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Stasi Wolf

Written by David Young

Published by Zaffre Publishing

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STASI WOLF

DAVID YOUNG

ZAFFRE

First published in Great Britain in 2017 by

ZAFFRE PUBLISHING
80–81 Wimpole St, London W1G 9RE
www.zaffrebooks.co.uk

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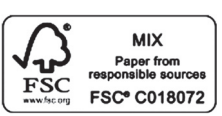
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

B Format Paperback ISBN: 978-1-78576-068-6
Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-1-78576-298-7
A Format Paperback ISBN: 978-1-78576-288-8

Also available as an ebook

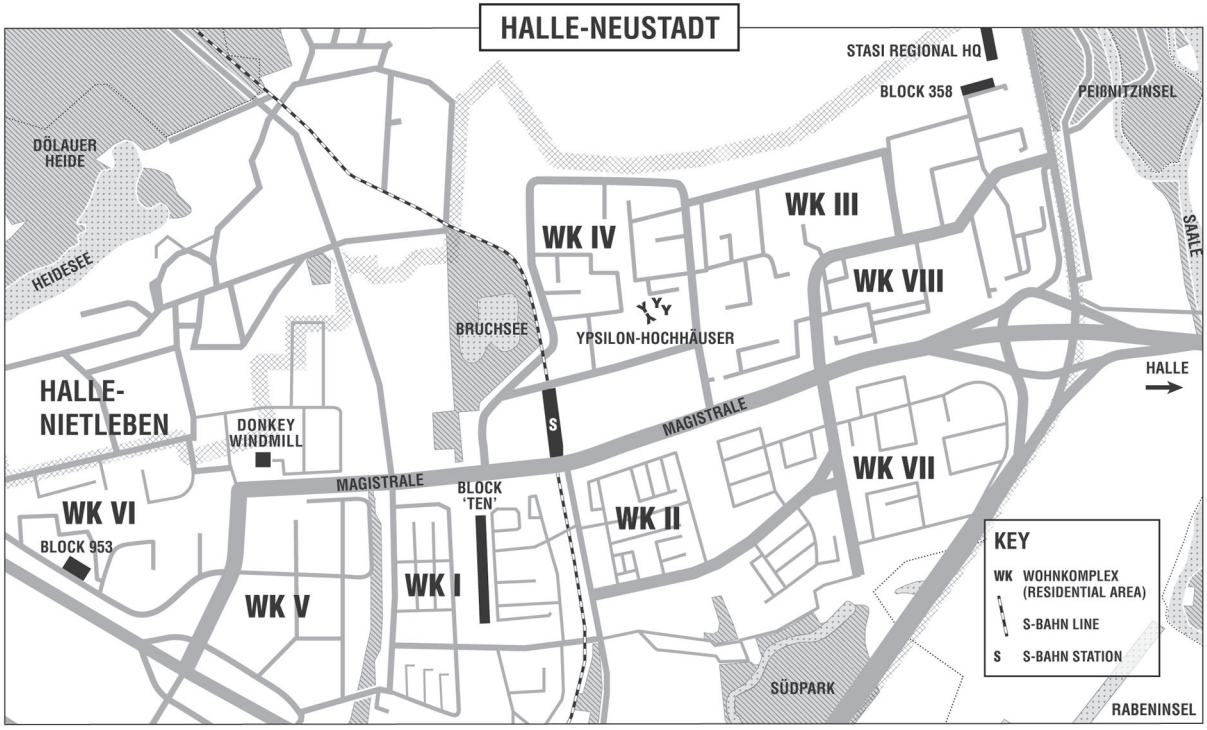
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset by IDSUK (Data Connection) Ltd
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc



Zaffre Publishing is an imprint of Bonnier Zaffre,
a Bonnier Publishing company
www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk
www.bonnierpublishing.co.uk

For Stephanie, Scarlett and Fergus


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S
MAGISTRALE
MAGISTRALE
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BLOCK 'TEN'
WK VI
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BLOCK 953
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S S-BAHN STATION
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second instalment of my *Oberleutnant* Karin Müller crime thriller series, set in communist East Germany in the mid-1970s. The story is set a few months after the conclusion of the first novel, *Stasi Child*, but – like the first book – it's a discrete story within the series and I've tried to write it in such a way that anyone starting here will still enjoy it and not feel they've missed out by not reading the first book.

Readers of *Stasi Child* found my introduction there to be useful, so apologies to them as this will repeat some of the same information.

East Germany, or in German the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR), was a communist state set up in the years after the Second World War, and very much dominated by the Soviet Union. It had one of the highest standards of living in the eastern bloc and although it was in many ways Moscow's puppet, living there was very different, even if the politics were the same.

My main protagonist, Karin Müller, is an *Oberleutnant* (or first lieutenant) with the state police, the *Volkspolizei* (literally People's Police) – although as a murder squad detective she works for the CID arm, the *Kriminalpolizei*, or *Kripo* (or often just the '*K*', although I've not used that here).

But looming large in the background is the East German secret police, the Ministry for State Security, more commonly known as the Stasi (a contraction of the German name).

Throughout the text I've retained the German ranks for a flavour of authenticity – many are self-explanatory, but for full explanations/translations of these and other East German terms please see the glossary at the back of the novel.

Please note some of the dates of real events used as the basis for this fictional story have been adjusted for the sake of the plot. For more details see the 'Author's Note' at the end of the novel.

Many thanks to everyone who read *Stasi Child*, especially those who reviewed it or blogged about it. It was lovely (and a little overwhelming) that so many of you contacted me to thank me for writing it. There was no need, but it was still great to get your letters and emails.

For contact details and more background, please see my website at www.stasichild.com or follow me on Twitter @djy_writer.

Thanks for reading!

D.Y. (February 2017)

PROLOGUE

July 1945
Halle-Bruckdorf, occupied Germany

Your leg stings as you shuffle along the ledge to try to get comfortable. Frau Sultemeier has fallen against you during the never-ending night. Being squashed together with the others down in the disused mine gives a little warmth, a perhaps misplaced sense of safety in numbers. So you feel slightly disloyal as you move sideways to get some space – feeling your way in the blackness, where the sun's rays never penetrate, even during the day. You daren't put your foot down because you know your boot will be filled again by the cold, coal-stained water and the pain will be unbearable. You can hear it, sloshing around – the water that seeps in everywhere, into every sore and wound. You can't see it, but you know it's there.

Sultemeier snorts but doesn't wake. You almost wish she did. You want someone to talk to. Someone to calm your fears. Dagna could do that. Your younger sister was never afraid. The drone of the bombers, the explosions of the bombs, the fire in the sky, the dust clouds and rubble. Dagna just used to say: 'We're here.

We're still alive. Be thankful and wait for it to get better.' But Dagna's gone now. With the others. She heard – we all heard – the stories they told in the League of German Girls. About how the Red Army soldiers are worse than wild animals, how they will rape you again and again, tear you limb from limb. The others didn't want to find out if it was true. So they've gone to try to reach the American zone.

Another snort from Sultemeier. She wraps her arm round you, as though you're her lover. Frau Sultemeier, the miserable old shopkeeper who before the war would never let more than two children into her shop at once. Always quick to spot if you tried to pocket a sweet while you thought her eyes were elsewhere. She, like most of the others here, was too old to run. And you, with your injured foot from the last British bombing raid, you *can't* run. So you had to come down here with them. To the old lignite mine. Most of the brown coal round here they just tear from the ground, huge machines taking big bites directly from the earth, feeding what had seemed like a never-ending war. The war that was once so glorious. Then so dirty, so hateful, so exhausting. But you *Kinder des Krieges* knew about the disused underground mine – the cave, you used to call it – when you played down here before the war, you and your sister Dagna astonishing Mutti with how dirty you used to get. 'Black as little negroes,' she used to laugh, playfully patting you on your bums as you ran to the bathtub. Mutti's gone now, of course. Died . . . when was it? A year ago, two? And you've still never seen a black person. Well, apart from in books. You wonder if you'll ever see a real, living one. You wonder if you'll ever get out of here alive.

You see the flash of the torches first, then hear the foreign shouts, the splashing of boots in the waterlogged mine. Frau Sultemeier is awake immediately, gripping your shoulders with her bony hands. To protect you, you think. You hope. You feel the quiver of fear transfer from her body into yours through her fingers.

Then the torch beam dazzling in your eyes, playing along the line of grandmothers, spinsters and widows. Women who've seen too many summers. Too many winters. All except you. Just thirteen winters for you, and this is your fourteenth summer.

'*Frauen! Herkommen!*' The Slavic tongue mangles the pronunciation of the German words, but the message is clear.

Suddenly Sultemeier, the old witch, is pushing you forward. You realise her grip on you was not protectiveness at all. She just wanted to stop you running.

'Here! Here!' she shouts. The torch beam is back, trained on you. 'Take this girl. She's young, pretty – look!' She forces your chin upwards, wrenches your arm away as you try to shield your eyes.

'No,' you say. 'No. I won't go. I don't want to.' But the Soviet soldier is pulling you towards him. In the harsh uplight of the torch, you see his face for the first time. His wild Slavic features. Just as the *Führer* described in his warnings. There is hunger there. Need. A hunger and a need for you.

He shouts at you again, this time in Russian. '*Prikhodite!*'

'I don't understand,' you say. 'I'm only thirteen.'

'*Komm mit mir!*' But he doesn't have to order you, because he just drags you with him, through the waterlogged mine, your

undernourished teenage body almost no weight to him at all, each of his strides sending darts of pain through your injured foot. You hear the laughs of his colleagues. 'Pretty girl,' they taunt. 'Pretty girl.'

Outside, even though it's barely after dawn, the light is blinding. Soldiers. Soldiers. Everywhere. Laughing. Whistling. Blowing imaginary kisses. You're trying to walk now, but each stride is more a stumble, and he has your arm locked in his like a vice. You feel the dampness where you've wet yourself.

He's taking you to the hut. The rusting corrugated-metal mine hut where you used to play with Dagna before the war, before all this hell. You were the pretend mother of the house, she your naughty daughter, always playing tricks to try to get you to scold her. He opens the door, throws you inside onto the floor, and then kicks the door closed again behind him.

'Pretty girl,' he says, just staring at you for a moment, echoing the animalistic approval of his fellow soldiers. 'Pretty girl.'

You edge backwards along the floor to the corner of the hut, across the dirt and debris. You see him undoing his belt, lurching towards you as his battledress puddles round his feet. And then he's on you. Ripping your clothes, pinning your arms down as you try to scratch his eyes, thrusting his foul-smelling face towards you for a kiss.

Then you give up. You just flop back and let him do what he wants. Whatever he wants.

Almost as soon as he's finished, he's ready to start again. And then the door opens, and another soldier comes in. With

the same hungry look. You realise, through the fog of pain, the shame, and the smell of unwashed man, that what they told you in the League of German Girls was right.

The *Führer* was right.

The Red Army soldiers *are* worse than wild animals.

1

July 1975
East Berlin

Oberleutnant Karin Müller fixed her gaze on the spotty youth sitting opposite her in the Keibelstrasse interview room. He stared back from under a curtain of shoulder-length, greasy black hair with an insolence which she feared wouldn't serve him well in the remand cells of the People's Police.

Müller didn't say anything for a moment, sniffed, and then looked down at her notes.

'You're Stefan Lauterberg, aged nineteen, of Apartment 3019, Block 431, on Fischerinsel in the Hauptstadt. Is that correct?'

'You know it is.'

'And you're the guitarist in a popular music group called . . .' Müller peered down at her notes again, 'Hell Twister. That's correct?' The youth just emitted a careworn sigh. 'Is that correct?' repeated Müller.

'We're a *rock* band,' he said.

'Hmm.' Müller made a point of noting this down, not that she really cared about the youth's pedantry. She had some

sympathy for him though. Just as he felt he shouldn't be here, being questioned by a People's Police officer, she believed jobs like this weren't what she'd signed up for. She was a homicide detective. She'd been the first female head of a *Kripo* murder squad in the whole Republic. She'd done well – at least in her opinion – and now they'd moved her from the Mitte Murder Commission and rewarded her with awful little *Vopo* jobs like this. Jobs which should be being done by some uniformed numbskull. Müller sighed, un-clicked her pen, and laid it down on the interview table.

'Look, Stefan. You can make this easy for me, or you can make it difficult. Easy, and you admit the offence, you're given a warning and you're on your way. Back playing with . . .' she peered down at her notes again. She remembered the name of his group perfectly well, but didn't want to give him the satisfaction of knowing it. '. . . with Hell Twister, in no time at all. Or you can make it hard. Play the smart-arse. And then we'll shut you in a cell here for just as long as we want. Any hopes of going to university, of getting a decent job, well, that will all be history.'

Lauterberg snorted. 'A decent job, Comrade *Oberleutnant*?' The use of her rank was laced with sarcasm. 'In this shitty little country?' He shook his head and smiled.

Müller sighed again, ran her hands back through her dirty blond hair, heavy and damp from the oppressive summer heat. 'OK. Have it your way. Stefan Lauterberg, on Sunday, June the fifteenth this year you were reported by Comrade Gerda Hutmacher for making an unreasonable amount of noise in

your family's apartment with electrically amplified music. And when she complained to you directly, you made an anti-socialist joke. A joke about Comrade Honecker losing his watch under his bed. Is that correct?'

The youth chuckled. He leaned forward and held Müller's gaze. 'That *is* correct, yes, *Oberleutnant*. He unfortunately loses his watch and thinks it may have been stolen. So he asks the Minister for State Security to investigate.'

Müller placed her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her clasped hands. She hadn't meant for Lauterberg to retell the joke, but clearly he was going to.

'But if I remember correctly,' he continued, 'Comrade Honecker *finds* the watch, and rings the Minister to call off the investigation.' Lauterberg paused for a moment, and stared hard at Müller. 'So, aren't you going to deliver the punch line, *Oberleutnant*?'

Müller gave yet another weary sigh.

'Shall I do it for you? The Minister replies: "Too late, I'm afraid. We've already arrested ten people – and they've all confessed." ' Lauterberg rocked back in his chair, laughing.

Müller got to her feet. She'd heard the joke before, didn't think it was particularly funny, and had had quite enough of Stefan Lauterberg for one day. Quite enough of her current job. 'Guards,' she shouted down the corridor. 'Take this one back to his cell.'

Two uniformed police officers entered, one of them cuffing the youth to his arm. Lauterberg looked at Müller in disdain as

they passed her in the doorway. Then he turned his head, and spat at her feet.

Müller decided to walk the couple of kilometres back to her Schönhauser Allee apartment, rather than take the U-bahn or tram. The heavy summer heat – so oppressive in the confines of the Keibelstrasse police headquarters – was tempered by an evening breeze. But despite the more pleasant atmosphere, she couldn't shrug off a sense of loneliness, of detachment. At the Mitte Murder Commission, under the arches of Marx-Engels-Platz S-bahn station, she and Werner Tilsner had been a little team. Lovers, one time only, but mainly good friends. But for the moment, Tilsner was out of the picture – laid up in a hospital bed recovering from a near-fatal shooting, with no news on when or whether he would return to police work. Keibelstrasse had many more officers within its walls, but Müller didn't really know any of them well enough to call them a friend – except, perhaps, *Kriminaltechniker* Jonas Schmidt. The forensic officer had worked with her on the case of the murdered girl in the graveyard earlier in the year.

She crossed Prenzlauer Allee at the Ampelmann pedestrian signal, and kept up a rapid walk towards the apartment. With each stride she wondered whether her police career, at one point so promising, had now reached a dead end. And all because she'd refused *Oberstleutnant* Klaus Jäger's offer to join him in the Ministry for State Security, the Stasi. She should have known it was the sort of offer you couldn't turn down.

Arriving at her apartment block's entrance, she gave a wry smile. The surveillance vehicle that had been there for weeks had finally disappeared. It was almost as though she wasn't important enough anymore. And when she climbed the stairs from the lobby to the first-floor landing, the almost ubiquitous click of her neighbour Frau Ostermann's door was also absent. Even Frau Ostermann could no longer be bothered poking her nose into Müller's life.

She turned the key in the lock, and entered the apartment. Once a happy home for her and her husband Gottfried. *Ex*-husband. He'd been allowed – as an enemy of the state for his supposed anti-revolutionary activities – to defect to the West, where he was no doubt carving out a successful teaching career. She wondered how long it would be before the authorities would force her – a single divorcee – to move to a smaller apartment, perhaps even a police hostel. Müller shuddered. She couldn't bear that. It would be like being back at the police college. She didn't want any reminders of her time spent there.

Müller went straight to the bedroom, kicked off her shoes, and lay on the bed staring at cracks in the ornate plaster ceiling. She had to pull herself together. Make a decision. She could either stick with the police, try to get her career back on track, or she could get out. One or the other. She couldn't face many more days trying to get idiots like Lauterberg, with their faux Western hippy attitudes, to confess to petty crimes against the state. It was more exhausting than a murder inquiry.

She took a deep breath. One of those days. It had just been one of those days – the sort you moan about to your husband or

wife or family when you finally get back home, letting off steam, allowing the frustration to drift away. But Gottfried was in the past now, and that was partly her own decision. For the first time in as long as she could remember she spared a thought for her family. Not that they were any help – they were hundreds of kilometres south, in Oberhof, and if she hadn't felt like going to visit them at Christmas, she certainly wasn't about to now.

She thought back to events in the Harz mountains, towards the end of her last big case. How she'd tried to be the heroine, leading her and Tilsner into a trap that was within a hair's breadth of seeing her deputy shot dead. Going in without back-up. Now Werner Tilsner lay in a bed in the Charité hospital, unable to speak, unable to walk, barely conscious much of the time.

She got to her feet. A shower and then go and visit Tilsner. That would remind her that there were those worse off than she was. Much worse off.