



## Saskia Goldschmidt – *The Hormone Factory*

### sample translation

The days following on that disastrous day, I had to pull out all the stops to save my own skin and the company's good name.

Immediately after my successful visit to the police, I hurried back to the factory, where by now the evening shift had begun. To quash the rumours, I gathered the foremen and told them briefly and businesslike what had transpired. The ladies and gentlemen listened to my story in shock. Aron was

loved by the personnel, and just like Agnes no one could imagine that the sombre goody two-shoes had been capable of such an outburst. I explained that the police were informed and that my brother would turn himself in at the station the next day. He would not escape his punishment. I asked them to tell this to the employees and to not tolerate any further gossiping on this subject in the company. Afterwards I hurried back to Aron's house and found the doctor and a disconcerted Rivka there. The doctor had first injected my brother with a firm dose of tranquillisers and when the expected result stayed out, given him a strong soporific. Now Aron lay dead to the world in his bed, liberated for a moment from his tormented soul. It was a mystery to both the Doctor and Rivka how my listless brother could have changed into the brute who'd assaulted that gal, who was known in the factory as a sweet and mostly unremarkable thing. Then too I told the story of the drug cocktail Aron was supposed to have taken to drive out his depression, at which the doctor gave me an incredulous look as he hadn't seen my brother once for a consultation in the past year.

"What kind of drugs were those then?" he asked suspiciously.

I assured him I had no idea of that, at which the conscientious medic suggested there must at least have been pill boxes that could aid us in finding out what medication my brother had swallowed. I informed him I had already looked and there had been no traces, not in his office, where the drama had unfolded, or here in Aron's house. But this doctor was a dogged type. Like a hound refusing to let go of his prey he demanded to know the names of the doctor or doctors who'd given my brother the medication. I promised the man I'd do anything to find out and eventually managed to get him out of the house. The fanatic was determined to visit his patient again tomorrow, before he'd have to go to the cell. That meant I had to get Aron out of here before that pit bull terrier would make his appearance. I didn't want to think of what

would happen if anyone so much as got wind of what had truly happened. I thanked the doctor graciously and closed the front door with a sigh, only to immediately be questioned by Rivka.

“Motke, what for heaven’s sake is going on,” she asked while she looked at me with a mixture of suspicion and worry. “Aron raping a girl. There’s no kinder soul on this planet. He would never do something like that. What got into him? And what a strange story you just spun about those medicines. Did you give him some or other filthy substance? That new preparation you’re working on so busily? Has he been injected with Rafaël’s testosterone? Was Aron one of your test subjects? Did Rafaël use him as a guinea pig? Surely that can’t be true?”

This was one of the moments I cursed the day married a smart woman who was not to be deterred. I asked her to make us a cup of tea and sat opposite her at the kitchen table after she’d done so.

“Rivka, I’m going to tell you something, trusting that this information is safe with you. That you won’t discuss this with anyone. You force me to be frank, because you’re close to the truth. You’re both right and wrong. Rafaël has nothing to do with this. He doesn’t know a thing and it must stay that way. Aron got the stuff from a doctor because everything pointed towards the fact that his body didn’t produce enough testosterone and he suffered badly from it. Something went wrong with the dosage. I spurred the doctor to augment the dose faster, because Aron was doing so badly. But if word gets out that Aron got a larger dose than Rafaël allowed, all hell will break loose.”

“So Aron and Roosje are the victims of that grand invention of yours? And of your impatience? Jesus. Why do you always have to do things your way? Why can’t you ever accept that someone else might know better than you?” Rivka got up and snatched a sponge from the kitchen counter which she used to wipe the table for the second time.

“Yes,” I admitted, “I really thought I was doing Aron a service. I was wrong, I realise that all too well. But if this gets out, that would mean the end of the company. A disaster, not just for me or us, but for those hundreds of employees who, without a job, will be reduced to beggary. So for their sakes, Rivka: don’t speak of this. I’ll do anything I can to limit the damage for Aron.”

“And Roosje?” she asked, “That poor child, what will you do about her?”

“I’ll give her all the help I can, you can be sure of that.”

"Tell me, Motke," she snapped while she looked at me coolly, "Give me one good reason why I'd protect you. I raise our four girls, I take care of your household, but that's about it. There's not that much that binds us anymore, the last few years. Why would I protect you?"

I was startled by the coldness with which she delivered that last sentence.

"You're not the only one who's hurting from the distance between us," I replied softly. "I too would like to find the connection between us back again. How did this divide between us grow, for gods sake?"

Rivka sat down again and stared in her teacup, dejectedly, stirred the spoon, looked up at me with a serious look. "You're miles away," she said. "Sometimes I feel we live on two different continents that drifted apart. There are stormy waters between us, preventing us from reaching each other. It feels as if I can barely catch a glimpse of you, while you stand there, orating from that iceberg of yours. I often tell myself that somewhere in that arrogant fellow the man who once seduced me must house somewhere. That sweet hothead I married because my father gave me no choice, to save the family honour. And though no one ever asked me if I even wanted to marry you, it was still a marriage that brought me a lot of joy. Where is that Motke, the man who showed me the Amstel by night, who seduced me with all the charm he had and let me feel there's nothing above two people becoming one like that? Where did that man go? I miss him."

I believe I felt something akin to pity for her, she looked so very sad and alone. I got up, knelt next to her chair and embraced her. Her body tensed at first, as if she armed herself against me, but eventually she laid her head against my shoulder.

"I'm sorry, dear," I said, while I stroked her leg, "You didn't deserve this. That boy you fell for, or rather, who fell all over you," and I grinned softly, "he's still here, really, he is. Just feel."

I grabbed her hand and lay it over my heart. "He's always there. It's just that he can't show his face as often anymore as he'd want to. He has to steel himself, has great responsibilities, is under a lot of pressure and too many people are dependent on him. If he'd show himself in all his candour, all his vulnerability, he'd be ripped to shreds by the wolves within moments. He has to stand strong, has to fight, or they'll eat us alive, me, you and the girls."

Rivka lifted her head and shook in denial. "No, Motke, I don't believe that. By saying that, you claim you couldn't live as a kind-hearted man. That fighting, suppressing people and hitting left and right are the only ways to survive. I don't believe that and refuse to believe that. Our greatest strength is to love and feel for others."

I held her face between my hands. "You're a woman, Rivka, of course that's the way you feel. You're in the nest with the girls, you live with them for the sake of love. And I'm outside, on the prairie, where the hyenas laugh and await their chance. I stand by the entrance of our nest and guard you from the animals. That's a man's job, of the boy you fell for."

"I believe there's another way," she insisted, "and I want it to be different. I can't accept this. We can guard our nest together and teach them together how to approach the world with love and kindheartedness."

We looked at each other and it was as if we really saw the other for the first time. Her serious look slowly became a soft smile, and I smiled back. Very slowly, the moment almost arrested, we turned our heads towards each other and kissed, long and intense. Rivka pressed her body against me, and without interrupting our kiss we stood up and I guided her to the room where I knew the spare bed to be. Aron was in the room next to us, unaware that this was his last night of freedom, and I made love with my wife in the house of my guilty brother. It was the most beautiful moment we ever shared, that I ever shared with any woman.

That night, following the day that my twin brother became the victim of his testosterone explosion, the moment when my company and professional life hung by a thread, in those merciless and endless hours, my seed penetrated one of Rivka's egg-cells and Ezra, my only son, my Benjamin, was conceived.