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## *Chapter 1. Nothing but the slush story*

Berlin's Kommandantenstrasse—partly still the old newspaper quarters, now turning into the garment district—begins on Leipziger Strasse with a nice view over the leafless trees of the Dönhoffplatz and disappears into the factory workers' neighborhood on Alte Jakobstrasse.

The Dönhoffplatz! On the right, the Tietz department store: Clearance sale! Clearance sale! Shoe store Stiller, "Even cheaper!" Umbrellas! They're all there: Wigdor and Sachs and Resi. A blind man with newspapers squats in front of Aschinger's distillery, waiting to snap a little something up. There's the best store for artificial flowers. In the spring, they have corsages for suits, in the winter, adornments for balls. Singers from Szczecin! There's always the big tall one and the little fat one. Cakes, perfumes, suitcases, and woolens. That's all fine and good. But the trouble starts on the first floor. Trade is dwindling. Everything's direct. Factory-retailer-consumer. If possible, straight from the factory to the consumer. That's the largest part of the Donhöffplatz.

But over on the quiet side, almost in the Kommandantenstrasse, with its small, nameless shops, lay the editorial offices of the Berliner Rundschau. The wide, long old house was four stories high, its corners crowned with two large Grecian vases with handles. In the middle were two oversize plaster statues of Mercury and Minerva, between them a Roman shield. This house didn't seem to have much business with Mercury these days. Half a floor stood empty. It was unclear whether Miermann had joined the newspaper's editorial staff because he had been seduced by Minerva, with her historical panels, or because of the rose garlands that floated below the windows. Both seemed likely, but he had probably not been enticed by the ostrich-feathered baroque helmets which crowned the upper windows. He had something against military uniforms. A large golden date in the gable proclaimed that this exceedingly genteel house had been built in the year 1868.

Downstairs was a small café frequented mainly by journalists, which reeked of cigarette smoke and was badly ventilated through a small opening which let out to the courtyard. The garbage bins sat directly underneath the shaft. The courtyard was so narrow that the sun barely made it up to the second floor. It was always dark in the café, only a couple of iridescent tulips and burned-out electric bulbs lit the whole thing up. There were red marble tables, small wooden chairs with caning and no armrests. But the owner was proud of his intellectual clientele. He came from Vienna and thought highly of journalists. He knew every single guest, and—more importantly—he knew his guests' articles.

Walking up the house's thoroughly trodden-out stairs, one came across a glass box, emblazoned with the word "Reception." In it sat a very young man. Beyond lay the editorial offices.

Emil Gohlisch, thirty years of age, tall and pale blond with unbelievably red hands, stood by the telephone. Editor Miermann, about twenty years older than Gohlisch, sat at a desk. He was as wide as an epic poet, and as bald as a comedian. His collar was always flaked with dandruff, and he never thought to wash his hands. He was an aesthete, but not when it came to his own person. He somehow managed to pair a green tie with a purple suit, but he could tell just from touch whether a porcelain figure was from the 1730s or the 1780s. His parents had sent him away to apprentice as a salesman, which he couldn't stand; it was only useful insofar as it had expanded his horizons. Since he had never finished high school, he couldn't go to university. That was how he found himself at an art dealership, but he wasn't particularly useful there either. He began to write. His family was glad that things hadn't turned out even worse. Later, when he had made a name for himself—still burdened with debts from earlier days—they were even somewhat proud. His two brothers were rather banal, a doctor and a lawyer who had married money and supported Progress. They never said anything out of keeping, never uttered a phrase that wouldn't have been said by anyone else in their generation.

Gohlisch hung up the phone.

Miermann looked at the clock. “If my watch is still correct,” he said, “tomorrow’s Thursday. I don’t have anything for Thursday’s page.”

“Someone should write about the new cafés sometime.”

“What use is sometime? Try today! Hic Rhodus, hic salta! Here is Rhodes, here scatter your salt.”

“Let’s see if there’s really nothing.”

Miermann pulled a yellow folder with manuscripts out of a desk drawer. “There’s a good article on slush, but it’s still freezing. None of these people can write. No one can write a decent story. They don’t have any new ideas.”

“Someone should write about the bathroom situation in the Berlin schools sometime.”

“What am I supposed to run as the lead tomorrow?”

Miehlke came in. He was the typesetter. Miehlke had a completely naked face—no hair to be found on his face or head.

“Day, gents. The page’s gotta be out by four thirty, it’s three now. Get to it. I’ve set the long article on the new construction work. If I take that one, the page’ll be full.”

“That’s far too long,” said Miermann shyly. He was bashful because Miehlke was the man who had once told the journalist Heye—Heye, who wrote the famous front-pagers—“If you don’t cut this, Herr Heye, I’ll cut twenty lines myself. You won’t believe how fast I can do that, Herr Heye, and no one’ll notice.” And when Stefanus Heye smiled, Mielke added, “Maybe you think that one of your readers will notice?”

Eh, readers don't notice nothing, I tell ya. You gents always think something depends on it. Let me tell ya, nothing depends on it."

"I don't care," Miehke now said. "The paper can't wait for you and cutting is better than printing on the margins."

Miehke left.

"So what do we do?" asked Miermann.

"Well, I'm going to order a coffee," said Gohlisch.

Old Schröder came in. Domestic affairs. He still sported a full beard, a green loden-cloth suit with horn buttons, and a wide black bow tie. "Things looked bad in the Reichstag today. I think the government's collapsing, the right's on the rise. Just wait and see, they'll pass all the tax laws that they yelled at the left over, no one but party members will get work, there will be pogroms, death sentences, and civil war. I know it. We'll see something, all right; five battleships, subsidies to the German nationalists, we may as well pack up and go home."

"I think they're cooking with water too," said Miermann. "I know for a fact that the nationalists are just as corrupt as everyone else."

"But Miermann! You have to admit that..."

"I never admit anything."

"Sales taxes, just you wait, nothing but sales taxes and tariffs until our eyes pop."

"Maybe tariffs are a good idea?"

"Herr Miermann!" Schröder cried indignantly, "be serious!"

“You ask too much of a man. I’m always supposed to get worked up: against taxes, for taxes, against tariffs, for tariffs. I’m not going to get worked up again until five p.m. tomorrow unless a beautiful girl walks into the room!”

“I should have been a political critic. That old judge, now there was a man who knew every position, who had studied the whole state. Now we have a parliamentary system without a parliamentary critic.”

Gohlisch got up. “Why bother? Breaking scandals sells more. Connections and a cushy little job. You’ve got a bug with your political criticism and your old judge. Three fat pigs, the headline says. Here’s the coffee. Are you paying, Miermann, or is it my turn? I’ll pay.”

“What’s happening with the page?” said Miermann.

Schröder left. Gohlisch said, “Listen, Herr Miermann, let me tell you a nice story. Recently, there was a man went from door to door, introduced himself to the Swiss presidents of big companies. He was their compatriot, a representative of Faber, asked them to cover their demand for Faber pencils with him. So they helped out their countryman, he went to Faber, bought leftovers, and sold the dirt for good money. One day, the boss asked for a pencil. He sharpened it, thought, hm, when the tip kept breaking off. Eventually, the affair came to light. Countryman thrown out. You won’t believe,” Gohlisch said, “all the things I learned on this trip. In Niedernestritz, the city council wanted to build a new town hall. Someone stuck it to the old apparitor, promised him 100 Mark, and the old dodderer, a slightly drunk figure who looks like Spitzweg, he went over one night and built a pretty little fire in the basement. He didn’t skimp on the gasoline or the kindling, so the town hall burned and burned, the firefighters were only called in the morning—the apparitor hadn’t noticed, after all—, he implored them to please not use too much water, and the building burned merrily to the ground. But all of a sudden, the apparitor was only going to be paid 50 Mark for his troubles. Naturally, he was very upset, and went to the insurance company to tell

them that he'd laid the fire, and was prepared to go to jail for it, but he'd never suffered such an injustice as with the 50 Mark. The insurance company had long noticed that they were dealing with arson, with a nice, well-made fire. But they hadn't been able to sell any insurance in Niedernestritz or the surrounding area for the past fifteen years. They were quite pleased with the fire, since once people noticed how nice the new city hall was that the insurance company was building, they quickly all got insured; it practically rained insurance applications. The insurer was delighted; so was the city council, and everyone was happy."

"That's a nice story. Maybe the insurance company also paid the city council a little something, what about that?"

"That happened in Niedernestritz, but of course, you can't write about that. You can never write about the really good stuff."

"Good story, but what are we going to do about the page?"

"I have an idea. An acquaintance recently told me about a popular cabaret: supposed to be a great chanson singer there, have to check it out, in Hasenheide."

"I've only got bad manuscripts; Szögyeny Andor's writing about 'The last buggy-driver' once again..."

"What pests, these career Hungarians!" said Gohlisch.

"There's been an article on weekends lying around since September, good article, but since I've gotten it there's been nothing but bad weather, so I can't use that. You can't run an article on weekends when it's so cold. You can't do that."

Miehlke came in again. "Well, what'm I supposed to do, gents, the page has to be out by four thirty. I'll take the construction and cut it myself if you gents won't deliver. Like I said, nothing depends on it."

Miermann sat there, resigned. “All right, we’ll take the construction piece, but we’ll have to cut half of it. Gohlisch, you always leave me hanging. When will we run the article on the singer?”

“Next Wednesday, for sure. Upon my soul!”

“Well, that’s something! When you say Wednesday in eight days, I can be sure that you mean Wednesday in eight months.”

“I can’t work on command, it has to come to me. I’m no fountain pen. I’m a steadfast servant of thought.”

“If it thaws next Wednesday, we’ll run the slush article; otherwise, yours.”

“Done.”

“But I need to be able to rely on you. That page is getting worse by the week. You writers are out of good ideas, and there’s nothing new coming. There’s no talent.”

“That’s true,” said Gohlisch, “but only because the untalented writers are popular and cheaper. A big-shot publisher recently said that the worse the newspapers are, the more they sell. What’s talent good for? No talent plus a dash of sadism sells a lot more. A rape is more popular than a sentence by Goethe, although Goethe’s still acceptable. Briand sat on the desk of the ‘Petit Journal’ for over a decade and told people stories. That’s how his newspaper got started. He never wrote a line himself. He was paid a handsome salary for that, and that’s how Briand was made. But publishers have no clue about writing anyway.”

And with that, they vanished in the composing room.

## *Chapter 2. Nothing comes of the slush story, again*

On the following Wednesday, it was even chillier. “Have we ever had a winter like this?” asked Gohlisch. “If we still had a real Gohlisch piece lying around on frost and ice, or on frozen lakes in the Mark, it would definitely thaw. Here’s the article. I’m going to order coffee now. Cake? No cake?”

“Cake,” said Miermann.

“My dear Miermann,” exclaimed the writer Herzband, who went by Lieven, as he burst into the room with outstretched hands and his cloak aflutter. “What do you have to say on that most exquisite piece that Otto Meißner has written about me?”

“I say that I read the lovely piece that you wrote on Otto Meißner,” said Miermann.

“I can’t deny that your answer could wound my self-regard to its utmost depths. I admit that I am vain to an almost ungodly degree. But can’t friends praise friends? I ask you: shouldn’t friends praise friends? Please, I ask you: isn’t it one’s duty to forge camaraderie in the face of this world, unartistic as it is, bereft of gods? We few creative, intellectual thinkers? The writer should praise his comrade, since only the like-minded can recognize one another! Have you already read my book, dearest Herr Miermann, Dr. Buchwald seeks his path? Not yet? A political novel of the highest caliber! Nothing less, I assure you, dear editor, nothing less is discussed than the solution to foreign relations. I will send it to you. The writer must be the traveling salesman for his own books, the writer must manage his own reputation, since one’s own fame furthers that of the nation. The writer’s laziness is justified, and nothing can damage his overall stature more than if he scorns and looks down upon the intellectual trade! Think: my books have been translated into all languages of culture, even Irish. I recently had a four-hour-long conversation with Bratianu on a trip to Bucharest. ‘I have read,’ he said, ‘a very beautiful novel by a German writer named Lieven.’ I stood up and bowed. ‘I am that very man.’ What a moment! What an experience!

What joy! Bratianu read a German novel; Bratianu loved this novel; Bratianu loved this novel's author; I am that author! So, dear Herr Miermann, so as to not take up any more of your precious time, I would like to ask you to run a notice regarding a European event: the great French lawyer and poet Paul Regnier has asked me to write a play with him on the trial against the saboteurs in the Soviet Union. I have accepted his request. We will begin work shortly. It's the first sign of German-French cooperation on a European theme. I have sketched out the import of this event in few words for you. Here is the note. It will be an international piece. Please place it in the evening paper straight away."

Gohlisch, in the meantime, had been looking out the window.

What a strange store over there, he thought, it was a clothing store for years, but now it's gone under, like all the others. Recently at the Hausvogteiplatz, an old lady said to me, "Isn't it awful, now D. Lewin's gone too. I've been buying my coats at Manheimer's for forty years. I've just come in to the city from Karlshorst to buy myself a coat. V. Manheimer's gone. I'll go to D. Lewin, I think to myself. Lewin's gone too." It was almost like in the revolution, people spoke to each other for no reason on the street. Later, it became a wine store. Germans drink German wine, but eventually, they also stocked Bordeaux, and all kinds of schnapps. Six bottles of wine for five Mark, even that was too much for people. Beer's cheaper. Then came a store for kitchen furnishings. All sorts of kitchen furniture. Eschebachs Reform Kitchen, three smooth cupboards next to each another, bottomless drawers made of glass; next to them, respectable old cupboards in carved wood or with colored glass. Furniture stores don't work. A human needs rent, gas, electricity, heating, and food, lots of food, fresh food three times a day, but he can walk around for years in the same coat, and get his kitchen cupboards at the flea market. Even the kitchen store vanished, thought Gohlisch, and a restaurant sprang up, but there are too many restaurants in the neighborhood. Good wine restaurants, Aschinger's, free bread, 45 pennies for a sausage, peas with bacon for 75 pennies, then there's the old Münze, a beer restaurant, excellent, separate meat and vegetables, there's a kosher restaurant, and a wealth of bakeries. Far too many restaurants in the neighborhood. New ones can't compete. The

restaurant moved out, and again, the storefront stood empty until another restaurant took its place. Young plucky things who stuck a pickled herring in the window.

“You’re not interested in literature,” Lieven said venomously, addressing Gohlisch’s back. He was still looking out the window.

“Oh, certainly, but only good literature,” said Gohlisch. “Karl May, or Buried in the Desert, or something like that. By the way, there’s nothing doing with the slush,” he added in Miermann’s direction. Miermann understood, and said to Lieven,

“Excuse us, we have to put together a newspaper, we are unfortunately honest workers. We are no free spirits, but servants to the publisher. Obedient slaves to the public. I’m very interested in your book. I will doubtlessly read it.”

Lieven bowed, put on his big, floppy hat, his cloak flew up. “I bestow my greetings upon the men of the world,” he said.

“He’s really gone soft in the head,” said Gohlisch, “you only hear news from that man along these lines: ‘Herr Adolf Lieven will write a drama that takes place among artists.’ No scenes, no title, no form. Just artists. Then they begin sending out press releases. ‘Herr Adolf Lieven announces that his book, *The Lame Vulture*, will be translated into new Siberian.’ Herr Adolf Lieven was received by the president of Argentina during his South American research trip. We don’t get these updates from Gerhard Hauptmann. But what will we do about Thursday’s page? Thank god, coffee. Say, girl, don’t catch a cold without your coat. Are you paying, Miermann, or is it my turn?”

“This time I’m paying,” said Miermann. “The slush isn’t going to work out this time. It’s disgusting how clean the streets are. But the slush has to come one day, where will the spring go otherwise? I also have an article on marriage statistics.”

“That will fill up a box, but you can’t use that as a lead.”

“I just got a lead article, a pleasant piece from Szögyeny Andor on the different ways that Berliners spend their Sundays.”

“These career Hungarians again! Why don’t you take a look at my article on the folk singer, I don’t think it came out very well, it didn’t really come together—I’m not feeling that great anyways, I’m going to order a schnapps. Do you also want one?”

“Who stands on one leg?” said Miermann.

Gohlisch went to the phone and ordered two grappa.

Suddenly, there was a loud noise in the corridor.

The door was ripped open, and a scent wafted in; first came the scent, then a very large woman. She wore a wide, thick fur coat made of light brown bearskin, underneath that a slender, very bright yellow dress, out of which peeked a pair of beautiful long pink-tinged legs. A yellow, brown, and red scarf curled around her neck. She wore a cardinal red beret on her head, perched atop very many, very blond curls. The beret was set far back on her head, crooked and to the right. She was strongly made up, which only accentuated her garish look. She was young with a wily face. With a great din, she suddenly stood in the small room that was already almost filled up by the two desks. An engraving of the Forum Romanum hung on the wall above Miermann’s desk. Over his own desk, Gohlisch had put up a watercolor of a sailboat that he had painted himself, fastened with a thumbtack. She looked around for a second, and then threw herself towards Miermann, who had jumped up, put her arms around his shoulders, kissed him, and cried, “God, Miermann, sweet darling, haven’t seen you in such a long time, what’s wrong with us? Here!” She pressed a manuscript into his hand. “Bring it, sugarlips, bring it! Do you remember?”

“Of course, dear,” said Miermann. “The academy ball, four thirty, second closet, fourth corridor.”

In a whirl, she was out again. Gohlisch yelled, “I’m an honest republican from the Verrina clan,” and banged his fist on the table. “Do you know that Kurfürstendamm slut?”

“No clue,” said Miermann. “I only know who that is.”

At that moment, a big blond man came in, Öchsli the theater critic. “What the hell was that?” he cried. “All of a sudden a sweet gal came sweeping down the hallway, called out, Sweet Öchsli, haven’t seen you in forever, d’you still remember? But I don’t remember anything.”

“That just happened to me too. I don’t know her, I only know who that was. That was Aja Müller. She has one car, two poodles, and two relationships: one with the playwright Altmann and another with the son of a director at the D-Bank.”

“Must be nice to sleep with her,” Gohlisch replied, and continued writing.

“The things she writes are even quite nice,” said Miermann, “snobby, but not too snobby given the topic. Parties and balls. I’ll give it straight to the setter, since I don’t have a lead. Maybe you can rework the thing on Käsebier.”

“I’ll have to see. By the way, the place was completely packed. No seats to be had, even at six thirty. A pair of acrobats performed, much better than in the big vaudeville shows. Käsebier is excellent. It’s worth it. He sings with a partner, also very good, by the way, Rhenish folk songs, endlessly kitschy. There was one that was especially good, the story of a tenement, ‘How can he sleep with the thin wall?,’ quite excellent. And then he plays the pimp.” Gohlisch picked up a scarf and took a few steps, soft and fresh. “Passage Friedrichstrasse, under the lindens green.” He raised his chin, thrust out his lower lip and held his open hand up to his face, and jerked it once, twice, to indicate business. “I’m pretty sure that there’s room for a thousand people in there. It’s quite an affair with the acrobats; a man walking on a tightrope is already

enough for me. But apparently that's not enough. He also has to play the fiddle while he's doing it. It's an odd affair, musical accompaniment to this display of human agility. There was also an excellent clown, he wanted to sit on a chair but it was wobbly, and he tried in vain to make it stable. Then he took a big cigar box, broke it into little pieces with a lot of difficulty, dead serious. Finally, he had a piece that was small enough to put under the leg of the chair, but it kept slipping away. All of our male seriousness, gone up in flames. The complicated affair of stopping a chair from wobbling that still wobbles. I'm going to go to breakfast."

Miermann said, "You lack ambition."

"Ambition? For lead articles?" asked Gohlisch. "No, I don't have any. I don't try; I want to be asked."

"You're being asked."

"No, I'm not, but I know that only smooth talkers make it around here."

Miermann laughed. Gohlisch went to breakfast at a Hungarian spot on the Kommandantenstraße. The place was decked out in white, red, and green, like a Hungarian land tavern. Ears of corn hung from individual booths, and the whole place was decorated with garlands of corncobs. The booths were brightly painted and looked like farmer's canopy beds with their four wooden pillars holding up the roof. Dr. Krone was sitting in one of them.

"Greetings, sir," said Gohlisch, as a conspirator crept towards him who published unsavory exposés in various newspapers and magazines under the byline 'Augur.' He carried twelve newspapers under his arm, kept his head down and his eyes up. He sullenly shook everyone's hand without saying anything. The three gentlemen ordered a bottle of Tokaji.

“What have you got, sir?” Gohlisch asked Dr. Krone, who hadn’t opened his mouth.

“I’m completely out of sorts. The current state of health insurance is unbearable. Ninety percent of the population has health insurance, the few remaining ones only go to a professor. The professorial title is pure gold. I don’t see any way of moving forward. I don’t have the time and the money to do the research work. Before the war, you could buy yourself a monkey, now I can’t afford a monkey, and the same goes for rabbits. On the other hand, it’s unbearable to sit in my apartment and wait for patients.”

“Yes, well, why do you live in the west anyways!” said Gohlisch. “If you moved to the Brunnenstrasse, you’d have enough to do.”

“I’d only be doing slapdash work there. With a hundred patients a day, ten minutes per patient, I’d have sixteen hours of work. But if you’re trying to make things easy for yourself, you have to forget about examining patients thoroughly. The only consolation you can give someone about the number of undiagnosed carcinomas is that there’s nothing to be done. Recently, I had a nice case. I wanted to prescribe a patient a hay fever treatment, now, during the winter. I asked the insurer whether they would approve it. A treatment like that is preventative and costs 85 Mark. What did the insurer say to me? That wasn’t possible, it cost too much. So what can I do? Become a charlatan or starve? You know, there are doctors who open practices with major traffic.”

“I recently went to see Dr. Ahlheim,” Gohlisch said. “First, I waited in a room with five other patients. Nurses kept coming in: ‘One moment, please.’ I wait. One comes, yells, ‘Frau Meyer to cabin one to X-ray please.’ Another one comes, ‘Frau Schulze to cabin two to undress please.’ A third one comes along, ‘Frau Kühne to the reception please.’ ‘Frau Marheinke to radiotherapy please.’ ‘The gentleman to the next room please.’ Fine, so I go into the next room. I wait, along comes another nurse, ‘Sir, please undress in cabin five.’ I tell her that I’ve sprained my thumb, I don’t have

to get undressed. ‘Very well,’ says the nurse, ‘then please wait.’ I sit for a while. In the meantime, the business continues. ‘Frau Niedergesäss under the electric arc, please, Frau Weltrein to electrotherapy.’ A nurse enters. ‘Next room,’ she says. By now I’ve been channeled into the third room. I wait. Next door, things carry on. Finally, the doctor we all know and love comes. I tell him I’ve probably sprained my thumb. ‘Yes,’ he says. ‘You’re very right, you’ve sprained your thumb. Diathermia. Come back twice a week for diathermia. If it’s not better after four weeks, we’ll talk.’ Well, I hadn’t lost my mind yet. I went to a young doctor, whom nobody recommended to me, he twisted my thumb back into place, case closed.”

“That’s how it is,” Dr. Krone said. “You have to start a business, things can’t continue as they have with the health insurers. They’ve socialized the profession without nationalizing it. The insurers deal with everything, but we haven’t become civil servants.”

“It’s the same everywhere,” said Augur. “It doesn’t matter what kind of service you get, because no one knows to value service anyways, and instead it just comes down to organizing discussions around it. Instead of an insider economy run by the officer and the student corps, we now have hundreds of interest groups: nationalists, socialists, Catholics, salary groups, pension groups. In short, those who can’t navigate the back corridors are lost. But they’re all the spawn of capitalism. What can you ask from a capitalist economy, in which there are only exploiters and exploited?”

“Well,” said Gohlisch, “I think communist terror would be even more horrible.”

“Last time that scoundrel Nagel, that slave-holder, got twenty Mark out of me,” Augur cried.

“I’m going to order three more grappa,” said Gohlisch. “By the way, that’s a disgrace, Augur.”

“You can’t find anything out,” the conspirator said. “You run around all day to get together a story that’s five lines long, and then they haggle with you over the price. They furnished new rooms in the city hall. First off, they’re incredibly fancy, second, they were given out on private contracts. How is that possible?”

“I’ve been running around for a tip for ten days, I can’t find anything out,” Gohlisch said.

Dr. Krone bade them farewell.

“I feel sorry,” Gohlisch said, “for Krone. He can do a lot. Specialists know what he’s worth.”

“Sure, but he has no authority,” said Augur. “An acquaintance of mine went to him recently, he examined him endlessly and finally said, ‘I’m still not quite sure what seems to be the problem. Come back the day after tomorrow.’ You simply can’t do that.”

“What, that’s rich coming from you, a man of our time! You don’t understand that high degree of honesty which makes a man admit that he hasn’t got the answer yet? You want him to tell you, ‘Go to bed straight away, you’ve got pleurisy, keep yourself warm,’ when he hasn’t found anything? You’re also part of that primitive persuasion: ‘When I go to the doctor, he better prescribe me something.’ People who have medical and legal stock phrases at the ready are good for hysterical women. But it saddens me that you can’t appreciate when someone isn’t trying to pull the wool over your eyes for a change.”

“Come on, Gohlisch,” said Augur, “I can appreciate it, I’m just giving you one solution to his puzzle, why he doesn’t have enough to do. Success is a question of suggestion, not of effort.”

“Miermann would say: ‘That single sentence explains all of Fascism, you are all cowardly slaves and need authority.’”

They paid.

“Live well, Augur. Heil and Sieg and bag a fat catch.”

*Chapter 3. It thaws. The slush article is published, and the article on the folk singer is typeset*

On Wednesday morning, Gohlisch rewrote the article on the folk singer.

“Will you permit,” asked the head of the local section, “that Herr Meise take a phone call here?”

“I’d rather not, but if I have no choice,” said Gohlisch. “I’d just like to order myself a coffee and a grappa beforehand.”

Herr Meise was a crime reporter.

“Herr Meise,” said the editor of the local section, an old grumbling bear of fifty, who secretly wrote very quiet novellas. “Herr Meise, we really must find out how Professor Möller’s doing. His obituary is the lead article, and it’s already gone to the typesetter’s. A man who redefined the natural sciences, so to speak. When it comes to him, we can’t be behind any of the big papers or quote them. W.T.B.1 doesn’t know anything yet.”

“I’ll start researching straight away,” said Meise.

“But please be particularly careful not to be tactless.”

Hm, thought Gohlisch, Käsebier is out of luck, I’ll never get on with the article if things keep going like this.

“Well, have you put the phone over here?” he asked.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wolff’s Telegraphisches Bureau (news agency)*

“Yes, of course,” Meise said. It rang. “What, a car accident? In the Pankstraße? How many dead? –None? We’re not interested if there are no dead.”

Meise hung up, the phone rang again. “Iron horse into streetcar? –How many dead? –None? Any badly injured? –Three? Fine, that’ll do, which hospital? –Please, your name and address? Müller, Freisinger Straße? –Thank you, Herr Müuller, many thanks, Herr Müller, you can collect your money at the till when the article has run.” He hung up. “Well, I better conduct my inquiries on Möller very carefully.” Gohlisch was curious to know what Meise would consider careful. Meise picked up the receiver and dialed a number.

“Is that Möller? This is Meise, Berliner Rundschau. What? Oh, the missus herself, please forgive the question, but I just wanted to inquire whether your dear husband is still alive?”

After a while, Meise put down the receiver.

“Well?” asked Gohlisch.

“Mrs. Möller appears to have hung up,” said Meise.

“I can imagine,” said Gohlisch, “you call that tactful research?”

“So, we can’t be sure yet,” said Meise, reassured, and left.

Gohlisch wrote. Miehke, the typesetter, knocked.

“What’s with the Käsebier story, Herr Miermann wants to know, otherwise he’ll take the slush story, the temperature just tanked.”

“Tell him that I’ll bring it to him by 3.30. I just want to go eat breakfast.”

With that, he put on his coat and went down to the café. Augur was sitting there.

“One breakfast with coffee,” said Gohlisch.

“Did you know,” said Augur, “Karl Lambeck has come to Berlin because of his play at the Deutsches Theater. I bumped into him yesterday on Rankestraße. I’d never seen him before, he didn’t open his mouth, but he looked great, even better than in all the pictures. Aja Müller was there, the ass, Lieven, and some others.”

“So,” said Gohlisch, who didn’t much care, “Why did Knorr get the job of furnishing the city hall on his own?”

“I know nothing,” said Augur.

“By the way, how’s your daughter?” said Gohlisch.

“She has a slight pulmonary apicitis.”

“I’d send her off to Switzerland.”

“The doctor says she’s in no condition to travel right now, maybe later. But it’s not that bad.”

“Shall we drink another grappa,” said Gohlisch. “I’d ask another doctor, maybe you can still send her to Switzerland,” and ordered two grappa. “The schnapps is good here,” said Gohlisch, “it’s made of pure grapes. –Oh, look, it’s already three thirty. How it’s thawing! But things were barbarically cold today. It’s better that Miermann use the slush story. Another coffee.”

“Yes,” said Augur, “do you already know that I’m the one who wrote the black Friday article.”

“Congratulations,” said Gohlisch.

“What do you think I got for that information?”

“Really, you should have gotten a few thousand Mark. It’s stupid, all of a sudden that silly gossip rag became famous.”

“Yes, but actually, I asked for five hundred Mark. Guess what they gave me?”

“Hm, one-fifty.”

“Thirty.”

“I’d sue.”

“What can you do, they’re my best clients.”

“All the same, that won’t do. We may be fountain pens, but a big deal publisher can’t just take you for a ride.”

“If I complained, I’d gain four hundred Mark and lose my best client. It may be a gossip magazine, but it’s independent. No one else would dare to publish the dangerous revelations I get from the ministries. I can’t consider it.”

“You should have a steady gig somewhere.”

“And be dependent.”

“You’re more dependent when you’re independent. – It’s five thirty now, better that Miermann use the slush story. – You know, it’s like this: a couple people are well-known, no one notices that they can’t do anything anymore, a couple of people can do a lot, but until word gets out, they’re useless too. I’m very lazy, but there’s also no

one who knows how to make productivity enticing to a genius such as myself. Well, Heil and Sieg and bag a fat catch!”

With that, Gohlisch went to Otto’s wine bar. When he came back to the office at six, the slush story was already typeset.

Miermann’s wife was there: Emma, a small older lady, who always wore the same dark blue dress. She was the same age as Miermann, who had taken so long to get a stable position and a respectable name, which had earned him a few thoughtful, well-written, little-read books. When Gohlisch came, she bade him farewell with a friendly smile. “I hope that I haven’t scared you off,” said Gohlisch.

“God forbid, I’m happy to leave the young ones among themselves,” she said, casting a benign look on her husband.

Gohlisch brought in the article, which was on the cabaret in Hasenheide, particularly on Käsebier.

“We’ll get it set straight away for next Thursday.”

“Otto Lambeck is in Berlin. Augur saw him on Rankestraße. He came because of the show at the Deutsches Theater,” said Gohlisch.

“Your article’s a mess!” said Miermann. “There are just as many commas as periods. If you say ‘as well,’ you need another ‘as’ somewhere. This sentence ends with and. Lord, lord, forgive him, he knows not what he does. What do you understand by partout?”

“Thoroughly.”

“It means everywhere. I don’t want to kiss Aja Müller partout, that means everywhere, not thoroughly. Gohlisch, Gohlisch! Keep learning. Keep improving. Do you find it beautiful to say ‘anyway’ all the time? No. You are my problem child. Go read Fontane. And read Heine and everything—everything—by Anatole France. He’s a bit brazen, but read him. I’ll bring you something tomorrow.”

Miermann sat with Gohlisch’s ‘Folk Singer’ for two hours. Only then did he send it off to the composing room.

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