

Freefalling

Draft Two

by

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INT. ROOM. DAY

BERTRAM (42) sits in a circle of people. He is leading an AA meet. Bertram is handsome if tired looking with the first signs of a middle aged gut. His straggly hair is unkempt yet somehow effortlessly stylish.

BERTRAM

Lots of new faces today. Welcome everyone.

Bertram smiles. Something in his manner displays a curious confidence that no matter what the next hour brings, he has seen and lived more than the people he is here to help.

BERTRAM

We're here to open up, but don't be scared. I lead the charge. So apologies to anyone who's heard this before. And to anyone who thinks I like the sound of my own voice, you're right.

Chuckles all round.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. AIRPLANE. DAY

Three men sit in the body of a TWIN OTTER AIRPLANE. They are dressed in carnival outfits (CLOWN, POLICEMAN and NUN) and are wearing parachute backpacks. None of them have helmets on. They are part of the SKYLINE SKYDIVING SCHOOL.

BERTRAM (V.O.)

My moment happened twelve years ago.

The clown is BERTRAM, (32). Here he is youthful, lean, strong and sinewy. His straggly hair flaps wildly over his unbreakable smile. He is in his element here in the sky, as he should be as Germany's preeminent professional FREE FALL SKYDIVER.

BERTRAM (V.O.)

I was a skydiver. One of the very best. It was the final jump of the season. Party time. It would be the last time I ever jumped.

(Throughout this scene the men shout to be heard).

BERTRAM

This is it, boys.

The men lean forward and look out the open back of the plane as the world below whips past. The pilot STAN (50) turns round.

STAN (ON THE INTERCOM)

Five minutes, boys.

The nun, HANNES (38), checks his chute clips are secure.

Bertram nods to the policeman, PATTE (28), his much loved apprentice. Patte's costume is self depreciating for he really is a policeman outside the skydiving school.

PATTE

(to Bertram)

So how many will this be Mr President?

BERTRAM

Five hundred and twelve. Most jumps in the country.

HANNES

(rolls his eyes)

Here we go.

BERTRAM

Everything you've learnt from me, you won't get anywhere else in Europe.

HANNES

I had to go to America -

BERTRAM

I had to go to America to really free up. This country only wants you to survive your jump. Over there they want you to live it.

CUT TO:

The Skyline Skydiving School. Partygoers look up, trying to catch a glimpse of the Otter airplane. They are a mix of staff, friends and family, all anticipating THE LAST JUMP. A young woman with strawberry blond hair rocks a pram back and forth. She looks up to the sky. This is PEGGY (25), Patte's wife. A frumpy woman in a Skyline jumpsuit walks over. This is DORIS, co-owner of Skyline and the heartbeat of the school.

DORIS

She's gorgeous. Your baby.

PEGGY

Thanks. Sorry, I'm nervous. My husband's up there.

DORIS

You've got nothing to worry about. He's jumping with the best instructor in the country. I'd enjoy the peace and quiet before they land.

CUT TO:

Inside the Otter.

PATTE

Remind me again why we do this without helmets.

BERTRAM

Because you can't see shit with those things on. The A.A.Ds deploy as soon as we hit 1000. You'll thank me when you're out there. You'll be free as a bird.

PATTE

We are still using parachutes, right?

HANNES

Don't give him any ideas.

CUT TO:

The three men stand at the open door of the plane. Bertram shrieks with excitement before a look of habitual calm crosses his face.

BERTRAM

On my command. Ready...Set...GO!

The three men jump.

Clouds cascade upwards as they hang like puppets in the air. We are with Patte as he sees the world around him - his first jump without a helmet. It feels different alright - way more visceral. Patte gives Bertram a thumbs up.

Bertram starts showing off, twisting and turning like an acrobat. Patte takes the bait and tumbles head over heels. Hannes goes one better, spinning into a double summersault; it's playtime as each skydiver tries to outdo the other. Bertram though is in a class of his own.

Bertram moves into his signature position; upside down and waves to his buddies. He checks his altitude watch - still plenty of time. He gives a thumbs up. Patte is having the time of his life - then he starts blinking. He's dizzy.

As Patte struggles to focus, Hannes is suddenly torn upwards as his chute opens. Bertram's eyes widen in confusion; the chutes shouldn't open yet.

Down on the ground, Peggy cradles her baby. Doris looks up.

DORIS

Oh no.

Patte's chute opens mid somersault. He gets tangled in his netting. As the ground rushes upwards Bertram grabs his own backpack to stop the chute deploying. He stretches out with all his strength to help his friend. He twists on his side but is having trouble seeing clearly. He is woozy, his moves ragged. He tries to summersault towards Patte but misses Patte's outstretched hand. He watches his friend plummet towards a line of trees.

Seconds feel like hours. Bertram sees a mass of green rush up on him. Patte disappears into the treetops. Bertram's chute opens but it's too late. He SMASHES into darkness.

FADE TO BLACK

OPENING CREDITS: FREEFALLING

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY

In a private room, Bertram slowly comes to. He is covered in bandages, casts and is up to his eyeballs on painkillers. A doctor and two officers of the criminal police are waiting patiently. Bertram tries to move but winces in pain.

DOCTOR

I wouldn't do that, Mr Scheer. You fractured both arms when you covered your eyes.

BERTRAM

Covered my -

DOCTOR

We reset your legs. You have a fractured hip, shattered pelvic bone, three broken ribs and two cracked vertebrae. You're the lucky one.

BERTRAM

Is that what you call it?

The senior investigator, KRIPO #1, leans forward. He moves and talks with slow, deliberate menace.

KRIPO #1

You were skydiving. Two days ago.

BERTRAM

Two days?

The doctor nods.

KRIPO #1

Mr Kemmerling landed safely. He called the emergency services when you and Mr Stausberg hit the trees.

A Beat.

BERTRAM

Patte.
(suddenly awake)
PATTE!

KRIPO #1

Why weren't you wearing helmets, Mr Scheer?

BERTRAM

Where is he? Where's Patrick?

KRIPO #1

Mr Scheer, I asked you about the helmets.

BERTRAM

I never wear one. They block your vision. Will you tell me where Patrick is, please?

The doctor and KriPO # 1 exchanges glances.

KRIPO #1

Mr Stausberg died when he hit the ground. You were found hanging from a tree.

(MORE)

KRIPO #1 (CONT'D)

It took the fire brigade several hours to cut you down.

Bertram is dizzy with shock.

BERTRAM

Died?

The doctor nods.

KRIPO #1

I need you to tell me everything about the jump.

BERTRAM

What? Okay, um...it was the last jump of the season. We were having a boogie.

KRIPO #1

A what?

BERTRAM

A party. It's what we call it.

KRIPO #1

You were dressed up. Could your costumes have gotten in the way?

BERTRAM

No. We check that sort of stuff over and over.

KriPO # 1 writes in his notebook.

BERTRAM

We had our altitude watches on. I knew exactly how high we were. It doesn't make sense.

KRIPO #1

Did you take any drugs or alcohol?

BERTRAM

What? No.

A beat.

KRIPO #1

Okay then. That's all for now.

The investigators stand and leave. Bertram shuts his eyes.

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY

Patte's widow Peggy sobs uncontrollably. Peggy stands at Patte's graveside with friends, family and several police officers.

Bertram is helped out of a car and into his wheelchair. His face is a mask of bruises. A carer pushes him towards the mourners until Bertram taps his hand - that's close enough. Bertram listens to the eulogy. The pilot Stan sees Bertram. Bertram waves but Stan ignores him. Peggy collapses and is helped to her feet.

Bertram puts his hands on his wheels and turns to leave. He is blocked by Hannes.

HANNES

You made it.

BERTRAM

Hannes. How are you?

HANNES

Alive.

A Beat.

Bertram looks to Peggy.

BERTRAM

Listen Hannes, I've got no idea how long I'm going to be in this thing for. So God knows when I'm going to be back at work.

HANNES

You think you're coming back?

BERTRAM

Yes.

Hannes turns and leans down so he is face to face with Bertram.

HANNES

No one at Skyline wants anything to do with you, Bertram. You're out.

BERTRAM

It was an accident.

HANNES

You and I both know know that isn't true.