandoned her.

In hindsight, it was a shallow idea, but at ten years old, I was probably pure enough to hold out a little hope.

Although the money was like an exemption for the people who abandoned us, it did not stop us from making a living, and I managed to balance my studies and family finances. As Iris grew older, and I

was able to share the household chores, I was able to take some time for myself. Finally, a few years ago, I explained to Iris what had happened to the Bernhard family in the past.

Mr. Boltz, who was now driving me home in Wartburg, was one of my few allies.

Mr. Boltz is a retired diplomat who now works as a part-time advisor. He told me that when he was in the service, he owed my father more than he could ever repay. Perhaps that's why he was so supportive of us when my father was hospitalized and we were left alone. But that's not the only reason why I trust Mr. Boltz...

"I have a question for you."

"What is it?"

"Have you ever heard of a house called Brehme?"

"It's not an uncommon family name in East Berlin."

"What if we limit ourselves to the world of politics?"

Mr. Boltz frowned slightly.

"What are you going to do when you hear it?"

I was sure that the shell had hit the target, so I continued.

"Brehme's daughter and Iris are going to be paired up for the tournament. There's something unnatural going on there."

"I can't tell you anything that involves the privacy of others."

"You know the Bernhard family is in a difficult position."

I replied in a stern tone.

"I don't want to get involved in that stuff if I can help it. and I don't want to get close to them, But I have to protect Iris if she is approached from that side."

I shut my mouth there.

I had learned from my father that sometimes silence was the best form of intimidation, and Mr. Boltz knew how my family had been destroyed. Mr. Boltz sighed and looked at me.

"I suppose I should commend you on your intuition."

"What do you mean?"

"Abel Brehme, He is a member of the Socialist Unity Party [\(17\)](#) (SED) and is deeply involved in the economic administration of East Germany. His father, also a prominent communist, defected to the Soviet Union [\(18\)](#) before the last world war, and returned after the war as a party executive, making a

great contribution to the founding of East Germany. He is a member of East Germany's 'red aristocracy' (nomenklatura). [\(19\)](#)

The "nomenklatura" was a slang term for the ruling class in socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and East Germany. It is strange that a ruling class should exist in a socialist system that advocates equality of wealth, but since my father was a diplomat, I have become familiar with this kind of story.

"Beatrix is the only daughter of Abel Brehme. He was known to be a man who was passionate about education, and of course Beatrix would have been deeply influenced by him. Besides..."

"Keep going..."

"Abel Brehme is known to be an avid supporter of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi)."

I unconsciously swallowed my breath. I felt an inexplicable sense of tension and disgust.

The Ministry of State Security (Stasi) - generally known as the Public Security Police - is responsible for maintaining public order in East Germany. Unlike ordinary police, the name is hardly known, and what the organization is doing in the first place is not made public.

But I know. What kind of existence is the Department of National Security (Stasi) -- and what kind of poison is spreading to ordinary citizens like us.

Mr. Boltz continued in an emotionless tone.

"Even the 'nomenklatura' cannot ignore the influence of the Stasi. It is said that they have the weakness of all the party members through intelligence activities. If they can deepen their relationship with the Stasi, the Brehmes' position will be secure."

To be honest, I didn't want to hear this. I don't care if the ruling class of this country is playing politics or not. But...

"You don't want to be concerned with Brehme's daughter, ... especially if you don't want to get involved."

Mr. Boltz told me to let it go.

As the sunset approached, the number of people passing through the streets gradually decreased. As I watched the houses in the neighbourhood light up in turn, Iris called out to me and told me that the meal was ready.

On the table were the salami and cheese that Iris had prepared, and plates with rye bread were arranged. Tonight's menu was a traditional German "cold meal without fire" (Kaltes Essen) [\(20\)](#). I guess it's a common habit of brothers and sisters that when they're busy studying for exams, they tend to skimp on their meals. I lightly buttered a slice of not-so-tasty rye bread and began to eat it.

"What's wrong with you, Niisan? It looks like you have not been in a good mood for the past couple of days."

When she spoke to me like that, I knew I was in trouble. I am always being told that I must have been suffering from something since the day I met my parents.

"That's not true. How was school today, Iris?"

I chose the method of deceiving her by replying to her question with a question. I asked Iris back while nibbling on a salami.

I don't want my sister to worry as much as possible. That's why I escaped by asking her the same question I've been asking at every dinner since I started taking care of Iris seven years ago.

"Nothing out of the ordinary."

Iris answered cheerfully. However, I noticed that there was something shady about her expression. So....

"What about that girl? Beatrix?"

I guess I was able to catch her off guard. Iris stopped moving and then answered in a slightly lower tone of voice.

"It seems that the other members of the club do not think well of her. She seems to rather want it too."

When Iris first brought up the subject of Beatrix, my sister hid her emotions. Today, however, she was not hiding her melancholy. She wants me to listen to her.

Recently, Beatrix had been a frequent topic of conversation at dinner. I didn't listen to her, though, as she talked about how good her skills were and what she was doing to catch up. I didn't know what to say to Iris about how to get along with Beatrix Brehme.

However, I was aware that Iris was practicing more intensively than ever before during my annual secret reconnaissance of the swim team. She had always been the type of person who worked silently toward a goal, but her face looked more focused than ever before.

Synchronized diving requires you to synchronize your movements with your partner. That's your biggest goal. That's why, normally, you aim for the highest score within the level that your partner can match. In other words, it is normal for the better diver to match the lower level diver.

Beatrix, however, does not lower the level of her own performance. As a result, Iris and her friends find themselves in a situation where their scores are not improving, despite the high level of their individual performances.

Whether this series of events is a sign of Beatrix's firm determination to stick to her own performance, or whether it is a way of harassing Iris - it is difficult to judge. And the fact that Iris has started to express her concern about Beatrix's position - how should I take this...

"Have there been any suggestions from the coach about lowering the level of performance?"

"No, nothing from the coach."

Maybe it's political pressure - I don't have enough information yet to make a decision.

"Any word from the seniors?"

"There was"

"Did Beatrix refuse?"

The silence was the answer.

"Other members of the club are saying that we should appeal to the coach to dissolve the pair. But I think there's a reason why she keeps that kind of attitude. I'm learning a lot from her performance, and I want her to succeed in synchronization."

Iris turns her gaze, with a pained expression, to the calendar on the wall.

"I may need some time to get in line with her dive."

The competition was next Sunday - there were only a few days left.

As I stared at Iris's blank expression, I kept thinking about how I should respond to her.

Beatrix's Brehme family is the ruling class of East Germany, the "red nobility" (nomenklatura). That's why they don't want to talk to ordinary people - it's easy to say that. And if you tell her that, Iris might be wary of Beatrix and stop trying to get close to her.

Moreover, it is easy to imagine that Beatrix, or her parents, advised the coach to flirt with the stasi and elevate Beatrix to the cypress stage [\(21\)](#), where she was able to make her way to the top. It can be said that Beatrix chose Iris as the most convenient partner to bring about this possibility.

If Iris's skills don't catch up with Beatrix's, and the synchronized competition itself wasn't performed well, what's the point?. But even if that happens, Beatrix has the advantage of being able to chain her skills together with Iris's, making her own skills stand out even more. It's not a loss either way.

I can read that far. It's just that it's really annoying for me.

But there's something slightly off about it.

Something in the corner of my mind is warning me that this idea is wrong - I can't come to a conclusion. In the end, After a few seconds of weaving, I chose the safest phrase I could think of.

"It is best to keep your distance from such people."

Iris turns her blue eyes toward me.

"Why, even your Niisan....."

"Your skills with Beatrix are at an all-time low, aren't they? and she's not going to match you. Cut it out then, with that narrow-minded person".

It was Beatrix who rejected Iris first. I'm sure the members of the swim team agree with that. If that is the case, then Iris is not responsible for the dissolution of the pair. Beatrix's intentions are none of our business.

However, Iris shook her head.

"If I can adjust to her, then the result will come naturally. It's just a matter of me trying."

"Her house is a powerhouse in the party. It's a privileged class. Don't go any further. If she decides she doesn't like you, you don't know what she'll do to you."

Iris replied, suppressing her emotions. It seemed that Iris and the others had heard about Beatrix's origins. Gossip about the guardian is something that spreads quickly among the students. I've experienced this before.

"I would like to add that the Brehme family is affiliated with the Stasi".

When Iris heard the name of the Ministry of State Security, a look of unconcealed agitation appeared on her face.

"I don't want you to get close to her. Don't even think about becoming her friend. As long as the Stasi is involved, It's not going to end well."

There was a pause.

"I understand what Niisan is saying."

Iris answered as if she was pushing me away. Her face was pale, but as you would expect from my sister, she was not distraught. She looked straight at me and continued to speak.

"But I still want to be her friend. If not..."

"You haven't forgotten what the Stasi did to our father, have you?"

I interrupted Iris in order to shut her up.

It was something I didn't want to say.

It was a topic that Iris and I didn't want to remember - a topic that had become half taboo. However, I felt that this was the only way to force Iris to change her mind.

Iris's whole body coagulated at my words, and she averted her gaze as if to flee. However, it was only for a moment, and then she immediately looked at me and said it clearly.

"Even so ..."

Iris whispered, "Thank you for the meal", cleared the dishes and left the dining room. I'm not sure what to make of this.

"..... Well, What happened has happened."

I sighed to myself. I'm not sure that Iris, who reacted that way, would have listened to my orders.

As I poked at the salami with my fork, I began to think about what I should do. The Stasi - an organization that has been expanding its influence in recent years, and the source of my father's destruction.

It was the reason for my interest in East Germany's national situation and also the reason why I avoided getting involved with it.

It's not that I don't have anger and resentment towards the Stasi for destroying my family. But more than that, I am afraid of the possibility of losing my family again.

I'm just a student, and I don't have the power to stand up to the government. No, even if I did, it was clear that I should not get involved in such things if I wanted Iris to live a happy life like other people.

"Even if you know it, you"

With a sigh, I ruminate on Iris's words from earlier.

In fact, it was half-intentional that I said what I did. I had already guessed how Iris would react to my words.

If it wasn't for that, she wouldn't have allowed me to talk about Beatrix, even though she knew she was a "red noblewoman" (nomenklatura) - or even though she had a sneaking suspicion that she was - she wouldn't have said a word in consideration of her. As someone who has raised Iris for the past seven years, I have to say that she is that kind of person.

Iris has something to believe in - unlike me. That's probably why she's so obsessed with Beatrix Brehme.

This was both troubling and gratifying to me, because at the age of thirteen - still a child in my eyes - she had begun to think and walk on her own, and understand the circumstances her family had gone through.

I put my weight on the back of the chair and sipped my coffee, which had cooled down completely, wondering what to do.

There was nothing I could do about Iris' bad mood. Once her head cooled down, she would understand what I was worried about. However, Iris is a stubborn person despite her honor student appearance, and once she decides to do something, she doesn't easily bend her opinion. I guess we'll just have to wait and see if she can come to her senses.

After the competition, I wondered what would happen to the relationship between Iris and Beatrix - I sorted out the situation in my brain.

At the moment, the only connection between Iris and Beatrix is that they are members of the same club and are a synchronized pair. And there's no way that Beatrix is going to try to close the distance between herself and Iris.

I came to a conclusion in my mind and stood up. I had to clean up after dinner.

"But why do you care so much about Beatrix?"

In order to avoid future danger, it still seems like the best solution is to keep your distance. I replayed the conversation with Iris in my brain while grumbling.

— I think there is a reason why she continues to have that kind of attitude.

— I may not have enough time to get along with her dive.

— Nevertheless, I would like to be friends with her.

A sense of discomfort sickled me - unexpectedly, the image of Beatrix came back to life. It was a brilliant, beautiful and effortless dive - but to me, it looked like suicide by throwing herself.

At that moment, I realized that I had made a simple mistake.

Yes, Beatrix was giving an uncanny performance that I, a first-time viewer, had noticed.

To the other members of the club, it would just look like an advanced performance. But what would Iris feel when she saw Beatrix's performance?

As the sons of diplomats, I and Iris grew up seeing the same things. A foreign landscape, a different language, a different people. A different city from Germany. Our parents were not always there for us, and we often had to solve problems on our own.

My father didn't want to leave the education of his children to private tutors, so Iris and I went to a local school. The world of children is cruel. Unwarranted slander, unreasonable violence... Iris and I worked together to overcome all of this.

We read the faces of our opponents, analyzed their thoughts, made contact with them, and blended in with the group. At times, I had to use violence. Iris and I had the same experiences, and we came to see things in the same way.

Not only that, but we were also together when my father put a gun in his mouth. My sister and I have looked into the faces of people who have chosen death at the same time.

I guess I was so focused on getting Iris away from Beatrix that I didn't understand what she wanted.

Iris wasn't lamenting the fact that she hadn't caught up with Beatrix. She is worried that Beatrix is isolating herself from the people around her. She senses a hint of death emanating from Beatrix.

If that's the case, there's only one thing Iris wants....

Feeling less than brilliant, I let out another breath and stood up from my chair.

[Sunday, May 25]

I was visiting the swimming facility at the National Stadium in the Pankow district. The purpose, of course, was to observe the swimming competition in which Iris was participating.

There were other events going on, too, and the area was crowded with students and families. I weaved my way through the crowds and secured the best seat for cheering.

Since the quarrel that day, I have had only the bare minimum of conversation with Iris. It's very hard not to be able to talk to my beloved sister, but I was stubborn because it wasn't a matter of compromise.

When I told Iris that I was going to the competition site, she didn't ask me to come or not to come. In any case, I wouldn't have missed my sister's big day regardless. I interpreted her lack of response in a positive way and hurriedly prepared to watch the games. In the first place, I was free to watch the tournament. No matter how much of a cold war I was in with Iris, there was nothing stopping me.

That's why I brought in the Leica ⁽²²⁾ that my father used when he was a diplomat. I have no other ulterior motives here. I wanted to show my father a record of Iris' growth when he recovered. It was difficult to get the film, but I bowed to Mr. Boltz and asked him to help me out. Again, I have no ulterior motives.

The competition program was going smoothly, with the 1-meter diving board, 3-meter diving board, and 10-meter high jump being completed in order, leaving only the synchronized dive to be completed. The synchronized dive is only for the finals, and there will be three attempts.

Although they had applied for a performance with a high degree of difficulty, the ranking of Iris and Beatrix's pair was sluggish and they were in fourth place, a position that would be difficult to reverse. As usual, their breathing was not quite in sync with each other. As a result, they were preceded by the other less difficult but well synchronized pairs in the ratings. Nevertheless, the whole hall was buzzing with excitement at the performance of the two pairs, who would surely have won a top prize if they had competed in the solo event.

Only one performance was left. There seemed to be no conversation between Iris and Beatrix. The members of the club seemed to be concerned, but they kept their distance regardless as if not wanting to touch their swollen attitude.

Iris' eyes are closed as she does some image training. Beatrix exudes cold air like a blade. They are sitting within arm's reach of each other, but the gap between them seems infinite. As I looked at the two of them, I thought back to our conversation last evening.

"Good evening, Brehme-san. I'm sorry to barge in on you like this, but could you give me a moment of your time?"

I caught Beatrix coming out of the school gates on her way home from practice, just as the evening sun was casting shadows.

I know that Iris does not come out at this time because she is staying behind after school for strength training. This was the only time I could meet her without my sister knowing

Beatrix had confronted my face directly for a short while. It was at this moment that I wondered if I was being watched.

"If you're asking me to lower the level of my performance, I won't listen."

An alarm went off in my head. As I thought, this woman is dangerous.

"Well, did you know that I'm Iris's brother?"

I'm not sure if she saw me visiting or not, but in any case, she knew who I was before I said my name.

Beatrix was silent when I asked her the question.. I can't read her true intentions from her expression.

"I think I haven't introduced myself yet, but I'm Jürgen Bernhard. Irisdina Bernhard is a member in the same club as you"

"If that's all you have to say, I will be going."

She started to walk past me before I could say anything.

"Wait—"

I reflexively caught Beatrix's hand, and An explosion of murderous energy emitted from Beatrix - So I reflexively removed my hand and took a step back.

"Oh, that's a good reaction"

There was cold sweat on my back. I'm sure I would have licked the ground if I had held her hand for even one more second longer.

"It's not a really nice gesture to try and shove off someone suddenly, you know?"

If you are thrown onto the asphalt, not only will you be injured, but in the worst case scenario, you might even die. I shuddered at the thought of a younger girl who would do that to me without hesitation.

"It's better than the perverts who hang around with the girls after school, I suppose?"

Beatrix smiles wryly. I think she could say to the police nonchalantly that she was defending herself because she was being chased by a pervert.

Then she looked behind her and waved some kind of sign.

I see... I finally realized. Beatrix has an escort. Perhaps that person must have reported my presence to Beatrix. I was somewhat relieved to find out the reason why she knew me.

"Peeping Toms can be good people sometimes"

"Durk, call the police..."

"Wait! I'm kidding, I'm kidding. Please don't get angry. Please. I'm sorry."

I was about to be admitted to the same hospital as my father. I had to avoid that for Iris' sake.

"I don't have time to play with you."

I think she is disgusted - Beatrix cut her gaze in a troublesome manner. The alertness is fading - the timing for the surprise attack is here.

"You injured your leg in practice today, didn't you?"

Beatrix's gaze rose.

"Just before the last dive. The others may not have noticed."

I continued to speak to Beatrix, who was once again looking at me intently.

"The way you are now, you can't possibly be the best performer you could ever hope to be."

Beatrix is standing still. Probably no one in the department has noticed. Not even Iris had noticed. Only I, who was observing from a distance, saw through this fact.

There was silence for a good ten seconds, and then Beatrix opened her mouth.

Iris and Beatrix walk up the steps of the diving platform at the end of the pool.

Both of them climbed the stairs as if they were taking it one step at a time. On the way up, I noticed that Iris had sensed Beatrix's injury. I could confirm from the cheering seat that Iris' face had suddenly paled. Beatrix was going up the stairs with a greasy sweat on her forehead while still keeping her expression. She didn't show any signs of protecting her right leg.

"...you're really stubborn,"

I muttered in a low voice.

"Now, What are you going to do? Beatrix Brehme....."

I wonder what's going to happen. The usual Iris would ask Beatrix about her condition, but she may abstain depending on the condition of Beatrix's injury. Otherwise, she might make a mistake on her own so that Beatrix wouldn't seem like the only one responsible for the low score. I'm sorry to keep repeating myself, but my sister is that kind of person.

Beatrice's expression has tensed. She does not seem to intend to degrade the quality of her performance, and was trying to perform at her full potential, as if she was in perfect condition and not injured. It seemed like a very foolish thing to do, but I just couldn't look away from them.

Iris is conflicted about whether to ask Beatrix about her injuries or not -. Beatrix is giving off an air of desperation. And her words from last night came back to my mind.

"So what? If I'm injured, do you want me to lower my level to match her?"

The evening darkness deepened. Something lit up in the depths of Beatrix's eyes. Maybe it was the first raw emotion she had shown.

"I will not lower the level of my performance. I don't care what anyone says. My performance is my own decision."

Sure enough, this woman was not competing in a synchronized event. She was going to perform the best she could. That was her only goal.

Blood rushed to my head. I don't know if it's the Nomenklatura bloodline or what, but I can't allow anyone to trample on Iris's wishes.

"Can you do it, .. with this leg? You are hardly walking on it, being taped like that"

"That's too bad, My way of life is not so fortunate that I as to whine about something of that degree"

I chuckled at the humorous and absurd lines of this spirited little girl, as if to provoke her.

"Of course, anyone would have to obey the self indulgence of an aristocrat's daughter"

"I don't care about such a thing"

I was interrupted by Beatrix.

"Bloodline? Huh? Do you think you can do anything if you have the blood of a red aristocrat (Nomenklatura)? And even if you can't, someone else will come to your rescue? Gimme a break! I am me! I'm not going to let anyone try to mold me!"

It was pure anger. To be honest, I may have been swallowed up by Beatrix's overwhelming whirlpool of emotions, which had been dominated by irritation. That's how strong her tone was.

"Was it my fault that I was born into the Brehme family? Do I have to live up to the expectations of my parents? The expectations of the party? If not, then I'm regarded as a failure? You've got to be kidding me! I'm going to live beyond those expectations!"

"....."

My instincts were beginning to tell me that I was right.

After I heard the story from Iris, listened to Mr. Boltz's investigation, and then had a talk with the person herself, I finally - at last - saw a fragment of the human being that is Beatrix Brehme.

"I will not let anyone force me to live my life. But I won't run away either. I'll make them all grovel."

Just as Iris and I have fought against the world and its prejudices, she has probably fought against her own bloodline as well.

Beatrix is interfered with by the fact that she may offer some interest to those who don't want to get involved. At its essence, the latter is not a civilian, but the assimilative consciousness of those who want to frame people and label them as they see fit.

We and she have been resisting and living with it.

It made sense to me that Beatrix's performance looked like a suicide. For her, jumping into the water is a rite of passage between life and death.

It is a way to erase the stress of not being able to talk about it with anyone, and to gain the courage to start over again - so there is no compromise.

I felt as if my vision had suddenly opened up. It was as if I had finally reunited with a friend I had been out of touch with for years.

So I naturally said, "Well, that was good. Then I want you to give your best performance."

Beatrix, with a look of relief, let out a sigh.

I guess she thought that the repeated sycophancy would continue, and her reaction was so strange that I let out a small laugh.

Beatrice spat out.

"I'll be the judge of my performance. It doesn't matter what others think..."

I continue without pause.

"You can't use the excuse of being injured against my sister. If you want to beat her, you'll have to give the best performance you can."

I saw this woman's quizzical expression for the first time.

I said, "You can't beat Iris with your injuries. You think you can win, that you're better than her, so you are not even looking at her, but you'll probably lose in the real thing"

This is coming from someone who has fought his sister and lost in almost every way.

"Don't underestimate my sister. She's vindictive. She is a woman who always gets things done."

In the same way that the Brehme family had a demon child named Beatrix, the Bernhard family had an outstanding child named Irisdina.

Any contest between me and my sister has always been settled down in the same way.

No matter how much I excelled among my peers, Iris, who had started late, would always catch up. And before I knew it, she would overtake me and reach new heights. It's always the same with her.

When I looked into the dark red eyes of the woman in front of me and saw my own reflection in them, I was convinced of one thing.

Irisdina Bernhard and Beatrix Brehme are very similar. The shape of their souls must be very similar.

The two beautiful princesses were now standing on a 10-meter high concrete guillotine.

Iris was observing Beatrix's expression intently. Beatrix noticed it. They stared at each other. They were silent, but there seemed to be a million words there.

I reflexively stood up, rushed to the front row of the auditorium and shouted loudly.

"Jump, Iris! Give it everything you've got!"

Because of my loud voice, Iris, Beatrix, and everyone else's eyes were focused on me. I ignored them and continued to shout.

"If you don't give it your all, you'll regret it!"

Iris rolled her eyes and muttered something.

"Crush her with all your might! Surpass her! It wouldn't be courteous to your friends if you did anything else! Rest assured, it will definitely work!"

It was a line without a shred of evidence. But that's okay.

I want to let Iris and Beatrix jump as hard as they can without any strings attached. That's all I was hoping for.

It's not that I didn't feel guilty. Until the other day, I hadn't thought about why Beatrix was so passionate about diving that she had cut off all ties with the people around her. Like the others, I labeled her and only had a view that was convenient for me.

Beatrix, standing still on the right side of Iris, moved her shoulders up and down in a big way, and let out a breath. Beatrix's expression distorted, as if her ankle was hurting - but she didn't want to ask for help. She doesn't ask for help from anyone, not from Iris next to her, not from her friends in the waiting area, and not from her parents, who are probably here to watch the game.

No, I wondered, were her parents really here in the first place? If a dignitary's family is here, there should be a certain amount of security, but there was little sign of it. Perhaps Abel Brehme hadn't made it to the venue. Beatrix was alone. She was going to climb up to that height and fight alone.

That's why she jumped into the air. It was as if she was committing suicide by throwing herself into the water. It was a real act of self-denial. She is fighting in a world where the glory of her parents and the prestige of the party cannot reach her. If she wanted to live by the rules of the Red Aristocracy (Nomenklatura), she should have done something that would have scored political points, such as becoming a Pioniere ⁽²³⁾, rather than devoting herself to club activities like this.

But she doesn't do that.

Like me and Iris, she is just a helpless girl who has been cursed by her parents and the state, an existence who cannot choose.

That's why I'm here, to protect my last bit of pride.

Just as I - me and Iris - are trying to survive together in order to protect our own pride.

I shouted with a sense of atonement.

"Jump, Iris!"

Iris was taken aback for a moment by my sudden exclamation, but then she gave a small smile and tightened her expression. Iris looked at Beatrix -- she must have guessed what it meant, and she nodded a little.

Surprisingly - Beatrix had the same expression as Iris.

A moment later, from a height of 10 meters, the two's fluttering silhouettes burst into the world at a speed of 60 km/h with a dwell time of 1.4 seconds.



The front gate of the national stadium was enveloped in the evening glow.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The swimming competition had already ended, and the athletes and spectators were on their way home. I stood alone in front of the gate, watching the scene. Soon, a figure comes running up to me.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Niisan."

Iris said with a smile.

"I'm sorry the meeting took so long, ..."

"But are you sure you don't want to go home with the rest of the club?"

"Yes. The full-fledged review meeting is scheduled for a later date. Besides, I feel like going home with my brother today."

She says some really cute things. I nodded and started walking with Iris.

"Thank you for that time."

"What do you mean, "that time"?"

"Surely I mean, right before the synchronization."

Iris looked me in the eye.

"Back then, I don't know if I could have jumped without your voice. Thanks to your shout, I remembered something important. If it weren't for that voice..."

In spite of the fact that it was practically an impromptu performance, Iris and Beatrix's synchronized performance was brilliantly executed, and they scored high marks.

In return, Beatrix aggravated the injury in her right foot - but the doctor said that the pain would disappear after two weeks of rest.

And above all, after all was said and done, Beatrix looked more refreshed than ever after getting out of the pool.

"I knew Niisan was amazing. You even managed to move her heart"

"It's no big deal. It's just a result of you acting better than usual."

I replied bluntly. And then I showed Iris my white teeth.

"All I know is that I'd do anything for the woman I love. You're doing great."

Iris put her hand over her mouth and laughed in a subdued voice. It was then that she heard footsteps behind her. When she turned around, she saw an unexpected person.

"Brehme-San....."

It was Beatrix.

"Irisdina Bernhard."

Beatrix walked briskly up to Iris, iron-faced as always. She stopped in front of Iris and remained silent for a while, looked at me once, then turned to Iris and said...

"I'm grateful. You jumped as hard as you could."

The words were surprisingly - unexpectedly honest.

"Brehme-San....."

"Beatrix is fine."

Beatrix said, keeping her eyes down.

"I'm going to call you Irisdina, too."

Iris muttered Beatrix's name as if she was overcome with a flood of emotions. As I stared at her, I was in an indescribable mood.

Perhaps a friendship will sprout between Beatrix and Iris in the future, but is that really the right thing for us?

Even if she has an aversion to her parents' constraints, she is still a member of the Red Aristocracy (Nomenklatura). There's a difference in our positions.

"Jürgen Bernhard."

Beatrix was staring at me, not Iris, as she said that short line.

Dark-red eyes. A mysterious colour of eyes that made her look both age-appropriate and much older.

"That's a good name. I'll remember it."

A mischievous glint flashed in her eyes.

"There was an officer in the Nazi SS named Jürgen, I believe. After the war, he was tried and executed."

"Jurgen Stroop ⁽²⁴⁾, right? He was a lieutenant general in the armed SS ⁽²⁵⁾."

He was a police lieutenant general who was sentenced to death for multiple crimes in the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising ⁽²⁶⁾.

"That's a strange conversation."

Iris was feeling confused.

When I was at a loss as to how the conversation would unfold from there, Beatrix suddenly looked away and returned to her usual self that was at the diving board, with a completely different expression from a moment ago.

"..... I'm not going to be your enemy."

As she walked away, Beatrix waved her hand once. After her figure disappeared into the crowded street, Iris whispered to me.

"Don't you think Beatrix knows about our past?"

Iris' voice was heavy. There are few people who know about our past, except for those who are related to us, such as Mr. Boltz. It's not something we want to talk about, of course. But Beatrix knew that - and then said that she had no intention of becoming an enemy. If that's what she really meant, then the words I should say to her are....

"Even so."

I tapped Iris on the shoulder.

"Your friend is the same, isn't she?"

Iris rolled her eyes at my words -- and smiled happily.

"Yes!"

That night.

I was in my room listening to the radio, spreading out my notebooks on my desk and finishing up my school work.

Perhaps it was the talent I inherited from my father, or perhaps it was the result of my education, but I was able to remember things better than others. Thanks to this, for the past seven years, I have been able to keep my grades at the top of the class while working part-time, visiting my family, and doing housework.

But now I've decided to raise my grades even higher. I only have about four months left before I graduate from high school. By then, I had to get the grades I believed I deserved, no matter what it took.

It's the only way for people like me to make Iris happy and not be crushed by politics ever again.

"I'll keep that in mind, huh?"

As I wrote the answer to my assignment in my notebook, I casually muttered the words that Beatrix had told me.

I glanced at the application form on the corner of my desk, which had a picture of a formation of jet fighters with East German Luftwaffe ⁽²⁹⁾ markings flying against a blue sky, and turned my attention back to the assignment.

On the radio, the news reported by the national radio station was broadcast in the voice of a stolid announcer.

"According to an announcement from the Ministry of Defense, the National People's Army (NVA) has dispatched engineers to join the ongoing development of a large-scale MMU ⁽³⁰⁾ in the Allied Soviet Union, which will be used mainly in satellite orbit and on the lunar surface, in line with the rapid progress of space development.

BEATRIX BREHME
ベアトリクス・ブレーメ



アイリスディーナと同じ水泳部に所属する少女。上流階級の出身で、常にボディガードが付いている。

第二章 ベアトリクス・ブレーメの告白

Chapter 2: Confession of Beatrix Brehme

1

Haro is one of the most famous supermarkets in East Germany. The store in the Pankow district, near a residential area, is always crowded during the evening hours.

Most of the customers are women, probably housewives, but it's not unusual to see businessmen on their way home from work or students on their way home from school. Both Iris and I often drop by on our way home from school in our school uniforms.

"So, Niisan, what are you doing today?"

Iris, my younger sister, asked as she and I walked through the automatic doors together. Her hands, which had the beauty of carved sculptures, were gripping the handles of a shopping cart. The contrasting combination of art and daily necessities is nice, I thought as I answered the question.

"For now, meat and cheese. The fridge was empty. I'll buy some eggs, too. As for the vegetables, ... Oh, and we ran out of bottled pickles, so I'll get those too. The rest should be fine. If we stock up today, we'll have enough for two weeks."

"Understood"

"Just the right time too, I'll pick out a new bathing suit for you. You'll need a new one soon, right?"

"I don't know what you mean by right, but in the end it doesn't matter. Even if I was asked to choose, there is no doubt that my brother's distorted and perverted tastes will be included."

She doesn't trust her brother's "Sense", so she refused with a big smile. I think Iris, who denies her brother's indulgence and good taste without wavering, is cute. It makes me want to stick to it ever more.

"There is a word in the world called filial piety"

"There is no such word. And if I'm going to buy a swimsuit, I want to buy it at a better store."

Haro has most of the daily necessities and is easy to use, but like most products in this country, the quality is not very complimentary.

"This is boring."

I sigh. However, Iris ignored me and proceeded with the cart to the fresh food section in front of the entrance.

Perhaps it was because it was the middle of July, but the fresh food section was more fully stocked than ever. Tomatoes, apples, bell peppers, and other colourful fruits and vegetables lined the shelves. There was also a jar of pickles, which I was looking for. A normal family would have made pickles from the harvest of their vegetable garden, but as we were half self-sufficient, we didn't have much time to spare, so shopping like this was all we could do to get food.

Iris was about half a step ahead of me, humming a tune as she gazed at the fresh product line. She seemed to be in a good mood. I asked her, half guessing the reason.

"Did something good happen to you?"

"You don't know?"

Iris' voice was booming.

"I told you before that the swim team has started practising for the summer competition, didn't I? Beatrix and I will be competing in the synchronized event, just like the last one, and we've been working together better than ever lately."

She looked back at me happily. It's cute.

"The coach also said that this is a sure way to win the competition. Of course, there are no absolutes in competition, but I was very happy to be able to fly with Beatrix in a clean and beautiful way."

"I see."

"And also, the other day, I went to visit Beatrix's classroom..."

Iris continued to talk about Beatrix with a happy and full face. She looks so full of life that it's hard to remember how she looked before the tournament in May, when she was so worried.

However, for the past two months or so, it's become commonplace for Iris and I to mention Beatrix's name in our conversations, and it's usually like this, so it's not a particularly unusual tension.

I'm sure she and Beatrix have been spending more and more time together outside of club activities. In addition to Iris's conversations, I have also heard that the two of them have suddenly and drastically lost their distance from each other.

In the past, it has been known that Iris is one of the most talented girls in the integration school and that her overprotective older brother is always chasing her around. If two beautiful girls like that, who not only have excellent rapport and skilful performance in the swim team, but also work together in the school, it would be unnatural not to talk about them.

I didn't witness it firsthand, but I've heard that the two are known as "Danziger's Rose and Maiden Virgins" and "Black and Gold Princess" and are popular not only with the boys but also with the girls. There are rumours that the teachers are also interested in the two and are planning to recommend their candidacy for the next student council.

However, Iris doesn't seem to be concerned about the voices of those around her, and although Beatrix recognizes Iris, she seems to be spending her time in a more natural manner than before.

To be honest, I didn't think that Iris and Beatrix would be so well-matched, but there is a part of me that can't help but agree. Originally, Iris was a hard worker, good-natured, and got along with everyone, but she was also too much of an honour student that an invisible line was drawn between

her and her admirers. In that sense, she may not have had many friends who were in the same position as her.

Beatrix must have been a person who could easily fit into the gap that Iris had.

By the way, I haven't seen Beatrix since the tournament in May. To be more precise, when I was secretly observing Iris' club activities, I admired Beatrix in her swimsuit, but I did not talk to her face to face.

"So.....are you listening to me, Niisan?"

Iris's voice was sharp.

"No, Sorry, Sorry. I'm listening, please continue."

But, Iris was looking at me with concern.

"Come on, Niisan, you're always doing that lately."

"What do you mean, lately?"

"Niisan, aren't you tired after all? Studying for exams is important, but please take care of your health as well."

After a moment's pause, I understood that this was the case.

Iris explained to me that my distraction was due to fatigue from studying for the exam.

What Iris said was right. I had been studying hard for the past few months to prepare for my future career after high school. I have some confidence in my head and my ability to get things done, probably because of my father's background as a foreign exchange officer. In addition, Iris seems to be concerned about me and has been actively doing the housework to reduce my burden.

However, it was a pity that thanks to her, I didn't have as many opportunities to go shopping with Iris as I would have liked. That's what I meant when I said earlier that we would buy enough for two weeks ahead.

I've been trying to keep Iris from feeling lonely and I've been trying to stay close to her as much as possible, so it would be great if Beatrix could take care of that part of my life.

"Beatrix....."

Iris murmured. I stretched out my back muscles in fear - I thought she knew what I was thinking.

But that was a mistake in my intuition.

"There, Niisan, over there."

Iris urged me to look in front of me... and I rolled my eyes.

There was a black-haired girl wearing the same uniform as Iris, who looked at me with the same surprised expression.

Beatrix Brehme, who would not normally be associated with the common people's store, Haro, was there.

The latitude of East Berlin is higher than that of other European cities, so the sun sets later in the summer. Even though the summer solstice has already passed, it is still only six o'clock in the evening. The sky was a blue summer sky with a slight tilt of the sun. The air was crisp and dry, and the heat was not unpleasant. With such a pleasant cityscape in the background, I overheard a conversation between two girls.

"What a surprise! I never thought I'd see Beatrix outside of school, and in a place like that."

"I at least do some shopping in Haro too."

"What did you buy?"

"Groceries. My parents have been coming home late lately, so I've been cooking dinner myself."

"Don't you have a maid?"

"I have servants, but I want to be able to take care of myself as much as possible."

"That's a good idea. I'm always relying on my brother to take care of me. The only thing I can say I can do better than my brother is cooking."

Phew. It's too cute. I wonder if Iris caught it too, but Beatrix also had an age-appropriate and soft smile on her face. It really surprised me.

"But it's hard to get it done. I'm always making mistakes."

"I see. What kind of menu are you trying for example? I might be able to give you some good advice."

"I appreciate it. I've recently tried making borscht. [\(28\)](#)"

"Oh, I'm good at that! It's called"

So that's what feeling alienated means. With such an impression in my heart, I stared at the backs of Iris and Beatrix, who were walking in front of me.

The two of them were enjoying their conversation. To be honest, this is the first time an Iris that can talk so much with anyone other than me.

I was completely out of zone, but I didn't consider mixing in. Well, after all, I don't know what to say to Beatrix when she asks me to talk to her.

However, to tell the truth, I don't feel comfortable. As Beatrix herself revealed the other day, there are always SP (Special Forces) around her. I'm sure they're still watching our movements somewhere.

Truly fitting to the name of Nomenklatura — I feel an unfathomable gaze on my back just by complaining in my heart. However, As long as the two are talking happily, They can't come out in the open.

"..... I'm surprised you had a knack for this."

To the surprised Beatrix, Iris continued with a light smile.

"Yes, you should try it. It's very tasty!"

Beatrix's face was pensive, but she soon smiled with satisfaction.

"Thank you for your help. I didn't have anyone around to share this kind of wisdom with me."

"You don't say. But I was just passing on what my brother had taught me."

It was a menu that my father had learned from the Russians who worked in the embassy kitchen when he was working there.

"But still, I am very grateful for you. You didn't flatter me, nor distance yourself from me. You gave it your all at that time too"

"That was also because of what my brother said."

Iris clapped her hands and turned to me.

"Niisan, once again, thank you for that time. Thanks to you, Beatrix and I are now able to exchange words in a friendly manner. You were the one who mediated between Beatrix and me."

"I don't really have any"

It was a complicated feeling. I was honestly happy to hear Iris's words of gratitude, but as a result of the friendship that had developed between Beatrix and Iris, the scrutiny had become more stringent.

Suddenly, Iris stopped abruptly.

"What's the matter?"

"No, it's nothing much, but..."

Iris pointed to one of the stores on the street. It's a brand new building, and the windows are lined with beautifully decorated tableware that appears to be made of ceramic and porcelain.

"It looks like a new tableware store has opened."

"Are you interested in tableware?"

"Iris likes to look at and collect beautiful tableware."

I had unconsciously interrupted her.

"She's particularly fond of teacups. Her latest favourite is, uh, ... what is it?"

"Meissen. It's based on the name of a place in East Germany, don't forget that, Niisan."

Iris started without a moment's delay. It's frightening.

"Meissen, as the name implies, is a fine china manufacturer located in Meissen, Saxony. You can think of it as a brand name if you like."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes. I can't afford it because it's too pricey. but the clarity of the shining white porcelain and the wonderful painting done by skilled craftsmen are comforting to look at."

Collecting tableware was one of Iris's few hobbies. I don't know what made her fall in love with it, but it has a certain innocence that is typical of Iris, and I like her for it.

Beatrix seemed to be on the same page.

"I agree. Then why don't you go take a little peek? I'll be here waiting for you with your brother."

Eh? With me? You are not going together?

"No way! It would be bad to leave you both waiting"

"I don't mind. Besides, I don't understand the value of tableware, and I'm sure you'll enjoy it more if you look at it alone."

And no matter how much you like it, you're not going to look at it for an hour or two - Beatrix added.

"If you're so inclined, I'll take your word for it."

Iris hurried to the store. Of course, I and Beatrix were left here. It was awkward.

What on earth am I supposed to say to her - or should I just keep my mouth shut? They say that a man who can't talk when he's alone with a woman is unpopular, but this is tough. In addition, Beatrix is looking away as if she's thinking about something.

"Jürgen Bernhard."

Suddenly, Beatrix spoke my name. Her voice was cold, as if she was trying to point something to me.

"I have a question for you"

"Anything."

I was trying to look nonchalant, but on the inside my heart was tense to the point of bursting at the seams.

Even though she is close to Iris, it doesn't change the fact that Beatrix's Brehme family is one of the party's high-ranking families - the "Nomenklatura". In addition, the Brehme family is said to be deeply involved with the Stasi.

And because of the events involving my parents, I have a deep suspicion of this country.

I'm sure that Beatrix herself is rebelling against her parents, but that doesn't mean that I can let her off the hook. In fact, I would not be surprised if her rebellion against her parents is a lie and she is trying

to find out what happened to me according to the will of the stasi. This makes me wonder if this situation itself is a trap.

"I have a serious problem I need to tell you about."

"..... That's interesting."

I replied in a pretentious tone. A serious problem - I'm sure I've never said or done anything anti-establishment in public, so why...? - My spine stiffened with tension.

"I will give you some advice. It would be in her best interest to do so"

I swallowed my spit. Beatrix smiled as if to mock me, and pointed at me. And then....

"You've graduated from school and you're still coming to the pool not only to watch Irisdina practice, but also to see her in her swimsuit!

"No! I am ... No, that's wrong! Eeeeeee!?"

These words were unexpected. How could this woman have staged this situation just to say something like that? But how did she know? It is true that she knew that I had come to the pool without telling her, but my thoughts were also confused. Why?

"You have that look on your face that says, "Why? That's the look you're giving me."

Beatrix smiles as she torments her prey. I don't know how I can even understand such a fine nuance.

"The reason is simple - my SP confirmed that you were eagerly staring not only at Irisdina swimming, but also ashore."

"What ... are you saying?!"

It was as if I was struck by lightning. Even my line of sight was monitored by the SP. I must be a big idiot.

It's not hard to see why: it's only natural for SPs to be aware of the eye movements of people they need to watch out for.

Frustrated by my own stupidity, I was about to ask about the state of affairs which I feared most.

"You can't tell Iris that..."

"Of course not. I casually asked her about it, including the fact that you were at the pool, and she replied with a misty-eyed glance, "I believe in Niisan".."

I have no answer.

"But I never knew that you, who graduated as the head of your class, was that much of a siskon. I heard rumors, but, hmmm..."

Beatrix mumbles happily as she presses her index finger to her cheek.

I was convinced -- this woman is a sadist. Just as it looks, no, more than it looks. If she keeps pushing me around like this, I am in trouble.!

"That's all right, isn't it?"

I tried to attempt a rebuttal.

"I'm Iris's brother. I'm just making sure she's having a good time at school. The only reason I'm looking at her in her bathing suit is to check on her development."

"Have you ever thought that developmental stuff is a load of crap and that it is too overprotective?"

"I don't want to hear it from someone who's been tagged with SP."

"During club activities, I have people standing around the pool. Unnecessarily tight guards can create gaps."

"Anyway, this is a matter between me and Iris. It's not your place to interfere."

"..... Hmm. Oh, Irisdina, you're early, aren't you?"

"...!"

A chill ran down my spine - Iris was rushing towards me.

"I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time."

"It's okay. Had fun?"

"Yes. It's a pretty good store with a good selection of products - I'd like to buy something from there someday."

"That's good to know. By the way, Irisdina, can you tell me about your brother's?"

"Hey, hey, hey, ...!"

I couldn't help but raise my voice. Iris is puzzled. Beatrix smiled at me.

"What's going on? Niisan."

"No, no, ..."

I glared at Beatrix, while being evasive in my words. She looked down on me triumphantly.

Is this girl trying to turn me into her toy?! Or maybe she is trying to extort something out of me?!
Damn it ---!

"Oh, and by the way, Beatrix."

Iris clapped her hands together. Her expression was unusually bright.

"I have a suggestion for you."

"A suggestion?"

After nodding yes, Iris looked at me and Beatrix alternately and said...

"I'd like to invite Beatrix to our home now, if you don't mind."

"What the?"

"If Beatrix is interested in cooking, I think it would be easier to make it with me and Niisan, and --"

Iris concluded her "proposal" with an angelic smile.

"If the three of us gather around the table, I'm sure dinner will be even better than usual."

"Ahahahahahahaha!"

A bright laugh echoed through the classroom. It was so loud that the other classmates turned to see what was going on.

Ignoring their gazes, the male student in front of me continued loudly.

"It's a masterpiece. Jürgen, you have lost your touch"

"Am not. I'm just being unfairly harassed."

"But it's true that you've been taken advantage of, isn't it? That's unusual for you. Hahaha!"

Oswald Katzen laughed it off. I agree with him inwardly, so I can't say anything.

The chestnut-haired stalwart standing in front of me - Katzen - is a classmate of mine and a friend from my integrated school days. For some strange reason, we got along well and are still friends to this day. The reason why we both attend Rosenthal High School is because after I decided to apply to this school, Katzen followed suit.

Katzen did not come from a background like me or Beatrix.

His family owns a small bakery in Pankow, and Katzen is the second son. He is a liberal - or rather, he is not interested in politics at all. He had a cheerful personality, and he was the person who taught me what it meant to be an optimist.

However, I have been saved by this part of Katzen. Even when I was struggling with my parents' problems, he never changed his attitude and stayed with me. Even though he had probably heard rumors about the problems I was having.

I don't know if it's because he's carefree or stupid, or maybe it's something else, but I think the world would be a more peaceful place if we could live like Katzen.

That's why I was telling Katzen about yesterday's events to pass the time between lectures. Of course, I didn't tell him about Beatrix's origins or anything else, but....

"So, what happened after that?"

"Ah, in the end, we parted ways with her shortly after. She had lessons in the evening, and Iris was deeply disappointed, but...."

"... but, you were relieved"

"Frankly, I was"

"You don't look too happy about it."

"Instead, Beatrix is going to be at my house before dinner today."

"All you get then is a twenty-four hour window."

Katzen's mouth twisted sarcastically. He must have been popular with the girls, but I couldn't guess.

"So, that's why I'm in melancholy. Please don't interrupt me."

With a sigh, I looked around the classroom.

All of my classmates were in the classroom, but the atmosphere was somewhat uncomfortable. There was a reason for this, of course.

The high school system in East Germany is a two-year system, and the year advances in October. It is July now, and we are in the second year, which means that graduation is just around the corner. There is a summer break before graduation, so we have less than half a month left.

My classmates had a variety of career paths. Some went on to universities, some to companies, some to become civil servants, some to take over the family business, and some to join the military after about two years of service. East Germany was one of the world's leading socialist countries, but in terms of freedom of choice, I think it was the most advanced in Eastern Europe.

As a side note, conscientious objection [\(1\)](#) to military service is allowed in East Germany, which means that instead of refusing military service, one can engage in labour. However, it was tacitly understood that if one chose to do so, he would be judged unfavourably in his future career and employment. Despite that, there are many people who choose to refuse military service, even if they accept this fact.

Katzen and I were going to choose the same path again, just like we did when we entered this school.

"How's your studying going?"

Katzen inquired, and I nodded in agreement.

"I should be able to pass, probably, what about you?"

"Well, you know. I'm not as smart as you, so I don't have much confidence."

Katzen folded his hands behind his head and laughed.

"I'll figure something out. but you have to be careful not to lose your mind over the scent of two beautiful girls."

"Don't underestimate me, I can sniff Iris's smell 24/7 with no problems, rather than being tired, the smells helps increase my concentration power, and makes me clear-headed as well"

"Is your sister a dangerous drug?"

Coincidentally while remembering Iris's smile, I also remembered Beatrix's sorrowful expression that did not match her age, and I was fed up. I can't stand the idea of inviting people from the Stasi into my house.

"It would be perfect if there were no foreign substances mixed in, as in this case."

"Hey ... isn't it just futile to fool around like that? Isn't that Beatrix interested not only in your sister, but you as well?"

"Huh?"

What the hell is this guy talking about?

Beatrix is interested in me?

"From what you're saying, that's what I'm thinking."

"Can you explain that a little more clearly?"

"You're smart, but sometimes you're stupid, ... Well, as far as you're concerned, this Beatrix girl was able to give her all at the swimming contest thanks to you and your sister, and the decisive factor was a single word from you."

"Not exactly. Iris responded to my voice, and then..."

"For her, it was an equivalent event. That means she's grateful to you, too."

Beatrix has gratitude for me... the thought never crossed my mind.

It is not surprising that Beatrix is grateful to me. The Beatrix who coerced me...?

"She can't have an overt attitude, because of her personality, and also owing to the fact that you are her best friend's beloved brother, so, isn't it reasonable to think that she was just trying to be mean and see how you would react?"

"I'm sorry, I just don't get it at all."

"Well, if it's you, then i guess you don't"

Katzen laughed and said so easily.

"But, isn't it okay? As I said before, enjoying dinner with your sister's friend is not an opportunity that comes around to most boys. She's cute, right? Why don't you try hitting on her?"

"She's no match for Iris."

"You're right, your sister is beautiful. I mean, she's going to be beautiful."

"That's true. But not for you."

"I don't want you following me around too, speaking of which ..."

Katzen said as he remembered.

"I thought we were going to check on your father today?"

I hadn't said anything about his condition, but had told Katzen that my father had been in the hospital for a long time.

"Yeah. That's why I asked Beatrix to come to my house in the evening."

To be precise, I had to go through the usual 'ritual' of meeting the woman after seeing my father. As expected, I didn't tell Katzen about this either.

Honestly, the ritual made me feel uncomfortable, but I had no choice now.

"I see. Well, don't get too worked up about it."

Katze stopped talking comfortably and suggested that we go to the lavatory. Perhaps a feeling of depression appeared on his face.

As I watched Katzen's back leading the way to the restroom, muttering something like, "I'm hungry," I thought to myself, "That's why this guy is my best friend."

About an hour after meeting with my father and completing the "ritual" with my mother, Ms. Boltz dropped me off at home - it was 6:00 p.m., the sun was still high in the sky. She showed up at our house at the appointed time.

"Welcome, Beatrix!"

At the same time as the doorbell ringing, Iris, who had been helping me prepare dinner in the kitchen, ran out the door in her apron.

When I opened the door, I saw Beatrix in her casual clothes. The moment I saw her in an elegant black dress, I thought of a black rose.

In addition, there was a man in a suit standing behind her, holding a paper bag. He was tall, thin, and had a taciturn look about him. His eyes, however, had a sharpness to them.

It seems that Iris had given her detailed instructions, so I inquired without any particular surprise.

"Didn't you get lost? The streets around here are so intricate and confusing."

"I asked him to do some research for me, so I was fine."

"I'm glad. By the way, may I ask the name of the person behind you?"

"Johan Durk. He is one of my SPs and is responsible for my personal security. Durk, greetings."

The man called Durk stepped forward in front of Beatrix and greeted Iris without missing a beat.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Iridina-sama. I've heard about you from ojōsama. Thank you very much for your concern for ojōsama ."

"Oh no. I just wanted to get to know Beatrix more."

"Don't say that, from what I could see, Iridina-sama was the first person to speak to ojōsama in a friendly manner. Iridina-sama's efforts must have broken down the barriers in the young lady's heart."

"No, I"

"Durk!" Iridina is stumbled, isn't she? Now, back off - I'll call you when it's time to go home."

The tone of voice was pummeling - typical of the ruling class.

"I understand."

Durk stood up, bowed, made eye contact with me for a moment, then turned on his heel and headed for a car parked on the street. The car was a new model of the Soviet luxury car Jill [\(32\)](#).

Beatrix sighed.

"That's what you get from a military man..."

"He is surely very dedicated to his work."

"Really? I think it's too much. Even today, until the last minute, he insisted on continuing to guard the house."

"You're adored, aren't you, Beatrix?"

Iris replied, somewhat relieved.

"It's usually only family members who are willing to speak so frankly, don't you think?"

Beatrix raised her eyebrows slightly and looked away shyly.

"Durk has been in charge of my house for a long time. More importantly, here..."

Beatrix handed the paper bag she had brought to Iris. As I watched her, I was reminded of the fact that Abel Brehme could intervene in state personnel matters.

"This is the tea that my family gets from West Germany through the public corporation. It's my favourite brand and I wanted you to enjoy it as much as I do."

"This is Ronnefeldt [\(33\)](#), isn't it? I believe it's a famous old company headquartered in Frankfurt."

Iris was surprised. I agreed with her. West German luxury goods are rarely available in East Germany.

I had heard from Mr. Bolz that the Red Aristocrats (Nomenklatura) preferred West German products, but I never expected to see an actual example of this here.

However, the fact that Beatrix is willing to show such contradiction means that she is so grateful to Iris and trusts her.

Iris hugged the paper bag happily.

"Thank you very much! I think I'll use this for my after-dinner tea."

"That's fun. I'm sure you'll like it."

The two of them smiled at each other in a way that was appropriate for their age - for two people who, because of their abilities, were often left out of their classmates, it must have been a pleasure to have someone they could talk to without worry.

Despite the differences between the Nomenklatura and the diplomat, the two have been trained from an early age to be more disciplined than their surroundings. Because they have risen to such heights without their knowledge, they have never had any friends who would treat them as equals. As a result, Iris poured out her love equally to everyone, while Beatrix avoided her own collapse by rejecting the people around her... I may be overthinking this, but I think this reasoning is correct.

"And by the way, about Durk whom you met just now..."

Beatrix said, throwing her gaze not at Iris, but at me.

"I have complete trust in him. I'm sure that whatever happens to me, he'll be the first to help me - he won't miss a thing."

I thought it was a warning directed at me personally. I wondered if she was trying to tell me that she couldn't guarantee my safety if something happened to her.

"After all, Beatrix is adored, isn't she?"

It was an iris that took a sigh of relief while misunderstanding the situation.

Thanks to Iris' preparation, the dinner we cooked with Beatrix turned out to be gorgeous.

Naturally, the soup was borscht. It was a joint effort by Iris and Beatrix. It was full of onions, carrots, cabbage, beef, and the decisive table beet. The deep red colour of the beets and their sour aroma were very appetizing. The pure white sour milk served with the dish is homemade.

The main meat dish was schnitzel ⁽³⁴⁾. In short, it is a cutlet. Normally, beef is used, but since it conflicts with borscht, pork is used. I made this one myself. It is served with French fries and lemon slices. According to Iris, my schnitzel has a juicy texture and is quite good.

There was also black bread, assorted sausages, sauerkraut, and pickles. All of them were store-bought and tasteless, but when served on Iris's favourite beautifully decorated platter, they looked delicious on their own. Germans generally eat cold meals for dinner, but not when eating out or when inviting friends over.

What I didn't expect to see were Beatrix's cooking skills. Yesterday, she had mentioned to Iris that she couldn't make the borscht taste good, but in reality, the only problem was the seasoning, and the rest of the work she did was quite skilful. He was especially good with a knife, which surprised Iris. Perhaps it was a reflection of her personality.

Cooking dinner for guests was a new experience for me as well. In fact, I had rarely invited anyone other than my family to my house before, with the only exception being Mr. Boltz who came to visit from time to time. Eating alone with Iris had become the norm, but in a normal family, chores would be done in a lively manner like this.

As the meal progressed and Iris and Beatrix continued to chat happily, I was absentmindedly thinking about such things.



"Are you going shopping in Mitte, Berlin tomorrow?"

Iris asked Beatrix.

The after-dinner tea was already settling down. The Ronnefeldt tea that Beatrix had brought was surprisingly good, even for me who remembered the taste of the West, and went exceptionally well with the apple pie that Iris had baked.

"Yes, I'm off tomorrow as well, so I think it will be fun to browse through the crockery stores."

Beatrix brought a cup of tea to her lips with an elegant hand. I'm really annoyed with the upper class because they can make even the smallest gesture like this look good.

"But, Mitte is that Mitte, isn't it?"

Iris was somewhat puzzled.

"Yes, the Mitte district in the centre of East Berlin. Is there something on your mind?"

"No, I just feel uncomfortable shopping in such a place."

The Mitte district is the centre of East Berlin, the capital of East Germany, and as such, all of the stores lined up in the district deal in luxury goods. The department stores in the area are of a rank far beyond that of our beloved Haro.

When I was living with my parents, I used to walk through these stores a few times a year with my mother holding the still young Iris, but that was it. Iris probably doesn't even have a memory of it. In East Germany, a country that advocates socialism, the disparities that existed in the city were clearly evident.

The café where I perform the "ritual" with my mother is also located in the Mitte district. That was one of the reasons why I didn't like that store.

"Don't worry. I'll escort you. Besides, I think you need a new bathing suit soon. I'll give you a present for today."

Beatrix smiled reassuringly. I know. Iris is growing up, I thought to myself.

"Oh, no, no, no! I can at least buy a bathing suit by myself."

"I'm not going to buy anything that expensive. I've been thinking about getting a new swimsuit for a while."

"Still..."

"I want to be with you. It's nice to go shopping in the city. It's fun to just walk around in those places."

I'd like to do something like a normal student - I think that's what Beatrix is saying.

"I'm sure that's true, but"

Iris shrugged her shoulders in fear and gave me a sideways glance.

"Niisan, would you mind?"

To be honest, it was a difficult question to answer.

There was no real reason to refuse. Beatrix and Iris are friends, and it's none of my business where they go. It's a shame that Beatrix is buying the new swimsuit that I offered to buy her the other day.

Well, if you're going to buy something in Mitte, you're going to get a much better quality product than you'd get in Haro. If Beatrix gives it to her as a gift, it's a win-win situation for my family budget. However, it was not without its concerns.

"Ah~....."

"Of course it's okay, isn't it, Jürgen?"

Beatrix put me on the spot with a satisfied look. That girl. She didn't even use any honorifics.

I cleared my throat and said my answer for the time being.

"No."

"Why not, ...?"

Iris looked confused. I nodded deeply.

"Iris is my sister, whom I have raised with great care. I'm not going to let her go to the vices of the Mitte district. Even with a friend from the upper class escorting her. What would you do if something influenced her badly?"

"That's a very prejudiced opinion."

Beatrix looked dumbfounded. She can say whatever she wants.

"This is between Irisdina and me. It's none of your business."

"No, it has a lot to do with me. I'm responsible for raising Iris to be a full-fledged adult."

My mission is to get rid of my mother and lock my father in the hospital.

"I wonder what kind of 'bad influence' shopping at a fancy department store would have on her."

"It's a capitalist influence, that's for sure."

"Even in a socialist country, economic activity is necessary. Rather, the Mitte district in East Berlin is the gateway from the West to East Germany, or even to the whole of Eastern Europe. It is only natural that they expect us to play a role as a show window to show them the development of East Germany. It's in her best interest to be exposed to such an international atmosphere."

The logic is sound. That's exactly what I should have said to Iris in order to broaden her horizons. But I can't afford to lose to Beatrix here.

"It's true, that's one side of the truth. But that's not the point. You [\(35\)](#) are forgetting something important, Beatrix."

I called her by her first name in the heat of the moment. I also called her "Omae". Well, she called me by my first name as well, so now we're even.

For a while, Beatrix and I stared at each other.

"What's so important.....?"

The stare was surprisingly cold.

"The main target of the shopping is swimwear, right? But will you be able to find a swimsuit that really suits Iris? You can't. So it makes no sense for us to go shopping together. By the way, Iris's bust has grown by eight centimetres in the last six months. I'm the only one who understands her growth curve after spending so many years with her. That's why Iris should go shopping with me."

"Hey, Niisan! What are you talking about?"

"It's about love."

"I don't understand!"

"Calm down, little sister. This is a serious competition between a stranger named Beatrix and me, who has raised you. In other words, a test of love! Now, what do you think? Will you be able to choose a swimsuit that suits you better than I can?"

I smiled at Beatrix as I tested her. I'm not going to worry about the fact that Iris made a gesture like she was suppressing a headache.

But Beatrix laughed lightly and shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about,....., but of course I'm more qualified."

"You don't say ...?"

"Yes. For example, if I show you an Irisdina that you don't know, Isn't that proof that the accumulated time does not matter?"

"What was that?"

Oh, you are going to list all the Irises I don't know about!

"What are you talking about, both of you?"

"For example, ..., this"

Beatrix, who was completely through with her protests, got up from her seat and walked behind Iris. Iris asked anxiously.

"What's wrong, Beatrix"

"For example, ..."

Beatrix traced a finger down Iris's spine.

"eh..... Kya!"

Iris screamed in a faint voice, her shoulders shaking. Beatrix smiled contentedly in front of the shocked me.

"She has a weakness in her back muscles. No one but her synchronized partner would know this."

"What the hell, ..."

"Oh, my God, Beatrix! What are you doing?"

Iris scolded, her face turning red.

"There are other things, you know. But I'm going to stop you for now, because there are too many problems with this."

"What do you mean there are problems?"

"Beatrix, please stop this! Don't look at me like it's the end of the world, Niisan!"

"Now you know, don't you? the depth of our friendship..."

I'm not sure if it's friendship or... No, because me and Katzen don't do that. So I couldn't resist the urge to ask.

"Wait, I have one question. How did you find out about it?"

I had my doubts. I couldn't figure it out.

"I didn't do anything serious. We were giving each other massages after club activities, and it just came naturally to me."

"Massage"

I was surprised. No, of course, I had at least given Iris a massage a few times, but I hadn't done it since she was old enough.

Beatrix had taken advantage of the gap. How horrible I'm terrified of her,.....!

"So, I guess you've accepted that I won?"

Beatrix asked to be sure. I had to nod.

"..... Oh, I'm very spiteful, but I have to agree. I didn't think you understood Iris that well."

"Right?"

"Please don't talk like this, both of you!"

I ignored Iris and told Beatrix.

But there is one condition.

"This late in the game?"

"I'm coming with you."

I declare.

Beatrix rolled her eyes for a moment.

"You're going to follow two girls on a shopping spree? Don't you have any sense of shame?"

"You can say what you want. I was actually going to go along in secret, but now that you've gone this far, I'm going to have to see how it all plays out."

To be honest, from the moment I looked into Beatrix's eyes, I knew it would be impossible to persuade her. So, this is my compromise plan.

"I see. By the way, is that an answer assuming you know what will happen to you if you follow us around secretly?"

"The SPs will find me immediately and beat me to a pulp. You showed Durk in case I might do that, didn't you?"

Beatrix smiled.

"You're very perceptive. But what if I say no?"

"Then I'll give up gracefully. I'm sure you'll show me how it's done and prove to me that you're Iris' best friend. In addition, if you want, I can comment on your choice of swimsuit."

A few seconds of silence passed. Beatrix kept staring at me, then exhaled tiredly and said.

"I understand. Irisdina, is that okay with you?"

"Hmph, You can do whatever you want"

Iris sounded like she was about to cry. I'm guilty of thinking my sister is cute like that.

"Then it's settled."

Beatrix gave a nod of agreement and muttered in satisfaction.

"I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

For Beatrix, asking Iris to go shopping was part of her plan. As soon as the matter was settled, she made a phone call, called up the SP called Durk, and headed home.

After seeing Beatrix off at the door, Iris and I sat down at the living room table without anyone saying a word.

We stared at the table with the three teacups still lined up and breathed a sigh of relief. We were both feeling a little tired, probably because we were not used to having guests outside the family. But for Iris, it was an exhaustion that was accompanied by a sense of comfort.

"Thank you for today, Niisan".

Iris turned to me and looked at me with sincere eyes.

"There's always tomorrow, so don't be too hasty in thanking me."

"No. Thanks to you, I think Beatrix was able to relax. Especially during the second half of the tea time, she kept smiling.

"I didn't do anything major. It's true that I wanted to see if she was worthy of being your best friend."

"I'm sure you're not that shallow. You wanted Beatrix to have fun, so you brought up that subject, didn't you?"

"If that's what you thought, then it was a happy misunderstanding."

"I don't mind. Niisan is an awfully kind person."

Then she cast her eyes down with her face dyed red, and her expression became quite stern.

"..... Well, I was more than a little embarrassed, too. What is it with you two?"

I replied with a crisp face.

"I would like to practice massaging as well"

"You are hopeless"

It's an extreme argument, but I'm willing to lie as much as I can to protect Iris - no matter how much she hates me as a result.

"..... Anyway, I'm grateful to you, Niisan, so I will count on your help tomorrow as well."

Iris smiled and stood up, grabbing the apron that was hanging on the chair.

"I'll take care of the cleanup. Please go back to your room. I know you have exams to study for."

"Nah, I can help. I have absorbed a lot of poison today and I need to cleanse my mind."

"Hey, enough with the nonsense please, Niisan"

Iris chuckled as she went to the kitchen to start washing the dishes. After a few moments, she muttered to herself.

"Actually, I think Beatrix is still holding on to a lot of problems."

"Problems?"

"It's her relationship with her parents. Apparently, it's not going so well after all."

"..... I see."

That was what I had been convinced of at the recent tournament.

Perhaps, or perhaps not, Beatrix has an antipathy towards the future that her parents will impose on her.

Nevertheless, I have added a question mark to that certainty.

Even if Beatrix is against the future that her parents have imposed on her, is she trying to resist it?

Certainly, Beatrix would like to fight against it. But is she actually trying to do so? Isn't she giving up while feeling antagonistic? Isn't swimming and Iris a way to escape from this?

Of course, there is a reason why I was given such a hint. And I'm not going to tell Iris about it.

Iris took a breath as if to refresh her mood, then looked back at me and said with a smile...

"That's why I'm going to make sure that Beatrix has a lot of fun tomorrow."

"The Stasi is short of personnel?"

I was on my way home from my usual "ritual" with my mother, in the passenger seat of Mr. Boltz's Wartburg, and I couldn't help but ask him back.

"And what does this have to do with Beatrix Brehme's family?"

Indirectly, Mr. Boltz replied, prompting me to continue.

"Within the Stasi, there is a growing consensus among radicals who want a military force that can operate under its own authority, different from the National People's Army (NVA)."

The idea of an independent military force is disturbing.

"Is this the result of the change of the general secretary to someone who is close to the Stasi?"

"That's right. But that's not all. Apparently, the Soviet Union's intentions are having an effect. Recently, the confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union has eased due to the fact that the nuclear forces of the two countries have become equal, and the Soviet Union does not want to intervene in the satellite countries [\(36\)](#) any more than before. Instead, it will increase the power of the Stasi."

In other words, now that both sides had the power to destroy each other, they could rest easy in their military buildup - a strange microcosm of the Cold War.

"The Stasi already has a paramilitary unit, the Felix Dzerzhinsky [\(39\)](#) Guard Regiment, which is designed to protect the capital. They want to use this as a base for further expansion."

"If the Stasi is going to expand its organization and authority, it will naturally need people who will become candidates for future leadership. That's why the Brehmes are planning to send their talented Beatrix to the Stasi."

"That's what I'm talking about. It would be even more desirable if the destination was an armed organization that reports directly to the Stasi. As you can see from the Luftwaffe during the Nazi era, new military types are promoted quickly due to the lack of personnel. If you are as talented as your sister's friend, you will quickly make a name for yourself."

"Why did you tell me this?"

I asked. But I had already thought of the answer to that question. I was still in an uncomfortable mood. Mr. Boltz continued, paying more attention to the road in front of him than he should have.

"If Beatrix is on good terms with your sister, you'd better watch out."

"You think she's going to ask Irisdina to join the Stasi?"

"I'm sure you and Katzen have a lot to discuss. That's what I'm talking about."

"..... Beatrix is rebelling against her parents' wishes. At least, she is not convinced that her future will be decided by others."

"Alone it might be cruel for her, but the both of them might be able to endure it. Oh, of course, I didn't mean to make a cynical remark about you two siblings"

I nodded, but I was sure that this was Boltz's way of warning me. I've been able to do my best so far because of Iris.

If Beatrix had asked for the same kind of help from Iris, I wasn't sure how Iris would have responded.

We both have a history of having our families destroyed by the Stasi, and Beatrix is not oblivious to this. But people unconsciously seek help from others and end up betraying them - just like our mother.

"I'll be careful"

"You've been through a lot, haven't you? You've got your work cut out for you, even with your sister and her best friend."

Mr. Boltz chuckled.

"There is nothing more important to me than Iris. I don't care if it's my best friend or my lover, I'll get rid of anyone who puts Iris in danger."

"What a hard to please Oniisan. How much better it would have been if Joseph had seen you for what you are now"

"That would be ironic."

"No doubt."

Before I knew it, the car was near my house.

Mr. Boltz asked to change the subject.

"Why don't we have dinner somewhere? Of course, you can invite your sister too."

"..... Sorry, I have a dinner party today."

"I see."

"I have one last question."

I turned my gaze toward Mr. Boltz.

"How does Abel Brehme, the head of the Brehme family, plan to deal with a daughter who wants to act against his will?"

"For now, he's going to let her do as she pleases. He wants her to be a young woman at least during her youth - well, I guess it's like a probationary period. If she doesn't say anything to you about her relationship with him, it means he's letting you go."

"As long as we don't turn on the Brehmes, or the state, ..."

"Or as long as you don't influence Beatrix for the worse ideologically."

I held back a sigh and repeated what I had just said - with a variety of meanings.

"I'll be careful."

The next day, the Mitte district of East Berlin was under a clear, cloudless sky.

"This is"

Iris's voice sounded hollow as she spoke.

The location was in front of Alexanderplatz in the Mitte district. The Spree River flows nearby, and there is the Berlin Cathedral, the red City Hall where the administrative district of East Berlin is located, and the Berlin Television Tower, which has become a symbol of East Berlin ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Of course, that's not what Iris is looking up at in dismay.

It's the biggest department store in East Berlin, covered with silvery-white walls of modern design. The name of the place is Zentrum (Central).

Right now, Iris and I are standing in front of our destination for the day after meeting Beatrix at Friedrich Strasse (Berlin Friedrichstraße) station.

"As expected of the Zentrum. It's big."

Iris gulped as she continued. The same was true for me. I go to Mitte at least once a month to see my mother, but I never go near Alexanderplatz, much less to a department store like this.

Incidentally, the Zentrum is a large shopping department store that is only located in large cities such as East Berlin, Dresden, and Magdeburg in East Germany, and it has become a place of longing for ordinary East German citizens.

The Mitte district is also lined with other department stores of the same or higher rank as the Zentrum, famous brand stores, and inner stores where you can buy western products for West German marks. It's not a Beatrix line, but these luxury stores are the symbol of the wealth that East Berlin should be proud to show off to other countries.

When I was a child, my father's work took us to many countries in Europe, but I think that East Berlin's wealth is the greatest among the countries of Eastern Europe.

"Come on, let's go in."

Beatrix tapped Iris on the shoulder. Naturally, both of them were in plain clothes.

Iris walked out slowly. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to go in or not, but I'm having serious doubts.

"You don't have to be so nervous. Like I said yesterday, I'm not going to buy anything too expensive. For a more expensive and better quality swimsuit, you should go to an innerwear store."

Beatrix makes a statement that implicitly acknowledges that Western products are superior to East German products. We may praise her for her honesty, but as a "red aristocrat" (nomenklatura), is that enough?

"I understand."

Iris lowers her chin and takes a step forward as if gathering up her courage. A little bit of guilt in the chest. If I had a little more money in my pocket, I could have taken her to a department store that was not as good as the Zentrum, but better than the local Haro.

"Jürgen Bernhard."

Beatrix said as she turned around. There is still the same cold colour in his eyes.

"If I may reiterate, are you sure you want to follow us on our shopping trip?"

"Of course."

I nodded vigorously, as if I didn't need to say anything. I half meant it, half lied.

Katzen mentioned that he wondered if Beatrix was interested in me. Mr. Boltz was also concerned that Beatrix might be trying to get Iris to join the Stasi.

I had to be especially careful about the latter. I'd like to think that Irisdina would refuse such an offer, but my own personal opinion is that Iris has a strong desire to believe in the goodness of others, and is often hesitant to refuse the requests of others. Perhaps this is a reflection of her desire that not all people are like her mother, who abandoned us.

I don't want Irisdina to have such hesitations. I know that I am no match for the power of the Brehme family, but I want to at least show my will to resist.

Well, the former is probably a misunderstanding on Katzen's part, so there's no need to worry too much about it. For now, Beatrix only sees me as a sissy brother who follows Iris around. I'm not going to deny that, because it's true, and it would be convenient if she misunderstood me as such.

Even so, after having developed such a thought, I was honestly surprised that Beatrix allowed me to accompany her on her shopping trip with Iris. It was a move that I thought hard about while I was buying time for that ridiculous - well, in one respect it was serious - exchange, but I thought I would get a little more backlash.

Of course, Beatrix's comment to Irisdina's need for a new swimsuit of choice was genuine. At the same time, It was for me, an important duty, or rather an obligation, as an older brother.

Whether she knew my intentions or not, Beatrix nodded.

"I understand. But will you be able to withstand the trials that are about to begin?"

"Trials? Such as ogling Iris's figure in her new swimsuit? Of course I'm going to give in to such an ordeal."

"Shut up, Siscon. I'll have Durk snipe you right between the eyes."

It was a horrible thing to say. However, I felt the murderous intent in Beatrix's gaze, so I meekly closed my mouth.

Beatrix let out a breath to regain her composure, and smiled like an angel that's about to give her a test. No, should this be honestly paraphrased as a devil?

"Yes. Trials. Think about it. What do you think we're going to buy?"

"Swimsuits?"

"Yes. The Zentrum is having a summer swimsuit fair right now, and they have hundreds of swimsuits lined up all over the floor. It's a holiday today, so I'm sure a lot of wealthy women are here to buy swimsuits. And women's shopping is long."

"You don't need to tell me, and? what's wrong with that?"

"Stupid, haven't you figured it out yet?"

"What's your point?"

Beatrix giggled and suddenly reached out with her right hand and pointed her index finger at me.

"You're going to be standing in the all-female swimwear department until Irisdina and I finish buying our swimsuits!"

"What?!"

A cold sweat slides down my back. It might be embarrassing, sure.

In a space where wealthy and proud women are gathering to buy swimsuits that suit only them, I am the only man there, just watching Beatrix and Iris choose their swimsuits.

What a shameful play.

No, No, Relax, me, On reflection, Beatrix's opinion has only one blind spot.

"Well, that's nothing, isn't it?"

"Why?"

"There are couples who come to the swimwear section. So it's no surprise that I'm there."

"A man wandering around the swimwear section with two beautiful [\(41\)](#) girls in his arms. That's disgusting."

This runt called herself a "Bishoujo" - she's absolutely right about Iris, but she's too unabashed about it.

"I am telling you, ...That's not going to dampen my spirits."

I said to myself as if to inspire myself.

"Isn't it nice with two beautiful girls in tow... Iris and I also have similar facial features and hair, so you can probably guess that we are brother and sister."

I developed a theory to answer Beatrix's troubled expression.

"What are you, then? They don't seem to be brother and sister. I see, she is the blonde young man's girlfriend - or so they would think. What's wrong with coming to the swimwear section with your own sister and girlfriend?"

Beatrix gave me a scornful look as I expressed my accurate perception of the current situation of the people around me.

"You are the ultimate in self-consciousness. I'm impressed."

"Are you complimenting me?"

"I'm making fun of you."

I'm five years older than you.

"And according to your hypothesis, Beatrix is the older brother's girlfriend?"

Iris was very astonished. She appeared to be floating with happiness.

"I'm kind of happy about that...! It seems to be getting fun!"

"What are you talking about?"

Iris sometimes says the strangest things and it bothers me. As a brother, I'm a little worried.

"You're forgetting one more important thing."

"What?"

"A commentary on my choice of swimwear. You're going to make sure we can hear you over the crowd, aren't you?"

"Wha.....!"

That's right. I forgot all about it!

In an upscale department store full of young ladies, I would be loudly discussing my sister's swimsuit - even if it was Beatrix and my sister, it was too crazy to imagine.

"No, no, wait.!"

I rushed to stop her.

"I'm sure there aren't many swimsuits that would look good on Iris. Just give me one shot and I'll be happy."

"No, as I said before, a woman's shopping trip is a long one. We are going to spend plenty of time, deliberately and viscosly discussing dozens of different swimsuits."

"Viscously?"

"Wait, Beatrix, that's really embarrassing for me!"

Iris also seemed to feel threatened as we continued to argue.

I'm not sure if Iris sensed my intentions, but she continued in an embarrassed manner.

"If you can, please choose Beatrix's swimsuit as well. I want Beatrix to wear a pretty swimsuit too."

Wait, wait, stop, I'm dying here! Why are you expanding my commentary to include Beatrix?

Beatrix rolled her eyes at Iris' suggestion, then smiled honestly.

"You're right. I was going to buy a new swimsuit too. Maybe I'll let you do that."

"Wait! I didn't"

"Niisan, can you please"?

Iris looks at me as if she is pleading. I can't say anything against it. I've never been able to beat Iris when she has this look in her eyes.

"I ...I understand."

"Hm..., that's good."

Beatrix nodded in a good mood. I was the only discouraged one here.

"Oh, by the way, Irisdina..."

Beatrix spoke to Iris Dina as if she remembered.

"I'm sorry, but I was wondering if you could accompany me for a bit after you pick out your swimsuit."

"I don't mind, but where?"

"I want to take a look at some lingerie for you."

Lingerie? Lingerie? Lingerie is underwear, isn't it?

"What's wrong with that? If you want, I can help you find something that suits you."

"No, that's really"

Iris' face turns red. She glances at me for a moment.

That's right. We are brother and sister, after all. I've seen Iris's underwear on a daily basis when she washes her clothes, but even so...

However, Beatrix seems to have taken Iris's words seriously.

"Thank you. So that's how it is."

"Wait! What do you mean 'that's how it is'?"

"What, can you stop poking [\(42\)](#) at me every time?"

"What you are saying right now is more troublesome than what I am doing! You're going to the lingerie department with me by your side?"

"Yes, I am. What's the problem?"

"What's the problem? After the argument in the swimsuit section, following you to the lingerie section would make me look like a complete pervert without question!"

"Then why don't you just stop following me?"

"That's true, but!"

I'm not sure if she's playing with me because she knows that I'm going to keep my grip on Irisdina no matter what, or if she really doesn't want me to follow her - probably the latter. I'm sure it's the latter. She wants to enjoy herself to her heart's content, along with her first friend.

"So, what are you going to do? Maybe I'll choose a pair of underwear that's a little too sexy for Irisdina. Can you forgive that?"

Beatrix asked as if she was being pressured to make a choice. It's certainly unforgivable, but it takes an unusual amount of heart strength to not allow it. I clenched my teeth and continued to think for a few seconds, and then I said my conclusion as if I were squeezing it out.

"I"

"I.....?"

"I'll follow you to!"

Beatrix's eyes widened in surprise.

"..... I'm surprised. You're a total pervert!."

"Look who's talking!"

What is this horrible course of events! If Katzen were here, I would have punched him. I can't find anything appropriate to say.

"So, now that we're on the same page, let's get going."

Beatrix walked out as if nothing had happened.

"Niisan, are you alright?"

Iris called out with concern.

I fought back the urge to fall to my knees and nodded as if to maintain some semblance of dignity.

"Yes. It's a little embarrassing, but it's also my way of showing my love for you as your brother. In other words, this is a battle of love between Beatrix and I.!"

"Oh, don't worry about that."

She told me firmly and walked away as if he was abandoning me.

"Even Iris Damn it, is there no God in this world! Well, Christianity ⁽⁴³⁾ in East Germany should be revered in secret and should not be mentioned except at funerals. If you are careless, you will be noticed by the authorities."

"But Beatrix, who was talking to Niisan, seemed to be having a great time."

With her back to me, Iris mutters in a small voice - a voice that only I can hear.

And then, for some reason, Iris turned to me with a smile that was a mixture of happiness and embarrassment.

"I think I might be a little jealous."

I tried to tell her that I didn't know why she would think that after the exchange we had just had. But Iris didn't seem to want my answer, and she quickly quickened her pace and walked alongside Beatrix.

Even as the clock struck noon, the sky above us remained cloudless and blue.

We finished our shopping at the Zentrum, had lunch at a nearby restaurant, and went straight to Karl-Liebknecht-Straße, which is adjacent to Alexanderplatz.

Karl-Liebknecht-Straße ran east-west through the Mitte district of East Berlin, and was one of the city's major shopping streets. Although most of it was destroyed during World War II and rebuilt after the war, it was lined with elegant medieval-style buildings, and many cafes and boutiques on the first floor. There is a lot of traffic, and foreigners who appear to be tourists can often be seen.

Unlike crossing the border from the east to the west, it is relatively easy to come to this side from the west. Visitors from the west are also good customers who drop valuable foreign currency. Of course, they're probably being watched more than we are, but....

Incidentally, I should mention that the hardships I experienced at "Zentrum" were generally the same as the ones Beatrix and I had talked about. After we finished paying the bill, the clerk who saw us off turned to me and looked at me in bewilderment, as if she had just seen a very strange person, but she had to deal with me without failing to be polite to the customer. I'll never forget that.

"So, what are you going to do now, Beatrix?"

Iris asked. In the meantime, the purpose of coming to the Mitte area has been accomplished at the great cost of my dignity.

"Since we're here, why don't we go to Lustgarten on Museum Island? The scenery there is beautiful, and it's a nice place to be in the summer."

Museum Island is located 500 meters from Alexanderplatz along Karl-Liebknecht-Straße, and is home to many of East Germany's museums. It is in the middle of the Spree River, and its original name was Museumsinsel. It is, of course, one of the tourist attractions of East Berlin.

Lustgarten was a park in the middle of the museum island. The park is beautifully landscaped with forests and lawns, and has become a place for East German citizens to relax in the summer. Although she called it an "inner store," Beatrix seemed to be offering Iris a way to enjoy the afternoon as an upright East Berliner. Iris clasped her hands together happily, as if she sensed the consideration.

"That's great! I've only been to Museum Island for a field trip when I was in elementary school."

"It's a place I never get tired of visiting. I've been to the Pergamon Museum a lot, too."

"It was a museum of historical artifacts, wasn't it? That's surprising. I thought Beatrix would be more interested in works of art."

"It's not that I'm not interested in that, but it's not as good as Pergamon in terms of being able to see the whole history of mankind. Shall we go together next time? I'd be happy to go with you, but I'll have to give you my poor commentary"

"Of course. I'd be happy to."

I haven't been to a museum in a long time. But if Iris can get to know Beatrix and enjoy a fulfilling leisure time like this, that's not a bad thing. Of course, I have not forgotten the words of Mr. Boltz, but...

A few minutes later, we arrived at Lustgarten.

"It's nice"

Iris muttered quietly, her blonde hair fluttering. As expected, the park's vast lawns were filled with families and couples, enjoying themselves in their own way. The cool breeze flowing in from the Spree River was also pleasant.

"I didn't realize how nice this place was when I was in elementary school."

Iris looked happy, but I felt guilty again. If I had more time in my life, I would have been able to take her to more of these places. Of course, there was nothing I could do about it since my parents were like that, but I still can't shake the feeling of regret.

And then Iris had a look of surprise on her face. She hurriedly checked the contents of her bag and was disappointed.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry, I seem to have left my handkerchief at the restaurant earlier."

It was a rare mistake for Iris. Come to think of it, while we were eating at the restaurant, Iris was in a good mood and kept talking to Beatrix. She must have been enjoying today's shopping very much.

I nodded. I had a number of concerns, but then I had one option.

"I'll go find it for you."

"No, you can't! I'll go look for it! You stay here with Beatrix!"

"It's ok, ... And I'll buy you a new handkerchief as well."

"It's the handkerchief Niisan gave me for my tenth birthday."

Iris answered enthusiastically.

Her tenth birthday present? Oh, I remember, I am sure that was

"But I'm pretty sure it was a cheap one from Haro. It was already pretty worn out, and every time I washed it, I thought it was time for a new one."

At the time, Iris was still small, and I didn't have time to get a part-time job and didn't have any money.

But Iris shook her head emphatically.

"It's important to me... so I'm going to go look for it."

"Oh, hey, ...!"

Iris ran without listening to my restraint. I'm sure she'll be able to get there and back in less than 10 minutes.

I said to Beatrix, staring at Iris' back.

"Oh dear, ..., I'm sorry..."

"You're adored, aren't you?"

Beatrix interrupted him. The pupil - the fiery black-red pupil - was set only on me.

"It's unusual for her to be so stubborn."

Is that so? But I'm aware that my sister has a tendency to not back down once she's made up her mind, so Iris' behaviour is not unusual for me.

"Not really. She's always like that."

"I am envious...."

The woman in front of me said something a little hard to believe.

"Hey, hey, hey. You gotta be kidding me."

I held my tongue. Beatrix had a very thoughtful expression on her face.

The cold-hearted part of me analyzes what lurks behind the scenes, even though I didn't ask for it.

A predetermined future. Conflict with parents. A probationary period.

Certainly, from Beatrix's point of view, the relationship between me and Iris might seem enviable.

Obviously, she lacks something - a familial bond. And that's what we have.

That's all we are.

Beatrix, who has been given everything else, even though her future course has been decided, can't possibly understand how we've woven it together. And that I'm extremely afraid of losing it.

I spoke to Beatrix as if I were overwhelmed with emotion.

"Beatrix, we're"

"I apologize for any misunderstanding I may have caused you."

Beatrix averted her gaze as she spoke in a whisper.

"You came along today because you were concerned that I might bring Irisdina into the Stasi."

Silence.

"You don't have to pretend, I'm sorry, but I already know how you siblings have been able to survive. My father told me without my asking him. And who you depend on for your livelihood."

So she has an idea of my relationship with my mother and Mr. Boltz. It's not like we're meeting in secret, and I know it's only natural, but I can't erase the discomfort welling up in my chest.

My cold brain begins to do simultaneous calculations. Why did Beatrix initiate the uncomfortable conversation?

Beatrix continued with her words.

"As I told you before, I have no intention of becoming your enemy. It is true that my father encouraged me to join the Stasi, and I have been approached directly by Stasi officials."

"....."

"But I'm not going to involve anyone else in that cause. I am a friend of Irisdina because I want to be friends with her. Nothing more, nothing less. Of course, if I could be friends with her all the time, I would be very happy - but still, I'm not going to force her."

It didn't look like she was lying - which meant I was wrong again.

"You don't believe me?"

A bitter smile crept into my face. This country is really good at making people distrust human beings.

"No, ..."

My body reflexively responded to her words. That was my answer.

Then, I thought, what will Beatrix do?

Just before that tournament, Beatrix had said that she would decide her own future. Does that feeling still remain?

I looked down at my feet as my brain processed what I needed to say.

"I'm sorry, too."

"It's okay. I'm used to being misunderstood."

Beatrix smiled a little as she gazed out into the river.

"Nevertheless, even though i have harassed you about it in every way, I have nothing but admiration for your love for Irisdina"

Beatrix returned her gaze to me and smiled wryly, but not unpleasantly. Seeing this, I felt like I understood Beatrix's nature for the first time.

The real Beatrix may be a bright, lively, smiling young lady with a bit of mischief in her heart.

I suddenly realized that I was staring at Beatrix's face. I hurriedly averted my gaze and asked.

"Are you okay with that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"About your future."

"Of course not, so I'm going to resist as much as I can. But I don't feel very at ease when I think that even that "resistance" is allowed because it's not yet."

Beatrix sighs. Being aware that you're being made to dance in the palms of someone else's hands, It can be quite exhausting... — and In a whisper directed only at me, she confirmed the sight of Durk across the river. I finally realized that he was not a bodyguard, but a chain that bound her.

"I think if you don't give up, you'll figure it out."

I had unconsciously started to speak. At about the same time, the calm part of me inwardly interjected.

The other party is Beatrix Brehme, the daughter of the Brehme family, the "red nobility" (nomenklatura). If Beatrix were to be influenced by me in a negative way, the Brehme family itself might become an enemy of the Bernhard family.

But I didn't stop. I couldn't stop it.

Because that would mean trampling on the beliefs I held, and because I thought it was the only way to respond to Beatrix's sincerity in preparing this day for me.

"I think so. No, I believe so. That's the way it is. Continue to strive to achieve the necessary results when you need to. It may sound arrogant, but that's what it comes down to in the end."

"That's easy for you to say."

"Yeah, it's easy to say."

I nodded honestly.

"But that's the only way. No matter how long and hard the road is, we have to keep walking."

Beatrix laughed. It was clear that she was not convinced.

It didn't make me uncomfortable. I don't know anything about Beatrix's life so far.

And then a heavy, hard sound echoed from a nearby road surface. I could hear people shouting. I reflexively turned my head in that direction.

To my surprise, a number of tanks had appeared on the road surface. The surrounding area was lined with police officers directing traffic, creating a sombre atmosphere. The civilians in Lustgarten stared in amazement - and a little bit of awe.

I had seen that tank before.

The T-72 ⁽⁴⁴⁾ is the Soviet Union's newest main battle tank (MBT), having only been deployed the year before last. As an extension of my childhood love for cars, I can guess the name of most tanks just by looking at their appearance.

In other words, that tank unit was the Soviet army. They are probably the ones stationed in East Berlin. If you look carefully, you can see the markings on the vehicles.

There are many Soviet troops stationed in East Germany, not only in East Berlin but also in Germany, including the Soviet Army in Germany ⁽⁴⁵⁾ (GSSD).

The ostensible reason for this is, of course, to prepare for war with the West. Even though the U.S.-Soviet détente ⁽⁴⁶⁾ is in progress, the Cold War continues in Europe. In particular, it is said that there are several huge Soviet military bases hidden in the forested areas of eastern Germany. The reason why the Soviet Union does not have bases in the western part of the country, close to the West German border, is probably because it does not want to exhaust its forces in a preemptive attack.

However, this is only an ostensible reason. According to Mr. Boltz, there is another reason.

The column of T-72s continued westward along Karl-Liebknecht-Straße across Lustgarten to Unter den Linden, the heart of East Berlin. They are throwing their gazes in all directions incessantly, as if alert to the movements of the civilians - It was not a gaze of protection for their fellow citizens. The machine gun turret on the turret also continues to turn.

I twisted my eyebrows slightly. The current movements of the tank troops, for example, are too quiet for an urban warfare exercise, and too languid for a parade. There was no prior notice - it must have been an unannounced event. If so, what was the purpose?

"A Show of force."

As if reading everything from my expression, Beatrix gave me a straightforward answer.

"Recently, thanks to the policy of reconciliation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the number of citizens in East Germany who are talking about the need for East-West cooperation has been increasing. There are more and more people in the East German army who are sympathetic to this - at least that's what my father told me."

"That's why Soviet troops."



I couldn't hide my displeasure. Beatrix also nodded blankly.

"Yes. Soviet troops - the Soviets would like to suppress any disturbing movements. The best way to do that would be to stage a demonstration in the capital, East Berlin."

"To show them who really controls this country."

Beatrix did not nod, because in a way, this must be an unpleasant fact for her.

The reason behind the deployment of the Soviet troops in Germany (GSSD) in East Germany was to stop the rebellion in East Germany. According to my father, during the Soviet occupation of East Germany immediately after World War II, there were numerous riots by citizens demanding freedom and democracy - all of which were crushed by the Soviet military.

The current show of force must be a response to that success. Certainly, if the main street of one's own capital city were to be traversed by the tanks of another country, it would be obvious who held the right to kill or steal from one's own country.

For the Brehme family and other members of East Germany's "red aristocracy" (nomenklatura), dealing with the Soviet Union would have been difficult.

It is true that they control East Germany, but they do so under Soviet control and with Soviet support. Even if they disliked the Soviet Union and formed an anti-Soviet regime - the Soviet troops stationed in Germany (GSSD) would overrun East Berlin and that would be the end of it.

Even if the Soviet Union were to refrain from intervening in its satellite countries due to détente, this fact would not change. The Soviet Union had no intention of ceding control of East Germany to its rightful owners just yet.

A few minutes later, the tank column passed through Luftgarden. All that was left behind was a thick cloud of dust and an indescribably heavy atmosphere. Even the cool breeze flowing from the Spree River seemed chilly.

I let out a deep breath. There was no way I could feel good about being shown the reality of the ruling structure in East Germany.

After searching for some words, I spoke to Beatrix with a wry smile.

"Good grief, those Russians."

"It's a necessary sacrifice to protect the system in this country."

There was no hint of humour in Beatrix's voice. The expression on her face was serious.

I asked her as if I were caught up in the moment.

"What do you mean?"

"It means exactly what it says. As long as we are a socialist state with the Soviet Union as our ally, it will be natural for us to follow the Soviet Union."

"That's surprising. I thought you might have a different opinion."

"I accept reality. No matter what we do, it won't change that."

Beatrix spoke up clearly. However, you can read the anguish on her face - despite her words, Beatrix must not be convinced.

But I couldn't take it in stride. The Nomenklatura, the Red Aristocrats, the people who are supposed to be responsible for this country far more than us, are approving the violent domination of East Germany by the Soviet Union.

No kidding. If even the Soviets become, even passively, obedient dogs to the Soviets - what do we expect to live with?

Do we have to be the dogs of the Soviet Union's "red aristocracy" until this country is gone, or perhaps until we die? When the war starts, East Berlin will be the first target. The face of my father, when he was still alive, came to mind.

I don't like political discussions. If someone else had said it, I wouldn't have been so upset. But the problem was that Beatrix - Iris's best friend, and someone with whom I had some contact - had mentioned it.

"That's exactly what we mustn't give up. If the politicians in this country don't do their best for us, we won't be able to change anything."

"This is not an issue that can be dealt with by emotionalism. Without the Soviet Union's help, this country will not survive. It's an irreversible fact."

"So I'm supposed to be their slave? I am not pleased with that at all"

"It's nice to have it easy."

"Is that what I look like?"

"Yes, we, the Red Nobility, have a duty to protect this country."

Beatrix's expression was no longer that of a young girl.

"We have been given a position to do just that. We have to accept the unpleasant reality of our situation."

"Noblesse oblige [\(47\)](#), you say?"

I hated that word. Noblesse oblige. You can take it any way you want, you can use it any way you want. It's also a great excuse for the strong to cut down the weak.

And it was annoying to hear such words from the "red aristocracy," a group that thrives on siphoning off wealth from citizens who are forced into equality under socialist regimes.

"I don't deny it."

"In accordance with your Noblesse oblige, you are happily wagging your tails to the Stasi."

"I know that you distrust this country."

Beatrix's voice was flat - she must have been suppressing her emotions. She was trying to be polite, but inside she was probably more upset than I was.

"But don't think that's the case with all people. I have a sense of patriotism, too."

"Maybe it's not something I'm familiar with."

"I'm sure it's not for you, whose mother was cuckolded by a Stasi official and turned into an IM [\(48\)](#)."

I knew that she would know. And I had a strange trust that she wouldn't put it into words. But I was betrayed.

I turned my eyes to Beatrix with all my emotions dead. My insides were in turmoil, but I had already experienced firsthand how bad things could get in this country if you let your emotions show.

Beatrix's words were true. This is the reason why my father divorced my mother, and even after the divorce, he suffered from distrust of humanity and was addicted to alcohol, and when he saw Iris, who resembled my mother, he went half-crazy - all because of this. That's why I....

I'm not sure if Beatrix could tell from my gaze that she had said too much, but she looked embarrassed. This is the first time Beatrix has shown me this expression.

"I'm sorry. I was out of line. But I'm"

"So you're saying you feel sorry for Iris, too?"

".....! It's not pity."

"We don't have any family to rely on anymore, and our relationships with the only people we know are being monitored. It's going to be a lot of fun indeed."

Beatrix did not answer.

I took a deep breath to calm myself down. The smell of the T-72's exhaust fumes was tingling in my nostrils, but I ignored the unpleasantness and said ...

"But I'm still going to survive. I will make Iris happy, without the help of the Red Nobility (Nomenklatura) like you, and without relying on the negative aspects of this country. I'm not like you... just watch me."

"Niisan, ...?"

A voice from behind -- I turned around in amazement and saw Iris staring at me with that handkerchief in her hand.

There was a hint of anxiety in her expression. She must have overheard parts of the conversation.

Iris smiled as if to make up for it.

"What's the matter with you, two? Oh, I'm sorry I'm late! I could have come back right away, but I got caught up in a tank parade or something, and the road was temporarily blocked."

"I know. I'm glad nothing happened to you."

I forced a smile on my face, then tapped Iris on the shoulder.

"Iris, I'm going to go home now. You two have a good time."

"Niisan, ...?"

"See you."

I started to walk away. Iris shouted hurriedly, as if she had swallowed the situation.

"Niisan! Stay Still! ... and don't be silent as well, Beatrix!"

Beatrix remained mute. I thought that was fine. Beatrix has her own pride, and I have mine. This time, it was a collision of the two.

That's all there is. That's all there is to it.

Iris came home three hours after I did - a little after 6 p.m.

"Niisan, ..."

I was sitting at the table in the living room, watching the sunset in a daze, when Iris called out to me apologetically.

I've heard about the situation. And Beatrix has a message for you that she wants to apologize again.

"Hey, Iris."

"Yes, ...?"

"I'm such a bad brother."

"Niisan, ..."

I'm sorry I ruined the holiday Beatrix gave me with my petty quarrels. I'm sorry."

It was an untrue emotion.

After returning home and drinking coffee, I finally calmed down and thought about today and Beatrix.

Noble duty (Noblesse oblige). Patriotism. I had only received these words from an oblique angle, but I guess Beatrix truly believed in them. That's why she is rebelling against her parents and searching for a future of her own, even though she is confronted with a predetermined future.

By the way, Beatrix said that she prefers to visit museums rather than art galleries. Facing the relics of history from thousands of years ago, and comparing them with our own country and ourselves today... I can see how such a repetition could lead to thoughts like Beatrix's.

Of course, I can't understand or sympathize with her.

But I had no right to make fun of it. Beatrix, like me and Iris, is one of those people who wish to resist fate.

In addition to that, even though Beatrix is a red nobleman (nomenklatura), she is five years younger than me - from my point of view, she is still a child. It's only natural that she would have one or two gaffes ⁽⁴⁹⁾. And yet....

"I'm not ready yet. I'm still not good enough. I lose control of my emotions over the slightest thing. I thought I had it all figured out."

I was speaking the words out of my emotions. I had a feeling that I would lose control. But I knew that if I didn't speak up now, I would go crazy.

Besides, I hadn't told Beatrix about this - there was one truth that she didn't know.

I felt like throwing it out there.

If I hadn't said that to my father in the first place, none of this would have happened.

"Niisan, don't go any further than"

"If only I hadn't told my father about my mother's affair."

The reason for my parents' divorce was my mother's affair with a Ministry of State Security (Stasi) official, but it was I who told my father about it.

I didn't have any idea what was going on. I was just a child at the time, and I didn't know the concept of infidelity, and I didn't even know that my mother was having an affair. She simply happened to see her mother chatting with a man in a distinctive school uniform at a café - and told her father about it as a chat.

But that was the trigger that turned our peaceful home into a place of arguing - and in the end, everything broke down.

Of course, that didn't stop me from being angry at my mother. She was the one who betrayed our family in the first place. I have no intention of showing any understanding or tolerance for that.

However, I now have an idea of why my mother had an affair.

My father was a diplomat who travelled to many countries on both the East and West sides of the Atlantic, which gave him a broad perspective. As a result, he often voiced critical opinions about the

current system in East Germany, and had many friends from that side of the world, especially since he had been posted to the West for a long time.

My mother was worried about my father, who had such ideas and rarely came home. That's why my mother began to rely on her relationship with a Ministry of State Security (Stasi) official she met somewhere, and became an unofficial collaborator (IM) to monitor my father - betraying him and us.

I'm partly to blame for that.

Iris is the only one who's innocent in all of this.

But Iris must have felt guilty about the fact that her face resembled her mother's, and that this had further disturbed her father's spirit. Of course, she had never asked him about it directly, but Iris had witnessed her father go half-crazy because of it.

Maybe that's why I couldn't forgive Beatrix for mentioning it so casually.

And before I knew it, Iris had disappeared from the doorway.

Did she quickly return to her room to avoid seeing her pathetic brother? As expected of my wise and bright sister, but the moment I thought that, A warm feeling dwelled on my back, and a thin, white hand, which I used to hold every day until a few years ago, was placed around my chest.

I whispered the name of the person, shocked.

"Iris, ...?"

"Niisan is a good man"

Iris hugged my shoulders from behind and said softly...

"So please don't blame yourself. It's thanks to you that I'm able to live happily now."

"But I am"

I'm upset by the unexpected way I was comforted -- no, I guess I looked so depressed that It was normal for Iris to do so.

"Niisan is faint-hearted. It must have been shocking for you to have had an argument with Beatrix"

She sounded like a mother - a mother in the sense that she had become an illusion to us.

"Normally, I wouldn't be this depressed."

"..... Maybe you're right."

In other words, I've been spoiled by Iris. And maybe even Beatrix.

It's a shameful story. However, Iris is trying to forgive me for being so naive.

"If it's too painful for you to see Beatrix, should I convey the words of apology myself?."

"..... No, that's fine. As for the apology, It will have to come from my own mouth."

"Then"

"But I won't see her right away."

I finally answered in a voice that had regained its tension.

Iris asked curiously.

"Why not?"

"She's the one who's worried about the Noblesse oblige of a 'red nobleman' (nomenklatura). It's truly a troublesome ideology to be influenced by. Moreso, she is a little kid compared to me."

"But Beatrix is"

"I know. That's why I thought I'd show you something."

"This is ..."

"It's the one brilliant way to keep my will intact. Or maybe I'd call it willpower."

"I don't know what that means."

I explained briefly.

Iris seemed surprised.

"Is that possible?" "No, I've heard about your career path for a long time, and I'm not going to interfere with it..."

"It has something to do with your future, so if you interfere, I'll be in trouble as an older brother..."

"I am confident that Niisan will bring me happiness"

What a nice thing to say.

"So how do you"

"I will have to try. I have got to die trying"

I turned my gaze upward and looked at Iris who was looking down at me.

"I know I can do it - I'm my father's child."

I forced myself to smile fearlessly, but I'm not sure I'm as confident as Beatrix.

"If we are to survive in this country, I will have to do just that."

9

As it turned out, I didn't see Beatrix for the next two months as I had declared.

It would be a lie to say that I didn't want to see her.

But more than that, I didn't have time. In addition to my previous goals, I also had new ones, and I didn't have time to worry about my relationship with Beatrix. Iris seemed to understand this, and she didn't try to bring me and Beatrix together. However, she did tell me about her friendship with Beatrix at every dinner as a status report.

Beatrix never tried to get involved with me after that. Thanks to her, I was able to push forward with my two goals.

It wasn't until the middle of September that I received the fruits of my labour.

10

"No way. That's"

I'm sure Iris invited her to celebrate with me, to make up for the quarrel we had some time ago. Beatrix, who showed up at my house in her casual clothes, muttered in apprehension after being informed of my "achievement".

"You've been accepted into the National People's Army (NVA) Air Force, the People's Air Force (LSK) Cadet School... and at the top of your class....?."

"Ha-ha-ha. Have you seen what I am capable of?"

I was in a good mood and made a peace sign. Capitalistic? Who cares. I don't want to delve into the matter with someone who used to frequent the inner stores.

It was only yesterday that I received my acceptance letter. Thanks to that, my excitement still hasn't cooled down.

Beatrix was speechless as she stared at the acceptance letter I had handed her. It may sound arrogant, but I think it's a natural reaction.

The military academies of the National People's Army (NVA) are the most difficult of all. In particular, the People's Air Force (LSK), which I took the entrance exam for, or to put it more bluntly, the East German Air Force Academy, is said to be the most difficult of the three armed forces to pass.

Moreover, to my disadvantage, the East German Air Force is the most meritocratic of the three armed forces, and it is impossible for even the "nomenklatura" to pass the exam through connections. After all, the Luftwaffe is an organization that has inherited the blood of the Nazi-era Luftwaffe, a tradition that cannot be shaken, and because the Luftwaffe was an emerging military type, there was a strong spirit of meritocracy, and it is said that promotions were rapid.

Incidentally, entrance examinations to the East German Air Force started after completing compulsory education at the 10-year integration school and entering the 2-year high school, with aptitude tests and

basic glider training during the long vacations in spring, summer and winter. I had completed all of these courses and was now ready to take the final exam. In the past, passing or failing the high school graduation exam was the same as passing or failing the military academy entrance exam, but since a few years ago, the entrance exam for the military academy has been held separately from the graduation exam.

"Well, it wasn't exactly easy to study with so few papers from past exams, but I managed."

I proudly added. Incidentally, Katzen, who had chosen the same path as me, had also successfully passed the exam. His grades were in the middle of the pack, but he was satisfied.

"But I'm really happy for you, Niisan."

Iris said, sounding relieved.

"A year ago, when I declared my intention to become a member of the People's Air Force (LSK), I wondered what would happen."

"You made me worried. But I'm fine now."

I nodded my head in appreciation.

"Now I won't lose my job. This country is kind to civil servants, and after all, I was admitted at the top of my class. I'm sure they won't treat me badly."

Beatrix was still silent, but after closing her eyes for a few seconds, she looked me straight in the eye and said....

"So, this is your way of fighting."

I paused for two seconds and then smiled.

"That's what it is,"

"Sure, in the People's Air Force (LSK) you can get promoted quickly and become an important part of national defence. If you become a highly skilled pilot, the nation will have no choice but to honour you as a hero."

"Yeah. In addition, the People's Air Force (LSK) is a meritocracy. Just like the entrance exam, promotions are based on merit, not connections. Even I, who is being watched by the Ministry of State Security (Stasi) because of my parents' involvement, can create a future for myself."

"And you can make Irisdina happy."

"That's what I hope."

Iris smiled. To be honest, when I first brought this up to Iris, I was prepared to be fiercely opposed. Becoming a soldier meant living with death. This is especially true if you are in the Air Force and want to be a pilot.

However, Iris was willing to accept it. She believed in my abilities.

Well, if there really was an emergency, East Berlin would be blown up in a single blow by a nuclear attack from the West...so maybe that's not something we should be thinking about.

Beatrix continued with her question.

"Did you have your eye on that career all along?"

"No. No, I decided after you and I had a fight."

".... Ha?"

Beatrix was appalled. The unusual expression on her face lifted my spirits.

"I wanted to prove to you that my determination is real, and that no matter how hard it gets, it can be done."

I looked back straightly at Beatrix

"I'm sorry we argued over something so strange the other day, but now I can apologize to you with all my heart."

Beatrix let out an exasperated - yet relieved - sigh.

"You're a fool, Jürgen, to make people wait more than two months to apologize when they've been meaning to."

"Hey, that's not the right thing to say at this time."

"But I'm finally convinced."

"Convinced?"

"That you are an interesting person to me. That I have a lot to learn from you."

"What are you talking about?"

Learn from me?

"You have shown me the path to follow, in previous competitions and this one. You show me the way to go. That's who you are."

Her eyes were pure and sincere. They were like a red jewel. The Brehme family is a "red noble family" (nomenklatura), and that term seems to exist for the Beatrix of today.

It seemed that my intentions had reached Beatrix. Well, even so, I don't know what kind of decision she'll make regarding her future...

But at that time, I was still not thinking straight. As Beatrix said, I was a fool, you could say.

Because after this, Beatrix said something outrageous.

"It is a little bit rude of you to apologize again after you have accomplished so much to protect your pride. If you do that to me, I have no choice but to accept it. In the first place, when it comes to apologies, the choice of whether to forgive or not should be left to the other party. In this case, I can't help but say that I myself was at fault..."

Suddenly, Beatrix began to chastise me.

I thought it was Beatrix's usual style and decided to just go along with it.

"You think so, don't you? But even then, you were still desperate, weren't you? Thanks to you, I put Iris through a lot of trouble."

The time I spent studying to get this grade was the time I spent letting Iris do most of the housework. For that, too, I am deeply grateful to Iris.

Beatrix nodded deeply.

"That's true. Besides, Iris will have to bear even more hardships in the future. The People's Air Force Academy is located in East Berlin, but it's a boarding school, so you'll have to move from place to place after you become a full-fledged officer. Are you planning to leave Iris Dina alone during that time?"

She had hit the nail on the head. That's exactly what I was thinking. Joining the People's Air Force (LSK) would mean that I would be separated from Iris.

However, I still chose this path, and Iris tolerated it. I have to repay her for her kindness.

"Yeah, but this was the only way I could think of. I feel bad for Iris."

I have to think of a way to deal with this - I have to face up to the problems that I've been neglecting, thinking that everything will be solved after I pass.

"You're right. You need to be punished."

"Punishment? Who the hell do you think you are...?"

This girl, she really had a sadistic temperament. Beatrix spoke out clearly.

"Go out with me, Jürgen Bernhard"

I froze in place at Beatrix's words.

Go out?

With me?

With whom?

Beatrix?

What? Eeeeeeeeeeeh?

"Just a You!"

"As I said before, I've been interested in you ever since you approached me at that tournament. Of course, I feel affection for Iris as well, but in a different way."

Beatrix said, straightening her right arm and pointing her index finger at me.

I was on the verge of panic. Hey, so Katzen is right, no, even more than that, this guy is....

"The events of today have convinced me. I feel that if I walk with you, I can break through my predetermined future - so I want to be close to you."

The eyes of Beatrix pierced me without hesitation.

"I was shocked in many ways when we had a discord, but you still seem to be a suitable man in my eyes"

Beatrix then spoke out her confession of love, once and for all, as if that was not enough.

"So let's be lovers, Jürgen, so that I can protect you both, and in order for me to be saved by you... I love you guys."

The completely unexpected turn of events had me in a state of shock.

It's not only that Beatrix is interested in Irisdina, but she's also interested in me. Aaaaah!

So until now, this venomous tongue has been communicating all this time without malice?

Iris was at a loss for words as well. However, as expected of my sister, or perhaps because of a third party, it was Iris who regained herself first.

"..... Beatrix and Niisan are now lovers! I think that would be so great!"

She put her hands together happily.

"Actually, I've always thought that Niisan and Beatrix would be a good match.! I'm sure that Niisan and Beatrix will be able to walk together"

Iris gazes at me with anticipation.

When I was a child, I helped my mother with her hobby of gardening, and although it was not very manly, I remembered the language of flowers. In particular, each colour of rose has a different flower language. In addition, the black rose had two different meanings....

I felt a chill run down my spine as I realized that every second I had before I could give my answer was ticking away.

IRISDINA BERNHARD
アイリスディーナ・ベルンハルト



ユルゲン・ベルンハルトの妹。容姿端麗で勉強、運動にも秀でており、学校内での人気も高い。水泳部では、飛込競技の選手としても高い期待をされている。

第三章 アイリスディーナ・ベルンハルトの決断

Chapter 3: Irisdina Bernhard's Decision

1

It has been raining since morning on Saturday, September 23.

I don't like the rain. The grey sky makes me feel gloomy, and more importantly, I can't hang my laundry outside. The washing machine we have at home is a reliable one that has been running for more than 10 years without any breakdowns, but unfortunately we don't have a dryer like the ones sold in West Berlin.

How do I know that they sell them in West Berlin?

The answer is simple. I saw it on a commercial for a West German TV program. In East Berlin, West German TV signals reach the city, so it is possible to watch them, and know how rich the people in the West are living. Receiving TV broadcasts in West Germany was publicly forbidden, but no one was obeying it, and the police were not overly strict - at least not yet.

That's why I was depressed this morning.

Besides, the Air Force Academy where I would be enrolled - officially known as the National People's Army (NVA) Air and Ground Forces Air Cadet School "Otto Lilienthal" ⁽⁵⁰⁾ - was relocated from Bautzen in Dresden to Straussberg in Frankfurt ⁽⁵⁵⁾ a few years ago, making it easier to get to from Berlin, but it still takes about two hours by train from my home. Students are placed in a dormitory near the school, so I have to live separately from Iris until graduation, although I plan to come home every weekend, Iris will be living alone at home.

Although Iris has agreed to this, I was having trouble coming to a conclusion as to whether or not such a life would be a burden for my sister.

It was at this time that I received a call from my mother.

It was a café near FriedrichStrasse station. Even though it was raining, the café was still crowded with people in elegant clothes.

"Congratulations on your acceptance to the Air Force Academy. I've seen the military press release."

That's what my mother said first, and handed me a large paper bag.

"Here, congratulations. These are Western confectionery. Eat it with Irisdina."

I accepted the gift in silence. I had no intention of saying thank you. I didn't ask for any congratulations, and more importantly, I didn't like the apparent lie that she had found out about it from the military's publicity.

My mother, who had no interest in the military, would never have read such a thing, and someone with a connection to the military - perhaps her new husband - must have known about my acceptance.

I stifled a whine that threatened to escape and hoped that this time would pass quickly. I know that today is not the usual day for the "ritual", and that I have been summoned for something else. If that was the case, I wanted to hear about it as soon as possible and get out of here.

The fact that she had taken the trouble to call me here meant that it was almost certain to be a nuisance. Whether or not she knew what I was thinking, my mother's next words were as if she was trying to figure out how I would react.

"How's Iris doing lately?"

"Nothing has changed."

"Has she said anything about your future plans?"

"Nothing much. I've explained to Iris the risks of becoming a soldier."

There was a slight pause before the next words.

"You're going to be in the dormitory at the academy, aren't you? Are you going to let her live alone?"

The tone of her voice was so unpleasant that I felt like shouting at her. I'm not sure what she's going to say after she abandoned us.

"I'm going home every weekend., and I'll have Mr. Boltz check on her. Iris says that's fine."

"If I were in her shoes, I'd have to say yes."

"I don't have much time before I move in. If you have something to say, please keep it short."

She stared at my face as I calmly told her, then looked away.

"..... You're really starting to sound like your father, aren't you? Especially in the way he tries to control himself in every situation. I guess blood really does run thick in the family."

"It's nice to know I've inherited some of my father's qualities."

I urged her to speak, cursing inwardly that I had inherited less blood from her.

After a moment of silence, my mother spoke clearly.

"I'll take care of her."

"No, thank you"

It was as expected. The proposal was so out of the ordinary, so ridiculous, so shameless - my mother must have been aware of it. In a firm voice, she called out to me again.

"I'll say it again. Leave her with us..."

"Don't be silly."

I'll assure you in a whisper. If I hadn't anticipated this proposal, I might have shouted at her.

"You're gonna take Iris now? Aren't you the one who abandoned us? You've got to be kidding me. it's not even funny. I'm not going to do it. If you thought you had a millimetre of rights like that, you're out of your mind. You need to be in the same hospital as father. Do you want me to refer you? I go there a lot, so I know what to say to get you admitted."

"..... You're just like him, even your anger."

"You're still the same person who goes off on tangents when she gets in trouble. That's what you did then too, mom."

I could see that my mother gulped. I wonder if she hadn't thought that she would be told that much - or if she has long ago decided that it would never happen.

"I've been protecting Iris to this day, and to begin with, I don't think she's going to accept that. She knows why father and you got divorced."

He glared at his mother who kept looking down.

"I'm worried about her."

My mother answered as she met my gaze head on.

"I don't think you should let a child under fifteen live alone just because you don't have any other choice. You can't be there for her if something happens, can you?"

"The area around the house is safe. I've never had a problem."

"Do you really think that's going to last?"

I was at a loss for words - I knew what my mother was trying to say.

"East Germany considers itself to be an ideal socialist state."..... she said. "That's why even if a crime has been committed, it will be swept under the rug and victims are forced to cry themselves to sleep. That's also a fact."

My mother continued in a heavy tone, while touching about the unspoken aspects of her current husband's work.

"I'm suggesting this because I don't want her to have to go through that. You can go to school from my house without changing schools. It's easier to avoid unforeseen circumstances when you're with someone."

I wonder if the fact that she used the word "someone" instead of words like- "Me" or "family" - was out of consideration for me. It reminded me of what Ms. Boltz had said to me before, and I thought about it a little.

"In addition, living alone will definitely cut into Iris' time for studying and club activities. You don't want to ruin Iris's future to protect your own pride, do you?"

I was confronted with a reality that I couldn't argue with. My mother's words, though very abhorrent, were the right thing to say, and my reason admitted it.

Beatrix's face flickered. If Iris wants to have an equal relationship with Beatrix, it would be better to reduce her burden. I think it would be impossible for her to continue her club activities while living alone.

"..... What's your husband's opinion?"

I asked.

"You have a two-year-old boy this year, right?"

This is one of the reasons why I have such a strong dislike for this woman.

Even though her husband was a diplomat who spoke out against East Germany, she sold information about him to the Ministry of State Security (Stasi) and even had a child with the man she was having an affair with. I think it's the height of vulgarity, and the thought of having to entrust Iris to such a family makes me disgusted.

"We have reached an understanding"

She promised that she wouldn't disrespect me just because I was her ex-husband's child — she continued

"Well, think about it, and I'll ask you again in a month."

My mother stood up without waiting for my response. Finally, as if as a souvenir, she said.

"I want you to think about Iris's future."

After paying the bill, my mother left the store. I kept my head down and couldn't get up from my seat.

There were two cups of coffee in my sight that I hadn't even sipped from. This only added to my misery.

The sound of the rain, which had been pouring since morning, annoyed me.

It was about two weeks later.

I was walking along Frienstein Street in the Pankow district, where I live.

This is one of the streets on the north side of Pankow, where there are many single-family houses. A little further south, there is Schönhausen Palace, where the East German presidential palace was located, and the so-called Mayakovsky Ring, a residential area where only the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) ⁽⁵¹⁾ live. However, not many citizens approach the so-called Mayakovsky Ring.

It was 7:00 p.m., almost dinner time, and there were few people on the street.

It was the first time I had been allowed to go out since I entered the Air Force Academy, but there was something a little unsettling about walking through the familiar streets in my cadet uniform.

Not long after, I saw my beautiful home. It was a two-story house with an orange roof, hidden by grass fences and a tree-lined street. Strangely nervous for some reason, I put my hand on the knob of the front door. When I opened the door, I saw my home for the first time in two weeks.

"I'm home."

There was a short pause, then a reply.

"Welcome home, Niisan!"

Iris came running down the hall from the dining room. She's wearing an apron over her plain clothes - a sight for sore eyes. I was filled with an inexplicable sense of euphoria, but that feeling did not last long. Because....

"You're late. We've waited long enough."

After Iris, Beatrix appeared. I don't remember making any promises, but I was about to say something when I fell silent.

Beatrix was also wearing an apron same as Iris. It was the same apron that Iris had used until a few years ago, but as expected, the size was too small, or perhaps the apron was too tight.

Beatrix started to say something, then muttered as she put her hand on her chin in thought.

I don't know what to say in this situation. This is not my home, so it would be strange to say 'okaerinasai,' but it would also be odd to say 'otsukaresama'.

You can just say 'konbanwa' ⁽⁵²⁾ as usual.

"No, it's not. It's more like this."

Beatrix turned serious and looked me straight in the face.

"Welcome back, dear. Would you like to take a shower? Would you like to have dinner? Or Would you like to have me?"

"Where did you learn that line? And don't say it with a straight face!"

"...I wonder if a smile would have been better. I made a serious face just in case."

"I don't need that kind of reality!"

"Oh, so you won't reject me?"

I was taken aback.

"Dinner's ready. I put a lot of love into it"

"I don't want any heavy spices."

"Iris, Jürgen doesn't want the dinner you've lovingly prepared for him."

"Wait a minute. No, no, no, no! That's not true!"

"Really? Then eat meekly, and be amazed at how much my skills have improved.""

"It was you who made it after all!?"

"Who knows" — With that, Beatrix retreated down the hallway and into the kitchen. I exhaled tiredly. Iris made eye contact with me and gave me a wry smile.

"I'm sorry, she was in a good mood today. she was really looking forward to seeing Niisan."

"What's with all the excitement?"

Nah, I thought I understood that she was like this, but as soon as she started walking distractedly, Iris giggled as if she remembered something.

"..... What's wrong?"

"I'm sure you've heard of it. It is true that girls change when they fall in love."

"You know, ..."

"Please give her an answer as soon as possible."

With that, Iris left me in the hallway and went back to the kitchen.

As soon as the door closed, I began to hear the happy conversation between Iris and Beatrix.

"..... answer, you say?"

I don't want to belabor the point too much, so I'll start with the conclusion.

I withheld my answer to Beatrix's confession.

Cowardly? Leave it alone. It would be out of common sense to accept a confession at a time like that.. Of course, there are many other reasons, but anyway, that was the answer I came up with.

Surprisingly, the answer seemed to be within Beatrix's expectations. "I understand," she said, and gracefully passed it off. And then, as I rolled my eyes, Beatrix said....

"I'll take care of Iris while you're at the Air Force Academy."

"Take care of her. She's not a pet."

"Iris was a pet? I always thought you were more than just a siscon."

"You're seriously freaking me out."

"Having Iris as a pet sounds like fun, but it's not ethically permissible."

"Of course not."

I'm the only one who can have Iris as a pet... I didn't want to tell her that because it would make her squirm. After all, Iris had a very delicate smile on her face.

"Well, how about I come stay with you every weekend?"

"Wait, I'll be home for the weekend."

"It can't be helped. I'll allow you to stay."

"Hey, it's my house."

For some reason, Beatrix's expression became more confident of victory.

"If I come to this house on a regular basis, there will be no more people who will try to mess with Iris."

I feel like the stairs of the conversation have been skipped 2-3 steps, but I managed to understand.

Beatrix was being driven home in a luxury car, which made her stand out. Such a car was parked in front of our gate. It is probably rumoured around my house that the daughter of the Brehme family has become Iris's friend, and no one wants to make an enemy of Abel Brehme, who serves as the leader of the party, so that's how Beatrix is saying she will protect Iris.

"What are you thinking?"

I don't know - it's unrealistic. Beatrix is the only daughter of the "Red Nobility" (Nomenklatura), the Brehme family, and she doesn't get along with her parents very well. It was unlikely that she would be allowed to stay at a particular person's house every weekend.

Consider it... That was the last thing she said to me when she confessed to me.

Dinner was a change from the previous day's dinner, and was a very ordinary home-cooked meal - a cold German-style meal (Kaltes Essen). However, it was enough of a treat for me as I was getting used to the messy food at the military academy. The menu consisted of cheese, sausage, salad, bread, and carbonara pasta. The pasta was not cold, but there was no contradiction, since cold food also meant easy cooking.

"What do you think of this pasta?"

Beatrix asked me as I took a bite of the carbonara - to be honest, it was pretty good.

The carbonara sauce, which used a lot of cheese instead of cream, had a mild and deep flavor, and the fried bacon and onions added the perfect accent. The pasta was imported from Italy, not the kind sold at Haro's, and was wonderfully crunchy and tender.

However, if I were to say it outright, I might end up putting this girl in a good mood again, but I'm also afraid to lie about the food. Hmmm.

"It's exceedingly delicious, Beatrix"

Iris interjected from the side, smiling. My Sister, what are you talking about all of a sudden?

"It's easy to tell when Niisan has eaten something good, because it shows on your face."

"Is it? Well then, it was worth the effort."

"How long did you practice?"

"I've been making carbonara for dinner for almost a week."

"A week? That's some obsession you've got there."

"I couldn't get the eggs to turn out right," Beatrix said, giving me a meaningful look.

I stared back at Beatrix in silence. I thought I was protesting against wasting valuable ingredients. But what was Beatrix feeling? She smiled at me — I thought she was going to kill me.

"...Well, that's all..."

I wiped my mouth with a napkin and blatantly shifted the subject.

"Did you have any problems while I was gone?"

"Nothing in particular."

Iris answered.

"We've had breakfast and dinner as usual, and I've been doing a little housework every day."

"How is school?"

"School is going well, although it's only been two weeks since the start of school."

As I may have mentioned before, the school year at Danziger Integrated School changes in October, and they will be in the eighth grade this month.

In three years, they will both graduate from the school and start their new careers. As I mentioned in my conversation with my mother the other day, I hope that Iris will find a job that is appropriate for her talents.

"I'm taking good care of my health. Don't worry. I'm already fifteen, so you're worrying a little too much."

The tone in which she rebuked me was somewhat nostalgic.

"It's true that I'm lonely, but I have friends at school, and Beatrix comes to see me on weekends."

Iris smiled apologetically.

"So you should take care of your own life."

I had no answer. I still hadn't told Iris about my mother's proposal. I'm still not sure if I should tell her or not.

The reason was that I knew how Iris would respond. Iris would probably say that she would follow my decision. Iris must think that her presence is a burden to me - that's why she hasn't interfered in my path.

"You don't want to ruin Iris's future," she said.

"But what about you? I'd like to hear about your time at the academy."

Suddenly, Beatrix interrupted her. I decided to take her up on her offer, hoping it would change my mind.

In the four years of the Air Force Academy, we cadets acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become Air Force pilots through a gradual combination of theoretical education, parachute training, and flight training using actual aircraft.

As this is my first year, I am undergoing training to acquire the minimum etiquette required for military life and the first theoretical education. I will not be able to start actual flight training until next spring, and my aircraft will be a reciprocating trainer. Eventually, we are scheduled to board jet fighters and be dispatched to various combat air units to receive practical training, but that is still a long way off.

It would be no fun to just talk about it, so I decided to talk about my life at the academy.

"At the moment, I'm still at the top of my class. Speaking of hardships, I have a hard time in the morning. I wake up at 5:30 and start training at 6:00. Breakfast is served afterwards. We new recruits have a lot of things to do before training, so we end up waking up at five o'clock. We go to bed as early as ten o'clock, though."

"That's a healthy lifestyle."

"I sleep better because of it."

Like dirt, thanks to fatigue.

"Have you made any friends? Besides Mr. Katzen?"

Wait a minute, sister... that makes it sound like I don't have any friends.

"Yeah, I'll introduce you sometime. They're pretty interesting."

Iris was smiling happily, but I noticed that Beatrix was not smiling. I don't know why, but it's bothering me. It wasn't long before Iris noticed that something was wrong with Beatrix.

"What's wrong, are you feeling sick?"

"..... No, it's nothing."

She was unusually sharp.

"I guess if you stay on top, you might even become an astronaut. It feels pretty good to have an astronaut for a lover."

East Germany participated in Interkosmos [\(53\)](#), a joint space exploration program between the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), and sent several former Air Force pilot astronauts into satellite orbit and to the moon. They are now revered as living heroes.

"I haven't decided to be a lover, let alone an astronaut."

"Oh, so you want to be a slave, huh?"

"Isn't that a huge drop?"

Suddenly, a chuckle came from next to me. Iris seemed to have lost her patience and let out a small laugh.

"I'm sorry, but you both look like you're having a great time."

"What makes you think that?"

I couldn't help but think that I was being teased one way or the other.

"But really, I wish this kind of life could go on forever."

Iris said, as if remembering somewhere that was not here.

It was nine o'clock in the afternoon, about an hour past tea time, when Beatrix called Durk, her bodyguard, to come home.

"You come home every week, don't you?"

Beatrix asked me, standing in the doorway with Durk, who appeared without a sound. Iris was next to me, so I couldn't lie to her. I answered honestly.

"Yeah, if everything's okay."

"Yes. If so, can you let me set up a table sometimes? I remembered that I hadn't celebrated your acceptance into the Academy, and I've found just the place for it."

So she's inviting me out to dinner. It's no wonder Beatrix knows a good restaurant.

"It's not really that important, is it?"

"Oh, you're not going to let your friends celebrate with you? Why not, when you will be flanked by two beautiful women at once?"

"That's right...."

Well, I don't feel bad. That's how hard I've been working. However, even though she's a member of the Red Aristocracy (Nomenklatura), Being treated by a younger girl seems kinda....

"If you don't feel like it, we can pretend we never talked about it."

Beatrix said softly.

"I want to do everything I can to help you guys, but I'm not going to force it on you."

"Niisan, ...?"

Iris's worried voice.

I was still confused, but I was fed up with my own ambiguity. I'm always like this when it comes to myself. I put a few thoughts together and came up with an answer, which I told Beatrix.

"I'm sorry, I was just thinking about something. I'd be happy to take you upon it."

"Do you mind if I choose the location?"

"I don't mind. Please do so. I just don't want to go to a place that's too expensive. It makes me nervous."

And in some cases, I should pay for it.

"All right. Look forward to it. I won't let you regret it. I'll give Irisdina the details later."

Beatrix smiled thoughtfully at me.

After seeing Beatrix off outside the door, I spoke to Iris.

"I know what you're going to say."

I answered, anticipating my sister's thoughts.

"You are thinking why I am not responding to Beatrix?"

"..... a little. Of course, I'm glad that Beatrix and Niisan get along. You have been working hard on your own for a long time, and that's why I thought you would need someone to support you from now on."

Is that what you really think? I felt like sighing. Iris is Iris, and she cares about me. At the same time, she is also concerned about the fact that she is a burden.

"It's hard to put into words, but"

I replied, searching in my mind for the right words to say.

"I have so much work to do now that I don't know if I can accept Beatrix. If I do it Half-heartedly, It will make us both unhappy, furthermore, I am hesitating out of consideration for her"

"What do you mean?"

"She's looking at me as a breakthrough to change her circumstances, isn't she?"

How much of this is politics and how much is emotion - going out with her means going out with the Red Aristocrats. Even if it's a student romance, I have to be prepared for it.

"But I'm sure Beatrix really loves Niisan....."

"I'm not going to deny that."

I want to think that that smile is not a lie.

"I'm the one who dared to say that I could break the current situation. I'm glad she believed that, but if politics gets involved, it's a different story."

No matter what I do, no matter how I try... the events of that day will never leave my mind.

"He's smart enough to be aware of it, and she still wants to help. She's trying to see if I'm going to be her prince on a white horse."

I thought it was a cliché, but I couldn't help it, because that's what I ended up doing.

"I still don't know what's going to happen to me. Of course I'll make an effort. I can see that she is serious, and that's why I still need time to think about"

It wasn't just the words that concerned my relationship with Beatrix. I'm also considering the proposal from my mother, as an example.

I have no intention of doing so, but if I were to accept my mother's proposal and tell her that I intend to leave Iris with her, what would Beatrix think of me? She may despise me or she may show understanding... To be honest, I can't predict.

It's not that I don't have the idea of asking for help from the Brehm family through Beatrix, but if that were to happen, I'd be completely tied to the Brehme family. In the first place, such talk would make

Beatrix herself suffer - she is repulsed by the idea of having her future decided by her parents. If she helped me with the help of her parents, Beatrix would also owe a debt to the Brehme family. What's more, I didn't think that Beatrix's father, Abel Brehme, was the kind of person who would act for such a trivial matter. I've always known that high-ranking bureaucrats have their quirks.

Incidentally, I have already reported my mother's proposal to Mr. Boltz, whom I trust the most, and I have decided not to ask for his help. Mr. Boltz has a family of his own. I can't take advantage of his kindness any longer.

"This is why the "red nobility" are so troublesome, or is it because they are noblemen?"

Iris didn't answer. I'm sure Iris doesn't feel too good about her best friend being called out like this, even though it was me who said it. I tapped Iris on the shoulder, her expression sombre.

"I'm sorry. I'm also confused. I'll think about Beatrix a little more and give you an answer. Please wait until then."

The curriculum of the first year of the Air Force Academy naturally includes a course on physical education.

The purpose of the course is to develop the physical fitness, motor skills, social skills, and practical skills required of future pilots in the East German Air Force, and it is a four-year course of theory and practice.

On the Monday morning of the week after I returned home, my class was taking a physical education class. The topic was "Theory and Practice of Self-Defense".

The self-defence technique we were discussing was Judo. Judo is a martial art that originated in Japan, a country in the Far East, and has been internationalized by being adopted as an Olympic sport. Even in East Germany, it was widely known as a "peaceful" self-defence technique that did not require the use of weapons, and a number of judo practitioners participated in the Olympics and won medals.

"Ippon!" [\(54\)](#)

The voice of the student acting as the referee reached my ears. I let out a deep breath and adjusted my dishevelled judo uniform.

In my vision, I see Katzen lying on the tatami with a pained expression on his face. He was the one I had slammed into the tatami [\(56\)](#) and held down a moment ago.

After catching my breath, I held my right hand out to Katzen and helped him up.

"Ouch, ..., you're still not taking it easy on me, are you?"

Holding his waist with his hands, Katzen stood up.

"I've already told you I'm not good at martial arts. You threw me as hard as you could."

"Judo is not a martial art, it's a self-defence technique."

"They're both the same thing! And you're still a smart mouth."

Throwing Katzen, who was much bigger than me, was quite exhilarating.

Fortunately, I was in the same class as Katzen at the Air Force Academy, and we were even assigned to the same squad.

To explain the word "squad" here, at the Air Force Academy, all the students form a student battalion (about 200 people), and under that battalion, two companies are formed, one for each grade. Each company consists of three platoons, and each platoon consists of 30 to 40 students. This platoon is one class. A squad is a subunit of a platoon and consists of 4 people, and the platoon consists of 7 to 10 squads. All student life is conducted in groups, and joint responsibility is strictly enforced.

I had heard in detail from Mr. Boltz what life was like in the military, especially at the military academy, so I was not particularly surprised, but to think that my relationship with this guy would last this long - I honestly thought it was a conspiracy.

By the way, I am not a beginner in martial arts, having studied sambo ⁽⁵⁷⁾ and karate when I was travelling abroad for my father's work. After I returned to East Germany, I didn't have the opportunity to experience martial arts anymore, but the physical movements I had acquired were useful in my training to qualify for the Air Force Academy.

When confronting a strong opponent, I would imprint a certain pattern on my opponent during practice sessions, such as randori ⁽⁵⁸⁾, and then attack quickly in the actual fight with techniques that I had never shown in practice, which is not what I would generally call a fair and honest approach. Well, I guess it doesn't matter. Warfare is deception ⁽⁵⁹⁾. That's what I read in an oriental tactics book on my father's bookshelf.

"So, what do we do now? Do you still want to do it?"

I am doing randori now (freestyle judo training), so I can practice freely. If I get serious about it, I will get hurt. If Katzen is my only partner, I can wash away proper methods, however, a new person appeared in front of me.

"I will keep you company, Cadet Bernhard"

It was John Yauch. He was the leader of the team in the room next to ours, with a distinctive bluish hairdo that tended to stand upside down.

I felt a little languid. I can predict what Yauch will say.

"According to the book I read, the essence of judo is to defeat yourself, not your enemy."

Yauch nodded his head in agreement, then pointed at me, and said

"But you only see judo as a tool for fighting! Moreover, your judo is full of cunning moves that are against the spirit of judo. I will not tolerate it!"

I stared at Yauch in silence. I waited for one of my classmates to butt in, but unfortunately, no one had time for that.

As you can see from the words I just said, Yauch was a person with a serious personality. I don't mind that he doesn't tolerate bad behaviour, but he's also not very flexible. To be honest, he's one of the types of people I don't like.

When I first met him, I wondered why he had joined the Air Force Academy, but he told me that his dream was not to be an Air Force pilot, but to become an astronaut and give dreams and hopes to people. In order to realize this dream, he seriously took the entrance exam to the Air Force Academy, which I think is an amazing thing about him... just to be clear, I am not praising him.

By the way, Yauch entered the Air Force Academy as the second-highest student. Thanks to this, I've been seen as a rival to Yauch's dream since I first entered the school. Oh dear.

"I'm to blame, I'll be careful from now on."

I raised the white flag right away. It's not like I'm going to keep getting tangled up in this.

"Wait! Now, you're not really apologizing! You were probably trying to end the conversation because you didn't want me to point out your immaturity!"

I don't like it when people are sharp like this. I'm not going to agree with you at all about my immaturity, but I did ask.

"I don't know what you're trying to say. Keep it short."

"It's obvious. It's a contest with me. I'll correct your twisted ways!"

Yauch quickly took a stance.

"Now, what's the matter! I've been fond of horseback riding and fencing since I was a child! My sense of fighting is no less than yours!"

It's really troublesome... But if I don't deal with him here, he'll say, "Don't you have the courage to face the enemy?" So I had no choice but to turn to Yauch.

I was about to turn my body to face Yauch when a small figure stepped in between me and Yauch.

"What's the matter, Vikman?"

I called out to Tsaritsa Vikman

Vikman was one of the few female cadets among her classmates who had enrolled this year. She was small, about my shoulders, maybe even smaller than Iris, who was five years younger. Her hair is blonde with a hint of black, and she often wears it tied back in a bun. Her face is soft, but her eyes have a certain sharpness to them.

I had only exchanged a few words with Vikman. She seems to have a taciturn personality. However, she also seemed to have a good head on her shoulders and was the quickest to learn how to make the bed, which was drilled into us on the first day of school.

So it came as a bit of a shock to me when Vikman tried to communicate with us on her own.

As if in response to my voice, Vikman took a natural stance to the right.

"You're asking me to compete with you?"

Vikman nodded silently.

"But Yauch has a prior commitment to"

She pointed his outstretched right palm toward the ceiling and flexed her fingertips. She was probably trying to provoke me, but rather than being annoyed, I thought it was cute. It's small.

However, the fact that she was coming at me like this meant that she probably had some experience in judo. I'm not sure if this is a good idea, but it's a good idea.

It's better than doing it with Yauch. I called out to Katzen, who was happily watching from the side.

"Katze, be the referee. Yauch, You are next after I am done with her."

"Oh, I got it!"

Katzen responded cheerfully, wondering what the fun was. Yauch was not satisfied and remained silent.

Vikman and I confronted each other. We were both wearing pure white judogi ⁽⁶⁰⁾. Of course, Vikman was wearing her judogi over her shirt, so nothing particularly interesting was likely to happen. There's hardly a bulge around the chest. For me, Iris is the best of proportions, so it's nothing to be disappointed about, but if I had been a Lolicon ⁽⁶¹⁾, I would have been in trouble.

"Begin!"

"At Katzen's command, we bowed and approached each other. Now, how should I play with you—"

The next thing I knew, I saw Vikman's petite body shrinking even further, as if she were about to burst into my bosom in an instant.

"Aaaaaah!"

When I raised my voice, I was already floating in the air. The ceiling filled my vision.

In addition, a moment later, I was slammed back down to the floor with a huge impact, unable to catch myself due to the suddenness of the event.

".....!"

The pain, no, the confusion was so overwhelming that I lost the ability to speak. I could also read the atmosphere and tell that Katzen and Yauch were in a state of shock that they became speechless.

"Are you okay?"

Vikman held out her hand with a clear face. I nodded, shook her hand, and stood up. My thoughts were coming together and I was beginning to understand what had happened to me.

Vikman has carried out a Seoi nage ⁽⁶²⁾ on me. The speed was unbelievable - clearly not the work of an ordinary person.

"Are you an experienced person? Or Perhaps you are a Dan - Kuro-Obi Class ⁽⁶³⁾?"

I asked with surprise. I had learned about judo ranks in class, and it was well known in East Germany that a black belt was a first dan or higher. Vikman looked away as if in doubt, and then said to me...

"I got my second dan in my first year of high school. If I had continued a little longer, I might have been able to become a 3 dan. ⁽⁶⁴⁾"

"..... Is that great?"

I was an Olympian candidate once.

This is what it means to be speechless. The Olympics - I knew through Iris that East Germany was putting a lot of effort into sports, but I never thought I would see an example of it here. I'm sure this is an ability at a professional level, but why would someone like that be in the Military Air Force Academy? This is a school to become a pilot, remember?

I'm not sure if she could read my thoughts from my expression, but Vikman said in a boring tone.

"I was suspected of doping by a rival at the same dojo, so I voluntarily quit."

"You didn't deny it?"

"It was someone you can't communicate with"

In short, the person who suspected her of doping had political power. She was the daughter of a party official - a member of the Red Aristocracy (Nomenklatura) like Beatrix, or a member of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi). It's no wonder she got fed up with judo and abandoned her dream of becoming an Olympic athlete and turned to judo.

"I see. No, but it's amazing. You came here because you decided that with your judo-trained body, you could become a pilot, right?"

I had unconsciously spoken words of praise to Vikman. The short conversation that we had just had may have given rise to a small sense of brotherhood.

Vikman gave a small nod, and then looked at me again.

"But you need to be a little more aware."

"Of what?"

"Of what exists other than yourself"

I had no idea what Vikman was talking about. I was surprised that Vikman spoke to me in the first place. Existence other than myself?

"I have seen many people who fight the way you do, with all the wisdom in them. That way of fighting leads one to only be confronted by people who are more powerful than themselves. I've seen the same thing in myself."

I was aware that my expression was frozen.

"But, in this case, no matter how much time passes You will be alone, eventually, that will happen"

But Vikman didn't say anything beyond that, and after adjusting her messy judo uniform, she said to Yauch: "Next, Shall I take care of you?"

The car parked in front of my house was a new model of the Jill's that I was already familiar with.

The driver, Durk, reverently opened the back seat to reveal Beatrix. She was wearing a black one-piece dress, just like at the dinner party.

She looked at me and Iris, who were waiting for the car in front of the door, and said admiringly,

"I'm glad you didn't feel like forcing yourself to wear something nice, because that would have been a disaster for Jürgen, if not for Iris."

"Sorry about that!"

By the way, Iris wore her usual uniform and I wore my usual casual clothes. Basically, it would be wrong for me and my sister, who don't have a lot of money, to expect that we would be able to afford a full set of clothes for dining out.

Today was a Sunday in the third week of October. The time is five o'clock in the afternoon. We were going out for dinner, as promised by Beatrix.

We hadn't been told where yet, but it would probably be somewhere in East Berlin. If it was the kind of place that a red aristocrat like the Brehmes would like, it would have to be in East Berlin.

"Get in, then. Both of you."

"Y... Yes! We will take you on your kind offer!"

Iris is a little nervous... Come to think of it, it's been six months since she met Beatrix, but she's never eaten out like this before. In addition, the means of transportation was a Soviet-made luxury car driven by Beatrix's bodyguard - how could Iris not be nervous?

On the other hand, I didn't think I was particularly nervous. When I was travelling around the world with my father, he used to take me for rides in luxury cars like this Jill. Thanks to that, nostalgia came first.

Iris sat at the far end of the backseat, followed by me, and finally Beatrix, who sat next to me as if it were natural. It was truly a flower in each hand, but one of the flowers must have had thorns.

Durk reverently closed the door of the back seat again, climbed into the driver's seat, and the car began to drive toward its destination.

The car passed through several small streets and came to Friedrich-Engelsstrasse, one of the main streets in the Pankow district. After that, we started heading south. After all, our destination seemed to be the center of East Berlin.

"Thank you for inviting me today."

Iris called out to Beatrix.

"It's okay, I invited you guys because I wanted to."

"But still..."

"You might be a little surprised, but don't worry, I don't think you'll be killed."

"I am filled with anticipation, aren't you, Niisan?"

"Hmm? Yeah, That's right."

I'm impressed with Iris, how she can turn Beatrix's boisterous talk around so matter-of-factly.

"Oh, Jürgen, you've got flowers in your hands, but you're not here in spirit. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing much"

"I apologize for not inviting you to a nudist beach instead of a dinner."

"Don't talk about people like they're perverts!"

A nudist beach is - well, let's not go there. I'm not going to tell you what a nudist beach is, because that's exactly what it sounds like. I should add that in East Germany, where gender equality is proclaimed in accordance with socialism, nudism - or, to put it in East German terms, naturism - is openly accepted, and it is said that there are such places all along the Baltic coast. Just so you know, I didn't do my own research. My father knew a diplomat when he was healthy who was fond of such things.

Beatrix said reprovingly.

"Your words sound like a criticism of nudists. That's not good, because they are enjoying their freedom of spirit."

"I'm not judging them, I'm just saying I don't have that kind of taste."

"By the way, I heard that if you go to a nudist beach with evil intentions, you will lose your mind. It is said that there are no young men and women at all, but only grandmothers with shrivelled breasts and grandfathers with flabby stomachs who have become bored after retirement."

"I didn't want to hear that! I didn't want to hear about that story!"

"And by the way, everything I'm saying is coming from Durk."

Durk answered in a troubled tone as he continued driving.

"Ojōsama, please don't make any misleading remarks. There was a naturalist in the special forces I belonged to, and I just told you objectively what I heard from him. I've never been there."

"You never said anything wrong."

"You're really annoying, you know that!"

What are you going to do if Mr. Durk gets upset and takes the wheel the wrong way?

"Do you want to go with him?"

"I'm not into that kind of thing!"

Eventually, the car entered the Mitte district and turned right at the intersection. Apparently, contrary to my expectations, we were heading east of the city centre.

After a disappointing conversation about nudist beaches, I stared out the car window in silence. Beatrix has changed the subject and is talking about swimming with Iris.

I was trying to act calm, but there was something inside me that I couldn't shake. The other day, Vikman had said something that had been weighing on my mind.

— You should be a little more aware of the existence of people other than yourself.

— Then you'll always be alone. If you keep trying to do everything by yourself, you will, eventually.

I wonder if Vikman was trying to say that I would eventually collapse?

I wanted to deny Vikman's words. I hadn't been living on my own for a long time. I had my father, Iris, Boltz, and Katzen around me, especially after my father became like this. Even my mother, though reluctantly, has helped me. And now, there may be one more person there. So, I am not a lonely person.

But there is a part of me that affirms Vikman's words in my heart.

I asked myself again. I wondered if I hadn't become conceited thanks to the fact that I had been admitted to the Air Force Academy at the top of my class and had a bright future ahead of me. You can stumble at any time in life. Just as I was easily defeated by Vikman - just as my family disintegrated with the speed of falling rubble.

In fact, I put Beatrix's confession on hold because I didn't want to get into political trouble, and my mother's suggestion that she would take Iris in, without telling Iris, I was running away from the decision.

"....."

I gave up trying to collect my thoughts and took a deep breath.

Today is the day that Beatrix and Iris are going to celebrate me. It would be impolite for me, the guest, to look so glum. There's still time left.

Come to think of it, more than ten minutes have already passed since the car started heading east. At this rate, we'll be out of the centre of East Berlin.

"We're going a long way east. I thought we'd choose one of the stores in the Mitte district."

I muttered casually. Beatrix replied as if it were a matter of course.

"Yes. We are on our way to my home."

..... What?

If it's Beatrix's home, then it means that the Brehme family is located at

Eh, eeeeeeeeh!?

"Hey, wait a minute!"

I snapped at the side of Beatrix's face as she turned away.

"I thought we were going to eat out at a restaurant."

"I said 'eating out', not 'in a restaurant.'"

"Even if that's the case, ..., I mean, if you're at home, you will not be with your parents, are you?"

"I wonder"

"Don't try to trick me!"

The timing of the meeting with the parents is, moreover, they are Apparatchiks [\(65\)](#).

"I tried to find a good venue, but I couldn't. That restaurant had a bad atmosphere, and the other had bad meat dishes. So after a lot of hesitation, the best place was my house. The number of participants will also increase."

"More people will be there, after all, ...,!"

"I don't know if my parents will be there or not. They're busy people."

"Of course they are!"

As far as Beatrix is concerned, her father, Abel Brehme, has already done all he can to find out what kind of person I am. I'm sure he's already found out what kind of person I am. The fact that he's celebrating her friend's brother's entrance into the Air Force Academy at this time, at his house, is beyond the scope of a normal friendship.

In other words, Beatrix, a daughter with a promising future, was going to take the trouble to bring me and Iris together with someone who was a member of the Nomenklatura, the red aristocracy that controlled East German politics and held tremendous power.

I've heard from Mr. Boltz that Abel Brehme has a close relationship with the Ministry of State Security (Stasi).

"Niisan, when you've come this far, don't you think you should be prepared?"

".....! Iris, so you knew about,!"

"I wonder, what are you talking about, ...,?"

Iris blatantly swims her gaze.

This runt is in cahoots with Beatrix.!

I was about to open the door to Jill's backseat when I was rendered speechless.

"Get me out of here! Quickly! Damn it, it's locked!"

"This Jill is customized, so you can't open it while the car is in motion. I mean, we're almost there."

"I don't want to go! I don't want to go! I don't want to go!"

"Brother, you're not a child. That's disgraceful"

"Shut up! This is what I call a bad day! You set me up! Goddamn you!"

Jill, driven by Druk, arrived at Beatrix's house as if nothing had happened.

The Biesdorf district, near the eastern edge of East Berlin, is a high-class residential area, but the distance from the centre of the government gives it a calm atmosphere. When you think of a high-ranking government official's residence, you tend to imagine a huge site and house, but Beatrix's house blended in with the residential area, and I felt it was a bit of a letdown in that respect.

The interior of the house was neat and tidy, which seemed to me to reflect the personality of the house owner. The dining room was calmly decorated. A man in an elegant suit was standing across a large table in the middle of the room, looking at me and Iris as if he was inspecting us.

When Beatrix introduced me and Iris, the man opened his heavy mouth. His voice was lower than I had imagined it would be.

"Jürgen Bernhard, I heard that you entered the Air Force Academy at the top of your class. The motherland is looking for talented people. Good luck."

"I am inexperienced, but I will do my best."

I shook the right hand that was offered to me. Even though I was used to such social greetings, I felt a different kind of nervousness.

Abel Brehme - The head of the Brehme family, the "Red Nobility" (Nomenklatura), and Beatrix's father. His deep, piercing eyes are full of intelligence and will, and even his slight demeanour shows that he is a man of distinction.

Abel Brehme took his gaze off of me and turned it this time to Iris.

"Irisdina-Kun, I heard that you were paired with my daughter in the competition. I am expecting great results from you"

"Thank you very much. I will try my best."

"You should aspire to represent your country. If you do..."

"We'll talk about it later."

Beatrix, who had been watching the exchange between us, stopped Abel.

"They haven't even been introduced to my mother yet. How long are you going to keep them standing there?"

You, You have quite the nerve to oppose such a dreadful person... Oddly enough, I was impressed with Beatrix. Abel Brehme's behaviour was flawless, and his emotions were completely unreadable. He was simply following the correct etiquette and conducting a proper conversation, and it was impossible to see where his true feelings lay.

"Beatrix, it's not polite to interrupt other people's conversations. I'm sorry, I'm embarrassed to show you such a scene, but let me introduce my wife. This is my wife, Zabine Brehme. Zabine?"

The woman standing next to Arber - Beatrix's mother - bowed lightly. With her characteristic wavy black hair, she resembled Beatrix in the atmosphere. However, she seemed to be more gentle than her.

"Take your seats. Let's start eating."

Zabine stood up and went to the kitchen with Beatrix. I was more than a little surprised to see her. She said that she wanted to take care of herself as much as possible, but...

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's"

"Such a simple life for a Red Aristocrat, don't you agree?"

My heart leapt - reading people's minds has become a habit of mine, but it's a different story when it's my own. I felt as if I had been stripped naked.

"I'm sorry, but you're right. If you had hired a guard for your daughter, I would have expected you to have a number of servants."

"Such Prejudice."

"Sorry about that."

I honestly apologized to Abel Brehme, who replied with hardly any expression on his face.

In the meantime, it would be better not to offend him. The person in front of me is an outstanding person who has won his way through this bureaucratic state.

"I'm in a high-profile position, so my security is always a consideration. I can't make the mistake of letting my family be taken hostage."

I wondered if this was a bluff on Beatrix's part to get me to have a relationship with her - I was having trouble deciding.

Mr. Boltz said that Abel Brehme might be wary of Beatrix being influenced too much by me. If he's right, then Abel's participation in this dinner may have been a warning to me.

The conversation was interrupted, but fortunately it did not last long., because Beatrix and Zabine brought us soup.

After placing the soup plates on the table, I looked at Beatrix who had taken her seat. Despite the fact that she was the one who had created this ridiculous situation, Beatrix kept a clear expression on her face.

Damn it — I curse you in my heart. I don't think there's any benefit to Beatrix right now in bringing me to Abel, So why did she go ahead with it?

It's not like she's going to ask me for permission to go out with her in front of my parents, but I don't think she's going to allow that. In spite of my unorganized thoughts, drinks were poured into everyone's glasses. After the toast, the dinner began in earnest.

The food of the Brehme family was carefully prepared, but honestly speaking, there was no way I could tell what it tasted like in this situation. The master, Abel, didn't seem to have any intention to soften the atmosphere with conversation. I had no choice but to proceed with my meal in silence, with Iris talking about the diving competition as background music. I couldn't ignore the feeling of pressure that I was being watched by Abel Brehme.

"Can you explain to me your relationship with Beatrix?"

I was about to spew out a mouthful of meat when Abel asked me that question, but I held it in with all my might. You never know what might happen if you make a mess in a place like this. After catching my breath, I asked him back.

"Relationship?"

"That's what I asked"

The simple wording of the question stirred up a sense of dread, and my thoughts once again became intricate as I wondered what and how I should answer.

In the first place, how much does Abel Brehme know about this? I know that Beatrix and Abel are not getting along well. Nevertheless, Beatrix has been escorted by the Special Forces. It's not like he hasn't received a report.

If Mr. Durk had reported on me, we should assume that he is trying to find out what kind of people are influencing his daughter at the moment.

Should I say that I'm in a relationship with his daughter - no, actually, I'm holding off. The fact that this is the case is shameful, but more than that, should I say that I underestimated the significance of dating the daughter of a red nobleman (Nomenklatura)? I thought I was taking it seriously, but it wasn't as if I didn't recognize in the corner of my mind that it was just a student romance, like the measles.

I made up my mind. There was no point in giving a make-believe response to someone like Abel Brehme.

"..... She is my sister's best friend. She's been good to me and I'm grateful."

All three of their eyes were focused on me. I tried to say that they should just turn a blind eye to me, but I began to wonder if that was a good idea.

Beatrix kept her gaze down. Zabine is smiling. And Abel Brehme is looking at me straightly. It's like a wolf aiming for its prey. The eyes of a judge who sees through the true nature of human beings - if I were a child, I would have definitely leaked. Abel's expression was so cold.

"I'm talking about now."

I couldn't help but add a few more words. But even so, Abel Brehme's expression did not change. I was about to add something, when my father's words came back to my mind.

Sometimes silence is the best form of intimidation - yes, that's what my father taught me. It is only when we are afraid of something that our true nature comes to light.

Then — I will desperately face the gaze of Abel Brehme.

I don't really remember how long the silence lasted. It wasn't me who broke the silence, nor was it Abel Brehme.

"Jürgen is the one who shows me the way. He is indispensable to me."

"Wai....., Just a....., eeeeh?"

I couldn't help but shout at Beatrix's bombshell. Both Zabine and Iris were frozen with surprised faces.

"He was the one who gave me courage. He's a brilliant, hardworking man who got into the Air Force Academy at the top of his class."

Beatrix's words continued, much to our astonishment.

"In addition, he is a wonderful person who cares about his family and listens to others. He's not like anyone else."

"I'm talking to him now. I'm not asking for your opinion."

Beatrix lunged at Abel.

She glared at Abel Brehme with eyes that burned like fire. At the same time, I finally understood her purpose.

At today's dinner, It's not that Beatrix wanted to bring her parents and me together. She wanted to show me how she had gone from that suicidal dive to being able to confront her father.

"This is"

An hour later - I was wide-eyed at the scene before me. Abel had invited me into his study.

Incredibly, the meal that followed was relatively harmonious. This was all thanks to Zabine Brehme, who sealed the dispute between Beatrix and Abel with a word in front of the guests. Perhaps Beatrix didn't intend for the dispute to get that complicated.

The study was in a secluded room in the house. Except for a simple reception set, bookshelves lined the walls on all four sides, and books were crammed into the shelves. The floor was also piled high with books, leaving no room to stand.

The books are not only related to politics, but also to history, economics, military affairs, and many other fields. Looking at the spines of the books, you can see that there are books that I wanted to get my hands on but could not. They say that a bookshelf represents a person's personality, and it seems that Abel Brehme is a person with a voracious appetite for knowledge.

"I'm sorry for the clutter, but it's my way of keeping things in order."

It's not often that I invite people into this room — I nodded at Arber's muttering.

"No, I understand. My father's study was like this when he was healthy. The room was a little smaller, though."

"I see."

That was all Abel said.

I didn't misunderstand what he meant. The point was that he had already found out about my father's current situation.

I remained silent, staring at the large number of books lined up in my study, trying to make sense of my presence here. Iris and Beatrix are not here - they are in the dining room talking with Zabine. In other words, Abel called me here because he wanted me alone.

Just me...

It was impossible not to feel nervous.

The other night at dinner, despite the fact that we were celebrating, Abel had asked me a question that I thought was rude. Looking back, it might have been a game.

It was a game to determine whether I am worth Abel Brehme's time or not. The reward for that might be the time I have now.

"Sit down there."

I sat down on the sofa of the parlour set as he asked me to. Abel sat down on the chair in front of the reading desk.

As he had done earlier, Abel spoke his mind without preamble.

"The reason you're withholding Beatrix's confession is to avoid getting into political trouble with us, right?"

I knew you had it in you. I nodded my head in response to Abel's frank question. I was afraid of answering straightforwardly, but I knew that I could not fool him.

"I don't want to get involved in any kind of state or principle."

I naturally spoke respectfully, but strangely I didn't feel bad.

"Are you avoiding them to protect your sister?"

"Yes, I am. I want her to grow up properly. It is my only wish and goal in life."

"Did you apply to the Air Force Academy to be able to protect your sister without getting entangled in political issues?"

"Yes"

"Did you aim for the top of your class so that you could teach Beatrix a lesson? You could have cut a few corners and still passed."

It's true, but I feel uncomfortable when people guess so accurately. When I hesitated to reply, Abel continued to talk.

"As a result, Beatrix is about to deviate from the future that I prepared for her."

I could not say anything anymore. Abel seemed to ridicule me, but his eyes were ever unchanging.

"I can understand why Beatrix is attracted to you. She doesn't have the eyes to see the future yet. That's why she wants to put her trust in someone like you, who can give her answers so easily."

"Your daughter is a woman of many talents. I believe that she will be able to decide everything for herself."

I think that Beatrix needed a chance, and it just so happened that the role came to me.

If I'm being honest, I don't believe in Beatrix's romantic feelings. I've thought that Beatrix's obsession with me and my sister is because she has an ideal family image in mind. In the Bernhard family, there are no parents, but instead, the brother and sister trust each other and support each other with love. Isn't that the scene that Beatrix Brehme, an adolescent girl, truly wants? In the event that you have a guest - or at the very least, a family member who can make it seem like there was no problem with just that one word - it seems distorted to me.

And if that's the right answer, then it doesn't matter if I'm not the one she falls in love with. It's just a matter of finding someone who meets the same requirements.

In any case, I am sure that I can understand her feelings better than an adult who is far away from adolescence. I think that Abel Brehme wants to raise Beatrix to be an independent person, but he has her trapped in a box. This is a blind spot that the adult Abel Brehme has become oblivious to, and the stress caused by this has led Beatrix to become immersed in diving competitions and to dislike her parents.

I want to do something to reconcile them, but I don't think I can accurately convey this to Abel. From his point of view, I am only a young man. I need more time before I can make him accept my opinion.

"In other words, we are adversaries in terms of position, ideology, and even with Beatrix between us."

"But I have no desire to make you my enemy."

This is the limit of what I can tell you right now. If we go any further, an irreversible situation may occur.

"You are a small person, aren't you?"

"I'm aware of that."

"You only do what you can. You are timid and narrow. That's the extent of your success at the top of your class, isn't it?"

I choked up.

"It's all right to protect your sister. Protecting your sister is great, it's a beautiful brother-sister relationship, but it's not good to use your sister as an excuse to keep yourself from stepping into the outside world."

I couldn't argue with that.

"A talented young man should be encouraged to try different things."

"I'll keep that in mind."

I was afraid that his expression didn't change, but I noticed that he didn't have an air of disgust about me. He continued his story.

"I'm a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and I'm also a member of the East German Economic Planning Commission, which is in charge of the East German economy."

Mr. Boltz had told me about this.

"Thanks to that, I think I have an idea of the current state of the East German economy and what the future holds. Would you be interested?"

"If you don't mind, I'd like to hear what you have in mind for the future."

Even though this was the first time we had met today, Abel Brehme's tone of voice somehow made me feel retrospective - which is why I was curious about what he wanted to say to me.

"This is just my personal theory, but..."

Abel stopped speaking there and said as if to spit it out.

"The East German economy may not last another twenty years."

I was stunned by his unexpected words.

The East German economy may not last 20 years.

What does that mean, ...?

Before I knew it, Abel had a stern look in his eyes. It was a serious look at reality - almost like a soldier's look. Abel asked me.

"How much difference do you see in the economic power of East Germany compared to West Germany? For example, ..., let's see, in terms of gross national product. [\(66\)](#)"

East Germany often compares its economic strength with West Germany and advertises how superior East German products are and how stable its economy is. However, East German citizens who receive TV broadcasts from the West know that West Germany is richer than East Germany.

Since we were talking about this, I didn't need to pretend to believe the East German propaganda... I honestly said the figures I had come up with.

"About eighty percent?"

"You're a bit of an optimist, aren't you?"

Abel let out a dry laugh.

"In fact, it's 40%, and it will probably get worse, possibly dropping to 35% in 10 years and even 30% in 20 years."

I felt a chill run down my spine. I had never imagined that the economy of East Germany, the world's leading socialist country, would fall so far behind that of its rival, West Germany.

It's hard to believe, but if it's true, then this story is certainly not irrelevant to me.

This is because a worsening economy leads directly to a weakening of military power. If I do a simple calculation, 20 years from now, the East German army will be only 30% as capable as the West German army.

"You look like you don't want to believe it."

"I won't deny it."

"The cause is our relations with the Soviet Union."

Abel took a document from his desk. It must be some kind of classified material, and I wonder on what basis he decided to show it to me.

While I was lost in thought, Abel handed me a bundle of documents.

"This is a graph showing the amount of various resources shared between our country and the Soviet Union every year. All of them should be declining year by year."

It was a fact. In particular, the ratio of heavy oil to total oil consumption has declined dramatically.

"Our country is poor in resources. We have a number of mining sites for iron ore and coal, but they are small compared to West Germany, and our country has this resource problem covered by supplies from the Soviet Union."

"However, this is declining year by year. Is the reason for this the economic development of the Soviet Union?"

"That's right."

Abel nodded his head in satisfaction. He felt subtlety in the fact that his random words had turned out to be the correct answer.

It's simple. If the Soviet Union develops economically, the demand for resources in the Soviet Union will automatically increase. There would be no room for distribution to satellite countries like East Germany.

When I accompanied my father on a business trip to the Soviet Union as a child, I was aware of the high economic power of the Soviet Union. The memory of that time gave me a hint.

At the moment, the East German economy is growing steadily, but if the Soviet economy continues to grow, the supply of resources will stagnate and we will have to import raw materials at high prices. This will lead to the decline of our country. Of course, there are many problems with our economic policies, but that is the root reason.

"But isn't East Germany an important partner for the Soviet Union? East Germany was the main battleground of the Cold War, and it should be given preferential treatment compared to other satellite states."

"Do you really think that the Cold War will turn into a nuclear war?"

"There is no war in a state of mutually assured destruction."

"Not unless there's an accident."

I had no answer. I thought that the dark future that Abel was talking about could actually happen. I was glad that the Cold War had not turned into a real war. The probability of my death in the war would also decrease, but to think that East Germany would continue to wither and die....

"This is just my opinion. Even within the East German Planning and Economic Planning Commission, only a handful of people understand the current crisis. If I were to make an honest statement, I would incur the displeasure of the party leaders and be purged."

I was painfully aware of the fact that this was the nature of this country. If the country had been a little more decent, my father would not have been destroyed. No, even before that...

"I am trying to find a way for East Germany to become economically independent in order to avoid future crises."

"..... Can you give me some specifics?"

"I'm not going to tell you that much."

So the time for education is over - I was feeling a little disappointed about that.

"One thing I can say is that, as one of the means to an end, I approve of the current situation in East Germany for the time being. The Ministry of State Security (Stasi) is a convenient organisation. Our relations with them must be strengthened."

"Are you planning to include Beatrix in the Ministry of State Security (Stasi)?"

Abel Brehme kept his mouth shut.

"I don't know how much she knows about the Stasi, but from her point of view, I think it's natural for her to interpret her life as something her parents decided for her."

"I have a high opinion of my daughter's abilities. East Germany is a country that believes in equal rights for men and women, and if a woman has talent, she can go as far as she wants. I'm just trying to broaden the range of possibilities."

"She didn't seem to take it that way."

"She doesn't see the future. As I said before, she doesn't understand the situation as if it were her own. What's important and what do we have to do to make it work"

"....."

"A person who can do that is a person who can create that path. In that sense, both you are my daughter are both disqualified"

Disqualified - I failed this interview. His words suggested that I was overlooking something. Like Beatrix, he was pointing out to me that I could only see so close at the moment.

What am I missing here - I thought hard, but nothing came to mind. But still, if Abel Brehme said so, it seemed to me that he was telling the truth.

Without changing his expression, Abel began to put away the stack of papers. There was no time to lose - at this rate, in a few more minutes I would be asked to leave. The only thing I could foresee was that I would lose something very important if that happened.

I replayed the events of the day in my mind. I was tricked by Beatrix into coming here. That was Beatrix's intention. She was trying to prove to me that she was strong enough to fight her father. There was no doubt about it. It's possible that Iris knew about this plan, but that's not a big deal.

What about Abel Brehme? He had probably been told by his daughter or wife that I was coming here. The fact that he was already dressed in formal attire when he greeted us proves this. As a result, I was given the right to spend a small amount of time with him in his study.

What did Abel say after I entered this room - he said it was a room he rarely invited people to. Then he asked me to sit down. Then... an uncomfortable feeling. I didn't overlook it from that moment. It's this.

Yes, that's what Abel said. He said he rarely invites people. The point is not that I was invited because I am special, but because he rarely invites people.

"..... Actually, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."



He opened his mouth slowly.

It was an impudent story. But even so, I had a feeling that Abel would accept it, because there are many people who want to use their relationship with him to their advantage. There's no way he'll listen to all of them.

And there was one more thing that encouraged my thinking. The idea that Beatrix and Iris might have conspired to create this situation struck my brain like a bolt of lightning.

"Talk to me."

Abel Brehme replied in the same languid tone as ever.

In conclusion, I think it was the right thing to do. Beatrix and Iris must have thought of a lot of things in order to prevent me from having to worry about my future. This is a sister who does not want to be a burden to her brother. Depending on the situation, Beatrix may have suggested that Iris should rely on her mother. However, if Iris were to be taken in by her mother, there would be no reason for me to come back to Berlin every weekend. Beatrix may have wanted to avoid that. What they wanted was for me to worry less about their current lives. How can I do that? It's hard to solve this problem as a student. But if you're in power, that's a different story.

I thought. In other words, this dinner was just a way to set up this moment.

It was not easy to believe. Beatrix must have hated her father, Abel. How could she ask him to help me and Iris solve the Bernhard family's problems? If you think about it, Beatrix's pride would never allow it, and Beatrix would owe Abel a lot.

Still, she's trying to help us. This is Beatrix's way of making sense of things...or is it her way of conveying her feelings to me? The depths of my heart burned.

If I were to make some kind of debt to Abel here, I would have a shallow connection with the Brehme family and would be entangled in politics. That's something I've been trying to avoid for the past few years, but that doesn't matter now. My power isn't as great as I believe it is, and I've always had to rely on the help of others - I may have mistakenly thought that I was on my own.

I wasn't sure how much Abel knew about our situation, so just to be safe, I gave him a brief explanation of the situation. Then....

"I don't want to leave Iris with her mother. But then there is the matter of Iris, who is to remain alone in East Berlin.."

Abel remained silent, listening to my words.

He touched his chin as if thinking for a moment, and then turned his gaze sharply to me.

"I think it's possible to designate your residence as an important security zone. That would prove that you are under the protection of the Red Nobility (Nomenklatura). However, there is a problem."

"What is it?"

"What do I get in return for using state power arbitrarily? It's true that your sister is an important friend of Beatrix's, but we can't use state assets just for that."

Abel is asking me to provide enough material to convince him.

"I am not prepared yet for the compensation. I'm still getting by on my father's inheritance and my mother's support, at least until I'm commissioned and can earn a reasonable salary."

"The protection of the Red Nobility (Nomenklatura) is not a cheap thing. If you can't pay the price, then this conversation ends here."

"..... There is only one thing I can offer you."

"Well, what's that?"

"My potential."

I replied with a thirst in my throat. I had a feeling that these words would become the chains that would bind me.

"If I rise through the ranks of the army, I may be able to offer you a favour to the Brehme family."

"There is no guarantee that you will be promoted. The East German Luftwaffe is the most meritocratic of the three armies, and your origins will have no small effect on your results."

"If I continue to perform so well that my origins are irrelevant, you will be forced to use me."

I looked into Abel's eyes, then continued as if cutting into them.

"I believe that retaining the top position should be a basis for judging, in case it was not accompanied with results, I will accept any treatment whatsoever"

I'm sure that Abel was expecting me to say this kind of answer.

If he hadn't, he wouldn't have talked about the prospects of the East German economy in front of me.

If East Germany's economy collapsed, the East German Air Force would suffer the same fate, and future pilots like us would be in serious trouble.

Perhaps it was Abel's goal to use this sense of crisis to get me to bite into his plan.

It was a game, after all, but in order to protect Iris, I have no choice but to use the chip I have now and play this game.

"I see."

Abel looked thoughtful, then nodded quietly.

"Maybe you're an optimist after all. You got it. At least, as long as you remain in charge, I'll make sure that your house is guarded. I won't stop Beatrix from going in and out of your house either."

"Thank you, sir."

I said my thanks honestly. Abel kept his expression blank and held up his index finger.

"I would like to add one more condition."

"What is it?"

"Let Beatrix spend her youth without regrets."

I stiffened as if I had swallowed a stick.

"I'm not going to get into your relationship with Beatrix. I believe that my daughter is free to choose whomever she wants, but as a parent, I really don't want to see her get hurt."

It was an unexpected declaration.

"She has a very temperamental disposition. If she doesn't have someone she could trust nearby, she will fall"

"I'll make every effort to"

I replied in a subdued voice.

"I think I've learned a lot from this experience."

"That's good to know."

Abel nodded and got up from his seat as if to say, "That's all". I couldn't tell whether he was joking or sincere in his last words.

I'm the one who talked to Beatrix about it.

In the dining room, after the conversation with Abel was over, Beatrix was next to me when Iris was speaking.

Iris continued apologetically.

"At the end of last month, I was wondering why Niisan was called by my mother. It wasn't at the usual timing either. My brother, on the other hand, was acting cheerful after he got home, so I"

Iris's words were vague. Iris herself had mixed feelings about her mother's financial support of us. Recently, she had stopped calling her mother "Mom" as well.

"... So, How did you find out after consulting with Iris?"

I asked Beatrix. I was too concerned that she was investigating my mother as well. Beatrix shrugged her shoulders as if she had read my thoughts.

"Your family situation and timing and your personality made it the only way to go about it. I am sure you would agree"

Beatrix smiled.

"Well, it looks like things worked out. I guess it was a good thing I brought you here."

I had already told Beatrix and Iris about the contents of my conversation with Abel in the study.

Iris looked apologetic when she heard this, but Beatrix had a rare look of relief on her face. For her too, setting this up was almost a gamble - she probably thought that if it didn't do well, she wouldn't even have any contact with me.

I didn't know what I should say to them. They - especially Iris - should be able to blame me. After all, I had kept something important from Iris without discussing it with her.

"I'm sorry, Iris. I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused you. You should have been the first person I talked to about this."

"No, it's not your Niisan's fault."

Iris shook her head.

"I know you were looking out for me. But..."

She turned to Beatrix.

"Beatrix told me," she said. "She told me that if I wanted to protect something, I had to fight for it. In the end, I didn't have the courage to ask my brother the truth, so I"

"So we were both saved by Beatrix."

I said apologetically to Beatrix.

"Beatrix, I'm"

"Don't worry about it. I did it on my own."

Beatrix said as if it was nothing. I can't find the right words to answer, but Beatrix smiled at me.

"Well, now you know the depth of my feelings for you, don't you?"

It's hard to explain in a few words how I felt about Beatrix at this moment. Thanks to Beatrix's quick thinking, I managed to avoid my mother's suggestion, but in return, I had to take the risk of repaying the Brehme family's debt of gratitude.

In order to protect my life with Iris, I had to maintain my position as head of the class... and in order to fulfill my promise to Abel, I would have to be actively involved in the world of politics from now on.

But even so, I was more than happy for the three of us to continue our relationship as it is now.

That's why I had a thought. For the first time in my life, I thought.

She's a good woman.

She's really too good for me.

I wanted Beatrix to be by my side, not as a reward for a favour or a political deal, but as genuine affection. So....

"Beatrix."

"What?"

"Go out with me"

As expected, the words were unexpected, and Beatrix rolled her eyes.

"Can I take it as... literally?"

I nodded.

"We have a lot of problems to overcome, but with you, I don't think that's a bad idea."

Beatrix blushed while averting her eyes -- plainly bewildered. Was she this cute before?

After a few seconds of silence, Beatrix moved forward and told me clearly.

"Then show me the proof. Proof that I can be yours and you can be mine."

"Hey, hey! I just said I'd go out with you."

Beatrix's face reddened even more, but she still insisted on telling me.

"I need proof."

..... In a situation like this, there is only one kind of "proof".

I asked my sister, who was standing beside me, for help, but Iris was holding back a painful laugh.

"Iris?"

"Hahaha, you're really abrupt, brother."

Iris answers with tears in her eyes.

"But, I'm happy for you. I also want to be with Beatrix forever. And of course, with Niisan too."

"..... You're right."

I really think so, but Iris never ceases to smile, and does not move from there.

"Um, Iris?"

"Yes, Niisan."

"Well, I'm afraid you'll excuse me. I'd like to do something a little embarrassing with Beatrix."

"Just because you're in front of me doesn't mean you have to hold back, okay?"

"I am the one who is embarrassed!"

"I don't like the sound of that."

"Beatrix?"

"I've had the courage to say it, and I hope you'll have the same attitude.."

"But not in public, not in front of my own family.!"

"It's fine."

"Not good! You can't do that until you're at least a little more grown up."

"Niisan, Isn't that the case for the things to be done only after marriage?"

I was at a loss for words. I can feel my cheeks flushing.

Beatrix smiles triumphantly.

"That might be a happy story."

"You don't get to decide!"

"Then hurry"

Beatrix's and Iris's gazes were passionate in a different way.

Damn it, I don't know what's gonna happen to me now.

With that in mind - and with an inexpressible tension and excitement in my heart - I lifted Beatrix's chin with my fingers.

Beatrix's cheek was trembling slightly, but that's a secret only I know.



Let me give you a brief explanation of what happened next.

When I informed my mother that I had asked the Brehme family to take care of Iris, she easily withdrew her proposal to take Iris in. Apparently, she had been informed of the Brehme family's movements through her second marriage partner.

Even though her well-intentioned offer had been rejected, my mother was nonplussed.

"I was only concerned about Iris's well-being. As long as you have the means to guarantee it, I have no problem with it."

At the usual cafe, my mother told me.

"But you have to be careful."

My mother's voice was hard.

"You have forged a chain of ties with the House of Brehme. If you go too far politically, you will end up destroying not only yourself, but also the people you are trying to protect. That's what this country is made of."

"Are you saying that one day I'm going to turn Iris into political collateral damage?"

"I pray that does not happen"

Without further ado, my mother got up and went to the checkout counter. On the desk were two cups filled with cold coffee.

I don't know much about the situation in other countries, but in East Germany, Christmas is a day to spend with family, and people don't go out on the streets at night.

On the contrary, the beginning of the year is a time for revelry, and young people go out into the streets. The main streets of the city are lined with stalls and improvised beer halls, performers show off their skills, and fireworks are set off out of nowhere.

So on the last night of 1972, I was with Iris and Beatrix in Unter den Linden ⁽⁶⁷⁾, a busy shopping district in East Berlin.

The time was fifteen minutes past eleven. In a few minutes, the day would change and a new year would begin.

Even though it was midnight, thanks to the festivities, everywhere was filled with decorations and bright lights, and it seemed that it was the same in West Berlin across the wall. Occasionally, fireworks are set off from behind the wall, creating sparks in the night sky.

"Is this how you guys pass the year every year?"

Beatrix asked, her white breath shimmering in her mouth as the temperature outside was near freezing.

Iris nodded. She and Beatrix were both wearing coats.

"Yes, I was thinking of spending a cheerful New Year's Eve at least. But it's been a while since I've been with my Niisan, since he and I have been spending time with our friends."

"Is that right then I did something a little bad back there"

"Don't worry about it. My brother and I wanted to start the new year with the three of us., right, Niisan?"

"Yeah."

I had a curt attitude. Iris chuckled and said to Beatrix.

"Niisan, I know you are acting like this, but up until yesterday, You had no idea what you were going to wear to escort Beatrix. You even carefully made up your mind on the course."

"Hey, Iris!"

"You are adored, aren't you, Beatrix?"

It's been three months since Beatrix and I started dating, and our relationship has been going without any problems.

However, the only time that Beatrix and I can spend time together is on holidays when I can come back to East Berlin from the dormitory. Moreover, both Iris and Beatrix are busy with club activities and studies, so there's not much time to relax.

Even so, Beatrix has been visiting Iris frequently, and I can only express my gratitude to her. Well, I'm sure Beatrix has in mind spending time with me as well as Iris.

At Iris's words, Beatrix said with an indifferent face.

"Is that so? Well, I'd go out with Jürgen even if he walked naked through Unter den Linden."

"You're just a pervert!"

Unter den Linden is not a nudist beach.

"Being looked at as if you are livestock. Doesn't that feel good?"

"It only feels good to you!"

"Beatrix, Love!. If you shout that, I will strangle you on the spot"

"That's what I get when you're involved."

"You and Beatrix are as good as ever..."

Iris chuckled and checked her watch.

"It's almost the beginning of the year. With the new year comes the fireworks, right?"

"Yeah, from the Spree, I think."

As soon as I answered this, the people gathered in Unter den Linden started counting down. In about 10 seconds, it will be a new year.

Beatrix silently held out her right hand to me.

"What's this?"

"Don't you understand by looking at it?" It's saying, "Let's hold our hands together."

Beatrix answered without hesitation -- her cheeks slightly flushed.

"It's a good idea to have a little romance at the beginning of the year."

"But in front of Iris, it's"

"Don't worry about it, Niisan. I'm also holding hands with Beatrix."

Iris smiled and showed him that her right hand and Beatrix's left hand were intertwined.

'So you should join us, Niisan."

"How naive..."

"You say that again, ... Niisan, come on! Beatrix is waiting for you too!"

I grabbed Beatrix's right hand, bluntly, hiding my embarrassment. As soon as I did, Beatrix's hand filled with strength.

"Jürgen"

Beatrix stared at me and whispered.

"I feel so lucky to have met you guys."

I don't know if Beatrix meant what she said. We had a lot of challenges ahead of us.

But it didn't matter. We were definitely living a fulfilling life right now, and we were happy about it.

East Germany, the German Democratic Republic, the other side - there are many names for it, but we are somehow able to continue living a peaceful life in this socialist country that is not without its distortions.

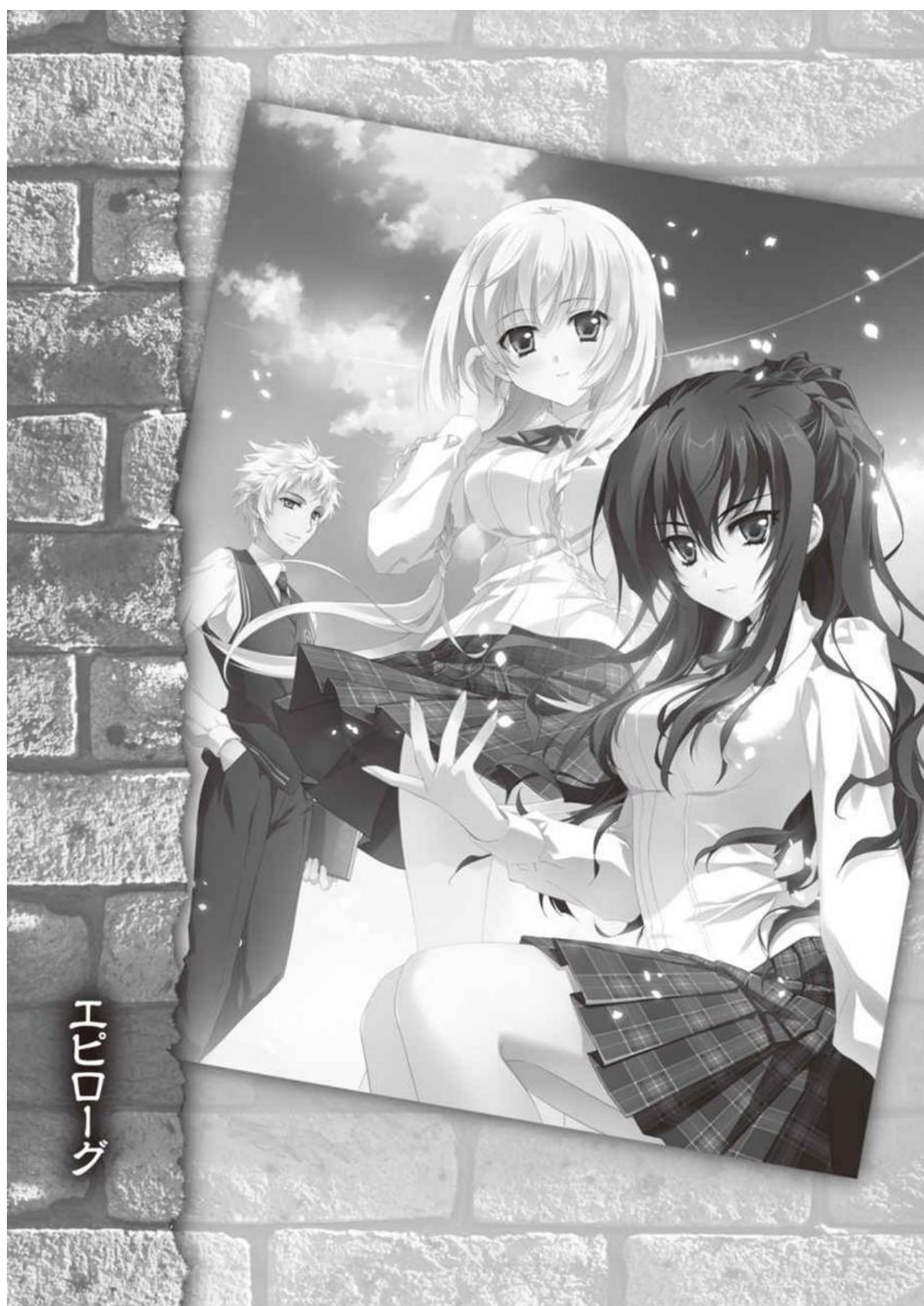
Is it God or our fate that we should be grateful for that?

The sound of something popping at once echoed from everywhere, and huge fireworks were shot off from the southern sky. A new year, the year 1973, has begun.

I, Iris, and Beatrix exchanged glances as they were illuminated by the light. Iris muttered happily.

"I hope there will be peace for a long time to come!"

Beatrix and I nodded quietly.



ヒロローン

Epilogue

The General Headquarters of the National People's Army (NVA) ground forces - the East German Army - was located in Gertow, Potsdam. The General Headquarters and the General Staff are located in the facility, and they control all units of the army.

However, its power is limited. The NVA has no authority to conduct its own operations because all of its forces are integrated into the Soviet command structure. In addition, the NVA has the General Political Directorate, which is the party's seconded agency, and political officers are dispatched to each unit, which is heavily influenced by the party's leadership.

"Is the West, or the American army, really going to deploy such a thing in the field?"

Major General Franz Heim's voice echoed in the cozy conference room of the NVA Army General Staff.

Heim is the deputy commander of the 19th Training Center of the 5th Military District, one of the mainstays of the army. When he was young, he had a serious illness that took him away from his unit for a long period of time, which delayed his promotion and caused him to be shuffled around the training units, but he doesn't mind that too much.

"I agree."

Major General Alfred Strachwitz, Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff for Operations, replied.

"But it's true. There are rumors that the U.S. military has already formed a number of mechanized infantry units equipped with manned control units for space combat and sent them to the moon. It wouldn't be surprising if they develop such a large weapon as an advanced form of it."

The men fell silent. What was described in the document with the word "top secret" printed on it was a weapon that the men had never seen before.

The information itself was said to be an unofficial leak from the Soviet Union. Perhaps there are people in the Soviet Union who don't want to make it public, but want to take precautions.

Heim nodded at Strachwitz's words.

"If the rumors are true, it will be the birth of a new branch of the military The operation of this strange weapon is going to be complex. The only people who can handle it are fighter or helicopter pilots."

Haim held up his hand to the document.

"The Army is also training pilots for an anti-tank helicopter unit, but we don't have the numbers to spare."

"So we'll have to ask the Air Force for help. However, fighter pilots are not convinced that they will be able to operate such a dangerous weapon. The cadets currently being educated at the Air Force Academy may be preferable. The Air Force would be more likely to agree to the transfer of personnel if that is the case."

After saying this, Heim glared lightly at Strachwitz.

"I'm sure you've already got the answers. You called me here just to check, didn't you?"

"I won't deny it."

"You haven't changed a bit, have you? How is your daughter?"

"She's four years old this year, and is staying with my parents in Ernestine. I try to see her at least once a month."

"I see."

That was all Haim could say.

The phone in the conference room rang. Strachwitz picked up the phone and exchanged a few words. Halfway through the conversation, his expression became suspicious.

"What's wrong?"

Heim asked, after Strachwitz had put down the phone.

"It's from the Intelligence Ministry. It seems that there has been a sudden increase in military radio communications throughout China. We think it's a sign of large-scale military action."

"A clash with the Soviet Union? As I recall, they were at the border..."

Strachwitz shook his head.

"I still don't know, but I would like to pray that this is not the case"

I was later told that neither Beatrix nor Iris remembered the TV news that reported it.

I learned about it on the TV news while I was having dinner with Katzen and the others in the dormitory cafeteria - I immediately forgot about it and didn't think about it for a long time.

There was no way around it. The East German state news only reported the fact that the Chinese troops were on the move as a "precautionary move probably related to the border dispute with the Soviet Union," and remained silent on the matter for a long time afterwards. The West German press was of a similar tone.

For this reason, we did not learn the truth until it was too late, and for this reason, it caused unspeakable horror and shock.

[Thursday, April 19, 1973.]

The BETA, which was hostile to humanity, fell to Kashgar, China, along with the accretion unit that would later become the original Hive. They began to engage the Chinese army.

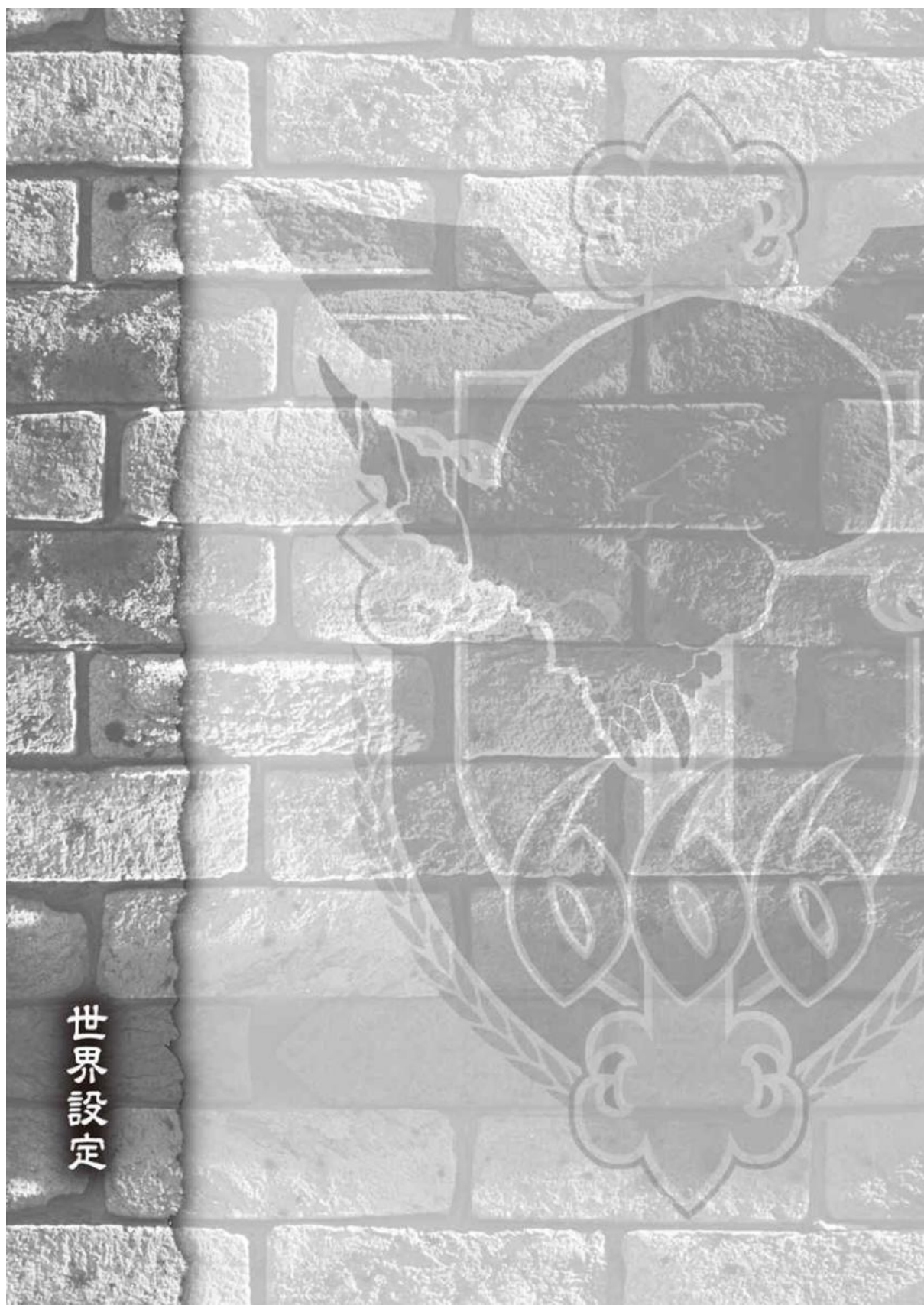
What awaited us was a war of extinction unprecedented in human history - the BETA War.

The beginning of the end has begun.



This work is a revised version of "Schwarzesmarken: Bernhard in Shadow," which appeared in the August 215 to October 215 issues of TECH GIAN.

世界設定



第二次世界大戦後の東西ドイツの情勢

第二次世界大戦後、ドイツは敗戦により東西に分割された。アメリカ、イギリスなどの連合軍が支配する西部占領地域と、ソ連が支配する東部占領地域である。また、これと同時に、ドイツの首都ベルリンも東西に分割された。

当初、この状態は長くは続かないと思われた。各国ともに、いずれ協議の末にドイツを再建させるつもりだったからである。しかし、戦後の冷戦の激化がこの構想を封殺した。ドイツは冷戦の最前線となり、西部占領地域には米英の主導でドイツ連邦共和国、通称西ドイツが、東部占領地域にはドイツ民主共和国、通称東ドイツが建国された。

東ドイツはソ連率いる社会主義陣営の一国として、ドイツ社会主義統一党が独裁的な政権を担うことになった。東ドイツの再建は戦後の混乱やソ連による賠償によって困難を極め、多数の労働者がより豊かな西を目指して亡命した。東ドイツはこれを防ぐために東西ドイツ、さらには東西ベルリンを封鎖し、労働者の移動を封じた。これにより東ドイツの国内状況は安定し、経済の復興が軌道に乗った。

1970年代初頭、東ドイツは主に重工業の成功により、東側で唯一の経済力を誇る国家に成長していた。しかし、一方の西ドイツの経済発展は東ドイツをさらに上回っていた。また東ドイツ国内では秘密警察である国家保安省が厳しい監視体制を敷いていた。

1972年のベルリン

冷戦の激化以降、ベルリン市街は「ベルリンの壁」によって東西に分断され、西ベルリンは東ドイツ内の「飛び地」と化していた。東ベルリンは東ドイツの経済、文化の中心であり、一種の経済特区となっていた。



World Setting

第二次世界大戦後の東西ドイツの情勢

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1972年賀のベルリン

冷戦の激化以降、ベルリン市街は「ベルリンの壁」によって東西に分断され、西ベルリンは東ドイツ内の「飛び地」と化していた。東ベルリンは東ドイツの経済、文化の中心であり、一種の経済特区となっていた。

The Situation in East and West Germany after World War II

After World War II, Germany was divided into East and West due to its defeat in the war. The western part was occupied by the Allied forces of the United States and the United Kingdom, while the eastern part was occupied by the Soviet Union. At the same time, the German capital, Berlin, was also divided into East and West.

Initially, it was thought that this situation would not last long, as each country intended to eventually rebuild Germany after talks. However, the escalation of the Cold War after the war blocked this idea. Germany became the front line of the Cold War, and the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany, was established under the leadership of the U.S. and Britain in the occupied western part of the country, and the German Democratic Republic, commonly known as East Germany, was established in the occupied eastern part.

In East Germany, the German Socialist Continuation Party (SED) assumed dictatorial power as a member of the socialist camp of the Soviet Union. The reconstruction of East Germany was made extremely difficult by the post-war turmoil and Soviet reparations, and many workers defected to the more prosperous West. In order to prevent this, East Germany sealed off East and West Germany, as well as East and West Berlin, and blocked the movement of workers. As a result, the domestic situation in East Germany stabilized and the economic recovery got underway.

In the early 1970s, East Germany had grown into the most powerful economy in the East, mainly due to its success in heavy industry. However, the economic development of West Germany was even greater than that of East Germany. In East Germany, the secret police, the Ministry of State Security (Stasi), maintained a strict surveillance system.

Berlin in 1972

After the escalation of the Cold War, Berlin was divided into East and West by the Berlin Wall, and West Berlin became an "enclave" within East Germany. East Berlin was the centre of East Germany's economy and culture and had become a kind of special economic zone.

戦術機とBETA

第二次世界大戦後に開始された米ソによる冷戦は、ひとつの劇的な副次効果をもたらした——米ソの宇宙開発競争である。両国は軍事的利益のため、あるいは国威掲揚のため、競って宇宙を目指した。

その頂点ともいえる出来事が、1958年のアメリカの火星探査衛星ヴァイキング1号による火星での生物発見の報告である。続けて翌年には火星に多数の巨大建造物が発見され、火星で発見された生物に知性が存在する可能性が高まった。人類は宇宙で孤独な存在ではなかった——「火星に知的生物が存在する」という事実は空前の宇宙ブームを巻き起こし、人類全体に夢と希望を抱かせた。

しかし1967年、状況は一変する。月面のサクロボスコレーターにおいて、地質調査チームが火星の生物と同様の存在を確認した後、消息を絶ったのだった。その後、月面各地で同様の事件が勃発。人類はこの謎の生物をBETA——人類に敵対的な異星起源種と名付け、交戦へとなだれ込んでいった。

BETAとの月面での戦いは第一次月面戦争と呼ばれ、1972年になっても継続されていた。しかし、その真相は戦争の主な当事者となっていた米ソによって隠蔽され、一般の市民には知らされなかった。

一方、月面での戦争を受け、アメリカは対BETA戦兵器として、既存の大型MMU（有人型操作ユニット）の発展型を開発、実用化寸前までこぎつけていた。これがのちに人類初の戦術機、ファントムとなり、対BETA戦で重要な役割を果たしていくことになる。

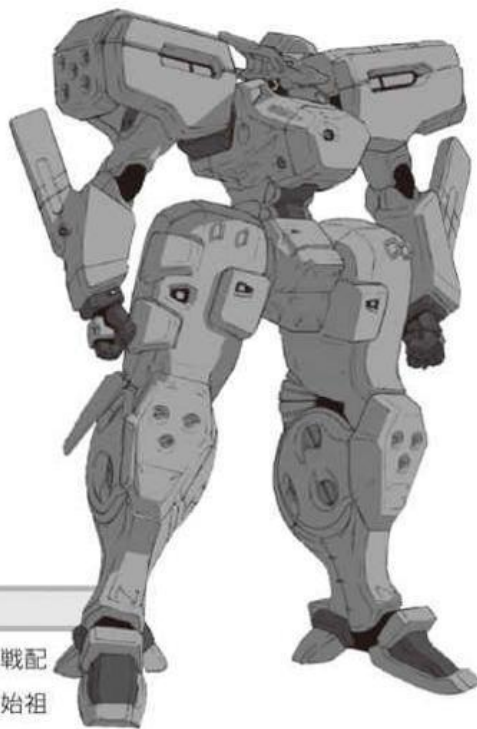


火星で撮影されたBETA

火星探査衛星ヴァイキング1号によって撮影されたBETA。しかし、その後の探査計画の失敗により、BETAの正体は月面戦争まで不明だった。

F-4 ファントム

アメリカのマクダエル社が開発し、1974年に実戦配備されたF-4は、対BETA戦の主力となる戦術機の始祖となり、各国で量産されて多数の派生型を生み出した。



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その頂点ともいえる出来事が、1958年のアメリカの火星探査衛星ヴァイキング1号による火星での生物発見の報告である。続けて翌年には火星に多数の巨大建造物が発見され、火星で発見された生物に知性が存在する可能性が高まった。

人類は宇宙で孤独な存在ではなかった—「火星に知的生物が存在する」という事実は空前の宇宙ブームを巻き起こし、人類全体に夢と希望を抱かせた。

しかし1967年、状況は一変する。月面サクロボスコレーターにおいて、地質調査チームが火星の生物と同様のそんざいお確認した後、消息お絶ったのだった。その後、月面各地で同様の事件が勃発。人類はこの謎の生物おBETA—人類に敵対的な異星起源種と名付け、交戦へとなだれ込んでいった。

BETAとの月面での戦いは第一次月面戦争と呼ばれ、1972年になっても継続されていた。しかし、その真相は戦争の主ば当事者となっていた米ソによって隠蔽され、殷の市民には知らされなかった。

一方、月面での戦争お受け、アメリカは対BETA戦兵器として、既存の大型MMU(有人型操作ユニット)の発展型を開発、実用化寸前にまでこぎつけていた。これがのちに人類初の戦術機、F-4となり、対BETA戦で重要な役割を果たしていくことになる。

火星で撮影されたBETA

火星探査衛星ヴァイキング1号によって撮影されたBETA。しかし、その後で星探計画の朱敗により、BETAの正体は月面戦争まで不明だった。

F-4ファントム

アメリカのマクダエル社が開発し、1974年に実戦配備されたF-4は、対BETA戦の主力となる戦術機の始祖となり、各国で量産されて多数の派生型を生み出した。

Tactical Surface Fighter and BETA

The Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which began after World War II, had one dramatic side effect: the U.S.-Soviet space race. Both countries competed to go into space, either for military gain or for national glory.

The culminating event was the 1958 report of the discovery of life on Mars by the U.S. Mars Exploration Satellite Viking 1. The following year, a number of huge structures were discovered on Mars, raising the possibility that the organisms found on Mars were intelligent.

Humans were not alone in the universe - the fact that there were intelligent beings on Mars triggered an unprecedented space boom and gave all of humanity dreams and hopes.

In 1967, however, the situation changed dramatically. In the Sacrobosco crater on the Moon, a geological survey team confirmed the existence of a creature similar to that on Mars, and then it disappeared. After that, similar incidents broke out all over the Moon. Humans named this mysterious creature BETA, an alien species hostile to humanity, and began to engage in warfare with it.

The battle against BETA on the moon was called the First Lunar War, and it was still going on in 1972. The truth, however, was kept hidden by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, who were the main parties involved in the war, and the citizens of China were not informed.

On the other hand, in response to the war on the moon, the U.S. developed an advanced version of its existing large MMU (Manned Maneuvering Unit) as an anti-BETA weapon and was on the verge of putting it to practical use. This would later become mankind's first tactical fighter, the F-4, which would play an important role in the war against BETA.

BETA photographed on Mars

The BETA was photographed by the Mars Exploration Satellite Viking 1, but due to the subsequent defeat of the Star Search Project, the identity of the BETA stayed unknown until the Lunar War.

F-4 Phantom

Developed by the McDowell Corporation of the United States and fielded in 1974, the F-4 became the progenitor of the tactical fighter that became the mainstay of the war against BETA.

After Word

It's nice to meet you, and long time no see for those of you who haven't seen me in a while.

I'm Hiroki Uchida.

Thank you very much for taking a look at "Schwarzesmarken: Bernhard in Shadow".

For those of you who are picking up this book for the first time, I would first like to explain about this series.

To begin with, "Schwarzsemarken" is a spin-off of the "Muv-Luv" (a super royal school adventure game) and "Muv-Luv Alternative" (a fairy tale about love and courage) series developed by the game brand Age.

The novel "Schwarzesmaken" has already been completed, with seven volumes of the main story, two volumes of the spinoff story, and two visual mooks published by KADOKAWA.

Thanks to everyone's support, "Schwarzesmarken" has now been made into an anime. In addition, the first part of the game version "Crest of Red Blood" is scheduled to be released from the game brand Age on November 27th this year (2015), and the second part "Martyrs" (tentative), is scheduled to be released this winter.

"Schwarzesmarken: Bernhard in Shadow" (hereinafter referred to as "Shadow") is a spinoff of "Schwarzesmarken".

In other words, it's a spinoff of the spinoff of "Muv-Luv" and "Muv-Luv Alternative," so it's a bit confusing, but I hope you can recognize it as such.

Both "Schwarzesmarken" and "Shadow" are written in such a way that they can be read even if you don't know the source material, so if you got to know "Schwarzesmarken" from "Shadow", please be sure to pick up the main "Schwarzesmarken" as well.

Schwarzesmarken is a story that takes place 11 years after this one. Since it's a story set in the future, reading it will inevitably spoil the story of "Shadow" (laughs), but don't worry, I'll try to make it an enjoyable work even if that's the case.

That's the end of the greetings Below is a short but frank talk!

So, "Schwarzesmaken" is getting an anime! Well, congratulations!

I honestly can't believe that even though it's a spin-off of the popular "Muv-Luv", "Schwarzesmarken", which takes place in a minor place like East Germany and is covered in mud, blood, and BETA bodily fluids, it's getting an anime.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the original author, Mr. Kouki Yoshimune, and all the people involved in "Schwarzesmarken", as well as to all the readers.

And! I will continue to write "Shadow" with all my effort, aiming for a quality that is as good as the main story of "Schwarzesmarken".

As mentioned above, the first volume of "Shadow" takes place 11 years before "Schwarzesmarken" - in other words, before the BETA attacked the earth, and the content is relatively calm (?). However, I believe that the next volume of will be a heartbreaking story that will not let you down, so please keep your eyes on it.

I hope that you will support the "Schwarzesmarken" series even more, both in the anime and the game.

By the way, the second part of the game version, "Martyrs (tentative)," will have three different scenarios. I, Uchida, also participated in the plotting, which means that there is a possibility that a different story will be spun from the main story.!

I would like to thank everyone who helped me write this story.

We would like to thank CARNELIAN for the original illustrations and Aru Mimizuku for the illustrations. Thank you very much for the many illustrations this time! Iris Dina and Beatrix in their younger days are both cute and charming! I look forward to working with you on the game as well!

The original author, Mr. Kouki Yoshimune. Thank you very much for your supervision this time. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Hatano and Mr. Hiki of the Tech Gian editorial department, Mr. Kawazaki and Mr. Totsuka of the Famitsu Bunko editorial department, and all of the Age staff for their help.

As for the internal situation of the East German army, which often appears in this film (in the world of the main story), I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. De Jay in Berlin, Germany, and Mr. Opechan in Warsaw, Poland, who are Japanese entertainment fans, for their advice. I would like to express my gratitude here.

Five years ago, when I started the project of "Schwarzesmarken", I had to search for materials almost by myself, but now, with the development of twitter and SNS, I can make friends with local people who love Japanese entertainment.

See you in the next volume!

August 1, 2015

Hiroki Uchida

Original work

Kouki Yoshimune (Age)

Representative of the PC game brand Age. He was in charge of planning and drafting for the "Kimi ga Nozomu Eien" and "Muv-Luv" series. He was also in charge of scenario and tactical machine design for "Muv-Luv Alternative" and "Muv-Luv Alternative Total Eclipse". He also designed the mecha for "Schwarzesmarken".

Text

Hiroki Uchida

Hiroki Uchida made his debut in 2004 with the virtual war story "The Glory of the Phantom Wings" (YURAKU PUBLISHING CO., LTD.). Since the 2000s, he has been working on works that combine moe and military, such as the "Schwarzesmarken" series (original work: Kouki Yoshimune) and "Fleet KanColle" (original work: "KanColle").

Illustration

Owl Mimizuku

Owl Mimizuku is an original artist belonging to ARIDESIGN, a company headed by Mr. CARNELIAN. He is in charge of the original drawings for "Bernhard in Shadow" and "Schwarzesmarken". In the past, he has also done original art for "FANATICA" and "Silver Eclipse".

Translator Notes

[\(0\)](#): **The Ministry for State Security** (German: Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, or State Security Service (Staatssicherheitsdienst, SSD), commonly known as the **Stasi** was the official state security service of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, GDR). It has been described as one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret police agencies to have ever existed.

[\(1\)](#): East Germany, officially the **German Democratic Republic** (GDR; German: Deutsche Demokratische Republik - DDR), was a communist state that existed from 1949 to 1990 in eastern Germany as part of the Eastern Bloc in the Cold War. It described itself as a socialist "workers and peasants' state". Its territory was administered and occupied by Soviet forces following the end of World War II— the Soviet occupation zone of the [Potsdam Agreement](#), bounded on the east by the Oder–Neisse line. The Soviet zone surrounded West Berlin but did not include it and West Berlin remained outside the jurisdiction of the GDR.

In the Muvluv World: The German Democratic Republic, also known as East Germany, and often shortened to GDR, or DDR in its native language, was formerly a satellite state (the term will be explained later) of the Soviet Union, with a one-party government led by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, backed by a well-trained military. Because of Soviet support, the nation was able to achieve a high level of industrialization, one that was second only to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, and was able to produce its own weapons to sustain its military forces.

Even with the emphasis of its industrial strength on military matters, due to the Cold War-era in which the nation was formed by its citizens, it still managed to achieve good living conditions. However, with the onset of the BETA War, even that industrial strength was eventually overtaxed in a war unmatched by any human conflict in history.

[\(2\)](#): The **National People's Army** (German: Nationale Volksarmee) were the armed forces of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1956 to 1990. The NVA was organized into four branches: the Landstreitkräfte (Ground Forces), the Volksmarine (Navy), the Luftstreitkräfte (Air Force) and the Grenztruppen (Border Troops). The NVA belonged to the Ministry of National Defence and commanded by the National Defense Council of East Germany, headquartered in Strausberg 30 kilometers (19 mi) east of East Berlin. From 1962, conscription was mandatory for all GDR males aged between 18 and 60 requiring an 18-month service.

In the Muvluv World: During the 1980s, the NVA's main TSF was the MiG-21 Balalaika, with the MiG-23 Cheburashka in use by select special forces. As of 2000, the MiG-23 and the MiG-27 Aligatori are the mainstay of the NVA; western-aided unit conversions, such as the MiG-31M, and the MiG-29OVT jointly developed by the East Germans in [Project Prominence](#) and the Soviets, are proceeding rapidly as well.

[\(4\)](#): **The Berlin Wall** (German: Berliner Mauer) was a guarded concrete barrier that physically and ideologically divided Berlin from 1961 to 1989. Construction of the wall was commenced by the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) on 13 August 1961. The Wall cut off West Berlin from surrounding East Germany, including East Berlin. The barrier included guard towers placed along large concrete walls, accompanied by a wide area (later known as the "death strip") that contained anti-vehicle trenches, beds of nails and other defenses. The Eastern Bloc portrayed the Wall as protecting its population from fascist elements conspiring to prevent the "will of the people" from building a socialist state in East Germany.

(5): The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, which began following World War II. Historians do not fully agree on its starting and ending points, but the period is generally considered to span the 1947 [Truman Doctrine](#) (12 March 1947) to the 1991 Dissolution of the Soviet Union (26 December 1991). The term cold war is used because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the two superpowers, but they each supported major regional conflicts known as proxy wars. The conflict was based around the ideological and geopolitical struggle for global influence by these two superpowers, following their temporary alliance and victory against Nazi Germany in 1945. Aside from the nuclear arsenal development and conventional military deployment, the struggle for dominance was expressed via indirect means such as psychological warfare, propaganda campaigns, espionage, far-reaching embargoes, rivalry at sports events and technological competitions such as the Space Race.

(6): Winston Churchill was a British statesman who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, during the Second World War, and again from 1951 to 1955. He was one of the best-known, and some say one of the greatest, statesmen of the 20th century. Though he was born into a life of privilege, he dedicated himself to public service. His legacy is a complicated one: He was an idealist and a pragmatist; an orator and a soldier; an advocate of progressive social reforms and an unapologetic elitist; a defender of democracy – especially during World War II – as well as of Britain's fading empire. But for many people in Great Britain and elsewhere, Winston Churchill is simply a hero.

(7): Socialism is a political, social, and economic philosophy encompassing a range of economic and social systems characterised by social ownership of the means of production. It includes the political theories and movements associated with such systems. Social ownership can be public, collective, cooperative, or of equity. While no single definition encapsulates the many types of socialism, social ownership is the one common element. Socialisms vary based on the role of markets and planning in resource allocation, on the structure of management in organizations, and from below or from above approaches, with some socialists favouring a party, state, or technocratic-driven approach. Socialists disagree on whether government, particularly existing government, is the correct vehicle for change.

(8): Trading company employee

(9): All expressions written here are actually written with the same **Kanji** 切, meaning cut or sharp. Because many verbs in Japanese can act as adjectives, the expression can be used to describe the act of cutting or making things sharp, or to give the attribute of sharpness to another noun. I tried to rework the handling of the expressions with fitting terms for the English language to keep the running jokes intact, but it works more in Japanese when you realize they are using the same word in different contexts.

(10): The Pankow district (German:panko) is the most populous and the second-largest borough by area of Berlin. In Berlin's 2001 administrative reform it was merged with the former boroughs of Prenzlauer Berg and Weißensee; the resulting borough retained the name Pankow. Pankow was sometimes claimed by the Western Allies (United States, United Kingdom, and France) to be the capital of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), while the German Democratic Republic itself considered East Berlin to be its capital.

(11): **Integrated Schools** refer to "a public school that offers kindergarten, elementary and junior high school education and has a unified instructional program. Integrated Schools ensure that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together.

(12): **2.0** is Equivalent in visual acuity to **20/10**. If you have 20/10 vision, you can see at 20 feet, what a normal person can see at 10 feet from an eye chart.

(13): **Greifswalder Station** is a railway station in the Prenzlauer Berg district of Berlin, forming the southerly and most urban district of the borough of Pankow.

(14): **Weissensee district** is a quarter in the borough of Pankow in Berlin, Germany, that takes its name from the small lake Weißer See (literally "White Lake") within it. Before Berlin's 2001 administrative reform, Weißensee was a borough in its own right, consisting of the quarters of Weißensee, Heinersdorf, Blankenburg, Karow and Stadtrandsiedlung Malchow. A fictional German-language TV series by the same name is set in the borough between 1980 and 1990 during the communist era.

(15): The **Wartburg** was a car marque known for its East German manufactured models, but has its origins dating to 1898. The name derives from Wartburg Castle on one of the hills overlooking the town of Eisenach where the cars were made. From the 1950s, Wartburgs were a three-cylinder two-stroke engine with only seven major moving parts (three pistons, three connecting rods and one crankshaft). Production ended in April 1991, and the factory was acquired by Opel.

(16): **Berlin Friedrichstraße** is a railway station in the German capital Berlin. It is located on the Friedrichstraße, a major north-south street in the Mitte district of Berlin, adjacent to the point where the street crosses the river Spree. Underneath the station is the U-Bahn station Friedrichstraße. Due to its central location in Berlin and its proximity to attractions such as the Unter den Linden boulevard, the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, the station is a favorite destination for tourists. At the same time, it is the main junction for regional traffic in Berlin, measured by the number of passengers. During the Cold War, Friedrichstraße became famous for being a station that was located entirely in East Berlin, yet continued to be served by S-Bahn and U-Bahn trains from West Berlin as well as long distance trains from countries west of the Iron Curtain. The station also was a major border crossing between East and West Berlin.

(17): **The Socialist Unity Party of Germany** (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED), often known in English as the East German Communist Party, was the founding and ruling party of the German Democratic Republic (GDR; East Germany) from the country's foundation in October 1949 until its dissolution after the Peaceful Revolution in 1989. It was a Marxist–Leninist communist party, established in April 1946 as a merger between the East German branches of the Communist Party of Germany and Social Democratic Party of Germany.

(18): In the World of Muv-Luv, **The Soviet Union** is known as The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Soviet Union Is a socialist state formed by various smaller nations in central and eastern Europe, and it is the largest known communist super nation by far in the world of Muv-Luv Unlimited/Alternative. The Soviets are generally regarded as second in position only to the United States of America. As of 2001, the Soviet Union consists of their area in Alaska, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Chukchi Peninsula, and the various small islands offshore mainland Russia, the Wrangel Islands being one of their more fortified locations.

(19): **The Nomenklatura** (Russian: номенклату́ра) were a category of people within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries who held various key administrative positions in the bureaucracy, running all spheres of those countries' activity: government, industry, agriculture, education, etc., whose positions were granted only with approval by the communist party of each country or region. The Russian term is derived from the Latin nomenclatura, meaning a system of names.

(20): **Kaltes Essen** or **Cold Food** is a part of the German kitchen, where dishes are prepared but no longer heated before serving. The dishes of cold food are often in the form of a cold buffet served, whether as breakfast , lunch , snack or dinner . They mainly consist of cold sauces, butter mixes , salads , starters , cold dishes made from eggs , fish , vegetables , sausage , meat from slaughtered cattle , poultry and game . There are also dishes made from fruit and cheese and other dairy products, some as decorations. The prepared ingredients and raw materials are often produced by other kitchen areas or purchased as semi-finished products.

(21): **Hinokibutai** 檜舞台, a stage made of Japanese cypress (in noh, kabuki, etc.), it also means putting a person under the limelight or showing them to the big stage.

(22): **Leica Camera AG** is a German company that manufactures cameras, optical lenses, photographic lenses, binoculars, rifle scopes and microscopes. The company was founded by Ernst Leitz in 1869 (Ernst Leitz Wetzlar), in Wetzlar, Germany. In 1986, the Leitz company changed its name to Leica, due to the fame of the Leica trade-name. The name Leica is derived from the first three letters of the founder's surname (Leitz) and the first two of the word camera: lei-ca (LEItz CAmera). At this time, Leica relocated its factory from Wetzlar to the nearby town of Solms.

(23): A **pioneer (military)** is a soldier employed to perform engineering and construction tasks. The term is in principle similar to sapper or combat engineer. Imperial German Army pioneers (**Pioniere**) were regarded as a separate combat arm trained in construction and the demolition of fortifications, but they were often used as specialist infantry, serving the role of combat engineers. One battalion was assigned to each Corps.

(24): **Jürgen Stroop** (born Josef Stroop, 26 September 1895 – 6 March 1952) was a German SS commander during the Nazi era, who served as SS and Police Leader in occupied Poland and Greece. He led the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and wrote the Stroop Report, a book-length account of the operation. Following the defeat of Germany, Stroop was prosecuted during the Dachau Trials and convicted of murdering nine US prisoners of war. After his extradition to Poland, Stroop was tried, convicted, and executed for crimes against humanity.

(25): The **SS (Schutzstaffel, or Protection Squads)** was originally established as Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard unit. It would later become both the elite guard of the Nazi Reich and Hitler's executive force that is prepared to carry out all security-related duties, without regard for legal restraint.

(26): The **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** was the 1943 act of Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto in German-occupied Poland during World War II to oppose Nazi Germany's final effort to transport the remaining ghetto population to Majdanek and Treblinka death camps.

(27): A **dissident** is a person who actively challenges an established political or religious system, doctrine, belief, policy, or institution. In a religious context, the word has been used since the 18th

century, and in the political sense since the 1920s, coinciding with the rise of totalitarian governments in countries such as Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, South Africa under Apartheid, and Iran. One of the **Stasi's** main tasks was spying on the population, primarily through a vast network of citizens-turned-informants, and fighting any opposition by overt and covert measures, including hidden psychological destruction of dissidents (*Zersetzung*, literally meaning "decomposition"). It arrested 250,000 people as political prisoners during its existence

(28): **Borscht** is a sour soup common in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. In English, the word "borscht" is most often associated with the soup's variant of Ukrainian origin, made with beetroots as one of the main ingredients, which gives the dish its distinctive red color. The same name, however, is also used for a wide selection of sour-tasting soups without beetroots, such as sorrel-based green borscht, rye-based white borscht, and cabbage borscht.

(29): **Luftwaffe**, (German: "air weapon") component of the German armed forces tasked with the air defense of Germany and fulfillment of the country's airpower commitments abroad.

(30): **Manned Maneuvering Unit**. Often shortened to MMU, it is a large bipedal machine, often used for heavy construction work involving orbital/surface ships and assets in sub-1G gravity conditions. Its basic frame and design would be used for the development of the Hardiman Feedback Protector during the 1967 Lunar War.

(31): **A conscientious objector** is an "individual who has claimed the right to refuse to perform military service , on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, or religion.

(32): **Jill** or **Zil** is a major Russian manufacturer of luxury cars, trucks and heavy equipment. At the end of 2012, all vehicle production was discontinued. At one point,they also manufactured buses, armored fighting vehicles, Aerosani, and armored vehicles for Soviet leaders. They also manually manufactured limousines and luxury cars, mainly for the Russian government. Jill's passenger cars are priced at the same price as Maybach and Rolls-Royce cars, but they are not well known outside the CIS and only a dozen or so cars are manufactured each year.

(33): The **Ronnefeldt** tea house is a trading [company](#) founded in 1823 that specializes in tea and is based in Frankfurt city. The brand name is mainly associated with the flavored green tea blend Morgentau.

(34): A **schnitzel** is a thin slice of meat. The meat is usually thinned by pounding with a meat tenderizer. Most commonly, the meat is breaded before frying. Breaded schnitzel is popular in many countries and is made using veal, pork, chicken, mutton, beef, or turkey. Schnitzel is very similar to the dish escalope in France, tonkatsu in Japan, cotoletta in Italy, kotlet schabowy in Poland, milanesa in Argentina, chuleta valluna in Colombia and "chicken fried steak" of the United States. The meat is also similar to the given name Sidsel.

(35): Jürgen here is using "**Omae**" おまえ, which can be considered a very rude way of saying "You"

(36): **A satellite state** is a country that is formally independent in the world, but under heavy political, economic and military influence or control from another country. The term was coined by analogy to planetary objects orbiting a larger object, such as smaller moons revolving around larger planets, and is used mainly to refer to Central and Eastern European countries of the **Warsaw Pact** ⁽³⁷⁾ during the Cold War or to Mongolia or Tannu Tuva between 1924 and 1990, for example. As used for Central

and Eastern European countries it implies that the countries in question were "satellites" under the hegemony (political or economical dominance) of the Soviet Union. In some contexts it also refers to other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War—such as North Korea (especially in the years surrounding the Korean War of 1950–1953) and Cuba (particularly after it joined the Comecon in 1972), and to some countries in the American sphere of influence—such as South Vietnam (particularly during the Vietnam war). In Western usage, the term has seldom been applied to states other than those in the Soviet orbit. In Soviet usage, the term applied to the states in the orbit of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan. The Oxford English Dictionary traces the use of the phrase satellite state in English back at least as far as 1916. In times of war or political tension, satellite states sometimes serve as buffers between an enemy country and the nation exerting control over the satellites.

[\(37\)](#): **Warsaw Pact:** The Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), officially the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, commonly known as the Warsaw Pact (WP), was a collective defense treaty signed in Warsaw, Poland between the Soviet Union and seven other Eastern Bloc socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe in May 1955 (including East Germany), during the Cold War. The Warsaw Pact was the military complement to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CoMEcon), the regional economic organization for the socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe. The Warsaw Pact was established as a balance of power in reaction to the integration of West Germany into NATO [\(38\)](#) in 1955 per the London and Paris Conferences of 1954. There was no direct military confrontation between the two organisations; instead, the conflict was fought on an ideological basis and in proxy wars. Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact led to the expansion of military forces and their integration into the respective blocs.

In our real world: The Pact began to unravel in its entirety with the spread of the Revolutions of 1989 (the period is often called the fall of communism) through the Eastern Bloc, beginning with the Solidarity movement in Poland, East Germany withdrew from the Pact following German reunification in 1990. On 25 February 1991, at a meeting in Hungary, the Pact was declared at an end by the defense and foreign ministers of the six remaining member states. The USSR (The Soviet Union or officially Union of Soviet Socialist Republics itself was dissolved in December 1991, although most of the former Soviet republics formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization shortly thereafter. In the following 20 years, the Warsaw Pact countries outside the USSR each joined NATO (East Germany through its reunification with West Germany; and the Czech Republic and Slovakia as separate countries), as did the Baltic states which had been part of the Soviet Union.

In the Muvluv World: With the separation of the Soviet Union from their satellite states in Eastern Europe, following the failure of [Operation Palaiologos](#), the remaining eastern European Warsaw Pact nations of East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and others, with East Germany (GDR or DDR) as their de-facto leader, formed the Eastern European Socialist Alliance, as a response against the oncoming BETA advance. The Eastern European Socialist Alliance became the forefront of the war against the BETA in the early 1980s, following tactics set down by the strategy of a static defence line against the BETA advance. For a while, the strategy worked, until constantly high attrition rates took their toll on the defenders.

With their support from the Soviets cut off by the BETA invasion, and with the failure of the Oder-Neisse Defence Line in 1983, the Eastern European Socialist Alliance was pushed back with great loss of life and material by the BETA, and its continued existence was made possible only by the

intervention of the European Union. As of 2000, the GDR is in an **alliance** with West Germany, similar to the situation between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan.

(38): The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 28 European countries (West Germany joined in 1955), 2 North American countries, and 1 Asian country. The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949. NATO constitutes a system of collective security, whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. The NATO headquarters are located in Brussels, Belgium, while the headquarters of Allied Command Operations is near Mons, Belgium. The combined military spending of all NATO members in 2020 constituted over 57% of the global nominal total.

In the Muvluv World:

Following the loss of European landmass to the BETA, most of the governments and social services of the European nations have been relocated to other locations around the world. The Federal Republic of Germany and Democratic German Republic have their governments housed in Central America, South America, and South Africa; other nations of the European Union have stationed most of their key facilities in Greenland. While each nation of the EU retains its own military force, anti-BETA operations often involve armies from different countries, necessitating a unified command. Although ostensibly part of the United Nations, soldiers under the command of the European Union wear the badge of the European Union Force.

Dominated by the British, West German, and French armies, as of the year 2000 it is primarily based in Great Britain due to the loss of the European mainland to the BETA, with its headquarters in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and apart from their normal operations, are also involved with refugee support activities with the UN and USA. The EU Force also works closely with non-member nations, such as the military forces of Switzerland and Turkey, and with the Scandinavian nations' efforts in TSF development, in their efforts to keep the BETA contained, and to one day reclaim the European continent.

In Alternative:

Most of their units participated in the diversionary attack during [Operation Ouka](#). Following the success of the attack on the Kashgar Hive, the European Union began to make preparations for their campaign to retake the European continent, which was finally put into motion in 2004.

Unlimited/The Day After

The destruction of the European continent has dealt great damage to the EU, with only France retaining any semblance of a nation; the status of the rest of the countries that make up the European Union are unknown. As of 23rd of February, 2004, most of their land is now submerged underwater following the G-bombing of the Hives around the defence lines on the continent.

(39): Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky (11 September 1877 – 20 July 1926), nicknamed "Iron Felix", was a Bolshevik revolutionary and official. Born into Polish nobility, from 1917 until his death in 1926 Dzerzhinsky led the first two Soviet state-security organizations, the Cheka and the OGPU, establishing a secret police for the post-revolutionary Soviet regime. He was one of the architects of the Red Terror and decossackization (The soviet's systems of political repression).

(40): **Mitte** (German for "middle" or "center") comprises the historic center of old Berlin centered on the churches of St. Nicholas and St. Mary, renowned Museum Island, the city hall Rotes Rathaus, the city administrative building Altes Stadthaus, the famous Fernsehturm, Brandenburg Gate at the end of the central boulevard Unter den Linden and more main tourist attractions of the city. For these reasons, Mitte is considered the "**heart**" of Berlin. Between 1961 and 1990, Mitte, one of the most important boroughs of East Berlin but close to all three western sectors of the city, was almost surrounded by the Berlin Wall. Situated in central Berlin and mostly in its old town, it is traversed by the river **Spree**. It borders the localities of Tiergarten, Moabit, Wedding, Gesundbrunnen, Prenzlauer Berg (in Pankow district), Friedrichshain, and Kreuzberg (both in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district). **Alexanderplatz** is a large public square and transport hub in the central Mitte district of Berlin. The square is named after the Russian Tsar Alexander I and is often referred to simply as Alex.

(41): **Bishoujo** 美少女: composed of the words 美人 (bijin) or beautiful person, and 少女 (shoujo) is a Japanese word describing a young lady with a beautiful appearance.

(42): Both beatrix's sentence and the answer Jürgen said use different forms of the same verb **tsukkakatte**/突っかかって and **tsukkakarareru**/突っかかれる. She is saying can you stop flaring up or charging at me, and he is saying her words are more flaring up than him. Again, it works because verbs can be used to describe nouns or give attributes to nouns as well in Japanese, so Beatrix is using it as a verb, and Jürgen is using it to describe her words.

(43): **Christantiy** in East Germany: 1952 onwards marked a period of struggle and conflict between the state and the church in East Germany. The announced "construction of socialism" required an "intensification of the **class struggle**" including an offensive against the power of the churches, and encompassing surveillance "of the churches and affiliate organisations such as the CDU - Christian Democratic Union (East Germany) has been ordered by the Stasi, because these "**reactionary** groups of people" were allegedly opponents of the construction of socialism. The **GDR** state sponsored atheism and tried to reduce the influence of the churches on society. The GDR's constitution ostensibly proclaimed the freedom of religious belief, while "Freedom of religion and liberty of conscience did not in reality exist, and the exercise of religion was obstructed in every conceivable way".

Class struggle: Class struggle, or class warfare or class conflict, is tension or antagonism in society. It is said to exist because different groups of people have different interests, most of which are economical. According to Marxism, there are two main classes of people: The bourgeoisie controls the capital and means of production, and the proletariat provides the labour. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels say that for most of history, there has been a struggle between those two classes. This struggle is known as class struggle. After The Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital, this concept became well known. He aimed at giving the workers the final say in their pay and what they make in the business, since they are the ones who make the things, not rich owners. He thought that the common man deserved to run the business, and that the rich were not better than the commoner.

A variation of the theory was also adopted by Mao Zedong in China. Mao Zedong's slogan "Never forget class struggle!" once plastered all over the walls in China. Check [Cultural Revolution](#) and [Struggle Sessions](#) for more information on how communism was applied in China by the CCP - Chinese Communist party.

Reactionary people: In political science, a reactionary or a reactionist is a person who holds political views that favor a **return** to the status quo ante, the previous political state of society, which that

person believes possessed positive characteristics absent from contemporary society. As a descriptor term, reactionary derives from the ideological context of the left–right political spectrum. As an adjective, the word reactionary describes points of view and policies meant to restore a past status quo ante. It can be considered the opposite word for **Revolutionary**.

(44): The **T-72** is a family of Soviet/Russian main battle tanks that first entered production in 1969. About 25,000 T-72 tanks have been built, and refurbishment has enabled many to remain in service for decades. The early T-72 versions are considered as second-generation main battle tanks. It was widely exported and saw service in 40 countries and in numerous conflicts.

(45): **The Group of Soviet Forces in Germany** or **Gruppe der Sowjetischen Streitkräfte in Deutschland** were the troops of the Soviet Army in East Germany. The Group of Soviet Occupation Forces in Germany was formed after the end of World War II in Europe from units of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts. The group helped suppress the East German uprising of 1953. After the end of occupation functions in 1954 the group was renamed the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany. The group represented Soviet interests in East Germany during the Cold War.

(46): **Détente** (French for relaxation) is the relaxation of strained relations, especially political, by verbal communication. The term, in diplomacy, originates from around 1912 when France and Germany tried unsuccessfully to reduce tensions. The term is most often used to refer to a period of general easing of the geopolitical tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States that was a distinct lessening of the Cold War. It began in 1969, as a core element of the foreign policy of US President Richard Nixon, in an effort to avoid nuclear escalation. The Nixon administration promoted greater dialogue with the Soviet government, including regular summit meetings and negotiations over arms control and other bilateral agreements.

(47): **Noblesse oblige** (literally "nobility obliges") is a French expression from the times when the English nobility spoke French and maintains in English the meaning that nobility extends beyond mere entitlement and requires people who hold such status to fulfill social responsibilities. As those who lived on the nobles' land had obligations to the nobility, the nobility had obligations to their people, including protection at the least. Some **socialist** and **Marxist** critics have argued that noblesse oblige, while seeming to impose on the nobility a duty to behave nobly, provides the aristocracy with an apparent justification for their privilege.

(48): An **unofficial collaborator** or IM (German; both from German **inoffizieller Mitarbeiter**), or euphemistically **informal collaborator (informeller Mitarbeiter)**, was an informant in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) who delivered private information to the Ministry for State Security (Stasi). At the end of the East German government in real life, there was a network of around 189,000 informants, working at every level of society.

(49): A **gaffe** is usually made in a social environment and may come from saying something that may be true but inappropriate. It may also be an erroneous attempt to reveal a truth. Gaffes can be malapropisms, grammatical errors or other verbal and gestural weaknesses or revelations through body language. A **Political gaffe** is an error in speech made by a politician. According to Barack Obama it is used by the press to describe any maladroit phrase by a candidate that reveals ignorance, carelessness, fuzzy thinking, insensitivity, malice, boorishness, falsehood, or hypocrisy – or is simply deemed to veer sufficiently far from the conventional wisdom to make said candidate vulnerable to attack.

(50): **Karl Wilhelm Otto Lilienthal** (23 May 1848 – 10 August 1896) was a German pioneer of aviation who became known as the "flying man". He was the first person to make well-documented, repeated, successful flights with gliders. Newspapers and magazines published photographs of Lilienthal gliding, favourably influencing public and scientific opinion about the possibility of flying machines becoming practical. On 9 August 1896, his glider stalled and he was unable to regain control. Falling from about 15 m (50 ft), he broke his neck and died the next day. Lilienthal's research was well known to the **Wright brothers**, and they credited him as a major inspiration for their decision to pursue manned flight. However, they abandoned his aeronautical data after two seasons of gliding and began using their own wind tunnel data.

(51): **Continued:** The **Socialist Unity Party of Germany** (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED). Although the GDR was a one-party state, some other institutional popular front parties were permitted to exist in alliance with the SED; these parties included the Christian Democratic Union, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Democratic Farmers' Party, and the National Democratic Party. The party pursued state socialism, under which all industries in East Germany were nationalized, and a command economy was implemented. The SED made the teaching of Marxism–Leninism and the Russian language compulsory in schools.

(52): **Okaerinasai** means welcome home, **Otsukaresama** means thank you for your hard work, and **konbanwa** means good evening. I felt the nuance of the expressions might not be conveyed correctly if i translated them, so i left them as they are as they are often repeated in Japanese homes and workplaces.

(53): **Interkosmos** was a Soviet space program, designed to help the Soviet Union's allies with crewed and uncrewed space missions. The program included the allied east-European states of the Warsaw Pact, Eastern Bloc, CoMEcon, and other socialist states like Afghanistan, Cuba, Mongolia, and Vietnam. In addition, pro-Soviet non-aligned states such as India and Syria participated, and even states such as the United Kingdom, France and Austria, despite them being capitalist states. Beginning in April 1967 with unmanned research satellite missions, the first manned Interkosmos mission occurred in February 1978. So-called joint manned space flights enabled 14 non-Soviet cosmonauts to participate in Soyuz space flights between 1978 and 1988. The program was responsible for sending into space the first citizen of a country other than the USA or USSR: Vladimír Remek of Czechoslovakia. Interkosmos also resulted in the first black and Hispanic person in space, Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez of Cuba, and the first Southeast Asian person in space, Phạm Tuân of Vietnam. Of the countries involved, only Bulgaria sent two cosmonauts in space, although the second one did not fly under the Interkosmos program, and the French spationaut, Jean-Loup Chrétien, flew on two separate flights.

(54): **ippon** is a full point scored in judo, karate, and other martial sports. Literally means "one full point".

(55): In reality Dresden is actually **closer** to Berlin than Frankfurt, and the distance can be covered in two hours by train, unlike Frankfurt which takes more than 6 hours. I want to point out that it's not a translation mistake and it might be a misstep on behalf of the editor or writer, but I didn't want to change the text to accommodate for this difference, so I kept the original text as it is and left this note here.

(56): A **tatami** (畳) is a type of mat used as a flooring material in traditional Japanese-style rooms. Tatamis are made in standard sizes, twice as long as wide, about 0.9 m by 1.8 m depending on the region. In martial arts, tatami are the floor used for training in a dojo and for competition.

(57): **Sambo** is a Soviet martial art, an internationally-practised combat sport, and a recognized style of amateur wrestling included by UWW in the World Wrestling Championships along with Greco-Roman wrestling and freestyle wrestling. The word sambo is an acronym of the romanization samozashchita bez oruzhiya (Russian: самозащита без оружия), which literally translates to 'self-defence without weapons'.

(58): **Randori** (乱取り) is a term used in Japanese martial arts to describe free-style practice (sparring). The term denotes an exercise in 取り tori, applying technique to a random (乱 ran) succession of uke attacks. The actual connotation of randori depends on the martial art it is used in. In judo, jujutsu, and Shodokan aikido, among others, it most often refers to one-on-one sparring where partners attempt to resist and counter each other's techniques. In other styles of aikido, in particular Aikikai, it refers to a form of practice in which a designated aikidoka defends against multiple attackers in quick succession without knowing how they will attack or in what order.

(59): The orientel book described is **The Art of War by Sun Tzu**. The quote referenced by Jürgen is **hei wa kidō nari** - 兵は詭道なり. A passage that appears in the first chapter of the book, literally meaning the way of a soldier or a strategy is deceptive methods or questionable means. The english translation of the book goes like this: "**All warfare is based on deception**. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.". Sun Tzu addresses in his book many methods of employing that "deception" in battle, more on this subject [here](#).

(60): **Judogi** (柔道着 or 柔道衣) is the formal Japanese name for the traditional uniform used for Judo practice and competition.

(61): **Lolicon** or **Pedophile** is a person who is sexually attracted to underage girls.

(62): **Seoi nage** (背負投) is a shoulder throw, one of the traditional forty throws of Judo as developed by Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo. The specific techniques of morote-seoi-nage (two hands seoi-nage), or eri-seoi, are usually generalised as simply seoi-nage. The distinctive technical aspect of this classification is that tori (the one executing the technique) grips with their two hands, as opposed to Ippon Seoi Nage, in which only one hand remains gripping while the other slides under uke's (the one receiving the technique) armpit. Additionally, reverse seoi-nage involves spinning up to 360 degrees so that uke ends up being thrown backwards rather than forward, as in other variations. Renowned seoi-nage martial artists are Isao Okano and Toshihiko Koga, and renowned reverse seoi-nage judoka is Choi Min-ho, who popularised the variation.



(63): The **dan** (段) ranking system is used by many Japanese, Okinawan, Korean, and other martial art organizations to indicate the level of a person's ability within a given system. The Dan Grade system is aimed at Judo practitioners who are 15 years of age and older and who have moved on from completing the Kyu Grades system. Kyu grades have White to Brown Belts, and Dan ranks have black belts / **Kuro-obi** (黒帯). Dan Ranks range from 1st to 12th rank,

(64): 3rd degree black belt, **sandan**, is equivalent to a bachelor's degree in college. This is a fairly rigorous course of study and the judo applicant would have to have time in grade and equivalent course work (knowledge) and be able to demonstrate a high level of understanding of judo. The student would be expected to study instruction/coaching of beginning and intermediate students, sports psychology, bio-mechanics, exercise physiology, nutrition, dojo management, judo games, judo drills, judo kata, how to set up a tournament, refereeing, and perhaps public relations, sports information, writing about judo, grant writing, judo storytelling, judo and the media, how to set up and conduct judo clinics.

The complete picture of Judo ranks based on the European education system can be found [here](#).

(65): An **apparatchik** was a full-time, professional functionary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the Soviet government apparatus, someone who held any position of bureaucratic or political responsibility, with the exception of the higher ranks of management called nomenklatura. James Billington describes an apparatchik as "a man not of grand plans, but of a hundred carefully executed details." The term is often considered derogatory, with negative connotations in terms of the quality, competence, and attitude of a person thus described. Members of the apparat (apparatchiks or apparatchiki) were frequently transferred between different areas of responsibility, usually with little or no actual training for their new areas of responsibility. Thus, the term apparatchik, or "agent of the apparatus" was usually the best possible description of the person's profession and occupation. Not all

apparatchiks held lifelong positions. Many only entered such positions in middle age. They were known to receive various benefits including free holiday vouchers, free meals and accommodation.

[\(66\)](#): **Gross National Product** (GNP) is the total market value of the final goods and services produced by a nation's economy during a specific period of time (usually a year), computed before allowance is made for the depreciation or consumption of capital used in the process of production. It is distinguished from net national product, which is computed after such an allowance is made. The GNP is nearly identical to gross domestic product (GDP) except that the latter does not include the income accruing to a nation's residents from investments abroad (minus the income earned in the domestic economy accruing to nonnationals from abroad). Gross national product is a convenient indicator of the level of a nation's economic activity. In 1991 the United States substituted GDP for GNP as its main measure of economic output.

[\(67\)](#): **Unter den Linden** (German: ['ʊntə de:n 'lɪndə], "under the linden trees") is a boulevard in the central Mitte district of Berlin, the capital of Germany. Running from the City Palace to Brandenburg Gate, it is named after the linden (lime) trees that line the grassed pedestrian mall on the median and the two broad carriageways. The avenue links numerous Berlin sights, landmarks and rivers for sightseeing.

[\(68\)](#): Iris uses the Kanji (子/**Ko**), which can mean a child or a young woman. It's a gender ambiguous word so it's hard for Jürgen to determine the gender of the person Iris is speaking about, and thought they were a boy, not a girl.