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I went through the underpass: white, scrubbed tiles, drops of water, an old man playing the accordion and singing something about the hills of home. I paused for a moment and dropped a coin in his Tyrolean hat. Then I climbed up to the bridge, crossed the little river called the Fils and went along Johnstrasse: cars, muck, the air scarcely breathable. At the *Spring Dew* restaurant a waiter was putting up sunshades. I turned off to the right: there was the school. I entered the school office and said I wanted to see the headmaster. I had, I added, an appointment for eleven o'clock. The headmaster, I was told, was in a meeting. I waited and looked at the office counter and the photos on the wall: teachers with leads round their necks and, in the foreground, two men, one fat, one tall, holding the leads; on their heads they wore caps with the letters EHO.

Soon afterwards I was called into the headmaster's office. The headmaster pointed to a chair facing him. I sat down. He was, the headmaster said, the man who would write my appraisal. 'What appraisal?' I asked politely. The appraisal at the end of the year, he said, the appraisal at the end of every year, he, the headmaster, he wrote them, himself. The appraisal, he said, would decide my career, for good or ill. It was, he added, preposterous that I did not know what the appraisal meant, the appraisal, he said, was the most important thing for teachers, the appraisal was their sole concern, nothing else was of significance for them. He would keep himself informed about my every step, he added, nothing, he said, would be hidden from him, at the end of the school year it would all be there before him and he regarded it as his duty to draw up an especially detailed picture of new arrivals in particular. I nodded, not moving at all. Why, the headmaster now asked as he scrutinised me, why did I not live in Göppingen? I said that until that point I had not had the opportunity.

‘Not had the opportunity,’ he broke in, what did I mean, not had the opportunity, that was unacceptable, I had already been informed two weeks ago that I was to come here, to Göppingen, to the ERG, not had the opportunity, he said, that was not the best of starts. When, he asked, was I thinking of moving?

‘As soon as possible,’ I said, hastening to add that I entirely agreed that the distance between my place of work and my place of residence was not the most convenient —

‘Indeed,’ the headmaster broke in, that was beyond doubt, he was adamant that anyone who worked there also had to live there, all his teachers lived in Göppingen, he personally had made sure that all his teachers lived in Göppingen and I would not be able to get out of living in Göppingen either, if I intended to work there, under him. After all, he said, Göppingen was a fine town. Yes, I said, of course I would make every effort to find a flat as soon as humanly possible, in order to erase the black mark I’d earned by not living in Göppingen. *For that*, the headmaster said, it was unfortunately too late, he had already as good as put it in the appraisal, he could already see my appraisal in his mind’s eye: when I took up my duties I, Kranich, probationary teacher, had not been in possession of a suitable residence in the town where I worked, what is more, when I took up my duties I, Kranich, probationary teacher, had not been aware of the significance of the headmaster’s appraisal.

While he was speaking I tried to give him a submissive look, but it proved impossible, the headmaster was moving his head to and fro too much as he addressed me and when he fell silent he turned his attention to my application form. I had not, he said, indicated any class. What kind of class? I asked. A class for which I would be responsible as class teacher. I had thought, I said, that as a newcomer I should perhaps —

‘Out of the question’ the headmaster said, precisely because I was a young teacher it was my bounden duty to take over a class. ‘A fine way to start,’ he said, ‘trying to get out of the most difficult task right from the beginning. No class,’ he said, writing something on a pad; his pencil broke, he picked up the sharpener, sharpened his pencil, picked up the pad with the shavings on it, took it to the wastepaper bin, swept the shavings into it, blew the bits of lead off the pad, placed the pad beside him,

looked at the pad again, read what he'd written, then tore the sheet off and placed it in one of the trays to his left before turning back to me.

He was going to be quite open with me now, he said. After everything that had happened so far, he advised me to stop. Even before I had begun. I should turn back even before I had climbed aboard the teachers' train, go away, seek alternative employment, anything but teaching. Yesterday he had looked at a video of classes I'd given during my teacher training, awful, he said, dreadful, totally useless, an absolute dead loss as a teacher, my question-and-answer technique, he said, beyond belief, no technique at all, the whole lesson with no question-and-answer technique discernible, question-and-answer technique was what distinguished a good teacher, question-and-answer technique was everything. After all, the aim was to get the pupils where you wanted them, to drive them into a corner with questions until all that was left was the correct answer, the *solution*. Only then could one reward the pupil who had been the first to stumble into the trap. Had I never listened to pupils talking after an oral test? All they were trying to do was find out what the teacher *wanted to hear*, all they were trying to do was establish what the *expected solution* was. No, teaching was certainly not a profession he would describe as desirable for me, the headmaster went on. My questions had been far too open, in every respect, that silence, almost a minute, putting a question, waiting a minute, inefficient, pointless, it was plain to see, a person should realise that. The pupils wanted *clear* questions, they wanted a helping hand, things made easy, they wanted to scrape everything out of the teacher's head that he had poured in during the hours of preparation, they wanted to gobble up everything in the teacher's head so to speak, to read all the prepared, reliable, assured material on the blackboard, write it down in their exercise books, absorb it and take it home with them. He coughed for a while, then calmed down and while he was silent I hastened to assure him that naturally I was prepared to take on a class as class teacher, I had merely overlooked the box that needed ticking and I begged him to give me one more chance. He waved my words away and said, certainly, certainly, I would get my chance, if I insisted, he had simply wanted to be honest with me. After he had blown his nose the headmaster made two crosses in my file, *two* classes, he said, he would give me two classes so that I would see the way the wind was blowing from the very beginning, and I said, certainly, sir, two classes.

And now, the headmaster went on, he was going to initiate me into the mysteries of school life, as he always did at a first interview with a new member of staff, he would be brutally frank and tell me, without mincing words, what awaited me. One could, he said, speak of four pillars on which the whole education system rested. These pillars were fear, moaning, pretence and lies. Lies, he said straight away, were something I must take to heart, they were the elixir of the school. Everyone there in the school lied. First and foremost he himself, the headmaster. Nothing of what he said necessarily corresponded to the truth, I could never, he said, be certain that he would keep to anything he had promised. A promise made by him was not a promise in the strict sense of the word, often enough teachers would come on their bended knees to him in his office, pleading, ‘But you promised, sir.’ But every time that happened he, the headmaster, would ward off the poor teacher grovelling before him with the well-known, not to say notorious saying that promises were meant to be broken, and carry on as if nothing had happened.

The headmaster puffed out his cheeks. Did I follow him? he asked. I nodded. And I could only survive, the headmaster went on, if I followed the system that was standard practice there. Let us say that one morning I did not feel like turning up in class, even though I was physically perfectly able to do so, what would I do then? Naturally I would come, I said. Well done, said the headmaster, I was a quick learner: my first lie. No, he said, I should ring up and say I was unwell. Of course he, at the other end of the line, would know very well that I was not telling the truth. But he had no problem with that. He would see other qualities in the fact that I was not telling the truth. He would see it as a demonstration of willingness, of my willingness to adapt to the system, my readiness to join in the game. Woe betide me, however, if I were to stick to the truth. The truth was a clear insult, a revolution, a slap in the face for him, the headmaster. He would have to take the strictest measures should he be confronted with the truth. Did I smoke? he then asked me. A quick glance at the desk told me there was no ashtray on it and so I said no. The headmaster sniffed suspiciously and

said he could, however, smell smoke. That must have been because the only seat I could find on the train was in a smoking compartment, I said. A non-smoker, then? the headmaster asked. That was good, he had no time for smokers, he hated smokers. Despite that, he had been obliged to set up a smokers' corner, in his school. As was appropriate, he had put it beside the rubbish bins, but no teacher who was a smoker had ever complained about the proximity of the stinking bins. They accepted everything, did the teachers. Yes, the authorities had even gone so far as to introduce regular tortures to find out what these teachers were capable of putting up with. There, in the ERG, the tortures were held every Wednesday, during the sixth period. Each and every one of them was obliged to attend the tortures. The tortures were called staff meetings. Nothing of what he, the headmaster, said during a staff meeting made any sense at all, but nevertheless the teachers were obliged to act as if it did make sense. Those celebrated discussions, for example, which ended up at the very place they had started out from. Headmasters' training courses laid particular stress on the art of leading a round-table discussion. He, the headmaster, had spent a long time honing his technique of leading round-table discussions. The most important rule was basically simple: end = beginning. The discussion had to go round and round the table and end up where it started, leaving the participants no wiser than before. Really the teachers ought to protest and say what they all thought, namely that nothing had changed. But they'd rather die, those teachers, than volunteer their opinion, all they wanted to do was to get home, to get the round-table discussion over as quickly as possible. Thus eventually one of them would hold up both hands — I should know that someone who held up both hands did not want to ramble on in the usual pointless manner, no, for that one only had to hold up one hand, anyone holding up both hands was raising a *point of order*, usually around one-thirty p. m., for example:

‘One moment ladies and gentlemen, I see two hands, a point of order, is it, Herr Safft, yes?’

Herr Safft: ‘Could we vote on whether to conclude the debate?’

If a point of order was raised, one had to break off what one was saying at once, stop the debate in mid-sentence, to hear the point of order. There was no choice, once a point of order had been submitted they had to take that point of order, unless a colleague should raise a further point of order, immediately after the first, to the effect

that they should vote on whether to reject the first point of order, which could, of course, lead to a further point of order, and so on. But usually the teachers were jolly glad someone had proposed the so-called guillotine motion, they would even heave sighs of relief, the end of the discussion was in sight, they were delighted to vote, result: 57 for, 12 against.

The headmaster paused to get his breath back, stood up, brushed a speck of dust off a rubber plant and went over to the gallery of portraits of his predecessors. His own likeness was the last in the row and he stood in front of it as if it were a mirror and brushed his hair back off his forehead. Then he sat down again and continued. Staff meetings, he said, were only one of the countless torments Education Head Office had brought in, another was the so-called visitations during which Education Head Office police attended classes given by established teachers and always criticised precisely the features they observed: if the teacher had included group work in the lesson, the teacher failed to assert his or her personality; if, on the other hand, the teacher went for ‘chalk and talk’ instruction, the lesson was too teacher-centred; if the teacher had copied a passage for the lesson, the passage was poorly chosen; if the passage was in the official textbook, it was wrongly used; if the teacher used a transparency, it was brought in at the wrong point; if he wrote on the board, they said why not use the overhead projector? There was no way out, the headmaster said, no escape from the torments of appraisal and arbitrary judgments. And over the years these torments had engendered fear, now the most important pillar of the system, fear hovering over everything, the king of scourges, so to speak, the inner strength of the whole system. He did not mean only the teachers’ fear of Education Head Office, of the headmaster, of the pupils, of their parents, he also meant the pupils’ fear of the headmaster, of their parents, of their teachers, and the headmaster’s fear of the parents and of Education Head Office, as well as Education Head Office’s fear of the Ministry officials, the Ministry officials’ fear of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Education’s fear of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s fear of the voters or, rather, non-voters, that is of the parents represented on the School Board: fear was the glue holding everything together. With time fear had become second nature to the teachers and so it had needed an outlet, a safety valve it found in the endless emission of repetitious moans, the third pillar. And the chief moan: how poor the pupils were.

They didn't know who de Gaulle was, what Vichy meant, not even what had happened on 1.9.39, they wrote Hitler with two 't's, they didn't know how long the Second World War had lasted, they didn't even know that there had been a *First* World War, one had to be grateful if they didn't spell war *wore*. And then the marking! You sat there, weekend after weekend, Advanced English, a pupil had used an expression you knew perfectly well no native speaker would ever use, your feeling for the language told you that straight away, but no, you could never rely on your feeling for the language alone, you had to rule out every possibility, it wasn't enough just to look it up in Langenscheidt, no, there was nothing in Langenscheidt. In the Oxford, perhaps? No. In Collins? No. So you had to drive to Stuttgart and look it up in the ten-volume Harper's and, indeed, there it was, the expression the pupil had used, archaic, true, but at some point the the 14th century some English-speaking person had once used it, so it couldn't count as a mistake, the most you could do was put a squiggle underneath it.

I should think very carefully, the headmaster said, glancing at the clock and getting up, whether I wanted to join in the endless chorus of teachers' moans. There was no time left, he said, to tell me about the fourth pillar, appearances, that is the fact that everyone who lived and worked there pretended, at the moment he himself was pretending he had no time, if truth be told he had all the time in the world, he said he was expecting a phone call when in fact all he wanted to do was take a nap in his chair, everyone there, he said, pretended, pretended they were good teachers, pretended they were interested pupils. But if everyone pretended all the time then in fact there was no difference between pretence and reality, but that was a tricky philosophical question he would discuss with me another time and if I had no more questions I should pretend I had understood what he had told me and turn up punctually on 15 September with the other four candidates, there, in his office, to take the oath to the State as a civil servant. Then he shook me by the hand, sat down and ignored me. I went out past the secretaries, who gave me friendly nods, almost pitying, it seemed, for the door had been open all the time and they had had no choice but to listen to everything. I went out into the corridor and inhaled, for the first time, the mixture of wood and linoleum, cold concrete, paint, herbal secretions and a little bit of sweat. I walked slowly along the corridor, down the stairs, past the vending

machine, out through the glass door, there was the smoker's corner, close to the silver-grey rubbish bins. Outside the *Spring Dew* were tables and sunshades, with the dust and dirt of the street collecting under them. The waiter, white apron, grey hair, stubble, crooked teeth, tall, placed a dish of roast lamb before the diners at the table I was just passing and said, 'The silence of the lambs.'

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