



Ellen Dunne

Hard Landing

A Case for Patsy Logan

Crime Novel

(Original German title: Harte Landung.

Ein Fall für Patsy Logan

Kriminalroman)

441 pages, Paperback

Expected publication: 07 August 2017

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Domestic Rights Sales: German Audiobook (Audible)

Nominated for the Friedrich-Glauser-Prize 2018

ABOUT THE BOOK

The higher you climb, the further you fall

Patsy Logan, 38, German-Irish detective chief inspector with the State Office of Criminal Investigations in Munich, is investigating a renowned online company. The case quickly attracts attention, media and internal pressure is huge. And Patsy's private life also becomes increasingly troubled...

Carolin Höller, top manager with the successful online exchange platform Skiller, has it all: model career, model marriage and model children – until she is found dead below her office window. It quickly becomes clear: She didn't jump of her own accord. Patsy delves deeper and deeper into Carolin's life and the structures of Skiller, encounters a web of lies and empty facades. Especially when she is sent to Skiller's headquarters in Dublin, a place she has been avoiding since her father's suicide. Not a good omen. And immediately things start to happen very fast ...

***Hard Landing* is the first installment of a new crime series revolving around DCI Patsy Logan. Quick-witted and stubborn, the ›woman of the hour‹ delivers results – with good sense, dry humour and an instinct that unnerves no one more than herself.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Dunne, born in 1977, worked as a text editor in an advertising agency and then held various positions with Google in its European headquarters in Dublin. She has published two crime novels. Her 2017 crime novel *Hard Landing* was the first of a new crime series published by Insel Taschenbuch. *Black Soul* (2019) is the second installment featuring heroine Patsy Logan.

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PRAISE FOR *HARD LANDING*

»An immensely exciting thriller with interesting protagonists and a very cunningly written cliffhanger at the end – I would have liked to go on reading right away. On the upside: *Hard Landing* is the beginning of a new series.«

Radio Bremen

»Great entertainment, but also yet another proof for the ability of crime novels to reflect upon current societal problems in a fictional setting.«

culturmag.de

»Ellen Dunne knows how to create characters.«

sabine-ibing.ch

»Excellent crime entertainment with a likeable, original heroine and enticing settings.«

BÜCHERmagazin 2/2018

SAMPLE TRANSLATION

by Laura Wagner

pp. 11—26

Munich
August 18 – 21

With every passing day and every new task, we surpass ourselves. Our benchmark isn't the comparison with other people's achievements, but only our own, individual potential as well as the will to fulfill it time and again and to keep improve upon it.

Article 4 of Skiller's Code of Ethics

»Fuck reality. Give me a life in the bubble, anytime.«

Anonymous employee

Carolyn, at night

It's her heart. It's beating too fast, too weak. Something isn't right with it. And how could it be? Nothing's right anymore. Bad omens, grim signs everywhere. Shadows that take shape and take position against her.

There's only one way. Down.

No! All she needs is some air. Oxygen.

There's a panicked flutter in her chest. She staggers over to the window, opens it wide.

Air. She needs a clear mind to chase all the unwanted thoughts away. Thoughts of Christian. Of hands that ball into fists in trouser pockets like muscular, hairless animals. Of fists that want to fly, the blood on her tongue, fingers clawing the flesh of her upper arms.

Air! She gasps for breath. Closes her eyes, opens them wide again. Munich's evening air brings no relief, it's leaden, ominous. The thought makes her laugh out loud, but there's no humour in her voice, only hysteria. She sees the flashes of summer lightning behind the towers of the Frauenkirche. Dark golems that lurk under the cover of early nightfall. Beneath her the dull pounding of house music. A babel of voices on the terrace two floors down. That laughter, young and carefree. Then a bark from one of the security guys. He herds the party crowd inside and closes the door. Can't have any trouble with the neighbours.

The armoured glass is fulfilling its duty. The quiet spreads. An unwelcome quiet. In it her heartbeat ramps up to a barrage.

The air doesn't keep its promise, it clings to her lungs like hot steam. She stands on her tiptoes, leans farther out the window. But she's too small. It's still stuffy.

Her office is almost completely steeped in darkness, by now the monitor of her computer is in power saving mode. Nothing but a green dot of light pulsating on her desk. A new message. Messages from the other end of the world. The rush is over. No matter which path she takes now, it is going to lead downwards.

Her chest tightens.

She needs help! Does she need help? But who could even help her? She's alone.

Pull yourself together.

Panic attacks aren't new to her. Just keep breathing and everything will sort itself out. If only she could breathe a little better.

She pulls up one of the chairs around her desk. Plain design, sophisticated wood. It creaks underneath her naked feet. The next step, onto the windowsill. Out of breath, she clings to the window frame. It was only a year ago that she ran a half marathon.

Now the abyss underneath her is beckoning. Two floors down to the terrace and the awning, three to the cobbled street. How easy it would be to find peace.

The windows of the renovated pre-WWII residential building are high, the top of her head doesn't even reach the upper part of the window frame. Her head is buzzing. She can smell fresh paint. The last builders only left this morning.

Greedily she sucks in air, her ribs a fine-mesh cage, and looks into the distance, into the summer lightning that is becoming more and more intense. The thunderstorm picks up, somewhere a window is banging in the draught. The rustling of trees, their branches creaking in the wind.

The rolling thunder comes from the city centre, from the east. Over there, in Lehel, behind neatly plastered facades of redeveloped pre-war buildings, Fabian and Lia are lying in their beds. Hopefully Fabian's fever has dropped. Hopefully the two are having a good sleep. Thunderstorms are still new and terrifying to Lia, bring her to tears every time. Why isn't she there to protect her daughter?

But Christian is there.

The smile at the thought of her children falls flat. Christian.

The darkness behind her thickens. Is someone there? In her office?

Nonsense. Pull yourself together. She shakes her head, rubs her hands over her face.

Then there's a noise that makes her start with fright. The clicking of a door, a sound she has heard a hundred times today. Why does it scare her now?

Because now there's good reason to be scared. She turns around, just in time to see a figure slipping from the light on the ground through the glass door and into the darkness of the room. Whoever was outside in the hallway just moments ago is now in here. A shadow on the white walls of her office. She is startled. By the shiny teeth. The glinting eyes. The familiar face. What now? Fight or flight?

The shadow lunges forwards and her heartbeat explodes in her chest.

Woman of the Hour

1

Timing is everything, Patsy! Just a second too soon or a second too late and your life becomes a different one. A wise man once told me this.

Alright, actually it was Fergal, who rents the Fiddler's Green Irish pub in Orleans Street, and he was referring less to life in general and more to the pouring of a perfect pint of Guinness.

Now, Fergal isn't necessarily wise, but he's smart. At least he used to be. Because ever since his fondness for perfect pints, not to mention for whiskey, got out of control he has been going downhill.

But back then, in the early nineties, I was a teenager and Fergal used to be my father's boss every now and again and my father still used to be my hero. At the time, you could really impress me with a line like that.

That was a long time ago. Twenty-five years to be precise. Now, my father is no longer a hero but dead. And Fergal's platitude? Rightfully forgotten. At least until the morning Konstantin called me and told me about a death under unexplained circumstances.

Konstantin Aigner and I share a long history. Police academy, patrolling the Maxvorstadt, then transferred to Munich's State Office of Criminal Investigations, to the homicide squad. Three months ago, he was promoted. Since then, he has been my boss.

»Carolyn Höller, forty-one, mother of two. She heads Skiller's German office.«

»You mean the exchange platform?« I asked into his dramatic pause.

»That's the one.« Konstantin sounded surprised. Unlike him, I only started following trends late in the game, if at all. But to not know the name Skiller I would have had to live under a rock for the past couple of months.

Skiller.com offered everyone the opportunity to advertise their abilities in exchange for a service in return: a fixed tap in exchange for three hours of ironing; two massages for an hour of nutrition counselling. Cash, sex and similarly indecent things were not allowed. »Sharing in stead of paying,« the media cheered. »The anticapitalist revolution from the Silicon Valley.« And it was spreading. The flow of investor's cash was immense, new branches were established on every continent.

»Mrs Höller fell out the window of her office last night. Probably voluntarily, but of course no one saw anything. Instead, we have a lot of witnesses who only speak English. And

a very interested press. I know, it's your day off today, but we urgently need a bilingual German-Irish inspector with authority and charm who can handle this no sweat. You know anyone for the job?«

Konstantin found it awkward that he had been promoted while I was overlooked. Particularly in situations like this where he couldn't just give me an order. And so, he was acting like we were still having lunch together at McDonald's, just like back in the day when we were doing nightshifts in the Maxvorstadt.

»You're the woman of the hour, Patsy Logan,« he said because I wasn't saying anything. I could picture his grin perfectly. So wide it hardly fit through the speaker of his phone.

It was right at that moment that I remembered Fergal and his line. Perfect timing, indeed.

Stefan and I were sitting in one of those hip cafés that were popping up all over Munich. *Fräulein Adelheid* or *Agatha* or something similarly old-fashioned. At least they had air conditioning. Nothing else was helping against the heat of this wilted summer.

My husband was staring past me into space while I talked to Konstantin. Listlessly, he poked at the last crumbs of his cake with a fork. It was surprising that he was hungry at all. The first bite of my croissants was still stuck halfway to my stomach and wasn't moving forwards or backwards.

About an hour ago, Dr. Siegfried Wahlheimer, owner of a fertility clinic of the same name, had declared us »primary infertile«. He couldn't give us a proper reason for why our sex had been unsuccessful for three years. All findings were normal. Apart from »our age« there were no clearly detectable reasons. It happened, he said, in about ten per cent of couples unable to conceive.

So, we're special, I had said, just to put an end to the ensuing silence.

Dr. Wahlheimer – magnificent head of hair, constant smile, dynamic as a fund manager – had praised my humorous approach and presented a whole catalogue of treatment options as well as the corresponding payment options. Blah blah blah, while all I could think about was how no one had ever called me old before. Or infertile. The words clung to me like millstones, pulling me under water into an abyss so deep I couldn't make out the bottom even minutes later.

But Patsy Logan wouldn't be Patsy Logan if she didn't immediately switch into survival mode. I nodded sensibly as Dr. Wahlheimer cautioned us to hurry up in a borderline reproachful tone, at forty and thirty-eight respectively it was high time, we could no longer afford our former patience. Artificial insemination was the only realistic option to maybe have some offspring after all.

I was in complete control.

Unable to conceive? Abandoned to lonely old age, an existence that leaves no traces whatsoever in this world? Come on, there's worse.

When we said goodbye, I made another witty remark and Stefan, the best of all the men that ever happened to me, even grinned for my sake, his gentle, big round eyes red-rimmed. In that moment I was convinced: No matter what happens, we're on the same page and we're going to find a good solution for this. Hand in hand.

How naïve.

»Let me guess,« Stefan said after I hung up. »There's a new case and you're the woman of the hour.«

He put the fork back on the plate with pronounced control.

Sometimes my husband reminds me of one of those bears that saunter along placidly only to suddenly start sprinting and kill a sheep.

The fact that he's a qualified psychologist doesn't make it better. Having a discussion with him is like playing poker with a telepath. Luckily, I'm a fiend at bluffing. That's probably what attracted us to one another from the start.

»You're clairvoyant,« I said and smiled. Stefan didn't smile. I tried a second bite of my croissant. This time it slid down. Being the woman of the hour is not all that bad. Better than being infertile or old.

»Does that mean you have to go now?«

»Reitsamer and the other experts in the squad speak English like ten-year-olds. I have to take over.«

»How convenient.«

I ignored Stefan's sarcastic undertone.

»It's not convenient, it's my job.«

»You mean, your exit strategy.«

»Sure, if I could choose between breakfast with my husband and a corpse, I know straight away what ...«

»This is about our future, Patsy.«

Stefan rarely raises his voice. His aggression is cold, exhausted by the constant struggle to have empathy for everything and everyone. But two hours ago, when we left our flat in Breisacher Street, he had looked ten years younger.

Now Stefan was a man without a future. And there was no one he could blame for it. Only me.

I took his hand, almost twice as big as mine and clammy, and squeezed it.

»Fortunately, we can do something about it,« he said.

Something dark was stirring inside me, so unexpectedly and violently that I couldn't even close my mouth in time.

»*We* is a bit of an overstatement,« I said through a hastily struck-up grin. »All you have to do is look at a couple of porn mags and go into manual mode. I have to do all the rest with the hormones and all that shit.«

»Does that mean you don't want to do it?«

»It means that I have to think about it.«

A desperate and shockingly mean line appeared around Stefan's mouth. You could even see it through his stubble.

»I thought we had agreed that we wanted children,« he whispered.

»Yes, but no one mentioned Frankenstein's lab until just now.«

Stefan gave a contemptuous snort.

»I understand.« He wrestled his hand from mine and waived over the elfish waitress. »Well, then think about it. If nothing more important comes up.«

It would have been less painful if he had slapped me.

I thought about what I should do. Try and smother our crisis before it could breathe and reach catastrophic dimensions? Or something I'm usually quite good at: Bring order to the unhinged world of others.

It only took a few seconds to make a decision.

From: Peter Brennan <peter@skiller.com>
To: Team Munich <muc-team-all@skiller.com>
Subject: Urgent: Skiller Munich closed today

Team,

as some of you may have noticed already, there has been a tragic accident in our offices on Herzogengraben. In order to support the work of the police on site as best as possible, the office will remain closed effective immediately through Sunday.

Everyone who isn't already there should please work from home via VPN.

Those who are already on the premises I ask for full and professional cooperation with the investigation of the events.

I expect utmost discretion of all Skillerz, especially in regard to the critical phase our company presently finds itself in.

According to our company guidelines on transparency, we're going to share further information as soon as we have a verified assessment of the situation. Until then, and out of respect for all persons concerned, I ask you to refrain from making any speculations.

Please direct any and all urgent questions to me personally.

Thanks, Peter

It was only ten minutes walking distance from *Fräulein Whatsherface* on Rumford Street to the site where the body was found on Herzogengraben. It would take twice as long with the car, especially on a Friday morning. And even more so when everyone was running around the city like headless chickens to make use of what would be the last day of swimming and barbeque weather for foreseeable future. The weather forecast predicted a change in temperatures for the late evening. So, I took a taxi. That way, there would be more time to forget Stefan, slip into my routine of bouncing back from anything and prepare for the case. Moreover, I was wearing my dark red Miu Mius. A miracle cure for a wounded ego, but entirely unsuitable for the world beyond runways and private drivers. Wearing them for the day was going to be painful enough. Right after I got into the car, I took them off and started doing my research.

Google's news index was downright swarming with the latest reports on Skiller.

Most of it was international coverage. It was about the proliferous growth of the company founded in California's Silicon Valley in 2010. About the boom of the so-called sharing economy that had been experiencing a wave of success since the economic crisis. Airbnb turned hospitable people into hotels, Uber turned everyone into a taxi company, and now Skiller was offering »luxury for everyone«.

»Everyone has something valuable to offer that others need. We bring people together,« was the quote underneath a photo of the two founders of the company. Brian Heffernan and David P. Shreve were not even thirty yet, sporting the slightly out of joint faces of teenagers. Just like the nerds from when I was in school. Gods in math and physics – untouchable during breaks. Teeth bent into shape: an awkward grin; hands in pockets; rainbow-coloured sneakers below cargo trousers.

They were the billionaires of tomorrow. Unicorns. That's what the articles called young entrepreneurs who were valued at more than one billion Dollars before they even entered the stock market. Eighty million users worldwide, five thousand employees – so-called »Skillerz« – branches in fifteen countries so far and counting. Takeover bids by Google and Microsoft in 2012 and 2014 had been rejected by the founders. By now, there was open speculation about when Skiller would hit the stock market.

The majority of the German articles were only a day old and reported the launch of the new Skiller office on Herzogengraben in Munich. Last night. With a big party and the usual suspects of mayors and business representatives. Even founder David Shreve stopped by

beautiful Munich on his tour of Europe to inspect the newest office with state-of-the-art furnishings.

An undoubtedly underpaid online editor for the *Münchner Abendblatt*, unable to contain his envy, called it »a playground for the spoiled employees of Generation Y«.

I could hardly wait.

I got out of the taxi on Herzogengraben just after ten o'clock but couldn't find anything groundbreaking on first glance: pre-war buildings in the typical Dallmayr aesthetic in dusky pink and white. On the ground floor one of those stores where there's more employees than goods for sale. A jumper, casually thrown into the display, cost more than half my monthly wage.

Dangerous. I'm quite capable of such acts of madness, especially on days that start like this one.

Following the arrow on a discreetly mounted brushed-metal sign, I turned around the corner, onto a driveway and further into a bare courtyard. The entrance to the building led across a fully glazed annex. The reception area resembled an oasis. Warm, inviting and illuminated by indirect lighting.

There was a terrace landscape on the roof of the annex. Tables and seating furniture made from teakwood, bamboo in big planters and – would you believe it? – a tiki bar. I heard myself sigh quietly at the sight of the open arms with which the building was welcoming me. A perfect world. Only the dirty-white mobile screen my colleagues had put up was disturbing the scene. It spanned between two folded sunshades like a biceps. Carolin Höller's last bodyguard. An open window two floors above. Probably the office from which her last journey had led downwards. How? Good question.

The photos on the Google image search had shown me a not quite beautiful but nevertheless attractive woman. Even though her blue eyes were pale, her naturally blond hair nothing extravagant and her smile a little too toothy, Carolin Höller exuded an effortless elegance. A confident energy that I could feel even through the screen of my smartphone. How captivating must she have seemed to her employees? What kind of hole did her death leave in the office?

The profile photo of her Facebook account showed her with two children – a newborn in her arms and a toddler of indeterminable gender leaning across the baby, who was sleeping like an angel, to kiss it on its forehead. All in black and white. One of those pictures from a professional studio. Sophisticated and visibly expensive. Carolin Höller, angelic. The woman

who has it all. Surely, there was a successful husband with slightly greyed temples and a loving gaze somewhere out of shot.

Unless he was the one who had offed his wife. Maybe given her a little shove to put an end to the insufferable perfection?

I shook my head and locked that thought away in the same place I had already stored the conversation with Stefan. Along with all the other images and memories I had no use for right now. My dad, for example, floating facedown in an ocean. Jumped. Flew. Shattered.

Just like Carolin Höller.

I smiled at the thought that she was keeping my dad company down there right now. He would like her.

Why do you have such a black soul?

Sister Reinfrieda, my religion teacher, had asked me that after I had fashioned a Plasticine figure of a baby Jesus with devil's horns and made everyone laugh.

I still don't know why. But I know that it helps.