

Patricia, Patricia

1.

The decisiveness with which Patricia Bartos' life began became the hallmark of her entire life. Her conception took place on the basis of precise calendar calculations – one might say, according to plan. Her father was a Biology and Physics teacher, her mother a secretary at a grammar school. Equally single-minded was the path she took in her youth – literally. On the way home from school she would turn down all offers – for example, to go and play with Dieter – on the grounds that she “had something to do” (it was Patricia's aspiration to put school behind her as quickly and successfully as possible, although she really couldn't say why). Dieter's attempts at bribery, first with chewing gum and finally with “St Clare's” books, failed to produce the desired result. By contrast, in the 11th and 12th classes Patricia managed to conquer the hearts of Daniel and Marco in no time at all – by means of analysis. At school she would record conversations between the two boys using a dictaphone hidden under the desk, and would observe them during the break and in their spare time. For this purpose Patricia would occasionally use the field-glasses she and her father took with them on their birdwatching walks, walks which, unusually for her, she used to find exciting. Whispered, yet nonetheless deeply felt, “ohs” and “ahs” would come from father and daughter when, after hours of waiting in the undergrowth first thing in the morning, the desired bird would show up in a clearing or on a tree. A sparrow-thrush, a rowan-finch, a green starling. Daniel's and Marco's behaviour could be studied in a similar way. Relying on drawings

made in a pink A-6 notebook, Patricia adapted her look to each of them: Rastafarian in batik T-shirts (for Daniel) and stylish-lascivious stunner in mini-skirts and manicured fingernails (for Marco). Immediately after achieving the desired success (both of them lay at her feet), she realised however that her interest in Daniel and Marco had faded completely.

The fact is that Patricia is a woman who makes a striking impression. One day during her first term at university – she was studying biology – she was approached on the street by an agent who asked her if she wanted to become a model. In an instant her whole future life stood before her: catwalks, clothes, high society, money, the challenge to make the biggest possible impression on the biggest possible audience in the shortest time. Patricia was delighted; she said: “I do”. And that is what happened. She became, among other things, the muse of the designer Giuseppe Montana. Her favourite colour is yellow. Her favourite dish is steak (rare) with potatoes and beans.

At the age of 39 she felt something inside her, somewhere between her heart and her liver, which astounded her for the first time – a vacuum. Immediately Patricia drew up a master plan for the next five years. She became an actress, and her first role was as a model (so in a sense she played herself). She went on to achieve ever greater success and to act in ever bigger productions; her roles included a princess, an agent’s mistress, a prostitute, a farmer in South Africa in the 1970s, a resistance fighter in the Third Reich who was executed, the chairperson of a fashion company, a murderess, a queen, a mother worried about her drug-addict daughter. Critics noted in her an amazing ability to transform herself but at the same time found her performances “anaemic”. Magazines wrote that there was hardly anything to write about her; her private life was a secret.

A paparazzo took photographs of her when she was out shopping, trying on new clothes, cooking, ironing, watching TV.

As she looks back on all this, Patricia is 48. She drinks a cup of green tea and looks out of her trailer window.

2.

For the first time she sees her life history in a completely different but very bright light. It could no longer be said that the decisiveness with which her life began had continued to mark its further progress; perhaps at her conception her parents had let out not so much a resolute “ah” as a hesitant “erm”. Her father, who always held his lessons in a steady, soft voice, was no longer as masterful as her mother described him in her loving anecdotes about him after his death. He was, rather, driven by a manic desire for order. He had to order everything: the tape recordings that made up his “chirp catalogue”, as he called his collection of bird songs, his books, and towards the end – in a meticulous hundred-page booklet which even made mention of his pencil sharpeners – his estate. Behind his compulsive behaviour, however, lurked pure fear, akin to the fear that can be seen in the wide-open eyes of a quail dove. This fear, as Patricia recognised now at the trailer window, was one she too had experienced on numerous occasions: fear of the realisation that everything – that is, her whole life – might have gone very differently. In other words, she could have collected “St Clare’s” books and played with Dieter; she needn’t have followed the advice of her father, who had put pressure on her to study biology, but could have studied, say, literature. As a matter of fact, she really couldn’t stand birds. In her childhood she had been very fond of a book of fairy tales, which her father had taken

away from her. If she hadn't studied biology, she wouldn't have met the agent that day, in other words, she would not have become a model, she would not be standing here at the trailer window, but would instead perhaps be a teacher standing at a bookcase in a library; or she might indeed have become a model but would then have got involved in some aid scheme in Afghanistan, in other words, she would at this moment be standing in a tent on the Afghan steppes and teaching girls; or she might have accepted the offer of appearing in a major Hollywood movie, as for one second she had deep inside her wanted to do; in other words she would now be in Beverly Hills, it would be very warm and she would be asking Roswitha the housekeeper to turn up the air conditioning.

3.

As Patricia saw from her taxi the corral of trailers and temporary sheds, the busy technicians, the actors, accompanied everywhere by a swarm of assistants, she felt the onset of an unfounded feeling that she was heading towards an important moment in her life. This was her first longer location shooting. Previously all outside scenes had actually been shot in the studio and then digitally processed, to avoid depending on outside light conditions. After spending three idle days in her trailer, Patricia felt that this method made a lot of sense. The weather was not cooperating. There was no question of bringing forward other scenes as this was the last and unfortunately one of the most important scenes in the film. Twice already Patricia had been picked up, fully made up and dressed as Margot Schneider, then taken to a spot on the edge of the forest where cameras, microphones, lights and reflectors had already been set up among the trees to make the most out of what was at that moment only

very poor sunshine. Twice the director had broken off shooting because of the cloud cover.

As it happened, Patricia was quite happy about the delay in shooting the last scene. No one on the set knew but the first time she had read the script of the last scene she had broken out in goose pimples, as it had an astonishing similarity to an episode from her own life. In the film the mother (Margot alias Patricia) by chance witnesses how her 24-year-old daughter Susan turns down Christopher, a friend who confesses his love for her. In real life, the mother hadn't been there. Patricia was Susan and Christopher was Gerhard, a doctor she had met at a reception. One day on a walking tour of the Rhone valley together he came out with "I love you, Patricia", as a mocking-bird sang in the background. Patricia had not known how to react. She liked Gerhard, there was no question about that. But at the time she was at the start of her career, and a relationship which would have endangered her emotional economy was out of the question. She had broken off all contact with Gerhard, cried about it once or twice, but then the hurt went away. But in dressing rooms, at receptions, at home, in bed in her flat, alone, the confession in the forest would come back to her. Gerhard, as she happened to find out some time ago, now had his own surgery in Cologne, plus family.

The episode had been on Patricia's mind constantly over the last few weeks. Although it had been very brief and in fact rather incidental, thinking about it now, she realised it had been decisive. The closer it came to shooting the scene in the forest, the more afraid of it she became; this was absurd because her role required her simply to stand there. She was not meant to intervene in order to bring Susan (i.e.

herself) to her senses. Her whole life could possibly be seen as a failure because at the time she made a/the decisive mistake.

And not only that. Patricia is now reminded that all her subsequent moves, all her decisions were ultimately completely arbitrary. She could do this – or she could do that. But what should she do?

4.

At this moment Patricia sees herself, or rather a second Patricia, coming to the door of the trailer and marching past her (or Patricia One) across the field into another life. Patricia Two looks as if she is really enjoying herself. She is whistling.

5.

Patricia puts the tea on the window-sill and has the feeling she is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She is glad that, at least for the days on the set, she can consult a script that tells her how to behave.

6.

There is a knock on the door. Olivia the make-up artist is standing there saying: “The sun’s shining!”

7.

(Susan and Christopher walk from the field into the forest)

Christopher: *Wait a moment, Sue! Wait a moment.*

Susan (coyly): *What?*

Christopher (stuttering): *There’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you for a long time.*

(Visible for the spectator, but not for Susan and Christopher, Margot enters the field some distance away carrying a basket; she notices the couple, stops, thinks for a moment and hides behind a tree)

Susan (coyly): *What?*

Christopher (stuttering): *I ... we've known each other a while now and I don't think I have ever met anyone I have felt so much for ... as I have for you.*

Director: *Cut! Ms Bartos! You're standing far too close to them. That way they can see you. Right, start again from Susan's second "What". Right, action!*

Susan (coyly): *What!*

During Christopher's confession, Patricia has to make quite an effort to stop herself from coming out from her hiding place and intervening. She has a lump in her throat, but still she pretends to be surprised. Patricia is a professional.

Susan (astonished, then stunned): *Now you've ruined everything. Why did you say that? You ruin everything.*

Director: *Cut! Ok. That was quite good. But let's take it again from the second "What". And Ms Bartos, please keep the right distance.*

8.

Patricia looks at her watch for the umpteenth time. Four minutes to nine.

Will he be on time?

Should she check her outfit once again? His tenor voice, not unlike that of a cockerel, had sounded pleasant and at the same time distinguished.

A few minutes more and she'll be able to see the man who goes with the voice and find out whether her spontaneous decision to investigate

Holger Atoz, the scriptwriter of the film, was a crazy idea. But after the last day of shooting, with the forest scene now in the can, Patricia had fallen into a deep crisis. Perhaps this was the life she had planned when she was young and later when she was a model – but had she really been desperate for it deep down?

It had occurred to her one day walking in the Alps that if anybody could help her in this situation, then he was the one, the person who had written the film and who had in some way, though unwittingly, acquainted her with her own life. He was someone who, as she had found out by looking him up on the net, had been the creator of many impressive female characters and unexpected twists of fate; he would know what to advise her.

Once again she takes the filing cards out of her handbag. Since the film, to the dismay of her manager and to the astonishment of those around her who think they know her, she has taken a “creative timeout” to think about what to do with the rest of her life. One day she started to write herself short stage directions for foreseeable important situations: what to say, what to do. If a conversation happened to unfold unexpectedly, this was no problem. She had noted down various alternative versions of the scene; all she had to do was shift mentally from one to the other, because, hey, otherwise what’s the point of being a pro? There was something restful about acting out these script Patricias, as she called it. Suddenly she once again felt a little more sure of herself when she walked the streets. She had written exhaustive notes for her telephone call to Atoz and now also for their meeting. Her future lies before her on the small yellow cards. She glances at them: I) he’s not going to come; consequence: she’ll go home; II) he comes; he: greeting; she: reply (polite, but not too friendly: it should not be immediately clear that she has

high expectations); she brings the conversation round to her last three films, describes the plot; II 1) he picks up on this, she asks him about his screenplays, about which she of course knows a lot after all her thorough research; II 2) they go home together; II 3) they go their separate ways; II 4) ... at some stage, roughly at VI 5 c), it becomes rather complicated, to the point where Patricia cannot decide what makes her more nervous: remembering the script properly or seeing Atoz for the first time. She is sipping on her glass, when she hears the voice she now knows so well: "Ms Bartos? Am I too late?"

9.

A moment of confusion. Patricia stands up. She shakes Holger Atoz's hand. He has brown eyes. Neither of them speaks. They sit down. What should she do now? She has a blackout, she can hardly remember anything that was on the cards, what is she doing here, this is complete nonsense, not only this rendezvous but her whole life; she has failed, failed and failed a third time.

10.

Atoz smiles at her. "Hmm, I guess it was a bit weird agreeing to a blind date like this. If I didn't know your films ... but never mind. At first I had a touch of the jitters about coming here. You must know that I don't like going out of the house. I even have problems leaving my room. But now I don't really regret my decision at all ... erm ... am I talking too much?"

11.

Patricia straightens up. She swallows, and moistens her lips. She doesn't

know what she is about to say. But suddenly – was it Atoz' opening gambit or is it his brown eyes? For the moment at least she is no longer afraid.

“So?” asks Atoz.

“Well, it's like this,” begins Patricia, and in her mind's eye she sees her filing cards before her: with every word, with every letter they are moving away from her just as she, Patricia, whistling as she goes, so to speak, bids farewell to what is written on them.