

## Hello

by Sue Hitchcock

Heidrun found a note on her desk when she arrived on Monday morning. Addressed to “Fraulein Heidrun”, it could only be from Doktor Heilbronn, with his strange old-fashioned script, which was still taught in some places after the war. The simplified Bauhaus script had been adopted widely after Hitler’s veto on it was gone, especially in the West where a new start was begun. Heidrun’s parents still used the double ‘s’, which looked like an elongated ‘b’. Of course Heilbronn must be about the same age as them. What on earth would he have to say?

*“My dear Fraulein Heidrun,*

*Please accept my sincere apologies. There are several annoyances I have caused and continue to cause you.*

*Firstly, I do not know your last name, and neither do I know your title. Should I address you as “Doktor”?*

*However, this is a small item compared to the embarrassment I caused you, when I asked you, if you worked at the library, before the Wall was demolished.*

*You are, of course, far too young, and the beauty of your youth confused me at the time, while reminding me of someone, whom I loved dearly many years ago. Of course, you could have been one of my students, but that does not excuse my mistake.*

*Like you, I was born in East Germany, indeed, in Rostock, not far from Warnemunde, and I feel there is some connection between us. So I would dearly like to spend an evening in conversation with you.*

*I conclude, therefore, with an earnest request, that you allow me to take you out for dinner, so that we can become acquainted and possibly friends.*

*Maybe you could reply when I arrive, full of anticipation, on Monday morning.*

*Yours with all sincerity,*

*Doktor Ernst Heibronn”*

Heidrun was amused at the formality of the letter, while puzzled why he had not addressed her directly. She had known his e-mail address from the beginning. It was required on the reader’s application form. It would not have been difficult for him to find her details on the library website. He was not so old that his gentility could be anything but an affectation. Why?

Heidrun decided it would be fun to play this game – it was a game, wasn’t it? Doktor Heilbronn would arrive at ten o’clock, if he was as prompt as usual, so she started to compose a letter in her mind while she shelved the books waiting on the trolley. She had only a quarter of an hour before opening time to write the missive.

*“Dear Doktor Heilbronn,*

*Your letter was a surprise to me this morning, though your apology was completely unnecessary.*

*Anyone can mistake the identity of a person, who closely resembles a friend from the past and once the reason was clarified, how could I be offended. I know nothing about you and now I am filled with curiosity.*

*It would be pleasant to discuss our circumstances over dinner and I am sure my boyfriend would not object, although I shall not tell him, as he would want to come too. Then complete openness between us might not be possible.*

*If it is agreeable, I could enjoy our trip tomorrow.*

*Many thanks for your kind invitation.*

*Heidrun Franken, Chartered Librarian”*

What should she wear? Something old-fashioned would be fun, but she had no time to shop. The latest addition to her wardrobe was a simple, retro frock, tight bodice and full skirt in dark cotton printed with tiny roses. Her white blouse with puffed sleeves underneath would make it look like a traditional dirndl. An apron would be too much. She didn’t want to be laughed at. And plaited hair would be ridiculous, so she just loosened it to swing free.

It wasn’t her idea alone. Dr. Heilbronn had suggested a place with a Viennese menu, which was a revival of a famous pre-war restaurant, and rather expensive.

He was waiting in the lobby when she arrived and she burst out laughing. He too was sporting a traditional look, with knee length leather trousers and a green jacket with brass buttons and broad lapels.

He greeted her with a heelclick and a bow and Heidrun's response was to hold her skirt wide and bob a small curtsy, "Hello."