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Lies, Lies and More Lies

Translated from the German by
Alex Gabriel

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Monday

I'm on my way to the office on this gloomy Monday morning – not full of energy, with neither a spring in my step nor a readiness to grab every bull by the horns, but rather listless, just utterly listless. I skulk along rather than striding forward purposefully; I let my gaze linger on even the most inane signs and posters, solely for the sake of putting off the start of my workday.

No one should ever suggest that my work as a white-collar crime investigator is actually valuable. “Valuable” is a word that can be used to describe the work of public defenders, of Red Cross aid workers, of those who strive to save our environment. What I do is merely figure out where things are out of order – I gather facts that run afoul of the law and hand them over to the prosecuting attorneys.

Does anyone actually think that I'm doing this to serve the cause of justice? I wouldn't spout such nonsense even if I was trying to paint everything in the best possible light. I don't really care about justice at all. It's the trendsetters who decide what's just. Justice depends on the time and the place – where did I hear something like that before? Ah yes, it was in physics class, when the teacher was trying to drill the theory of relativity into our heads. Sorry, though – none of his explanations actually stuck. I do respect science, but ultimately I'm just a lawyer.

As such, the eternal question of guilt should really concern me. It doesn't. Even though casting guilt and blame is simply on everyone's agenda nowadays. For example, let's say it's been raining for days. It's raining and raining, as much as the heavens can pour forth,

the whole month of August. So what happens? People insist upon explaining to me who's to blame for all this rain. They do so because they won't just accept the world as it is, but rather insist on taking all events and occurrences personally. It's no wonder that they believe in a God who controls everything, an Argus sprung up from the cosmos who perpetually keeps each and every one of us in his sights. And they won't simply give me their explanations and then leave it at that – they want me to express agreement with them too. This is something that I do not do. So I'm considered a bit of an oddball who doesn't fit in. Or maybe they think I'm just someone who feels better than them. Someone who doesn't want to take part in all this casting of blame. And thus perhaps even someone who himself is to blame. Because this casting of blame is essential – it's what allows us to distinguish between the good people and the bad people.

Even if I'm not quite excited by these questions of guilt and blame, I must admit that when an investigation turns out to be a protracted process full of obstacles – as happens rarely enough – it absolutely enthalls me. It's like I need to solve some gripping mystery, or piece together one of those confoundingly complicated jigsaw puzzles. And as soon as the investigation is finished, I simply let go of it. I don't really care whether the prosecutors actually prosecute the subjects of my investigations. They always manage to do so, of course. Any prosecutor who can't wangle the results of an investigation doesn't really have a handle on his job and should just be dismissed from the post. After a yearlong selection process, our prosecutors are all crafty guys. If I were a judge, I wouldn't buy anything from any of them.

I'm currently working on two cases that couldn't

possibly be any more boring. So not a word about them. They don't even warrant being mentioned.

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I find Lara already in the office. She's an intern who has been assigned to me, though I'm not quite sure why. Maybe my colleagues got a whiff of some extra work being involved and thus used their good rapport with our superiors to relinquish it to me – oh, but they most certainly regretted this when Lara showed up. She's quite pretty, with an absolutely luscious derriere. She's also vivacious and peppy and plays tennis rather aggressively – she's humiliated quite a few colleagues who tried showing off in front of her. But she's always very nice to everyone, even to me, someone who makes no effort at all to win her affection. Undeterred by my indifference, Miss Friendly shares with me the Russian tea that she brews, and even the sweet Russian pastries that she bakes herself; she hums cheerfully as she arrives at the office with them. Sometimes I eat one; they do look quite delicious. But again and again, they turn out to be too dry. Lara pays no attention to my gagging though. This is a good thing – I don't want to offend her. She is a valuable person. Unlike me, she believes in the work that she does. The idea that she's fulfilling an important function keeps her ticking audibly. That's alright – at her age, she can indulge in such illusions.

Lara is twenty-five and I am fifty-six, which is a reasonably large – some might say unreasonably large – age difference. The entire office is watching us furiously. They're waiting for us to start up a fling. But I lack the desire to pursue such a thing. Don't think I don't have the sexual desire – I most certainly do. That, however, doesn't mean I'm going to run after Lara with my tongue hanging out. It just means that the

desire grabs me every couple of weeks, at which point I go unload my burden and my passions on Jenny.

*

I wonder what hookers are thinking when they choose their *nom de guerre*, their *nom de plume*. Jenny, as a prostitute's name, reminds me of *The Threepenny Opera* – and the possibility of well-read, literate hookers certainly can't be ruled out nowadays. Jenny has a Rubenesque figure and a throaty laugh. She attends to me following a precise ritual, the details of which I have no interest in boring anyone with. I'll mention only that as soon as I arrive, before she even serves me a drink, I'm required to wash my hands thoroughly, under her supervision. "Why only my hands?" I wanted to know. "The rest I assume you wash on a regular basis," she said, giving me a challenging look. Our encounters are altogether quite clinical. But I've got no complaints; she brings me the needed relief without me having to exert myself. I wouldn't want it any other way. I think back uncomfortably to those sexual acts in my life that represented love and devotion, acts that involved surrender. Suddenly I would look into a woman's face, in which a certain defenselessness was reflected beside the desire. This frightened me profoundly. I would no longer be able to bear such a thing nowadays.

The last time I really fell in love, passionately and unhappily, was five years after my divorce. She was working for the prosecutor's office too at the time. She cordially rejected me twice. I don't know why. Maybe she was already in a relationship that I didn't know about, or maybe she didn't want to get into one, or maybe just not with me. Or maybe she didn't want anything to do with me because of my background? It doesn't matter. Gradually I realized that I tended to

create images of women in my mind and fall in love with those images, despite the fact that they did not at all represent who those women really were. So I just gave up doing so.

Likewise, when my childhood friend Nick tried setting me up with his sister Iris in an attempt to get me back into a stable relationship, nothing came of it either. Iris has evolved from a plain, gap-toothed young girl to a tall, beautiful woman with dark hair, red lips, and a sexy voice. As soon as she speaks, everyone's eyes turn towards her. I brought her to a very fancy restaurant, all marble and glass and chrome with extremely snooty waiters. We wine and dined and tried to get to know each other, but even Iris' alto voice was swallowed up by the combination of materials that the building's star architect had chosen, and I managed to catch only a bit of what she was saying. I was struck by the notion that people mostly just speak to themselves and hear only what suits them. We talk past each other, with nothing in common beyond a few platitudes. What purpose could such a relationship serve?

Iris invited me out to dinner three weeks later to return the favor. I wriggled out of this obligatory act, and that was the end of it. Nick was puzzled by this turn of events. He shook his head, but withheld any commentary and didn't ask any questions. I can't deny, though, that our friendship became a bit more distant afterwards – he no longer even took time to go grab a beer with me, instead just occasionally inviting me to one of his parties.

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Anyway, a relationship with Iris would hardly have been likely to transpire, even if I'd popped right up at her apartment. I'm afraid I'm not exactly an irresistibly

attractive partner. To start with, I'm anything but a brilliant entertainer – probably because I just don't take any pleasure at all in this world or the people who reside in it. Moreover, I'm just a completely ordinary person. A boring Joe Shmoe. I lack any particularly distinguishing outward traits; that's just how it is.

Well, I suppose I do have a couple – but none of the sort that would delight any female beholder. “You don't actually eat, you just stuff food in your face like a pig,” is what my first and only wife Lilian used to declare during Sunday lunch at her parents' house, as I talked with my mouth full and spilled sauce all over my tie while her father – an old judge whom I liked quite a bit – took an interest in my work and continuously fired inquisitorial questions at me. Everyone around the table would look at each other tellingly. That wasn't how one conducted oneself in the Lenhart household. In fact, they had warned Lilian quite early on. The direct quote that Lilian had indignantly relayed to me was as follows: “His exotic background may well lead to problems. Such people are, and remain, foreigners. It's not his fault, but our Swiss mores are hardly familiar to him.” Nevertheless, as liberal social democrats, they had accepted me when Lilian and I had gotten engaged.

Lilian also reproached me for using coarse, boorish language. “You swear too much – I can't stand how you say ‘holy crap’ at every chance you get.” Holy crap! There are just some situations that can't be qualified any other way.

“Yes, Your Honor,” I replied accordingly. By then our relationship had reached the point where I just addressed my wife as “Your Honor”, since she was constantly putting me on trial. She didn't like that. I went one further: “You used to accuse me of not

expressing my feelings, but now when I do – you don't like it."

"I was talking about positive feelings – joy, happiness, those sorts of things. Now you're cursing like a sailor, but you still can't express the nice feelings."

"That's because I don't feel them! Holy crap!" I shouted at her.

In my father's Jewish family, everyone was extremely well-mannered. Anyone could see in an instant that these people had been well-educated and also worked on their own selves. Highly cultivated was the least one could say about them. Exemplary Jewish students. This probably had something to do with the strict rules of the Jewish religion – they've had a lasting effect, even among those who haven't abided by them for many generations.

But my mother's Christian family – quite the contrary! They came from central Switzerland, and a more boisterous demeanor prevailed there; a rough but affectionate style. Grandma Elsa dominated the family, and she used to use foul language. She was too Catholic to say things like "holy crap"; she would, however, discreetly say "*merde*", having spent her adolescence at a boarding school in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Under these circumstances, my mother didn't stand the slightest chance of getting us children to avoid swearing.

Maybe my mother's family passed this crude language on to me. In any case, what I did learn from them is this: Don't waste time vainly searching to find who's to blame for your own misfortune – instead just buckle down and take responsibility for shaping your own destiny.

My eating habits and language were far from the only things about which Lilian used to criticize me.

She grew increasingly displeased with my opinions, my way of dressing, my hygiene. I tend to sweat heavily and have neither the time nor the opportunity to shower several times each day. I also have a strong growth of beard, which has since become less conspicuous as it has gone grey, but which must have been like a grater on her delicate cheeks whenever I kissed her. Other women might have welcomed it as a sign of masculinity, but not Lilian. She also thought I was too fat – I had, in fact, steadily gained weight over the course of our marriage.

And so, the inevitable happened. (Sorry about that hackneyed expression!) We separated and, soon afterwards, were divorced. Incidentally, I quickly lost weight after our separation. Not because loneliness was gnawing at me though. Say what you will about Lilian, but she is quite simply a highly gifted cook. My doctor quipped that he would start prescribing divorces for his overweight patients in the future. I shot him down by pointing out two current trends – that more and more marriages are ending in divorce nowadays, yet people are still growing fatter and fatter. He responded by telling me that I have no sense of humor.

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At eleven o'clock, I'm called into the office of my boss, Chief Prosecutor Helmut Falckenberg. As always, I have to wait in the outer office until the padded door opens and Falckenberg leans all the way out through the doorway, keeping one hand on the door handle. Will he fall or won't he? What I wouldn't give to see my boss tumble flat on his face! And as always, Doris, his personal assistant, engages me in a conversation about some topic related to the Jews.

Doris is a beautiful blond angel, on whose face one

can immediately read what she's thinking. At some point she chose me as her only concrete Jewish reference point, and now she uses me to "get to know you Jewish people". She tries nailing me down with questions, like, "Why do you guys insist on the repeal of the law against ritual slaughter – it's animal cruelty!" Or, "Don't you also think that the World Jewish Congress is blackmailing Switzerland?" And, under the influence of the anti-Israel propaganda on Swiss radio and television, she asks indignantly, "So don't you think that Israel violated international law in Gaza/Lebanon/Hebron?" As if she were actually concerned about human rights. She always sticks to asking questions though – giving the "defendant" an opportunity to "justify" himself. I don't make any effort to do so. Her opinions are set in stone anyway. I simply remark, "If you say so..."

It would be useless to explain to her that I'm only half-Jewish – and the wrong half at that. It was my father who was Jewish, while my mother was Christian. So my non-Jewish compatriots treat me as a Jew, while to the Jews I'm a lost sheep. I don't really care either way, but I simply can't provide information about Judaism, as I was raised Catholic and only have secondhand knowledge about the Jewish faith. And I turned away from the bloody Catholic religion as well – much to the chagrin of my mother – as soon as I came of age.

Falckenberg then waves me into his office. He's alone – usually he likes having his chief of staff with him when he gives out any instructions. And he doesn't sit down behind his desk now, but rather leads me over to a seating set of which he is incredibly proud, as he is of the entire décor of the office. The furniture is all ultra-modern, of the sort that is not actually offered by the cantonal logistics office. He nevertheless managed to

wrest it from them – some claim he did so with a threat of resignation, while others insinuate that it was with tears. And one colleague even swears that Falckenberg had sent Doris over to the logistics office, and she had managed to procure the furniture with just a few well-placed glances.

Falckenberg's always nervous when he's alone with me. He's not looking me in the eye, and he's just babbling on. Much of it I've already heard many times before. It takes some time before he finally gets to the point. He's sitting at a right angle to me, and I also have no reason to turn my head to look at the fit, healthy chief prosecutor dressed in his fashionable yet understated manner. The first time I met him, I thought – Holy crap, this is a guy who follows those men's magazines that tell you what to wear and what to drink and which car to drive.

He finally starts letting the cat out of the bag. "Listen, Kremer..."

Most of my colleagues have reached the point where Falckenberg addresses them on a first-name basis – I hope I continue to be spared this fate.

"Listen, Kremer, we're facing an extremely delicate investigation, in which we must proceed with absolute – I stress, absolute – discretion. Just to make sure we're on the same page right from the start: Not a word about this to anyone besides me, not even a casual word over coffee. And you will report to me and me alone – and only verbally, I don't want anything on paper during the preliminary phase of the investigation. Do you understand?"

"You've made yourself quite clear."

He casts me a brief questioning glance. He can never be sure about whether or not there's a bit of disrespect lurking behind the things I say.

"I've been informed by a member of the Cantonal Parliament, Helfenstein, about a possible corruption case. It involves the sale of a small private clinic here in our canton, the Goldach Clinic, which specialized in reconstructive surgery for accident victims. The clinic is located in Andelfingen, of which Helfenstein is also the mayor. The sale turned out to be a difficult process, apparently the cantonal healthcare management bureau was involved, and now Helfenstein wants to know if everything happened above board. Sound things out a bit, discreetly. Only if we come to the conclusion that there's something concrete will we call on the police to seize the relevant documents."

"Is there already a file on this?"

"No, nothing in writing. And even I know only the little bit that Helfenstein has told me. The best thing to do would be to use the newspapers to get yourself informed, and then discreetly ask around a bit. This matter is a high priority for me. Get started on it immediately. You're relieved of all your other cases. My chief of staff is the only one in the loop on this, and he'll help get things transferred over to your colleagues. Do you have any other questions?"

"Just one: Why are you assigning this specifically to me?"

Falckenberg casually leans back, presses his fingertips together in front of his chest, and turns to face me, beaming. A lie would now be forthcoming, the truth having been trapped in that cage formed by his fingers.

"Because you're good. Reliable. And above all, independent. I see you as kind of a maverick, and that's an invaluable advantage. Also, thanks to your background, I might even say that you've got a connection to a sort of Old Testament sense of justice."

Before he can come up with any more of this nonsense, I exclaim, "I'm on it then, boss!"

He hates being called "boss". He once sent Doris over to my office for the sole purpose of communicating to me that the word "boss" might be suitable in blue-collar operations, but most certainly not in the prosecutor's office. Besides, if there's a man within a hundred miles who doesn't act as a boss, but rather as a collegial *primus inter pares*, it's Falckenberg.

Holy crap! It's all too clear to me what Falckenberg's words mean, in simple terms. None of my colleagues wanted to get their fingers burned. Nor did Falckenberg himself – thus his instructions of carrying out only a preliminary investigation, with no paper trail. Afterwards, he could always say that I had misunderstood him, that I had acted overzealously on something to which he had merely hinted. Doris gives me a strange look as I leave the office, and whispers, "Be careful with this assignment. No one else wanted it – you're the one who finally got snagged."

Why did she tell me that? I know she doesn't like me. Maybe some sense of justice? That's possible – the support staff who work for the legal authorities generally have a much greater sense of justice than any of the prosecutors themselves.

In any case, her declaration indicated that it wasn't her who had suggested me as a victim here. Falckenberg is like putty in her hands, at least when his own personal interests are not at stake. I'll just quote the words of Falckenberg himself here: "Who can resist a beautiful woman?"

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Pfulg, Falckenberg's chief of staff, is already waiting for me in my office. From a distance I can hear him

laughing. Pfulg is a short man, but what he lacks in height he makes up for with his vociferous demeanor. Lara has brought him a cup of tea and a plate full of pastries. As I walk in, she's asking him, "Sugar?"

Pfulg smiles mischievously and warbles, "Of course – three cubes please. I love everything sweet." His eyes are glued to her figure as he says this.

Then he turns to me and says, "You've got it so great here. You get to enjoy such splendid hospitality without having to lift a finger. I'd love to have the same!"

"You're right – I'm going to get thoroughly spoiled. Anyway, I can give you the files now for the cases I've been working on. Here are the two dossiers – on the first page of each one, I've logged all my updates on the status of that particular investigation."

"Meticulous to the core. No one could ever accuse you of any fault in that regard."

He jams the papers under his arm and stands up. I turn to Lara and say, "Falckenberg has expressed his enormous trust in me. He's assigned me a highly sensitive project – this means he has faith that his investigator Thomas Kremer has the necessary tact to deal with such a sensitive matter. I absolutely must celebrate this. Can I invite you for lunch?"

"Sure!" she exclaims delightedly.

Pfulg interjects, "A new kebab joint just opened at the intersection. It's supposed to be really good."

"And I should express my appreciation for such splendid hospitality with lunch at a kebab joint? No, no, we'll go to the Cantina and celebrate properly."

Pfulg gapes at us with envy. It's visible in his expression. He wants to make a comment, but he holds himself back; he is convinced Lara and I have something going on.

Tuesday

“Meticulous to the core,” Pfulg had said. Well, that being the case, I started off with some research in our internal databases yesterday afternoon, though I didn’t find any information relating to the Goldach Clinic. This morning, I start delving into the online newspaper archives. I have to go back through the last two years and the search turns out to be quite time-consuming; what I’m researching was not exactly a huge story. In brief, what I finally do discover, spread out across numerous articles over the course of a year, is the following:

The clinic, located on the outskirts of the wine country village of Andelfingen, was owned by the Goldach family for generations. Old Dr. Goldach dies, and his heirs try to sell the clinic. Not a soul is interested in buying it. In an interview, Mayor Helfenstein laments the lack of entrepreneurial spirit in the medical profession; apparently, surgeons these days would rather work as employees than actually own a mid-sized operation with about sixty staff members. Well, the heirs then decide to continue running the clinic themselves, hiring a new doctor to replace their father. But it’s just their luck – for the longest time, not a single candidate appears. Finally, an Austrian surgeon who has worked for years as a senior physician in a hospital in eastern Switzerland comes forward. Unexpectedly, though, the healthcare management bureau doesn’t play along – they’re not prepared to give the Austrian doctor a private practice license. The situation is getting critical. Two young assistant physicians manage to keep the operation running on a makeshift basis, but no new patients appear, as they had been coming based on Dr. Goldach’s reputation up to now.

The clinic is practically on the brink of shutting down, and the heirs are helpless to do anything about it. But then finally a professional fiduciary appears and buys the clinic from them, apparently at such a cheap price that the newspapers call it a steal. This professional fiduciary brings in an already-retired German doctor to run the clinic. He has no problems getting a license from the authorities. And immediately the question arises: Why was approval granted for the German doctor whom the new owner had magically pulled out of nowhere, but not for the Austrian doctor whom the heirs had brought forward earlier? Although this question would indeed be raised in the press, no one would insist upon an answer to it. Well, maybe the healthcare management bureau finally realized that the clinic would go under if they didn't grant approval. In any case, the heirs apparently accept this. They also accept the new owner's plan to shift the clinic's specialization from reconstructive surgery for accident victims to a new focus on cosmetic surgery. Regardless of this trendy change, what is ultimately most important for them is the preservation of their father's former clinic, as well as the jobs of its staff. The German clinic director doesn't last long in the post. He is replaced by a former high-ranking healthcare management bureau official.

That's what I get from the newspapers. Anyway, Willi Zehnder was one of the correspondents who had reported on these events, so I immediately reach for the phone.

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Zehnder describes himself as an "old-school journalist". He had completed an apprenticeship as a typesetter before joining a newspaper printing

company. As he had correctly recognized that his profession was doomed, he had gone to night school and started writing small articles. These articles had been relevant and palatable, and had helped him get his career underway. For many years now, he's been on the editorial board of the *Morgenpost*. He's dedicated to doing voracious research, working doggedly on each matter until he has completely wrapped his head around it. Sometimes his journalist's nose tells him to try tapping into the prosecutor's office. He contacts me for some tipoff, and I tell him what I know. He strictly adheres to our arrangement, never revealing the source of his information; the information I provide, though, does help him continue drilling deeper.

Willi is small and wiry, invariably unshaven and unkempt, and always wears battered black jeans, a knit pullover, and a green coat. This latter keeps getting frumpier throughout the year, and he won't replace it until there's at least one irreparable tear in the fabric. It's clear that Willi intends to send a message with this stagy get-up. He's presenting himself as an underdog. This instills trust among his informants, and helps him keep a healthy distance between himself and his interviewees from the worlds of politics and business. At least that's how I see it. Since we're friends, I've never teased him about it.

Willi doesn't think much of people. "The average person's just a bum," he always says churlishly.

"What do you mean?" I asked him, the first time I heard him express this sentiment.

"I'll give you an example from my military service. One day I notice that this guy Wachter is missing his gloves. A little while later my own gloves disappear, and then during inspection I'm left standing there like

an idiot while Wachter manages to produce a pair of gloves. Do you get what I'm saying?"

"Sure, but that only says something about Wachter."

"Of course, but I can give you another hundred examples just like that. They all show that the average person doesn't step up and take responsibility for his own affairs, he just passes that responsibility on to someone else."

We met at a wine seminar to which Lilian had dragged me. The Lenharts are proficient wine drinkers. Lilian's father, the old judge, is of the opinion that any lawyer who doesn't regularly indulge in wine is useless. He's right. Falckenberg and Pfulg, for example, don't understand wine. They stick to beer, occasionally partaking in a sticky-sweet Prosecco at best. Yet when I brought a few bottles of Rioja wine for the office, on the occasion of my last promotion, Falckenberg nevertheless volunteered his expert opinion that "the Crianza grapes are superb." Holy crap.

While Lilian, at the wine seminar in question, insisted that only French vintages were drinkable, Willi Zehnder and I discovered our mutual love of Spanish wines. So today we meet up at the Bodega Española in Zurich's old town.

"Cheers, Thomas. So what is it that the prosecution is interested in, that I might have information about?"

"Cheers, Willi. There's nothing at all, of course. You know Falckenberg; he ordered me not to talk to anyone about it. So I can't actually do any investigating, since that'd mean I'd have to talk about it."

Willi grins sardonically. "Come on, tell me what's going on."

"If you promise to keep it to yourself until I agree that anything can be disseminated."

"I promise, if you agree to tell me everything you know about Jimmy Repf."

I almost choke on my wine.

"How did you come to be interested in him?"

"There's this professor who writes crime novels, and he was screwed over by Repf. The professor knows my editor-in-chief, who smells a big story here. But the professor doesn't want to be in the headlines. So I'm searching for other victims."

"And what brought you to me?" I ask, though I've already got a sense of what he's going to answer.

"Well, I immediately went researching and stumbled across an announcement that his publishing house would soon be putting out your father's memoirs. That was two years ago. But he wasn't the one who ended up putting out the book. And I also heard that he was having some financial troubles. So, what do you know about this?"

"I'll tell you what I know, but I also don't want to be in the headlines."

"Alright, tell me. I'm only interested in what happened; I don't have to name names – except for Repf's."

Well, Jimmy Repf is a fraudster. He appears completely harmless, even writes poetry himself, owns – or rather owned – property in Burgundy as well as a small castle in the Solothurn region, and he can really turn on the charm. He places small ads in the newspapers: "Publishing house seeking authors". He's a last hope for everyone who's repeatedly gotten rejected by the big publishing houses. Well, I thought, let's bring my father's memoirs to the public now. It's worth mentioning that my father was a professor who floated about in higher realms, and only thrice briefly came down into the real world. The first two times were to beget my own humble self as well as my younger

sister. The third time was about forty years later, to put onto paper his thoroughly fascinating and eventful life as a refugee from the Nazis. I had sent the oeuvre to various publishers, but not a soul had been interested in it.

Jimmy presented me with a contract that seemed reasonable, hired an editor to go over the manuscript, and immediately collected three thousand francs for his expenses, with the remaining half of the fees payable upon publication. Two months later, I was called to Jimmy's small castle. He first delivered a tour of the premises, which didn't impress me much. Lilian and I made pilgrimages to dozens of such stately residences over the course of our marriage, as per her wishes; I've simply grown numb to them, and there's nothing I can do about that. Anyway, we then made our way to Jimmy's office, which he had set up in the castle's tower. He invited me to enjoy the view across the Swiss Plateau and proffered me a whiskey. And while the beautiful, articulate German studies student who had edited the manuscript announced her corrections in a stern tone of voice, Jimmy lolled about with his feet – clad in well-crafted light-brown-leather cowboy boots – up on his desk, and pretended to look over a manuscript.

A year later I would read in the newspaper that Jimmy was about a million francs in debt to various printing companies, and that his income, beyond a bare minimum subsistence level, would thus be seized. But this development was not yet looming as of the time of my visit. Everything seemed to be going well. I felt as one with my father, who was smiling down from philosophers' heaven at the product of his golden years, which he presumably could not have imagined turning out as they did. I went home in good spirits.

Nothing happened. Two months later, Jimmy sent me a letter saying that the book was just about ready to be published. He asked for the second half of the publishing fee – urgently, as he needed to pay the printing company. I paid him another three thousand francs and looked forward to soon having a copy of my father’s tome in my hands. Nothing happened. Another two months. Then came another letter, addressed to “my friend and partner”, in which Jimmy sweet-talked quite skillfully – remember, he also wrote poetry. He lamented the sudden death of his mother, who had been suffering for years, and his divorce from his wife, who had taken all his property, as well as the fact that he was now in a nasty financial squeeze; he asked for seven thousand francs, which he would pay back within a year along with ten percent interest.

Having a good laugh at my gullibility? Go right ahead. By then I should have realized what was going on. But Jimmy had made an impression upon me. His cowboy boots, his easygoing nature, that beautiful student editor. And he had even described for me his close relationship with his poor, sick mother back when I had visited. Full of pity for him, I sent back the countersigned loan agreement, along with seven thousand francs – it was no problem for me given my income. And then I never heard anything more from him. Later on some news leaked out, suggesting that the divorce probably happened just so that Jimmy’s wife could keep the property in Burgundy and the small castle in Solothurn for them in her name. I also found out that the beautiful German studies student hadn’t collected a single cent for her editing work.

Meanwhile, I managed to get the book released through a reputable publisher – against a new payment, of course. It attracted some interest. A young

German dramaturg named Jakobs-Berick turned up, revealed that he was descended from a Nazi family, but that he himself had nothing at all against Jews and was, in fact, even willing to link his own destiny with that of the Jewish people – he wanted to make my father’s book into a theatrical play. Why not, I thought, and put him in contact with my sister, who is a fervent lover of everything theater-related. Sara assisted him, even though she didn’t find him to be an especially likable person. She’s never openly expressed such sentiments, but I can hear how she says his hyphenated surname with a certain derisive undertone. The play was brought to the stage; I think it turned out quite well. It was performed in a few small Swiss theaters, even won some prizes for its screenplay and performance, and will soon have a run in the German city of Frankfurt an der Oder.

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I told Willi all of this, watching as the expression on his face changed from one of incredulity to one of pensiveness, and finally to a smirk.

“And you, a lawyer, don’t bring him to court?”

“Are you crazy? Money is ephemeral. Also, I don’t want to open myself up to ridicule. So please don’t mention my name.”

“I promise – even without any names, there’s a terrific story here. Anyway, now it’s your turn – what do you want to know?”

“It’s about the sale of the Goldach Clinic. What do you know about it? Do you think there was anything dirty about what happened?”

“I have no idea. I’ve got nothing to go on. Incidentally, I was invited to the celebration of the cosmetic surgery clinic’s one-year anniversary. It went

off with a lot of fanfare – a press conference, aperitifs, speeches. The new owner announced that the German doctor whom he had originally hired to run the clinic was resigning based on a ‘mutual understanding’, and that he’d sought out a replacement. He’d needed someone well-connected, and Dr. Kogler, in light of his prior role in the cantonal healthcare management bureau, brought exactly this to the table. There were happy faces all around. Even Hardauer from the Executive Council, who used to be Kogler’s top boss, was there. And Helfenstein, who’s a member of the Cantonal Parliament as well as the mayor of the town, and who has always stood up for the clinic. They also celebrated the clinic’s discreet new name – *Elegantia*. So everyone looked pleased with the whole thing, even the German doctor who had vacated his post – he was probably well-compensated for doing so. Everything seemed too slick to me. I went looking for some background information, but I ran into brick walls everywhere. I actually know Kogler – we were in the army training school together. And I can tell you, I don’t really like him. He was the worst slacker in the whole company. You can ask Pfulg – he’s a colleague of yours as far as I know. He was our lieutenant, so he had to listen to our complaints about Kogler. He always protected him though; I think they’d been in the same fraternity. As I said, though, I couldn’t find anything I could pin on Kogler. I’d have been only too glad to have found something, believe me.”

“Did you speak with the Goldach heirs?”

“They were actually there at the celebration, but they just sat in a corner and said that they were satisfied with the whole deal. I got the impression that there wouldn’t be anything I could get out of them. Not because they’ve got anything to hide, but rather

because they're just the sort of feeble guys who simply watch life and all its perils pass them by. They don't want to actually get involved in anything."

"You could speak with Helfenstein."

"What for?"

"Just to check in with him. Tell him you got a lead – though you should absolutely not mention my name. And obviously then you tell me what you find out from him. I'd like to follow through on this together with you – on the condition that you don't put anything into print without my consent, as I mentioned."

"And you think there might be a big story here?"

"I have no idea. It might just be the usual hanky-panky. But there might also be something more behind it."

Willi shakes his head and says, "There's lying and cheating going on wherever you look. That's all we've been talking about the whole evening."

I can't help but laugh. "That reminds me of the favorite line of Grütter, the old prosecutor. Every chance he got, he was always grumbling, 'Lies, lies, and more lies!' Anyway, we've got to look at it that way for professional reasons – we're constantly dealing with people who do lie and cheat."

"At least people aren't still going around bashing each other's heads in."

"Don't say that – didn't you hear what happened to Sara?"

"Your little sister? No, what about her?"

"Her former patient almost bashed her head in."

"What? Details!"

"Well, as you know, she's dedicated her life as a psychologist to helping the disenfranchised people of this world – 'in the good Jewish tradition', to use her own words. She leaves the lucrative psychoanalysis of

wealthy men's wives to her Catholic colleagues, who don't only lighten their patients' wallets, but also give them some good therapeutic fornication, she says. And as the good human being that she is, she sometimes even financially helps out her marginalized patients. And she even makes herself available outside of her office hours. I mention all of this to lead up to what happened: Two weeks ago, one of these patients, a guy named Pietro Gysin, gives her a call. He had studied medicine but hadn't become a doctor – he wanted to become rich, so he launched a company that dealt in medical equipment. He actually had a good nose for it, and was bringing in a whole lot of money for a few years, but he was stupid enough to throw it all away. He became depressive after going broke, and ended up coming to Sara for therapy. She even gave him some money for his basic living expenses, but she stopped the therapy when it seemed like he lacked any desire to get better. Gysin actually didn't trust psychology, but he'd nevertheless decided to get therapy. A Jewish woman was his only option though. As he couldn't pay anything for the time being, he figured it would help that, as a Jew, Sara would certainly already be well-off – you know, the usual anti-Semitic stereotypes.”

“She shouldn't have taken him on. No therapy without payment, if you ask me.”

“She refuses to see anything wrong with it. Anyway, that was about ten years ago, and she hadn't had any more contact with Gysin since then. Then suddenly he calls her up at home one evening, saying he was coming by to repay what he owes her. She doesn't actually believe this, but she opens the door for him anyway. He hardly seems to be doing well financially. He looks miserable, and he's walking with a cane. She makes him some tea and starts thinking about how she can

get rid of him. He claims he doesn't have the money with him, but if she would drive him home – which she would have to do because he didn't have money for a taxi – then he would pay her."

"That should've made her suspicious."

"It probably did, but with her single-minded instinct to help, she goes ahead and gets her car. When they reach the address he'd given, she climbs out and goes around to help Gysin out of the car as well. And then, to quote Sara, 'he starts bashing my noggin with his cane and yelling "dirty Jew".' While she's laying there on the ground gushing blood, he zooms away in her car. She manages to get to a local bar where she's cared for, they call the police and an ambulance, and then I get a call from the hospital. Fortunately the wound isn't too serious, just a mild cerebral concussion. What actually hurts her even more is that, as a specialist, she hadn't managed to recognize that Gysin was dangerous. She also ended up with a whole lot of other hassles – the car wasn't found for weeks, and it was all damaged when they finally found it, and her cell phone is also gone along with everything she had on it."

"And the guy who attacked her?"

"Gysin gets caught by the police. The wheels of justice are set in motion. Deputy prosecutor Wladimir Vischer is in charge of the case, and he soon discovers that Sara's my sister. He stiffly tells me that he won't talk to me for as long as he's on the case. Well, we're not exactly fond of each other, so I've got no interest in talking to him anyway. He should just carry out his duties. I find out from Sara that he wants to drop the case right away. He's got no interest at all in Gysin's anti-Semitic remarks – he says that Sara must've misheard, that Jews are known to be oversensitive and

are always hearing things that weren't really said. He construes the whole thing as a domestic dispute, saying that Gysin and Sara must've gotten romantically involved and then had an argument, something that's not so uncommon in the real world. He even insinuates that Sara must've provoked Gysin. Sara's never at a loss for words though, so she articulately and vociferously drives these macho ideas right out of his head."

"I've heard about Vischer already. It's entirely possible that he's prejudiced against women."

"Or against psychologists."

"Well, you know as well as I do that psychologists aren't held in particularly high regard – especially among men. So what's next?"

"It's going to trial within the next week. But Sara won't get anything out of it, as she already knows. She's understandably bitter when she talks about how she's got a whole lot of extra troubles as a result of what happened, including the costs of the lawyer and the new cell phone and the car repairs – yet, as Vischer has told her with an ill-disguised sort of malicious glee, she'll have to fork out all that money from her own pocket. Gysin's a welfare case. And he can't be incarcerated either due to his poor condition."

"So even if the law is satisfied, she won't get what she deserves. It's certainly understandable that she doesn't think a great deal of the judicial system."

"At least she doesn't hold me responsible for all of the system's problems. Anyway, I'm not exactly eager to defend the system. When talking to Sara, I'd only do so if I wanted to annoy her – but no, she's been through enough already."

"It's a sick story. Next week, you said? Let's see if they'll let me in."

"It'd be best to try to arrange it beforehand with my

sister. Her office is listed under her name in the telephone book."

"Good, I'll do that. I've got to hit the hay now – it's been a long day. Say hi to Lilian for me, whenever you see her again."

"We run into each other from time to time, but not very often – we're working in different areas of the justice system, after all."

"Whatever. She may have been a touch too noble for you."

"Are you saying that based on your sharp perspective as a journalist?"

"I'm saying it as a friend. Didn't actually want to go so far as to congratulate you."

We both grin. We've emptied two bottles, and now we both stand up rather clumsily and head home – Willi to his den right around the corner from the bodega, and I to my small, expensive apartment in the outlying district of Oerlikon.