

István Rudas

Die Sache mit dem Fasan



The Pheasant Thing

17 purrs of my life ...

München: Pöhlchen

The thing with the pheasant - english

The thing with the pheasant - english

by István Rudas

[Off to America](#)
[Alsdann](#)
[The Escape](#)
[My friend Patroklos](#)
[Corsica](#)
[The Boxing Matura](#)
[Breton cliffs](#)
[Adventures in the Red Sea](#)
[A year like any other](#)
[Chief Tecumseh](#)
[Irish fragments](#)
[De Administrationibus](#)
[Merry Christmas](#)
[Sweating Things](#)
[Night Ride](#)
[Diamond Fever](#)
[The thing with the pheasant](#)
[Afterword](#)

Off to America!

At the beginning of the 1950s — I was about 4 or 5 years old — the part of Budapest where my family lived was a small, innocent village; perhaps comparable to today's 19th district of Vienna, where detached houses with large gardens and lots of greenery dominated the scene. For us children, it was a paradise where we could play cops and robbers, Indians and cowboys, or Russki and partisan to our heart's content. If only the great steely man (Vissawjoronowitsch Dschugashvili, alias Stalin) had known that! But he was sitting there, in the Kremlin, smoking his horrible makhorkas and panting laboriously towards his last year...

To my annoyance, my peers at that time were all female and useless - fortunately, this would change later, but maybe another time... In any case, I had no choice but to join the 2-4 years older companions of my older brother János (1945 - 1977). Perhaps I should briefly introduce the gang.

János, about 8, black-haired and strong as a bear. Later, he was not wrongly called "the Russian tank". Then there was Árpád, the same age as him, the son of the judge who lived next door, who traveled abroad several times a year to attend conferences - which was not the norm in Hungary at the time - and brought us children cowboy hats, chicklets (chewing gum) and comic strips. He was by far the most beloved old man in our neighborhood. Árpád now lives as a lawyer in the USA. Zoltán was the serious, taciturn senior of our gang and often looked over at the girls next door while biting his fingernails; today he is also a lawyer and a grandfather several times over, which I probably don't know. Injustice - to nail biting. The brothers András and Gábor were cousins, sons of a daring war hero and well on their way to becoming equally daring heroes. They also live in the USA today, have children, wives and other achievements; one, as expected, as a fire chief, the other as a sports teacher, etc. Tracing all of these life stories would provide material for another book.

Well, and then there was little István, me, the later master spy of our gang. Back then, still a blond-haired angel and quite capable of asserting myself in real politics with a baby-like blink of the eye. At first it was of course difficult to keep up with the big boys and to make yourself indispensable. But gradually the gang realized that a little angel face like that can sometimes be useful. They were benevolent and gracious and let me take part in everything - or almost everything - even though this school was very hard; the little angel sometimes had to make a real effort to keep up. As expected, however, this made the little angel even tougher and more resilient.

Well, the thing about Stalin wasn't just a random chat. We didn't just mind our own business, no, we sometimes hung around the adults, trying to get to the bottom of the things that preoccupied them so much (or that they kept as secret as possible - but here too self-censorship takes effect). And the growing pressure from the East, the plague of the Man of Steel that was trying to devour Hungary, perhaps even the whole of Europe, was at the centre of their debates — they were bourgeois, Catholic and western-oriented.

Of course, I don't know who came up with the idea; all I can say for sure is that it wasn't me, honestly! Whatever the case, we played “emigrating” or “running away” more and more often - to America, of course. We had no idea about the reality, but the fact that Árpád's father brought the best chewing gum and comic books and, of course, the coolest cowboy hats with him was an unbeatable argument for America. Everyone there walked around cool in those hats, chewed chicklets and read comics. So we walked around looking cool in the cowboy hats made of papier-maché chewing chicklets until they turned into a crunchy, grey mass and reading comics where you also chewed chicklets, walked around cool in cowboy hats and so on. Wham, Bang and Zoing entered my vocabulary as “ho mee dareis anthropos”, “jus primae noctis” or “a digital error has occurred and your computer has to be shut down immediately; Cancel (C) or Continue (C)?”

Perhaps I could tell you about two things that also entered my vocabulary at that time: “Atlantic” and “Operencia”, which needs a little explanation. It left a lasting impression on me, a little idiot, when my

father once expressed the opinion that the Russian War Machine of Steel, once set in motion, would not stop in Hungary but would roll straight through to the Atlantic. Since I knew that rollers rolled downhill but never uphill, it was clear to me that this ominous Atlantic must lie far below the horizon. And the children's song "Túl az Operencián ..." (Behind the Upper Enns, behind the great sea...) was sometimes whistled by the adults, for example when they wanted to debate about emigrating and signaled to the others that they would meet in the back room. Little István was sure that the Operencia must be a huge sea that an emigrant would have to overcome with great effort. Of course, the etymologists among you immediately recognized that the Operencia is nothing other than the Upper Enns and "the sea" is Lake Neusiedl... I had only a vague idea of something, Atlantic or Operencia or America. Because of the cowboy hats and stuff.

I was the last to find out, of course. To be more precise, it was only thanks to my extremely suspicious attention that I was not simply left behind, left behind in backward Hungary, which had been given over to the Steel Man. The big guys behaved almost naturally, but only almost. At some point I noticed that cult objects like 'Árpád's ultimate pocket knife made in the USA were no longer in their place one day. Then Andy's leather pilot's jacket, which his father had worn in the war, disappeared. When János gave me his comics one afternoon, put his fatherly hand on my shoulder and murmured in a husky voice that I had to be very brave and look after our sisters, that's when the penny dropped.

Of course I didn't let it show, but something was up. The older ones were very mysterious, and I didn't understand what they were actually up to - I was only 5 or so - and I wasn't very good at asking questions. So I kept watching and kept quiet. My victim was Gábor, best friend and only a little older than me. I stuck to his heels and didn't let up. Wherever he went, I was his shadow. The grown-ups didn't notice anything, but he was starting to get a bit worried that the little one - we're talking about me! - had clung to him like a limpet.

Then, one afternoon, he got restless. He tried to lose me; me, the budding future master spy! I gave him a few seconds' head start and

stuck to his heels. Gábor climbed over the small wall of the neighboring property, crawled through a hedge to the next one and secretly slipped through the last neighbor's cellar. Over there, on the still vacant building plot, he breathed a sigh of relief, but was almost frightened to death when I sneezed in the dark, musty corridor just a few meters behind him. His desperate look and the curses he sent to heaven remain a permanent memory for me.

Andy, Árpád and János then appeared on the other side of the building site. Zoli had obviously been sitting on a silently rusting construction machine for a long time and was looking at us seriously. The older ones stopped and discussed things. I stood next to Gábor and waited. If they were going to do something adventurous, they wouldn't do it without me: I wanted to go with them! (Apparently, my family says today, all that remained from that time was the stubbornness of the stubborn angel; — could that be true?).

Catch the neighbor's cat and lock it in the basement. Steal the caretaker's moped and drive around until he ran after us, screaming and cursing. Using the large dressing mirror from my parents' bedroom to direct sunlight onto the drivers and blind them, until one of them stopped and angrily smashed the mirror, which required considerable argumentative acrobatics. That was more or less what I expected. But nothing came close to what the grown-ups now revealed to me - rather hesitantly and reluctantly.

"We're emigrating," said Zoli, and Árpád added, as if I were slow on the uptake: "...we're running away!"

"We're going to America," said Andy and János, as if from one mouth.

"But you're too small," said Gábor, my best friend, "unfortunately we can't take such small children with us!" A friendship that had lasted for years could break up in a split second, especially because I now really and truly began to cry. No, not from sadness, but from anger. What does "small" mean here?!

Gábor slowly straightened up again, held his aching stomach and only with difficulty suppressed the tears, because my then still childish fist already had some of the power it would later have. “Well, if he really wants to...” he began, panting, and János, my brother, was the first to give in. “Well, perhaps one could...” he began, but Andy kicked him in the shin bone. Zoli got up from his rusty bowl and strolled away. As always in such situations, as a great statesman and world leader, he had nothing to do with crybabies or wimps; he was destined for greater things.

János immediately took the initiative. “Okay, you can come with me, little brother!” he said, taking my hand. As we passed Gábor, my former best friend, I muttered “Phew, you pig-cheek!” and shook my curls in triumph. I had beaten him, by Zeus!

We discreetly followed Zoli, the eldest, who was the only one who knew how to get from a Budapest garden settlement to America. We didn’t go down the road, of course, where do you think we would go! We naturally crept through the district’s gardens and fields, using tried and tested pirate and robber secret routes. As we crept through Grandpa’s big garden, I tugged on János’ shirt to ask if we shouldn’t go up to Grandma’s instead, as she usually had hot cocoa and cake or cookies. America would probably be interesting too, but Grandma’s cookies were definitely worth stepping back from this adventure. Although I had whispered almost inaudibly, Zoli grumbled in annoyance that they - the grown-ups - had sworn a great, sacred oath to go together and win or go down together. And if anyone - whoever it was, I didn’t know of course - should we go up to Grandma’s instead? so if they caught us, we would be silent like the grave.

I nodded, intimidated, and János reaffirmed the Great Sacred Oath on my behalf, until we were “silent like the grave.” Then we crept on. No one noticed that “pirates” or “robbers” or “cowboys” were creeping through the gardens - we did it almost every day. So we overcame all the hurdles, walked inconspicuously and quietly through the gardens and then came to more populated areas.

Zoli walked purposefully ahead, and soon we crossed the high walls of the hospital complex, which until then had been a natural

barrier at the end of the world. More skillfully than the grown-ups had imagined, I used their ladder and arrived in amazement behind the edge of the world. Zoli walked briskly ahead, we crossed a few streets, then we stood in front of the Budapest South Railway Station, which you may know as Déli Pu (déli pályaudvar). We dawdled around for quite a while until Zoli and Andi, who had gone ahead as scouts, waved. Then we crossed the main street and, with our hearts pounding, entered the beautiful old train station, whose metal design bears the signature of Gustave Eiffel.

For the younger generation, I should perhaps add a little period colour, as things are done differently today. Nowadays, we go to the station, get into the right carriage and just leave. We either have the ticket saved on our mobile phone via SMS or - a little more old-fashioned - as a computer printout. Those in a hurry just get on and then pay the conductor, with a credit card, of course. Back then, things were a little slower. Tickets were produced by specially made printing machines that were only available at larger stations: the ticket clerk took a small piece of light brown cardboard, about the size of a matchbox, out of the drawer (and if you don't know what a matchbox is, just go to the tobacco museum next Sunday instead of sitting in front of the screen, OK?). Then the ticket clerk looked for the right one on a large board on the wall, where the metal printing plate negatives were stuck in small slots in alphabetical order, and put it together with the cardboard into a slot in the machine. A short, nervous check, a push on a spring mechanism, and the metal plate and cardboard were shot through the machine, coming out again on a small dispensing plate at the bottom. The metal plate with the negative print was replaced and the passenger received the printed ticket if he had the money ready.

I would have liked to stand there for hours and watch this marvel of Western engineering, but the big guys moved on. Firstly, we had no money, and secondly, part of running away is traveling without a ticket, i.e. without a ticket. Of course. In any case, I whispered to János as we walked on, one day I would become a ticket clerk, and this great ticket machine would be mine, my word of honor forever!

Of course, you, fragrant reader, nail-biting reader, have probably arrived at the station late at some point, have also raced through the hall, panting, out onto the platform and jumped onto the train, possibly already moving, with the last of your strength. Just as this is no longer possible today with the remote-controlled, automatically closing pneumatic doors, you wouldn't have even been able to get through the hall at that time.

There are police officers there. In case of doubt, "real" ones, in case of luck, station police officers. Lucky because in later years I often used their simple self-importance to my advantage. But back then, when we kids sneaked through the Budapest South Station, we became a case of doubt.

They were real ones.

Two.

Zoli, Árpád and Andy got past without any problem, they were obviously hurrying after "their parents". János, Gábor and I were undoubtedly unlucky, just unlucky. The police officers' job was to make sure that no one got into the car, no rabble cheated their way onto the train without a ticket or even dragged sheep or goats along - although it is seriously questionable who keeps sheep or goats in a cosmopolitan city like Budapest, but come on, the Balkans were not far away, as we know they start just south of Budapest.

One of the policemen stared through the asphalt of the platform with x-ray eyes and tried to counteract the rotation of the earth by gently swinging his body, still shaken by yesterday's drinking binge, the other looked irritably to the left and grumpily to the right and then irritably to the left again. Irritably, of course, because three kids, barely older than eight, came and wanted to get to the trains. But that's not possible; not as long as I have to stand guard here, damn it!

As often happens in life, several things happened in parallel. Firstly, the locomotive began to steam and stamp like a beast, and the carriages began to move with infinite slowness. Zoli, Árpád and

Andy were already standing on the running board and whispering excitedly to each other because the watchful policeman was holding us and trying to question us. Then they jumped off again and came closer. János and Gábor took a desperate lunge forward and passed the policeman. My lunge came a blink of an eye too late and then 50 percent too short.

He had me grabbed around my neck, the policeman!

The train slowly drove out of the station. On the completely empty platform, two officers acting on official business and six kids who had been caught. The venomous looks from my gang members would have surely killed me immediately if I hadn't had the awareness of childlike innocence. And I had made such a big lunge!

A little later we entered the guard room. While the bad boys sat contritely on the poor sinner's bench, I was soon sitting on a secretary's lap and munching on sweets. - Did I mention the thing about the blond-haired angel?

Change of scene.

Mother runs from house to house in a panic, looking for us. Soon the other mothers join in; both in terms of panic, searching and running. Even today I can read the full medical findings from my mother's report, with "imminent circulatory collapse" being the least of it. After a time that is difficult to define, the desperate women looked at each other and decided to call their respective fathers. All in all, an improvised but no less effective logistics emerged here, which I was later able to develop in similar panic situations - when my children went missing. I believe that even the news of the legendary Puskás's goal in the World Cup was not spread any faster in all the guard rooms in Budapest than the news of the disappearance of a whole handful of magnificent heirs. With dirty white cowboy hats.

Of course, the news also reached "our" guard room. The police questioned us one by one again, but we just shook our heads silently.

The great holy oath, you know, the one about “silence until the grave” and so on.

János, who in the eyes of the law enforcement officers looked most like the gang leader, had to sit down at the desk of the Grand Mufti and answer questions. He didn’t answer for a long time, only when the Almighty turned red as if he were having a heart attack and began to roar uncontrollably did he mutter that his name was Lacika (Lacika is the diminutive form of Laci, Ladislaus. A fairly common first name at the time and perhaps comparable to the American John or Jim).

Of course the questioner shouted that he — János — must be called Rudas, but János shook his head stubbornly and claimed his name was Lacika. And he didn’t say anything else.

After a while, even the meanest cop gives up, it seems to me, because exhausted, he wiped the sweat from his brow and called my mother to say that the children, so presumably, madam, probably only, were on his territory and that she should please come by for identification purposes. Of course, she called father and he hurried across half the city to come here too.

The secretary shoved another cookie into my mouth and casually asked what her sweet little angel’s name was.

“Pityuka,” I said, munching and giving her my most trusting look - because nobody actually called me Pityuka, a ridiculous diminutive of the diminutive, only for real tiny people. Not for budding spies. Now my big buddies could see that I could also give a false name and keep quiet until the grave. Even if my tongue had been ripped out, I would still have said my name was Pipfuka.

“Yes, fine, and what are your parents’ names?” she asked, because secretaries are always smarter than the boss.

“Mom and Dad,” I said truthfully, because I had swallowed the biscuit and was glancing at her stash again. Of course I had had to

learn my own name, address and phone number by heart in case I got lost. But I hadn't gotten lost, had I?

"But they must have other names too, right?" she cooed and lured with another biscuit. I'm incredibly embarrassed now, but I actually didn't know it back then.

"Anyuka and Apuka," I said, hoping you'll recognize my little Mommy and Daddy. The good woman waved another cookie around and asked where they lived. I was silent and looked at the bait. When I finally got it, I said correctly that we lived "at home." All the children live at home, I added in a schoolmasterly manner, except for Ilona, who lives with her grandmother because her parents are having a fight.

"And don't you have any other name than Pityuka?" she asked, making a last, desperate attempt. Triumphant, I took her last cookie, then said with my mouth full, blushing: "Yes: my little angel!"

What can I say, time was running out to finish off her other supplies, because now mother and the neighbor stormed in, hugged me, crying heartbreakingly, and turned to János. He looked grim and stubbornly straight ahead.

"But Jánoska, don't you know me?" she asked palely and looked around in despair, as any mother would look in despair whose son had either become amnesiac or stupid. The policeman looked very grim again, then finally János admitted that his name was Lacika and that he did not know this woman. Not at all. Then János looked stubbornly at the window frame again and probably thought of the 150 warriors of Chief Sitting Bull, who had bravely accompanied the self-chosen protector of our band to the death.

Mother's crying did not help. The people who wanted to emigrate had sworn to silence and kept their oath. The youngest had not taken an oath sworn, but tried to lie about the time with childish jokes. The neighbor tried to speak to Árpád, after all he was her son, but he looked right through her and shook his head vigorously in denial when she cheekily claimed to be his mother.

Even when father came, the guys couldn't open their jaws. They sat there mute and stubborn and remained silent. My father not only had a clever head, he also knew how to use it and had quickly brought a folder full of family photos from home. It then became almost really embarrassing when one or the other policeman reached into his jacket pocket and showed pictures of his wife, children and dog - a cultural reflex when someone shows his photos.

So everything ended in pure joy and happiness. Or maybe not entirely, because the faithful János received a terrible thunder slap and had to go to bed without dinner, and it happened like this:

We were all already standing in front of the door to the guard room when my father turned around again and sternly ordered János to say his name immediately. János turned around, looked seriously at the group of uniformed men and said:

“Lacika!”

Occasionally I allow myself a bit of nostalgia, romance and emotion. This is also the case with this text, which at first glance does not have much in common with the other texts.

And yet. It was the first consciously staged text that I wrote with the intention of publishing it one day. Since then, of course, I have published it everywhere I could. Sometimes to the despair of my readers, who wondered, pondering, what is this all about?! — The worst thing was of course the readers of “Euro Agrar”, who found my writing surrounded by foot and mouth disease. The editors, however, followed my argument that the 30th anniversary of the great artist's death was approaching.

Looking back after around 15 years, I still recognize some elements that are so typical of my way of writing: a bit of eroticism, but only in tiny hints. A crumpled and yet lovable hero. An event that is of course only an event from a subjective point of view. An arbitrary choice of name, little wordplay and a true core story,

wrapped in a sparse packaging. A touch of quirkiness. And in between, a little humor flashes up.

Not too noticeable, but still.

I did have a hard time coming up with an argument, however, when a somewhat humorous reader asked me who the “Hollinger” actually was and who also harshly criticized the original subtitle “Obituary for K.F.” - good advice was needed, but too expensive. I couldn’t really translate the text as “When I met K.F. the only time in my life” - yes, I only met him that one time and was deeply affected when he died a few months later. Perhaps that is closest to the truth: my only dialogue with the master still seems worth reporting to me today.

So then!

Meeting with Karl Farkas (* 28. 10. 1893 Vienna, ▪ 16. 5. 1971)

“You’re a fool, Hollinger,” growls my graying German professor, and his mixture of standard German and dialect rises to a worrying 63:36, “Karl Farkas has been dead for quite some time, and a possible “The anniversary of his death is nowhere in sight!”

The place where first-class Italian ice cream is served today used to be the LUGECK, an elegant and inexpensive restaurant that had already seen its best days. I dined there one evening with my bride and future parents-in-law, who had rushed to Vienna from the far-off provincial capital in their skirts to see how everything was going after the teacher with whom my bride Angelika, who was a little in love with her and had traveled to join her in her final year of school because she had been transferred to Vienna as a punishment for loving young girls, which was completely impossible in a provincial capital at the time, initially lived, worriedly informed the parents that she had to evict their daughter because she had let a man stay with her overnight and she, in turn, felt compelled to do so, citing the pimping law, so that the poor child now lived completely unprotected with this strange man who had followed the daughter like a lovesick rooster and who was also a casual worker from the provinces with no long-term prospects.

“Let’s get down to business, Hollinger, let’s get down to business!” grumbles my graying German professor in pure High German, “and no such daring sentence constructions, please!” He shakes his head wearily: “13 commas, 2 exclamation marks, seven points!”

The LUGECK was the perfect way to end this cold, wet November weekend, when everything was in order, even though we were the only guests in the vaulted cellar and the slow service by the snide waiter could only convey the sophisticated flair of the capital to a limited extent. But the young couple with their parents’ blessing needed neither cheerful service nor cheerfully chatting company,

they were enough for themselves. The only other guest, who arrived later, sat down at the farthest table and immediately began to mutely devour the liver dumpling soup that had been served without a word or greeting, to spoon in.

We exchanged glances with each other, pointing our eyebrows, and whispered: “Isn’t that, well, what’s his name again, Karl Farkas?” “No, no, yes, believe me, I recognize him!” Again and again, furtive glances darted to the master while we ate our meal and talked quietly, until after dessert, the father-in-law hesitated and blurted out, “It would be great to have an autograph from HIM!” The effect of his wish on the casual worker with no long-term prospects was electrifying. “I’ll do it!” “No, I just said it,” the father-in-law interrupted half-heartedly, in vain. I’m already halfway out of the chair, my mother-in-law hisses after me: “You can’t do that!”, which anyone who knows Alemannic can easily translate as “You can’t do that!” But I’m already on my way, crossing the hall with weak knees and a queasy stomach. Hundreds of tables and chairs that I hadn’t noticed before and that are blocking my way fill the vastness of the hall, and I’m in the middle of them, in an agile slalom towards the master.

He looks at me stonily when I finally stood in front of him. I hear someone who obviously has either throat cancer or a breaking voice ask: “Could I have an autograph for my future father-in-law, please, Mr. Farkas?” He looks at me for a long time, silent and expressionless. The gears in my head, paralyzed with fear, slowly start grinding back into motion. I follow his gaze and realize after ages that I haven’t brought anything to write with. “One moment, please, Mr. Farkas!” Hectic slalom back to our table, “Do you have anything to write with?” and a look around for help. The father-in-law rummages in his pockets, an unwritten postcard has to do. Slalom back, pushing the chairs aside, halfway I turn around, “and something to write with!” and then armed with a ballpoint pen, I go back to Mr Farkas. I will remember the following dialogue for the rest of my life:

“For?”

His scrutinizing look is more reminiscent of a hawk than a wolf. Farkas actually means wolf in Hungarian.

“For Hans.”

The master turns the postcard over and looks expressionlessly at the Lipizzaner, the Giant Ferris wheel and the Opera House. The ballpoint pen scratches deeply as he scribbles the sweeping, illegible text. I assume, “For Hans, K.F.” I am fascinated to see that when he writes he only looks at his huge nose and not at what he is writing.

“Where from?”

“Bregenz, Mr. Farkas.”

“Have you been here long?”

“Three months.”

Pause. He turns the postcard over again and looks from the town hall to the Upper Belvedere and Castle Schönbrunn.

“Do you like it?”

Embarrassed, I shift from one foot to the other. “It was the last one we had, Mr. Farkas, and the one with Empress Elisabeth...”

“Do you like it in Vienna?” he interrupts me.

“Yes, very good, Mr. Farkas.” I am perplexed, that was the first complete German sentence. Long silence.

“Simpel?”

I am hurt and look at him defiantly; I may be from the country and I am not a doctor yet, but I must not let myself be insulted, not even by Mr. Farkas.

“Have you been at Simpl yet?” he repeats his question somewhat impatiently.

I search feverishly through my brain, desperately searching for the keyword for “Simpl”. What the heck does he mean? Oh yes, there is something: “...a recording from the SIMPL cabaret. With Karl Farkas and Ernst Waldbrunn.”

“Unfortunately not, Mr Farkas, the in-laws were only there for the weekend.” Icy silence. Long silence. From one foot to the other. “My bride and I, we can’t afford to go out,” the casual worker with no long-term prospects mumbles embarrassedly and stares fixedly at the tablecloth. Pause, a very long pause, I wait.

“Then.”

I think feverishly about what that could mean. I look questioningly for a long time, while the master turns back to his liver dumpling soup without any emotion and continues to slurp it, completely ignoring me.

Then. Oh, I see. He can go now.

“Goodbye, and thank you very much, Mr. Farkas.”

He doesn’t even look up when I turn around and hastily return to our table. “What did he say, what did he say?” my family ask in confusion. I tremble with relief, the wet shirt sticks coldly to my back. “Nothing,” I say, “he just asked how we liked Vienna and whether we had ever been to SIMPL.” My bride beams at me, her hero.

“You’re an idiot, Hollinger,” growls my graying German teacher grimly, and the ratio in his mixture of standard German and dialect shifts to a mild 61:38, “since the high school graduation thirty years ago, you don’t even have to know me or even say hello, and you come to me with your writing so that I can correct it!” He shakes his head and mutters something about the decline of the West. “An obituary for Karl Farkas, what a thing! Hollinger! - Well, then give me the piece of paper!”

My children have repeatedly urged me to tell the great story of our escape (from Hungary, 1956) again. Reading aloud was never easy for me, they already knew “And Again No Pig Looks” or “The Language Craft Book” by heart, not to mention “At Night All Ravens Are Colorful”; so I was increasingly tempted to tell stories (or rather, little tales) from my life. And the escape had to be told again and again, as a matter of honor! Of course, it happened as it had to. Instead of falling asleep, the child sits up in his bed indignantly and complains that the last time the “...” was completely, completely different! And why are there no more evil policemen there?! The part about the rocket is also missing...

The caught father Ignorance turns red in the ears, looks for words, excuses and waves its arms around. Child, you don't understand yet, but we older people are sometimes forgetful. OK, I'll tell you about the “...” again, try to remember the details [what in the devil's name did I tell you last time?!], the child nods and continues to suck its thumb obediently, listens carefully and shakes its head vigorously when the part about the police inspector comes up in the wrong place again. The little lips move silently and repeat the text, the little eyes are about to close, but the mistrust of the father's storytelling keeps the poor little one awake...

The mother carefully sticks her head in the door and grumbles that the child will definitely not fall asleep...

But you all know that.

A few years ago (1996, on the 40th anniversary) I decided to write down the story of the escape once and for all and give it to my children for Christmas. Perhaps (and I say perhaps because I am somewhat forgetful - see above) perhaps I was already fed up with all this stupid Christmas present shopping, perhaps I was already repelled by the junk and trinkets in the shopping street and was looking for something that was mine and could perhaps bring joy to my children.

But perhaps it was also the case that my children once talked about the “father's” stories and realized that one or two details

didn't quite match (I deliberately say: not quite). No two children are the same, so you have to adapt your inventions, would be my excuse if I needed one. Anyway, one day the children confronted me with the "not quite" matching details. (Now comes the thing with the red ears again ...).

Be that as it may: I sat down in front of the PC and thought. Could I start as trivially as "One day I decided to escape..."? No, and again no. I don't write like that. Rather, I had to have the story (and the embarrassing little differences) told by several people, so I made *THE ESCAPE* a *RASHOMON* rip-off. Yes, of course, the people involved each told a piece of their subjective truth, deliberately only one piece, and the reader/child has to put the pieces together themselves.

I liked the idea, so I let Aunt Elli (who is called Elisabeth and is called Elly by my father) tell the whole story - I deliberately didn't portray Elli as hysterical as my father may have experienced her, but that's just how she was for me. Then I let one or two of the soldiers we came into contact with have their say - of course everything here is pure invention, but based on what I could remember. What must have been going through the mind of such a guy when he was confronted with a refugee group of 4 adults and 8 children?

Since I was already writing so well, I naturally also wrote a fictitious correspondence between the Hungarian and Russian commanders. I ask you, why not?!

Our behavior towards and our assessment of the Russian soldier, who presumably came from Mongolia, seemed arrogant and presumptuous to me in retrospect. So I quickly wrote a few lines: the Mongolian writes about us and asks himself why we classify him as a backwoodsman: "... or do you monkeys think I can't tell a violin case from a monstrosity?!"

Uncle Ákos was also allowed to "write along", he is identical to the Feri whose son Feri was father's best friend at the time and who fled with us. The reason I named him Ákos is probably because I think Feri is a horrible Teutonization and I liked the rather rare and

old name Ákos (at the time). - Then I had my sister Juli tell the last part (the confusion of the bottles); I just liked letting her spit a little against the adult world - that was also true at the time.

One small difficulty could not always be overcome permanently: the linguistic peculiarity in Hungarian of using first names in different “pet forms”. So when talking about Bandi and If Endre is mentioned, then it is the same one (as you now know), so the two cannot play tennis together. - Some of these names are already very old, often the origin and connection can no longer be clarified (why István can become Pityu, for example). - Let me give you a few examples:

Andreas = Bandi = Endre
Istvan = Pista = Pityu
Maria = Mancsi = Mátyika

It is easier to use forms that are known almost everywhere:

Elisabeth = Elli = Elly
Juli = Juliska, etc.

I had named my work *THE BLUE RIBBON* with reference to the last chapter, printed it out four times with different forewords and afterwords for my children and bound it in cardboard by hand. (Nota bene, printing the boxes with the PC was an adventure in itself and started a long-term friendship with an American named Bill Gates, that's his name, I think). - The thin booklet got lost among the other presents lying under the Christmas tree; a few days passed before the children read it. I waited impatiently to see if they liked it (because every author is really keen to know if the reader liked it), and whether they would notice that something was “not quite right” again? But they were probably too grown-up and sensitive; not a peep, not a complaint. - My siblings read it later too, laughed heartily and thought I had become a real storyteller. No, you can't say that there is anything untrue about it, but it is all very well dressed up, isn't it?

My father sat down and wrote his own version.

Was I mistaken, or did he mutter something about “smug - unse-rious” to himself before he started writing? - Whatever the case, ul-timately, in RUSHOMON the wise man can have the last word, and the viewer can only understand the whole thing after everyone has told their truth (and nothing but the pure truth).

In addition to the many true parts, there must also be something like a whole truth.

PS: an early and very tearful version of the FLUCHT won first prize in the Austrian school competition in 1967 and was submitted by the Salzburg Lions Club to the headquarters in New York for the Lions Club’s 50th anniversary.

The Escape

Chapter 1

(The second night, told by Aunt Elisabeth)

Not that I'm a particularly fearful person. But when I think about it now, my knees shake and I know that it's not just something to smile about, but also something to be afraid of. Anyway, it's been forty years now and I'll try to tell the story in order. So, we arrived in Austria on December 8, 1956, and the first place we went to was Deutschkreutz in Burgenland. We were caught by the border guards in the morning of December 7th, which means that we left Budapest on the morning of December 6th. We are my husband Feri, our three children aged 8 and 5, our baby who is a few months old, and I, Aunt Erzsi, or Elisabeth in German. And there was Feri's work colleague Endre (also called Bandi), his wife Maria and their 5 children János, Juli, István, Johanna and Tomi, who is almost one and a half years old.

After we discussed with Endre on December 5th what his threat of arrest on December 4th was all about, we came to the decision: now or never. Feri was also in danger, and we women were not only afraid for her, but above all for the future of our children. We prepared everything, trained the older children to march in column, to obey the men's commands, "jump— Forward - cover!" is something I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Of course we told the children a big story: that we were going to Aunt Anni's in Sopron, the former Austrian town of Ömlinghausen, because she was going to slaughter a pig again and we would finally get meat, real meat. And we disguised the military preparations by telling them about the current situation and the dangers lurking along the route. The children were very docile; the girls were a bit silly at first, but they were soon fueled by the ambition to do the same as the boys.

The men took on the task of assembling the documents, money and other important family items into manageable pieces of luggage. We women had to look after the older children and their equipment first, but then ourselves and the babies. Oh, I don't even want to list what this meant in detail - in any case, equipping a Himalayan expedition was child's play in comparison! But the men did not have the better lot, because while they were packing what little they had, they had much more time than we women to be afraid of the undertaking and its consequences and to think over and over again about the correctness of the decision...

Even today, we know; I was discussing with Feri and Endre how much bribes we would have with us in small, handy bundles (and each one was "really, our very last money!"). Feri had the brilliant idea of taking a bottle of schnapps with us so that we could immediately celebrate our successful escape. He would have preferred to take cognac or something else fine, but in these difficult times nothing of the sort could be found; it was already a hard job to get hold of this cheap booze. I also took another bottle of schnapps with me, just in case we ran out of bribes and we might have to appease a border guard with a good tipple. In order for this to be different from the To distinguish the bottle of baby tea from the bottle, I took a blue ribbon and tied it around the neck of the bottle: Juli, the overzealous one, kept fiddling with it and complaining that the little girl didn't look pretty enough, but I shooed her away because I wasn't in the mood for games at the moment...

The next morning we set off, the train ride took an eternity; the train kept stopping, Revolutionary Guards, regulars and Red Army soldiers took turns checking passengers, luggage and presumptive loot. I became slightly hysterical every time a soldier's paw stroked my baby; I breathed a sigh of relief when the guy disappeared again, and I was almost indifferent when some cheeky hand brushed against my body as if by chance - what the heck, the main thing was that these scoundrels left my children alone.

We arrived in Sopron, prepared everything and went to bed early. The guides, friends of Endre, woke us up long before sunrise and we drove to the border in an ancient van. There our guides waited with

us until dawn, described the route again and scurried back into the undergrowth. We “12 apostles” marched along the tracks to the point where they split to the south and west; here, according to the program, we had to “get lost” and follow the tracks to the west. While the two men were trying to agree on the cardinal points (in the fog, without sun and compass, this was certainly not easy), we saw a Hungarian border guard coming towards us.

We were frightened at first, but he looked peaceful, and when he reached us, he really just wanted to get rid of his loneliness and chat with us, smoke a cigarette and find out what the children’s names were, etc. All in all, it was a pretty peaceful situation, and when he noticed the restlessness among us adults, he said: “Yeah, yeah, I know! Well, I didn’t see you, I’m going to walk a little further now, and now make sure that you don’t get lost.” You can move on!” he grumbled kindly and turned to leave.

If the higher being that some of you worship had intended to create the borders for escape purposes, he would probably have had warm waiting rooms there, well-signposted paths “This way to Austria!” and “To freedom, please keep left”, squeaking escalators and bored officials.

But His Highness was known to be in the Holy Land at the time to follow the Suez Crisis live from a bank of clouds, so we had to deal with our fate alone. Yes, of course I still believed in guardian angels at the time, but when we arrived at the rail junction they just flapped their wings briefly and whispered almost inaudibly “we’ll fly ahead” - and then we were really alone.

Not all alone after all. The friendly border guard’s foot faltered. A small group of Red Army soldiers, looking cold and hungry, came towards us. Our border guard ripped his gun from his shoulder as he turned around and shouted at us: “Stop! Stojeto! Rabble! Stop immediately!” and whispered through clenched teeth: “I’m sorry, guys, but I know the brothers over there and you can’t mess with them. Understand me, but I have to think about myself too, they won’t do anything to you, think of a good excuse and they’ll send you home again...”

The Russians took us with them and we drove to the commandant's office in an open truck. There we had to go from interrogation to interrogation all day, but we had already practiced that beforehand, and all they heard from us was the stubbornly repeated story of the Sunday excursion and the loss of our way. At some point, however, even a commander had to finish work, and he threw us out in a bad mood, threatening that if he caught us again, then...; and we scurried as fast as our feet would carry us, relieved, back to Aunt Anni's house and licked our wounds.

Our guides, father and son, knew their area very well. They pored over the general staff maps with Feri and Endre for hours, then they found a route and the men memorized it. We set off late at night, the guides took us to the death strip, looked for the signs for us and then whispered to our men how to proceed. Then they hugged us again, firmly refused any payment and disappeared silently into the pitch black night.

Bandi (as Endre was sometimes called) went first, his sleeping youngest son rested on his shoulders, in his hand he held a metal strip with which he wanted to find the mines, and we all followed in complete silence. The older children had now realized what time it was, so they were very focused and calm. Every few hundred meters we had to make a detour when Bandi found or even suspected another mine. He was very reliable and an ace in these technical things. Several times we had to throw ourselves flat on the cold, wet ground because flares went off and there was wild gunfire all around us. Once I was lying next to Bandi and saw his sweaty bald head reflected in the light of the flares. I whispered to him that he could certainly be seen a hundred miles away, and he pulled his little son, who was sleeping peacefully, over his head. Another time I cried out because I ended up lying on a dead body when I threw myself down to say "Take cover!" I cried and couldn't be calmed down for minutes.

Well, we got closer and closer to the barbed wire entanglement and Bandi and Feri started working on it. Feri had brought his thick chemist's gloves for this purpose, Bandi had brought some metal wires, which he skillfully threw at the fence, which then sprayed evil blue sparks and hissed like a dog. Then they snapped the wires and

tore a small hole in the electrified fence, Bandi attached some insulators, took off the glove and - after a moment's hesitation - grabbed the fence with his bare hand. He turned around grinning and said: "All right! Just stay inside the hole, nothing will happen to you!" and so we crawled to Austria with our heads bowed.

That is, I thought it was already Austria. But we had hardly got across when a cigarette glowed not ten paces away from us, and a hoarse, muffled male voice said: "Well, you did well!" Feri, the well-bred city boy, who had not started his escape without a tie and carefully ironed trousers, thanked us warmly and said that we were finally over the border. The other man laughed quietly, and as I came closer I saw with rising horror that there were badges and shiny buttons on his coat, and when he stood very close to us we all stared at him: it was an armed Hungarian border guard.

He savored his performance for what seemed like an eternity. But then his wrinkled face twisted into a broad grin, and he said: "Well, I'm not a monster. I don't hurt anyone and I help everyone with this miserable fence if they can't get any further. Maybe you can give me something if you can."

Feri pulled a small bundle of banknotes out of his jacket pocket and began to carefully divide it up. Smiling, the border guard took all the notes from his hand and said: "Godfather, you won't be able to do anything with that in Austria anyway!" I stood very close to this impudent fellow and smelled his sharp breath. I immediately remembered the bottle of liquor and reached into my pocket, found the bottle with the ribbon and handed it to him: "To your health, officer, and God will thank you for letting us go!"

Perhaps this rough fellow was a little embarrassed, because he didn't want to spoil things with God (the higher being that some of you worship), or it was simply the thirst of the eternally thirsty: he thanked him with an incomprehensible murmur and went off.

Only now did I notice how much my knees were shaking; I quickly gave my baby Feri and said: "I have to, I have to; now, otherwise it will happen" and took a few steps away. The child woke up in Feri's

arms and immediately started screaming. I ran back to him as fast as I could and took a bottle of baby tea out of my pocket and gave him something to drink. The little one swallowed and swallowed and spat out the tea in disgust and screamed like mad. We were at a loss, Feri tried helplessly to cover the child's mouth, I hit him and shouted: "You'll suffocate it, you monster!"

Bandi thought the tea might be too cold and tasted it. He immediately spat it all out again and gasped: "For heaven's sake, that's booze!" I froze like ice. The child! I ripped another bottle out of my pocket, tasted it first (yes, it was lukewarm children's tea) and gave it to the still screaming child, who stopped screaming in surprise and then sucked greedily and happily.

We walked another half a mile until we could make out the houses and street lights very clearly, then we sat down, ate a little something and sang our old national anthem. We were moved, not ashamed of our tears, and we looked alternately from the abandoned home to the new home and back.

We were already in the town by now, the Austrian border guards had led us to the school in a friendly manner, where sleeping quarters, hot soup and warm food were ready for the refugees. We had looked after the babies and the older children and were just about to go to bed when Feri and Bandi, who had been whispering quietly to each other until then, suddenly burst into loud laughter. As if they were out of their minds, they hit each other on the shoulder, slapped each other on the thighs and laughed like idiots until tears rolled down their cheeks. They could hardly calm down and Feri stammered, the fit of laughter shaking him between each word: "Imagine the face of the border guard as he takes a deep drink from your bottle and then realizes that you have not given him any water." it's just baby tea..."

My children are now grown up. Peter is an engineer and architect, Paul is a successful dentist, Feri and I have been retired for years. Feri has had a great career as a chemist, he has made various inventions and registered patents worldwide. In doing so, he has fulfilled a childhood dream, because even as a schoolboy he always talked

about wanting to become a famous inventor one day. In one respect he has not improved: even today, at well over eighty, he has to wear an ironed white shirt and a nice tie every day. He will probably keep that up for his whole life, although I can't see well anymore and I find ironing very difficult. Hopefully I won't leave this world before him, because who knows who will iron his shirts?

Chapter 2

(The third night, told by Sergeant Béla)

Well, at least I still have my own boots on. Those damn Russians have taken everything from me, belt, cap and winter coat. The thin uniform jacket is the warmest thing I have on my body. They also wanted to zabralize my wallet, but since there was nothing in it except a picture of my wife and children, they left it to me.

The damp December fog creeps through the concrete walls, the small barred window hatch, and even penetrates the floor. A few cockroaches busily scurrying back and forth are my only cellmates. How good it would be to have a drink now, even if it were just water! My split lower lip is burning, I think not just from the punches, no, it's burning because my insides are burning from top to bottom. I want a drink, just a tiny little drink!

Four of them overpowered me, threw me to the ground and took me to the commandant's office. I interrogated, beat, interrogated and beat again. The commandant questioned me for a long time. He wanted to know exactly who had crossed the border, of course I didn't tell him everything straight away. But then at some point, when I was already lying there half dead from the pain, I told him how these townspeople suddenly appeared before me, with a good dozen women and children. And that I then thought of my own family and let them go.

He wanted to know exactly how many there were, what they looked like, where they came from. I tried my best, although in the dark I probably didn't see much more than this dandy or the quiet

man who was carrying a child on his shoulders. But he suddenly seemed to know exactly what and who he was looking for, and his well-aimed kicks helped me to remember. Yes, there was also a small, delicate woman who had nothing but her brats on her mind.

I didn't remember much of the conversation, perhaps because they told me something about the tracks of the Raab-Eisenstadt railway, about a Sunday excursion during which they had gotten lost and then been caught, and then I just saw his fist flying towards me, accompanied by a wild curse, "Job toi Matj!". The Russki had completely freaked out, his face had turned dark red and the little veins on his forehead were swelling alarmingly. I ducked as he continued to hit me, but the merciless first blow had badly torn my lower lip.

As if through a fog, I can remember that at some point he let go of me and had me dragged into the basement. His henchmen attacked me hard when they brought me out of the commandant's interrogation room, but in the corridor they loosened their grip. their grip and took me down in silence. Downstairs, one of them gave me a cigarette, we smoked in silence at first, then one of them said that the old man had been out of his mind today. It can't be true, buddy, that you've made him so angry that he's so drunk just because you were shooting around drunk. What did he want?

Well, I started cautiously at first, but then quickly and fluently told the whole story about the townspeople. They looked at each other and burst out laughing at the same time: "Those were the Budapesters!" With a pained grin, I asked to be allowed to laugh with them, and they said that these townspeople had been there yesterday, that the Red Patrol had caught them as they were happily marching along the tracks towards Austria, humming a little song. The Red Army soldiers certainly felt sorry for them, but they knew that they themselves would not get anything to eat until they had caught refugees, so they took them to the barracks and then ran straight to the kitchen cop. The old man had interrogated the people, but they were hardened and unbreakable. They admitted nothing, were overwhelmed by their simple-minded Stories and excuses didn't get them away and they didn't get entangled in contradictions. They had to be cleverly well prepared or completely crazy. In the

evening, the old man was furious because he had to send them home, because of the children.

The little black cockroach tries to climb up my boot. I watch its efforts in fascination. I see it climb a little way up, then it starts to slide and then lands on the floor again.

I'm in the same situation. They simply forced me into service, they didn't ask me whether I wanted to be a border guard or not; they pressed a gun into my hand and chased me out into the cold. I haven't seen or heard from my family for weeks.

And then there were these townspeople. I was friendly to them, almost brotherly! Well, I took their money, but what are they supposed to do with it in the West? It's worthless to them there, and I have to help my family somehow later on. The only thing is that they pressed a bottle of lukewarm tea into my hand instead of schnapps - I can never forgive that - "Enjoy it, Officer!" - that false snake, that one!

I hadn't had anything proper to drink for hours, and then this mockery, this disappointment! I opened the bottle greedily and put it to my mouth immediately, took a deep, greedy sip and only realized after the second or third sip that this was slightly sweetened tea.

The anger rose up in me like hot, boiling lava rising up in a volcano. Then suddenly I only saw red, slammed the bottle against a tree and roared like a bull. I took my rifle and fired the whole magazine into the air and fired and roared until there was nothing left in the barrel, and then four of them attacked me...

To the

Commander of the glorious Red Army

Colonel Vladimir J. Kniezewski

Field Marshal Von der Trenck Barracks

SOPRON

Subject: Sergeant Béla HANCSÁR Sopron, 9.12.56

Dear Colonel!

I have learned that one of my subordinates, Sergeant Béla Hancsár, was taken into custody by your brave forces last night.

Since I do not believe that If this is something serious, I ask you, dear Colonel, to release the otherwise impeccable sergeant from the custody of the glorious Red Army and transfer him to my area of responsibility.

Down with the revolution!,

Your humble servant,

János BÁNFFY,

Major of the National Defense Forces

Prince Eugene of Savoy Barracks SOPRON

To

Regular National Defense Forces

Border Security Dept.

Major J. Bánffy

Prince Eugene of Savoy Barracks

SOPRON

Subject: Zl. 8934/56.01 Sopron, 10.12.56

Major!

Did your so-called loyal subordinate have valuable ammunition because he was completely drunk and fired worthless ammunition into the area and didn't hit anything, thank Lenin. He smuggled a lot of imperialist spies and high traitors across the border and accepted bribes with a lot of money that isn't worth much anymore.

Our esteemed Commander, Commissioner Colonel Vladimir J. Kniezewski, personally interrogated spies and brought incredible facts to light. Among other things, capitalist imperialist spies hide behind children's backs, but also pretend to walk with a song and walking stick along the border, unsuspectingly playing idiots with whistles on their lips. Our esteemed Commander, Commissioner Colonel Vladimir J. Kniezewski, immediately reported this to the main commissariat by dispatch.

And the esteemed Chief Commissioner Colonel W.J. Kniezewski instructed me to tell you that the idiot should not think that it is nothing serious, because he will tell him himself. And that Private Béla will of course be interrogated further because he has always been a collaborator of the imperialist border spies and perhaps knows more, certainly probably.

At the end, Mr. Commissioner Colonel Vladimir J. Kniezewski says that after the execution they will perhaps eat a good goulash together and drink one and of course all the other vodkas with Mr. Major and then everything will be done.

Long live the glorious Soviet revolution!

Jan Tschech, translator for

Mr. Commissioner Colonel W.J. Kniezewski,

Main Command of the victorious Red Armed Forces SOPRON

URGENT!!!! OFFICIAL MAIL!!! PERSONAL!!!

To the

Commander of the

glorious Red Army

Colonel Vladimir J. Kniezewski

Field Marshal Von-der-Trenck Barracks

SOPRON

Subject: Sergeant Béla HANCSÉR Sopron, 10.12.56

No. 8934/56.01

But my dear Colonel!

We don't want to talk about execution right away, just because the good Béla treats himself to a drink or shoots around! Nothing happened! I admit, the boy should hold back a little more if he can't stomach anything, right, Colonel, we've both probably lifted a lot more and taken it all in our stride, hahaha!

I remember that delicious evening when we, dear Colonel, celebrated your esteemed wife's birthday together and...

I don't want to rehash old things, but I need this Béla Hancsár, still alive and sober today. Translate that literally, Jan Chekhov, or I'll tear your lying mouth open from ear to ear! — And, dear Colonel, I've done my research on the spies and I assure you that they were really just a couple of idiots, who even knelt down and sang hymns after crossing the border illegally! No offense, my dear Colonel, but you should forget about these stupid people once and for all.

Just send me this Béla, I'll take care of him, believe me, he's already caused me enough trouble and deserves a beating, but execution, no thanks! So, when that's done, come over and we'll forget the whole thing over a glass or two!

Long live the glorious socialist revolution!,

Down with the revolution!

Yours sincerely, always yours,

János BÁNFFY,

Major of the National Defense Forces

Prince Eugene of Savoy Barracks SOPRON

To

Regular National Defense Forces

Border Security Dept.

Major J. Bánffy

Prince Eugene of Savoy Barracks

SOPRON

Subject: Zl. 8934/56.01 Soldier Béla H. Sopron, 11.12.56

Dear Major!

We have once again vigorously interrogated the soldier, Sergeant Béla. He confessed to everything, but also that he is a pretty big idiot. That at least saved him from the firing squad. But he saw the spies crossing the border, and that's why he shot so much.

I think he missed because there were no spies there, there were just vodka ghosts in his head. So we'll definitely forget about the spies and the child spies too, I've already sent a dispatch to the capital, explanation: vodka and December fog, hahaha.

And you're going to do some more vigorous drills with Private Béla so that the December fog will disappear, because we have a Russian saying: if you can't stand bull's horns, don't go into the arena! If

he has a small bump on his face or a big one, then maybe he fell down the stairs. We certainly didn't hit him. Jan didn't translate everything in Czech accurately, so I replaced him with a substitute interpreter and now he's cleaning potatoes for the whole big pot. He translated December fog as imperialist spies, so he's cleaning potatoes for the whole glorious soldier's kitchen until the December fog is gone.

And we'll meet again Thursday evening for a game of chess, OK?

Down with the revolution!,

Long live the glorious Soviet revolution!

Wojtech Czymielinek, translator for

Colonel Commissioner W.J. Kniezewski,

Main Command of the victorious Red Armed Forces SOPRON

3rd Chapter

(The first night - told by Uncle Ákos)

So, now everyone is well accommodated, the children are upstairs in the grandparents' bedroom, the adults are above the stable in the hayloft. Bandi, Feri and I discussed everything, then they all went to bed.

I have marked the way for them through the last fields and then through the elder bushes to the tracks, drilled into them where they would "get lost" and marked some landmarks on the map, such as the dilapidated mill and the cut in the railway embankment. If they are lucky, they will cross the border unscathed and without any major complications. I will take them to the border early in the morning together with my son Antal.

I also made sure that they have small bundles of banknotes with them in case they encounter border guards. Feri, that dandy, acted a bit stupid at first (no, of course you won't get any Receipt!), but finally, even he understood that only courage and improvisation will help here. I pray to God that they get across the border without any problems, because Feri's nervousness and clumsiness could ruin everything.

During my tour, I checked to see if everything was OK. Under the stairs, little Juliska was still busy with the luggage; I think she was checking the drinking bottles for the small children and putting them away. She was a little startled when I passed by, but I gave her a conspiratorial wink and then walked on. She is a dreamy but also very stubborn child.

Behind the pigsty I suddenly stop and hear someone whispering. I creep closer carefully: it is Bandi and Ildikó, my only daughter, standing there, talking quietly.

When Bandi was transferred to Sopron in the last weeks of the war and was quartered with us, little Ildikó fell madly in love with the tall and handsome soldier.

At the age of 12 she suddenly became very quiet and shy and just adored him; damn it, we had a hard time making her understand that he had long since been taken and was much too old for her. Bandi and I had a drink together and when I explained the situation to him, he was very upset. Honest and kind as he was, he remained very friendly to Ildikó, but he followed all the rules and then very soon set off back to the capital.

Now they are standing there and Ildikó, now well over twenty, is talking to him with her head bowed. Tears are running down her face and it almost breaks my heart. I don't need to understand what they are saying, I understand it anyway. She suddenly hugs Bandi with all her fervor, her head rests on his chest for a moment, time seems to stand still. He clumsily grabs her hair and gives her a gentle kiss on the forehead. Then he lets go resolutely and goes through the door, upstairs.

Ildikó stands frozen for a few seconds, then her shoulders slump and she goes into the house through the back entrance. I stand there for a while, realizing how much this farewell must hurt her forever, and then I go to bed myself.

I wake Antal and the townspeople before sunrise.

Mother and Ildikó have already prepared a good breakfast, and there is even a real beef bouillon for the adults and the older children. When we sit down, Ildikó has already gone back upstairs and Mother returns my questioning look with a grim shake of her head. After breakfast, everyone gathers in the back yard and waits for old Karcsi, who will drive us to the border in his ancient truck. When he arrives, they quickly climb onto the loading area in the dark and we pull the tarpaulins shut.

Karcsi is the lousiest driver in town, but he cannot be dissuaded from still driving the old junker himself. Every time he changes gear he winces because the gearbox makes a terrible noise, then he grins stupidly and says: “Ah, the clutch!”. Antal stands outside on the running board, facing backwards, and tells me when cars are coming. Then I knock three times on the rear window and the townspeople know that they have to be as quiet as a mouse.

After about half an hour we arrive unmolested at the fields that lead to the railway tracks. The truck jerks to a stop, the engine dies with a final desperate diesel bang, and Karcsi curses loudly and blasphemously into the silence. Antal sprints to the back, lifts the tarpaulin and says: “Quick, quick, we only have a few Seconds to get out!” The Budapesters crawl out of the car with tired limbs, I immediately move a little further along the road and gather them around me. Antal gives Karcsi the money, and after a brief whisper he hurries to me, muttering that the old man wants more. I tell Bandi that we still need money, and Antal gives Karcsi some more, but then remains firm and sends the moaning old greedy man away.

I go ahead on the secret path and everyone follows me in single file. Antal is the rear man and helps the children with the small obstacles that appear. The children go in pairs, Peter with Paulchen,

János with Hanni, István with Juliska. And Antal, my eldest, goes behind them and makes sure that they don't miss the connection. It fills me with pride that I can rely on him completely.

At the end of the last field I stop, say that we are going to have a fifteen minute rest and then go on a walk around to make sure that we don't experience any unpleasant surprises. There are still a few mines next to the railway tracks, so I show Bandi and Feri again at dawn, where small craters can be seen next to the tracks, caused by exploded mines. I see them gritting their teeth. "There are no mines on the tracks or between them, just stay away from the embankment!" I say and they nod.

The sun will soon rise, I think, but today it will not break through the fog. I show Bandi and Feri the small hill behind which the turnoff is again, then we say goodbye. I shake Bandi's hand for a long time and notice that he wants to say something else, but then he presses his lips together. I say: "I know what you want to say, I will tell him," and he looks at me, shocked. I pat him on the shoulder, swallow the lump in my throat and hug the others; then I quickly walk back the way I came with Antal.

Big is the surprise when the Budapesters are standing at the door again in the evening. They excitedly tell of their adventure, and I think to myself that they have had an unbelievable amount of luck.

The Russian commander is a dogged, rude man who is torn between vice and the fulfillment of his duty. He has not infrequently tortured prisoners with his own hands, and rumor has it that he has several deaths on his conscience.

Antal not only helps me at court, he studied technology until the unrest broke out and has a very sharp mind. He listened quietly until the last details had been told and the townspeople began to repeat themselves. Then he looked at me piercingly and said: "We can't wait until tomorrow! That's exactly what the Russians will think, because of the children, who have to sleep at some point. We should put them to bed for a few hours now, but then leave before midnight. They

should choose the death strip as their route, the Russians don't expect that."

I know immediately that he is right. So we sit down with the two men and look at the map very carefully. Bandi says he knows about electric fences and we shouldn't worry about the mines either, he had to deal with them during the war. Antal brings some mines that he dug up and defused and he and Bandi study the construction together. In the meantime I make a few detailed sketches of the exact design of the electric fence and the death strip and Bandi and Feri memorize everything. It is already almost midnight when we wake the children and get ready to leave. Antal comes in with Karcsi and says that Karcsi will drive us a little further. Karcsi grumbles to himself that this is probably the very last time he will do this. Antal whispers to us that it won't cost anything this time, and I secretly wonder how he managed to pull off this feat.

The journey goes like the first one, and we hear nothing for days. After about ten days, the mayor received a call: "The city apartment is free," the agreed code word that they had arrived safely in Austria. I still have to grin to this day that Bandi used this fat communist pig as a messenger of conspiratorial messages. At least I was able to explain to the questioning fat man in a nutshell that it was a student apartment for Antal.

Ildikó didn't say a word for months. She did her work in silence and then retreated to her room. I only saw her cry briefly once, when I told her what Bandi couldn't say. Her cheerful and light-hearted nature had become dull and sad. For many days, our house was quiet and depressed.

One day she decided to go to the city, trained as a teacher and returned after several years in the city. Since then she has been teaching at our school, children and parents love her for her gentle nature. She still lives with my mother and me and helps to look after my mother, who is no longer the same after her stroke.

Antal now lives in Budapest, works for the radio and has become a real director. He has made something of himself, but he has not for-

gotten his old parents and visits us quite often. His children are now grown up, some of his grandchildren have gone to university and are our pride and joy.

No, we have never heard anything from the people of Budapest again.

Bandi sometimes meets with Antal when he is in Budapest, but he has never come to see us again. I understand him.

That was around forty years ago. Now I sometimes sit in front of the house, breathe in the scent of the acacias and birches and think how wonderful it is to have grown old in my old homeland. And that I was lucky that they never caught me: after all, I smuggled hundreds across the border back then...

Chapter 4

(Afternoon of the first day - narrated by Private Yuri)

When we arrested the two families, I felt pretty miserable. I saw the children from our village in my mind and thought: what we are doing is not right. I was brought to this country from my homeland Tungusistan weeks ago. The officers told us that we had to fight capitalist pigs and imperialist spies because they threatened the survival of the entire Soviet people. When we arrived here, we saw that we were actually involved in a civil war, that our enemies were women and children. The border guards were replaced every month because they lost their morale in a very short time.

My comrades teased me because I looked Mongolian - well, I was of Mongolian descent, and the more they teased me, the prouder I became. As we were loading the people onto our truck, I noticed the two men whispering to each other and heard the word "mongol" quite clearly. One of the little girls had her violin case with her and was pressing it anxiously to her body. She seemed to be afraid that we might do something to the violin. Yes, of course, after what this

people had experienced from the glorious Red Army, this fear was not so unreasonable.

I offered the little girl a seat; I wanted to take away her fear and convince her through my friendliness that we were different from what people said about us. I kept pointing to her to sit on the seat, and tried to translate my Russian and Tungus words with the appropriate gestures.

The men whispered to the little girl, who now clutched her violin case even tighter and looked a little tearful. The finely dressed man in particular bombarded the little girl with a torrent of words, and the little girl looked at me with her dark eyes, silent and defiant, and pressed her lips tightly together. It didn't exactly look like friendship.

I asked Gregorij, who understood a little of the language, what the men were whispering. He said he didn't understand exactly, but perhaps it could have meant that you think the violin case is a deity or a house altar, and you asked her to "lay the god or altar" on the seat.... Gregorij shook with laughter.

Yes, and then you feed us bananas, I thought grimly and was angry because international understanding was obviously not the order of the day today. This dandy probably divided the world into two categories: Hungarians and apes, and the little girl was intimidated and frightened, probably also because she had never seen such a stupid creature as me.

I was speechless for a few minutes. Gregorij chatted with the men and I recognized his mischievous grin already! He was probably telling them a story about the enchanted Mongol prince or something like that. That made me really angry.

Then it was Gregorij's turn to stand there with his mouth open like an idiot, because I knelt down, gently but firmly took the violin case from the girl's hand and carefully placed it on the seat. Then I started to bow like a praying Muslim and drone on with stupid sayings like "Your ticket please, anyone got on?" Today is Wednesday,

the fog is white, long live Mother Russia” and so on, whatever came to mind.

Gregory couldn't stop laughing. The lieutenant looked back from the cab and grumbled. None of us had eaten anything and were irritable. My clowning was just a sign of complete exhaustion, exhaustion and hunger. We were all happy when we got to the barracks.

Years later, Gregorij visited me. He had lost a leg during the fighting and was now travelling through the country, from mate to mate, and begging his way through life in a good-natured way. We told each other this story - among others - over and over again and laughed heartily. At the time, I had a good job as a senior engineer in the oil refinery and was able to employ Gregorij for a short time until he moved on again.

What became of the little girl with the big sad eyes and the deity - sorry, the violin case?

5th chapter

(The evening of the second day - told by Juliska)

No. I'm always portrayed as stubborn, I can't do anything on my own, and the adults never admit when they do something wrong. But when I want to say something, they just say: be quiet, you're still a child.

No. I'm not a little child anymore. I know a lot more than the adults think. Only my dad is the only one who takes me seriously. Mother and disgusting Aunt Erzsi or her idiot husband, they're all against me, they always have something to complain about and to nag about.

Then they tell us something about the pig slaughter and the trip to Sopron to see Aunt Anni. As if we were completely stupid! Of course we already know everything, Pityu and I spent half the night on the floor spying and listening through the gap under the door while they

arranged everything. Of course we know, they can't fool us. We are the Knights of St. Stephen (that's the name of our secret society). Pityu is my first knight, I am the queen, of course. We are in the process of recruiting more knights.

We have also let János in on the secret, even though he is not a Knight of St. Stephen; he probably thinks he is too good, even though almost everything about our secret society was once thought up by him. But this matter is of the utmost importance, so we'll let him in on it. He scratches his head for a long time and then says that if we cross the border we'll probably never, ever come back.

I suddenly have a big lump in my throat. The playgrounds, the schoolmates, the secret society, the best and second best friends, our dear nurse Mányika: we're never, ever going to see all of that again? I suddenly feel very small and shriveled up. János then says we should call a big secret meeting. I know; not what that is, but then he explains that all secret societies know about a great secret meeting, and that everyone must come, even the enemy gangs, and that they must abide by a general ceasefire.

The next morning, there is intense diplomatic activity. Knight Pityu, Queen Julia and special ambassador János rush from house to house, greet each other with the ceremonial greeting of the local secret society and whisper the message into ears that have been spat on three times. Everyone is amazed; no one has ever heard of a Great Secret Assembly, but it is another new adventure and everyone will come. We meet in the Royal Courtroom (a basement of the waterworks) and take our seats ceremoniously. János, Árpád and Zoli, the three eldest, have sat down on a higher water pipe and are wearing a special ceremonial hat for the occasion. their dirty white American cowboy hats that Árpád's father had once brought back from America.

After the renewed announcement that an absolute ceasefire was to be observed, Zoli gave the floor to Árpád, who made everyone swear a holy oath with a completely new but deadly-sounding oath to keep their mouths shut about what happened next and never tell a soul,

human or animal, anything. Now everyone was extremely excited and waited until Árpád then laboriously passed the word on to János.

János stood up dramatically slowly, threw his cloak over him once more and pointed into the distance with his hand outstretched in a dramatic manner: we would go there, far away, to a strange, distant land, and we would never, ever, ever come back. The old people had decided this, and after that there was deep silence.

Some said disparagingly: aha, so they're going across the border too, but the others were really moved and said shhh, shhh! Ceremonial oaths of loyalty followed, vows of silence were sealed with all kinds of secret signs, and eternal friendships were promised. I could only say goodbye to Zoli in tears, as we were as good as engaged, although only Pityu, my First Knight, knew this apart from me. Zoli's sister Babu cried loudly when she said goodbye to János, and Pityu gave away his treasures, the beautiful longbow and his infallible slingshot, to his comrades in arms from the First Wars in a magnificent gesture. His eyes were shining with tears, too.

Then the Holy Mist rose one last time from a fire made of newspapers, the princes and shamans muttered their magic spells once more, and we scattered in all directions.

Ah, then the admonitions of the annoying adults again, they wanted to be absolutely sure that not a word was uttered, and if they had known that about thirty children in the neighborhood were in on it, they would have had a stroke! But we trusted the Great Holy Oaths, and we were right: no one ever betrayed us. It took a while until I had distributed my treasures, which I couldn't take all with me, to my friends. There were jealousies, fights and insults. But it was good for my ego to act and be treated in accordance with the position of a queen. I didn't give away some of my favorite treasures, but wrapped them carefully in a cloth and hid them in my violin case. It was clear that if the adults found out about these activities, they would know that we knew what they knew. So everything was kept under the strictest secrecy.

Helping mother pack was fine. But Aunt Erzsi, a skinny, pale goat who was always thinking about baby-back and baby-forth - oh, she really got on my nerves! While she was packing and unpacking the baby things for the umpteenth time, I silently helped her sons, Peter and Paul, to pack their things. Little Paul was quiet and taciturn, but Peter, the older one, was quite bold. Once he tugged at my pigtail, then he pushed me here and there, tried to grab me - he was quite annoying. Of course I knew what this cheeky toad wanted, but it would never, ever, ever happen that I would show him anything, although this curiosity was very important even in the secret societies.

Aunt Erzsi was repacking the baby things again. Then she and Feri, her pretty little one, whispered that they should take an extra bottle of schnapps for the border guards. As always, Uncle Feri didn't listen to her and just mumbled "yes, yes" over his shoulder. Erzsi-néni then took a bottle and very clumsily wrapped a blue ribbon around its neck to mark it as "the" bottle. Of course I had much more delicate fingers than this whining goat and tried to make a proper and pretty stitch out of her mess: but you should have seen that! Like a fury she hissed at me, telling me to forget about it, she already had so much on her plate and couldn't take care of me, "brat"! And her stitch was perfect, I should just keep my hands off it!

The queen walked away with her head held high, but murder and manslaughter raged in her heart. The First Knight was just treating Peter, who had cut his finger, and I was able to take a little revenge on the miserable goat by helping to bandage it and making Peter suffer more than necessary. The idiot believed everything you said, blood poisoning and tetanus were all that was needed, and the coward was whimpering with bulging eyes for fear of hellish torture and gangrene. Desperate, he ran to his mother, who saw yet another reason to curse the miserable brat - me.

I still remember the whole journey and the escape well (but you've already read all about it). Perhaps it should be added that In the evening in Sopron, after everyone had gone to bed, I had to go out "to the toilet" again. There they were, our travel packages, under the stairs.

I crept there quietly, waited a moment to make sure no one was disturbing me, and then searched Aunt Erzsi's bag. I just wanted to do the trick properly and if she didn't let me voluntarily, then I would take my rights myself.

I had unpacked the bottles and untied the ribbon. I smoothed it out with my hand and started to tie a nice bow when I suddenly heard Uncle Ákos coming. I quickly put all the bottles back in the bag and only held the bow in my hand. my hand, but there was no time to put it in my pocket, so I crumpled it up and hid it in my hand. Uncle Ákos came slowly towards me, a giant of a man, and I was a little frightened when I saw him. Mother had once told me that in war Uncle Ákos would kill his enemies with his bare fist, strangling them with his bare hand before they captured him. If that was true, then he could easily crush me - or someone like me - between two fingers. I stared at his hands, which were really huge, and felt my skin tingle as if I had goose bumps.

But he just looked at me and winked in a friendly way. Had he noticed something? Why didn't he say anything? He must have noticed that I was crouching under the landing, with my hands in my travel bag and probably looking a bit defiant. I looked up at him, prepared to give him a perfidious excuse, but he just gave me a friendly pinch on the left cheek and said: "Good night!", then he went on and left the house through the courtyard door.

I waited a few heartbeats and then took the bottle out of my pocket. It was this bottle, wasn't it? I looked a little confused because they all looked the same. Then I noticed that time was running out. Yes, I could almost physically feel the seconds ticking away. I quickly tied the blue ribbon around the neck of the bottle, tied it in a nice bow and put it back in my pocket. I didn't think for a second about what would happen. could if I had mixed up the bottles.

Then I went back to the toilet door, opened it quietly and closed it louder, went through the corridor and back into the bedroom.

Later, when the adults were wondering how the poor baby could get schnapps at the border and what the border guard might have

said about his bottle of baby tea, I felt very uneasy, but no one paid any attention to me.

And Pityu, who I confided in, had to swear a hundred holy oaths that he would never, ever, ever tell anyone.

... a word, my child!

Of course, anyone who was there will immediately notice that these stories are not entirely true. Well, Erzsi's story really did happen - apart from a few tiny details. The electric fence was not charged that day, probably there was not always electricity during this chaos. This is just a small example of where a story can be safely enhanced without immediately having to talk about lies and deception!

The other stories and the names of all the people are made up, although anyone who was there will sense that everything happened almost exactly like that. But how can I portray a mood, a time and people's experiences at a time other than in fantasy stories that are somehow magically true?

July got it the worst. Of course there was never a blue ribbon, and so she never sneaked out at night and never mixed up the bottles. There is no infamy in my heart in attributing this role to her, I just wanted to come up with a halfway plausible explanation for the confusion of the bottles. And, it seems to me, you can read it and enjoy it. Juli will forgive me...

My father (Bandi) also came with Ildikó (who was not called that) to kiss his hand undeservedly. On the other hand, how am I, as an eight-year-old, supposed to classify things in my imagination that I saw and did not understand? The pretty young girl who scurries around her father eager to serve and want to attract attention? Of course, she wasn't even born during the war, and my father had other worries all his life than swaying maiden skirts. But that's how unfair our poetic world is, and Ildikó will continue to be the lonely, aging spinster for me, even though the actual grandmother, who is probably a grandmother several times over, has become heartily laughing and otherwise wrinkled.

Perhaps you liked this story after all, even if it turns out that not everything is as you wish it to be. All I can say is: I like it as it is. And next year I would write it again, completely differently and yet somehow the same.

It happened exactly like that, exactly the same, every iota, I swear!

My friend Patroklos

Ho me dareis anthropos u paideuetai
A person who is not tormented is not educated!

It was only in later years that I understood the above saying, which the town priest of Troy, Laocoön, said to his king Priam so casually and lightly. No, he didn't just say it like that: Laocoön was an advocate of the "healthy slap", and so I don't feel sorry for him at all that the sea serpents swallowed him up. A healthy slap was always unhealthy, you, sir, you!

Apart from that, Laocoön was right, because the criticized prince Paris was a cheeky teenager who rebelliously ranted against the gods and was extremely proud of his future kingship. Although, on closer inspection, in Troy, with its barely two thousand inhabitants, he could at best be the mayor. Paris, who lustfully pursued the daughters of the Greeks and Trojans on the beaches of Hellas and Troy...

But I wanted to tell you something completely different. My father held the laudable and honorable opinion that his children should go to elite schools in order to have the best starting conditions for life. My older and younger brothers attended a well-known school in Ried, Upper Austria, my sisters went to a women's convent run by tall penguins, and I was predestined for the STELLA MATUTINA, the super Jesuit school in Vorarlberg.

Thank God the Jesuits were wiser than my father in this regard, recognized my difficulty in educating me - without ever having seen me - from afar and did not take a penny of the horrendously high school fees, refugee or not. The convent school on the shores of Lake Constance was more understanding; The feud with the Jesuits from STELLA had been smoldering for centuries, and they also have a heart for refugees. I was looking forward to Lake Constance, the great sports facility and the horses that were looked after by students in the adjacent enclosure.

Well, that's the theory. In practice, it was cramming until you drop, high-performance sports and evening trouser spanking (=caning on the bare bottom) for the small or large sins of everyday life; horses only saw the best, the most well-adjusted and the most hard-working. You owed that to the monastery's reputation, you were only a thousandth of a second behind STELLA. Like the latter, the latter was also a humanistic grammar school, so Latin, ancient Greek and a broad, classical general education. I admit that I sometimes cried into my pillow at night out of anger and disappointment, and very, very quietly, because there were 40 boys in one dormitory. But looking back, I am grateful for the profound and thoroughly modern education.

I don't remember all the priests, but I will never forget some names. Paulus, the old swashbuckler responsible for the trouser tighteners; Ambrosius, who taught us Latin and Greek in a playful way; Kassian (the current abbot), who as a young gym teacher once climbed the scaffolded church facade with his cassock pinned up to prevent a drunken, lovesick high school student from a botched suicide plan for rejecting a bar waitress and got him down over the scaffold; Anselm, who was responsible for the choirboys at the early mass and the theater. It will not surprise you, dear reader, that I not only distinguished myself as a feared ankle killer at football, but also carelessly pushed my way to the front of the singing audition, spurred on by Father Anselm's empty promises.

And won.

Every morning, six boys with a bell-clear soprano accompanied Theo, who was two or three years older than him, a child prodigy and would probably have become a new Benjamino Gigli if he hadn't been called away by God one morning years later, in the middle of Gregorian chant. So the choir needs to be seriously explained. Of course my heart leapt into my throat when Father Anselm read out the 6 names after the audition, the last being "little István from Hungary". A day later, nothing leapt any more, because we started at 5 (five!) in the morning without breakfast, putting on choir robes and singing at the morning mass as clear as a bell, Gregorian chants in antiphon to the basses of the Fathers, who had already started their

silent prayer at 4. When Theo sang, I closed my eyes and was moved to tears: I want to sing like him too, I thought over and over, without realizing that the breaking of my voice would put a damper on my plans.

God's reward came at half past six: while the others were still sleeping or fighting over the best washing places, we choir boys sat with the fathers in the large refectory, had a hearty breakfast and listened to the reader in silence, just like they do in a proper monastery.

Unfortunately, I was not only the bell-clear soprano, but also the ankle killer. Whenever we were allowed to, we raged on the football field, scored goals and I killed ankles, row after row. One day I took it too far, was surrounded by angry teammates and threatened with lynching. The Ravensburger narrowed his eyes in pain and hissed that he would hit me, and how, because I was a wild boar! The twins from the Bregenzerwald imitated everything the Ravensburger did and hissed too, although in my view they were tiny little things and toads. This time, however, the Swiss Roger S. was also angry, and he was not without his skills. The only one whose fist I had felt before and who could defeat me. He was not to be trifled with, he was stronger than all of them. I held my bleeding nose after his first blow and considered whether I should completely cut off the twin I had in a headlock, while the Ravensburger, a cowardly pirate from Lake Constance with a hooked nose, threw himself on top of the tangle and beat everything below him.

Roger staggered back, his eyes wide open in surprise, as an even more powerful fist grabbed him from behind and pulled him back. I got my breath back, kicked the cowardly Ravensburger hard in the abdomen and staggered away from the battlefield. It was Klaus H., a boy from the Principality of Liechtenstein from the high school class, who couldn't bear to see my downfall and saved me from being lynched. The disappointed mob left, Klaus treated my bleeding nose and a short friendship developed, which began with him teaching me the basics of professionally killing treacherous people from Ravensburg, Bregenzerwald and Switzerland. I often visited him in his single room, we studied together and when I admired his atlas one day, he gave it to me without thinking.

I wasn't ungrateful. But what could I, an 11-year-old, offer to an (say) 18-year-old? For the first time, I experienced the wisdom of life first hand: even a poor but clever mind can give someone a gift. Klaus was a gifted person, well-bred and from a good family. He was excellent in mathematics and the natural sciences, but he was a genius when it came to languages. He spoke his Liechtenstein dialect perfectly, but all other languages remained hidden from his genius.

He suffered greatly from this, and after a while he admitted that despite studying hard he was only just able to get by in both Latin and Greek. I could already read Greek and often sat with him, studying with him and checking vocabulary. Of course, I knew from the beginning of school that there would be a theater performance at the end of the year, and that the high school students would reenact scenes from Homer's Iliad, as they do every year. Klaus was assigned to a class like all the other high school students and, to his dismay, had to learn to play Achilles, one of the most talkative main characters in the siege of Troy.

Great armor (borrowed from the Theater am Kornmarkt), great fight scenes (with real theater swords) and a great amount of text! Klaus always seemed very upset during the latter. When he recited the text, he didn't sound like Achilles, who frivolously blasphemes and challenges the gods during a drinking party and then laughs loudly, but like Klaus, who staccatos the text with a serious, almost sour expression, barking in a choppy manner, boring the gods with hexameters that he drones on like a mantra, and of course there's no trace of loud laughter. Achilles also had a friend, a best friend, called Patroclos, as is well known, was a level-headed youngster who had been commissioned by the king to look after the impetuous young warrior; King Agamemnon insisted on this personally. The Patroclos of this year was, however, in reality a student of Bacchus devoted to wine, women and song, slept more often in the city bars than in the boarding school and slyly promised to practice the friends' dialogues with Klaus "tomorrow", but then really. Of course "tomorrow" was then "today", and Patroclos, insulted, said that it had been agreed, "tomorrow", not today!

Dear reader, do whatever you have to do, but never do one thing: never challenge the ancient Greek gods! They actually do exist - unlike UFOs - and they can punish terribly. About three or four days before the performance, for which Achilles prepared very carefully and I stood in for Patroclos, the god Zeus had had enough of Patroclos, the drunkard. He let the brave hero, who had to leave his adored waitress and his beloved pub at closing time, fall asleep in the beer garden, even though it was raining lightly. Patroclos developed a savage kidney infection and was in hospital until after the performance. Zeus nodded grimly and turned back to his earthly playmates, satisfied; his anger lasted for weeks, and so he left it to Apollo, in the guise of the gym teacher Father Kassian, to pluck the drunken youngster from the scaffolding of the church façade... Father Anselm, his high school class and Klaus were deeply affected; no, not because of the kidney infection, but because of the problem that had to be solved within a few days. They debated back and forth, Father Anselm was already thinking out loud about cancelling the performance due to higher authority or about speaking the text himself, when Klaus suggested in a low voice that I (little István from Hungary) could play Patroclos.

Without having been there, I know that you could have heard a pin drop in that second, it was so quiet. An 11-year-old!? Patroclos!? Impossible! After some back and forth, Klaus ran into the large study hall and whispered to the priest on duty, then he snaked his way through the rows of benches and wordlessly tugged at my arm: "Come with me!" I waited for the guard to nod his head to signal his consent, then I slipped out of the bench like a weasel and ran out after Klaus.

Father Anselm resisted for a long time, saying that my voice was much too high for a Greek hero, the others complained that I was lost in the hero's bronze-colored breastwork like a farmer's child in his father's winter coat, but one thing was undeniable: I knew the text almost flawlessly by heart, knew from Klaus's stage directions when Patroclos should sit or stand where and when he should boldly draw his sword to make it clear to Achilles that he, Patroclos, would stop him, Achilles, from his plan (namely to massacre the hero Hector) by force of arms if necessary.

A whim of fate or the favor of the gods, for which I had prayed so earnestly? At the third test gallop, Father Anselm pulled himself together and gave his consent. The high school students cheered and patted me on the shoulder. Patroclos, let's be friends! I suddenly felt very small and vulnerable among all the great, strong heroes of Greece and Troy. Helena (whose real name was Peter) lisped and grinned, Patroclos would draw the laughter and distract from her/him. Thank God, added the beauty of the night with a pagan, sinful flutter of the fake eyelashes. Father Anselm went into the back of the theater room, shaking his head, and chose the smallest possible parapet, the smallest helmet, and a hemp beard for me. The helmet was later removed, I was given a kind of purple turban, and my milky face was tanned with a dark paste.

I was really scared and had stage fright and messed up the text in the dress rehearsal, so that I almost burst into tears of anger. Father Anselm was a good person, he gave me a motherly hug and said that everything would be fine, that I could take the text with me to the performance and read it out, that people would understand it.

Friend Patroklos, he then said in the announcement before the performance, had unfortunately had an accident and was in the hospital (well, now I was enlightened: clergymen lie too). But, continued Father Anselm, I have discovered a young Greek talent in the lower grades (correct: shamelessly lying) who can speak Patroclos like the grown-ups; so he asks for benevolent understanding for my high childish voice and short stature, which would certainly not have prevented the real Patroclos from avenging the death of his protégé Achilles (finally settled: clergymen haven't a clue about anything — as if an immortal could be dead!) An observant person would immediately notice that Father Anselm had no idea what the play - his play - was actually about. Oh well... Thus prepared, the audience waited eagerly for the "Scenes from the Siege of Troy".

You have to imagine it like this: the props, i.e. the scenery, weapons and clothing of the legendary heroes, were borrowed from the Theater am Kornmarkt. The background image was a Renaissance painting, an English park landscape with an English castle: that would be Troy. Rough potato sacks mimicked the sandy beach in

front of it, wooden chairs covered with rags had to serve as seating. The campfire around which the heroes gathered and shouted out their dialogue was there as a pile of wood, but the fire authorities did not allow it to be lit, which made the whole thing look somehow irritatingly fake. The fact that the heroes wore Roman legionary armour and Roman short swords could only bother a pedantic narrow-minded person. The art-loving viewer could close his eyes and feel transported right in front of ancient Troy. - Then!

I only had a very brief appearance, in the fourth scene. I was so nervous that I laid my manuscript down the wrong way round, and my turban slipped over my forehead and over my eyes when I took off my helmet, which was much too big, on entering. I couldn't see the audience because of the powerful spotlights, but I immediately sensed that a large, breathing and coughing monster was lurking behind the lights. I quickly turned the manuscript around and memorized the first verses until I realized that I knew them anyway.

Achilles came in with some effort and gave me a little time - as agreed. Then we got started. As in the dress rehearsal, I was irritated by Odysseus and Heracles interrupting us. They were absolutely right to do so, but we had obviously left out their part during training with Klaus. Now I had to wait carefully until Klaus gave me the signal to start bubbling. Of course, I still didn't understand much Greek, but I read quickly and tried to find the rhythm of the poem. Klaus frowned darkly to draw my attention to my completely out-of-place, Italian-sounding gestures and hand movements.

Father Anselm nodded appreciatively to the abbot and the deputy mayor, nodding around the group in a particularly graceful and sincere manner when a hero stumbled and stumped in an inglorious way.

The finale was approaching. Patroclos was able to appease Achilles by taking his armour himself and beating Heracles. The beefy demigod did not stand for this and so I had to bite the sand - continuing to declaim theatrically. The dead Patroclos watched the rapid ring-killing from the corner of his eye; Menelaus finally saved my corpse and Achilles' golden armour: it tore. I was picked up by

the elbow, dragged myself around the still unlit campfire and let myself crash onto the boards behind it that mean the world. Klaus, who was saddened to laugh at the pain-contorted face of his friend Patroklos, grimly blared his text at the deputy mayor, the assistant festival director and Father Anselm until his mother goddess Thetis (multiple transvestite Helena, wrapped in a black cloak) brought him a shield, helmet and lance from the deep sea. Having become invincible, he slew Heracles, then torches were lit and while the choir of the remaining heroes murmured a final dirge, the curtain fell and the bright light went out.

Caesar's triumphs could not have been greater when the curtain fell after the last act and the audience, led by Father Anselm, began to applaud wildly. Yes, it was not us who deserved the applause, but Father Anselm, who had backed the right horse and had the courage to take a young boy into the troupe; it was Father Anselm who had tamed a horde of teenagers and triumphantly paraded them in the theater. While the heroes were pathetically hugging each other in the dressing room and acting like they were crazy (like everyone who has an enormous burden lifted from their shoulders), Klaus simply held out his hand and looked me in the eyes. Thank you, my friend Patroklos, he said, and that was that.

Ankle killer!? No, from then on they called me Patroklos, the Ravensburger slapped me jovially on the shoulder and said that he had told everyone that I would bring it, but really! The twins looked at each other and whispered that they had always said that and so on. Roger, the future ski racer, remained honest, kept his hands in his pockets and muttered defiantly over his shoulder that I was just very lucky, just really lucky!

Then we cleaned up the theater and the adults went to the banquet, which was held in the abbot's private chambers, because that was tradition. Klaus tugged on Father Anselm's elbow and then Father Anselm announced that I must of course come with Klaus to the abbot. I almost sank into the ground when the High Lord patted my head and said that I had done Father Anselm and the monastery a good service by stepping in for the sick boy. He exchanged a few more irrelevant words about the existence and non-existence of

refugee children and the Lord's generosity in having endowed me with a beautiful voice and a good feeling for Greek tragedies (although I was only a refugee child, *nota bene!*), then his noble interest waned.

Actually, I shouldn't report on the legendary heroes' feast. I'll just say that Brother Josef was sweating profusely when the abbot ordered that Patroclos get milk, fresh milk! The heroes of Troy cheered, Brother Josef rolled his eyes and whispered that for agricultural reasons there would be fresh milk only in the morning, but no way, the abbot waved, the boy won't get any wine! Then he turned to the deputy mayor and the assistant festival director and was no longer interested in what the boy actually got. And so it was that Patroclos got to know the white "Spritzer" (white wine mixed with sparkling water) for the first time in his life.

Brother Josef brought the glass with a slightly shaking hand and Klaus mumbled dryly that if necessary it would just about pass as milk. *Ego te absolvo*, he whispered with a conspiratorial wink to the unsettled brother, who hastily made the sign of the cross and left.

Of course there was no happy ending. After the long meal and drink, the High Abbot remembered the little Hungarian refugee and asked him to sing a Hungarian hymn. The boy turned bright red and whispered in a failing voice that he couldn't now, but Father Anselm's stern look left no room for excuses. Even the fact that it would have been no use if the boy had not known any Hungarian hymns, and his silent pleas went unheard in the grand hall. "István will now sing us a Hungarian hymn," Father Anselm announced in his soft eunuch voice, folding his hands as if in prayer. Black fog covered the boy's empty hymn repertoire. Klaus, who recognized the boy's distress in a flash, kicked me in the shin and told me to just start singing, no matter what. And so it came to be that the abbot, the dignitaries and the heroes of Troy, with folded hands and looking fearfully at the tablecloth, listened to what was supposed to be a Hungarian clerical hymn, which rang out squeakily and rather powerfully from the boy's throat and can easily be recognized in the translation as a children's song:

“Behind the Oberenns, behind the sea, once lived a small cockchafer...”

Corsica

In the late summer of 1967, my brother János (1945 - 1977) and I took a trip to Corsica on a moped, which took me - then 18 years old - to my limits. Since almost all the documents and photos were later destroyed in the fire at our parents' house, I had to reconstruct most of this adventure from memory. Nevertheless, everything happened as I describe it; however, it may be that the one or other shark we encountered now seems a little bigger and more threatening in my memory ...

Preparations

The lively correspondence with my brother, who was studying in Rome, always led to shared adventures. This was also the case in 1966: while I commuted between my hometown of Bregenz and school in Salzburg, my brother János, who was three years older than me, was studying canon law and dogmatics at the Institut Germanicum et Hungaricum, reading his breviary in silence every day and sometimes furtively glancing at the small map section that he had stapled to the inside cover of the breviary:

Corsica.

My two- to three-weekly visits to my parents' house often followed the same pattern: a warm hug from my father, mother and siblings; then a few minutes of reporting on my successes (I usually only reported the "other" things just before leaving, of course!). Then I rushed into the garden and got to work on my father's moped. He was now approaching 50 and had bought himself his first car; his moped was used by everyone who could handle it. That is, by me, since my sisters were girls (!) and my younger brother was still too young.

Unnoticed by the old man, I transformed myself into a brilliant mechanic in the garden and devoted myself to refurbishing and styling the good piece. If father had ever suspected what we boys

were really doing, he would have given us a good beating. But he was happy that I was so enthusiastic about something constructive - cleaning the moped, as it seemed to him - and not hanging around with a horde of beer-drinking hooligans. In reality, I dismantled the thing in a flash and took the pieces to the boy next door, who was a gifted mechanic's apprentice and generously trained me to be a master (moped) hairdresser. In short, a Puch 50 became a projectile with a bored-out carburettor and widened, smoothly polished fuel ducts, as well as a second exhaust silencer that had been removed and could be released using a small foot lever (which I wisely stored at my teacher's). Unofficial measurements showed top values of around 100 km/h with a tailwind.

In faraway Rome, János bent over the map, tinkered with different routes, inquired about the prices of the ferries and suspiciously watched the rise and fall of petrol prices, chewed desperately on his calculator and probably shook his head now and again: our joint finances would leave us miserably stranded in the middle of the Corsican mountains. Meanwhile, I filed and drilled the exhaust valve and polished it for hours, then I wrote to János that he should not let his hair grow grey, because I had taken on a job for three weeks that would fatten up our coffers.

This job was tough and would fill a chapter of its own; maybe just enough to tell you that we loaded household appliances into train carriages and got paid for it. The extra night shift brought me a lot of money, but on one of the last days I got my leg caught between the platform and the carriage, my knee swelled up badly and my guest appearance ended. I couldn't go to the doctor because the cigarettes I begged for were probably the only legal thing on this job (to be more precise, I doubt that myself today because they were probably contraband too...). The party leader, a former Foreign Legion member, paid me off with a gruff look on his face and chased me away after reminding me once again that there were no electrical appliances or carriages here and that he didn't know me at all.

The plan for the Corsica trip was brilliantly simple: I would ride the moped from Bregenz to Rome, where János would get on and we would take the ferry to Sardinia and from there on to Corsica. At the

end we would take a third ferry to La Spezia, where I would have to take János to the train to Florence on such and such a day. From Florence I would again ride alone on a moped to Bregenz. We would cover about 2,800 km on the road, sleep outdoors or in haystacks and generally be very, very economical.

To give you an idea: a Puch 50 moped (not two), with two boys plus a big backpack on top, no tent, no sleeping bags and not a gram too much. And of course with exhaust no. 2. Father lent me his leather helmet, but I politely declined the huge rubber coat because of the weight and “the sun always shines in Corsica”. Also - father should have known this - James Dean doesn’t wear a rubber coat à la Gestapo.

The clothing was one of those things that has to be mentioned. I have to say evidently had seen too much James Dean or Humphrey Bogart, in any case I had scrounged a white hat from the Red Cross, or rather a formerly white, wide-brimmed hat, and a shabby, worn leather jacket. I also bought myself (with a heavy heart and without informing János beforehand) a pair of white jeans. Yes, white jeans! - You can smile: there I was sitting on the white moped, with a brown leather helmet, black shabby leather jacket, white scarf and white trousers: the outfit of an adventurer! - James Humphrey Rudas.

All roads lead to Rome

Then my alarm went off at three in the morning, I packed my backpack onto the moped, hugged my mother and set off with a pounding heart. Towards morning I reached Chur and drove up to the small San Bernardino pass (either the tunnel didn’t exist yet or I didn’t want to go through underneath). The higher I climbed on my moped, the colder it got; the sky slowly darkened and I reached the border guard’s house in the snow. The border guards were amazed, and while one of them disappeared into the office with my papers, I got off and did a bit of gymnastics to warm myself up. Grinning, I left the moped. the other one kicked me under the door and then said I could have a tea from his thermos. I slowly warmed up again and shook the snow off my wet white jeans.

Late in the afternoon I climbed the Giove Pass north of Genoa (I didn't have to go via Genoa, of course, but because I had heard that the harbor there was particularly great, I had to). The moped wheezed and sputtered and I got off more and more often to clean the spark plug and investigate the cause. When I entered the city of Genoa, I could only go a few hundred meters before the engine died. I looked for a workshop and after a long search I found one that was just about to close. My hard work at school (or should I say not skipping school too often?) was bearing fruit: speaking broken Italian, I pointed to "il Vergasero" and "nix funziona maladetto, rubbish!" The foreman pushed me aside, shook his head when he saw my exhaust construction and then said that the "carburatore" was ruined. He shook his head and told me that they had been filing around too much. Fine, let's call the carburatore from now on, what shall we do?

I realized what I could do with my carburettor when he simply threw it over his shoulder into the bucket. Then he went out the back, I trotted after him, beaming: he had dozens of wrecked mopeds lying there, made an inviting gesture with his hand and handed me his wrench. I nodded, went from wreck to wreck and after a while had two carburettors that should fit. The foreman nodded, took one from my hand and shook his head: into the bucket! He weighed the second one in his hand, then said a number that made my throat tighten. I rummaged in my pocket and started counting; he laughed and said: OK! He was satisfied with one banknote, then he said that I could work in the yard. All I had to do was put the tools back in the box, then he locked the workshop and disappeared.

It took me about 2 hours to install the carburettor, which was a little bigger than the original and also had more power, but also in terms of fuel consumption. In the dark I made a test drive to the harbor, where naturally all the boatmen were already in their bunks and I could not see anything special except silence and darkness. Well, not silence actually either, because suddenly some boatmen started shouting wildly for me to use my carburatore to make sure I could get on! I drove a few kilometers further south and slept on the grass on the outskirts of a village whose name included "Mamma."

At dawn I drove on, kept looking at my white-spotted jeans and mourning. They were no longer white, not quite. But the carburettor was perfect and the machine had bite again, and I thought even more than before. Somewhere on the country road to Grosseto I tested the speed and got about 90 km/h. Then I tried what I had seen other Italian moped drivers do: I held on to the tailgate of a truck with one hand, let myself be pulled along and turned the engine off to save fuel. (Children: please don't imitate this!) On the evening of the next day I pulled up in front of the Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum in Rome. Sweaty, dirty and in my black and white jeans.

The brother gatekeeper actually wanted to send me away angrily (begging and peddling forbidden!), but my brother picked me up at the gate. I had to wait a few more days in Rome until János had finished his exams and we could finally leave. During the day I wandered aimlessly through the Eternal City, looked at everything and everyone, and in the evening - mostly hungry - I returned to the seminary. I wasn't allowed to sleep there, but János had found me a cheap, simple room a few blocks away. He accompanied me there every evening, since the route led through the prostitute district and he was worried about my salvation, as he admitted with a grin. But the Signora Landlady (I have forgotten her name), a middle-aged frigate who struggled with the rigors of cosmetics every day, patiently escorted the Padre (that was János in his red cassock, the priest's robe of the seminarians) and the Signore (that was me) into the room and had to promise the Padre every evening that she would look after my virtue. And as soon as he had left, she came back with a large bottle of Birra Forst and said with a wink that it was on the house.

We had a big problem. On the last day we were allowed to attend a "private" papal audience, where the "private" referred to the fact that only a few hundred (and not thousands) of believers were present. The problem was that I had nothing to wear. The black and white spotted jeans were simply not papable. - János sometimes had brilliant ideas. And that was the case now: he brought me his "second cassock" and I slipped into it; well, János was a few centimeters taller than me and a few kilos heavier, but it would be fine. But my roommate Wolfgang (later my best man and then bishop in Germany) shook his head and said we couldn't do that. Another friend, Gyuri

(later archbishop in Alba Julia, Romania) said we would just have to clean the trousers. So we knelt two men in front of the bathtub, rubbed the good piece with a hand brush and another brush, the origin of which was uncertain, and used soap after soap, the stains became paler and paler until they turned light grey. - We didn't think of going to a dry cleaner. When Gyuri, who is about my size, lent me a snow-white shirt, nothing stood in the way of a visit to the Vatican. To put it casually today, I would say that although I hadn't stood in the shoes of the fisherman, I had worn the socks of a German bishop and the shirt of a Romanian archbishop.

The papal audience was unspectacular. Certificates and medals were handed out, and a prince or other lordship was the only one allowed to kneel briefly before the throne and kiss Peter's ring. At the end, the believers filed past the Holy Throne in a long line from the rows of seats, were allowed to nod briefly to the Pope from a few meters away and then had to move on. The papal ear whisperer stood next to His Holiness and whispered the name, rank and importance of the person filing past into His Holy Ear. You might not believe it possible, but I understood exactly what was being whispered, because I could (at least at the time) read lips:

"The Count of the Press..."

"God bless you, my son!"

"... and his daughter, the Contessa!"

"God bless you, my daughter!"

"Lord Greenbawm and wife Sara!"

"God bless you!"

"Seminarists from the Germanicum & Hungaricum seminary!"

"God bless you, my sons!"

"Pongratz family from..."

“Benedetto, you left one out!” says His Holiness reproachfully. Benedetto looks at me briefly again, then whispers: “Your Holiness, the red ones are from the seminary, then the Pongratz family comes from...”

“No, that one in between, the one in the white-spotted uniform!” and there is already a hint of displeasure in the saint’s voice.

The eyes of the papal whisperer etch a deep hole in my shirt: “A seminarian who is obviously not wearing a cassock, Your Holiness!”

“Benedetto, Benedetto!” The tone becomes a little sharper, the Holy Nostrils tremble: “... and, tell me, can’t you smell it, it suddenly smells so strongly of cheap soap here...?”

“A madman from Vorarlberg, who repairs his moped in white trousers and therefore looks accordingly, on the way to Corsica, and the Pon family...”

“God bless you, my son!” great-great-grandson Petri interrupts him, then His Holiness lowers his voice and winks: “... and maybe try Rei!”

The Pongratz family pushed and shoved, so I kept going, but I heard His Holiness muttering to himself: “When I was young, I also...”; unfortunately I couldn’t hear the rest.

Well, maybe it wasn’t quite like that, but it was essentially that. In the midst of all these scoundrels dressed up like oxen for Pentecost, I felt very small and worthless, hid behind the man in front of me and repented of all my sins multiple times, especially the one of illegal carburetor tuning, and even three times over, vowed to improve and that I would never, ever, ever drink the Signora’s beer again. Honestly.

The next morning, i.e. the morning after I had broken the above beer vow, and long before the Roman sparrows woke up, we both knelt before Father Spiritus (who was not called that because of his drinking habits, but because he was the good spirit of the house) and received his fatherly blessing for our plan. Then we happily drove

southwest on the shiny moped to the ferry to Civitavecchia, which took us to Sardinia overnight.

As a bank robber in Sardinia

Olbia in Sardinia welcomed us at the crack of dawn with bright sunshine and an unfriendly official who held our papers back for at least an hour, but we stood firm and did not give out a bribe. At some point it became too much for János and he took out his seminary ID card, written in Latin and with the papal coat of arms. In the same moment the papers were OK and we looked at each other: next time the ID card will be pulled out immediately!

We spent the whole day driving slowly and leisurely north. The distance was only an hour's drive, so we bathed in a bay and grilled a slice of black bread with canned tuna. The ferry to Corsica didn't leave until the evening, so we dawdled around all day and in the late afternoon we set off for Santa Teresa di Gallura, the northernmost point of Sardinia, just a few centimetres from Corsica (look it up in the atlas if you don't believe it!).

This Santa Teresa, if you've never been there, was a village with not even 10 houses, a storage shed with a police guardhouse (which was also the harbour master's office and border station) and a concrete wall left behind by the Allies, which could be used as a harbour facility in an emergency (but only then).

The ferry wasn't there yet, but I was already smart from the day before and knew that I had to stand in the front row to get to them quickly. So we stand there with the moped, arranging our luggage and rustling the tickets, without noticing that the village policeman and two other civilians with shotguns had positioned themselves behind us.

Suddenly we get a shout: "Hands up!" For the first time in my life I look down the barrels of pistols and rifles and I feel completely different. János looks up, more surprised than afraid, and wants to go up to the three of them to ask what, how; but then the policeman shouts that he should stop, you scoundrel, otherwise there will be an

accident! So we stand there, with our hands half raised, looking ridiculous, with (quite) shaking knees and probably not looking very intelligent.

The three of them are whispering about who should disarm us, Giovanni, you go first, no, I have two children, do it yourself! The little fat policeman comes closer cautiously and says we should open our jackets, but slowly. We follow his instructions in slow motion, he walks around, looks and looks, then he carefully feels us up and calls out to the other two: "They don't have any weapons!" - János wants to ask what's going on, but the nervous policeman shouts at him to shut up. So we remain silent, the men and the policeman stand motionless and everyone waits. Then the policeman tells us to go ahead to the guard room.

One of the men goes ahead and unlocks the door, János and I stumble after him and then we are sitting in a small, dirty cell. There is now a crowd outside, everyone is cheering and shouting at each other: "Now we've got them!" János and I look at each other helplessly, we hear a horn and our ferry docks. After a few minutes, which seems like an eternity to us, the policeman comes into the guard room and is making a frantic phone call. János listens and translates for me that we are the dreaded bank robbers who robbed the bank in Palma this morning and shot a security guard. Then he says quite dryly: I didn't know how dangerous we actually are.

Our ferry, which has filled up with people, cars and goats over the last half hour, honks three times and then sets off. In my mind I tear up our tickets and think about what we are going to do for the two days until another ferry from this company comes along. And how we will ever be able to fill this huge hole in our travel budget.

The sheriff calls one colleague after the other, telling them in increasingly longer versions how he and Giovanni and Guido, well - actually just him and Giovanni, no, actually he alone, arrested the dangerous murderers.

The phone rings again, the law answers. It seems that a general is on the line, because he jumps up and salutes the invisible man. Yes,

there are two of them. A small one and a big one, yes, bald. I breathe a sigh of relief, because I have bushy, thick hair, a James Dean look-alike. No, the big one is bald. I collapse again. Yes, a leather jacket. White trousers, yes, but very dirty. No, they threw away the guns. I feel a choking sensation in my throat, I ask János whether garroting is only fashionable in Spain or also in Sardinia. He says, shh, and the garrote isn't used anywhere at the moment.

The sheriff nods on the phone. They have everything with them, it's them, for sure! No, not the guns, and not the money either, but a huge backpack, which he has already examined. Just tourist stuff. And a white motorbike, yes, he confiscated that. It's in front of the house, brigadiers.

No, white, not black. With foreign license plates, they must have stolen it. No, a black motorbike, oh, I see.

I listen up. The fenders are made of white plastic, that can't be painted black, I can prove that.

The fat, sweating policeman rummages through our papers and reads out our details. Then he says it can't be right, the little guy is definitely not 17, definitely older. Suddenly he stops. You stammer, then he says: Brigadier, the tall one with the bald head has a strange ID card with him, Colleggio and so on, papal coat of arms. A very nice fake. His Latin, read out in Italian, almost makes me laugh.

János says through the bars, just call there, Signore, I'll tell you the number! The policeman waves him to be quiet, then listens into the receiver and grumbles irritably: OK, what's the number? János closes his eyes and calls up the saved file card: he patiently repeats number after number, which the fat man then repeats in turn and the invisible man obviously writes down. János calls out that they should ask for Padre Spirito, but the conversation is already over.

The policeman comes closer and asks, somewhat uncertainly: so, is all this true? János explains everything to him, tells him in detail about the preparations for our trip, and it seems to me that the fat man is now more inclined to believe us. Then János says he can

check, our ticket for the ferry to Olbia is still there. The policeman takes the ticket, calls the port of Olbia and becomes serious again as he looks over at us.

You arrived early this morning, he says, it's only half an hour from here. Where have you been all day? No, don't say it, I know: it takes two hours to get from Olbia to Palma. You robbed the bank there and shot the security guard, then spent two or three hours in the mountains to bury the loot and the guns. From there you drove back here in two or three hours to flee to Corsica.

He picks up the phone to give his foreman another call. He stops when János says: my ID is real, you'll see! Our sheriff is in a tizzy, he walks up and down, muttering to himself. Then he goes out and leaves us alone.

János and I try to calm down and discuss the situation, which is actually not so rosy. He says that at this time no one in the seminar answers the phone, it is already after work and everyone is probably already in the residential wing.

The hours pass, I am desperate because I hear the village children fiddling around with my moped outside and I imagine that by tomorrow morning only a naked skeleton will be left of it. Every few hours the sheriff comes back, brings water and a few slices of pizzetta around midnight, then disappears again to continue the party in the village pub.

János and I sit on the cold floor, dozing in the semi-darkness and sometimes I mumble something about Chateau d'If and Abbé Faria, until he tells me to stop thinking, everything will be cleared up sooner or later...

At some point the guard room is locked from the outside and we are left to our fate.

In the morning the phone rings incessantly, but no one is there to answer it. János grins at me and jokes: "Pronto! Pronto!" - which is the Italians' substitute for hello. It takes at least a quarter of an hour

for the policeman to arrive. We say excitedly that the phone has already rung several times.

He calls his office, but it wasn't them. Finally, finally the bell rings. It's the foreman. The little fat policeman salutes, listens, gets smaller and smaller. Si, foreman, Si. - Si, Si.

After hanging up, he slowly comes to our gate.

He plants himself in his full little width in front of us, looks serious like the robber captain Hotzenplotz and rocks on his toes. Then he takes the keys and unlocks the gate, opens the gate door wide and points outside: "You are free!"

We go outside uncertainly, I look into the bright morning sun and think how beautiful this Sardinia is. He comes out behind us and starts gushing: that the guys had been caught during the night, that the brigadier in Rome had called and had a radio patrol get Padre Spirito out of bed because no one had answered the phone, that the black motorcycle, the guns and all the loot had also been found and that he now believes that we are Austrian tourists.

Then he asks us to sit down at the table in front of the guard room, there is coffee and a roll. We chew and listen to his dramatic description of how the real robbers were captured - a wild shootout, by my soul!

At some point János interrupts him and says that we don't have a ferry until tomorrow evening and that our tickets have expired. I interrupt János and say that our backpack is gone and apparently the side mirrors too. After a quick inspection, I am relieved to see that everything else is still there. The policeman (I have forgotten his name, but he introduced himself over coffee) stands up and calls a name across the street. Then he sits down next to us again and says that we will manage it.

A small, disheveled boy comes slowly down the street, greets us and looks serious. The policeman is chatting at breakneck speed in a language I don't know. The boy looks stubborn at first, then nods

and runs off. We carry on talking. The policeman says that everything will be OK and wants to know if we know Rapid. János shakes his head, I guess that it's a football team, our policeman laughs and says yes, but they're pretty good and I nod, not knowing what the idiot is talking about. Time passes, our ship is gone, the tickets too, the moped is ruined and he's talking about football.

There's a rustling sound behind him and two little dwarves are dragging our backpack over. I want to jump up, but the law tells me to sit down again. The dwarves take off as fast as they can run. Then there is another rustling sound and a young man my age appears behind the lawman, puts two mirrors on the floor and disappears again without looking at us. I beam, because this is real magic. - While I put the mirrors back together, János and the lawman go into the inn and come back a while later, beaming with joy. The day is saved. A barge will cross to Corsica around midday and take us along for free. Since we hardly have any money, the policeman has offered to buy the "Capitano" a large drink, which is fine.

Hours later we hoist the moped onto a small, robust-looking cargo ship, the swell getting stronger and stronger causing the ship to dance up and down and I see the moped sinking in the water a hundred times. After some effort, everything is stowed away, the captain gets his drink in the village inn, János and I wait on the ship, impatiently. The wind is getting stronger, the waves too, and János is already pretty pale around the nose. I tie the engine to the wildly bucking boat, which is now doing 27 knots, and feverishly wonder whether I'm just hungry or whether I'm getting seasick. The captain's booming laughter can be heard from the inn, then we hear his "un altro!" (another one).

The crossing to Corsica

The captain's shrill whistle hurt my ears almost more than the cracking of the rusty gears as he maneuvered back and forth to get us out of the port of Santa Teresa di Gallura. "The Pipers of Tralee" or maybe just a Corsican freedom song, who could have said?

The brave little barge ploughed through the straits between Sardinia and Corsica, which are about 14 km - or less if you count in nautical miles - wide, chugging on diesel. The captain was in good spirits, he had bravely swallowed the fare and now seemed to want to replace the missing on-board loudspeakers with funny whistled shanties from the Sardinian mountains - after all, we are concerned about the well-being of our guests, aren't we? We didn't understand his Sardinian, and he didn't understand our textbook Italian either, so he devoted himself to the engine and the music, János and I retreated to the bow, far away from our musical steam driver.

János was awful to look at, he was pale and wan around the nose, he held on convulsively to the wooden railing with one hand and looked into the distance, choking. I listened to my physical body and was amazed that that was the legendary seasickness and thought hard. What if it isn't seasickness after all? What if I was simply hungry - after all, my breakfast had fallen victim to the work on the moped. János, my good János, had made me a double-decker out of white bread and Sardinian cheese before we left and put it in my jacket while I worked on the moped. I thought about it for a long time and then decided that it could only be hunger - I don't get seasick, not me!

János' ears twitched nervously when I reached into my jacket pocket and heard a rustling sound, but he bravely suppressed his curiosity and didn't look over. I unwrapped the bread slowly and carefully. It rocked so damn much and sometimes a little sea water splashed up, so be careful not to make it salty! The pungent smell of the Sardinian cheese (which, unlike Corsican cheese, was never used as an explosive) hit me unpleasantly in the nose at first, only to then unfold in a caco-olfactory cloud made up of all the scents and smells of the highlands. The cloud of smell must have hit János like a club blow, because he twitched and pulled his head between his shoulders. While I opened my mouth wide, really wide, to sink my teeth into the juicy double-decker, poor János opened his mouth wide too, to make a high-arch sacrifice to the sea god Neptune and the wind god Rasmus.

Of course I remained hungry, because János' accusatory lamb-like look abruptly stopped my snack. The sandwich disappeared again with a rustle in my jacket pocket and stayed there until we reached Corsica, at the southernmost place, Bonifacio. Corsica, here we come!

Bonifacio

Bonifacio is a nest situated on several high chalk cliffs, the harbor is in the gap between the rocks. Nothing special so far, an eagle's nest on rocks, very close to the sky, beautiful. And mainland, above all. The miserable rocking stops, a rope is thrown to the pier and tied up; you are happy to have land under your feet again, even if it is barren and rocky. But the joy ends very quickly when the soldiers, who appear as if from nowhere, start arguing with the captain. Shrugging his shoulders, he keeps pointing at us and chattering, chewing cigarettes, nodding his head, spitting into the harbor basin.

Clear case. A barge with two stowaways; your papers, please! Now it's my turn to translate, having studied French for three years at school, and the first thing that surprises me is how sloppily these legionaries speak their own language, and above all, how quickly! But it sounded completely different at school, Professor! - It certainly wasn't my translation that was to blame, but suddenly we're sitting on the back of a large jeep, helpful hands lift the moped up, then we go up the steep street to the barracks in the fortress. We're going to the centurion, says the decurio, he has to decide, after all he's a centurion and I'm just a decurio! Unfortunately, I think about yesterday and try to find out, stammering, whether they are looking for bank robbers again (I say: robbers above a bank, for lack of a technical term). Well, maybe I should have left it alone. The decurio hisses into his radio again as we drive uphill past some Corsicans riding donkeys. "I already have a feeling where we'll be spending the night tonight," János murmurs resignedly and buries his face in resignation on his crossed forearms. I whisper back: "...but there is one good thing about it, on this incline one of us would have had to get off and push!"

The Bonifacio fortress is probably a beautiful tourist attraction. Probably. We drive into the fortress's barracks courtyard, which looks like all barracks courtyards in the world. Otherwise we don't see anything of Bonifacio. Oh yes, maybe the big clock in the long, bare corridor where we sit on a wooden bench and wait, wait, wait. The decurion, probably promoted to centurion during the long wait, often walks past us and nods seriously at us each time; the legionaries, perhaps already promoted to decurion by now, march down the corridor once and don't even look at us; then finally the centurion appears, who was probably just waiting until he was promoted to general or at least rear admiral.

"Nonsense!" says János, "he just finished his siesta and then had dinner."

In short, a well-rested and well-fed general has its advantages: we can hear him laughing from the hallway as he speaks on the phone to his colleague in Santa Teresa di Gallura, who we know very well. [Perhaps something like this: "Hello, dear servant, you can stop the manhunt, I have caught your bank robbers!" - "No, we have them!" - "Why? They are sitting with me, a fat bald man and a tall, thin man, we fished them off a barge..." - "No, we have the right ones, the ones with you are two harmless Austrian lunatics on a moped..." - "Oh, come on, tell me..."]. Then he comes out into the corridor, grins and gives us our passports back, says that our adventure with the Sardinians was very funny, that he must tell his wife about it right away, and waves to us so that we can leave now.

The decurion from before welcomes us in the courtyard and says that it is probably too late to drive on; if we wanted, we could spend the night in the former - now empty - stables. After we had briefly looked into the gaping, dark emptiness with the inevitable bars, we just looked at each other briefly and politely declined. No thanks, we'd rather sleep outside! - The soldier is surprised, shrugs his shoulders and allows us to spend the night in the courtyard when János asks him.

One night in a cell in Sardinia, one night in the barracks yard in Corsica; these statistics are impressive. We sit, thickly wrapped up,

with our backs leaning against the moped and doze towards the morning. Several times during the night we hear shouts and the clack of boot heels: changing of the guard!

Above the sea

If I haven't mentioned it yet: we naturally wanted to drive the route of the "Rallye des Mille Virages" - the rally of a thousand curves - from Bonifacio to Bastia, anti-clockwise, like Juan Fangio once did. So the next day we set off, after a short lap of honour through the steep streets of the mountain town, we head northwest towards Propriano, which is halfway to the capital Ajaccio. There are two things we want to see here: the nature reserve near the Bruzzi Islands and the Calanques of Roccapina. You probably know what islands are, but the Calanques need to be explained: they are bizarre rock formations, rocky cliffs that rise vertically above the sea. (Well, OK, some people also use the term Calanque to describe the fjords that have eaten their way deep into the mainland between the actual Calanques...). The most famous Calanque is the one on France's south coast, 13 km from Marseille, near the town of Cassis - there Europe's highest cliff, the Calanque du Cap Canaille, towers over 500 meters above the sea (it is now a paradise for free climbers). Second place goes to the Calanque of Piana on Corsica (we want to go there later); it is not quite as huge, but it goes up about 400 meters, but also down...

In the sixties there was no free climbing, at least we were not aware of this sport. However, János and I (usually the two of us) had made the mountains of Vorarlberg unsafe; many a real mountaineer could only shake his head in silence and/or despair when he saw us city kids, armed with our mother's hemp rope (yes, the one for hanging up the laundry!), climbing around in the mountains. Of course, we had no idea about real climbing; we were simple mountain hikers who sometimes climbed the odd easy rock face, especially when our parents weren't watching. Our last climbing action was climbing the rock called Tschengla, just below the Pfandl cable car in Bregenz, when our mother's hemp rope and her patience were at an end. - [When I later went up there in the cable car, I shuddered every time,

because now I'm a father myself and my stomach turns when I imagine my children there ...]

Okay, where were we: at the Calanques. Hardly anyone knows the third ones, those of Roccapiña. Far too unspectacular for self-respecting free climbers, they are not 500, not 400, no, maybe not even 40 meters high, and not even vertical. But for us amateurs, they are just right. And, as János innocently noted, "...if you fall, just get away from the rock, push off! And make sure that you don't fall off the rock." you fall into the water..."

[From a purely film academic perspective, the following dialogue should be added here:

"Have you ever tried that?" - "No."

"Did you think back then that it could work?" - "Yes."

"Do you think today that it could work?" - "No."]

We spent the whole day in the Bruzzi area and were a little disappointed because the famous islands were just small islets - and there were no shipwrecks anywhere! But that's exactly what they were famous for: the clever Corsicans of earlier centuries lured ships to the Bruzzis with the help of false beacons. - Were they among Bill Gates' ancestors? - Well, we didn't let that discourage us, because the nature reserve is beautiful, and we also discovered that the best places to swim and dive are right next to the "no swimming" signs. Those clever Corsicans!

Dinner: cold - we don't dare light a fire in the nature reserve. Spending the night in the pine bushes: a dream! We see stars, thousands upon millions of mega-many stars! We compete to see whether the moving object is a satellite or a comet, only to be sobered to discover that there must be an airport nearby. But it was also the first night we slept properly, without any bars. My brother, I love you, sleep well, you too!

The Calanques

In the morning we drive a few kilometers along a tiny little path along the coast, through increasingly dense undergrowth, to the Calanques. The moped is made unusable with a few simple steps, hidden under the bushes and covered with pine branches. Wearing only swimming trunks and father's camera (a Makina bellows device), we head for the Calanques. From up close, 40 meters is already a throat-squeaking height. Before we get on, I pull a thorn out of János's foot; we had underestimated the macchia (that's what the low bushes are called here).

After the first half hour of climbing I've had enough. But a look at my brother, who is fighting doggedly, gives me new strength: no, if he can do it, then so can I! I stop now and then, direct him a little further forward or backward and take a photo. What seems so easy to write here was in reality a hair-raisingly complicated matter. A bellows device like this is not only heavy, it also has to be opened and operated with two hands (you would hold on to the rock with your third hand, if you had one). And the film is expensive. So no half-hearted snapshots, you have to think carefully about every shot, choose the right section, János has to be yes, be in a good mood, with the sea and the steep cliffs, so I have to bend further forward, no, back and - a cry from János, and I catch myself in time. Phew, that was close!

János also takes a few pictures of me, and when we hand over the camera, the camera is often in mortal danger. Until the clever little fellow of a younger brother (me) comes up with the idea of replacing the person instead of handing over the camera in a complicated way.

So the camera is jammed into a crevice in the rock, then A climbs further and B gets to the camera. That works quite well, because it is easier to climb without the camera. We scrambled around there all day, found a deep part of the small fjord that extends into the Calanques and jumped into the water from 3-4m - pure bathing fun.

We spent the next two days lazing around in the Propriano area, swimming on the rocky beaches of the Golfe de Valinco or scrambling through the man-high bushes to get to some dilapidated wind-

mill ruin or a farm. The latter served successfully to procure food, our money was worth more to the farmers than in the city.

We gradually made our way to Cap de Moro, a barren and rocky area that offers a wonderful view of the Bay of Ajaccio. There we sat, watching the boats and admiring the sea: it really was much bigger than Lake Constance, and much more moving.

János had another trump card up his sleeve; he had vaguely hinted in Rome that there would be something special in Ajaccio, but he didn't tell me anything. We looked out over the gulf, and in the distance, west of the city, you could see the group of islands known as the Iles Sanguinaires, the "Bloody Islands". János looked there more and more often, asked if I couldn't see the lighthouse on the middle island; and with dreamy eyes he murmured: it must be great there, I want to go there!

Ajaccio

At first I didn't take it literally. We rode into Ajaccio, I had a good look around the outskirts of the city to see if there were any cheap places to stay. But János tapped me on the shoulder and shouted in my ear that I should continue along the sea on the coastal road, yes, into the center, along the promenade road.

In the middle of the promenade he commanded "Stop!" János walked towards a palace, grinned at my astonished face and rang the bell. The brother gatekeeper opened the door and let me in. us in. While we were taking care of the moped and unloading our luggage, János whispered that we could now stay in the archbishop's palace for a few days - so that was what he had kept from me in Rome! The archbishop wasn't there, but that was still okay, we could at least sleep in normal beds, have a proper breakfast. We wanted to stay one or two nights, see the city and then move on.

And so it was. Or almost. On the very first evening, János directed me about 10km out of the city to the west, to a headland called Point de Parata. There, at the foot of the an old Moorish (actually: Genoese) lighthouse, we sat, carefully drinking water from a canteen

(an earlier form of sundowner) and looking over to the Iles Sanguinaires, to their silhouettes in the sunset. I didn't need to be a clairvoyant to guess my brother's thoughts. From the Pointe de Parata it was a good 2km to the largest island, in between smaller boulders (islands would be an exaggeration) were lined up in the water like a string of pearls. And I thought I saw a small white dog running around under the lighthouse on the main island in the back-light. The bright building in front of it had to be a restaurant, right? (By now it should have become clear that we had to plan the entire trip without Dumont or Marco Polo, otherwise things would have turned out differently...)

We didn't say much; on our previous voyages of discovery we had never had to debate for long about how and what. Yes, swim along the small rocks, relax on them. Put a few coins in our pockets to maybe buy something to drink in the restaurant on the main island. After a walk around, swim back again. We looked at each other inquisitively once more, then nodded at the same time: so be it!

The next morning - at the crack of dawn - we drove back to Point de Parata. A beautiful, bright and clear morning. When we get to the Moorish tower, we get a brief shock: the place, which was deserted and empty the night before, is now teeming with people. A film crew is working on the tower itself, filming a love scene (a pirate kisses a lightly armored woman before he swings himself up the tower with a knife between his teeth, and he does this a dozen times in a row!). I pull out my camera and take a photo of the historically significant tower (somehow the pirate's long legs got into the picture too, strange, strange!). The cameraman picks up my Makina and is amazed: it was built in 1939! We are undecided for a while (János thinks about where to hide the moped and I think about what the pirate would look like without makeup), then János discovers a group of bushes where we can hide the moped and change.

The Iles Sanguinaires

We start swimming with just a few coins (restaurant!) and a small pocket knife (white dog!) in our swimming trunks. The sea is as smooth as glass, there is not a breath of wind, so we make good

progress. It takes a long time until we reach the first small rock and take a rest. Then to the next one and so on until we (almost) reach the main island. In the meantime, a strong wind has started, which also causes some waves. Swimming “against” the current becomes difficult, we now have to take breaks in the water; while one of us rests, the other treads water and holds the first one; then we switch. The closer we get to the main island, the more I suspect that the lighthouse isn’t one, but one of those Moorish round towers, and the restaurant is dilapidated, windowless, burnt out and lost.

I don’t say anything yet, we’re still fully occupied with swimming and resting. The wind picks up even more around midday, and we reach the east bank of the main island with difficulty. János carefully climbs onto the bank in front of me, then we sit down and rest. I say: “Now I know why the island is called ‘the bloody one’” and point to our feet: the dark red porphyry rock is as sharp as coral, our soles are bleeding from tiny cuts. We discuss the Nix lighthouse, Nix restaurant and Nix drink; we decide to swim along the leeward north side of the coast to the tower. No one can walk barefoot on the island; they would completely cut their soles.

So we swim along the island at a distance of a few meters, the mid-day sun burning down mercilessly. When we get close to the tower, it turns out to be a ruin (it’s called Tour Genoise, the Genoese tower, by the way). No white dog, no restaurant, and climbing up this steep coast is out of the question. We rest in the water and swim back a little. We take a break in the shade of a huge boulder and sit there for about an hour. Not a word of disappointment passes our lips. Not a word.

The way back is easier because the wind is blowing from the southwest and we are swimming with the waves. But my knee (the one that was pinched) is hurting and swelling. I take more frequent breaks now; János is worried about whether I can manage to swim with just one leg, but I prove to him that I can grit my teeth: at sunset we reach the Point de Parata again. Exhausted and panting, we sit on the beach, drink a sip of water for the first time since the morning and look back at the sunset. When we dig out the moped and get

dressed, he complains of pain in his shoulders. I look at him and discover finger-thick, watery blisters.

Half an hour later we ring the doorman's doorbell and lie down. An hour later I run downstairs in despair and try to explain to the priest on duty that János has blisters on his shoulders, a terrible headache and a fever to boot. After ages the Father Medicus (that's what they really called him) is called. He gives János burn ointment and an injection, shaking his head at us fools who have been in the water unprotected for a whole day in the blazing sunshine. My skin is red but not in pain, and I still get the ointment rubbed on. I cowardly avoid the injection. [Years later, at a high school reunion, one of János' schoolmates - I think it was the well-known Vorarlberg skier Udo Albl - told us that he had been diving in the Ajaccio area around the same time and that you had to be very careful of the sharks there. I was at least as pale as János when he told me!]

The doctor father comes several times to check on János. In the morning we are feeling more or less OK again; the father gives us a long and only partially understandable lecture (or has the fool ever tried swimming in the sea with a wide-brimmed hat?!). The ugly, watery blisters are carefully cut open and bandaged. János has to stay in bed for three days. We are disappointed because our travel plans are completely thrown off track. And whether we would be allowed to stay there that long? János only negotiated one or two nights with His Excellency the Archbishop from Rome; there was no talk of four or five days! The Father Medicus looks stern and remains firm; he will take responsibility for this.

I am now trying to be a nurse as best I can. Fetch water. Bring food. Empty the chamber pot. Shake the pillows into place. Feeding him semolina porridge by the spoonful. I sit bravely for hours next to János' bed, twiddling my thumbs. We discuss for a long time about his future career as a priest, and later about my career aspirations of becoming an astronaut. I would need a lot of math for that, yes. And the binary system, calculating with zero and one, vital for survival in space. So János teaches me how to add and subtract with my fingers (the things are called digits). When it comes to multiplication, which he is a genius at, as well as binary division, I finally give up. Outside,

the birds are chirping, the children are laughing brightly, and below, on the promenade, beauties in miniskirts are strolling. And I'm sitting in a bare, darkened hospital room, listening to how you can remember the transfer by bending your little finger.

"Now go, go!" says János. I let him ask me for a while, no, I can't do that, you can't do that, but then I give in and disappear, explore the old town, the beach promenade and the beauties strolling there in the sunshine. Oh, how long it has been since the Signora brought me that horrible beer to my room! Sighing, I return to my brother. Celibacy is not for me, really not!

On the third day, the doctor father carefully bandages the burns, says that it is still far too early to leave, and adds sadly that he knows that we cannot be stopped. We thank him, say goodbye to each priest individually with a long handshake and a serious "Addio", then the moped is saddled up and we set off. But we only get as far as the end of the promenade street, because there are children, tourists and elf-like beauties frolicking on the sandy beach. We decide to have a long swim before continuing on our journey.

Bathing pleasures (II)

The idea of going into the water with bandaged blisters is pure madness. But in that sense I could have stayed in front of the TV in Bregenz, couldn't I? So off with the robe and into the water! I feel the eyes of the elves, my chest puffs out and my pants bulge (sorry, but that's how it was!). And like the peacock I was, I strut a few meters across the sand and throw myself headfirst into the water in a skillful manner. Flat, as is appropriate for shallow water, half belly flop, half headfirst. And immediately push back up again with my arms under the water. Surface and immediately check whether the beauties have been watching!

Yes, of course they have, and appreciative glances peek out from under wide sun hats; I look over at them gratefully. I see János standing on a small boulder, then climbing onto a higher one and trying to jump headfirst into the water. I call and scream: "No! Jáááános! Don't jump! Not like that!" but it is too late, he flies in a

wide arc over the water like an eagle, burrows deep into the sand of the shallow water and stands up, astonished, in the water that is only knee-deep: his forehead is scraped, bright blood is running down his face. I run to him, examine him in a hurry: thank God, nothing serious. But he is bleeding quite a bit! He keeps asking, dazed and completely bewildered, why him and why not me?! - I explain to him that I have practiced jumping in the shallow water before and that my header was only a pretense. Because of the girls, I add sheepishly.

My handkerchief is now soaked in blood; I think quickly about what I can do now. My gaze falls on the archbishop's palace. János follows my gaze and shakes his head, no, we can't do that!

Of course we can! I am now mother and father to him, I energetically grab the reluctant brother and lead him across the street, impatiently ring the doorman. The question dies in his throat when he sees János covered in blood. He immediately calls Father Medicus.

Priests are only human, I learn that quickly. Even the dazed János turns pale at the Corsican curses that the priest now lets loose. Really, these brain-dead tourists! They can't even go an hour without bandages and painkillers! Well, at least János only scalped himself superficially and didn't get a fracture or even a concussion. While the priest puts a proper plaster on my brother and then a turban, I swear to myself that we would immediately drive 20 or 30 km further so that - even if the worst came to the worst - we would not be faced with the humiliating situation of having to ring his doorbell a third time.

The kind-hearted Samaritan looked at his work again, nodded in satisfaction and ordered that we spend another night here; because only when he examined János again tomorrow morning could he be sure that there was no concussion. So we went back to our room, I fetched the moped and the luggage from the beach and had to tell the compassionate ladies there how poor János was doing. They ask and ask and I urgently need to get back to the palace, so I promise to come back right away. This of course means that I have to pack up my luggage, moped and the dazed János as quickly as possible and then rejoin the elves on the beach. - I only have the Bregenz Indians'

long-practiced art of stealth to thank for the fact that I was able to get past the brother porter at night unseen and like a cat (theoretically, because all the sneaking and sweaty heart palpitations were for nothing: the gate was open, the porter's lodge was empty and he was snoring blissfully in front of the blaring television...).

Above the Sea II

This happened on the first day of the second half of our trip, and we were still in Ajaccio. At this time we should already be in the highlands, the originally planned route led via Vizzavona to the old capital Corte and past the foot of the 2708m high Monte Cinto, westwards again to Porto and Piana, back to the sea, to the Calanques of Piana, back to the route of the Mille Virages. We discussed things back and forth over our (definitely) last breakfast in the archbishop's kitchen vault, and could not easily accept a change in route, as it would mean admitting partial failure. On the other hand, we had spent 4 days in Ajaccio without seeing much of the city and should have left the Calanques behind us long ago today. However, we would save a little money on petrol, which seemed appropriate with this thirsty carburetor from Genoa. So we decided to "just" drive along the coast and forego the trip to Corte, but not the Calanques near Piana.

Without looking left or right, we left Ajaccio in a hurry to the north, stopping at the Golfe de Sagone to have a long swim. János still looked pretty rickety, and there were a few disagreements that needed to be settled in a brotherly manner. Shouldn't I have thought to take sunscreen with me? Spending a whole day in the water would inevitably lead to sunburn, why didn't anyone think of that? Did my jump really have to be so spectacular and boastful? And - worst of all - what was going on between the old women and me? There was still the young friend in Bregenz, eh?!

I countered that I didn't get sunburned because there was no excess fat to lift me out of the water (an unfair allusion to my then athletic 60 and his already impressive 90kg, roughly). And who of us is bald, who scalps themselves in the sand on the shore, who has to compulsively copy everything the little one does? And you don't un-

derstand the thing about the ladies, my brother, there's nothing to confess, and that's that! - I only have vague remnants of this conversation left in my memory; forgetting will also have its good side.

We spent the whole day swimming in the area north of Cargese, lazing in the sun and eating a few cans of tuna that had travelled from the Atlantic to Bregenz and from there by moped to Corsica in the Mediterranean to reach their final destination. Gradually I brought the conversation to something more serious; our petrol price and financial calculations were completely wrong, our cash register was shrinking noticeably and worryingly despite the most economical use. It must have looked strange, two guys camping in the most deserted area with nothing better to do than checking the travel accounts backwards and forwards. Then János sighs and says it's true, we're running into a problem. He will call a fellow student who lives in Calvi tomorrow to see if we can visit him; he might be able to help us overcome our shortage.

The next morning we drive up high, into the middle of the Calanques, climb around all day and look down at the blue sea. We don't dare to challenge these huge rocks and stay on the narrow goat paths. Sometimes we crawl out onto one of the rocky ledges and stick our heads out over the abyss. Sometimes János throws a stone down, we count the seconds and try to work out how far the stone might have fallen. In this beautiful, peaceful landscape, our disagreements suddenly seem far away, as do our worries about the travel budget.

We spend the night in the bay of Porto, sleep wonderfully in a dilapidated little stone hut and look up at the stars through the missing roof. In the evening, János had called his friend Pierre in Calvi and told him we were coming; we were warmly welcomed!

The next day we head north again, chatting to a shepherd during the siesta in three languages (French, Italian and Corsican, which only he can speak) and learning a lot about his life as a shepherd. We share canned tuna, salami and Corsican cheese that is so spicy that it knocks you off your feet. I am fascinated by the huge Corsican folding dagger that the old man uses to share white bread and cheese.

From that moment on, I know that I would not return home without one.

To be honest, the time and the distance between Piana, Ile Rousse and St. Florent have largely been forgotten; although I am tempted to throw in a good story here, or at least to try, I will for once stay on the path of virtue and only report what I still remember - at least a little.

The snake

Somewhere along the way, as we master the wild curves of the poorly maintained, narrow coastal road with brilliant driving technique, I jerk the handlebars: a long, thin snake crosses our path. I have a hard time keeping the overloaded moped on the road despite the high speed. János shouts in my ear: “Did you see them?!” and I growl back over my shoulder, asking if he thinks I was just zigzagging for no reason, huh!?

Later - I think a few days later - we had our (only) breakdown in Corsica: I felt the rear wheel starting to wobble, I slowed down and stopped. The rear wheel had a flat tire. No problem, as I had taken enough tools with me as a precaution, so we got to work together like a well-rehearsed team. After unloading the luggage and jacking it up, I started to unscrew the axle and immediately stopped: there was something wrapped around the wheel hub and the chain case. It must be an old rag, I think and pull it out.

János took it in his hand and then we were both shocked: it was the remains of the snake that didn't make it and wrapped itself around the rear wheel and the chain case. I'm pretty pale and skip the snack that day.

Calvi

We won't see much of Calvi, because as soon as we enter the town, János directs me left into the mountains, where after some searching and wandering we find the small village where Pierre lives. I can only remember that Pierre, who I assumed was a fellow student, turned

out to be one of the university teachers from Rome, was already a few years older than us and was vacationing here in his parents' house. He wanted to drive with János in the dusty Renault to the next largest village or suburb of Calvi to visit someone; I had the honor of being able to take his niece (I think) in the back seat and follow the two older ones as best I could.

Before any false impressions can arise, I would rather report straight away that I was already familiar with the stories of shotgun-wielding Corsican fathers, that the niece René did not speak any of the languages I knew properly and was also much younger than me, more like 12 than 13. She begged and insisted, chattered and babbled at Pierre until he gave in and, shaking his head, translated the irrevocable advice to me in the form of a request. Secretly, I was proud to have something special with the moped and immediately agreed.

While Pierre, János and Renée disappeared into the rectory, I declined with thanks and said I would walk around a bit and look at the place - today, I wasn't in the mood to talk shop with priests. I walked around a bit, returned to the main square and discovered that there was a stone bench around the church on which some old men were sitting, calmly staring at the heat of the main square. (Later, when I was reading the Corsica volume of Asterix with my son, I saw the old men there again, to my astonishment).

I sat down at a respectful distance, but one of them spoke to me and gestured to me that I should just come closer. In a trilingual mixture of the two languages I know, we talked about where I was from and where I was going. What kind of moped it was. No, you don't say, from Austria to here, and so fast - they saw me racing up! Giuseppe, he has one of those too, but it only goes in first gear, you can overtake it on foot, at least you can, you with your young feet!

And what a pretty young wife I have. She's veeerrrry young, one of them grumbled. No, she's not my wife, I'm still a student. Oh, it must be difficult, being a married man in school, surrounded by all those children. No, I'm not married, she's not my wife! Well, my boy, it's the same for all of us; first we can't do enough crazy things just to get her, and then once we've had her long enough, we can't get rid of

her, right, Giovanni, you don't want your old lady anymore either? Roaring laughter, I protest no, but it's completely pointless. My school French and equally good Italian are obviously not getting through their presumably battery-free hearing aids. If they even know anything about such things here. Batteries, I mean.

In the political part that follows, I keep my mouth shut as best I can. I nod when they complain that the French have always oppressed the Corsicans. I nod again when they say that nothing like that would have happened "under the prefect" (whoever the prefect may be). That the French have been really bad since the prefect is no longer there (aha, probably dead). But the young people would still bomb the French out of Corsica, yes, and that would certainly be in the prefect's interest, he was a savage himself back then, wasn't he? (I nod vaguely, doubting whether he has the right to be wrong). And then they ask me, indignant, whether I think it is right that the French sent the prefect into exile and left him to die there - on the distant island of St. Helena?!

How many sheep does my father have? Does he make the cheese himself or does he go to the Union (cooperative). I explain, somewhat resignedly, that we don't have a single sheep and that my father doesn't make cheese, but works with electronics in the basement workshop (as a hobby; or, how should I translate "export salesman" for Corsican hearing aids?). The old people nod thoughtfully and shake their heads, yes, yes, So-and-so, he tried it too, but the machine-made cheese is no good, So-and-so has to take it all the way to Marseille, no one here would buy it. I nod and grin, saying that Corsican cheese is really something special. They thaw out, one of them rummages in his bag and pulls out a cheese wrapped in paper. With red ears and beads of sweat on my forehead, I chew on my sample, this time irretrievably and mercilessly the famous explosive! One of them hands me a bottle as I gasp for air. The acrid, bitter cider (apple juice) has never been more welcome to me than now. My father should think again about the machinery in his fromagerie and maybe make the cheese a mano again, that's what we all do here. I nod silently, not daring to take a deep breath. Because of the explosive.

The conversation then continues without my participation, the stranger is told that the prefect was the Great Corsican, born in Ajaccio (15 August 1769), and that he ruled half the world. But the French! No, they can't even make cheese properly, don't you want another piece? And so on and so on. I breathe a sigh of relief when Pierre, János and the niece come out again and I can say goodbye to the old people.

Before we set off, Renée was quite cheeky, chattering and using sign language to indicate that she was expecting at least a rocket ride: wrummm, step on the gas! OK, I nod internationally. - When we arrived, she jumped out of the saddle and ran towards Pierre's car, which was just arriving, gesticulating wildly and letting loose a torrent of words: how great it had been and that we had driven like savages; arms and hands eloquently described the ride on the rocket, the scattering goats and the goatherd who saved himself by bravely jumping into the ditch. I grinned at János, who understood a little more of her rambling and seemed to disagree with my ride. Father Pierre gave me a friendly slap and said: "Tu es con, tu sais?" which I would translate to advantage as: "You drove like a wild boar, you know?"

Pierre's sister generously packs us bread, cheese and a hard salami - the provisions will last us a few days. We drive on without asking Pierre for money, look at Calvi's old town and the famous castle complex. In the area around the town of Ile Rousse we drive around a bit, looking at everything. I do the math again, take into account that the return fare (in Italian lire) remains untouched, rummage and scrape together the last pennies and buy a nice Corsican folding knife for myself with János - the smallest and cheapest one they had, but a Corsican one, after all. Probably not the smartest decision, but very emotional. Very István.

Funfair in St. Florent

On the second to last evening we reach St. Florent, a small and very Corsican-looking town in the bay of the same name. There is a funfair on the beach. We eat our second to last provisions and wander around the funfair; a miniature Prater in the middle of Corsica.

Our eyes light up, we feel like children again. The last attraction on the north beach was a tent with music and a dance floor outside. Lots of young people our age on the dance floor. We sit on the edge and watch them; my neighbor and I keep smiling at each other.

János looks at the dance floor, I slide over a little and make contact. Corsican? No, from France, Nicole. Ah, my brother and I come from Austria. On a moped. The white one over there. Nicole is impressed. She is friendly, speaks slowly and in simple words. My French doesn't seem so stilted anymore, I dare to speak more fluently. I tell her what, where, how and why. She is on a school leaving trip, from the Lyon area. She will study medicine, and live with a friend in a student apartment. The whole class passed, and now they are here for a few more days. Those on the dance floor there, those are their classmates. I'm on the line and just say: aha!

They have nice music, says Nicole and looks over at the dance floor again. Yes, I say and nod several times, the music is good, but it's on tape. You can still dance to it, says Nicole, and I continue to sit on the long line. Slowly, like a drop of sweat, a thought creeps through my head, I wipe it away. Then Nicole asks if I don't want to dance? I say that I've always played in the band and therefore can't dance. She laughs at me, then leads me onto the dance floor. A kind God takes pity on me and plays one slow dance after another. János sits rather forlornly in the sand and looks up at the stars when he's not watching us dance. Nicole doesn't seem to be particularly lucky when she has to smile at a full-blooded dancer like me. I do my best, but our attempts all end the same, in a tight embrace.

That has its good side too. We can whisper in each other's ears, I hear my heart pounding in my throat, I feel Nicole with all my senses and realize that it's been an eternity since I drank Signora's beer. I feel like we're one single body, split in two by annoying fabric; sweaty bodies, carefully and curiously touching each other as they rock and sway. I hear Nicole whispering, giggling, whether all the bad Austrians are as daring as I am.

Apparently you can dance on a long line, not just sit on it, I reply that I see myself as rather shy. Nicole laughs and says she is a puce (a

flea, damn it, why a flea?) and looks me in the face. I say a flea, I don't understand that, I know Libra or Gemini and also Scorpio, but a puce (a flea), no, I don't know that, and the person dancing next to me looks at me grumpily, as if I had said something bad. Nicole is silent, then she whispers if I don't understand, a puce, a pucelle (a small flea, a little flea).

Here and now I call for a general rethinking of French teaching in our schools; what a metro is, a bourdaloup or a topsail staysail, yes, we learn that, but not what the French understand by pucelle: Nicole dances me discreetly out of the crowd to the less lit edge of the dance floor and hugs me tightly, then whispers in my ear that a puce is when you have never had sex with a man. Joan of Arc, the Pucelle d'Orléans, the Maid of Orleans. Do you understand? I nod silently and we sway, tightly embraced, to the beat of "Yesterday, all my troubles seem so far away." My head is racing with thoughts: why is she telling me this and what does that mean?

We dance in silence. I am so sad because I have just fallen in love and tomorrow it will all be over again. I tell Nicole that our trip is over and that we will continue on tomorrow morning, to Bastia, to the ferry to Italy. Nicole asks if we are really leaving yet. I nod and then we both cry. John Lennon is finished at some point, Paul McCartney continues: "She was just seventeen, and you know what I mean." and we jump like goats, like everyone else around us. Nicole stops and says she can't dance anymore. Not when everything is so incredibly sad.

Nicole from Lyon and István from Bregenz take a few steps to the sandy beach, to the edge of the cones of light, sit under billions of stars, listen to the gentle rolling of the beach waves and whisper quietly, whisper and cry. István from Bregenz kisses Nicole from Lyon, pulls her gently into the sand and hugs her. János from Rome slowly comes closer, coughs quietly and says to István from Bregenz: "Come on, we have to move on!" and to Nicole from Lyon: "Il faut nous partir (we must leave)!"

Blind from tears, I let János drive for once, we drive a few kilometers towards Punta Mignola, where we have already scouted out a

good place to sleep near a castle ruin during the day. We don't speak much. János starts and says that he is sorry, but I growl that he should finally leave me alone. We both know that he is right, but my heart is almost bursting with grief and heartache.

The Col de Teghime

The next morning, the sun only wakes us up when it is already quite high; we have both slept deeply and dreamlessly. In silence, János prepares some bread, in silence I fasten the steel spring that keeps slipping off the exhaust and needs to be fastened several times a day. Then we sit opposite each other, I suffer under János' sad look. Oh, what the heck, I punch him on the arm with a grin: "Must be hard for you to be on the road with an asshole like me!" János smiles hesitantly at first, then we both laugh. Years later, we still wink at each other when there is talk of a sand flea in Corsica.

We eat the last of our provisions for breakfast and drive past St. Florent to the pass road that leads up over the Col de Teghime to almost 1300m and from there back to sea level in the port city of Bastia, where the ferry to Italy awaits us. We have already written off the round trip to Cap Corse with its extensive chestnut and walnut forests. No time and no money left.

After the last gas station, at the first hairpin bend with a rest area and panoramic view, I stop. We check our luggage, travel money and petrol tank again: everything seems pretty meager. We have run out of provisions, the travel money is empty except for the "Italian reserve". empty and the tank, well, the tank! I shake my head and say that the juice might still last up, but we have to drive downhill electrically (that is, without the motor) so that it lasts to the harbor. János says that we can't take long today, because we can't buy provisions until we get to Italy. That would be 24 hours "without."

A tourist standing next to us speaks to us. He is also from Austria, there, the old black Mercedes with Viennese license plates, that is his. Where we come from, etc. etc. Jesus, on the moped, from Bregenz to here! That is a huge distance! He had come from Marseille on the ferry, the crossing was extremely expensive, but he had saved up

for this trip for a long time and could finally afford it; but on a moped, no! - It quickly became clear that he was a friendly and easy-going person who meant no harm, quite the opposite: after questioning us at length, he said that he had heard how we had discussed things and that he wanted to give us (so many) francs so that we could get home safely. He calculated out loud that this would roughly be enough for two tanks of gas plus a decent snack.

At first we thought he was joking when he said it so casually, but he reached into his pocket and counted out some bills. Without hesitation he pressed the money into my hand; when János asked him how we could pay it back, he said, "Oh well, you'll probably meet someone who needs it one day, like you do today, so just give them something!" Then he got into his car, "God bless you and drive carefully!" and sped off.

We remembered this man for years; that was charity in its purest form! At the moment, however, we drove the short distance back to the petrol station, filled up the tank and bought food for two days, then we drove up the mountain, which at that time (after the Koppen Pass near Hallstatt) was the second steepest pass road in Europe. At the top, at the pass, where an old cannon commemorates one of the decisive battles for the liberation of Corsica, we stopped for a rest and looked again at Corsica, which you can see almost in its entirety from up there.

János rummaged through his papers again, found the place with the Col de Teghime and read out who had fought against whom there. It was a nice way to end the day. For our trip, we had successfully completed something important for us and the sun was shining, today especially for a man in a Mercedes who was heading south to Porto Vecchio. Yes, my friend, I have often recognized you since then, paid off my debts, and I'm still doing it! I looked down at St. Florent, down there where the old church stands in the water, and almost forgot about Nicole, my flea from Lyon. János read on and brought a part of the history of Corsica to life.

From Bastia the ferry took us to La Spezia, from there - because the ferry was delayed - we made a real dash to Florence, where I lit-

erally got János to the train at the last minute. I remember as if it were yesterday that I needed exactly 58 minutes for the last 70km; we looked at the clock almost every minute, that's how close the time was until departure.

And I have forgotten just as precisely, but really absolutely forgotten, how my journey from Florence to Bregenz went; I still discover fragmentary memories of an overnight stay on a farm near Merano and the next day a visit to my school friend Walter S., who lived in Nauders on the Reschen-Scheideck Pass.

But the rest is forgotten. Forever.

The Boxmatura (The Boxing Graduation)

I don't really care that everyone and everyone uses the western zodiac signs for astrology; you can see how stupid that is when you look at the fact that I was born under the zodiac sign of Libra, for example; an interesting animal, Libra, isn't it? - Seen in this light, it's natural to use something more appropriate, such as the Chinese calendar, according to which I was born under the sign of the rat. That's more appropriate. Or the Tasmanian devil - definitely my zodiac sign! I would like it best if it were recognized that I was born under the sign of the Charioteer, whose main star is Canopus. And I could tell you a lot about Canopus, the cleverest mind at the court of Pharaoh Ptolemy III.

Why am I thinking of this now? - Well, I was just thinking about why I didn't graduate until I was 20, even though I didn't lose a single year by repeating a year or anything like that. As I was born in the autumn and only started school at the age of 7, and completed a 5-year upper secondary school - that is, with a polytechnic year - it is easy to calculate that I was not ready until I was 20. I served these 5 years of upper secondary school in Salzburg.

Why in Salzburg? - Well, the professor of ancient Greek at our humanistic high school was a die-hard Nazi, who, among other things, made my fellow student Tomi, also of Hungarian origin, and me - sitting backwards on our wooden chairs - gallop across the wooden floor of our classroom while he uttered his favorite saying (it couldn't get any more stupid than that). read: "... there they are, the Avar horsemen from the east..." Well, it was difficult for me to learn ancient Greek under such conditions. As an honorable representative of the pure German race, he offered me the choice of either failing every year - and he would make sure of that, by Thor! - or leaving school with honor. I was the wiser one and emigrated to Salzburg, where my parents were able to get me a place in an elite school. When I heard

years later that this teacher had been dishonorably fired from the school because of his honorable but backward behavior, I was a little happy. I was even happier when he lost his position as a member of parliament because the right-wing party fired him for some embarrassing outbursts on the radio and a completely crazy election speech on local television. He was then placed in a psychiatric institution, where he lived to a very old age.

The fact that I didn't take my Matura until the fall needs to be explained. Subjectively speaking, I was always a good student, objectively speaking, other things interested me more than learning at the time, and strictly objectively speaking, my grades were more so-so to just-okay, even if they put me in the top third of the class. I had barely acquired a basic, half-knowledge of the subject of women through time-consuming, detailed work (which hasn't changed much to this day), when I was presented with the bill for it in mathematics.

No, I don't think that had anything to do with the fact that the mathematics teacher was the second (and last) Nazi among my teachers; I was simply too ambitious with the basics and too lazy and too comfortable when learning, and that is not ideal for mathematics. When I let out a big mouth during a smoke break in the schoolyard and called the mathematics teacher a "...fucking Nazi" who "has to be careful not to paint swastikas on the blackboard instead of plus signs...", I noticed far too late that my classmates were staring past me in horror; the teacher was standing behind me, his eyes flashing and his chin shaking with anger. Since my grades in the first three quarters of the school year were fairly satisfactory to just about usable and I had already passed the written Matura, I was not particularly worried. But I should have done it, because in the last few weeks of school I got one mark after another in math. So far, so good.

And, since I've already started, I have to tell you that Michael K., a lovable, affectionate school friend who became quite annoying over time, took me to boxing training a few times and hoped that we would achieve something together in the Salzburger Stier* boxing club. However, I didn't really have a good attitude towards training and so Michael had to become a boxing legend on his own. The Salzburger Stier needs to be explained in more detail here, perhaps

you'll be in Salzburg one day and wonder what all goes under the name Salzburger Stier. Firstly, the Salzburg Bull has been a cabaret prize since 1981, and with this knowledge you are the hero of the evening - hardly anyone knows about this coveted cabaret prize. Then the tour guides at Hohensalzburg Fortress show off an ancient organ construction* known as the Salzburg Bull, which in earlier times gave off an alarm signal that could be heard from far away when the robber Bavarians invaded. But the legend of the Salzburg Bull is better known, a real beast that the besieged Salzburger painted a different colour night after night and walked on the fortress wall in the morning so that the besiegers (sorry, but it was the Bavarians again) could see that the Salzburger still had plenty of steaks in stock and then actually left. Last but not least, the renowned Salzburg boxing club, which has produced several champions, is also named after the Salzburg bull.

After this little excursion into animal life in Salzburg, back to boxing: Michael soon gave up dragging me around, I was simply incapable of completing a continuous training and wasn't really into it in other ways either; there was still so much basic half-knowledge to be acquired! In addition, Michael complained whiningly behind my back about my "lazy left hand", that is to say, a trick that I had thought up myself and which always painfully surprised him.

Our school director, who valued me very highly, appointed me as the boarding school's ... He didn't miss the chance to take advantage of a naive guy like me. Unfortunately, his appreciation ended abruptly when, on a fine Saturday afternoon, I beat a guy right down the long corridor of the boarding school and then through the closed door at the end of the corridor. I only stopped beating him when the guy was lying on the floor on what was left of the door - in the room of a teacher who was standing at the washstand wearing only a pair of brightly colored boxer shorts and shaving. The guy screamed, the teacher screamed - he had slit his cheek open in shock - and I screamed too because I was still angry. "Murderer!" shouted the bleeding teacher and the whole house ran to him, "Murderer!"

I was immediately put under arrest. Before the gendarmerie was called, my victim's mother rushed over and interviewed her son, in-

specting his knocked-out tooth and bruises. After apparently not being satisfied with his explanations, she demanded to see me. I was obstinate and insisted that I was in the right (as if there was a right to beat him!). In her cross-examination I had to repeat word for word what the guy had said, which is why I had beaten him. The mother asked me to repeat it again, had me ask her to. I more or less had to swear that it was like that, exactly like that and not otherwise. Then she called her husband, the ambassador, and discussed it with him. The headmaster had been alerted in the meantime and now joined our small group; the teacher breathlessly described everything to him from the perspective of the smashed door, bloody shaving foam and adhesive plaster - the headmaster must have assumed at first that I had attacked the teacher with the razor. He only realized much later that I had not beaten up the teacher, but the guy, and tried to defend my honor - in any case, the headmaster loudly interrupted any debate and ruled that the delinquent (me) would be expelled from school immediately!

God must be a woman, because now she intervened in the form of the mother. She believed me rather than her own son, she said coolly and resolutely. She had spoken to me for a long time and everything I had said seemed credible and honest. We all knew that violence was fundamentally wrong and he (i.e. I) had certainly understood it by now. Her son had made a serious mistake and should really apologize to me, not the other way around! The ambassador and she insisted on letting the whole matter rest and vehemently demanded that I remain at the school. The ambassador (or was he the consul?) would be coming back to Austria in a few days and would personally speak to the director again; he insisted expressly that I would not be punished. *Expressis verbis*, I will never forget that.

Although the waves continued to rise for days and I and the guy had to serve a punishment of several hours peeling potatoes and cleaning the kitchen in order to improve communication and increase humility, the ambassador's decision stood. Only Michael K. was very disappointed, because the director had immediately called the boxing club and told them properly: such a brutal thug like me, that was surely not compatible with the concept of boxing, was it?!

Oh yes, when the whole thing had died down and everything had apparently calmed down after this stupid fight, the director called me into his office a few days later and told me that I had cowardly disappointed the trust he had placed in me and that I was a really nasty little thug, yes! And he was doubly annoyed that I had taken boxing lessons, because now he was no longer surprised that I had beaten up the guy who was at least 20cm taller than me. He promised me solemnly that he would get me, just wait and see!

The opportunity arose when I called the math teacher, who was a Nazi, a Nazi in the schoolyard. Only now, during his rather dirty, albeit legal, exam orgy, did a classmate discover that the math teacher had served under the headmaster during the war, who of course had not been a Nazi since 1945, but was a thoroughly Christian, honorable member of the church community.

It was no use that the entire class went to the headmaster's office en masse despite my protests and demanded that a Nazi should be allowed to be called a Nazi. Even today I can imagine the bastards patting each other on the back and laughing until they cried after we naive people had been sent out without having accomplished anything!

While 75% of my classmates were thinking about what they wanted to do with their lives after graduating from high school, Evelyn and Eva, Christian, Billy and I were thinking about what essential things we could learn in the summer in order to excel in the post-graduation exam in the fall. Christian - he would later become a major economist in the civil service - had his connections and found out that there was a regulation from the Kaiser's time that those who volunteered for military service and came to the Matura in uniform were to be judged favorably by the examination board - which meant that everyone in uniform had to get through it, period.

Christian, Billy and I naturally turned up in uniform for the Matura, which started late because the astonished headmaster had to consult with the teachers first about what that meant and whether it was above board. It worked, it worked! - but I don't want to get ahead of myself.

Billy and I decided to work together in his father's hotel over the summer and study together. Billy, who was not yet a commercial councillor at the time, decided at short notice that the little bit of work wasn't enough for two and he would rather spend the summer on the Italian Riviera; as the son of a capitalist, he couldn't possibly take this little bit of work away from me, the son of a worker! His father grinned and agreed; I agreed too, but I couldn't quite manage the grinning.

The small, formerly elegant hotel on a Carinthian lake suffered from poor marketing and the not very rosy times in the tourism industry. There were days when three or four people could barely manage the work, but often the house stood empty for days. Since I didn't earn any money on these empty days, I increasingly tried to get guests into the house. I called everyone and asked if they could send us guests.

So I stupidly called Michael in Salzburg; Michael, who had dragged me to boxing and hoped that we would achieve something together at the Salzburger Stier. Well, Michael was working in a travel agency over the summer and got back in touch a short while later: yes, he had negotiated with the Austrian Amateur Boxing Club and they would like to hold a training camp in Carinthia with some athletes; after a few phone calls everything was satisfactorily arranged. They were preparing for the Olympics, Austria had hopes in boxing in particular and so it happened that the Olympians* Rainer Salzburger, Franz and Hermann Frauenlob as well as the coach of the national team, Jo Kaspar, ended up in our hotel.

At the same time — If it wasn't a coincidence, it must have been Michael - a group of freestyle wrestlers registered at the hotel who wanted to prepare for the Catch-as-Catch-can tour that was starting in a few weeks (at that time, this form of exhibition fighting wasn't called wrestling). Among this handful of strong wrestlers, I still remember (hopefully correctly) the names of the Austrians Otto Wanz and Ferdl Weiss; the other wrestlers were athletes from Eastern Europe like Mr Dimitroff (or was his name Domitscheff?), the mysterious "black mask".

When checking in, one thing led to another; Michael must have told them a few things about me; in any case, Jo Kaspar said in passing that I should run with him first thing in the morning.

It starts at 5 o'clock. Monika, the pretty waitress who I'm working with today, looks at me sideways. Before I can even say a word or think about an honorable withdrawal that won't diminish my standing with Monika, Jo Kaspar goes to his room and that's the end of it.

My God! Five o'clock in the morning! There's no point in crying or gnashing your teeth, my honor is at stake and - much more importantly, because it's more tangible - my chances with Monika, so I get up! While I'm waiting in the parking lot in borrowed gym shorts and a tank top, I see her face flash briefly behind the curtains. OK, one point for me, even if it's 5 o'clock in the morning. The fun that followed was called a forest run.

Minutes later I regret every single Marlboro I have ever smoked, a few minutes later the beers and then the roast pork. Not even twenty minutes later I regret my entire cosmic existence. The athletes help the waiter in distress in a friendly manner. At six o'clock we arrive back at the hotel, I have sweated out at least a dozen liters and now everyone is sitting expectantly in the breakfast room. Not me, because I run to my room, take a shower and minutes later I am downstairs in black trousers and a white shirt with a bow tie to serve breakfast. Limping, panting and with massive muscle pain.

My goodness, that was stressful! However, on the following days I only managed half the distance - if at all - and then took a shortcut to the hotel to greet the athletes with the breakfast ready. But don't think that was all. It got even more stressful after all the other hotel guests had left and our hotel mutated into a pure sports hotel.

Jo Kaspar smiled kindly when he suggested after breakfast that I should come with him to the wrestling tent where the boxers were training. I was very curious, I especially wanted to see the famous wrestlers and immediately said yes, gladly. So I quickly cleared the tables and put away the dishes, then went to the bus.

The first half hour was as I expected. The wrestlers practiced wrestling and I watched in amazement as the men practiced grip for grip, throw for throw. It was all carefully rehearsed choreography. Of course, the correct way to fall and throw had to be learned so that it looked bad, and it probably hurt a little too, but on the whole it was about not seriously injuring yourself or the other person. Nevertheless, it had to look martial. I was fascinated when a combination was practiced slowly at first, then faster and faster, and at the end you had the impression that the guys were really hitting each other hard. Of course they weren't. Or a little bit, if it was Dimitroff.

Then Jo Kaspar strolled over, stood silently next to me and watched the wrestling. He was already around sixty at the time, about my size, but very athletic and tough and had an iron-hard grip that brought tears to my eyes every time I shook hands. Rainer Salzburger, on the other hand, was tall and so slim that hardly anyone would have suspected him to be the best boxer in Austria. The two women were broad and muscular, both blacksmiths by trade, who ran an art forge in Salzburg. Franz's forearm was as wide as my thigh, Hermann was a bit slimmer than his brother.

So Jo Kaspar leans next to me and says with a serious face (only a grin flashes deep under his wrinkles) that he needs me, his boys need a sparring partner. Of course I don't notice anything about the flash (or that it was a little prank) and I'm perplexed, because I know exactly what sparring is: a punch to the nose and I'm flat on the mat. And that's how it was, or almost exactly like that.

I have to add here that I must have misunderstood something during a conversation and from then on believed that Jo Kaspar was a former European boxing champion, which filled me with great respect and awe. It was only thirty years later that the mistake was cleared up; but I don't want to suggest that the good man had lied to me!

"Michael K. said," said Jo Kaspar, "that you were really quick with your legs and that you threw a cheeky left. I want to take a look at that!" (Michael probably actually said: lazy left, but that's not a boxing term, but he probably wanted to imply that I had fouled him

sometimes.) Jo handed me a pair of gloves and put some on himself. I was still paralyzed and absently experienced Hermann putting the gloves on and then tightening them quite tightly. Before I could even say a word, I was standing in the ring opposite Jo Kaspar. I, who had never fought a real boxer, was now facing a former European champion and was about to receive a terrible beating. All because Michael had to rant about my incredible speed! Where was that now, eh?! My knees were weak and my pulse was racing at 180, I can swear to that!

“Come on!” said Jo Kaspar and punched the air in front of my nose a few times. I recoiled in shock, because nobody had ever wiggled around so quickly in front of my nose during training, it was an instructive and pedagogical slow pace. Jo grinned (because someone who has already sent several other masters to the mat has a tendency to grin) and landed one hit after another on my face and body. No matter how much I ducked and jumped, he had me right in his sights and hit me every time. Not hard, always just very lightly. In this drum roll I heard his instructions that I should now dive left or right, raise my guard right or left and, damn it, who taught you to hunch back like Quasimodo? I followed as well as I could, but he hit and hit and I knew that my performance wasn’t good enough, the best I could do was as a punching bag.

Disappointment. He hit every time. I never did. I stood like a goat, rooted to the spot and didn’t move. It slowly dawned on me that I had to move, quickly. So I moved as fast as I could and now only 99 out of 100 punches hit. Jo took a short breather and commented that he (I) did know a thing or two about footwork, then all I saw was a big, round brown leather thing whizzing towards me. I almost sat down because I wasn’t prepared for it; we were taking a breather, weren’t we? Rainer was standing behind me and cheering me on. Franz and Hermann interrupted their training and came closer. Rainer cheered me on, telling me to duck faster, strike, and then immediately take up my guard again. At some point I took a big leap backwards, let my arms hang and said with tears of anger that I simply couldn’t hit someone who was so much older than me!

I shouldn’t have said that, I know that now. I knew it right away then, because Jo Kaspar immediately hit me hard on the nose, so

that the sparks were flying and he said that he didn't feel that old at all, I should just hit him if I could, and the others laughed loudly. I got angry, which didn't help much, because it made my intentions all the more predictable. As I'm a left-hander, I start the attack from the right, and of course you can see that ages in advance, because the right shoulder pushes forward long before the fist. An angry shoulder can be seen two ages earlier.

Franz commented on this and said to his brother Hermann that all beginners feel the same way and that it doesn't help. Hermann thought that only deception could help him (me), deceive so-and-so and he did it, punched - bang! - into the air. I somehow noticed it and copied him. Turned half-heartedly and struck with the "wrong" fist, hit Jo hard for the first time and said in astonishment: "Sorry!"

Of course, my hard blow was as if the flap of a butterfly's wings had grazed Jo; he laughed and told me to try again. Most of the time it didn't work anymore, the trick had become transparent and predictable. But once or twice I managed the quick double turn and I hit, at least grazing the master's chest or shoulder. Unlike Michael, he didn't complain about my "lazy left", didn't even bat an eyelid and soon let my attack go to waste. Again I feinted twice over the right, let my left dart forward and struck hard into the air, because he hadn't been "there" for a long time. What I thought was a brilliant feint in my self-confident arrogance turned out to be an easy-to-see-through process for the professional. The realization that I looked like a wingless duck compared to the old man almost brought tears to my eyes. I lashed out like a berserker and hit the ropes of the ring, the corner post and probably innocent spectators too, but I never hit Jo Kaspar again.

At some point heaven had mercy and made Jo realize that I would never be good enough for boxing, at least not yet. He stepped back and told me to stop the nonsense and I stopped the nonsense, grateful and completely out of breath. Michael was right, said Jo sarcastically, I could really do a feint. If I had been a little less naive, I would have noticed that not all of the athletes agreed with their trainer's antics. Later, Hermann took me aside a few times and showed me some of the basics of proper boxing; first of all, how a boxer should

stand correctly and not look like a waiter who accidentally stands in the ring, but my meteoric boxing career ended abruptly at the end of that week when the athletes left.

We must have got on really well, because when I had to go back to Salzburg in the fall to prepare for my Matura, I was allowed to stay with the Frauenlobs. I got through my Matura and the obligatory drinking session afterwards quite well. A little later, I was glued to the TV to watch Rainer, Franz and Hermann fight at the Olympics. But by then I was already serving in the Austrian army, and I had to learn to fight more and in a different way.

*I have marked some things with * to add some facts that could not be included in the text:*

The “boxing professor” Mag. Dr. Rainer Salzburger was Austrian champion five times. Amateur boxing champion and Olympic participant in Mexico in 1968; in his civilian career he taught physical education (sports) and geography at middle schools and is president of the Austrian Amateur Boxing Association (ABV).

The brothers Franz and Hermann Frauenlob from Salzburg were also multiple Austrian amateur boxing champions and Olympic participants in Mexico in 1968.

Josef “Jo” Kaspar from Linz was the national trainer of the boxing association for around 20 years.

In addition to the cabaret prize already mentioned, the “Salzburger Stier” is also the namesake of a weightlifting competition, a darts festival and a competition for divers; as far as I know there was never a Salzburger Stier boxing club.

Disharmonies with Michael K. (who is not called that) prompted me to change both his name and the name of the club.

For those interested in history, it should be noted that the “Salzburger Stier” is actually a unique musical instrument: built in 1502 on behalf of the then Archbishop Leonhard von Ketschach (1495-1519), this late Gothic barrel organ with horns (200 tin pipes)

served as the acoustic timekeeper for the city of Salzburg. It was housed for 500 years in a small wooden structure next to the material cable car (the "Reißzug" from 1504). The 1.7 meter long maple rollers were first manually driven with a wooden gear and later with an iron gear. Some of the works by Leopold Mozart that are still preserved today are worth mentioning. The Salzburg bull was decommissioned in 1994 and was restored between 1999 and 2002. I was unable to find out whether it was ever used as an alarm signal.

My collection of autobiographical adventures has shrunk considerably in the meantime, I have already described most of them to you. The other things that have moved me over the past 50 years are not suitable for writing... ;-) But undaunted, I dug deep into the old mothball box again, cleared away the seaman's yarn and also the many funny stories that the amateur world traveler can tell when he has returned home safely (if he has returned home safely, of course).

The story of a prematurely ended boxing career was pushed aside, as was the story of the Holy Grail, of the first ascent of Montsalvatsch in the Pyrenees. I brush off the dust from Merlin and Arthur, which have been waiting for publication for years and days, and I feel silly and wistful when I pick up the hand-drawn sea charts of Oahu and Viti Levu: no, all that will come later, maybe. King Richard the Lionheart and his courtship of the beautiful Berengara of Navarre: a short blow, a wink in the small fountain of dust - and the dust blows to the ground like his adversary Isaac of Byzantium. Unfortunately, the three of them will have to wait too. I'll write all that, but later - - - -

... hey, what's that!? At first I think that it's an old bicycle tube, but when I blow the dust off and take a closer look, I discover a dirty gray-orange children's kayak. You know, the kind of inflatable one that used to pop up every year in the camping equipment departments of the Gerngross (God rest his soul) and Herzmansky (as well) department stores.

What was that again? A rocky cliff with a medieval fortress on it; a wide, light sandy beach and a laughing crowd of children; mothers browsing through the triple novel edition "Summer Love" by Bastei-Lübbe and screeching seagulls shitting on Bastei-Lübbe from a safe height. In the midst of all this summer hustle and bustle, an agitated father rushing desperately and sweatily across the beach....

Breton cliffs

The family holiday of 1984 was drawing to a close. In the last few days, my almost 12-year-old son Tibi had managed to soften his father's heart and was now strutting down to the flat sandy beach to launch the newly acquired rubber kayak, an inflatable orange monster, for the first time. For the sake of clarity (and in defence of his father's indulgence), it must also be said that despite being only 12 years old, he worked diligently and courageously, which made the work of the large eight-man tent with its heavy poles a real relief. So the kayak was fairly and honestly earned. Although Tibi was very disappointed with the orange and would have preferred a completely different, super cool one; but it was the only one in the tiny sports shop that he could "choose" between... His mother Margret and my daughter Julia - not even two years old at the time - were already sitting on the beach with my daughter Anuschka - almost 4 - and Anuschka's mother Geraldine and enjoying the sun-drenched beach life: building sandcastles, destroying enemy sandcastles, running to their respective mothers crying ("Mommy, Mommy, she's ruined everything for me again!"). Tibi's and my architectural consultancy, including construction support and temporary staff, ended abruptly when Tibi came across something slippery and slimy from the earth's past at a depth of about 50cm....

The first signs of the math geniuses appeared when one of them took a stick and drew a line in the sand: "My half, your half!" - which inevitably led to a set theory drama ("Mommiii! She has more sea than me again!").

Sun-drenched beach life, as I said. Meanwhile, Tibi and I were struggling further out to inflate the orange monster. My cheeks swelled up, the vein on my forehead swelled up alarmingly and my silent curse on the stupid smoking and its noticeable consequences was blown loudly into the rubber sausage with my breath. Then I coughed slightly and blew again!

The beach at the foot of the town of Douarnenez in Brittany, in the middle of which we camped, was one of the few family-friendly ones: it was a good 200m wide, the water was surprisingly warm and you could go out quite a long way before it got really deep. In the south there was a mighty rock face on which the town of Douarnenez, once a medieval fortress, stood. The only problem was the cliffs that bordered the beach in the north; according to the nautical manual and the guide to France, there were relatively dangerous whirlpools there that could be dangerous for careless swimmers. Of course, I described the danger lurking there to my children in detail and that if you go too far out you will be swept away to Brazil.

“Dad, what is Brazil?” - Well, I’m certainly not an epic storyteller, not at all, but to let a child grow up so stupid and uneducated, no, I just couldn’t let that go. “Brazil, my dear child, is a country far, far away...” - Margret and Geraldine took the children into the tent at lunchtime to prepare a snack for them, although I had only been to Francisco Pizarro and of course hadn’t been to Brazil yet, not to mention Pelé and the Sugarloaf.

But please, I don’t want to be to blame if one of my children forgets to eat and starves because they’re listening so attentively! So give the Infante what the Infante has, and then they’ll come back here so that I can get on with Brazil - hey, where are you going?!

“Daddy,” says the bright 12-year-old, and it seems to me that there is a hint of defiance in his tone, “I want to go paddling now!” But yes, I think he hasn’t even tried out the new boat yet!

“Well, go ahead and be careful, there are dangerous whirlpools over there by the cliffs...” but the son has already disappeared in a cloud of dust, dragging the orange monster behind him.

I look around to see if there are any other listeners - no, the mothers are reading and the young sparrows are doggedly starting to build new sand burrows, while Tibi, on the other hand, is fighting his way up north against the wind and waves as bravely and doggedly as his father once did - well, then I’ll lie down for a few moments and think

about how I can still get stupid Pizarro, who was hopelessly lost in the Chilean Andes, to Brazil...

Margret nudges my elbow lightly. The cute Indian girls with whom I had been playfully weaving daisy wreaths disappear in a flash, and I wink sleepily up at my wife. "I haven't seen Tibi for a while!" she says seriously, and I am immediately wide awake.

"He was just down there, on the beach," I say, looking astonished. Where a few moments ago there was a deserted beach, there are now hundreds of people! I jump up as if I had been stung by a tarantula and start running. To the cliffs, to the north, of course.

Do you know that? Running through the hard sand, jumping over deck chairs and beach towels, chasing after every orange, no matter how inconspicuous? The orange things soon turn out to be towels, swimming rings and swimsuits. But no orange rubber boat anywhere!

"Have you seen an orange rubber boat? Avez-vous vu un bateau en gomme, un Kajak orange?"

I slow down and walk step by step towards the cliffs - nothing! Carefully and as quickly as I can barefoot, I climb over the small rocks, round the cape after a few minutes and shrug back, stammering an apology, when a pair of lovers hiss venomously at me.

No Tibi, no orange anywhere in sight!

Yes, laugh - but I'm staring at the horizon with hawk eyes, scanning the wide, blue sea for something orange and rubber boat-like. Nothing! My eyes are already watering from staring, but I don't care, I have to save the poor thing!

Where could he be? After some back and forth, I decide to go back to the beach and to the women. I run along the water again, look inquisitively at each group of children jumping in the waves and keep running. I ignore the anxious mothers who are hugging their little ones because there's a man like a steam engine. running along, not

the braver ones who ask the sweating runner in all sorts of languages what's going on? - That's unbelievable! Where the hell is the boy?

Now I'm back with Margret, Geraldine and the girls. "Have you seen him?" We look around helplessly, looking more and more desperately towards the cliffs. The helplessness soon becomes a certainty: my little son is drifting on the Atlantic, to Brazil!

Or maybe not? We ponder, then my wife - the smartest wife of all, a certain E.Kishon would write - says whether we shouldn't look in the other direction? - A weight is lifted from my heart, but yes, of course! He certainly won't have swum to the right - as he usually does - but instead paddled to the left, towards the inner bay.

Relieved, I set off trotting, the orange search filter fully switched on. The further I get to the inner bay, the fewer people there are. No one swims there, it's a collection point for dirt and driftwood that the sea washes up. I run until I'm standing in front of the high rock face, over which the town of Douarnenez towers, blinded by tears.

No Tibi, no rubber boat, no nothing.

It's not just the unfamiliar walking that makes my knees go weak. No, I've now searched the entire beach, my little one is gone, gone, forever! Slowly my big, soft heart turns into a small, hard lump of ice. I walk back, thinking of a thousand possibilities, including human traffickers, UFOs and slave hunters.

From a distance I can see Margret and Geraldine running excitedly in my direction, and there, yes, next to them, a tired and very worn out little warrior carrying a stubborn orange rubber boat on his shoulders, which makes me think more of a turtle...

Tibi.

We have him back.

As agile as a deer, I run to my family, hug everyone and am happy that we are together again. We try not to unsettle the poor guy and then find out that he was actually carried away by the wind and the

surf towards the cliffs, of course always in knee-deep water and in no danger at all, until he decided to return home on foot and beaten, as he could no longer row against the forces of nature. I must have overlooked him - staring into the distance - and walked past him. He didn't want to drag the new beauty through the sand (what his father would have said!), he turned the monster over and put it on his head, on his shoulders, then he walked back along the shore road to his mums.

The adrenaline level returned to normal, the afternoon became hot; and I recovered with a pleasant nap. Phew, that was the last day of vacation, quite exciting, but tomorrow we're heading home again. And this evening we want to go out for a really big party, "big wild boar dinner a la Asterix". Then this adventure would also be over. I dozed off peacefully. We had our son back, now nothing could go wrong.

Really nothing.

When we went to the tent and got dressed up, we were surprised to see that a fair had been set up on the 1km long riverside road to the village, with one stall after another. Cotton candy, sweets, cuddly bears and artistically decorated shells. In front of the large, expensive restaurant there was a carousel.

Up to this point we had been able to maintain general discipline, we had deliberately divided up the French cash so that there was enough left for the last evening, but we still didn't have enough cash for the fair. Discipline or not, even the most hardened shopkeeper could no longer turn a blind eye to this wonderful carousel. The children were allowed to ride. Once. Twice, three times. But that's enough, children, we're going to eat. Four times. OK. But that's enough now, then again later, maybe.

As planned, we ate very finely, ordered the best on the menu and ate with cloth napkins and seven different cutlery sets. Classy, after several weeks in the tent.

Then Anuschka said - we hadn't even got to the main course yet - that she was already full and wanted to ride the carousel.

Now.

She was patiently explained that There would be another course soon and then dessert and maybe a coffee after the cheese and then the meal would be ready. After the meal there would be another ride on the carousel.

No! Little Anuschka wanted to go on the carousel, now. In a few seconds our dear little daughter turned into a roaring beast, to whom I was certainly not related, and roared in a stream of angry tears: "Carousel, carousel", so that not only the waiters looked offended, but also the fat chef looked through the door and shook his head. Our attempts to mediate failed, the roaring became embarrassing, the few guests looked over at us reproachfully. Geraldine - normally a patient and well-behaved mother - increasingly lost control of this roaring beast (which could not possibly be my daughter) and screamed that if she didn't stop immediately, she would take her straight to the tent and there would be no carousel rides. And so on.

We tried to look contemptuously at the other, impatient guests. No, we weren't bad parents, we were alternative, we worked out these small differences with the children, we didn't want them to fail because of the mother's (less often father's) dominance. And we don't give a slap, not even a healthy one. But actually, child, that's enough now! You can stop, we know now how strong you are. Stop, I said! "Carousel, carousel!" screamed the red-faced alien and stamped his feet with every Ka and Ru and Sel, spat tears and screamed with an increasingly fragile voice "Carousel, carousel!" and howled and sniffed and stamped his little shoes.

Geraldine, who had bravely held out up to this point, had had enough. She grabbed Anuschka and whispered quietly to us that she would walk a few more steps with her to the beach and let her scream herself tired there, then they would come back. And disappeared. We, the waiters and the chef breathed a sigh of relief when noble calm returned to the five-star restaurant.

Julia and Tibi had kept themselves well-behaved. Julia because she had secretly eaten Margret's dessert (I think it was iced chocolate and chestnut slices) during this activity, and Tibi, who at 12 had no time for screaming little ones. But now Margret's dessert plate was empty and the children were bored.

Julia shuffled on her chair and didn't want to sit properly any more. A French restaurant like this is not for little girls in the long run (she told herself) and became annoying. Then she became even more annoying. I felt sorry for Margret because she was worried about Geraldine and Anuschka, who had been gone for a long time; I felt sorry for myself because I saw the cognac and the fine cigar disappear - one way or another.

You wouldn't believe how creative and clever some children are at the age of 12! Of course Tibi didn't care about my cognac and especially not about the smelly cigar, nor about mother's concern for the screaming Anuschka. He was very embarrassed by our play, he would have preferred to be far away - in the safety of the tent, for example - and because his little sister was already squirming on her chair, he offered to go with Julia "to Geraldine and Anuschka's". Margret and I, who were (presumably) deeply involved in a pedagogical debate about fancy restaurants, carousels and small children, nodded absentmindedly and dear Tibi took his little sister by the hand and left.

Minutes later, Geraldine returns from the beach with Anuschka. Anuschka had had her fun. We looked curiously at the door to see where Tibi and little Julia were?

Wars have probably been lost and princesses not saved from the evil dragon because "listening carefully" is a very difficult thing... Geraldine hadn't seen them, no, they weren't in front of the restaurant either. Margret and I looked at each other, turning pale. We paid as quickly as we could, then rushed off and combed the area. No Tibi, no Julia. It quickly got dark.

What had he said? "I'm going to Geraldine and Anuschka!"

So, Geraldine had gone to the beach with Anuschka, to the deserted beach, so that Anuschka could scream without bothering anyone else. But where, “to the beach?” No, not again: the cliffs!

We searched everywhere, it had become pitch black by now. The tide was rising inexorably, the small footpath along the cliffs was already completely flooded. I took off my shoes and balanced myself over the slippery stones, searching in every corner. Margret, Geraldine and Anuschka, who had become very quiet, searched behind the shooting booths and in the small dunes, but there was no sign of our children. They had disappeared, swallowed up by the night.

Determined, I walked towards the only policeman I could see. I used my best French and tried to explain to the fat, phlegmatic man in blue that my children had disappeared, a 12-year-old boy and a nearly 2-year-old girl. They had gone here to the beach, but they were nowhere to be found. After several attempts, he understood me and leaned into his Peugeot to radio it. Yes, the tourists! Another couple of children had gone over the cliffs, fallen into a crevice in the night and drowned miserably!

At this moment I looked over the crowd - I don't really like sudden deaths like this, and I prefer to look into the distance so that no one can see my twitching eyelid - so at this historic moment I saw Tibi. Tibi, carrying Julia on his shoulders and looking very exhausted.

I saw Margret running off into the middle of the crowd. I eagerly tell the policeman that the little ones are back and he should just forget about it, and then he is amazed because I also run off like Nurmi.

After the reunion, the children are allowed to ride the carousel again (under strict supervision, of course), get an ice cream and walk back with us through the noisy shopping street (again under strict supervision).

Little by little, everything becomes clear. Tibi had only heard that Geraldine had threatened the raging Anuschka to go to the tent; but had not heard that Geraldine had whispered something about the beach. So he went to the tent with Julia, there was no Geraldine and

no Anuschka anywhere in sight. Getting into the well-locked tent was of course little more than a finger exercise, and before Julia could really start to feel afraid in the dark, the resourceful man had lit a mosquito light. Still no Geraldine, no Anuschka. So he sat down with the little one in front of the mosquito light, read a story and waited anxiously for Geraldine and Anuschka to appear. After a while - a small bar of chocolate had also been sacrificed in the meantime - he went back to the riverside road with Julia to see if anyone was coming. But no one came, apart from a friendly tent neighbor who cycled towards him just before he reached the village and said that his parents were desperately looking for him! He quickly decided to put Julia, who had become sleepy by now, on his shoulders and hurried on to the village, where he found us.

Wars have probably been lost before, or princesses have been saved from the evil prince - - - ähhh, we've already had that... Well, what I actually wanted to say: I was goddamn glad that I had my children back.

Adventure in the Red Sea

Cairo, November 1991. Per, Helga and I - the vanguard, so to speak, who were supposed to get the ship's papers, passage rights, diving permits, etc. We would meet the ship and the rest of the crew in Port Said - had spent a few days in Cairo, and now we were dead tired from this abundance of cultural treasures. We soon realized that we were (of course) thought to be spies, as the Gulf War was going on right next door! Anyone who wasn't a journalist or TV man was inevitably a spy. Of course.

So the receptionist at the Cairo Sheraton gave us a friendly wink when we asked about the best routes through the city and to the pyramids. We had immediately and flatly rejected his first offer of a run-of-the-mill tourist sightseeing tour; but that's probably what all spies do, they rent a car, of course. So he recommended his cousin, a very reliable driver who often drove for government officials - you know, wink, wink.

Our sincere, honest assurances that we were just simple sailors were met with a knowing look: good cover, hey!

We had probably eagerly visited all the sights listed in the relevant cultural guides, and despite dozens of taxi rides we had walked mile after mile to really see everything. A few fragments from my memory, the rest is in the cultural guide: Day trip to the Fayum oasis: when the driver wanted to know which road he should take - there were three - I pointed with my fingers, with three roads you would surely take the middle one, right? (you can try it after all?!), he grinned broadly and said, "He must have known that, it's a forbidden zone, military zone, yes!" For imitators: definitely not via the middle one! There is a military checkpoint halfway between Cairo and Fayum, in the middle of the desert. We were lucky because Per has one of those blue civil service passes, which looks really baroque and impressed the militia, who had rudely blocked our way and initially wanted to send us back the 80 miles. With this miracle pass, however, they let us continue with a frown - you know, never, what is written there in

ornate French and German hieroglyphs - and our driver grinned, because “he already knew that, before”. Wink, wink.

Return journey in a very wide arc through the western provinces. At one point the driver points to the left, there, that is Libya, the great Libyan desert. The White Desert. Stop, stop, we have to see that! So we get out of the Peugeot (almost all taxis in Cairo are Peugeots) and up onto the dune ridge. - I think I’m suffocating. There’s steam coming out from behind the ridge at 50 degrees or more, I can’t breathe, it’s like an oven! Three steps back, take a breath, three steps forward and look back, don’t breathe. Three steps back, breathe out. Breathtaking, the White Desert. Over there, I say to Helga, about 120 km to the west is the town of Sakra-Blabla, where Alexander the Great died and is probably buried. “You mean the Siwa Oasis,” whispers Helga, who has been battered by culture, and turns away from me, the philistine, in horror.

The trip on the Nile is untypical for us “real sailors.”

We actually just wanted to quench our thirst and saw one of the disused steamers lying on the bank of the Nile; I joked and said that it reminded me of the “Johann Strauss,” which has been “nailed” to the Danube Canal for years. So we go to the ship’s bar and drink something cold, and then the wreck suddenly sets off with a loud honk! Our shock only subsided when the barman said that the bar and ship belonged to a few cameramen, TV journalists and us, wink, for the next three hours. Per dozes under the parasol as we drive past the only papyrus plantation in the world and watch the film crew at work. I tell Helga that the plantation was (co-)founded by old Prince Pückler, that’s the man after whom the ice cream dessert is named, old Pückler with his Egyptian princess, the beautiful Machbuba. Helga wants to know everything, and only my Catholic upbringing prevents the worst from happening, so I don’t tell her everything.

The Bazaar

Behind the magnificent Sultan Hassan Mosque is Napoleon’s house, which is in the middle of the Sukh. The Sukh is the bazaar dis-

trict. Foreigners shouldn't go in there without a local guide, and certainly not alone.

They shouldn't. But, wink, you know. Per, Helga and I looked at each other briefly for advice - no one wanted to admit that they were actually scared - and then we set off. The locals avoided us in fear at first, you never know what kind of people they are who enter our increasingly narrow, dark and threatening Sukh without a local guide, right? Later, one or two shadows followed us. Per and Helga moved closer together, I brought up the rear and unclipped my camera, which would be a poor substitute for a phaser or at least a laser pistol if necessary, but I don't have anything like that with me.

A figure, fat and with shaggy hair, emerges purposefully from the shadows; we surely want to go to the Sukh, he will accompany us. We say no and thank the perhaps 16-year-old, but he simply says yes! and goes ahead. Soon we are winding our way through the narrow streets, Per, Helga and I, the shaggy one, his little brother and the uncle, behind us his twin nephews and the boy next door too. I keep turning around and counting the heads. Per, the two-meter-tall man, also turns around furtively and looks at me. I nod and indicate "stomach cramps" with my index finger. Per grows taller and strides, like the ministerial official that he is, stiffly and dignified as he did during the May Day parade through the Sukh. Oh, the Ringstrasse and May Day, how far away that is; I get really homesick in these dark, narrow streets where eerie shadows follow us.

Whenever we want to turn left or right, the old man shakes his head and walks on undeterred. I move up and whisper to Per, something is cooking, man! He makes the sign for "beer" with his fingers, and as I move closer, not understanding, he whispers: "Something is brewing!" Helga grins and whispers that we're just imagining it all, they're all really nice anyway and besides, we're democrats, so - you don't have anything against foreigners, do you?! - Oh well.

Per refuses when the old man suddenly stops and points to the entrance of an inconspicuous house. "Come, I'll invite you for a drink, come in!" I murmur quietly that we have to accept this invitation, just look around, there are too many of us and we can't just run

away! The two are still undecided, so I gather all my courage and go into the house.

No, not into the house, Effendi, please go to the left here, into the sales room. We are standing in a tiny shop that sells top-quality tourist junk. Carpets, pyramids, camels and Queen Hatshepsut, in real marble, honestly. We are a little undecided, the old man goes to the refrigerated display case and offers each of us a Coke, “only 2 dollars, free!” We nod and drink the cold drink. 2 dollars. OK.

Wouldn't we like a carpet? A pyramid? Or a little camel, really cute? A camel, made of Camel? No? How about a...

Helga comes at Per and me from behind. She walks around, picks up this and that. Asks about prices, puts the items back and protests that she doesn't want to buy the whole shop. “Bargain, Helga, bargain!” I whisper urgently, because I had realized with regret that she had realistically taken the right path. When we arrived back at the hotel an hour later, we were richer by three small wooden boxes, hand-made inlays. And by an experience too: when something is described in a travel guide in a compelling way, just believe it and don't try to be any wiser. “Bazaar only in guided groups.” That's experience.

The last day was also packed full of programs; driving through the city was my nightmare: a huge traffic jam in a city of ten million. The taxi driver knows his way around though, winding his way through backyards, over sidewalks and through construction sites, I would say. We want to go up to the citadel, he waves his arms, obviously explaining that because of the many one-way streets we have to drive in circles - I shake my head and point to the castle hill, right up there, where the mosque and the citadel are, that's where we want to go! He nods grimly, then unexpectedly - when we get to the roundabout - he yanks the wheel to the LEFT and cuts our route by kilometers by swimming AGAINST the current in the roundabout! My eyes almost pop out of my head when cars come towards us on at least four lanes, honking furiously, and he skilfully slaloms between them. When he then starts a dispute with the general wearing a tropical helmet, who thinks he has to direct the already perfectly functioning vehicle with

a shrill whistle, and we stop for the first time, my normally robust nerves fail me and I slam the flat of my hand on the dashboard, shouting angrily in German: “Well, now we’re getting a parking ticket too!”, whereupon the two squabblers suddenly fall silent. The taxi driver drives off without a word, the astonished general salutes, and then we race up the castle hill so that even Niki Lauda would have been left behind!

Stamp and signature

The moment when we had to take care of the ship’s papers was getting closer and closer. I’ll leave out the long backstory, but I can say this much: we had been instructed by the agent in Port Said (whom our friend Harald Klärner* had recommended us to) to get this and that paper in Cairo ourselves (which in plain German means that he, Prince Achmed, who usually takes care of all the paperwork, was sure that we would fail and would realize that you can’t just sail around in times of war! And he told us that right away, as sure as his name was Achmed Ben Dings and Bums, damn it!)

- *)*Harald Klärner, Carinthian circumnavigator: “Hot winter in the Red Sea”, Carinthian University printing press 1990.*

Per and I put on our best clothes, tie and all, Helga put on the long black dress with puffed sleeves plus plenty of glittery stuff including crown jewels; clothes make the man! It would be a laugh if we didn’t get the papers, Achmed Ben Dings and boom! We made the first mistake - simply stupid, I have to say in retrospect - when we left the hotel: instead of ordering a black, oversized Mercedes to be parked in front of the hotel and driving up like Pierce Brosnan, we (simply) walked across the street, because that’s where the Maritime Administration was, along with the Maritime Administration Police and the Maritime Administration Police porter.

We had certainly not yet reached the middle of the street when the Maritime Police porter picked up the phone and reported our approach, perhaps the hotel reception had also called in advance, who knows. In any case, the Maritime Police Colonel asked the Maritime Police porter again whether we were really coming on foot (please re-

peat: on foot?). Then he leaned back and said to his adjutant that they could not possibly be hardened spies if they were coming on foot. On foot!

So we waited an hour (or was it two?) in the anteroom. The flies were buzzing, Helga was shifting around as if something was bothering her and the guards looked past us bored.

Then the door opened and the officer acted as if he was sorry for making us wait so long. I was sorry too because I could watch him the whole time, he was just reading his big book and sometimes sighing, for an hour or two. He was reading leisurely and making us wait, and he was apparently sorry too. Well, never mind, now we can finally move on.

We sat down in front of his huge desk, he politely gave us his rank and name and asked if we wanted a cup of tea, yes, we gladly accepted. He sent his adjutant off and immersed himself again in his thick book; the Koran, as I noticed, because he was praying quietly and moving his lips. Per began to formulate our request in clear English. The superior looked at him with a frown and asked whether the master could not see that he was praying and that the tea was not there yet?! Then, without looking at us, he turned back to the Koran and continued to silently chant his suras.

Several of these suras passed before the adjutant trotted over again and balanced several cups of tea on his serving tray. We nodded silently and were about to drink, but saw the superior's reproachful look and stopped. He spoke a few words of Arabic [Per whispers: "What did he say?" and I: "I must have misheard, because he said 'It's already a quarter to seven, I hope it won't take too long, he wants to be home for the evening news'" and Per kicks me in the shin as punishment], then he was the first to drink and smiled encouragingly at us. Oh. Now we were allowed to too. "In Vienna they send you twice for stamps," I whisper to Per and Helga and we grin despite the difficult situation. The boss looks questioningly. I say in English that I would have said that we couldn't get peppermint tea as good as here in Egypt in Austria.

Oh, Austria, sighed the officer with a dreamy look. There's Hans Krankl and Rapid, do I know them? Yes, I'm lying, and I know Schneckler too - Herbert, Prohaska. Who is that again, asks the officer. He's the greatest for me, I say, because Krankl is world class and loved by the media, but Prohaska is also world class, but he is not so loved by television, so at least I stick with him.

The officer nods and writes Schnkkl Prchtzk' on his desk pad. Per and Helga bite their lips in despair because they know how close I am to the subject of football. Per says with a straight face that the best strikers at Rapid are currently Josef Hader and Alfred Dorfer, the colonel and I nod in agreement, yes, yes. Helga can't hold herself back any longer and stands up, goes to the open window, and bursts out with her face turned away. The officer suddenly gets angry and shouts at Per and me, telling her to get away from the window immediately, because it's not right that a woman in his office - dressed so indecently - should stand at the brightly lit window and discredit him in front of the whole world...

Helga immediately sits down again, clenches her hand around the tea bowl and arches her back so that her breasts are no longer visible. I think something very unkind about the culture of our host country and that Helga just gets a hunchback and backache when she has to hide her breasts.

Per starts talking about the ship's papers again, presents all the documents and on top of that his blue miracle service pass. The officer takes it in his hand in surprise and asks what it is. "A service pass," says Per patiently, "it is issued to senior officials by the presidential chancellery" - he can't immediately think of government office or presidential chancellery and gets stuck on president - which the officer clearly misunderstands, gets really grumpy and asks whether Per is the president, ha!? We are confused because it is just too stupid. The officer, for his part, is also confused because everything is written in French, with a flourish and actually signed by the UHBP (our Lord Federal President). Le président de la République, in his own hand. Maybe the passport is real after all, he thinks, and maybe we are more than the Maritime Police porter said, the idiot.

He defuses the situation and tells us how he has to do his boring work day in and day out, filling out forms and so on, even though he is actually trained for higher tasks and studied the Koran at university - he adjusts the large, green-bound book and points at random to this and that place - but then he takes a lot of forms out of a drawer and starts to transfer the data from our Austrian documents to Egyptian forms. Lots of forms. Bit by bit, beautifully thoughtful.

“Like in the passport office in the Seidengasse,” whispers Per and I nod, because if he carries on like this, circle by circle, it will be midnight, gentlemen! The officer seems to have understood us, because he suddenly looks up and says that that’s not possible, it’s the Gulf War, you can’t go there! He can’t give us permission, not for us, not for the ship, no diving permit. Why don’t you go to Cyprus to dive?

Long, awkward silence. We discuss, I mention - whispering in German - Achmed, the prince, who is supposed to be, or is, the most famous shipping agent on the Suez Canal, and that I will drive to Achmed by taxi right now and, if necessary, drag him by his ears. Now the Egyptian intervenes, did he hear the name Achmed Ben Dingsda correctly? He may be forgiven for overhearing our conversation, but he knows Achmed very well, a distant relative, so to speak... the rest, like his eyebrows, remains hanging in the air. I start a heated genealogical dispute with myself, that he is also a prince...

Well, if that is the case, why did Prince Achmed not come with us? He picks up the phone and to our amazement, he spends the next thirty minutes on the phone with Achmed - I only understand Rapid, Hans Krankl and (looking at the desk pad) a certain Schaneggla Prohassgar. In between there are long passages of smiling silence with “smile” and “laugh-smile”, which can easily be translated as “yes” and “yes, yes”. (Years later, you could read in Achmed’s brochures that Rapid, Hans Krankl and Herbert Prohaska were also among his satisfied shipping customers).

I don’t know how well you speak Arabic. I get out after “Good Morning!” and “Good Evening!” (and even that is English), so I don’t know what was being discussed - whether camels or cars were being auctioned, the Gulf War was being discussed or Fatima’s plump

calves were setting the telephone line on fire - Per, Helga and I hung on his every word, listening to the strange sound. Then he hung up and smiled at us.

“Everything’s fine!” he said and added with a friendly, reproachful look, “we could have just told him about Achmed and who we were.” The three of us remained silent and avoided blinking. - (I would like to apologize to the FB in advance if the three of us should possibly - I say possibly - appear in Egyptian maritime history as Mrs. Rapid, Mr. Hans Krankl and Mr. Herbert Prohaska...)

He completed his hieroglyphs in an astonishingly short time, then looked out into the now dark city and shook his head worriedly. All the offices are already closed, there’s no chance today, he mused. Per stiffened his back and drew himself up to his full height. I know him well enough to know what would happen next.

We need the papers now, this evening, said Per loudly and firmly. Tomorrow, no, tonight at three or four, we’re going to the ship and we have to get the papers, whatever the cost. The officer was really depressed, his eyebrows were raised in concern. We’re in Egypt here, Effendi, the offices close at 9 p.m., remember, sir!

But we had the upper hand. Achmed, a real prince after all, the UHBP and the blue service pass. Everything was brought up again, like a worm snake the conversation spiraled and wound its way into the warm night sky.

The officer made calls here and there, he was now really desperate, because the offices were actually all closed, and Per added a little more, he, the officer, had made us wait and wait unnecessarily, we could have been in the taxi to Port Said long ago and now he didn’t care how the officer did it, but the papers had to be ready today. Period.

Helga and I studied the commentary on the back of the forms and we whispered to each other that everything except two places had already been written in a squiggly, scribbled manner. The officer looked suspiciously at our whispering and then explained, yes, ex-

actly, the thingamajig office would have to put its stamp on that, and back there too. Per, who had spent his life fighting his way up through the Viennese bureaucratic jungle, was obviously on the right track and kept putting pressure on (although I would have given up long ago and gone to the hotel bar).

Then, finally, someone on the other end of the phone line.

The officer shrinks by half a meter and bows before the big chief, the Mufti, or Grand Mufti, whom he had caught. Yes, he is terribly embarrassed, three foreigners... no, important ones, who need..., yes, Prince Achmed... no, Excellency, today, I spell it: tonight, because they are going straight on to Port Said by taxi... yes, unfortunately, I know, but it has to be done. today...

Okay, the content of this dialogue is pure speculation, but he hung up, covered in sweat, and drank a few sips of tea before looking at us in amazement and saying that we must be special favorites of Allah - praised his name - because the head of something-or-other was coming to the office again to sign our papers. We had to take a taxi to this and that place right now, right now, to get the papers stamped.

We paid for the forms (without a receipt, of course, and generously) and took a taxi there. I am not understating it when I say Alcatraz is a problem; we went to Alcatraz - or rather the Egyptian version of it. As we were led by the guard into the waiting room, the furnishings of which are described in sufficient detail with a narrow wooden bench and a flickering fluorescent tube, I nudged Per in the side and muttered that it looked exactly the same in the East Berlin ports, didn't it?

Immediately after the gate guard had led us in and left us alone, a nicotine-addicted, skinny question mark appeared and took the forms, said in French that it would only take a few minutes and immediately disappeared again. The minutes really were a few, and then a few more, damned! I lost the bet because the question mark appeared before the hour had passed and, puffing nervously, handed us the stamped forms. Per immediately checked whether there was anything written on them; there were only a few lines and a bombas-

tic stamp impression, nothing else. The question mark lit the next one next to the last one and led us out through the maze of corridors - yes, there are a few taxis over there, and good night, gentlemen! He hadn't even noticed Helga, the well-bred man. Instead, he put the dollar bills away without saying a word, that's how well-bred he was.

When we were sitting in the hotel bar at night, we treated ourselves to a pretty large one. We had made it after all. After the third cognac, I took Helga's side, who suspected that the question mark had been scribbled under herself, as there was no grand mufti to be seen anywhere.

The next morning we overslept on the bus. The next one didn't leave until midday. So we found time for one very, very last mosque and one very, very last museum. Then two hours by bus north to Port Said. Halfway there is the newly built city of "23 October" (or is it 27 September?!?), in any case an attempt to settle people in the desert. The bus driver points, "Here's your pee break now." Per and I look around questioningly, the bus driver laughs and points to the large construction board on which the bus station that is still to be built can be seen. There! he points and we join the other men, who are all standing obediently in a row at the side of the road and doing the Lulu. Helga looks out from behind the window curtains full of hatred; she still has to pull everything together for an hour before she gets to the city of Port Said.

Later, Per and I drink loudly from our plastic bottles and laugh meanly as Helga hits us, almost blinded by tears.

Port Said

Achmed gets nervous when he asks about the ship and I point wordlessly to the sea, where you can see a small white dot on the horizon. "You have to leave in twenty minutes, then they'll close the canal again and you won't be able to go through until tomorrow!" Per wins our bet, because our PAPAGENO takes 3 hours to get back to the harbor. Prince Achmed gives me a pack of Marlboro and I give him 20 dollars for another night in the harbor. For those who don't have much sailing experience, it should be noted once and for all that

sailing is no longer free anywhere. (Our canal fee was negotiated at 150 dollars, but all in all we paid around 200. Nowadays it doesn't go under 350!).

We spend the rest of the day on the beach and in the coffee houses. I don't care about local customs anymore and go to a coffee house with Helga. I ignore the protesting looks of the Egyptians, basta. My respect for this culture that is thousands of years old has been so battered in the past few days that on this day I place particular value on my own culture and demand respect: women HAVE a soul, and they are allowed to drink coffee in public. Basta.

Per and Achmed have completed all the formalities and are coming after us. Achmed nervously leads him and Helga out of the coffee house, while I remain seated, cheeky. My anger at this gang of men only subsides when an old local invites me to his table and we converse in fluent English. He is a professor of astronomy and I hastily dust off the very bottom memory cards with the Arabic star names in my brain box so as not to appear completely ignorant: Mirphak, Denebole, Al Debaran, Al Kaid, Al Suhal, Al Genib and so on. His joy is evident when he orders a water pipe and we smoke it together; my first water pipe! Although I had already read about it, I am astonished that in a coffee house you order a water pipe like we order a coffee and specify the exact type and amount of tobacco, which then proves you are a connoisseur. I am grateful for the instruction on the water pipe and am saddened to hear that my relevant Arabic vocabulary (tschibuk and tütün) actually comes from Turkish and proves that I am a naive Karl May reader. The old astronomer smiles gently as I take a deep drag and almost sneeze.

In the early evening we bring provisions and water on board the PAPAGENO. The sailing yacht is a 15-meter-long trimaran (Cross 50 Sherman), made entirely of mahogany and teak, and its special feature is that everything (but really everything) that is electronic is broken. The radio, the direction finder, the autopilot, the satellite navigator, simply everything. But it is well equipped with everything a diver's heart could desire. The crew is a mixed bunch: the two Clauses from Austria are 2 of the 3 owners, Kerstin and Alexandra from Switzerland focus on skydiving and flying, Alex is a university

assistant in Innsbruck, and the almost blind Matz used to work in air traffic control.

Achmed, who as always appears in golfer's clothing, although the nearest golf course is a two-hour flight away, drinks a few more glasses on board and explains the special features of the channel to us, gives valuable tips on how to deal with the pilots, describes particularly beautiful bays and marks on the nautical chart the places where we can find provisions or water. There will be no diesel for the next two weeks, and then we will need form 17b (this one, the yellow one) so that we are identified as being entitled to diesel. Per, little Claus and I take notes; who knows, maybe we will still need Achmed's knowledge. The evening ends cheerfully as Achmed listens to the story of our Cairo Maritime Police adventure for what must have been the tenth time.

The next morning we wait, ready to sail and nervous, for the pilot who will guide us through the Suez Canal. The clock ticks relentlessly, Helga makes tea for the third time and I drum my fingers on the steering wheel. Per asks me energetically to drum somewhere else. Big Claus shows the first signs of his true state of mind when he prepares to go water skiing in the harbor basin of Port Said with Matzen's help. On the other hand, this seems to have been the right trick, because a small pilot boat leaves the harbor master's office and comes alongside. Are we completely crazy to want to go waterskiing in the harbor?! Little Nicholas (our skipper, i.e. captain) grumbles back that if we have to wait a long time for the pilot, then we'll just go waterskiing! Ten minutes later, a sweaty, fat pilot climbs on board and takes the helm. I sulk and leave, because I'm actually the helmsman, damn it!

The Suez Canal

My friends actually call it the "baksheesh canal", and rightly so. Forget our primitive, western world order, where you drive into the entrance of an underground car park, press a button and get your ticket, which you then pay for at a machine before driving away. In that area, things would be different. There is someone at the entrance who pulls up the barrier with a rope if you hand him a bill. On

the lower floors, there is someone else who directs you to the left row, where everything is almost full, even forcefully, even though everything is still free on the right. On the right, no, Effendi, that costs a dollar more! Before you can even get out, his hand clenches around your bill, which you have to keep ready as a precaution. You go to the lift, but it only starts moving when the lift attendant notices that you are rummaging around in your pockets for a bill. When you want to pick up the car, do the same thing again, but in reverse order. When you add it all up and convert it, it only comes out to a little more than what you would shell out in an underground car park in Vienna, but you can drive on with the happy feeling that you have helped to feed at least three or four families. Inshallah.

A short excursion into our lexicon: The Suez Canal (Quanat as Suways), which the then Khedive (Viceroy) Mohammed Said Pasha commissioned the former French consul in Cairo, Ferdinand M. Vicomte de Lesseps, to build in 1854 and which was built in less than eight years (1859-1867, with a one-year construction freeze) according to the plans of the Frenchman Linant de Bellefonds and the Austrian A. Negrelli by 2.5 million Egyptian construction workers (125,000 died), is approximately 163 km long and was inaugurated on 17.11.1869 in the newly built opera house in the presence of the new Khedive Ismail, the Empress Eugenie of France (wife of Napoleon III and The palace was opened in 1837 by the Pharaohs (de Lesseps' cousin), Emperor Franz Josef of Austria and the Prussian Crown Prince; the opera AIDA by Verdi, which had been commissioned especially for the palace, was finished too late and was not premiered until 1871 in Cairo. Its southern part, between Port Tawfiq near Suez up to Lake Timsah, had been built around 1900 BC by the pharaohs (perhaps already by Tuthmosis III, but certainly by Necho) and was continually improved by various kings (Xerxes, Darius I, Ptolemy, Trajan and Amr-Ibn-Al-Aas). In the 8th century AD it was closed and forgotten. From the eventful history of the canal: In 1875, the English bought all the Khedive's shares when they could not prevent its construction, but in 1888, in the Treaty of Constantinople, they had to guarantee international shipping through the canal. De Lesseps died on December 7, 1894 in his Chateau La Chesnaye, mentally confused and completely ruined, after he and Gustave Eiffel were (wrongly) accused of corruption and breach of trust during the

construction of the Panama Canal in 1893 and were sentenced to five years' probation. In 1956, President Abdel Nasser snatched the canal from the clutches of the British lion. In 1973, the Israelis overran it, and since 1975, peace has reigned there. From 1980 onwards, the canal lost its previous importance for shipping due to its shallowness and high prices (and, as Xinhua News reported on December 19, 2000, the tariffs remained unchanged in 2001...).

It shortened the shipping route around Africa by almost 9,000km, or 50 or more days. There are actually two canals: the northern part from Port Said (Bur Sa'id) via Lake Manzalah (Buhayrat al-Manzilah) to Lake Timsah (Buhayrat at-Timsah), is artificially carved into the sandy rock, then from Ismailia a cut through to the Great Bitter Lake (Al-Buhayrah al-Murrah al-Kubra), the Small Bitter Lake (Al-Buhayrah al-Murrah as-Sughra), then the southern part of the canal runs in a partially natural or historical bed to Suez (As-Suways) and Port Tawfiq (Bur Tawfiq). Even at its narrowest point, the canal is wide enough (approx. 70m) to accommodate a large tanker and our small ship, but the large ships are still guided through in southbound and northbound convoys; the Gulf War with its numerous warships and supply ships is a welcome additional source of income.

This brings us back to the pilot. Unlike other pilots, this one wanted to drive himself; my heart clenched every time the gearbox responded to his fiddling with a bang and the engine howled in agony when he fiddled around with the levers with his paws. We stopped several times so that he could pray in the bow of the ship facing Mecca. Alexandra cursed like a sparrow when she wanted to go to the toilet after him and found everything there covered in snot; what a pig!

Every few kilometers there is a tower in which the pilots and canal security officers sit and observe and regulate the traffic. They keep in radio contact with the pilots on the ships and direct them. Not us, of course, because we don't use radios. Our pilot is desperate and sweating even more, moving ever closer with his engine howling to Captain Rahn, who is sailing ahead of us with his MUGGELE from Germany, and communicating with his pilot by shouting, only to then fall back again.

We see many soldiers in the dunes to the left and right of the canal. We wave and they wave back. Some of them make internationally known signs when they see Helga, Alexandra and Kerstin in their skimpy bikinis. The pilot tries to make us understand that honest Muslims only despise such loose women and that we (men) should chase the women below deck. Skipper Nikolaus kindly hands him a can of Coke and tells him in good Salzburg dialect where he can put his wisdom. Captain Rahn's MUGGELE suddenly slows down and the pilot shouts something at us, ours answers with long 'la-la's (yes, yes). We turn into a small parking bay.

It's still early in the afternoon, what's up with that? The pilot explains to us that we're spending the night here. At first we laugh at him, but then he sends us over to the MUGGELE, and we hear the man from the tower say that the first part of our passage ends here, and we'll continue tomorrow morning. End, over and out.

Per, little Claus and I are sitting bent over the maps and calculating. That will probably take four days, sighs our skipper. Per is annoyed, but he doesn't want to get involved. I do a rough estimate and say that we will have to pay about \$200 more, and that would go against the grain for me. Claus asks me what I want to do - I don't know. But I speak to the pilot after he has finished his prayer. Our hand-and-foot discussion ends when he immediately explains that he is just waiting for his money, then he will leave; another pilot will come tomorrow. Little Claus gives him the money, but he wants more. We shake our heads, no, not with us, what's agreed is agreed! He glances at my cigarettes. I fall into a childish social readiness to help and give him half a pack. When he cheekily demands the other half, I say no and indicate that otherwise I would have nothing left to smoke myself. Reluctantly, he gets off the boat and wishes us a good trip (or not, who knows).

Captain Rahn's Turkish wife is very sweet and has prepared a small snack; ravenously, we then devour a huge portion of spaghetti that we have prepared. We drink another bottle of wine with this quiet man from the Allgäu, who is on a long voyage and plans to sail around the world. On his advice, we give the guards who are guarding the dilapidated hut in this parking bay a few packets of cigarettes.

They indicate that they have understood and that we can sleep peacefully.

The new pilot arrives the next morning on his bicycle (from where, I ask myself, in the middle of the desert that stretches left and right of the canal?) He speaks reasonable English, is talkative and lively and treats the machine more carefully than his predecessor. After just a few minutes, Per and I look at each other in surprise: he has no idea about sailing and steers casually like a car driver. Per engages him in conversation and the distracted boy promptly heads for the rocky shore. I stroll over and correct with my hand; he willingly hands over the steering wheel to me. Little Nicholas has watched everything in silence and asks me what's going on. I hiss to him that the pilot is not a professional, can't steer and I don't want to end up in the *Kronenzeitung* as "the one who got stranded in the canal".

Later, Per whispers that he doesn't believe the pilot is a pilot, he smells more like the police. We are a little nervous that our pilot, who we hired through Achmed, has been piloted away and we have been given a fake pilot. I sublimate my nervousness by starting a conversation about the rest of our journey. We'll be through the canal this evening, won't we?

The pilot squirms, then says that we have to spend the night here and there. I agree with little Claus that we have to get through this evening. The pilot insists on spending the night at the next checkpoint.

Blind Matz actually gives me the idea when he says that they couldn't have done that to him before, he would have really messed them up, the Kanaks! I consult briefly with Per and, armed with his miracle service pass, stroll over to the pilot.

"A problem," I say with a pained face, "a big problem!" What's wrong, the pilot asks worriedly, because I look really worried. I moan and moan that this is going to be a big problem. I'm on the road with the big boss, the tall lanky guy, he's my boss, and he'll blame me if it takes much longer! The boss had already been here before, he even drove through in a single day. And now two or even three days - the

boss will definitely call Cairo later and cause us all a lot of trouble. Big trouble! Then I showed him the blue service pass and explained everything to him, how it was with the UHBP and so on. I must have babbled on a lot, because he slowly became soft and restless. "You security, bodyguard?" he asked and I carefully avoided the question with "No, assistant!" Who knows what the boy's real job was, but assistant always fits. I left him to his thoughts and left, reported Per that I had perhaps made our boy think, but nothing more.

Helga seemed to have been harmed by all the sun, because now she got involved (women have a soul, definitely!) and quoted from world literature, if they want a show, then give them a show! She made a shady nest for Per on deck out of the cushions of the bench, told him to sit down and gave him food and drink. The farce almost descended into the bizarre when she began to dab the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief - now childishly dressed like a harem lady in baggy trousers and a veil. The pilot was now obviously heading for one of the control towers. I asked him in a whisper whether he thought it was a good idea to stay overnight, it was only just after midday and we were going to have a lot of problems with my boss, ouch! He replied nervously that he was going ashore to make a phone call. Per turned around and said in English that was good, because then he would also be able to call Cairo; he would not accept such treatment without comment! The pilot ducked and calmed me down; he wanted to ask the canal authorities to let us through to Suez-Port Tawfiq (the end of the canal).

Hey, that sounded better! We docked at the foot of one of these towers, little Nicholas ran ahead to the MUGGELE and called to Master Rahn, we'll have them call to see if they'd let us through today! Rahn also docked and we waited together. Our pilot spent a long quarter of an hour in the control tower, at times we could hear loud screaming. Per laughed quietly: "That's a story!"

The pilot came down and headed towards Per and me. "We're lucky," he said, "the canal remains open, there's only one American warship coming towards us and they've agreed to let us through." He looked at us with satisfaction and waited for applause. Per nodded and said: "Tonight, Suez!" The pilot wanted to say something (proba-

bly that it was too far), but Per had sat back down on his cushion throne, pointed south in a Lord Nelson pose and said: “Come on, let’s go!” Even the pilot understood that.

We were now traveling at double speed, Nikolaus took over the helm and we sped along. The pilot took me aside and asked if that was OK, how he had managed it. I stayed cool and said that if we reached Suez today, I would ask my boss to give him a positive mention in Cairo. The pilot said OK, but he still didn’t tell me his name.

The American warship came towards us, the GIs waved and laughed, there was enough room for another ship. At the checkpoints, people waved to us in a friendly manner as we passed. Helga continued to play the harem servant and little Claus taught the pilot the basics of steering multi-hulled boats. Alex and I went to the chart table and did some calculations: we would be in Ismailia before sunset and realistically in Suez tomorrow afternoon! The MUGGELE stayed behind, the good Rahn had to conserve his engine and could not keep up with our speed. We suspected that he was in for a lonely night.

Indeed, the last bend in the canal, then we drove into the bay in front of the city of Ismailia. Apparently we were expected there; the supermarket owner came to the anchorage with his water taxi to bring us and the pilot ashore. I “put in a good word with the boss,” who graciously pressed a few dollar bills into the pilot’s hand. As soon as this shady rower had disappeared into the launch, everyone was laughing heartily and asked the nice supermarket owner where they could buy something to eat and shop.

At first he looked stupid, then he grinned and said, “At my place!” We agreed that he would pick us up when it got dark.

The sandstorm

It was beautiful, calm, perfect weather. Little Nicholas began to clean the ship, one after the other joined in without saying a word, and after a short time the white-painted wooden deck of the PAGENTO was shining in brilliant white again. I passed the barometer

and couldn't believe my eyes: the thing had to be broken! I've never seen such a steep drop. The captain said the barometer was definitely OK. We went on deck. A dark, grey-brown veil hung over the city. Alex muttered that it was definitely a sandstorm and I commented, what nonsense, dear Alex, there are no sandstorms here.

Then the sandstorm started within a few minutes. It got dark, the wind howled in the shrouds and the sand flew horizontally around our ears. I took care of the dinghy with Nikolaus and called to Alexandra to close our cabin, otherwise we would sleep in the sand that night. Soon we had everything below deck and closed all the hatches. For the first time the whole crew sat around the large saloon table and only now did we notice that there was hardly room for 9 men.

Alexandra, who was holding me tightly because she was very afraid of the roaring and howling of the storm and also because there was so little space, suddenly whispered in my ear, there - there was a rower out there! I thought it was an Alemannic misunderstanding or that she had gone mad, when I saw him gliding past us in a shadowy shape. A young man in white gym shorts and a vest, in a rowing skiff, one-two, one-two, elegantly scurrying past. I said, it's a real storm, what's he doing out there?

Curiosity has gotten me into tricky situations a few times, but this time I controlled myself. At least for a minute and a half. Then I got free and crawled on deck. The storm wasn't so bad up above, it was only below deck that it sounded bad; the howling and roaring of the wind and the poisonous hissing of the sand that swept along the superstructure.

The sand crunched between my teeth and I watched the rower with excitement as he appeared out of nowhere, passed us one-two and disappeared into nothingness again one-two. After about three minutes the same thing happened, but in the opposite direction. Little by little everyone came on deck and watched this boy wonder, for whom training was more important than the sandstorm, which subsided from one minute to the next. Nikolaus looked at the deck, which was now covered in fine brown sand several centimeters deep.

“And that was just an hour after we washed the ship!” he said sadly and went below deck, shaking his head, to do something about the bad taste in my mouth. I also drank a beer and enjoyed it. it despite the crunching sand that was washed down the esophagus and would probably act like sandpaper afterwards...

The water taxi docked. We asked the supermarket manager what he thought of the storm and he asked back: “What storm?” Apparently this storm of the century came here every day. We looked around the (small) town, bought provisions for the next week and had everything brought out to the ship - the water taxi belonged to him too. The man was fine, offered reasonable prices and when it got dark we had a really good evening meal in his gazebo. Then he took us back to the ship.

When we got back on land, he turned his launch (on the sign: PORT AUTHORITIES) into a service vehicle and brought the harbor master and guard on board the PAPAGENO. We were given permission (as VIPs!) to sail out into the Red Sea with the next convoy. So, off we went - night trip through the Bitter Lakes...

The exit to the canal at Suez is also guarded by a tower. They had already informed us that we had no radio, so they put up a flag when the exit was clear. We - with a boat measuring an impressive 15 meters - led the convoy: behind us were a dozen huge tankers, none of them under 100 meters long. We immediately swerved after the exit and moved closer to the shore, letting the monsters pass. At first we dipped our flag as required (boats are required to greet each other by lowering their flags), but after the fifth or sixth elephant that roared past us without a greeting, our enthusiasm waned. Good seamanship or not, the merchant fleet did not think much of our flag salute, so we left it alone. This was to be the smallest mistake of the day.

The collision

We formed three teams: little Nikolaus, Alexandra and I were to have the first watch, big Nikolaus, Kerstin and Matz the second and Per, Helga and Alex were to do the morning watch. The wind was blowing strongly from the northwest and drove the ship along on a

beam reach at a good 10 knots - a good performance for a heavy cruising boat! Before night had really fallen, we had left the last small islands and shallows behind us and were now setting a perfect course over open water: we would advance far south in a long tack and by tomorrow morning we would be halfway to the Gubal Islands (which lie on the western shore of the Red Sea and were our first destination); in the evening we could be there with a bit of luck.

As we sped along, small, bright lights kept appearing on the water. Fishermen fishing with gas lamps. Because of the high waves, you only saw these small boats, often only 4 or 5 meters long, at the last moment when they were dancing on a wave crest. Sometimes we sped past just a few meters away, greeted the fishermen with a loud hello and waved. They were friendly and greeted back; apparently no one except me was concerned about the fact that the pointed hulls of our trimaran were ploughing through the water at breakneck speed and could easily impale a small boat. Shut up, Cassandra, and go to sleep!

Change of guard. Nikolaus instructs Nikolaus, points out the convoy behind us. Kerstin, an experienced boutique owner, skydiver and pilot, has me explain the compass and steering wheel thing again and also that the bearing (the direction that points there from our position) cannot remain the same. Then we have a goodnight cigarette and the rest of us go to sleep.

A loud bang tears me awake. I immediately think of the fishing boats and our razor-sharp hull tips. As we run past, little Nikolaus looks at me sleepily: what is it? I don't know, I shout and run on to the deck. When I climb out of the hatch and see a huge black wall and illuminated windows high above me and hear a roaring hum, no one needs to tell me what happened. We didn't impale a poor fisherman, we were rammed by a tanker! A quick look around: the big Nikolaus and Kerstin are kneeling in the cockpit, behind them the bent railing and on the half-torn davits (two small cranes on which the dinghy hangs) the battered dinghy, which is half dragging in the water: muddled up, as if someone had driven over it with a roller!

The tanker has now passed completely, I can see the huge screws at a sufficient distance - in this gigantic mixer we would have been ground to a pulp in seconds! The black, mighty wall - as high as St. Stephen's Cathedral - and the roaring noise of the screws take your mind off things for a moment. I stand next to little Nicholas and look up. It immediately becomes clear to me that we were very lucky, that could easily have ended in death. A glance at the clock - it is just after one in the morning.

I say to Nicholas that we have to count the crew. But he stands there as if paralyzed and doesn't move. I now count everyone out loud, calling out their names - one is missing!

"Nikolaus, Per!" I shout, "one is missing!" "No way," is the laconic answer, "count again!" I count and call out the name. I hold on to the last one - Alex - after I say seven and then beat my chest and call out "Eight!"

"One is missing!" I shout desperately and suddenly think that it is Matz. I shout: "Where is Matz, where is Matz?!" A squeaky voice right in front of me says: "I'm here, I'm here!" and I say to him, without realizing that I'm still holding him and hitting his chest "no, not you, but Matz!" Almost tearfully, the supposed Alex says: "But - I'm Matz!"

I need a second, then another to understand the meaning of his words. One is missing, of course, but it's not Matz, but the other one.

"Alex!" I call, "where is Alex?!"

Dead silence. Per says dryly: "His bunk is right under the crushed dinghy." Nikolaus: "For God's sake!" Kerstin: "Well, doesn't anyone want to go and have a look?" Awkward silence all around. Down there - no one wants to go down there now.

Per and I go to the companionway at the same time, crawl along the narrow bachelor's bunks to the very back. There lies a figure wrapped in a sheet, silent and motionless. I have only one thought: he must be dead. Per stands motionless behind me, I hear him -

rarely enough - breathing deeply. Then I carefully feel forward and touch the figure.

“Yes, what is it?” Alex mumbles sleepily and rolls over, “what are you guys shouting up there?” Per and I sigh with relief - the good boy is alive, sleeping peacefully, while perhaps 15cm away from him thirty thousand tons of steel rushed past at 20 or 25 knots and half tore our ship to pieces.

Alex quickly puts on some clothes and comes on deck. Helga has lost her composure and found her voice again; like a fury she screams at big Nikolaus, Kerstin and poor Matz, asking what they’ve come up with; they can see the ships and can get out of the way in time, damn it!

We discuss things for hours, until dawn. It went something like this: Kerstin and Nikolaus retreated to a corner of the deck to flirt. They put the three-quarter blind Matz at the helm and told him to just watch the compass and drive “160”. Matz said he could read the brightly lit compass well, so it was OK.

Nobody was paying any attention to the convoy behind us.

After a while, Kerstin and Nikolaus, startled by the noise of the tanker, came back to the helm and saw the giant ship, already close enough to touch. Nikolaus shouted that it was too late to avoid it, all they could do was pray! So the two lovers knelt down while Matz stared into the darkness, terrified - he couldn’t see anything of the tanker, he said, he only heard the roaring of the gigantic bow wave. The tanker hit our ship on the starboard aft and brushed it aside as if it were flotsam. Somehow the dinghy softened the blow a little and therefore helped to keep our boat from going off course and being pushed aside. The davit scraped along the side of the ship and screamed like a wounded animal before it broke. The squashed rubber sausage that had once been a dinghy wrapped itself halfway around the bent stern railing and prevented it from breaking. After a few seconds, the nightmare was over.

Per and I sat in the foredeck and discussed the situation. We had been lucky this time, but there would be no second chance. We decided that from now on one of us would always be awake, because we knew that we could rely on each other, that was tried and tested. We would not trust our lives to such amateurs again - after all, the big Claus (who we unanimously blamed) was not just any green bather, but one of the ship owners and co-skippers, with a test and a license. - We stuck to this decision until we left the ship.

The next morning, both Clauses proved what different stuff they were made of. The big Claus, who silently avoided us and did not want to have breakfast with us ("because we are so mean to him"), was at the helm when I looked out of the porthole, chewing, and saw a work boat with a crane crossing our course. I immediately jumped up and went to the helm. Per followed me; he too had noticed that something was wrong.

I stood next to Nikolaus in silence. "He has to get out of the way, we have the right of way," said Nikolaus and continued driving calmly.

"The bearing is set!" I said (which means that we were heading straight for a collision). Nikolaus said nothing. I repeated, more emphatically: "Man, we're heading for a collision, just bear off, turn the boat away from the wind so that we slow down and let him pass in front!" "No," Nikolaus insisted, "we have the right of way now!"

In the meantime, little Nikolaus, still chewing his sausage sandwich with his mouth full, had come up and stood at the second steering position. Without a word, he pressed the switch lever down and took over the steering. He skillfully dodged the issue and let the Egyptian through, who waved politely and was apparently unaware of his wrongdoing.

In the meantime, little Claus, still chewing his sausage sandwich with his mouth full, had come up and stood at the second steering position. Without a word, he pressed the switch lever down and took over the steering. He skillfully dodged and let the Egyptian through, who waved friendly and was obviously not aware of his wrongdoing.

In the heated discussion that followed, we told little Claus quite openly that we did trust him, but no longer trusted his partner at all, and that he could consider this a mutiny for all I cared: we would not stand by and watch the other Claus kill us! The atmosphere was pretty tense, but after a few hours everyone calmed down. Apart from that, the big Claus didn't get to the helm for the next week.

The wind was no longer playing along, we went for an afternoon swim and tried to repair the worst of the damage ourselves. But the dinghy was completely ruined. But that doesn't matter, said little Claus, we have a second one, one that is still packed under deck, we can now put it into operation. It took a few hours until the new boat was unpacked and assembled. All in all, we were a pretty good crew, because everything that could go wrong did go wrong during assembly.

Towards evening we headed for a small bay that was obviously an abandoned depot or abandoned business. The quay wall was intact, so we moored, but put out a small anchor with the dinghy, just to be on the safe side. We spent a very quiet evening - to my own surprise, I caught the first little fish of my life with a line, using Alma cheese from my home region as bait. Originally, I only had "fishing nonsense" in my head, because everyone said that I would never (ever) catch anything here and with this fishing rod. Nikolaus fried the fish à la PAPAGENO and prepared a great snack, but we were still hungry. A fishing boat chugged in the distance, then it turned around and came alongside. The fishermen waved a large fish; did we want to buy it? It must have weighed 30 kg. But the 100 dollars they wanted was too much for us, so they chugged away again. During their maneuver they got caught on some line, but they accelerated and disappeared into the darkness.

Anchoring maneuvers and reefs

The next morning we were very surprised. Our additional anchor was gone. Nikolaus looked at the broken line. Aha, the fishermen, yesterday evening. They had gotten caught somewhere. Now we knew where. We dived around for another hour and had to continue without accomplishing anything; the anchor was gone forever; I as-

sumed it was still hanging on the fishing boat. Towards the afternoon we reached the northern Gubal Island and rounded it. Here the reefs were only very vaguely marked on the map, the Red Sea pilot even reported on “sand dunes moving underwater.” It soon became clear that the whole thing was no fun when we counted the wrecks stuck to the reefs. One was even a brand new motorboat that probably cost a tens of millions of dollars - but now it was standing motionless on a reef and with the binoculars you could see that it had been completely plundered in the meantime. Little Claus sent Big Claus with the bosun’s chair halfway up the mast to the lookout. The lookout, perhaps for the younger readers, is the person up there in the air who has to look out for Gauls, pirates or reefs and call out loudly when he sees something dangerous. (“The Ga-, the Ga-, the Gaga...!”, as Asterix says).

The big Claus even took his polarized sunglasses with him, because “with them you can see under the water surface”. Snails! He looked here and there and just made faces, but he didn’t see any reefs.

A helicopter took off from the shore about 2-3 km away and flew over us. The pilot turned around and looked at us very closely. Everyone waved, but he came even lower; he obviously wanted something. Then we could see that he was pointing to his headphones. Radio? No, we don’t have that. Since no one else was making any move, I went to the foredeck and first pointed to my ear, then the telephone sign with my thumb and little finger, then my forearms crossed in an X (=broken). He nodded and descended a few meters. Then he pointed ahead and drew hills and mountains in the air, then his hand glided through the air again and smashed into an imaginary obstacle.

Per had stood next to me and translated loudly: “There are reefs ahead and you’ll really hit the concrete!” We nodded that we understood, but he put the helicopter in front of the boat and set a course about thirty degrees to port, then repeated it again. We nodded and little Claus turned the steering wheel in an exaggerated way so that he could see our change of course and know that we had understood him. He shook the helicopter a few times and disappeared behind the dunes again.

Per and I stood at the front railing and watched the water while the girls, Alex and Matz, stowed the foresail. Big Claus felt old and superfluous because we pointed to the other Claus at the helm when we saw light green water and the first reefs - dangerous things, so-called nigger heads, which lurk a few centimeters below the water surface and are only clearly visible at low tide. We slowed down and glided at walking pace through the entrance between the two large Gubal Islands, always along the edge of the reef.

Then we reached the place that Achmed had marked on the map a week ago: a really beautiful, small bay, protected to the north. The wind was now blowing at 8 Beaufort across the flat sand island, the anemometer in the masthead showed a constant 8 Beaufort. Down on deck we were protected by the island, there was only a light breeze.

Little Nikolaus felt his way carefully, Alex and Per fiddled with the large main anchor and let the chain down. Then the anchor took hold and Nikolaus let the ship drift back to dig in the anchor. A jolt and we drifted away quickly - the chain had broken! After a moment of shock, we did what we had learned: Nikolaus started the engine again and headed forward again to the place where the anchor had to be; Matz and I prepared the small hand anchor and let it into the water. The anchor took hold, the line tightened; but that could only be a temporary solution. We wouldn't be able to stay here overnight with this small anchor.

Per, who almost took the breaking of "his" anchor as a personal insult, stripped down to his swimming trunks and jumped into the water to dive for the anchor. Then he surfaced and held up the anchor chain - unfortunately, he had made a mistake in equalizing the pressure and his ear hurt like hell for a few days. Nikolaus rushed into the cabin and looked for the anchor repair kit (I have to admit that I've never seen such a thing before). Triumphantly, he held up a repair link; Now it was a matter of minutes until the two halves of the anchor chain were firmly connected again. The ship slowly moved back, the anchor and the repaired chain held. - It was strange that we lost two anchors in one day.

We stayed on the northern Gubal Island for a day and two nights, went on shore excursions and explored the completely uninhabited sand island a little. We dived on the reef, which made me feel quite uneasy because we had to rely completely on the big Claus, even though we didn't really trust him anymore.

All the equipment belonged to him, he was the only certified diving instructor (certified here means with a certificate) on board, and we wanted to learn some diving techniques from him, after all we had paid him for it. I am an excellent freediver, but I wanted to brush up on my scuba diving skills. I came up with a (technically questionable) compromise: I would only dive for as long and as deep as I could at any time remove my equipment and surface in the event of an "unexplained defect". I expressly said: don't do what I did, you can really die doing it! Later, I was able to fully enjoy the thrill when dusk came and we dived without light in the increasingly dark water.

Then we headed east again and crossed the Red Sea, driving south along the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula to its southern tip, Ras Muhammed.

Diving at Ras Muhammed

You probably know the area from television, because the then President Mubarak had a conference center built there next to the presidential vacation residence, in which Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have often taken place. So we drove around the corner there in good wind - in front of us lay the wide, beautiful Gulf of Aqaba. Up at the cape (Ras is the Arabic word for it) there is a long building next to the lighthouse.

Kerstin, a pilot and skydiver, looked up and said it was just the right place for a free jump. Alex cast an expert glance up and said it was a tidal observatory. Alexandra, who was lying on the bench with her head resting on my lap, was reading the cultural guide to see what the area had to offer. I played with her blonde strands and kept my mouth shut as she read the title of the next page in a low voice: Ras Muhammed - the newly built international shark observation observatory opens!

Little Nicholas soon found an entrance between the reefs and carefully steered in, then we anchored. We dived and frolicked in the water, fascinated by this abundant underwater fauna and flora. In the water, you are just one of many, many tasty fish. A hundred meters above us is the concrete platform of the observatory, little people stand there waving and shaking their hands and calling out to us. We wave and shake our hands back and call out hello and hello and hel-looooo. Alexandra tugs uncertainly on my sleeve, asking if they can see more from above than we can from below?

No, of course there are no sharks here, says the big Claus, who has been diving here “quite often”. At least he is - admittedly - adept at practicing with the diving equipment; we brush up on all the behavior in emergencies, how to manage a regulator in pairs, etc. Unfortunately, our underwater lights fail, so his video recordings and the photos I take are of very poor quality. We enjoy the wonderful underwater world at Sharks Reef and only come out of the water after hours when we start to freeze.

The next day we chug along in calm winds, sailing up the Gulf until we reach the city of Sharm El Sheik (Ofira), the legendary land of Ophir, if you remember the Book of Kings by the old Persian Al Firdausi. Sharm El Sheik is our destination, from there we will fly back to Cairo, the PAPAGENO will head back to the west side and take tourists diving in Hurghada. The city deserves a full description: a port with barracks, eighteen houses, two shops and 15 five-star hotels. On the beach there are two diving schools, three rental boat companies and a tour boat “Visit the Shark’s Observatory at Ras Muhammed!”

At the harbor master’s

Despite all its architectural modesty, Sharm el Sheik is an important place for Egyptian seafaring and El Gism, the army. The almost square harbor basin (new harbor) is a concrete bathtub, a 17-meter-deep swimming pool, probably 250 by 250 meters. On the beautiful sunny side, on the pier, there are an Italian and a Spanish warship. We are met by a small launch and guided to the shady, craggy east side of the harbor basin. Our anchor is simply thrown down on the

smooth concrete floor, not to mention buried. The distance is too great for a shore line, but the pilot, who speaks reasonable English, expressly forbids us from coming any closer to the shore. Warships and cannons impress us civilians, so we swallow any protest and stay lying in the middle of the swimming pool - from a seaman's point of view, this is nonsense, but we don't dare to discuss it either.

The day before, we had written an accident report about our collision. Of course, not a word about our incompetent watch commander, just a simple, precise description of what happened. The only thing missing was the name of the tanker - we couldn't read it in the dark. Our skipper, Per and I climbed into the dinghy and followed the local to the harbor master's office. There we were sent back, the harbor master would not come until such and such a time. We stayed on board and cleared the ship, that is, we tidied up and washed it. When the time came, we chugged back to the harbor master.

The walls of his small office were plastered with photographs and photo trophies. His name was Colonel (pronounced Körnel), everyone addressed him that way. In some photos you could see him in a great carnival uniform; he was probably a real Körnel after all; after all, he spoke fluent English. They had already seen us coming, and as soon as we sat down we were given hot peppermint tea in thin clay bowls - I have to tell Michael Häupl about that! On the table was his name card: Capt. Abdel Wahab M. Saleh. Father of the whales, I whisper to Nicholas, and he whispers back: I can read too! (On the wall hung a brightly painted plaque: Abd el Wahab - Father of the Whales. I wonder if this is where Melville got his Captain Ahab for MOBY DICK?).

Per puts our report, written in English, on the desk, Körnel takes it away again immediately, points apologetically to the thick, green-bound book on which Per had placed it and says with a smile: this is the Holy Koran! Then he takes our paper and starts reading. He stops again immediately (I can't read Arabic either) and says: "Well, tell me!" Nikolaus introduces himself, ship, name, etc., reports that we wanted to go from Port Said to Sharm el Sheik (here are our papers), and that we had a collision with a tanker on such and such a

night. (The conversation is so vivid in my head that I want to repeat it here word for word:)

Körnel smiles. "Collision?" - He is obviously imagining, with a grin, how we ride with our lances lowered against a mountain of steel.

"Well," corrects Nikolaus, red in the face, "the tanker rammed us!"

"Aha," says Körnel, satisfied, "that sounds better. And - did something happen to the tanker?"

Nikolaus says no silently.

"But your ship - is it badly damaged?" Nikolaus shrugs his shoulders. We repaired the railing ourselves in a few hours, we can throw away the old dinghy, there are only a few inconspicuous scratches on the hull - no, the ship is not really badly damaged, good American craftsmanship!

"And - was anyone injured?" Nikolaus says no again.

"Inshallah!" exclaims Körnel and pushes our report, folded and unread, back across the table, "thank God that nothing worse happened!"

So much for the maritime trial. Nikolaus and Per make a half-hearted attempt to find out the name of the tanker and pursue the matter further from an insurance perspective, but the father of the whales has long since retreated into his peppermint tea and is not answering. Meanwhile, I tried desperately to identify the people on the photo trophies, but alas, the Egyptian nobility were all unknown to me.

Körnel has seen my inquisitive glances, and now he takes one picture after another off the wall and explains that here he is pictured with Minister So-and-so, there with General What-and-what, and here his second-to-last ship, 1,500 HP by the way, which he sold to the merchant Icksipsilon. Speaking of which - if we need provisions, water or diesel, he can get us everything, because the merchants in

Sharm are cutthroats, really mean fraudsters who then demand extra money for delivery; but with him, you can simply give him a list of the goods and he will deliver them to the ship free of charge. - Welcome to the Bakschischkanal!

I rummaged around in the Red Sea Pilot for a long time and had a problem, so I brought it up: “Mr. Körnel, Sir, Your Excellency! We would like to go diving here and there today and tomorrow - is that okay?”.

The Colonel suddenly sat upright - he had obviously never seen an idiot who voluntarily asked to pay. “Of course not,” he said as expected, “you need a special permit!” Now I smiled broadly, because that was what I had been aiming for, “here it is!” and Nikolaus put the form with the red diving man printed on it on the desk.

Körnel paused, studied the paper (“oh, you were with good old Achmed!”) and dismantled us in the next second: “This is a 14-day general diving permit for the entire Egyptian coast, except for Ras Muhammed and the bay of Sharm to the island of Tiran, which are nature reserves, and have been for two years!”

That was exactly what the Red Sea Pilot had said, and now I had confirmation. Yesterday we had dived illegally in the nature reserve at Ras Muhammed without knowing it, but we couldn’t do it anymore since I found out and Körnel had seen us; it was as sharp as a razor and I didn’t want to mess with one of those. Friendly and without saying a word, he reached into the drawer and picked up a form. “I need an ID or passport from you,” he said as he began to write.

Nikolaus and I rummaged in our pockets - no, we didn’t have anything with us. Per casually reached under his shirt and pulled the blue miracle service passport out of the bag. “Yes, what is that?” asked the Körnel, and began to leaf through it. He discreetly hid the form under a pile of newspapers while he studied Per’s passport. “A diplomatic passport!” he said with an air of expertise, “I used to travel with that as a military attaché!” He suddenly became so jovial and friendly that I felt a little uneasy - this could go really wrong.

Without further ado, he picked up the “invalid” diving permit, slapped a few different stamps on it with a friendly grin and scribbled his name underneath. “So, now you can dive anywhere,” he said, “I’m also the highest nature conservation authority here, I give you permission!” He barked at his doorman, and a few moments later we were given fresh peppermint tea. The grain grinned broadly as he reached into the bottom drawer of his desk. “Allah will forgive,” he murmured and put the cognac on the table. We said no, but he poured the brimful cognac into our hot tea.

Like cat and mouse, he and Per danced around each other in the small talk that followed, neither of them telling each other anything, absolutely nothing about their jobs, just that they both worked for the state (each for his own). Per didn’t correct the “diplomat” thing, let the father of all whales think what he wanted. During a break, Körnel pointed to Nikolaus: “He’s the skipper?” and we nodded. Körnel pointed at me with his chin, without looking directly at me: “He’s security?” I said no: “No, assistant” and Körnel nodded understandingly, winked at Per. Yes, assistant.

The conversation then turned to the Gulf War and the amount of work that the two warships caused in the harbor (and, incidentally, Per was carefully questioned as to whether or not he was a diplomat with three percent status and a penny-pinching ability to deliver). Poor Körnel had to supply them with truckloads of provisions and forbidden drinks, “You can’t imagine how hard it is to find all of that here!” I thought to myself, I’d like to have his misery and his percentages...

We were back on the topic; a brief eye contact, then Nikolaus said we would like to go on board to put together our shopping list. Körnel said goodbye to us and gave us a man to take the list and handle the delivery.

The mood on board was very cheerful. We sat around our coffee, chatted and Nikolaus had to tell the story of the harbor master for the third time. Then Alex said that the boat was not lying steady, the anchor was dragging on the bottom. The boat had already gone in circles several times, so the chain was twisted and might break again.

Nikolaus decided that we should move carefully towards the shore and put out a shore line. When the anchor winch lifted the chain, you could see under water that it had stupidly wrapped itself around the anchor itself. One of us had to go down to sort it out before we caused any damage.

The big Claus was just in the middle of putting on his diving equipment when Per dryly said that the soldiers on the warship were watching us with binoculars - and if you go into the harbor basin with diving equipment on too, they'll get you! Claus, the quick thinker, paused and left his mouth wide open. Helga had to immediately disappear into the galley, where I heard her laughing loudly.

"I'll do it," I said and dropped the covers. Per took his underwater camera and got into the water with Alex. I jumped into the warm water, dived the 17 meters down to the anchor, worked and pulled a few times on the chain, which was free again almost immediately, then I pulled up again. Per immortalized this successful diving action in a wonderful 8mm sequence - in it I saw myself diving for the first time. Big Claus got rid of his bottles, grumbling, and was very angry, "because we're always so mean to him."

Alexandra asked how one could go down so deep? She could barely get a meter deep, the air in her stomach, in her chest, would immediately push you back up again! I first commented on the chest thing with a grin and then said that I would just let all the air out first, but Alex (as well as being an electronics technician, our paramedic) commented that I was a fool, letting air out and so on, you can easily drown - that's why a weight belt is safer. Everyone agreed with him, except Alexandra. We practiced for a while and suddenly she got it. "Phew," she said, panting when we got back to the top, "I have to swim up really hard and when I lose my strength, I'll be pulled down!" Yes, that's just how it is with free diving.

Diving in paradise

After breakfast we hurried to get the ship ready and followed the caravan of excursion boats, after half an hour we reached the bay that is described in every diving guide as the divers' paradise (Ras

Umm Sid). We were the last to arrive in the bay, we stood excitedly on the foredeck, watching the excursion boats that were slowly driving in circles and letting the divers into the water. The big Claus, who was now at the helm (!), because after all, he “had been diving nearby a few times”, drove briskly into the middle of the circle, because there was a rock in the water.

“Drop the anchor!” he ordered, Alex and I hurried over, unsuspecting.

Suddenly someone shouts from one of the diving boats, asking if we’ve lost our minds by anchoring in the middle of the “cathedral”?! Get lost, you stupid tourists! (or something like that). The “cathedral”, it should be noted, is an underwater stalactite about 15 meters high, unique in the world and sacred to all divers. Some call it a “temple” and that it’s a coral, but I know Aunt Amalie’s coral necklace, but that looks completely different!

Per takes the helm and drives the boat outside the circle. Alex snorkels ahead and waves that there’s good anchoring ground over there. We anchor the boat and go diving. As there is not enough equipment on board, we split into two groups: Claus and Kerstin with bottles, the rest of us free dive.

It is all new to me: the cathedral, which rises like a huge candle from the black nothingness; the many colorful schools of fish that come within centimeters; the small, cheeky zebra-striped fish that nibble on our skin and wetsuits. I see barracudas for the first time, and I photograph lion fish for the first time. Unfortunately, the pictures are only mediocre because the flash does not reach far enough at a depth of 10 meters. When I show the slides to friends, I have to I explain why everything is so dirty green and why the (in itself fiery red, poisonous dragon’s head) appears in a rich dark brown with white feathers. I only confess to very, very good friends that I simply didn’t dare to go any closer.

Matz, our blind air traffic controller, has no wetsuit with him and is freezing miserably. We leave him on board as a guard and follow the Clauses to the steep abyss, where the edge of the reef drops verti-

cally into the black nothingness. They dive down and in their uncomradely manner do not notice the hand signals from Kerstin, who is obviously afraid of the depth and who stays behind with us up above. Alex is chasing a school of barracudas, we quickly swim up to him and ask if he's crazy? He grins and says that they won't do you any harm anyway, but then he lets it go. Alexandra and I look at each other: we're already on a damn ass, gentlemen!

Per, Helga, Alexandra and I stay together, swim around in this beautiful underwater world and marvel at this fantastic garden for hours. I take and take pictures until the film ends, asking Helga to take a picture of this and that, because it's like the Garden of Eden. The sun is slowly setting, the light is getting dim and the predatory fish are waking up. Now it's Alex who is being chased by the school of barracudas and reaches the ship in a record-breaking crawl finish. Slowly everyone gets on board and we chug back to the harbor. The best dive of my life (so far).

Captain's Dinner

I still admire little Claus today. With little money and a lot of hard work, he manages the PAPAGENO single-handedly, because his partner has lost all sense of humor and is more of a nuisance than a help. He keeps the ship in excellent condition and does everything he can himself. I'm not an expert, but as far as I can tell, the ship is in tip-top shape. The defective electronics are just a superfluous luxury and do not affect its seaworthiness.

The baksheesh channel has eaten into his finances, gentlemen! Nevertheless, little Claus announces that he wants to invite us to the Captain's Dinner in Sharm el Sheik today, our last evening together. We dress up and chug across the harbor basin, which is surrounded by the barracks wall, go through the "passport control" again and trot over a small hill to the city. There - we would not have believed it - we cannot find a restaurant. Apart from perhaps the horrible hotels where even the starters cost more than a meal in Cairo. This price maximization goes against the grain for all of us, we leave the greedily rubbing their hands in the air and go back into the city. After a

long walk we sit down in a street café and have a drink before we continue walking.

Why keep walking, the owner of the coffeehouse asks us, I'm having chicken and rice tonight, in the garden restaurant at the back. Then he lowers his voice so that Allah can't hear, and whispers quietly: I have beer and wine, too. We look at each other, then follow him into the garden, where it's absolutely comparable to a Viennese Heurigen restaurant, except that the drinkers here are darker-skinned. The space is tight, but we enjoy the menu, which is terribly fatty and spicy, but far tastier than the spaghetti bolognese and spaghetti papageno (and vice versa) that we were used to on the ship. Here at the back in the garden, where Allah can't see, wine (in large quantities) and beer (in cans) are served openly. After dinner I try to start a conversation with our table neighbors, two dark Arabs, but it is very difficult, very difficult. They wave me to sit down with them.

The crew cheers when Per casually interjects that he doesn't dare now, Mr. Security. I don't need anything else, I nod briefly around the group and sit down with the two dark fellows. Our conversation slowly gets going, I slowly speak English, they slowly speak Arabic-English. I have three children and no, no wife. They are surprised; everyone has a wife or more. Yes, yes, but not me, but I have a girlfriend, but no ring. Aha, they nod in incomprehension, what, no ring, isn't it a ring? Yes, yes, I say, a signet ring, a decorative ring. No ring for a woman. Aha.

The two of them work in road construction in Cairo, I quickly understand that, they come from the island of Tiran. It actually belongs to the Saudis, and they are also Saudis, but that is not so precise here. At midnight they would travel by bus across the Sinai to Cairo, and they would be there tomorrow at noon. I ask if I can buy them a beer - head shake, beer, for Allah's sake, no! I soften the offer to peppermint tea: yes, of course, that is very friendly. When ordering, one of them points to my cigarette - no, when I offer him one, he makes a hand sign that he means a water pipe. So, then a chibuk for the dark guest, waiter, and plenty of tütün (tobacco) for three. Thanks to Karl May.

This invitation to tea changes the whole conversation. Suddenly the Arab construction workers are no longer so gloomy, they laugh and sip the hot tea. Questions about my work and the customs in Austria and I slowly notice that their efforts to pronounce Austria correctly are slowly but surely turning into Asturia and we suddenly find ourselves at a bullfight in Barcelona. No, gentlemen, Austria, not Spain! No bullfighting - except perhaps at the Opera Ball - and no fandango, but Schnadahüpfler! - Schna- Schanada - what!?

The water pipe is passed around (not the pipe itself, just the hose), I wipe the metal mouthpiece with the palm of my hand as a precaution, hygiene and all, but they acknowledge my anxiety with broad smiles. Apparently the greedy waiter has not given them enough tobacco (tobacco is rolled into small, cone-shaped paper bags and put into the clay head containing the glowing pieces of coal). One of them takes out his own tobacco pouch and puts a little on top. A pleasant, sweet smell immediately spreads; we puff and puff the delicious tobacco, laugh and joke and try to bring Vienna back from Spain to Austria. I could say that it was exactly the other way round in the time of Charles the Fifth, but my Arabic gesticulations probably aren't enough...

I had already bought the third or fourth round of tea and tobacco, and the dark man had dutifully mixed in his own tobacco, when Alexandra came strolling over and sat on my lap (of course only because there was no free chair). She sniffed and then whispered in my ear: "Darling, that's hash!" and looked at me wide-eyed, knowing that I consistently detest this kind of thing. I can still hear the words, but at the time they didn't penetrate my consciousness because I was in such a good mood and saw everything through a sweet fog, everyone was so nice and I felt wonderful. I explain to her in a friendly way that I'm just drinking tea and smoking a hookah with the two gentlemen. Alexandra goes off again, sulking for no apparent reason.

Every Captain's Dinner has its end, and this one too. We go out into the warm full moon night and I'm amazed at how soft and springy the soles of my ancient sailing shoes are. I dance and hop in front of the others, uphill towards the barracks, still hearing the comments behind me that I thought he was now completely out of it and

looked around to see who “he” could be. But there was no one there except me. So we strolled home - I was dancing in my new shoes - and we reached the barracks gate, where three guards were standing; two with Kalashnikovs, one without, because that was the commander. We must have shown our passports and the port papers for the PAPAGENO ten times in these two days, but each time they relentlessly wanted to see them again - rules are rules!

As I dance along in front of the group, it obviously looks alarming, because the militiamen huddle close together and hold on to their guns: Watch out, a fool! Even today it is a mystery to me from which corner of my repressed subconscious this homosexual impulse came, in any case I suddenly hugged the commander and gave him a loud kiss on his unshaven cheek. “It’s me, your dear István!” I add unnecessarily. He opens his eyes wide in shock like a calf in a slaughterhouse, then he points angrily, saying that we should make sure we get through the gate quickly, but hurry! Delighted that there is no boring passport control, we walk down to the harbor laughing.

The others are still roaring with laughter, only Alexandra swears never, ever, ever to kiss me again, I’m such a horrible person! The others are now teasing me, saying that I’m so high that I could fly to the Italians (add: warship) and ask if they have something to quench our thirst. I couldn’t hold back any longer when the others noticed my drunken determination and tried to downplay the whole thing with “I was only kidding!” How often have we been told that we should never go to the warships!

The others only slowly follow as I walk towards the Italians in a dancing step. In front of the Passarella, the pier that leads onto the ship, a corporal is sitting at a table and is looking at me calmly. It is clear to me now, because I am probably not the first person he has seen threatened in his long years of service, but at the time I noticed that he remained completely cool, even though everyone else neighed or freaked out at the sight of me. From a distance I greet him in my rusty school Italian and ask him not to shoot - we are the tired and thirsty sailors from the trimaran out there and we just wanted to ask if we could have a sip of Chianti or something else decent. Cheekiness wins, I thought.

In his rasping English he told me that “the Italians” were the ones at the back, and that he was “the Spaniards”. But if I wanted, we could have a beer; there were no other drinks because the harbor master wanted exorbitant amounts of money for them. I quickly rummaged through the hash-clouded seaweed that filled my brain and tried to make myself understood in Spanish. When I threw one at him, saying that the harbor master was probably a *ladron* (thief), he became approachable and grinned broadly; well, come on then!

Helga whispers: “István, you are the greatest” while we wait at the Passarella until the officer comes back with two cartons of cold, nice cold beer. While we drink our cans, the others tell him in broad strokes how our trip went. When Nikolaus reminds us that we have to go to the ship, the Spaniard gives us a full carton of beer “for later”.

Needless to say, after the rowing session I returned to our ship soaking wet. It was also superfluous to mention that the beer did not survive until the morning, but it was also superfluous to mention that at some point the wet clothes had to be taken off and that Alexandra and I danced Sirtaki on the cabin roof - under a full moon, fully naked and beautiful! (Sirtaki because that was the only cassette on board that was still playable).

The two Clauses split up soon after - the big Claus and Kerstin pooled their savings and bought the SYMPAT, a trimaran that they still charter today. Alex walked from Sharm (in several days) to the Sinai to the St. Catherine’s Monastery and then had to have his bleeding soles treated in hospital in Cairo. Matz took the tourists for a while with the little Claus on the PAPAGENO in Hurghada, Alexandra went to Brazil, Helga, Per and I went to Vienna.

We still sometimes go to sea together today.

I probably haven’t mentioned that I spent most of my working life in data processing. Computers and stuff, you know. Of course you can do that for a while without becoming completely out of touch with the world or obsessive. But you shouldn’t forget to do something else, at least as a hobby. I couldn’t think of anything bet-

ter than working my way up in the computer club I had joined and becoming editor-in-chief of the club's newspaper one day.

Well, it wasn't actually that bad.

There wasn't even a club newspaper yet; Two or three times a year, a double-sided, hectographed paper was sent out, listing the most important events of the previous year and upcoming dates, etc. Then the president in office had the idea of asking me to contribute a small amount to the next paper, which I did. Unfortunately, I couldn't manage less than 12 pages. Now good advice was hard to come by, but the good man could be helped: and so the newspaper was born.

Perhaps the president thought at the time that I would publish great programming tricks or masterful coding examples, and he probably hoped that I would be able to put together 8 to 10 pages with that.

He soon knew better.

Month after month I filled the pages, sometimes only 48, but usually a full 64 pages. Among other things, I had stipulated that I could let my pen run free. Regardless of whether it was an announcement of a conference or presentations with bigwigs from IBM, I wrapped everything up neatly in small, readable stories and thought that this would be a better and more humorous way of conveying the dry facts to readers. I always wrap my dog's tablets in a special sheet of paper, claro? So you don't need to worry that you'll fail somewhere in the following stories because of incomprehensible technical jargon; it is enough if you know that computers exist, that there is a computer manufacturer called IBM and that this same IBM produced one of the world's best computers, the legendary AS/400.

The rest is logical; a club of computer freaks who meet in some big city for conferences or other lectures; an editor-in-chief who has to get them to talk before anyone comes to the conferences and meetings, and a president who spends nights brooding over the un-

paid printing bills for the newspaper that the editor-in-chief produces...

The hot topic of 1996 was of course the year 2000, which would lead to the biggest computer changeover in the world. Thousands of editorial offices around the world were typing their fingers to the bone, because everyone was afraid of disaster, maybe even chaos.

Not so in our small one-man editorial office. We (or more precisely, I) had made provisions in good time and had no Y2K problem at all. Nevertheless, the editorial office had to address the general problems and nervousness and published a simple, cheerful article on the subject of the two thousandth and the upcoming congress; but unfortunately the editor had made a typo on page 3, which was not without consequences. The former (the cheerful article, of course, not the congress) brought me a multi-page, laudatory letter to the editor, the recognition of which culminated in a flattering comparison with the works of the famous Israeli humorist Ephraim Kishon.

The joy of this and the anger over the many complaints about the stupid typo that had so shamelessly exposed my all too lax research first swirled with plenty of cognac, then my name swirled into a pseudonym; and all these swirls then led to the following melancholy reflection (and more cognac, of course).

May E.K. forgive me!

A year like any other

Ornella Muti, who is stretching out her arms longingly towards me, bursts into a thousand pieces when the wretched cucumber starts chirping. I hastily fumble around in the dark for the device (the cucumber, as you have probably noticed, is my mobile phone) while trying to decipher the luminous numbers on my watch: 3:30! What idiot...

“Yes, please?” I whisper and glance worriedly towards the other side of the bed, where Ornella’s predecessor becomes restless for a moment, but then continues to sleep. “This is Ephraim K., the famous humorist,” the voice on the other end of the line croaks, “I would like to speak to the editor-in-chief!”

I immediately break out in a cold sweat. Taxi Schwechat Airport Airplane Tel Aviv Hotel room three suitcases. How the hell...?

“The editor-in-chief and my wife have already retired to their private rooms, so I can’t possibly disturb them, Excellency,” I say hoarsely, adding just to be on the safe side: “I’m only the First Secretary. But what makes you think we’re in Israel today?”

In my mind’s eye I see Ephraim K., the famous humorist, smiling mischievously: “I have my connections. No, seriously: my friend Jossele saw him this evening at Tel Aviv airport with his wife and luggage trolley.”

“That was the AUA cabin steward,” replied the baggage cart, “who accompanied my best friend and us to the hotel; we are here for the annual meeting that will take place in Jerusalem in June.”

“I know, I know! So what is it, can I speak to the so-called editor-in-chief now?”

“Unfortunately not, Your Grace, I really can’t disturb you now.” A warm, comfortable wave of power floods through me, the enslaved

creature. “But of course I could do something,” I add vaguely, in a fit of magnanimity and peasant cunning. The bait always works - at least with Viennese local politicians.

General knowledge, yes, but at 2:30 a.m.?

“Very well, make a note,” growls Ephraim K., the famous comedian, and I fumble on the floor for the cigarette packet, between socks, beer cans and the remains of the Jerusalem Post. “In the last issue, the great master made a huge mistake; apparently not only did he not understand the leap year thing, but he also published misleading information on page 3. If that isn’t an embarrassment! Well, I want to give him a little help - from colleague to colleague, so to speak - although he apparently has never heard of me, the greatest humorist,” he adds, somewhat piqued.

“Are you even listening to me?” he asks and I hurry to mutter “Hmm-Hmm” into the phone while my eyes greedily wander around looking for the damned lighter.

“Go ahead, Eminence, I just quickly grabbed my notepad,” I lie happily and take a blissfully deep first drag.

“So, you don’t need to say goodbye to February 29th for 8 years, as mentioned in your little leaflet. The year 2000 is a leap year!” I want to say cheekily that he is the eleventh caller in this embarrassing matter, but then I keep my mouth shut in time. “Perhaps you should do some educational work on the leap year,” says Ephraim K., the best-known humorist between the Elbe and Euphrates, condescendingly.

Leap year, nightly enlightenment

“First of all, you have to get rid of ‘Pope Julian’, this slip-up is just too embarrassing. There was a Pope Julian around 300, and then another around 1700, so forget it. Tell your people that the term “Julian calendar” is named after Julius Caesar and it was the great Cajus Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) who, returning victorious from a campaign in 46 BC, found a miserably inaccurate military calendar stolen

from the Persians in Rome and was annoyed that his victory, which he had won six weeks ago, would actually only take place in three days. Furious, he decided that this year (46 BC, *nota bene*) should last 455 days and thus 15 months. Then he smashed the curtain into the door panel and had himself taken to Egypt galley rowing. - Do you have that?" "Of course, that is really interesting news," I say hypocritically, yawning and watching with interest the miniature beetle that is kicking across the bedsheet on its six little legs.

"So, Julius not only courted Cleopatra in Egypt, but also roamed around in the pharaonic archives (you need breaks every now and then, haha). There he actually found the decree of Pharaoh Ptolemy III from the year 238 BC, in which the gifted astronomer Canopus calculated the tropical solar year to be 365.2422 days and the synodic lunar month to be 29.5306 days, and from this he concluded with razor-sharp precision that for every three years with 365 days, there should be one with 366 days must follow. Cajus J. C. was delighted with this discovery and immediately ran to Cleopatra the Beautiful and soon worked out his new Roman calendar with her: 11 months with 30 or 31 days, a 12th month of February with 28 days, every fourth year with 29 days, and a bright boy called Caesarion were the results of this productive collaboration, hahaha." I don't know why he laughs so much every now and then, but older citizens find some things so funny.

"But was this calendar accurate enough?" I ask, feigning interest, while I frustratedly leaf through the Hebrew Gideon Bible that I found in the nightstand in the hotel room, trying to at least find out which way is the front and which way is the back. And I find all this calendar nonsense disgusting: as if the Roman Christian calendar was the only one! There's also the Jewish, Islamic and whatever calendars, why doesn't he take care of them too?

"Young man," the humorous great continues, "you have no idea what Julius left behind in Rome. No, it was not just the unfortunate year of 46 with its 455 days. The Romans had already upset the Persian war calendar many years before; the year ended on February 24th with the festival of the god Terminus (not related to "train station", but the reason for our New Year's Eve fireworks) and began, in

the sensible Persian way, on March 1st, but continued with solar and lunar months of varying lengths and ended in a February with 22 or 23 days. The months themselves had three fixed points, the 1st day (Kalends), the Nones (5th or 7th day) and the Ides (on the 13th or 15th day). The other days were given in relation to the next fixed point (the 11th was “two days before the Ides”). Of course, the Romans also invented something like a short-circuit month (Mercedonius began after February 23rd) to compensate for the inaccuracies. These leap days between February 24th and March 1st (Latin “bis sextum ante calendas martias”) can still be found today in French (année bissextile) and Italian (anno bisestile) for the leap year. In addition, after Caesar’s assassination, the Romans moved the start of the year in 43 BC to January 1st, the day the consuls took office (that was what the Viennese local politicians were called in ancient Rome), where it has remained to this day. Nevertheless, even this ingenious Julian calendar had a catch that would not be corrected until a millennium and a half later: the annual average was 12 minutes, or more precisely 11 minutes and 12 seconds, too long.” Ephraim K., the famous humorist, takes a short break, exhausted, which allows me to carefully place the miniature Hebrew that fell off the bed back on the bedsheet so that it can continue to wander around the yellowed HOLIDAY INN JERUSALEM lettering.

Leap year, a papal brainwave

“Here it comes!” the master of humor exclaims, “please write that down word for word! In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII (the 13th, E. K. adds instructively) had finally had enough of having his lunch served at half past nine in the morning, of hearing the Angelus bells at a quarter to three instead of five, and, even worse, of having to pay extra interest for 11 minutes and 12 seconds at the Banco di Roma every year. So, while one day, by chance and without any ulterior motive, he met the chubby, blond-haired Roman While watching altar boy games of sack racing in the Sistine Chapel and Maestro Michelangelo painting frescoes, he had a sudden epiphany: a division quickly scribbled in the centuries-old dust showed the correctness of the papal brainwave: all you had to do was make every fourth of the secular years (the turn of the century), which occur every 100 years, into a leap year, and you would have saved or gained around 12 minutes

(including interest). So the rules were refined immediately, in 1582: every fourth year of a century is a leap year, but not the secular years (the ones that end with 00, you cultural pigs), unless they are evenly divisible by 400. So 1600 became a leap year (Gregory XIII used the interest to finance a small weekend campaign to give the Pisans a slap in the face), and 2000 will be one too.”

Leap year OK, everything OK

“Then everything is fine,” I say, turning the little fidgeting mini-romper onto his back and trying to anesthetize him with cigarette smoke, “so we’ve had a flawless calendar for a good 400 years...” but the eloquent advocate of humor interrupts me immediately: “What are you thinking! Nothing is fine! Of course, that’s only a piecemeal solution, this four-hundred-year rule doesn’t really solve the problem, because in the year 4300 an additional leap day will be needed to correct this papal correction again! Besides, what do you mean here, for 400 years? Oh, you and your AS/400 number games! No, in reality this calendar regulation only applied to the papal sphere of influence from 1582 onwards; the Swiss canton of Valais, for example, only followed in 1583, the Japanese in 1873, and the Greeks in general in 1923. And your editor-in-chief probably only in 2012,” says the humorous great and laughs briefly and bleatingly, as if it were a joke.

So we gossip for a while about whether Canopus was just an advisor and astronomer or maybe even a brother of the Pharaoh, etc. yawn-yawn-yawn, then I let the cucumber slowly slide to the floor with sleepy eyes and think of Ornella, her slanted green-grey eyes, her full lips, as she lisps through her cute little gap in her teeth: “... let’s gossip.” thatß Sssßold year Sssßold year, Büßer little Russy...” and the voice of the greatest humorist of all time continues to squawk from the cell phone, ever quieter and more distant and quieter....

Rust van Idas,

First editorial secretary

Leap year, an epilogue:

Instead of this epically broad feature article, a four-line paragraph would have sufficed:

“Correction: in our last issue, page 3, a small error crept in with the year 2000: the Julian calendar was developed by Julius Caesar in 46 BC. The correction of the annual difference of 12 minutes was made in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII: every year divisible by 400 is also a leap year, period.”

M.M. G., editor's wife

Another newspaper appointment was due, once again I had only been thinking about earning money, car repairs and taking my child to the country school week and hadn't written a single article.

Atlanta is not only home to Coca-Cola, but also IBM research facilities and our next computer congress. The best computer club newspaper that ever had me as editor-in-chief lay lasciviously stretched out on the hard drive and waited happily to receive my messages. Time was pressing and I really had to do something quickly - in a one-man editorial office, what I had learned in the course on how to delegate correctly is difficult to implement - I don't know why. — Nevertheless, a real, thoroughbred editor doesn't give up and uses the Internet to fill the pages.

Not everything in this article is true — with the one exception that my computer magazine was probably the best you've ever read. — Some things are completely made up, brand names are mixed up, as are manufacturers — you don't want to get yourself into trouble. Nevertheless, you will already recognize some things from your own experience, or will soon. You'll go online at some point, won't you? You have email, right? Are you already “in”?

At some point it has to be mentioned that many a veteran programmer has been shipwrecked on these new-fangled data highways. And that this is less often the fault of the veteran programmer than you think or than we are led to believe.

For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that all of this happened “back in the day”. Nowadays, Internet connections are completely problem-free and extremely fast, the modems and the cables work perfectly and of course the stork still brings the little babies....

Chief Tecumseh

Perhaps you have a mailbox like mine: in the hallway by the entrance to the house, all the mailboxes of the residents are lined up in a long row. When you come home, you take your briefcase in one hand, your cell phone in your mouth and your bunch of keys in the other. Then you unlock the mailbox, open the narrow door, yes, a lot has come in again, and then you drag the sluts out of the mailbox in bunches. If they let you drag them.

Sometimes someone sends a thick manual or Microsoft sends its latest price list, then it can be a big package, and then you tug and pull at this thing until it— more or less undamaged - comes out. Phew, I made it, but almost everything got stuck in the narrow door.

Last week it happened again. Of course, you're no longer a punch card dinosaur, and of course you don't receive your mail via the mailbox anymore, you're in e-business after all! Of course, I've been posting more or less brilliantly over the last few years using the Internet's mail facilities. There have been a few problems here and there, but all in all it works (when it works, and that often doesn't). Objectively speaking, my passion for communication has actually increased, because it's really quite easy to send a few lines across the Atlantic now. In the past, such a call would end with a glance at the Swatch (it is now 3:15 in the morning in Toronto) or at the first few pages of the telephone book (a minute costs 27.50).

But e-business is worth it! As the editor of a market-dominating trade magazine (you are holding it in your hands), I have e-mail contact with most of the authors/editors; that is my e-business. Yes, readers can also contact me directly and without bureaucratic nonsense (do you think there is another 750 euro stamp on it, right?) via our website or my personal e-mail address. Maybe I should publish my first time in the section "My first time" (the youths Sex-magazine BRAVO also has a section "My first time"!):

My first time

I, a telephone-wired PC-pendejo, can get involved for around \$25. A fairly casual identification at IBMNET, insert the disk, type in INSTALL. Snork snork, and completely surprisingly: it installs without any ominous MRI-xxxx or other error messages! Joy! Emotion! Fatherly pride! What do you want to be called, what is your nearest IBM dial-in node (select the phone number from the drop-down list), your credit card number or do you want to cancel (it used to be: money or life), and that's basically it. 30 days trial, after that it's a monthly subscription of, as already mentioned, about 0.25 kilo shillings or \$25 per month. And that would be worth it if...

Or rather, if not.

Joy in the editorial office. Baby champagne and a bag of peanuts are sacrificed to the gods. Almost all people and institutions in the editorial office now have Internet addresses. All IBMers, of course, and anyone who doesn't have Internet is no longer in.

Vanity and bliss. Atlanta, here I come! Well. No matter how much the Atlantans advertise, I just don't like the CoCoLaLaLight. The best, in my opinion, are the old 0.2-liter bottles, which, when half empty, can be refilled with White Coruba rum. Just by the way, in reality Courvoisier Dreistern surpasses both.

Of course I'm still struggling with the tricks of this tiny computer. I wonder how unfair the world is that products like Windows for Workgroups or WINDOWS of this quality make a man like, say, Bill G., the richest private individual in the world; others, say, me, write their fingers to the bone and then buy a well-run-in new car (four years old) with only 120,000 km on the clock. Sigh! Addio, mondo cane!

But - where was I? Oh yes, I wanted to say something about the Internet. It takes a while to get used to the tools, of course, as a veteran screen voodoo artist, I mean. Of course, I haven't been able to surf properly yet, because my Netscape clashes with the Netscape of my co-user, who has a university version at a reduced student rate and whose father is me. Of course, you will immediately realize, just

as I do, that Netscape cannot be compatible with Netscape, of course! (Any questions?)

I don't have to surf around, I have to yes, work and s... — ähh, earn. So, I'll just claim the email part of the Internet for myself, we'll just look at Hugh Hefner's colorful pictures with "his" Netscape. OK. If you haven't asked yourself yet which root words Netscape is made up of (net = network, scape = abbreviated to Escape), then that's probably a good thing, because you're a computer specialist and not an etymologist.

The email program (EULALIA is its name) is just to my taste. It's great how one (1) line opens up behind the term "help" with a mouse click, which is green. I vaguely remember that in OS/2 green in the help screens means "more behind" (i.e. hypertext behind). So I happily clicked on the green text with my little hand (the arrow has long since passed), and a paid registration form from Qualcomm for EULALIA appeared (we'll spare you the details). This registration form beamed with joy that you will receive more emails from this company from time to time, you just need to fill in this form and submit it using the button. Thank you for using EULALIA. But it doesn't really help me, I already need help to look at my emails.

Well, that's what friends are for. One of them is just coming to visit my fridge and says: "HowdyOldChampWhatsUp?" Beaming with joy, I tell him about my EULALIA, which I still don't know much about. He quickly gets a small one from my fridge, then sits down in front of the PC with his legs apart and starts clicking on this and that. Suddenly a directory of names (NICKNAMES) appears, he says: "Go on, give me your addresses" and types in some of the names along with their Internet addresses. Then he clicks here and there again and also in the top right, and then it says "New Mail, No Subject, No Recipient". My English is just good enough to guess "New letter, no subject, no recipient", then he starts writing to the address that happens to be at the top "Tscharli. Hello, old champ, I've just taken Eulalia for a run, the dumb master doesn't even know where to type anything. Bye, Xandl" and before I can even say "gicks" he does a monkey grip SEND click and off it goes. (I haven't heard anything from Tscharli since).

You see, it's that easy. I ask him how things are with manuals etc. at EULALIA. With a broad grin (I only allow friends to do this without reservation) he squeezes out "nitschewo, no manual, intuitive user interface". Aha! I say and don't understand anything. Somehow it has to do with his endless car examples; oh yes, "if you can drive one, you can drive them all." or something like that. But it'll take at least three months if you go crazy... Intuitive user interface, and I, the idiot, write 30 pages of manuals for my customers' intuitive interfaces. Well, I can still improve that.

When he comes back from the fridge, I ask him what that is now, I'm completely confused. The "demon" writes me a "non-delivery report" or, more or less, a "non-delivery report from the evil spirit". I am informed that the address I entered, "I4atdiaus.abaI@traumi.net.komm", is wrong. A laborious search, oh yes, a small typo. Roaring laughter and a crashing blow on my left shoulder; he seems to know Monika's email address too. "Brinxtna noa Bia, then I'll explain everything to you," and that's what happens. Soon (it seems like dawn is already dawning) I can send a message to my friend Alex, attach a Word text to my accompanying lines, and it gets through.

At least I think so.

Far from it. After an hour and a half, another DAEMON tells me that the letter could not be converted. After deciphering the English jumble of abbreviations that is at the beginning of every email (if you like, I know), it turns out that the Word text could not be converted by the recipient (an AS/400). Oh yes, compatibility. Forgot again that you can't put petrol in, should fill in diesel (thanks for this helpful example, dear Alex!)

E-mail, the wonderful message in a bottle. If I write a message on my completely outdated terminal, the error message appears immediately and without delay if the user ID is wrong or the user is not online, etc. You will have to get used to it.

Friend Alex comes over from the kitchen ("Hi, I'm going now. That's not how it works. Whenever I come, your fridge is always

empty. I really don't know what you mean by friendship. Bye.”). I'm also surprised that the fridge is empty again.

Internet light

Two months have passed since then. I have around 300 emails on my PC, around 700MB. I'll probably have to buy a new hard drive or get rid of this or that document. Printing would also be an alternative to paperless office. It's great that everything has already been thought through so well.

A week ago I discovered: now I can only write. Yes, I can no longer read, in other words: pick up my mail. Then a POP3.CA.US....andso-media comes up and says I no longer exist! User RUDAS does not exist, please enter your password: *****.

17 times I try to pick up mail (CHECK MAIL). 17 times nothing. So no connection, the post office doesn't send anything without - yes, without what exactly? I entered my password KAKERLAK a dozen times, it always came back OK, then a certain MIME SERVER said you do not exist, the genie in a bottle texted, the sad one! Or how do you insult the DAEMON of a message in a bottle?!

So, at the terminal, I know what to do, I call the operator and say: this and that doesn't work, do something, please!

It will probably be no different with the Internet; if my password has expired or something similar, then he should just give me a new one. Wait - who the hell is the Internet operator? And, just because I'm interested, where is he? All I know is that the Internet is a system of many, many thousands of computers connected together. But which is “the system”?

Now I have to go to the fridge (it's full again) and get some good advice. After the second or third piece of advice, I remember that there's a funny icon of a reception bell in the top left of the Internet dialer (you remember: Franco Nero rings at the counter in “For a Fistful of Dollars” before he starts shooting). By now I'm desperate enough to negotiate with any receptionist or operator, be it Django or

Quasimodo himself. I click on it (the bell should now ring) and a form appears. Open a new account, change an existing account.... no, that's probably not it. Yes, where is he?

Then I discover HELP at the bottom. Click, and a lot of text comes out. I work my way through it, find out a lot about the people at IBM who write these texts, they also prefer manuals, and after reading for a while (manuals are sometimes better than intuition) I find the U.S. telephone numbers where you can also call toll-free. Of course, this doesn't apply to me (I've already had this experience on satellite TV: you can't call the great girls toll-free from Austria, no matter how good it sounds). Oh, there's something else... "local support". Ha! After the inevitable click, a dropdown list appears (a list pops out in a small window) with the numbers of the worldwide country helpdesks. Yeah! Austria 0660 and something. Call: there's no one there except the Dүүtdүүt. Helpdesk light! Does anyone at IBM believe that these new help desks are worth a penny? Really "valuable"?

Now good advice is hard to come by, a commercial advisor, so to speak, is called for. The refrigerator reports a failure, Jennifer graciously lends me my key to the bar cabinet. Speaking of commercial advisors! The saving idea: I write to a well-known person at IBM. No sooner said than done. I know my guys, he'll get it tomorrow, then call, etc. And then no-one says that a visit to István's bar isn't worth it!

The next day everything clears up wonderfully (that will definitely be tomorrow, I assume, because I can't wait any longer to write the article until the help desk finally gets around to it), and my IBMer will definitely owe me a piece of good advice or two. Gladly! But what does someone who doesn't know anyone at IBM for a drink?

Oh, I see. My proofreader asks what the point of the Internet light is in the headline. Well, I've become very light on these time-consuming quarrels. It's a light experience until you have this email thing halfway under control. And I'm grateful to all those who still have it ahead of them.

Chief Tecumseh

Friedl and I meet on the Internet, “yes, hey, hello, howdy? Can you send me something for the newspaper again? — Yes, I’ll email it to you, I’m in Budapest right now. — Okay, see you later then!” - this e-business is actually simple, isn’t it?

The next day, during my holy morning hour, when the cigarette, coffee, shower, yogurt cereal and the sacred post collection ceremony (in which the word “ceremony” is only included by chance: but the automatic spell checker always suggests “Sere money” here...) are to be completed one after the other, I am taken aback, and so violently that the cigarette falls into my cereal, just past my coffee cup: mail from Hungary! Aha, Friedl is sending his tips and tricks for the newspaper!

A short but important architectural digression to illustrate my private sphere: my apartment is divided into two parts by a long, narrow corridor: the office/editing office and the machine room on one side, the private rooms (large audience hall, the princess’s bedroom, kitchen and pantry as well as the bathrooms) on the other.

So, I wander impatiently back and forth in my panties between the office and the Blue Salon (TV room) to hear the “Ping! You have new mail!” from the mail program, I glance back and forth between the Internet and Eurosport. The thing transmits and transmits and transmits and then finally pings! but only to tell me laconically: Error 10060 timed out by SMTP server.

Oh, I know that already. So, I quickly remixed the muesli in the kitchen, then went back to the PC and happily clicked on “Check Mail”. My mail program hooks itself into the IBM net, meanders past Paris and Ostend straight to Rosslare in Ireland and from there under the Atlantic to New York, to connect to the smtp-pop3 server of ca.us.ibmnet, the nimble devil!

I get up to get my yogurt, nut and nectarine muesli, but freeze in the middle of the movement, which turns into a still image pirouette: Ping! Error 10060 Timed Out by SMTP Server.

“Honey,” comes a voice from the chamber, “you can’t even fix the socket, the hairdryer doesn’t work anymore!” Caution is advised when a sentence contains the word “net”, so first of all gain some time (double click on Hang up, then Do you really want to hang up at this time, Yes + Click) and then off to bed. A light tap with the elbow on the socket, the ends of the plug of the hairdryer are bent apart briefly (why can’t the engineers at the manufacturer produce such bent plugs for defective sockets as standard!?), and then it buzzes again, my sweetheart, but I scurry back to the office.

Two time-outs with two cereals, I haven’t had so much bad luck in a long time! I dial into the global conflagration again (IGNIS, the abbreviation for IBM Global Network and Information Services, means in Latin: conflagration or world conflagration). Attempts two and three unexpectedly fail after 20 minutes each, and my best half says goodbye with “it’s not okay, honey?” Oh, don’t take too long, you have an appointment at 9 o’clock!”, then it disappears in a huge cloud of perfume. I tirelessly start attempts 4 and 5, then my patience and the next 45 minutes are over, and I curse the sender of such a time-out package. What the hell is he writing so powerfully that the server keeps pinging?

To give the whole thing a special touch: I have a huge customer problem to solve - now, and quickly, please! I seem to have exhausted the possibilities of the local IBM support staff and have been waiting for a helpful answer from the IBM laboratory overseas for days. And I stare at the screen with each attempt, where I can see that there are 5 more items of mail waiting to be picked up behind this big egg. I’m impatiently pawing the ground.

It’s already late in the afternoon when I leave the customer’s office, full of anxiety, and log back into the mail system. Ahh, now it’s working! I stare at the screen, spellbound, watching the blue bar slowly signal the passage of time. DECODING TIPSUND6.DOC, is now written there, because the first 5 attempts were a waste of time. When the time bar gets to around 75%, the screen flashes briefly and Error 10060 is back, damn it!

Hang up to optimize the phone costs and I walk up and down a few steps. A new form of reminder? No, I'm using a bank debit. Is my email software in...? Sorry. No, it's not even two years old and is only just entering puberty, right? What else could be disruptive? My eyes fall on the backup device (ZIP drive). On the joystick. The mouse. The microphone. The dual speakers. The color flatbed scanner, the laser printer. Of course, the poor PC has to monitor all of this while I'm emptying the mailbox! So I quickly fetch the tools from the machine room, do a few turns with the cordless screwdriver here, a few there, and the joystick, the scanner, the ZIP, the speakers, the microphone (yes, that too, I can type the DOS commands instead of barking them) etc. are disconnected until the device can finally breathe freely again. Sweaty, I take off my sweater etc., I want to breathe freely too. Then I switch the PC back on and let the mail program, now without reins and bridle, loose on the POP computer like a wild horse, only to get the 10060 with Ping! immediately (and that was no pun intended).

My scream must have been similar to the death scream of the Comanches, because the office door is violently thrown open: "Honey, what are you doing there, naked in front of the screen?!" I cover myself with an 8" floppy disk (a 3 1/2" floppy disk would have done just as well, editor's note) and reply: "The mail isn't working anymore!" She, now curious, sneaks closer with suspiciously shining eyes and asks: "Oh, and where are the colorful pictures, honey?". I'll just ignore the next hour.

(later:) I'm sitting in front of the unplugged PC, listening to Ravel's Bolero and pondering. Time Out Error - somewhere, someone is running out of time (what time?). I see the mailbox in front of me. The messages arrive at the server via SMTP (Simple Mail Transaction Protocol), are neatly arranged one after the other, and are then picked up later via POP3 (Post Office Protocol 3). And the first thing that appears is a big package. The POP3 comes along, takes his briefcase in one hand, his cell phone in his mouth and opens the mailbox with the key in his other hand, and then just can't get the big package through the door. Maybe a neighbor comes along (let's say old POP2, for example) and wants to go to his mailbox, but POP3 is standing with his legs apart in front of my mailbox and wants to pull

Friedl's big package out, but he can't go forward or backward - so old POP2 hits POP3 and yells: "I want that too! I want that too!" I want that too!" and kicks him out with an error 10060 Timed out.

Yes, that's how it has to be. Quickly pour another Jaki (Russian nickname for cognac), then stare at the screen, take a deep breath, and the next attempt ends again - as expected - with a ping! What would Mr. Spock advise me to do now?

"Captain, people tend to get drunk on jaki instead of solving problems. Very strange behavior, sir!"

Oh, shut up, I have to concentrate. "No, seriously, sir, your excessive concentration is transmitting the vibrations of your overloaded - and I must add, impaired by alcohol consumption - brain to the communicator, causing intermittent interference..." Shut up, pointy-ear! What about allolo...alloho...alkolo...

Very well. I sit down completely relaxed on the swivel chair, let my feet dangle coolly, tap the "communicator" very lightly with the mouse, refrain from any intermittent... intermittent... ähh and grin just as coolly in the direction of Mr. Spock, who is silently concentrating on his consoles. There!, after twenty minutes, again! 10060 — ping! Well, Master Spock? Any suggestions?

I won't say a word about the nightmares (nightmares, according to Duden possible) of this night, except that neither Friedl nor IBM nor the SMTP server got away unscathed, especially the nagging—pushy POP2 neighbor got a real beating... Why IBM, I don't know either, but if she's innocent this time, then it was for something else.

In the morning, I growl at my best friend when she brings me coffee to the PC that I've been tinkering with for an hour. She rushes off to work without making a sound, but not before hanging a garlic ring over the door. I hear her spit over her left shoulder three times as she crosses the threshold, and I know that she wants to scare away the evil spirits and the intermi... interfe... interthingy. True love.

Following a spontaneous idea, I email Friedl, tell him about my trouble and ask him to resend the email, perhaps in a smaller size or even in the right format for Word 6.0. The brevity of my message must have alarmed him, because shortly afterwards I see in my inbox that there are now 6 items of mail waiting to be picked up. I'm boiling inside and thinking that the mail programmers could have built in a button (F2 or click/there) so that you can "put a certain piece of mail at the back". But that would be asking too much. I think wistfully of the (far more convenient) web mail program that my son uses, which first shows the list of all pieces of mail in a list and where you can decide for yourself whether something should be transferred or not. That would save me the current worries...

The answer from the USA must have been there long ago. Maybe they are still waiting for additional answers from me, such communications are often real "talks". Damn, I have to keep trying! Attempts 10 and 11 are over so quickly that I hardly notice the simultaneous reporting on the life's work of Aldo Castignani, the creator of the Superleggera sports car. Yes, I even get the impression that the ping! comes at the exact moment when I am just sitting comfortably in the armchair watching TV. Who knows, maybe?

Attempt 12: cautiously and coolly start the communication, stroll out whistling indifferently, then stop next to the armchair watching TV in the Red Salon. It works! Just don't sit down! Hurrah! The blue bar gets longer and longer, Aldo is just handing over the Carozzeria of the Superleggera to his son Sergio, and ping!, it happened again. So the television has nothing to do with the email problem after all, thanks to Gates!

During attempt number 13, I stand patiently next to the PC, use the remote control to mute the interview with Sergio and don't make a sound. The bar gets longer and longer and I can't stand it any longer because I'm so hungry. I tiptoe into the hallway, turn right to the kitchen and ping! It's over. Tears of anger mix with the mustard spread, making the gherkin wet too. and I'm angry, damn angry, and I almost bite my own tongue out of sheer anger while I chew the jam, mustard and pickle sandwich.

What has always been the same? Let's be analytical. Timed out. What if the programmer has entered a carefully-detailed error number? 10060 - could just as well mean that he doesn't want to have an improperly dressed person sitting in front of the PC. I was mostly only sparsely dressed, and I don't know how the military reacts to that (even when only one uniform button is open). I know from my own experience: fall down on ten! (= ten push-ups, if you weren't in the army). I shower and comb myself and my beard thoroughly, get dressed and spray plenty of Eau des Marineurs Bleus Supérieur under my armpits.

Attempt 14, fragrant, perfectly dressed and well-dressed, is a total failure. I defiantly turn off the PC, get into my "Net-ganz-Superleggera" car and purr to the customer. A very reasonable person who doesn't make us unhappy with e-business.

In the evening I don't really feel like bothering with the postal matter any more. I listlessly start attempt 15, go to the laundry room (sorry, but that's the kitchen where there's a washing machine) and empty this oh-so-perfectly working machine (an intelligent product that doesn't yet have internet access) and wait and wait for the ping!, but it doesn't come! Yes, is there such a thing? Can I believe it? After I've finished my housewifely chores, I tiptoe down the hallway, around the corner and stare at the beam that slowly grows and grows. Like an Indian (let's say Winnetou, or better yet Tecumseh, not everyone knows him) I slowly sink down and creep on all fours across the office floor to the postal machine, slowly wind myself up on the swivel chair and

Ping! Well, I have to catch my breath first, a hundred kilos of Indian on all fours, that takes energy, doesn't it? As I close my eyes, I watch as a thousand small explosions behind my eyelids signal the racing pulse of the alarmed work of art "István". Retinal reflections of the fundus of the eye, yes, Professor. Reflections of the background? Wide awake, I open my eyes, shake my fist at the communicator, Mr. Spock and Chief Tecumseh and start the 16th attempt. I know it will be it. When I'm in the mail server, this window is there again: PROGRESS "Decoding Tipsun16.doc". If I now move the mouse (arrow) beyond PROGRESS (it flashes through my mind that

one of the parts of the defective Russian space station MIR is also called PROGRESS), this arrow turns into an hourglass (Bill must be called that, and have plenty of time!). Meanwhile, the blue bar that shows the progress of the process jerks imperceptibly by a tenth of a point to the right - that's it, reflections against the background.

I sit there, jerk the mouse up and down, the arrow becomes an hourglass, the hourglass becomes an arrow... the bar grows and grows. I slowly dress myself completely with my other hand, while the arrow and the hourglass alternate, I say quick prayers to Mr. Spock and kneel down next to the swivel chair in a Tecumseh-like manner and the beam slowly gets longer and longer and I don't care that my very, very best friend is now standing in the office door as if petrified and watching this unusual charade with her mouth open, the main thing is that the beam keeps growing and growing...

This ritual lasts 45 minutes and 23 seconds until the bar reaches the far right and the second and I can't believe it third and hurray! the fourth and fifth and last email are received in rapid succession and a new image appears: "You have new mail! Ping!"

96 percent of the members of our computer club were not at the annual congress in Dublin; if we were to ask them, they would probably say that fear of flying, the long distance or the lamentation of so much wasted kerosene were the main reasons for not going (but we don't, because we're not stupid and we know full well that it's down to completely different things). However, 4 percent - fearless pilots who couldn't care less about kerosene consumption - were there, so it would undoubtedly be disgraceful if I were to bore them again with my subjective impressions of the congress. Which, it should be mentioned, did not satisfy my sailing interests or my natural curiosity about the mating behavior of the Seven-spotted Cockchafer, but rather offered very little in the way of nautical or zoological information with dry topics such as Java, the Internet, SMTP servers and programming languages.

The fact that I undertook a week-long (wonderful) tour of Ireland immediately after the congress in Dublin had a deep impact on

this dilemma: I did not waste a single second of my valuable free time on AS/400, OS/400 and whatever/400. Instead, I devoted myself to the country and its people, opened myself (and my wallet) to the lovely Irish people and forgot about the world around me. I was completely surprised that a system change, the next newspaper and the unsolved problem of cubic, eight-dimensionally nested sales statistics awaited me in Vienna. So sit back and let's read together what my Thinkpad has to offer.

I have to explain two women's names in advance: Deirdre is the know-it-all, elderly secretary and eminence grise of our association, with whom I have had a bitter, public discussion since the congress in Jerusalem, because I did not understand why congresses were held in places where bombs were speaking. —; Fiona, on the other hand, is her friendly, capable (designated) successor, with whom I got on very well - even out of spite....

Irish Splinters

This title came about when I tried to translate one of the lovely Irish sayings I came across along the way: “If you slip down the Banisters of Life, may the Splinters not point the wrong way” or something similar.

The day before yesterday in Dublin I was unable to answer Deirdre’s astonishing question: “...and where are your bombs now, eh?!” However, today, on Sunday 21 June 1998, the radio (Belfast Channel, FM 100.6) was broadcasting every hour: “A bomb exploded last night in Belfast, hundreds of windows were broken. Thank God no one else was hurt, as the IRA had given a warning in time. - A man, 27 years old, was seriously injured with 4 shots in the back of the knee and ankles. These were probably traditional(!) punishment shots. - A car bomb in Armagh today, 25 June 98, ripped apart two people and injured a dozen others. The National Liberation Front (INLA) claims responsibility for this attack on the eve of the vote in Northern Ireland...” There they are, Deirdre, there they are, even if you don’t notice much of it on your golf course. I approach Ireland respectfully, but with a keen ear; not on the golf course, but in the pedestrian zone, among the drinkers, street singers and street whores: that’s where you’ll find me.

The stupid sheep

I want to start my report with Deirdre’s second astonishing question (and Deirdre, as you surely know, can really ask astonishing questions): “... well, and where are all your women that you always surround yourself with, eh?!” Arnold, Beatrix and Wolfgang look at me in silence, and I sit there with an embarrassed face. What a question! Firstly: they’re still coming! Secondly: my readers have long since realised that my women (doesn’t sound as shabby as women) are exactly here, in the newspaper: wonderful, exotic-erotic-banal creatures of my imagination, who I of course couldn’t take with me on such an arduous journey. So much, dear Deirdre, for your “above without” asked question. Well, to round off the transition to my fur-

ther report: when I trotted up to the car rental company to pick it up, I laughed so suddenly and brightly that the poor Irishman who served me looked at me slightly disturbed and worried: Deirdre, just imagine, I didn't make this trip with Michiko, the exotic Japanese model, but with a Japanese starlet, a real starlet (from Toyota)! Even though I immediately realized that I was risking an angry email from you, I laughed very, very heartily at your expense.

Admittedly, she was very narrow, my Starlet, thirty litres of excess weight had to be stowed behind the steering wheel. But I know that from the Prater: go-cart driving in Ireland! Second observation: it is much, much more affectionate than that. Happened in the parking lot of a road restaurant: I got out and started strolling, and the sheep just rolled after me! I was just able to pull off a skillful act as a Starlet catcher and push the stupid thing back into its place. From then on, the Starlet was called Dolly, the stupid sheep that always had to be carefully tied up in the parking lot, but from then on I also knew what this annoying lever between the front seats was actually good for: the only problem was that in some parking lots the tow rope turned out to be much too short when tying it up!

Merlin I

I'm sitting all alone on a tree trunk in the Irish steppe, wondering what to write on my Thinkpad, when I suddenly hear a discreet coughing next to me. Although there wasn't a soul there just a moment ago, there's now an old man dressed up like a carnival costume sitting next to me.

"I'm Muirlinnhe," he says, and I add on a whim: "Oh yes, you're Merlin, who stole those old stones in Ireland and brought them to Stonehenge! King Arthur and all..."

"Shh, not so loud!" growls Merlin, looking nervously in all directions, "it won't start until next week, and if the warlike Picts (for non-Latins: the ancient Irish) hear us, we'll lose the stones! Besides, Arthur is still called Saint Camber here, the Latins used to call him Rhiathamus, and it wasn't until the 11th century that the French started calling him King Arthur."

“Merlin, old house, you really know everything in advance! How are you, and how did you get here in the first place, when the evil Morgane La Fay locked you up in the magic forest near Douarnenez and...”

“Don’t remind me of that unfortunate story! Yes; I wandered blindly and aimlessly around the magic forest, but after a thousand years the spell suddenly broke as if by itself and...”

“Oh, I know that!” I interrupt Merlin, perhaps a little rudely, “the counter goes to 998, 999 and then comes 000! Then it’s: Bingo, play your game, rien ne va plus! We call it the Y2K paradox. Y2K stands for Year 2000, the Year 2000 problem,” I’m still being a smartass.

Then there was a “pop!” and Merlin was gone.

Port - Starboard

After at least an hour of zigzagging through Dublin’s busy streets (lots of wrong-way drivers, I tell you!), it occurred to me that the local president (Mrs Mary Robbins) wanted to do something for women in the “Year of the Woman”: so she ordered that from now on women could sit in the driver’s seat, and men were banished to the passenger seat (at about the same time). But since the car industry knew from statistics that in many families only the men have a driver’s license, they also discreetly placed the steering wheel towards the passenger seat. So overnight the left-hand driving rule was created here, which we also know from the English and seems rather strange to us, but on the other hand gives the otherwise heavily oppressed Irish mothers the feeling that they are sitting in the right place. No, the daddies sit on the right! Mums sit on the left, as does the ashtray. So, now the confusion is complete, but it’s not my fault. Just ask Mary Robbins.

Instead of traffic lights, there are roundabouts. Imagine, instead of driving around at every traffic light and looking for the right exit: so if you have to go from the South Station to Floridsdorfer Spitz, for example, then goodnight, you’ll arrive feeling really tired, I promise you! However, when I got back, my cook said that I didn’t have to

drive a whole circle every time, just the part up to my junction, but I ask you: why is it called a roundabout then? - Well, exactly! I'll tell you, dear readers, my recipe for driving on the left: I simply did everything wrong there, and now everything was totally right again. Capiesch?

On the expressway from Dublin to Galway, I slowly got used to this strange wrong-way driving regulation and settled in. For example, the middle of the road is not only marked with the central reservation that we have here, but also with small, round metal inserts that reflect at night and are called bumpers in English. The only problem is that when you change lanes, the tires bump every time they rumble over one of these metal things (that's why they're called bumpers), which made me a little nervous. My Starlet is still very new, not even 600 miles (or kilometers?) old. So I start to avoid this bumping with a fervent practice of skillful slalom driving, and even gain a certain mastery in changing lanes quickly without bumping. Until the Garda, the local police, let me drive on after two hours, a more stringent breathalyzer test and 50 Irish pounds lighter. Spoilsport!

The continental driver, the driver from the mainland, where the mothers sit on the right (etc., oh well, just read it above), can be recognized by the strained, bent-over posture, the pursed mouth and the oh-so-typical slow driving. Knowing these facts, I drove through the country as quickly as I could, mostly belting out Hamburg pub songs or shanties from Lake Neusiedl and pushing my shoulders back. Beaming, I waved jovially to every tractor driver and trekking biker before my wind blew them into the ditch. How I cheered when, sweeping down from the Twelve Pins Mountains, I saw the line of cars of touristy Continental drivers slowly creeping uphill! You should have seen me then, how I roared down the mountain like a thunderstorm in a cloud of dust, belting out the Andreas Hofer song at the top of my voice and sending the astonished continental crawlers into the ditch! Football World Cup, me? - No, I don't need it!

Dr. Rudas

The language is also difficult. No, it's not a problem at all, as the country is bilingual: Irish (that is, Celtic/Gaelic) and English; so you can choose. But what English! An Irishman doesn't like talking to English people, but once they understand that there are no kangaroos in Austria, they thaw out and talk. Fast, incorrectly and non-stop. That's what happened to me in the diving centre in Kilkee, about 30 km south of the Cliffs of Moher (note: mohair is the curly-haired sheep or rather their wool, the word itself is Persian and has nothing to do with the Cliffs of Moher, as I was surprised to learn).

So, there I am sitting on the pier in Kilkee, feeding the seagulls (you will find out their names later) and watching the divers going about their business. The people from the Marine Rescue Centre are excited, screeching with the seagulls and running back and forth. I mean, there has to be something wrong with that. But what happened? A rubber dinghy comes whizzing around the pier, the rubber dinghy drivers jump out, gesticulating wildly, a stretcher is brought, the neoprene-wrapped body of one of the victims is hoisted onto it! A rescuer runs wildly to the rescue centre, talking on the walkie-talkie, others carry the stretcher, and a young rescuer pumps the victim's heart while counting loudly 1, 2, 3, go!

I jump out of my deck chair (you know your István, he must be right up there!) and run the few steps up to the rescue hut, flicking my cell phone, and ask one of the important-looking people: Do you need a doctor? and think, now I can finally try the 112 number and find out whether it's an Irishman or an Austrian. The important man looks at me, then says: Come on, doctor and leads me into the hut. Are you a doctor, the big shot asks me again, and I tell the truth that I'm just an amateur gynecologist. The "dead woman" (because it was clear that it was a she) jumps out of her shell and yells, laughing and snorting, to the group: hey, he is a spare time gynecologist! As it turns out, she, Jutta, is from Germany and is very much alive. The whole thing is just an exercise, and I, the idiot, am standing there with my cell phone and staring. Jutta hooks her arm under me, squeezes me in a matter of minutes, where I come from and why, what I do, etc., then I can buy the still crookedly grinning team a mug and leave sheepishly.

Jutta catches up with me again at the parking lot, reassures me that it is good when outsiders are also spontaneously helpful and shows me around the rescue centre; she seems to be happy to meet someone who speaks the same language as me. At dinner she shows me how to open Cornish crab crawls with a nutcracker and how to remove the crab meat from the claws with a flattened knitting needle. Afterwards I had to go to McDonalds because the crabs are a lot of work but don't fill you up.

Bed and breakfast is the right way to get to know Ireland, although I would have preferred not to have had to share breakfast with Jutta. (Deirdre, please: it's not true, just a story! Made up! Nothing Jutta! Just breakfast!).

The Irish breakfast is worth describing. First, coffee with milk and sugar, but without the harmful coffee beans. Milk soup with kernels or cornflakes with orange juice. A few slices of bread and toast and lightly salted butter; with the salted butter, honey and jam for the really stupid. Then fresh and hot: a fried egg (for me), a slice of black pudding (ew, that's for Jutta), two sausages (one for me) and two slices of bacon (both for me). To finish, a deep and enjoyable Marlboro (Jutta rolls a joint, but only to annoy Deirdre).

An Irish couple in love

"My name is Henry," says the big-eyed sheep to the starlet who is braking with a squeak, "and over there sits Thusnelda."

"Beat," says the starlet, "beat, beat!" The human presses the airbag again vigorously. "Beat!"

"Yes, cousin Angus had that too, you should perhaps try three drops of honey in your tea!" says Henry, and Thusnelda turns her head to the starlet and says: "That affected city girl! Pahh! She has a red-lacquered, smooth coat, probably belongs to old O'Brien. Phew, and what big TVs she has!"

Henry trots slowly to Thusnelda and whispers to her: "A little more composure in front of strangers, my dear, if you please, and

don't bleat like a goat!", and turning to the starlet he says: "Oh, you know, she's having trouble digesting, so she's lying on the warm road now, that will make it easier for her to expel the exhaust fumes."

"Beep," says the starlet impatiently, "beep, beep!" In the Toyota, you honk with the airbag, funny, isn't it?

Henry shakes his shaggy, yellow-white fur, which is marked with a blue spray spot, and slowly retreats to Thusnelda. "You're not very talkative today, ma'm'selle," he says to the starlet before slowly sitting down on the road next to Thusnelda. The starlet hums once again briefly before falling silent, and inside you can see someone desperately hitting the airbag.

"The lady looks good," Henry says to Thusnelda with a knowing look, "her smooth, red fur seems to be the urban fashion now, isn't it?" "Oh, you men! You only look at her tires anyway, you horny old goat!" Thusnelda sighs sadly, tears well up in her eyes in a sudden wave of self-pity, so she turns away and stares up at the mountains so that Henry, that dear old monster, doesn't see.

Meanwhile the human has carefully heaved himself out of the Starlet, and Henry says somewhat contemptuously: "Just look at him, my dear, he's not in a good mood! Just look at his bald head...", but he doesn't get any further, because I'd had enough of it, and I pushed and shoved the two stupid creatures off the road to continue on my way.

Map reading I

It is not difficult at all to find your way through Ireland. You just need to follow the signs, the signposts are in English, Celtic or both languages, but sometimes also in Italian (example: Pizzeria Da Giovanni, 2km; pronounced: due chilometri). So polyglot people have a certain advantage here, even though languages are not everything: distances in kilometers and/or miles should not be difficult in themselves. They wouldn't be, if the remaining realist in the vacationer's brain didn't want to constantly convert, because a mile is known to be around 1,600 meters and a few squashed ones. Or is it?! Today I

came across a sign: an Ceirinn 7½, below: 21km. I'm going crazy, those aren't nautical miles or statute miles, so where the heck do the 21km come from? I then picked up a hitchhiker, he laughed briefly when I asked him about it, then he said (if I understood correctly): Don't look at the signs, just drive along the road and you'll get somewhere! So I did.

He was an excavator driver from Dingle, already smelled strongly of Guinness and initially crossed himself at every little church we passed. As our journey continued, he also crossed himself before and later after every bend and when drifting through the peat fields and seemed to be prone to seasickness in general, this pale child of the Emerald Isle.

I was able to rely even better on the map (kindly provided by Fiona). I had to spread it out on the back seat to get the right reading distance, though. Glasses? Oh yes, where were they again - just a minute, I'm rummaging around in my tourist fanny pack - oh, my goodness, the glasses are in the suitcase in the luggage storage in Dublin, along with the suit, tie and conference documents. Bravo, master! But the spare glasses are at least in the glove compartment (unfortunately my car with the glove compartment is in Vienna...).

It doesn't matter, I'm farsighted (sometimes even long-sighted), so I first look ahead, read the sign, then look behind to find the place on the map, then engage the clutch and ratchet into the next gear, turn left and turn right! You make an even better impression if you press your cell phone to your ear (but it doesn't necessarily have to be switched on). You can really see the whites of the oncoming driver's eyes, honestly!

It's amazing what kind of automatisms people can build up over the course of a lifetime. At first I thought that driving on the left (i.e. when the moms are in the driver's seat, you know) would be the biggest problem: far from it! As a pedestrian in Ireland, I must have looked in the wrong direction twice as often. The hardest part was getting used to the ashtray on the left. No, don't laugh, I'm serious! Driving and smoking are obviously two different pairs of boots in my head, not to mention felt slippers (left) and diving fins (right). Turn-

ing the steering wheel with the right instead of the left hand: works. Changing gears with the left hand or using the handbrake when skidding in a peat field also works (the downhill zone after tight bends, which is so important for us holiday racing drivers, is usually laid out as a peat field in Ireland, although the catch fences are made of barbed wire!). But when I then press the cigarette into the right door panel with my left hand over the steering wheel and the plastic hisses with a nasty sound, then I know: oops, that wasn't the ashtray! This ashtray (the one to my right) is in Vienna! - You see: nobody is perfect.

Map reading II

Back to glasses. No, not back to Dublin to the luggage storage, but back to the topic of glasses and map reading. Late in the evening, I was joking with friends in a Dublin pub about the fact that the French wine cooperative Le Ventoux has recently started adding Braille to its wine bottle labels: you could also add Braille to road maps and traffic signs... But you should think about the wine bottle labels and Braille again, and this time very carefully. After all, you could also look at it that way, this could be understood as a warning: whoever drinks this broth could then...

So now I was without my glasses and had to rely on my ability to confabulate (no, you don't even need to look it up in the dictionary: to confabulate means to make something up; for us club officials, this is indispensable).

So, what do we have here? A big blue one, aha, the Atlantic. Then a small yellow-green sausage that juts out into the sea: the Connemara Peninsula. A dark brown one in it - those are probably the Twelve Pins mountains. Hey, look, a little line! That's definitely the road through the mountains! Where is the sun? On the left. So (I turn the map upside down) the sea must be to my left now (yes, that's right, there's an oil tanker over there), the mountains to my right, and now there must be a road somewhere?! That's how the memorable encounter with Henry and Thusnelda came about.

It was nice up there that I was the only road user for miles around, the others were all jostling and winding their way through the valley below, while up here I found green pastures and sometimes a peat field (after tight bends).

The only annoying thing was that this road somehow ended, yes, you read that correctly, the road ended miserably in the high moor. The black and blue storm clouds that were gathering that night (it doesn't get pitch black here until around midnight) couldn't scare me, as I had full comprehensive insurance. It was a shame about the bed, but I would definitely be there in time for breakfast.

The Starlet struggled through the hilly landscape with glowing eyes, digging its tires deep into the soft green grass; at least those who followed later could find a properly groomed trail (to put it in ski terms). Long story short, I did manage to get to bed, but I missed breakfast (I only went to bed then, right?).

So I decided to buy a map despite feeling guilty towards Fiona. The woman in the shop was friendly, yes, exactly, he wanted it in a larger scale, the gentleman from Austria. She rummaged and rummaged and then brought the one with the smallest scale (= the largest resolution, as we screen-damaged people would say). The sea was huge, and instead of a sausage there was a real headland. Extremely satisfied, I paid for the map and went to the cafe to take a closer look at it.

Please, every village is on it, every street, no matter how small, runs through the tree bark like a fat bark beetle channel. Every little stream is a thick blue line, every little hut is at least a small black dot. The mountains are brown-red areas, interspersed with green forest and light green moor areas. The map is so great, I can't get enough of it! But the place names are in such a tiny, inconspicuous font that I'm now remorsefully using Fiona's high-flyer again...

Map Reading III

Fiona and her map, that was quite a thing! Almost reluctantly, she gave me her road map in Dublin with the apologetic comment that

she had eaten a grilled chicken once and there had been a few spots on the map. I assured her solemnly that it didn't matter to me, I would carefully drive around the spots.

Perhaps that was a bit too hasty, because when I returned to my room on the first evening after a long walk through Galway, determined to tackle my overweight problem seriously and not eat anything today, really nothing, at most a few Snickers, the odd bar of chocolate and a can of Coke, the whole room smelled like grilled chicken. I almost went mad with passion, in my mind's eye I could see tender, crispy legs, rusty wings and hormone-swollen breasts! Fiona! Not two seconds later I was on the road again, leaving Snickers and all my good intentions behind me.

Fulfilled, I sat down in front of my beer and lit a Thank you for not smoking. I took a deep breath of smoke, closed my eyes and imagined Fiona, holding a tenderly roasted leg between her pointed fingers and biting into the crust of skin with a crunch... no, there was something wrong with this picture! I looked at the map again, the stains, the dozens of fingerprints next to the crossing from Galway to Dublin: yes, that must have been how it was! Now I saw Fiona turning and twisting the sacrificial animal on the map, muttering magical spells and counting out whether she should turn left or right. That, and only that, is what I want to believe: like the augurs in ancient Rome, she asked the gods for the right path by reading the entrails of the barbecue victim! Map reading in Ireland.

Birds in Ireland

I finally had all the sights behind me, the weather had become Irish accordingly; rain, fog and strong gusts of wind didn't make it any easier for me. But I finally reached my destination. I tied up the Starlet in the parking lot, took my umbrella, old bread, phone and laptop and walked through the dunes.

Well, some of you know that I have a thing for birds. This was probably the most remarkable spot in Ireland, a true bird paradise. I climbed along a stream bed out onto the sandbank, then over some stones to the small bird islands offshore and was then right in the

middle of them, my birds. I pulled out the laptop, put the screen between my teeth and put in the CD “The Birds of Ireland”. And there they all were.

On the left a Shag (Latin: *phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Celtic: Seaga) fighting with a Cormorant (Latin: *phalacrocorax carbo*, Celtic: Broigheall) over a piece of seaweed, on the right a Snipe (*gallinago gallinago*, Naoscach) that seemed to be waiting for food from me with its head tilted. The Lapwing pair (*vanellus vanellus*, Pilibin) were cooing vigorously despite the biting wind and apparently didn’t mind that an Oystercatcher (*heamatopus astralegus*, Roilleach) was watching them unashamedly. The Arctic Tern (*sterna paradisaea*, Geabhrog artach) tried to scare the horny voyeur away with wild twittering, but his cousin, the Sandwich Tern (*sterna sandvicensis*, Geabhrog dhuscotlach), just said: “Leave them alone, young people today want to try everything, you uptight bastard!” The Common Gull (*larus larus*, Faoilean ban) circled majestically above the colony of Blackheaded Gulls (*larus ridibundus*, Faoilean ceannndhubh), while the Great Black-Backed Gulls (*larus marinus*, Droimneach mor) loudly and wildly insulted the Herring Gulls (*larus argentatus*, Faoilean scadan), whose last raid had badly damaged the breeding colonies.

So I stood among my feathered friends for almost an hour, typing away on the laptop and occasionally sprinkling old toast (left over by Jutta, dear Deirdre) so that they wouldn’t fly away. Then I suddenly had the feeling of being pushed from behind. Well, I know just as well as you, bird-loving reader, and also such loving reader, that I was all alone with them on the bird islands, so no one could push me from behind. But still, the feeling remained. Stubborn. You know how it is: no error in the program code, and yet the result is wrong.

I looked around. The stiff breeze blew strongly in my face, the waves raged as they always do, and the birds screeched as usual, they hadn’t learned anything else. And the stream, over there, by the dunes, flowed peacefully upstream in the streambed.

Stop! Excuse me? The stream is flowing upstream?! I turned pale and looked down my trouser legs, and sure enough, I was almost up

to my ankles in water. The tide was rising rapidly, and I, the top specialist, wasn't paying attention. The ford towards home was now at least knee-deep or even deeper, so I had no choice but to climb higher up the bird island. The shag and the cormorant took off screeching indignantly (please read the other birds above for yourself; they also took off when I gasped), and I ended up standing on the top granite block, roughly 20 minutes before I went under.

Good bikes are expensive, as my friend Miro once said. I looked at my now completely soaked Bally treads and was amazed that they had survived all of this so well. Further up, in the dunes, there was a parking lot with a bus from Peter's Reisen from Kassel (what do they think they're doing here), but of course no one was looking.

Perhaps they are just taking a photo of me (title: Irishman on off-shore island). Further down, in the dunes, there are a few colorful anoraks, indefatigable Ireland travelers who are not deterred by wind and weather from their evening stroll along the sandy beach and who at most shake their heads in amazement at the living advertisement for IBM Thinkpads on the bird island.

In between, in the middle, the tide, and in the middle of it I and my little island, which was rapidly losing square meters. In the bay, a fishing boat was slowly swinging (turning) and a man waved to me in a friendly manner, of course I waved back. Vigorously.

I couldn't understand a word he was shouting to me. I simply called back in German: Yes, you too! and thought about how often I have let down rubber mattress drivers who drifted away in Lake Neusiedl (actually never).

Mike - of course I didn't know at the time that his name was Mike - so Mike swung himself into his dinghy and rowed slowly towards my bird island. About half a cable's length from the island - or was it only 20 metres? - he slowed down and started to chat. All I could hear was that he was speaking Celtic, not English. I knew immediately that this was a language test, because if I answered in English (British), it would be a long and wet night. I gathered all my strength and shouted: "I am from Austria!" - Mike thought for a moment,

then shouted: “Rainhard Fendrich!” And I called out, completely stunned: “Yea, that’s correct!” So Mike rowed over, let me get in and brought me safely to shore. With a broad grin, he told me that he saved at least 5 or 10 tourists per season. He was also a fan of a certain Wulfgeng Embrous, and to the astonishment of the Kassel pensioners’ group, the “two Irishmen in the rubber dinghy” roared loudly and so-so “forever young, forever yay!” On the bank, I asked how I could return the favor: at “half past nine” in the “Wagoneer” in Kilmare, said Mike (a Brit would have said half past eight) and un-rowed. (Curtain).

It was my most expensive evening in Ireland, folks: when Mike appeared, washed, combed and obviously very thirsty, the bartender turned pale and asked for a replacement. Mike, who knew all the waitresses in the bar and introduced me to everyone properly (that bloody guy from Austria got wet at Kings Head, you see). Mike, who could drink four pints without a pee break. Mike, who pitied me because I didn’t drink more than two small beers. Mike, whose 150 litres of body weight had to be dragged home around midnight by his blasphemously cursing maid Mary and me. Mike, who assured me at least a dozen times on the way that our Federal President, a certain Mr Hölmüt Cole, was a wonderful Mr President. And that he loves him very much, Cole, the Hölmüt.

Two bad fouls

I was relieved when I was able to wash the socks and jeans in my quarters and hang them up to dry. The widow Plunkett, with whom I stayed, offered me a video of Scotland vs Morocco in her living room, as well as a plaid (Scottish patterned wool blanket) for my loins, “otherwise you’ll catch a cold, my dear!”. It really only happened by accident, to be honest, that I jumped up reflexively when a Moroccan player committed a nasty foul, but then I let it go, even though she rewound the scene three times. Everyone has their principles.

I’m watching the fishermen in the harbor getting their boats ready, cleaning their nets or just standing around and taking a smoke break. I’m just about to walk on when a guy speaks to me: “Hello, how are you?” and chatters away happily about where I come from,

how I like Ireland, etc. etc. In the course of the conversation I politely ask him what his profession is (sensing that I would not get an honest answer, as I had already noticed his erratic, blurred eyes and I suspected that the whole thing would end in the obligatory bak-sheesh for the next pint), when he takes my hand pathetically and says: "I am a visionary." Then, after another dramatic pause: "The visionary of Clifden." I have trouble suppressing a grin and say: "My children are visionaries too - they are Televisionaries." He smiles wryly, assures me that I will have a nice trip and discreetly guides our steps towards the pub. When I let him in first, his clairvoyant abilities seem to have suddenly deserted him, because far too late he notices that I had turned around behind him and was looking to see if I could move on.

Merlin II

Up on the pass, the heavy rain, the cornering in the thick fog and the sheep wandering aimlessly on the road were too much for me, so I looked for a spot in the meadow and dozed a little on the reclining seat. But I had barely closed my eyes when an old man knocked on my window with his knotted stick.

"Failte, welcome!" he said, "I am Muirlinnhe, the king's advisor."

"Failte you too, Merlin, old friend," I said, tired but still surprised, "You again? What brings you here at this time of night, you should actually be languishing in the magic forest near Douarnenez in Brittany?!"

"The evil Morgane La Fay locked me up there for a thousand years," said the wise old Merlin, "but I don't know how that happened, suddenly the spell was broken..."

Laughing, I interrupted him: "Hey, we've already had that, after 998 comes 999 and then 000, bingo! Year2000! Don't you remember?" Ploff, it went again, and Merlin disappeared.

I dozed a little longer and thought about Morgane and the obvious programming bungle in the Dark Ages when there was another

knock on my window. “Okay, Merlin, what’s going on now?” I asked, waking up. But the old man outside in the rain didn’t look like Merlin at all, more like an old shepherd with the inevitable Irish paddy cap on his head.

“The name’s O’Brien,” he said somewhat disapprovingly and asked if I could take him down to Molly’s pub in this (beep!) weather, his (beep!) old legs weren’t so good anymore and it would be a good three miles, (beep!) and (beep!) again! When we arrived there after a wordless drive, he got out, thanked me and asked: “Why did you call me Merlin earlier?” I couldn’t answer him and, shaking his head, he disappeared into Molly’s den of vice, muttering “(beep!) foreigner!”

The biggest steak in Ireland

In Wexford I was quite surprised when I returned to the car from a lunchtime stroll in the harbor and found a voucher from the local police (worth 50 pounds) behind the windshield wiper. For 50 pounds (equivalent to a measly thousand), I walk miles, or more precisely around two kilometers, uphill to the police station. When I got there, I quickly turned into a mentally handicapped, anxious Alpine countryman, nospiek English. I can’t read any traffic signs. I can’t understand anything, Mr. Inspector, what kind of voucher is that?

Excited buzzing in the beehive. Phone calls, a radio conversation: “Jamie, you’ve caught a stupid tourist! What can we do?” I cross my fingers and pray quietly to St. Brendan, the patron saint of Irish sailors.

The constable behind the glass looks at me two or three times, nods vigorously, describes me in detail (I can’t repeat it here, but I might buy the guy...). Barking on the other end, then the man nods and hangs up. Turning to me, he says: “Okay, you don’t pay anything, nothing fifty pounds, we’ll do blablabla with the car rental company.” Well, he’ll thank me, I think, but why do I have fully comprehensive insurance?!

Then he says: “You go to the car, Jamie is waiting there.”

I am irritated by the slightly amused gleam in his eyes (there's something there, right, but what?!), I summon all my language skills and say goodbye "humbly". And out of the temple, trudge to the car, which is now almost three kilometers away because I'm taking a shortcut.

On the way I imagine that Jamie, the little guy, will probably want a drink or something. That's fine, the two or three pounds is still worth it to me. But I shouldn't count my chickens before they hatch.

Jamie was standing by the car, that was visible from a distance.

To be more precise, Jamie was standing there, and right next to him, my little red starlet from Japan was crouching in a no-parking zone. My feet initially stopped when I saw Jamie, but then I kept walking, whether I liked it or not.

When I arrived, my eyes about level with Jamie's belt buckle, I couldn't say much more than "Hi, ma'am!"

Jamie stretched her shoulders back so that the two enormous domes of the Duomo di Milano loomed over me and boomed down: "So, you're the one who says he can't read the Irish tablets! Hey, guys, look, that's the dromedary from far away Austria that can't read this tablet, please, this tablet here!" and pointed accusingly at the round blue sign with a red border and a red X on it (you can look at any no-parking sign on Mariahilferstrasse if you don't know what a complete no-parking zone looks like, you dromedary...).

There then followed a ten-minute lecture on traffic signs and ground signals. How to walk, how to stand. Where to look left and where to look right. When to signal and when not to - unless you're from the continent, as Jamie sneered. On which Sundays, public holidays and banking days you are no longer allowed to stop where and why, unless it's a Tuesday. Double yellow line: "Even people from Austria are not allowed to stop here!" Single yellow line: "You are allowed to stop here briefly to load or unload!" - "Ma'am," I say, "Ma'am, there is only one yellow line!" Jamie pauses, looks down unkindly at me, a little earthworm who dares to interrupt her: "Now

don't chatter, there are two yellow lines!" I don't give up. "Ma'am," I say, "there are two yellow lines up ahead and there too, but here, where I and at least ten other cars are standing, there is only one yellow line!" Jamie growls something non-English (probably (beep!)), walks briefly up and down the street, bends down next to the cars and finally states: "That must have happened when the new surface was being asphalted, there, you see, it was supposed to continue with two lines, but they just slapped the surface over it (spoiled over if you don't think I know what (in English it's called gossipy)!"

Jamie shrinks a little, I grow a little, now I can already see the sweaty marks of her Wonderbra under her uniform shirt. If she wasn't so anxious to appear official, she would be a very nice lady. A little strict and a little edgy, but when I imagine her in leather, with a mask and a whip... "They're having fun," Jamie says sternly, but at the same time unsure how to interpret my cheeky grin. I say: "You know, ma'am, I've been in Ireland for a few days now: a wonderful country! But I've become an even bigger admirer of Irish women, they have their hearts in the right place, they bravely grit their teeth on a problem and stick to it like bull terriers. That's something I really like!"

Bingo, she runs her hand through her hair to tidy things up: "No Irishman sees a woman when you're wearing a uniform, and they shouldn't see me as a woman on duty either. And as for the bull terriers," my cheeky heart stops for a second, "you're exaggerating. I don't insist on a double line if it's not clearly visible, but that would still be twenty pounds!" Half of fifty pounds is twenty pounds, of course.

Before I go down another wrong path about uniforms and "my God, you look good in them", I'll add a little sweet talk: "Of course you're a police officer first and foremost and that's how you should be seen when you're on duty (sorry, I got the text from one of those incredibly boring Saturday afternoon soaps, Cagney and Lacey or something. But now comes the original István transition, which you, dear readers, already know very well:). But when I imagine you without the uniform (oops, too early), in civilian clothes or casual dress

(correction successful), then I see a smart Irish woman with heart and character.”

Jamie now moves a good step away from me, a few people are standing around us and gawking. “Don’t imagine me without the uniform!”, but threatens me with a smile and points his index finger and turns away with a flirtatious, jagged turn, strolls towards the harbor and looks back twice inconspicuously to see if this sleazy guy from Austria will finally disappear. Which he does without a second thought.

That evening, dear Arnold, I rewarded myself with a steak three times as big as the one you had at Planet Hollywood and only managed the last quarter after a long smoke break (The Coach House, Roundwood near Newtown Kennedy, £9.95 including vegetables, salad, young potatoes AND chips), and for the rest I raised a beer or two to Jamie’s health (that horrible non-alcoholic one from Schmeck’s, because of the starlet, you know?).

Irish humor

Later I tell Mike how I avoided a peacefully grazing billy goat in the raised moor near the Neolithic stone ring, which, startled by the flash of my camera, pretended to blast its horn harmlessly in my direction, so that I, now frightened in turn, jumped violently to the side, not considering that I was standing on stones placed in the moor: in doing so, my mobile phone fell into the moor water (dear Fiona, that’s 9 (nine) commas, and please keep them!). Reflexively, I grabbed this gem of Swedish craftsmanship and saved it from destruction. After a moment of shock, I knew what to do: sit down, call Vienna immediately, to say that the mobile phone was probably lost. or drowned, so that they don’t think I’m missing. — However, if someone from Ireland called me to say that their mobile phone had just “drowned”, well, ...

Mike slaps his thighs and almost chokes with laughter when I describe to him what this picture must have looked like: a madman sits in the middle of the old pagan Druid monument, talking on his cell phone in German and moor water drips from his cell phone. The 4 or

5 Italians who are just turning the corner stare in amazement when, to top it all off, the guy on the phone says: “Questo qui è un Druido-fono — funziona solo con acqua, veramente!” and lets the water drip out of the device. I translate for Mike: “That’s a Druido-phone, it only works with water, really!”

That evening, Mike makes me tell the story ten times, each time new friends turn up in the roaring pub. He drinks beer in quantities and I shout into the ear of his maid Mary, who is sitting between Mike’s and my bar stools, wedged on our thighs: “Mike must have a damn big bladder!” and of course I mean that he hasn’t gone to the toilet (Pipi) once so far.

Mary, again, turns red from her hair to her chest, and looks at the stuffed capercaillie above the bar; I’ve obviously said something very wrong. Mike asks, so I explain that I’m surprised he doesn’t go pi after 4 or whatever litres of black Guinness. He grins, digs a one-penny coin out of his pocket and says: that’s a pi. I smell a joke and dig out a two-penny coin: that’s a pi-pi. Mike now digs out a five-penny piece and holds it under Mary’s nose: well? But Mary just gives us two venomous looks and sits away. Irish humor that I didn’t quite understand, but Mike laughed loudly and for a long time.

Mike has to sing songs by W. Ambros, Franz A. Heller or R. Fendrich again and again, and I shout along more out of tune and loudly than beautifully: niente sandale, lauter Skandale, and so on, you probably know the lyrics (I don’t, of course). Then Mike tells us about his trip to Austria: he was in Wiesen, at a jazz festival. And he also had a great meal with his friends in Lower Austria: he liked the “Saumösen” best. I almost get a bad taste in my thin beer and look at him, taking a deep breath: say it again, please! Then ask him to remember “Saumaise, Maise Maise Maise” and not to use the other no-no word anymore. When I say no-no-word, Mary’s interest is aroused and she really wants to know what it means. Jon Bon Jovi’s portrait is emblazoned on her T-shirt, so I reach out to where - in my mind’s eye - Bon Jovi’s belly button should be and say: that’s it! I’m a bit taken aback myself, though, because she looks at me calmly without batting an eyelid and doesn’t seem the least bit embarrassed.

Irish girls, which I didn't quite understand, but we both laughed loudly and for a long time.

Intermezzo (dedicated to all those who think they know me): well, I don't know how you feel about it, but every time I fall in love, it's really sad! That's the reason why I'm racing through the rain-soaked landscape and hugging trees: either an unhappy love affair that is particularly painful for me. Or an unhappy pain that I particularly love. Or a particularly unhappy person that I love painfully. I hug another mossy tree (according to tradition, this is supposed to increase fertility) and speed on through southern Ireland. Of course, one or two of the drivers following behind will have had a thought for it, but it's all the same to me: if I see a mossy tree, I brake hard, leave the engine running and jump out into the rain, hug and kiss the tree and then carry on again. There has to be enough time for fertility, don't you think? What an effort, I think as I reach the last tree before the pass, my God, if only it hadn't rained so much! What the heck, I have to go through it, have to suffer and cry and keep hugging trees. The bitter pain of being in love diminishes in proportion to the moss-green discoloration of my light sweater - oh, it's all so complicated! István's private life, which probably no one understands, but please laugh loudly and for a long time anyway.

Bonnie and Clyde

This morning I am attacked for the third time. Clyde holds his gun to my head, Bonnie holds her orange laser rifle to my chest, somewhat uncertainly, and a little water drips from the barrel onto my pants. Clyde squeezes out in an Eastwood-like manner between his pursed lips: "Stranger, 20 Pi for Snoopies (sweets), otherwise your last hour has come!" I rummage in my pocket and put the coin in his small, cheeky, demanding hand. "And another 20 Pi for Eli... oh, Bonnie, she'll get something sweet too!" and I dig out another coin. Bonnie bites her lip a little uncertainly, then looks up at her big brother, and when he nods, she pockets the loot as nimbly as a seagull (*Larus larus*, oh well, just look for yourself!). The bandit looks at me with a merciless look and says: "It's over anyway, Stranger, pray your last Hail Mary." and "bang bang bang!" he sprays the full load from his water pistol into my face.

Bonnie desperately presses her laser gun, but it doesn't work properly. I help the seven-year-old and press the pump mechanism a few times, which is really a bit stuck, and then I get my full salvo. Aaargh! Like a hit Godzilla, I choke on the air with my flailing arms, sink to my knees and croak miserably in the soft grass. Bonnie and Clyde run around me screaming wildly with dripping Colts (smoking would probably not be appropriate) and hoot.

“Kevin, Eliza, come in the house, leave the gentleman from Austria satisfied!” cries widow Plunkett and rushes worriedly towards the fatally wounded Alpine native. “Wait, I'll bring you a plaid (wool blanket, see above), give me the wet clothes to hang up!” I appease the widow Plunkett, and for certain reasons (see above) I categorically refuse the plaid and the trouser dryer. The widow Plunkett is, as you will surely know, a direct descendant of William Robert (real name Joseph) Plunkett, one of the ringleaders of the Sinn Fein uprising of 1916, where he and many others fought for their (which? whose?) freedom under the leadership of the Polish Countess Mankiewicz (!) in the St. Stephens Green park in Dublin. W. R. Plunkett (here the widow was crying and sniffing pitifully, so that I put a reassuring hand around her) her trembling shoulders), so W. R. Plunkett was subsequently shot by the English, but the death sentence of the noblewoman Mankiewicz was commuted to 6 years imprisonment (released early after two years) (here the widow Plunkett trembled with anger at the social injustice and energetically shook off my therapeutically placed hand, sat me down sniffing and blowing my nose in front of the video recording of England against Morocco, carefully laid the plaid on my knees and disappeared into her kingdom with my wet trousers).

No, Deirdre, no! For your peace of mind, I will not soften it, such as: “The Widow Plunkett, with whom I stayed, was very amiable, garrulous (see William Robert, etc.) and busy; her children were at least my age, red-faced, unemployed drunks with moderate IQs, who lived on their mother's bed and breakfast and slyly watched me at breakfast as if I were stealing something from them.” Furthermore, dear Deirdre, my stories would be absurd if I were playing Wild West with water pistols with two fifty-year-olds (I can already hear Mrs. Plunkett's comment: “Now they're acting totally stupid! Bonnie and

Clyde are playing in the garden! - I'd rather have Alzheimer's!"). So, and now I'm driving on (now the tree-kissing can come back).

Master of savings

A few Irish people also love to pluck us tourists like we're stupid birds. 25 pounds (approx. 450 öS) for a smelly, moderately clean bed, a non-functioning shower and a poor copy of the Irish breakfast described above give rise to a desire for revenge. So one morning I passed the bread basket around the breakfast room, demanding applause, saying that the bread was already green and moldy. The lady of the house hastily exchanged it for freshly toasted bread. When I paid, I left the bread basket open. she gave me 5 of the 25 pounds and apologized a thousand times, shaking her head, saying that she really didn't know how the bread could have gone moldy... I left her high-priced establishment and thought to myself that I had done quite well not to have fed everything to the birds back then....

Merlin III

In retrospect, I must offer silent apologies to that poor Irishman who spoke to me very kindly and politely in the coffee shop opposite Richard II's palace in Waterford, built in 1741 (now the bishop's residence): "So, how is the Pope in Vienna?"

I am experienced and confident in such situations and explained patiently that the Pope was in Rome.

"No, in Vienna," he said stubbornly, so I ordered him a somewhat more detailed treatise on the Habsburgs, the Hofburg, the Spanish Riding School and the Lipizzaners, culminating in the - not in itself incorrect - instruction that the Pope lives in Rome, or more precisely in the Vatican City, and has done so since the treaty concluded with Italy's King Emanuele in the year ...

No, the Pope is in Vienna, not in Rome, the kid insisted(!), interrupting(!) me, and Emmanuelle is banned in Ireland, it is sexist trash, yes, he only saw the video once and only reluctantly with his nephew Brian....

My hackles rose and I hissed at him quite venomously, Emmanuelle could only be described as trash from the episodes with Laura Gemser at the earliest, and the Pope certainly lives in Rome, I had seen him there myself around 1967, and he should please not tell me who was in Vienna and who not....

The know-it-all said about my Lipizzaners, which come from Yugoslavia and not from Italy, that they were known to have come from Spain and came there with the Moors from northern Africa, and that the Habsburgs were Swiss from Aargau; he graciously left the Hofburg to me. When he then also claimed to have football knowledge and I triumphantly countered that we Austrians don't need the first 89 minutes at all, that the one minute, the 90th, is enough for us to win, he fell silent, shaking his head and finally left me my Pope in Rome.

It was only on the plane that I was almost shocked when the Kronenzeitung newspaper laughed at me as I boarded: "Pope has returned to Rome - Schönborn next Pope?"

That, I suspect today, was my last encounter with Muirlinnhe, King Arthur's strange magician.

Finally, my business was doing so well that I could lease my own new computer - but the joy didn't last long, because the manufacturer had obviously thrown out the wrong people in its overzealousness to save costs, and the cheap workers who were allowed to stay couldn't cope with either the customers or the programs. Between you and me, the administration was in a real mess.

My dilemma was multiple. On the one hand, I was a paying customer and didn't want to put up with such miserable treatment. On top of that, I had projects with computers from the same manufacturer and couldn't just piss in my own nest. Thirdly, I was the editor-in-chief of the only true and most beautiful newspaper, which was maintained by the club of fans of this computer series. Of course, the term editor-in-chief is perhaps a bit of an exaggeration

in a one-man editorial department, but what is true must remain true.

That was the fourth problem. It was true that this manufacturer produced the best computer at the time. But it was also true that some of its administrative staff were obviously completely overwhelmed and were deeply annoying the customers. The newspaper had to report, but how?

Necessity is the mother of invention; so I asked my friend Quintilius Tertius Faber from the Latin provincial town of Vindobona for a guest commentary. Not knowing that this humorous commentary was supposed to break my neck as editor-in-chief...

De Administrationibus

by Quintilius Tertius Faber, Unio COMPUTANDI Latina

Quintilius Tertius Faber amici sui ad Unionem COMPUTANDEM salutatur —

Apollonia, the first wife of all, actually had the idea: “The club is your lobby, your strong ...” she quotes from some piece of paper that she was probably given at the market or somewhere else - ; in reality, none of this has anything to do with us, you can be sure of that. “Besides, the previous editors have disappeared,” she sniffs, “so we can now comply with the request, ” about our experiences!” Yes, we. We, that’s me.

A word about me: I head the complaints department of our small company (here, us means Apollonia), everything else is managed her. From design to production to delivery. She consults me on legal and business issues on a case-by-case basis (marital matters excluded). As a husband I have a difficult to describe not-but-yet-somehow function in our company.

I like to sit in my office, in the complaints department, and watch the cemetery sparrows. Apollonia has I was strongly advised to mention our company in this article, you never know. Maybe I will. —

I wanted to become a master parachute tailor back then, yes, but then Apollonia, daughter of a rich stonemason, and I put the thread and awl to one side. I can hardly say no, God knows! So, here we are, Apollonia and I, with our FABER GRABSTEIN CONSULTING LLC. We deliver promptly and free of charge (so, to the churchyard, so to speak), at the best conditions, gravestones in all sizes and variants, in real marble, real marble substitute or in real plastic, marble-looking.

Perhaps that is enough, Apollonia would certainly like to see more here, but I am thinking of your newspaper, where you shouldn’t do too much self-promotion. Nevertheless, one last thing: should you -

as we did with our Unio Computeris Latina - want to lay it to rest one day, then you will get the best conditions from us, in terms of tombstones. Us, that's actually just Apollonia, because I only head the complaints department (surviving relatives excluded!).

So one day we decided to replace our old PRAETOR computer system from Rufus with a modern one from Businnox Machinibus Internationalis (BMI). The consultation went smoothly, everything was in order, the Businnox salesman was beaming and we were already wondering whether he hadn't sold us something like Julian's tomb. But we put our gloomy thoughts to one side, because the horrendous one-off price was mitigated by an attractive offer from Businnox to pay in installments. We would only have to pay two handfuls of sesterces now and then small handfuls of sesterces every month. We asked Apollonia's uncle, a Gallic menhir supplier, what he thought about this advantageous contract, but then we ordered it anyway.

Faster than a Phrygian runner can run, order forms and contracts from Businnox fluttered in, and Apollonia joked: no job is done until the paperwork is done, a saying she probably picked up from one of the Scythian or Pictish slaves. We opened the carefully sealed papyri. And froze.

I will spare you the blasphemous curses that follow, but suffice it to say that everyone from Godfather Jupiter to the Germanic Loki got their comeuppance. What was that about?! The contracts - there were V of them - were made out to V (five!) different companies, from J.F. Faber, who sold automotive bicycles, to Gutemine Faber, Senator at Businnox itself, to the vegetable shop Faber & Faber, and yes, Faber Castellum, the pen manufacturer, was also there.

An angry phone call sent a message to the company. the writing slaves at Businnox turned pale, but I advised Apollonia to be more cautious, because the poor guy was the least to blame. But I could tell from his stammering that this was a malfunction of the word processing that sometimes occurs, no, they don't use Businnox's own at Businnox, but the one from Microprox, which is so popular everywhere, even with the pirates in Taiwanium. Apollonia and I looked at each other: yes, had we ordered the wrong thing after all? I won't

soon forget the sleepless night that I spent - to escape the angry woman - in the middle of or on our cold home-made products.

Anyway, after a few days we received the message from a friendly Businnox slave that the contracts had now been corrected and everything had been sorted out; this was actually the case. So we were reassured, signed and sealed everything (Consul T. Ing. Faber sounded very pompous to Consulting Faber, presumably the Businnox word processor or that of Microprox had gone crazy again).

The mild days of March passed uneventfully, I sat in my office watching the sparrows and was glad that no complainant came back from the cemetery - then something happened again.

Oh joy, oh jubilation, oh cheerfulness! The oops! (object-oriented parcel service) delivered the Abacus Electronicus AE/CCCC packed in cardboard papyrus, including all accessories including many papyri, cartonii and manualii, but also the ELP/CCCC (first living program/400) on many small discii compacti, with which the AE/CCCC first had to be given artificial life, installare necesse. Apollonia and I had to first endure the tombstone stress that followed the many bacchanalia, saturnalia and other festivals before we could turn our attention - sobered up - to the new Abacus.

What a joy to see this truly virile black comrade standing in the midst of our equally not unattractive black marble, marble substitute and plastic gravestones!

But before I could even finish thinking about my vague idea of a new gravestone model in the shape of an abacus, Apollonia said, let's take a look at the many papyri, maybe there's something important in there, a Ridmi-först, or whatever the people at Businnox call it. So we looked through everything for the new AE/CCCC, so far everything seemed to be in order, but wow, the license seal for all program disci Compactii was (this time uniformly) in the name of Gutemine Faber, the well-known senator at Businnox herself, a kind-hearted person with great general and specialist knowledge, but with whom we are not related in any way and whose business has absolutely

nothing to do with our business, FABER GRABSTEIN CONSULTING GmbH (I should mention this again here).

So I called Businnox again, drumming my knuckles, panting hard, heaving my chest. No, we are not who people think we are. We have plastic stones that look like marble and ones made from real marble substitutes, and real marble on request, but we are not the honorable Senator Gutemine F., but A. & Q.T.F. Couldn't that be fixed somehow? It's not right that we have to guess whether we are us or not every time we watch a new program about oops! or Littercom. The friendly writing slave whispered "but of course" into her telephone and promised to put the matter to rest once and for all. Yes, even more, she sent an e-mail to us via the UUU (Urbi Urbani Ubique, the global Roman network), to Hibernia and elsewhere, to inform everyone about the Fabers and their naming rights. Last but not least, with a wink, she sent us a digitally certified e-mail, in which it is assured that we, the real Fabers, are right to use the products of Businnox Machinibus Internationalis on our Abacus Electronicus /CCCC. Yes, indeed.

After this last e-mail, Apollonia and yours truly threw a little party, there was Aurochs tripe in honey and — oh well, that really doesn't belong here. Anyway, we were happy to be the Fabers, FABERS GRABSTEIN CONSULTING LLC, to be precise (sorry, but it has to be said). Fredericus from Carinthia and Antonius from Pannonia and many other friends talked to Cervisia from Noricum until the early morning. Then the Littercom came and brought an express registered letter. From Businnox.

After reading the letter (which was surprisingly correctly addressed to us), Apollonia ripped open her toga from her navel to her knees, screamed murder and manslaughter and threatened to maltreat the brand new Abacus Electronicus with a twelve-tooth chisel. It was only with great difficulty that the Nubian servants (copyright by Wolf, Gang) managed to calm her down and escort her to the Budovarium. The guests and I were amazed when we read that Businnox had sent us a first reminder for the instalment amount due for last month, for a handful of sesterces. But - we had contractually

agreed that after the down payment, the first installment was due at the next Saturnalia, so in about 14 days?!

Determined, I sat down that same day and wrote a not entirely humorless, but serious letter to the Businnox, directly to Quirinus Schlapfus, the keeper of the sesterces and other pecuniary items. I told him the facts, copied the originals and sent everything with a reliable express courier.

For days I sat in front of my office, watched my sparrows rather listlessly and waited impatiently for an answer. Instead of a messenger, the one I expected, another uniformed Littercom officer came and brought a registered letter to the Fabers. That's us, as everyone now knows. Again, the letter was from Businnox, and, suspecting nothing good, I opened it without waiting for Apollonia to return.

The people at Businnox must have gone completely mad: a 3rd warning (where was the 2nd?) about the same handful of sesterces, a typewritten warning in horribly tortured Latin that the Businnox will now unfortunately have to hand all of this over to a lawyer and will have to collect so much interest on arrears because we, the delinquent Fabers, did not pay the sestertii that were due up to the month before the month before the month before!

As sure as my name is Quintilius Tertius Faber, I was left speechless at such impudence, which I have never encountered before either among Hibernian boxers or Frankish oyster suckers (please do not classify these comparisons as racist). On the other hand, I feared that Apollonia would even take off her entire toga in her pain, so I grabbed the intercom and angrily called the keeper of the sesterces and other pecuniary items, Quirinus Schlapfus, and had him summoned. I left aside all the trinkets and humor and asked him frankly whether he had an Archaeopterix or even a Helikopterix in his head: a third reminder with an advocate, although according to the contract the first instalment is only due in 10 days?! He remained cool and wanted to look into the matter first, but behind his coolness I sensed his bored disinterest in me, the imperial sub-subject. When I casually mentioned that I had recently torn apart a Libyan lion with my bare hands, he hastily assured me that he would look into the

matter immediately and call back - he doesn't have to know that it was an image on a newspaper papyrus...

XL minutes later my cell phone chirped, it was Quirinus. Well, he had looked at everything, the reminder text was completely wrong, because it was actually about the down payment that this Abacus was missing, but (here he quickly interrupted my angry interruption) he knew that we had already paid the down payment months ago because he could see it in another Abacus Electronicus. It's just that this is one Abacus and that is the other Abacus, and - he put the joke record in - you know those ancient punch card programs, don't you? And no, I didn't need to do anything else, he had since corrected the situation in all Abaci Electronici; I could safely recycle the reminders without further thought. When I finally got a chance to speak, he didn't understand at all what I meant when I said that Businnox should buy itself a good abacus and good programs as well. A shoemaker couldn't walk in worn-out sandals, a butcher couldn't walk with meat poisoning and a gravestone dealer - well, that was the end of my argument.

Well, I didn't tell Apollonia all this until everything was definitely over. On the one hand, she was grateful to me for sparing her this nervous breakdown. On the other hand, I recently noticed that while she was painting her toenails red Phoenician purple in the Budovarium, she was talking on the cell phone with her friend Elena and casually pondering how much it would cost us to switch from Businnox to Microproxx - it's not better, but cheaper?

Dear friends of the Unio Computandi, you may not have these problems with your abacus supplier, but we here in the Urbs Latina must build a strong lobby to make it clear to Businnox that only they themselves can contribute, with exemplary administration, to trusting their products for administration.

"But do you think it's possible that this could happen to you too?" Take part in our unique COMPETITION by answering this one question and sending me an email: one of you can win a beautiful artificial marble stone with an individual gold inscription, guaranteed to

be hand-soldered; at the same time you can also let me know whether you liked my first work.

May Hermes guide your affairs, Apollo smooth your face and Hebe bless your women

Yours, Quintilius Tertius Faber.

The business of Quintilius, Apollonia and the Abacus led quite directly to my resignation from the newspaper editorial office after the censorship department of our association vigorously forbade the editor-in-chief from publishing it. Never in my wildest dreams did I think we had such a thing as censorship.

Anyway, I shook the dust off my sandals and turned my back on this unworthy heap. Because of course it was once again the case, as is so often the case with the rulers of this world: if a red warning light is on, the bulb is unscrewed, but the actual problem is not fixed...

For a year and a half, I received reminders from Businnox month after month. On a sunny December morning, I was sitting on a plane to Cyprus and was forced to listen to a conversation between two businessmen, one of whom was an employee of the same manufacturer and praised his company above all else. I couldn't really get involved, although I almost choked with anger when I involuntarily listened to these lies, but I immediately decided to write a Christmas story.

Here it is.

Merry Christmas

I told you: you'll get the ultimate, most heartbreaking and emotional Christmas story anywhere, for real! The only truly complete compendium of pre-Christmas poetry, even Selma Lagerlöf or Karli Waggerl would be thrilled!

Santa Claus in a sleigh, with reindeer, snow and a traffic jam on the A2, little angels fluttering excitedly around the manger and under their smocks the little, frozen bottoms...

???

One moment please, the doorbell is ringing, I think it's the postman!

Originally it was supposed to be a really nice, cheesy Christmas story with Santa Claus, reindeer, snow flurries and ching ling bells. But then the postman rang twice...

The European Christmas sensation!

e-XMas at its finest!

Download, now!!!

Quintilius called me a week or so ago, upset and quite hectic.

"I'm at the airport, but I have to tell you this first!" Apparently he's dragging Apollonia's suitcase through the departure hall, panting. I wait patiently until the crackling of his guaranteed noise-free cell phone dies down, then I tell him: "Well then, do it!"

Quintilius seems very annoyed and confused because he asks back: "What?"

You know me, dear readers, my proverbial patience is not easily strained, so I remain silent and continue typing “.....shh, and then the Lapp mother put the little, most darling Lapp baby in the Lapp father’s...”

“Oh, yes!” says Quintilius, “so, what I wanted to say is that this morning, as you know, we are flying on holiday and then suddenly the doorbell rings and the post brings a registered reminder from Businnox and I think I’m going to have a heart attack, which I’m sure you understand!”

“Please, dear Quincy, not so many ‘and’s, besides, why I know that you are going on holiday? And - who approved that?”

Quintilius was of course not up to this masterful rhetorical hook, and in the break that followed I corrected the passage “...but no matter how hard Santa tried, the reindeer flopped off into the bushes to the side...” and listened to Quintilius again.

“I’m not in the mood for jokes,” Quintilius grumbles rebelliously into his cell phone. “You’ve already sent me a reminder, again with the threat of a lawyer, but this time by registered mail!”

I remain silent and think that’s what he gets for not being a club member, but please, he has to go headfirst into the wall! - But if I remember correctly, this dull club has already renounced its history once before ...

“What should I do?” he interrupts my club-philosophical musings, and I hear the announcer in the background telling the driver of the car with the license plate W 236 KL to please go to the information desk.

Time is obviously pressing, because if he parked his car wrongly, he’ll probably have to walk. So I help him and answer:

“I don’t know what to do either!” This story with the Businnox has been going on for a while, maybe we should... . .

“I have an idea, Quincy, why don’t you write down the whole story and send it to me via the Internet. Then we’ll see what happens!” I hear him breathe a sigh of relief and he says:

“Thanks, I’ll do that! But I have to go, my car is right in front of the fire department entrance and Apollonia’s hat box is...”

I quickly interrupt him and wish him a good flight. — Annoying guy!

A few days later, I was just writing “...a small piece of dirt from the hoof of the last reindeer flew straight into Santa’s eye, so that his tears mixed with the snowflakes...”, when my PC sang: “You have got an e-mail!”, so I looked it up, and lo and behold, it was the story that Quintilius sent me from vacation.

The shrill ringing of the doorbell rouses me from my sleep.

7:01 a.m.! Yes, hello, that’s unbelievable! But the short-short-short-long signals to me that it is Mr. Wawranek, our postman - a die-hard old radio operator who simply ignores the official world-wide cessation of Morse code (July 1, 2000) and rouses me from my sleep with the (now former) call signal •••—.

He will certainly not do it without a good reason, I think in alarm and get up with a groan, trying not to wake Apollonia. I shuffle down the hall and open the door: it is the postman.

“Well, master, how are you?” he asks as always and holds out an envelope to me. I grumble something at him in a friendly but grim tone and look at the sender: Businnox Internationalis Machinibus, BIM! -

Yes, are they completely crazy now? Are they already sending their annoying monthly reminders by registered mail?!

I sign nervously and nod to Mr. Wawranek, then I shuffle back into the bedroom, roll myself into the warm blanket and try to go

back to sleep. My heartbeat subsides and Hypnos, the god of sleep, takes care of me again. As I fall asleep, I think that we are going on holiday today and this idiotic reminder doesn't interest me at all, I prefer to imagine the blue sea and the palm trees, the ice-chilling tequilas and romping around with Ornella in the hot sand...

And then the bell rings again. . . . — Di-Di-Di-Daaa! Wawranek! What has he forgotten again, the idiot, why does he have to ring me out of bed again?! I jump up angrily with the elegance of an excavator and wake Apollonia, who sleepily mumbles “Well, what’s wrong, darling?” and rolls over to the side again.

“I’m going!” I whisper and stomp out with a dark look on my face. And that too - now she’ll probably be in a bad mood all day! As I open it, I joke grimly: “... and if the postman rings twice!”

Mr. Wawranek looks at me with his dachshund eyes, trusting but uncomprehending, holds out a package and says: “Sorry, this seems to be for you too!”

I look at the thing, it’s incredibly heavy. Addressed to Quintilius T. Faber, Big Boss. I tell Wawranek that I’m not a big boss, but he thinks I’m the only Q.T.Faber in the house, except maybe my nephew, but his name is Q.Q.Faber, Quintilius Quartus.

Shrugging my shoulders, I sign and go back into the bedroom. On the way, I put the package on the couch, checking who the sender is. But it’s illegible, a “Sowieso” from San Tacla, U.S. Aha, from the USA - well, it must be some kind of plug in or something. I sneak into the bedroom and am just swinging leg number one over the edge of the bed when the doorbell rings again. Klihihihing.

Well, now I’m going to give Wawranek a smack, damn it! Can’t he deliver everything at once?! First this stupid reminder from Businnox, then the ominous package - what will it be this time? I walk briskly to the door and tear it open, freezing in mid-movement. Outside are Joshua alias Samuel Jackson, and Vince alias John Travolta.

No, I'm not completely crazy, as you might think - I'm just standing there with my mouth open, amazed. Out there are the two super killers from Quentin Tarantino's PULP FICTION, Joshua and Vince. In their black suits, Joshua with oiled curly hair and Travolta with a shoulder-length wig. In their hands they casually hold their silenced cannons. [If you haven't seen the film yet: a lively rogue comedy that will make your French fries get stuck in your throat when you laugh!]

"The Lord gives, the Lord takes away," says Joshua, the former preacher, pushing past me into the apartment.

"We're just picking up the package that was left here!" explains Vince, "hh Travolta," and pushes me back into the apartment with the silencer on my chest, closing the door behind him.

We leave - I backwards - to the living room, Joshua picks up the package from the couch and grins: "If you seek, you will find!".

It's totally paradoxical, it can't be true! How do these characters come to me, why do they want this package, what do I have to do with all of this? Joshua - Mr. Jackson - sees the question marks on my forehead and explains: "We have been tasked with sending the Big Boss a nice greeting from the Little Boss - who now wants to become Big Boss himself. It seemed easiest to us to send the package by post, that's still the most reliable way today!" I'm still staring at Vince's long shot, but I can't help but whisper, "You're probably the only one who still believes that." Vince pokes me in the chest with the barrel and asks Joshua: "Kill me?"

I'm horrified at how quickly something like that can happen. Travolta aims at me and is just waiting for Joshua's OK. Desperation and a fair amount of anger make me burst out: "It's just unfair! First this stupid warning from Businxxx! Then the package - and now you two, who want to flatten me without any trouble!"

Mr. Jackson — Joshua — thinks for a long time, then nods. Travolta aims the buffer directly at me, I squint my eyes and hear a double "plop!", hear the bullets clicking into the plaster behind me.

When I open my eyes again, I see Vince fiddling angrily with the device, probably a jam.

Not so Joshua. He reaches for Travolta's silencer and the barrel falls to the ground. "A miracle! The Lord has performed a miracle! Listen, my brother, this miracle is a sign!"

Perplexed, I hear Joshua giving a sermon, talking about the Lord and his miracle, about how Vince has never, he repeats, never failed! While the crazy Joshua gets more and more entangled in his sermon and Vince looks more and more embarrassed at the floor, I look at the bedroom door, where Apollonia is standing, still looking completely tired, in her short, favorite good morning toga. Suddenly it becomes clear to me why Vince had missed the mark: no man can see past this nothingness of a toga!

With shaking knees, I sink onto the couch. Joshua's cell phone rings, interrupting him in the middle of the sermon. He says politely, "Excuse me!" to me, holds the phone to his ear and listens to his conversation partner. At the end he says "Okay, boss!" and puts the device away again. Turning to Vince he says laconically: "Our job is done, the big boss got caught jogging this morning!" Vince shrugs his shoulders, then asks: "And what now?" Joshua sits down, Vince too and waves to Apollonia to sit down with us, then Joshua asks me after a long pause: "What was that about the trouble this morning?"

I ask carefully whether he had read my story on the Internet; but Joshua says no. So I tell him in broad strokes that we had leased a computer from Businnox. And since the first installment, we have received a reminder every month (until today!), sometimes a stern one with the threat of legal action. Today was the first time we received one by registered mail, which indicated that the last fuse had obviously blown at Businnox.

Vince asks if I haven't complained? Of course, I answer, of course! I have called them at least a dozen times, and they told me that there are two computer systems involved, one that receives the payments and another that carefully enters them into the accounting accounts. The two just don't get along well. And, I was advised to just throw

away the reminders, as they would be obsolete after a few days, when computer number 1 had notified computer number 2. Month after month, a nasty reminder comes out, then my automatic payment arrives, and then there's peace again for three weeks.

Furthermore, I said, I suspect that Businxxx has a problem with my standing order, as it seems that only the direct debit has been programmed properly; but, and now I look innocently at the two crooks, would you grant such a company the automatic direct debit when you see how incompetent the people at Businxxx actually are?! When they both shake their heads, I grin and tell them that - in order to be able to give the whole thing a humorous touch in a possible legal dispute - I have I also made a manual overpayment.

When Joshua looks at him in disbelief, Vince explains to him that Businxxx apparently has no control over its system at all, and that if there is an overpayment, the reminders should stop immediately - the customer has a credit balance. It's a shame, says Vince, as he once worked in accounting himself, back then, before computers. But Businxxx? A computer manufacturer so big that it boasts about e-business and solutions for a small planet, but uses such a catastrophic system that God have mercy on it! Well, people have saved up, I say, otherwise I wouldn't get a reminder every now and then about "(-,-) ATS", zero shillings, so to speak. Vince laughs so hard that tears run down his makeup.

"I understand," says Joshua, "so you rented the machine and set up a standing order; but because they can't cope with their own computers and programs, you are bombarded with reminders, month after month!" He pauses for a long time and lets the thought mature in our heads before he slowly continues: "Well, then we'll just bombard them back!" I look at him wide-eyed; and he grins, tapping the package with his hand. "Well, what did you think was in there?" he smirks, "a little greeting from Santa Claus!" - I suddenly understand what San Tacla, U.S., means.

"But you can't do that!" I protest, "You can't just..." Joshua grins and snarls, "Of course we can! So, let's go, we're going!" He and

Vince stand up, and since neither Apollonia nor I make any move to follow them, Vince pulls his buffer and forces us to come with him.

There follows a rapid ride in the white Mercury, across the ring to the Danube Canal, where the main building of Businnox is. I close my eyes, praying that Joshua doesn't drive over a bump, because what can happen! I remember all too clearly that in the film the car jumps over a bump, a bump, and a shot goes off from Vince's cannon ...

The car stops right in front of the main entrance. Vince takes the Package, both get out and go to reception. While Joshua engages the person on duty in a complex conversation, Vince gets into the lift and comes out again after a second. I hug Apollonia, who is shivering in her good morning favorite toga, to my chest and pray silently that today will be a holiday. That the early comers are not yet allowed in and the late comers are already out. But it is still 7:01 in the morning, so there is no particular danger.

Joshua and Vince come back to the car. Joshua says: "Merry Christmas, Businnox!" Vince lights a cigar and counts: "Four, three, two, one, boom!" and at the same moment a dull explosion tears apart the Businnox building, and Joshua adds: "... and a Happy New Year!" The building is torn apart from the inside, desks, filing cabinets full of punch cards and insanely long lines of computer print-outs are catapulted out into the morning silence. One such filing cabinet full of punch cards flies straight towards our car, turns on its axis and will crush us in the next moment! While the others stare at this projectile as if spellbound, I tear open the door and throw myself out sideways ...

... and crash onto the bedroom carpet with a cry of pain. Where am I, what happened to the explosion? Slowly I recognize the familiar Outlines of the bedroom, I sit up dazed and rub my eyes. Apollonia wakes up with a sigh, bends over me with a smile and gives me a kiss: "Merry Christmas, my darling, today we're going on holiday!"

Quintilius swallows gratefully and says: "Merry Christmas, my darling!" (Also a kiss).

His gaze falls on the registration reminder, which is lying crumpled on the floor.

And - well: "Merry Christmas, Businxxx!" (but no kiss), "...and a Happy New Year!"

Istvan is pacing up and down the living room, excited. "I knew as much," he says over and over again, waving the card with the invitation wildly around. "Andy Ritter, he's a pianist, I've always said so," is the second sentence that keeps coming back. It looks as if the great psychologist is not quite coming to terms with the fact that he completely misjudged a colleague from the computer club. "But," he continues, talking to his spirits in the air, "I suspected something. He has something with music, I could tell right away, and what does SWEATING THINGS mean? Andy will pound away at the piano keys, until he sweats! - Ah, in Plutzerbräu! They have a stage there, sometimes small-art-cabaret artists perform, or even a pianist. Andy is definitely a pianist, delicate hands, smokes like a chimney - pianist, after all."

Satisfied with himself and his perfect analysis, István looks around, rubs his hands triumphantly and says: "Well, and if I'm wrong, then he's just one of those small-art-cabaret artists, like Josef Hader or I-Stangl, you know?"

He turns to me to explain everything to me in great detail for the umpteenth time, puts on his fatherly expression and begins: "So, we're going to go to Andy Ritter's concert on Sunday evening, listen to it a little, nod to him and so on, and then we'll go to your place. Only for twenty minutes, but we have to, he's with the computer club!" I know that as soon as he says these words, he becomes very soft and docile, he loves his computer club so much.

Sunday evening - he had laid out at least six or seven ties on our bed and moved them around, but then decided to go "without" them in a revolutionary way - so Sunday evening we walked up to the Gasslwerk around Spittelberg (I will spare you the fact that he told me at almost every corner that the Plutzerbräu was coming up, but then it was just one corner further and another...).

Sweating Things

István went straight up to the manager of Plutzerbräu, put his hand on his forearm and whispered conspiratorially: “Where is the stage?”, whereupon he took a step back, looked us up and down twice and then said to me: “Ono koga ono wanna aisuru”, whereupon I said to him: “Please speak German, he doesn’t understand Japanese” and thought to myself that if he did understand, he would smack him straight away. The manager then said calmly: “We don’t have a stage, but if you want to go to SWEATY, please go there. Go downstairs!”

István said, quite unnecessarily, “I have a visitor from Japan and I’d like to show her a bit of Vienna,” then we slowly went down into the cellar vault while I whispered the greatly watered-down translation “Every man loves this woman” into István’s ear. We seemed to be the first guests, but then, sure enough, a slim young man walked up to István and said how pleased he was that he had accepted his invitation.

István briefly introduced me as a friend from Japan and a music student, and embarrassingly he deliberately fibbed “and she plays the piano, just like you; you are colleagues, so to speak!”. Andy Ritter just nodded briefly at the “colleague” and then made the international gesture with his hand “it’s all around here”, and István looked around the almost empty room in amazement. “Where is the piano?” he asked Mr. Ritter, who in turn looked somewhat irritated behind his glasses at István and shrugged his shoulders: “Which piano?”

I admit it: I’m always really happy when István comes ashore. Like a heavy oil tanker, he drives straight towards the reef with the certainty of a sleepwalker, crashes, bursts - and then very, very slowly runs out of oil. This alone makes the trek up Spittelberg worthwhile.

István looked around again, looked inquisitively behind this and that corner, and then said vaguely, but still somewhat uncertainly: “But the invitation, Mr. Ritter - there’s supposed to be something go-

ing on tonight? I accepted to..., I meant..., you look like a pianist, so where is the piano, the grand piano, the jingle box?"

Andreas Ritter laughed, went with us to the buffet, offered us a drink and told us that in his free time he made sculptures out of left-over metal (welding and forging, aha!) and gave them away to family and friends until one day he found the courage to hold an exhibition (in Munich). When he was well received at that one, he decided to try it in Vienna: and voilà, there it is! He showed us around, showed us the exhibits, some of which were still for sale, and told us the personal story behind each piece.

As I didn't have anything to write with, I had to write down the details. I can now dig it out of memory, and I don't even need to ask István for help, he already has Alzheimer's! On the far right, next to the GUARDIAN, a menacing-looking monster, stood UAKA TANKA, and Andy said that this was the Great Spirit of the Indians. A proud, man-sized structure that created a strong feeling, especially because of the lighting that Andy had made himself. Next to it was a RUNNING MAN, who seemed to be running down the cellar stairs. On the wide side of the room were two similar wall lamps, the ONE-ARMED BANDIT and GOMBKÖTÖ, which Andy said was it belonged to Toni (G.) and was only on display as a loan. These wall lamps were made from pans, pitchforks and scythes and fitted with lamps. They would certainly look very good in a modern apartment!

FELI and MAUSI seemed to be two female figures, but Andy got us another glass and deliberately ignored the story of these figures. My gut told me that there was more to these figures, but we had already moved on to DON QUIXOTE, and István was taken with him: there really was the old Hispanic, shield and spear in hand, ready to take on all the windmills in the world. "I want it," István whispered in my ear, so I asked Mr. Ritter if it was for sale. Andy - who was now on first name terms with István - said: "Well, I'm very sorry, but the Don belongs to my seven-year-old, it was his birthday present. You can't have it anymore." István walked on, apparently unmoved; only I noticed his disappointment. We came to KAWASABE, whose title, as Andy explained, had come from a song by Laurie Anderson. István only looked at it briefly, his gaze slid longingly back to Don Quixote.

“The Quixote would look great in my office, and my customers would know straight away what kind of person I am,” he said to Andy, somehow still hoping that Andy would react to that.

But Andy Ritter continued to show his exhibits: HÄLTA SCHIFFTA, he explained, was based on the title of the Beatles’ Helter Skelter song. I saw a funny guy who was clearly holding his oversized, half-limp penis in his hand for the purpose of urinating. István walked on, because he wasn’t interested in this topic, and looked at the last two exhibits in silence, one of which was probably based on Mickey Mouse, the other on a giraffe and was probably also intended for Andy’s offspring.

Andy went to other guests in the meantime, István and I also spotted an old acquaintance, Birgit, a foto model. We gossiped and made small talk, and it soon became clear to me that István was vigorously fore-checking his chances for a shoot. I quietly crept away to the group around Andy, because a crowd had formed around him and a visitor, and they were haggling over the price of a figure. After some back and forth, Andy finally managed to sell the sculpture without a discount! Everyone laughed at each other and was very loud (which - as always - seemed very inappropriate to me) while the lady wrote out the check and ceremoniously handed it to Andy. The first person to congratulate him was Andy’s mother, who could be very proud of her capable son.

I took a couple of rolls from the buffet, admired Andy, who could balance a glass of wine, a goulash soup, a loaf of bread and a spoon with both hands and still neither eat nor drink, and let myself drift slowly through the densely populated area back towards István. He was surrounded by a crowd of young girls to whom he explained HÄLTA SCHIFFTA in great detail, gesticulating magnificently and feasting on their wide, lustful eyes; He was also having an argument with a know-it-all who had come along and who thought he was the artist and was persistently asking how much the wrought iron banister leading to the vaulted cellar would cost and would not be fobbed off.

My intervention by kissing him on the cheek saved István from a fit of rage or a stroke, which he was obviously close to. We looked at the really great and successful exhibits again, stood for a long time, almost too long, in front of Don Quixote and then said a very warm goodbye to Andreas Ritter. As we walked home in silence, István only broke his angry, pondering silence once: "...and he plays the piano! ... But don't tell anyone about the piano!" he demanded, and I promised him.

Holy crap.

Michiko,
foto model

At one of the lowest points in my life, I took the night train 700km almost every week to visit my sick parents. Night trips take ages, the pounding of the wheels goes through the mattress and pillow straight into my brain, making me think up the most absurd stories. A chance glance in the sleeping car corridor, the encounter of two lives in a tenth of a second lets me sink into tormenting fantasies for hours.

I always thought I had no problem with getting older. But when little innuendos, hidden bites and tiny digs at me, who was almost fifty, started to pile up, I started to think hard. I started to hear things that no one had said; I started to observe myself more closely and soon discovered this and that which you only notice when you start to observe yourself critically and suspiciously.

The most painful thing for me was that the young and pretty girls, whom I always met in the tram and admired, reacted to my eyes with surprise or bewilderment and returned them less and less often. Tick. The realization that I was no longer the irresistible conqueror (of tram-riding beauties), even if only for the duration of the journey from station A to station B, caused self-doubt to arise. Tick. The cogwheel of self-alienation turned a little further, the self-doubt sank deeper and lay like lead on my weakening loins, Tick. I'm getting old, suggested my loins, it will soon be over! Tick. Damn, what do you actually expect?! Tick.

A chance glance in the sleeping car corridor, the encounter of two lives in a tenth of a second, lets me sink into tormenting fantasies for hours.

Night ride

“The brain is fucked,” Jack quoted, “when the sky is full of violins!” I carefully peeked out of the corner of my eye at the pretty blonde woman who - like me - was standing in the aisle of the sleeping car and smoking. I quickly drank my beer and, shaking senselessly inside, went to the conductor to get another bottle. “Don’t talk nonsense,” I heard Jack’s voice, “you just want to walk past her and talk to her!” Jack knew as well as I did that this could never happen.

No, I am not schizo at all, but Jack is something like the personification of my parental superego, as Freudians would probably call it. He has been with me since my youth, correcting, criticizing and annoying me with his cold and clear logic. It may be OK that he is the one who stares at the speedometer needle and growls “130!” or who chews out the sensible and logical sentences that I then just have to repeat in order to appear logical and sensible. The fact that he is a logician and mathematician with heart and soul and loves computers more than anything, and can look into them with X-ray vision, is the basis of my professional success. But I was determined to ignore Jack completely today, here and now. As if my life depended on it.

With the new bottle in my hand, I slowly walked back to my compartment in the swaying train. As I passed her, she looked at me and that look completely threw me off balance.

In truth, I stopped because I was out of breath and couldn’t take another step. I broke out in a sweat and she probably saw the color of my face change despite the semi-darkness.

I spoke to her.

She smiled at me, her eyes radiant, her whole being inviting. Suddenly my daze vanished and we chatted about what travelers chat about in such situations - where they go, what they do, who they visit. Evi, that was her name, worked as a therapist and had just returned from visiting her parents. I told her that I was just about to

visit my parents, and I steered the conversation towards my elderly mother's illness, as this coincided exactly with Evi's work. I don't know, maybe I was getting on her nerves, but this had been bothering me ever since I bought the ticket.

Jack retreated grumbling, from a distance I sometimes heard him muttering "he doesn't dare!" and I thought defiantly "yes he does!". While Evi and I were chatting animatedly, a compartment door opened behind us and a sleepy guest came into the corridor. Correctly interpreting his look, I asked worriedly whether we were disturbing his sleep and he nodded grimly. I looked at Evi, gave myself a jolt (and, folks, bungee jumping is nothing compared to that!) and offered my compartment so we could carry on chatting there. My knees were shaking and I expected the end, may it only be quick and painless.

She asked again if I was alone in the compartment and when I said I had reserved it so I could travel alone, she said yes. I could practically see Jack's face turning green and he said: "You won't dare!". "Yes," I whispered back and walked surprisingly calmly with Evi to my compartment.

I looked at her as we talked and I felt myself burning for her by the minute. At first I started to talk about my professional successes, but then I thought that was actually a stupid thing to do and - somehow - I got to talking about sex, love and relationships. Maybe she was taken aback by the change, but maybe it was OK for her to talk about it and we became more serious and closer to each other.

Closeness. She offered to address me as "you" I began to open up to her more and more, a blissful rush of opening up began to take hold of me.

Grasp. I noticed that in the last few minutes I had been grabbing her hand more and more often when I spoke about things that had been kept secret for years.

It doesn't really matter what we talked about, dear Jack; what was important was that she had a kind, open personality and was neither

a bitchy city noodle nor a stupid, naive provincial aunt. She was simply Evi, who talked about her ideas about relationships, about her work, her parents in Vienna and her apartment. Jack adds that it was Evi who let me speak for a long time, almost too long.

Speak out. As if I had been sentenced to silence for life (which wasn't true!), I held on to her and talked about my loneliness, my grief over the things I had lost in my life, but also about things that didn't put me in such a great light. It suddenly seemed important to me to stand there openly, honestly and naked and to leave all the social nonsense aside. At times I was really afraid of my own courage, that Evi would be repelled by my directness and my refusal to present myself as a great showman and would leave.

Leave. She stood up suddenly and said that she had to go to the little girls' house and when she came back she didn't know yet whether she wanted to sleep with me; she might not be as in love as I was, but she liked me very much. I hugged her while she was sitting there standing in front of me and I said nothing and just thought to myself that it wasn't important, I wanted to be close to you, hug you - come back! After she left, I saw that she had left her handbag behind - was that trust? No one else I knew would ever leave their handbag in a stranger's compartment.

When she came back, we turned off the compartment light and sat very close to each other. We kissed and hugged each other, whispered and were happy. The kisses and hugs turned into caresses, my hand tried to get under her sweater. "It's a bodysuit," she whispered, but I didn't know what it was at the time. I confessed my problem to her, but she just laughed quietly and undressed quickly and easily. I quickly took off my clothes and we lay down next to each other.

I can remember every little detail, that night was so important to me. Jack and the bad air conditioning ensured that my already retired masculinity stayed in the background; I was far too afraid to sleep with her, because neither of us had any contraception with us - it was a surprising, completely unplanned event. (I would have to laugh at myself if I was constantly carrying a condom in my pocket walking around...).

I gave her all my attention, my tenderness and let all the softness I felt towards her slide through my hands onto her beautiful body. She loved to be caressed and caressed, she gave herself over to her feelings and I tried to give her all the love and tenderness I felt for her - I kept catching myself being too fleeting and insensitive, but I was terribly nervous, irritated by the surroundings and thought far too often about tomorrow. Only once did we both get too carried away, but Jack, the reliable one, was there and pulled us apart just in time.

The hours passed in lust and tenderness, in gentleness and excitement, in closeness and concern. But at some point we got tired, whispered to each other and smoked, listened to the rattling of the wheels and were silent. Evi said she might want to sleep for another hour or two before she got out. I said goodbye to her body with many, many little kisses, kissed every place I could reach and cried silently in my grief.

Then she got dressed, and as she put on the bodysuit, Jack looked closely at how it was constructed...

I gave Evi my card, scribbled my personal phone number on the back, asked her to get in touch with me and to give me time to sort out a few things. We had reached a very depressing point. I suspected that now, tired, worn out and sleepy, she might not be thinking about continuing. I told her to get in touch, please, but at the same time I said (or was it Jack?) that she had a choice. She shouldn't feel pressured by me; I would be in a blaze of joy now, but I knew that I would never be pushy or demanding with her. I can still hear her saying the same thing. That she could feel how much I was in love, but she herself was not as in love as I was. She put my card in her wallet and said that maybe she would get in touch, but she wasn't sure. Bye, said Jack.

I don't remember the moment she left, only that I watched her for a long time after she had gone to the front. My eyes filled with tears that choked me deep in my throat, and I was left in the dark compartment. I set my alarm to be awake when Evi got out, lay down and tried to sleep.

I didn't sleep. Jack had decided to keep me awake with his comments. All he had to offer was mockery and bitterness. And clear logic about the meaning of the positions of the pieces on the game board - Jack and his game board!

Jack explained: after the first sleep-in, Evi would wake up and there were several possibilities as to what would happen then. First, if this wasn't her first sleeper adventure, she might think it was quite nice and then go about her day's business without making a fuss about the night. Bye, said Jack.

Secondly: if it was her first such adventure, then she would perhaps be ashamed, blame herself or be shocked afterwards by our directness or think that I might disqualify her as an "easy girl"; then she would hardly seek contact with me. Instinctively I wanted to punch Jack in the face, but he was only worried about me - and that's why I couldn't really be angry with him.

Evi could also be smart and know that Cupid's arrows can hit anyone at any time. That in the given situation neither she nor I had any other chance. The usual beginning of a relationship, getting to know each other slowly and slowly becoming familiar with the other: that was not possible in this situation! But should everything be lost because of that? On the other hand - what did I expect? Could I, almost 50, ever hope to meet such a beautiful and much younger woman and be loved by her again? Would I be able to get my currently restless and stressful life under control in order to start from scratch, from the beginning, with a lovely person like Evi? From the beginning? That I could say: "without ifs and buts"?

What, a thought flashed through my mind, if Evi thought I was a sly dirty old man? What if she was convinced that I drove sleeper cars week after week just to lure young girls into my compartment? I asked Jack to leave me alone - I didn't even want to think about this, because in that case I would be completely out, completely out of the loop; she would be glad to have escaped the old pig. Bye, said Jack.

In the half-light, Jack mumbled something about someone else, said that Evi certainly had a lover, a relationship that our meeting

was insignificant compared to, and that Evi would soon forget this night and turn her attention back to her relationship. I fought desperately against this thought, held on to her warmth, her smell, her womanhood, her closeness with all my senses and didn't say another word to Jack.

I turned off the alarm before it could startle everyone and quickly got dressed. I saw that we were almost there and went ahead; Evi stood all alone, serious and silent at the door. I was very inhibited and couldn't get a whole sentence out, maybe she noticed, maybe she was annoyed at how clumsy I was - I went crazy at the thought of making a serious mistake now, at the last second. We were more silent as we stood so still next to each other and looked out into the last foggy November morning. Maybe we even spoke to each other, I don't remember.

I saw the first houses and the railway facilities only through a slowly blurring wall of tears, which I fought against as much as the lump in my throat. The train slowed and then stopped. When she got out, Jack automatically bent over her luggage, picked it up and handed it to her.

Jack saw that a wilting, long-stemmed red rose was lying on top.

Quintilius Tertius Faber sends his readers his warmest greetings.

For a long, long time I thought about whether and how one can write something that some readers (who are well known to me) might find blasphemous, disrespectful or simply tasteless, but that others - the majority, I mean, of readers who do not know me - would very well classify as enjoyable reading material. The more I thought about this publication problem, the clearer it became to me why such a discrepancy, albeit only apparent, existed.

Firstly, after a death, it is simply not appropriate for the bereaved to be funny; a poet in mourning should put down his quill. Paradoxical, because what should a grieving poet do when

Dionysian humor smiles back at him? - Anything other than hearty laughter would be sour.

Secondly, a story always says something about the author. Suppose the author thought that the logical conclusion $A + B = C$ was given. But perhaps you see it differently, if A is not an A for you but an F or something like that, then you would surely think, "Aha! So that's how the old Latin thinks that A and B are connected!" I usually like to hide my thoughts, but in this case I am giving in to my desire to write. It is.

Thirdly, a story says something about the characters. All of whom, thank God, are invented here. Because I would not know how to protect myself against their indignant telephone calls from Vindobona, Ostia or Lutetia if these characters were all real and alive.

Quintilius Secundus, my father, went to his ancestors. When he was still alive, he fearlessly wrote against Caesars, consuls and augurs, eagerly sharpening his goose quill and often thinking long and hard before he went into it deeply. and stabbed violently into poisonous ulcers and papist felt. But he also loved it when there was something to laugh about; then his serious face would split into a thousand laugh lines and he would sometimes laugh until he gasped: "Stop, stop, I can't take it anymore!"

I am writing this story for him, I am with him in my thoughts and I hope that he reads it and laughs until the tears run down his cheeks.

The blasphemy can begin. Sit venia verbo.

Diamond Fever

“Telephone for you” István’s voice rasps angrily from the intercom. He has been working on the representation of his family tree for days, which he had promised his father he would make, as he has a graphics program on his Abacus Electronicus. During such production phases, it is best not to disturb him at all, as he takes any interruption personally. Particularly because this program comes from the Microproxx company of Giulielmus Gattus, whom István now considers to be a complete idiot, as his programs resist any kind of continuous productivity and automatically exit at beautiful irregularities. During these phases, the telephone is no longer the necessary. It is not a bad way to maintain communication with the environment, but a devious enemy whose ringing is a hostile interference with the productivity of the genius.

“Thank you, and please excuse me!” I answer quickly and pick up the receiver. “Quintilius, yes, hallus?” I answer, keeping an eye on my two grandchildren, the twins Tiberius Primus and Tiberius Secundus, with whom I had just been playing.

On the other end of the line is my half-aunt Agrippina from Nova Scotia. I am happy about her call, because she is also still very affected by the death of our father, we talk about all the things that relatives talk about at such times. After a while Agrippina gets to the point.

“Tell me, do you know anything about a diamond? Did your father perhaps give you a diamond?” I can hear in her voice that she is a little embarrassed by the materialistic content of her question. I answer truthfully: “No, I don’t know anything about it, and he hasn’t given me anything like that.” I see her in front of me, a half-expected disappointment spreading across her face.

“Well, it was just a question. It could have been,” she says and steers the conversation in a different direction. Apollonia, my wife and owner of A. Faber Grabstein Consulting GmbH (this must be

mentioned again here), has overheard a few words and is now waving her arms as if she wants to tell me something urgently, but I continue to concentrate on the phone call. Agrippina and I say goodbye, then I put the receiver down.

What was so urgent, I growl somewhat gruffly in Apollonia's direction and take the Schuko plug out of Tiberius Secundus' mouth: "That's malus, little Secundus, very very malus! That-there is electricus, Stromus electricus, he can really, really malus pinch little Secundus!"

Apollonia's acute need to communicate wins out over her standard criticism that my methods of upbringing and, above all, my childish language - singular masculine chauvinisticus - are simply stupid. "The diamond, Grandma's diamond!"

I'm confused (no, not Stromus electricus). Which diamond? Which grandma? Apollonia beams at me like a quizmaster beams at his counterpart when asking the five thousand sesterce question; it's that typical "Well, tell me!" face. If there's nothing else I hate, then it's Apollonia's simple quiz shows on the Televisionium. Exempla trahunt.

Istvan, who has retreated to our house because he finally wants to finish this project, stands up and paces restlessly. I ask him what is bothering him. He mumbles something about Microproxx and that the Javascriptum doesn't always do what it wants. Then he continues to run around in circles and mindlessly tries to light his Tabaccum, but I grunt and point to Primus and Secundus; that doesn't have to be the Benzadrine from the Tabaccum!

Apollonia can't wait any longer and bursts out: "Remember, when Grandma Constantia died, everyone was looking for her diamond!" Now it hit me like a blow. This story was so annoying that I could still lose my temper today. And this is how it happened:

Good old Constantia lived in that part of the empire that was occupied by evil eastern peoples and whose peaceful inhabitants suffered a lot under their rule - especially when it came to the Pekunia, their

possessions. Those who had once been rich patricians were now poor penniless, the devaluation of money and the expropriations did their part. Constantia had a small bag from her husband (Quintilius Primus). sesterces, and when she felt her end approaching, she called me, her grandson with the most financial interests, and asked if it was true that the best way to invest your money was to invest it in diamonds and then hide them. I said yes, because that's what we all do, and have always done. But when I asked Constantia how many sesterces it was, I had to tell her, to my chagrin, that for that amount of money, it was unfortunately not worth taking the somewhat arduous detour via diamonds. Politely and considerately, I did not tell her that her sesterces would have been enough to pay for a single orgy for two at the "Drago Imperialis Pekinensis".

When I learned some time later that Mother Constantia's last hour had come, I immediately rode off with Apollonia and visited her in the hospice. When we arrived, she was already half with the gods and talking to her ancestors, probably no longer noticing our earthly presence. Sometimes she saw her Quintilius Primus through me and spoke to him, stammering blissful words of love until tears ran down my cheeks. Apollonia and I kept quiet and rode back home in silence.

But as soon as she was laid in her poor mausoleum and the grave flowers began to wilt, my aunt Olivia from Baleum Mallorquiniae called me and asked if dear Grandma Constantia had passed away safely and happily. I am delighted to hear her call, as she too was very affected by our grandma's death; we talk about all the things that people talk about at times like these. After a while, Olivia gets to the point.

"Say, do you know anything about a diamond? Did Grandma give you a diamond?" I can hear in her voice that she is a little embarrassed by the materialistic content of her question. I answer truthfully: "No, I don't know anything about it, and she didn't give me anything like that." I see her in front of me, a half-expected disappointment spreading across her face.

"Olivia," I say, "Grandma Constantia was as poor as a church mouse. She just didn't know it, because sesterces don't weigh as

much today as they did back then, in her day. She asked me about investing in diamonds, but I advised her against it.”

“But I thought - we all thought she had a diamond and we thought she might have entrusted it to you.” Olivia was a proud patrician before she became an impoverished proud patrician and it was hard for her to admit that she had followed a rumor. I declared once again that I had not received a diamond from Grandma Constantia, because where would the impoverished Grandma Constantia have one from, and that was the end of the matter for me.

It was not. Because years later my mother also went to her ancestors, I often visited her in her sickbed and talked to her until she was already half with the gods and began to talk to her ancestors. So I stayed away and mourned until she too died in her poor small mausoleum and the grave flowers slowly began to wilt.

A few days later, Aunt Cassiope calls from Lugdunum. I’m happy to hear from her, because she’s also very upset about the death of our mother — her sister — we talk about all the things that relatives talk about at times like these. After a while, Cassiope gets to the point.

“Tell me, do you know anything about a diamond? Did your mother give you a diamond?” I can tell from her voice that she’s a little embarrassed about the materialistic content of her question. “You mean Grandma Constantia’s diamond, right?” I ask cautiously and she says yes.

I answer truthfully: “No, I know. nothing about it, she gave me nothing of the sort and as far as I know, it doesn’t even exist.” I can see her in front of me, a half-expected disappointment spreading across her face.

“Well, it was just a question. It could have been,” she says resignedly and steers the conversation in a different direction. I return to the diamond again and explain to Aunt Cassiope that since Grandma Constantia’s death, this has been repeated in loose succession with every death and is gradually getting on my sandal laces. There is no Constantia diamond, and that’s that!

István, who was still pacing restlessly, suddenly stopped and interrupted my train of thought. “I’ll leave the program for now,” he said to the wall, “and maybe continue with the oldest ancestors, that’s more productive. I’ve discovered an interesting branch of the family, the Weiss family from Budapest.” And after a while he added in a didactic manner, as if we Romans were uneducated barbarians: “Budapest, the capital of Pannonia.” He looked at me questioningly. “Are you joining in?”

I had actually already played enough with the grandchildren and now left them to Apollonia, who retreated to the marble bench with them and tried to teach them Mices, although I had repeatedly explained to her that they were still much too young for this dice game.

Then I sat next to István and together we rushed through the old data sets, trying to sort his ancestors in order. But with the very oldest, Weiss, we got no further. “Perhaps they emigrated to America!” I muttered to myself after a while, without thinking much about it. But István eagerly took up the thread.

“America! Aah! We should look into that right away!” and his fingers flew quickly over the keys. Yes, someone had emigrated from Budapest, a Dr. Samuel Weiss and his family, in 1878. In silence we read the lists of names that the Imperial and Royal State Archives had meticulously listed.

Istán cleared his throat and said: “No, not what you think, dear Quincy! There’s definitely a catch, just like with that grandmother who had the same name as the Hungarian kings but turned out not to be my grandmother at all!” I remembered that that grandfather had been a cunning bigamist and had left behind a number of grandmothers as well as many broken hearts... But I couldn’t help but say under my breath, “It seems to be in your blood.”

We printed out what we had found and arranged the pages. It was an amazing and exciting story that unfolded before us. In the middle of it all, he asked me what I thought about Houdini, so I dug everything together from my memory: American escape artist, daring stunts and famous performances where he frees himself from chains

under water, until one day his jealous wife switches the key and he drowns miserably in the ice-cold water, ...

“Easy, Romans, easy!” István interrupts my flow of speech, “not a word of it is true!” Then he leans back, takes another deep puff on his tobacco and then begins to tell his story.

On March 24, 1874, Ehrich Weisz was born in Budapest as the third of five children of Rabbi Dr. Samuel Mayer Weisz and his wife Cecilia Steiner Weisz. Four years later, the Weisz family emigrated to America, where the immigration authorities changed their name to Weiss. Weiss settled in Appleton, Wisconsin and became the spiritual leader of a new, German-speaking Zionist movement, as he spoke fluent German in addition to Hungarian and Yiddish.

The young Ehrich soon Americanized his name to Erik, was already delivering newspapers at the age of 7 and took on a variety of odd jobs until he was 13 to help out his family, which was still very poor. But his interest was in magic and magic tricks; he first admired the traveling magician Dr. Lynn and later the Frenchman Jean Robert Houdin. The deciding factor was an apprenticeship with a blacksmith (a locksmith who also made locks and keys), which he later abandoned. Little Erik quickly learned how to pick locks. The nine-year-old made his first appearance on October 28, 1883 as the rope and trapeze artist “Ehrich, Prince of the Air.” Not even 13, Erik appeared on small stages as “Erik the Great” and ran away from home, followed the traveling people (circus), and only returned to his family a year later, who were now living in New York.

After his father’s death (October 5, 1892), Erik worked as an errand boy, electrician, cutter and “girl for everything” at the tie manufacturer Richter & Sons, became a photographer and again an apprentice to a locksmith. At the same time, he kept himself physically fit for his artistic performances and won several sports medals in running and swimming. At the age of 15, he read the autobiography of Jean Robert Houdin: his life suddenly changed. Full of enthusiasm for the then world champion in escape, he called himself Houdini, Harry Houdini.

At the end of 1892 he appeared with his brother Theo “Dash” (who later became famous under the stage name Hardeen) in a show called “Metamorphosis Illusion - The Houdini Brothers”; they gradually worked their way up and appeared at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, as well as at the P. T. Barnum Museum Circus and the Welch Brothers Circus. Over the course of his life, Houdini performed 11,000 “Metamorphosis” performances.

In June 1894, he performed in Coney Island, where he fell in love with one of the artists from the Floral Sisters, Bess. Two weeks later, he married 18-year-old Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner (June 22, 1894). Bess soon replaced Theo in the performances, who began a solo career as Hardeen, the Iron Man.

From 1898, Houdini developed incredible numbers with strait-jackets and handcuffs, and was soon nicknamed “The Handcuff King.” He never failed. His acquaintance with the vaudeville agent Martin Beck soon brought him out of the suburban squalor. Beck arranged for him to make large-scale newspaper reports, and even to carry out daring prison escapes in front of the eyes of the state police and paying audiences, of course. His fee soared to \$125 a week, and soon his fame spread beyond the USA, so that in 1900 he began his first European tour (in London). His weekly fee settled at \$1,200 after he escaped from Scotland Yard custody while handcuffed. In Paris, he jumped off a bridge over the Seine while tied up and fooled the horrified spectators by hiding behind a bridge pillar for minutes. He then not only allows himself to be handcuffed, but is chained to a chair in a straitjacket and pushed off the bridge - his fee increases to \$2,000. Houdini buys a beautiful house in New York with Bess.

In 1906, he allows himself to be artfully tied up and chained up in the death cell of Charles Guiteau, the murderer of US President Garfield, and escapes: the whole of America goes wild with excitement. He jumps off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, chained up, handcuffed and weighted down with a 75-pound iron ball. When he demonstrated on January 27, 1908 in St. Louis how one could escape hanging headfirst in a giant water jug despite chains, a straitjacket and handcuffs, an imitator drowned. Houdini was shocked and wrote article after article in specialist magazines

and began to write his autobiography, in which he described some of his tricks in detail. At the same time, he spoke out against all occultism and the con artists involved; this interest stayed with him until the end of his life. Houdini exposed fraudsters several times, which also brought him worldwide attention.

He bought a plane in Hamburg for \$5,000 and in 1910, during a tour of Australia lasting several months, he set the first Australian flight record (in Diggers Rest) - the 17th flight record in history. For whatever reason, Houdini never flew again after that.

He invented ever more dizzying stunts, escaping from water tanks at night or from the barrel of a huge cannon just a fraction of a second before it was fired. His daring game with death, a very realistic death, was not insignificant for his fame. His most spectacular invention was the Chinese Water Torture Cell, which he was able to drag out so nerve-rackingly that it took him almost 100 minutes to complete. Soon and quite persistently, the rumor that he had died in the process arose, and in some places it still persists today. Increasingly daring combinations of ropes stretched between skyscrapers or ropes dangling from the world's tallest buildings, from which Master Houdini hung and freed himself from chains, handcuffs and straitjackets, brought him constant headlines in the newspapers and a considerable income. In 1918, he made the elephant Jenny disappear in the hippodrome in New York City in front of thousands of spectators.

In 1919, Hollywood discovered him, he played several small roles and then made two films himself, with himself as the lead actor; the films were a financial success. Houdini is at the peak of his career and is indisputably the most famous magician of his time.

On October 22, 1926, Houdini performs in Montreal. While he is preparing for the show in the dressing room, he chats with some students from McGill University, where he had given a lecture that afternoon. One of the students, J. Gordon Whitehead, asks him if it is true that he can take any punch to the stomach (like his brother Hardeen, the Iron Man). Before he can answer, he is completely unprepared for three punches to the stomach. Nine days later, on Octo-

ber 31, 1926, Houdini succumbs to internal injuries (peritonitis, to be precise) in Detroit.

I was moved and silent, because what István had unearthed in terms of history, based on a previously undiscovered ancestor named Weiss in Budapest, was something! Admittedly not a jealous murderous wife and a man struggling in death throes in the icy Niagara Falls, but ...

“Stay cool, Romans!” István warned me, guessing my thoughts. “Our Weiss certainly have nothing to do with the American Weiss, believe me! There must have been several more Weiss in Budapest!” There followed a long pause in which I remained thoughtfully silent and he blew his tobacco smoke.

Suddenly he slaps his thighs, looks at me with a grin and starts laughing loudly. “That’s it!” he gasps every now and then, “that’s it!” And while I look at him, worried and questioning, the words slowly come over his lips, interrupted by a booming laugh: “That’s it: the Houdini diamond! It’s there, it’s not there! Disappeared — reappeared — disappeared!” I’m usually quick to understand, but now it takes a while until I can follow his train of thought from Harry Houdini to Aunt Agrippina’s call from earlier.

Then I laugh too.

So much for the contribution from good old Quintilius, dear readers. How could he know that sometimes at night, when everyone is already asleep, I sneak to my safe and take the beautiful, large diamond out of the leather bag to admire its sparkle in the moonlight...

The thing with the pheasant

The manuscript was actually already finished. Actually, because unfortunately the most important thing was missing: the title. I only briefly considered keeping the previous title “My colorful fur” from the Internet and consulted with family and friends, but even the brilliant working title “I wish I could write like Kishon” was rejected after the first discussion with the in-house lawyer. I continued to rack my brains, and the vacation date was getting closer and closer...

I had decided months before to go to Venice for a few days with my youngest daughter Julia. Oh, these children grow up all too quickly in our fast-moving world and that’s why we have to be careful. As a father, you have to make up for all the holidays you have missed in good time, because one day she will also leave the nest and prefer to spend her holidays with people her own age rather than with her elders. Julia’s adulthood is deceptive, because I am still successfully clinging to the last piece of my own youth...

Venice. I breathe in the smell of the wonderful lagoon city, enjoy the autumn mist and spend hours with Julia on the vaporetto, that’s what the public transport boats are called, through the canals. With a bit of luck, we get the best seats in the bow, let the wind blow around our noses and look, look. Sometimes something appears that means something to both of us, then we break the silence and talk in a low voice. Yes, look, over there: the small palazzo with the green roof garden, your mother would definitely like that!

We were just imagining how we would convert the lottery millions we still have to win into palazzi, green roof gardens and fast, maneuverable boats, when a passenger leans forward in his seat and says in a low voice: “From the sound of his voice, that could be István!”

I look at him in amazement - the short, grey hair, the angular features, the sharp, sparkling eyes behind the glasses - heavens, that’s...! “And you are Christian N.N.” I say, although I didn’t know

the name at the beginning of the sentence and had to look it up from the dusty file in my brain box.

The joy of seeing a roommate from boarding school again after 33 years. The all too quickly approaching final destination forces a quick decision: we would meet at such and such a time for dinner together, then he and his family would disappear into the crowd of St. Mark's Square, Julia and I would continue our journey to the lagoon islands. It warms my heart to have seen this friend again, my mouth overflows and I tell Julia again and again about our time together at boarding school. Soon I'm only talking about Winnetou, because that was Christian's "war name" among our friends. And I'll call myself to order again, because Christian's wife and daughter had looked at me very strangely when I said Winnetou to him for the first time (again). No, we weren't children anymore: I would probably have to switch to Christian!

In total, it was two evenings, because the first wasn't long enough to make up for 33 years. You can probably imagine that the table order was unspoken and completely automatic: we two grey-heads sat together, opposite us Julia, Winnetou's wife and her daughter tried to talk about common topics when they just couldn't follow our rambling any more. It wasn't until the end of the second evening that our initial curiosity was satisfied enough for us both to break free from our isolation and finally all talk together.

Julia had, in all innocence and honesty, answered the ladies' question about what "other things" her father was doing, mentioning sailing and writing books. I had only half listened, but the conversation threatened to turn to "books" and I have something against that: it's bad luck to talk about a book that hasn't even been printed yet! So, like a mouse, I looked for a hole to slip through.

Not for the first time in my life, it turns out to be a mistake to start again from the past, usually with "Oh yes, I wanted to ask you...". But since I have not yet reached the age where not making mistakes is considered wisdom, I started: "Oh yes, I wanted to ask you, Winnie, what do you do in your free time, what is your hobby?"

Winnetou's answer was initially unconvincing, because the fact that he had taken over his father's hunting and become a hunter seemed entirely legitimate to me, especially since my questions revealed that he was highly professional and conscientious about the game and the game population. "Not like before," grinned Winnetou and his wife looked up attentively, "when we still caught pheasants, right?" His daughter and Julia immediately fell silent and also looked at us expectantly.

"Oh?" said his wife slowly.

"Yes, and what about the pheasant?" asked her daughter.

Julia looked at me in surprise: "Pheasant?" and her eyebrows twitched upwards questioningly.

"Well, I don't know anything, I wasn't there and I have an ir-refutable alibi," I choked out and tried to avert the inevitable, although I knew painfully well that I could no longer stop the avalanche. Winnetou misinterpreted my light kick to his shin and said lightly: "Oh, come on, that's long since out of date!"

You know my avalanche theory: sweaty, you smoke - finally! - the summit cigarette, flick the ash down, which falls into the snow and forms a small, dirty-grey lump, the small lump rolls down the valley and grows bigger and bigger, soon tearing huge snow slabs from the slope and then the Arlberg Express derails below, dozens of people die - something like that, anyway.

Now there's no stopping it more, the ladies first ask, then they vehemently demand the story about the pheasant. Winnetou tells it (in my opinion, a little too matter-of-factly and definitely too dryly) and finally nudges me in the ribs: "Well, that's how it was, wasn't it?"

I nod silently and think of the Arlberg Express.

For years I wrote my stories and let my children read everything - after all, it was all true, maybe a little embellished here or there, but that's just how poetic freedom works - but of course I didn't write about everything that happened over time, everyone still has their lit-

tle secrets! And now Julia looks at me silently and with big, wide eyes in which I can read the headline: “MY FATHER, THE POACHER!”

Winnetou looks from Julia to me, then he clears his throat and says: “What, you haven’t told her that yet?” I say no, shake my head unhappily and think that there is nothing I hate more than a book that ends like this: To be continued!

Author's notes

The author should probably first point out that all people, actions and events, wherever they did not actually happen or befall the author, are fictitious and therefore fictional. Any resemblance to living, dead or undead people would therefore be purely coincidental and, in the latter case, extremely surprising.

It should not be surprising that the people in all autobiographical texts are actually alive or have lived - even if, for good or not so good reasons, their names have been changed here and there. One should probably point out in the same breath that some of these real or invented events, viewed in retrospect - and not infrequently under the influence of alcohol, which the author contritely admits and warns his possibly young readers not to imitate - have been slightly or seriously distorted, which can be attributed to forgetfulness, a desire to ramble or simply the poetic license of writing.

However, it was by no means intended to mislead the esteemed reader in any way or to portray the author as a special hero or artist of life, although he would like to see himself as a special hero and/or artist of life. If it weren't for the irritating fact that the former usually lie in beautiful marble tombs and the latter quite often sit in prison.

Thirdly, the author should mention that this book is a collection of texts, some of which have already been published on his website and in computer magazines, which will cause a certain amount of frustration for the loyal reader. As paradoxical as it may sound, this pressure gives the unfaithful, i.e. new reader more pleasure than the loyal reader who already knows the texts from the newspaper or the Internet.

It is to be hoped that one day a psychology student will scientifically treat this phenomenon of the reader-psychological paradox and its effect on authorship at the beginning of the twenty-first century (including propaedeutics and proof of profitability for the publishing industry) and thus gain a master's degree or even a doctorate.

And since the publisher has already been mentioned here, the author should also mention, fourthly, that he was fed up with canvassing at good and not so good publishers from the very beginning and that he therefore took the - probably not so - unconventional route of self-publishing; despite the lame PC software and stubborn laser printer, he tackled the text again and again until he was mentally and electronically exhausted, until it was typeset and, thanks to the help of a publisher friend, could be printed and given to the bookbinder.

Thanks must also be given, quite undoubtedly. The author himself another time, but first of all his children and the women who shared his life with him (and he shared his life with them, too).

His life also meant reading his texts.

To praise heartily.

To criticize carefully.

Very carefully.

It hit the children particularly hard, without a doubt. Usually when an exciting TV series was on or friends were inviting them to chat on the Internet, the author would appear at the door with sweat-stained glasses and flowing hair (this one was thinning, though) to ask his dear children for the urgent service of proofreading. Urgently to ask. Naturally, therefore, thanks must also be given to the video recorder, which recorded the exciting TV series at the same time as the children were doing their father's service.

Thanks also to everyone who was friends with the author (at least up to that point) and who read his texts and helped to shape them with their opinions. It would be right to thank each individual in particular, but the author admits his mistakes and simply refrains from making them. Those who are still his friends know this anyway, and the rest can go to hell.

Unconventionally, the author will now also thank the characters in the story (even if they are only fictional), simply because he has never heard of an author who has thanked his protagonists (although this

may also be due to our author's hearing loss, admittedly). Or did William Shakespeare write a single word of thanks to his Mercutio or Agatha Christie to her old Hercule Poirot in their book, eh?

There you go!

Finally, the author has the honor of thanking all those who he met on his journey through life and who have remained in his memory for this or that small or large event (or who have given him one or another strange thought or even the idea for a funny, bizarre or serious story).