

Julia Butschkow

# Hansen

translated by Peter Sean Woltemade

It's in Fælledparken, on May Day, when I'm heading over to the bushes to pee, that I catch sight of Hansen.

My first thought is that I should go over and greet him, say, "Hello, Mr. Hansen."

Which he would surely answer with a "Hello, young miss."

At least that's how he always begins our dialogue every time I go to his place. My next thought is that I'm already too drunk and can't deal with going over to him.

Anyway, I see him every Wednesday, in his senior residence in Nordvest.

I was actually only supposed to be working as a home helper briefly, until I was accepted into the National Film School. But since I didn't get in the first time I applied, or the second, I kept on working as a home helper.

Hansen is one of those people who collects things.

Everything. Anything. Clippings. Stamps. Buttons. Books. Bottle caps. Tin figures. Key rings. Coins. Ballpoint pens. Matches. Nuts. Pencils. Stones.

His whole apartment is filled with things like that.

One of my friends thinks this is because Hansen was in a concentration camp during the occupation.

This friend has a grandfather who was an SS officer during the war; she says it's the same with him. He collects everything, too. She says she's read that both victims and executioners developed such behavior after the Second World War in many cases. Systematized little worlds of tin figures and clippings and buttons. As a defense against the world and the chaotic course of history during the war.

The first time I came to Hansen's place there were so many things in his apartment, on heavily laden shelves going all the way up to the ceiling and in meter-high piles on the floor, that it was impossible to walk through the apartment unless one followed one of the narrow passages or paths that nevertheless remained among all the things.

Hansen can spend hours, days, even weeks sometimes, immersed in his little worlds, polishing his tin figures, sorting his buttons, gluing his clip-pings into thick scrapbooks, intently studying the postmarks on his stamps under a magnifying glass.

He has a special ability to sit at home and concentrate on his projects while I dust, do the dishes, scrub the bathroom floor; it doesn't even bother him when I vacuum. On the other hand, it's problematic for him to move around outside his apartment. Cars, bicyclists, pedestrians, dogs, everything confuses and disturbs him, so he seldom goes out. And as far as I know I'm the only other person who enters his apartment. When I started coming to his apartment as a home helper, it took over half a year before he said anything to me other than hello and goodbye.

The first complete sentence Hansen said to me was, "May I offer you a brandy bean?"

I jerked when I heard his rusty voice behind me while I was doing the dishes. When I turned to face him, he was standing there with a half-full box of chocolates in his hand, stretched away from his body, while he stared down at the floor without ever lifting his gaze, even when I had dried my hands and took one.

"Thank you for offering," I said.

He said nothing; he turned around and took the box with him into the living room; the door remained open a crack, and I could see him locking the box in a cupboard.

I stood there with the chocolate in my hand, noticing that it was practically white with age; I guessed the expiration date had passed quite a few years previously.

Nevertheless, I put the chocolate in my mouth; its surface felt almost rough against my palate and tongue; it didn't melt and was hard as a rock. I had to strain my jaw muscles to get it to split open. The liquid inside had almost dried; it had the consistency of resin and tasted bitter, with an indefinable aftertaste, and not at all like brandy.

I could hear Hansen rummaging around in one of his systems of shelves. I quickly opened the garbage can under the sink and spit the mass out. So he wouldn't notice this, I tore off some pieces of paper towel, wadded them up, and lay them on top of the clump of chocolate.

Hansen is standing with his back to me in Fælledparken when I squat in the bushes and pull down my pants. He hasn't seen me.

He is staring down into a yellow Netto bag; his white-yellow hair bristles; I wonder when he last washed it. Feel affection at the sight of the skinny body, the old leather shoes, the wrinkled Netto bag, and Hansen's serious look of deep concentration. The confusion of deep wrinkles on his forehead.

For a moment I want to go over to him and say a few friendly words or just squeeze his hand. But I know this will confuse him terribly; maybe he'll even be so frightened he'll take off and hurry out of Fælledparken, all the way home to Nordvest.

When I've finished peeing, I cautiously pull up my pants, as quietly as possible. Hansen's now standing sideways to me; I can see he's standing bent over something shiny in his hand—must be coins.

Then it occurs to me that of course he's gone around collecting bottles and cans. That he's taken them somewhere and collected the deposit. It actually surprises me that he hasn't long since gone home. I can't imagine Hansen spending the coins on anything; my first assumption would be that he would save them.

Hansen nods to himself and closes his hands around his coins.

Then he walks off. Purposefully, toward the food stands.

And I follow him. Sneak out of the bushes and stay back a good distance, so I can jump behind a tree if he suddenly turns around.

Over at the food stalls Hansen heads straight over to the line at the ice cream stand. He gets in line behind a couple with small children they're leading by the hand or carrying.

When it's Hansen's turn, my phone rings. It's one of my friends, who's sitting in the park and wondering where I've gotten to.

"Your beer's getting flat," he says.

"You can just drink it," I say.

Hansen's pointing at a picture of a gigantic ice cream cone for forty kroner.

It features five scoops of ice cream plus soft serve, a chocolate-coated marshmallow, whipped cream, and jam.

He nods when the girl behind the counter takes one of the largest cones down from a shelf and points at five different kinds of ice cream.

This is a surprise; I'd never have thought Hansen would do something like this.

When I've said goodbye to my friend, I set my phone to vibrate.

The girl behind the counter knocks a coconut chocolate-coated marshmallow against a chopping board so the top splits. She presses it onto the impressive mountain of ice cream in the cone. Hands the ice cream cone to Hansen, who lays his coins on the counter and takes the ice cream cone with both hands.

He has slid the Netto bag over one wrist.

He stands like this for a moment, disoriented, and stares at his big ice cream cone.

I've stepped behind a tree a bit so I can see where Hansen goes to eat his ice cream without him seeing me.

I know from experience that he doesn't like to eat in public. At home in his apartment he eats in silence, behind closed doors. During some periods he has the curtains closed as well.

Now he's standing in the midst of this mass of people with his ice cream.

And I'm standing behind the tree, watching him.

He takes his eyes off his ice cream, looks over his shoulder, first to the left, then to the right, then to the left again, as if he were in the process of crossing a busy road. Then he walks over toward the bushes where I was peeing earlier. I follow him; I keep my distance as I did before, but keep an eye on him the entire time.

Hansen leaves the path when he gets to the bushes. He walks in among the bushes, toward a little tree stump surrounded by a little group of anemones. He sits down there.

Somehow he's gotten the Netto bag off his wrist, and he's spread it out on the tree stump before sitting down.

Now I should leave and let the man eat his ice cream in peace; I shouldn't stand behind a beech and watch. Nevertheless, I take my phone out of my pocket and open the camera app. Suddenly I'm videoing Hansen. I really have no business at all doing this. But I do it. It must be because I've been drinking. Under normal circumstances I would have long since left.

His skinny body is bent over the ice cream cone, which he's holding with both hands. His mouth gapes, bites, closes, and chews.

Hansen eats the ice cream quickly, like a horse eating oats.

His hair shines as white as the anemones around the tree stump.

The Netto bag glows under his gabardine pants.

Over Hansen's head, the beech is in bloom, and over it the sky is blue and cloudless, full of birds.

The hidden orgy in the bushes makes me want to laugh and cry at the same time.

Hansen has gotten over halfway through the ice cream cone; he pauses and takes a few deep breaths. Then he gets up and picks up the Netto bag.

For a moment he stands with the ice cream cone in one hand and the bag in the other; he hesitates. Then he lays the rest of the ice cream cone in the bag, wraps the bag around the cone, and takes the bag under his arm. He walks through the bushes and out onto the path again, and I step behind the tree. When he has passed it, I video him from behind. He goes over to a garbage can, opens it, and places the Netto bag in it.

Then he walks on. Suddenly he laughs, loudly, like a small child.

This is the first time I've heard him laugh. And then I feel doubt. I've never heard him do it before, never seen him smile, always only seen him serious. Is he crying?

Now I should really turn off my phone. Go over to Hansen, greet him, and make sure he's okay. But I don't do this. I keep videoing him while he walks.

With stiff steps, shoulders that rise and fall in little jerks. He's walking in the direction of the park exit at Vibenshus Runddel.

And I follow him. Video him. I'll have a hard time looking him in the eye again.

I'm finished as a home helper; the only thing for me now is to film.

And keep filming.

Whether I get in or not.

Julia Butschkow

## Hansen

Det er i Fælledparken, første maj, på vej over mod buskadset for at tisse, at jeg får øje på Hansen.

Min første tanke er at jeg bør gå hen og hilse på ham, sige:

– Goddag, hr. Hansen.

Hvilket han sikkert ville besvare med et:

– Goddag, unge frøken.

Sådan indleder vi i hvert fald altid vores dialog hver gang jeg kommer hjem til ham. Min næste tanke er at jeg allerede er for beruset og ikke kan overskue at gå hen til ham.

I øvrigt ser jeg ham også hver onsdag, i hans ældrebolig i Nordvest.

Egentlig var det meningen at jeg kun skulle være ansat kortvarigt i hjemmeplejen, indtil jeg kom ind på Filmskolen. Men da jeg ikke kom ind første gang jeg søgte, og heller ikke anden gang, blev jeg ved at arbejde som hjemmehjælper.

Hansen er et af den slags mennesker der samler.

På alt. Hvad som helst: Udklip. Frimærker. Knapper. Bøger. Kapsler. Tinfigurer. Nøgleringe. Mønter. Kuglepenne. Tændstikker. Møtrikker. Blyanter. Sten.

Hele hans lejlighed er fyldt med den slags.

En af mine veninder mener det er fordi Hansen var i kz-lejr under besættelsen.

Min veninde har selv en bedstefar der var SS-officer under krigen, hun siger, at det er nøjagtigt det samme med ham. Han samler også på alt. Hun siger at hun har læst at både ofre og bødler i mange tilfælde har udviklet den slags adfærd efter Anden Verdenskrig. Sat system i små verdener af tinfigurer og udklip og knapper. Som værn mod verden og historiens kaotiske gang, under krigen.

Første gang jeg kom hjem til Hansen, var der så mange ting i hans lejlighed, på tungt læssede reoler der ragede helt op til loftet, og i meterhøje bunker på gulvet, at det var umuligt at gå igennem lejligheden, medmindre man fulgte en af de snævre passager eller stier, der trods alt fandtes imellem alle tingene.

Hansen kan bruge timer, dage, ja, sommetider uger på at fordybe sig i sine små verdener, pudse sine tinfigurer, sortere sine knapper, klistre sine udklip ind i tykke scrapbøger, studere poststemplerne på sine frimærker intenst, under lup.

Han har en særlig evne til at sidde hjemme, dybt koncentreret om sine projekter, mens jeg støver af, vasker op, skrubber badeværelsesgulvet, det forstyrrer ham ikke, selv ikke når jeg støvsuger. Til gengæld er det problematisk for ham at færdes uden for lejligheden. Biler, cyklister, fodgængere, hunde, alting forvirrer og forstyrrer ham, derfor går han sjældent ud. Og så vidt jeg ved, er jeg det eneste andet menneske der kommer i hans lejlighed. Da jeg startede som hjemmehjælper, tog det over et halvt år før han sagde andet til mig end goddag og farvel.

Den første hele sætning, Hansen sagde til mig, var:

– Må jeg byde Dem en brandybønne?

Det gav et sæt i mig, idet jeg hørte hans rustne stemme bag mig mens jeg stod og væskede op. Da jeg vendte mig om mod ham, stod han med en halvfylt æske chokolade i hånden, strakt ud fra kroppen, mens han stirrede ned i gulvet uden på noget tidspunkt at løfte sit blik. Heller ikke, da jeg havde tørret mine hænder og tog et stykke.

– Tak som byder, sagde jeg.

Han sagde ingenting, vendte sig bare om og tog æsken med ind i stuen, hvor jeg gennem dørsprækken kunne se at han låste den inde i et skab.

Jeg stod med chokoladen i hånden, lagde mærke til at det var nærmest hvidlig af ælde, og jeg gættede på at udløbsdatoen var overskredet med en hel del år.

Alligevel tog jeg chokoladen i munden, overfladen følte nærmest ru mod min gane og tunge, stykket smeltede ikke og var hårdt som sten. Jeg var nødt til at lægge kræfter i kæbemusklerne for at få den til at flække. Væsken indeni var nærmest tørret ud, den havde samme konsistens som harpiks, smagte bittert med en udefinerlig bismag og langtfra af brandy.

Inde fra stuen kunne jeg høre Hansen rumstere ved et af sine

reolsystemer. Hurtigt åbnede jeg skraldespanden under håndvasken og spyttede massen ud. For at han ikke skulle opdage det, rev jeg nogle stykker af køkkenrullen, krøllede dem sammen og lagde dem hen over chokoladeklumpen.

Hansen står med ryggen til mig i Fælledparken da jeg sætter mig i buskadset og trækker bukserne ned. Han har ikke set mig.

Han står og stirrer ned i en gul Nettopose, hans hvidgule hår stritter, jeg spekulerer på hvornår han sidst har vasket det. Føler ømhed over synet af den spinkle krop, de gamle lædersko, den krøllede Nettopose og Hansens alvorlige, dybt koncentrerede udtryk. Virvaret af dybe rynker i hans pande.

Et øjeblik får jeg lyst til at gå hen til ham og sige et par venlige ord eller bare trykke hans hånd. Men jeg ved at det ville gøre ham frygtelig forvirret, måske ville han endda blive så forskrækket, at han ville fare sammen og ile ud af Fælledparken, hele vejen hjem til Nordvest.

Da jeg har tisset færdig, trækker jeg forsigtigt og så lydløst som muligt bukserne op. Hansen står nu med siden til, jeg kan se at han står bøjet over noget i sin hånd som lyser blankt, det må være mønter.

Så slår det mig, at han selvfølgelig har været rundt at samle flasker og dåser. At han har afleveret dem et sted og fået udbetalt panten. Egentlig undrer det mig at han ikke for længst er gået hjem. Jeg kan ikke forestille mig at Hansen vil bruge mønterne på noget, umiddelbart ville jeg tro han ville spare dem op.

Hansen nikker for sig selv og knuger hånden om sine mønter.

Så går han. Målrettet, i retning af madboderne.

Og jeg følger efter. Lister ud af buskadset og holder god afstand, så jeg kan smutte ind bag et træ hvis han pludselig vender sig om.

Henne ved madboderne styrer Hansen direkte over mod køen ved isboden. Han stiller sig bag et forældrepar med små børn i hænderne og på armen.

Da det bliver Hansens tur, ringer min mobil. Det er en af mine venner, der sidder inde i parken og ikke kan forstå hvor jeg bliver af.

– Din øl bliver doven, siger han.

– Du kan bare drikke den, siger jeg.

Hansen står og peger på et billede af en gigantisk vaffelis til fyrrer kroner.



Der er fem kugler i, plus softice, flødebolle, flødeskum og syltetøj.

Han nikker da pigen bag disken tager en af de største vafler ned fra en hylde, og udpeger fem forskellige slags is.

Det kommer bag på mig, det ville jeg aldrig have troet om Hansen.

Da jeg har sagt farvel til min ven, sætter jeg mobilen på lydløs.

Pigen bag disken slår en kokosbolle mod et spækbræt så den flækker i toppen. Hun trykker den fast på det imponerende bjerg af is oven på vafflen. Rækker isen til Hansen der lægger sine mønter på disken og tager isen med begge hænder.

Nettoposen har han taget om det ene håndled.

Sådan står han et øjeblik, desorienteret, og stirrer på sin store is.

Jeg er gået lidt om bag et træ, så jeg ubemærket kan følge med i hvor Hansen går hen, for at spise sin vaffel.

Af erfaring ved jeg at han ikke kan lide at spise i offentlighed. Hjemme i sin lejlighed indtager han sine måltider i stilhed, bag lukkede døre. I visse perioder også med nedrullede gardiner.

Nu står han midt i menneskemængden med sin is.

Og jeg står bag træet og betragter ham.

Han flytter blikket fra isen, ser sig over skulderen, først til venstre, så til højre, så til venstre igen, som om han er i færd med at krydse en trafikeret vej. Så går han hen mod buskadset hvor jeg før sad og tissede. Jeg følger efter, holder afstand ligesom før, men holder hele tiden øje med ham.

Hansen går væk fra stien da han når hen til buskadset. Han går ind mellem buskene, hen mod en lille træstub der er omgivet af en lille flok anemoner. Der sætter han sig.

På en eller anden måde har han fået Nettoposen af håndledet, han breder den ud på træstubben før han tager plads.

Nu burde jeg gå, lade manden spise isen i fred, ikke stå bag en bøg og se på. Alligevel tager jeg mobilen op af lommen, går ind i kamerainstillinger. Pludselig filmer jeg Hansen. Det kan jeg virkelig ikke tillade mig. Men jeg gør det. Det må være fordi jeg har drukket. Under normale omstændigheder ville jeg være gået for længst.

Den spinkle krop er krummet sammen over vaflen, der bliver holdt af begge hænder. Munden gaber, bider, lukker sig og tygger.

Hansen spiser isen hurtigt, som en hest der æder havre.

Håret skinner hvidt som anemonerne omkring træstubben.

Nettoposen lyser under gabardinebukserne.

Over Hansens hoved er bøgen sprunget ud, og over den er himlen blå og skyfri, fuld af fugle.

Det skjulte orgie i buskadset giver mig på samme tid lyst til både at le og at græde.

Hansen er over halvvejs gennem vaflen, han holder pause og tager et par dybe indåndinger. Så rejser han sig og tager Nettoposen med.

Et øjeblik står han oprejst med isen i den ene hånd og posen i den anden, tøver. Så lægger han resten ned i posen som han vikler rundt om isen og tager under armen. Han går igennem buskadset, ud på stien igen, og jeg går om bag træet. Da han har passeret det, filmer jeg ham bagfra. Han fortsætter over mod en skraldespand som han åbner og lægger Nettoposen ned i.

Så går han videre. Pludselig ler han, han griner højt og som et lille barn.

Det er første gang jeg hører ham le. Og så bliver jeg i tvivl. Jeg har aldrig hørt ham gøre det før, aldrig set ham smile, altid kun set ham alvorlig. Græder han?

Nu burde jeg virkelig slukke mobilen. Gå hen til Hansen, hilse på ham og sikre mig at han er okay. Men det gør jeg ikke. Jeg filmer ham stadig mens han går.

Med stive skridt, skuldre der hæver og sænker sig i små ryk. Han går i retning af udgangen ved Vibenshus Runddel.

Og jeg følger efter ham. Filmer. Jeg vil have svært ved at se ham i øjnene igen.

Jeg er færdig som hjemmehjælper, nu er det eneste for mig at gøre: at filme.

Og blive ved med at filme.

Uanset om jeg kommer ind eller ej.

Julia Butschkow translated by Peter Sean Woltemade – Hansen

Julia Butschkow is the author of three novels, most recently *Aber dabei* (Samleren, 2013), the volume of poems *Lykkekomplex* (Facet, 1997), a play (*Sidespor*) that has been staged in Copenhagen and Malmö, and a short story collection, *Der er ingen bjerge i Danmark* (There Are No Mountains in Denmark) (Samleren, 2011), in which “Hansen” first appears.

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