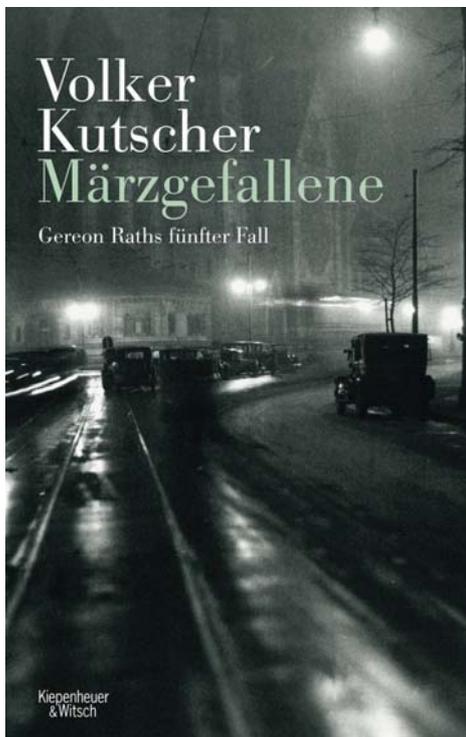


Sample Translation (chapters 1-5, pp. 9-39)

# **Those Who Fell In March** **by Volker Kutscher**

Translated by Will Hobson

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*'Ah, you know, I can't eat as much as I'd like to throw up.'*

Max Liebermann on the evening of 30 January, 1933, when he saw the SA's torchlit  
parade through the Brandenburg Gate

Part One

**FIRE**

Saturday 25 February–Thursday 2 March, 1933

*There once was a hussar, loyal and true  
Who loved his girl a whole year through;  
One year, then the next, and on, and longer  
Loving her without end, his love ever stronger.*

18<sup>th</sup> Century German Folksong

***Fire:** a phenomenon produced by the simultaneous  
generation of light and heat. When occurring in solids and  
porous fuels, it is called embers, in gases flame.*

Meyers Encyclopaedia, 1905

The man was sitting by a steel column in the shadow of the elevated railway, his chin sunk on his chest as if he had just nodded off for a second. Huddled up in an old, patched army coat, puttees and a pair of gloves full of holes, a thick woolly hat pulled down low over his eyes, one might have thought he was sleeping off his drink.

Wilhelm Böhm had to hold on to his bowler hat, which a bitter, icy wind was trying to snatch off his head. They were directly under Nollendorfplatz station, a stone's throw from the stairs, but clearly no one had noticed the man for days; no one, at any rate, who thought an inanimate body lying on the street in sub-zero temperatures merited a call to the police. Böhm held his breath as he squatted down: the dead man looked like someone who reeked, a real vagrant, one of the numerous homeless who populated Berlin's streets and whose ranks seemed to swell by the year. And, sure enough, Oberkommissar Böhm had to hold his scarf over his nose to be able to breathe, because, despite the cold, the dead man gave off the stench of someone who'd been living rough for years, a mixture of sweat, urine, and alcohol.

Pigeon droppings covered the motionless body in a thin, blotchy layer, from the man's shoes to his woolly hat. There were cooing sounds overhead, in the steel beams. Scores of pigeons—a regular colony—were perched on the struts and constantly marking their terrain: the pavement all around was filthy as well. No wonder passers-by, or at least the ones who knew the area,

avoided this spot and preferred to walk under the elevated railway elsewhere.

A Schupo who patrolled Nollendorfplatz on his daily beat had finally—after how many days?—discovered the pool of blood under the lifeless body and called in Central Homicide. Oberwachtmeister Breitzke still radiated satisfaction at having got shot of the dead man without needing to put his station to any trouble. No one in the police force was champing at the bit to handle the death of one of the unwashed homeless, and Station 174 was no exception.

With his scarf over his mouth and nose, Böhm studied the dead man. A thin stream of blood had run from his left nostril to the ground, forming a pool that had already coagulated, or frozen, it was hard to tell in these temperatures. Where it had run over the coat the blood had mostly seeped into the heavy material.

Böhm gingerly searched the dead man's pockets and found an old, extremely tattered military passbook, which was even singed at one corner, as if its owner had tried to burn it once, holding a lighter to its edge before thinking twice. The Oberkommissar unfolded the worn, grimy document. The reservist *Heinrich Wosniak*, according to the details on the stained cover, *born on 20 March, 1894, in Hagen, Westphalia* had joined the *1<sup>st</sup> Guard Reserve Infantry Regiment* on the Eastern Front in August 1915, shortly before its transfer to Flanders. He had survived the hell of the trenches and yet had still died in his army coat. The majority of Berlin's beggars wore items of uniform of some description, uniforms that the men, who were often horrifically crippled, hadn't taken off since the war. They had sacrificed their health for the fatherland and now there was no one to look after them. If anything, their attempts at begging provoked irritation

rather than sympathy; certainly not gratitude for the fact that they had risked their necks fighting for the patriotic beliefs of the people who had stayed at home.

‘Shall I start securing the evidence, Oberkommissar?’

Böhm looked up. There stood Kriminalsekretär Gräf, one of a grand total of two men he had brought with him to Nollendorfplatz, his breath forming little clouds in the cold February air. They hadn’t even given him a stenographer, just the detective and a Kommissaranwärter, a candidate for detective inspector. The Oberkommissar jerked his bulky body upright and struggled to his feet. Once out of the immediate atmosphere of the dead man, he could at last breathe freely again.

‘Get started, Gräf. Kronberg’s people are still in Wedding; we can’t count on them showing up today.’ Böhm pointed to the evidence collection kit in the sergeant’s hand. ‘Which means we’ll have to make do with what we’ve got. Have a look round first to see if you can find anything. Cigarette butts, footprints, things like that. Luckily not many people pass this way so anything on the cobbles could be a clue.’

Gräf set down the case and opened the locks with a snap. ‘What about fingerprints?’ he asked.

‘I’ll take care of those. The girders are a possibility. If there are any prints at all, that is. In this weather does anyone even poke their nose out of doors without putting on gloves?’ Böhm looked round. ‘Incidentally, where’s Steinke got to?’

‘He’s probably having problems getting the camera out of the boot.’

Reinhold Gräf set to work with a stack of marker tags and a handful of evidence containers bags, while Böhm turned to the Schupo.

‘Heinrich Wosniak: does that name mean anything to you?’

‘Can’t say as I know any of the names of the riff-raff that hang around here.’

‘Have you seen the dead man before?’

‘Eh?’

‘I mean, this is your beat. Did he sit around anywhere near here, perhaps?’

Do any begging? Sleep on a park bench? That sort of thing.’

Oberwachtmeister Breitzke shrugged his shoulders. ‘Got to see his face first.’

Böhm nodded. The dead man’s head was sunk so deep into his chest, and his matted hair hung so low over his eyes, one could barely make out his features.

‘We can’t move him until the evidence has been secured. I’m going to have to ask you to wait until then.’

‘Hang on a minute!’ Breitzke suddenly sounded noticeably less bored as he pointed at the scars showing under the dead man’s cap. ‘That could be Potato. He hangs around on Nolle, over by the U-Bahn, cadging off people.’

‘I thought you didn’t know any of the characters round here by name?’

‘It’s a nickname, isn’t it?’

‘Potato...’ said Böhm. ‘So you don’t know his real name?’

‘I just said that, didn’t I?’

‘When we’ve taken some photographs, have a good look at his face. Maybe he’s just who you think he is.’

Looking less than thrilled, Oberwachtmeister Breitzke nodded.

Böhm heard someone cursing under his breath. Komissaranwärter Steinke was approaching carrying the photographic equipment, with the unwieldy camera clamped under his arm and the heavy tripod on his shoulder. Would this law graduate, who had gone straight to the Castle from the lecture hall, ever be any help? Böhm doubted it. Even after a year in the Kripo, he still

acted like a raw recruit; the only areas he had really mastered were ranks and pay grades. Nevertheless Steinke had every chance of passing the exams and, as Kommissar, becoming the superior of men like Gräf, who unfortunately lacked the ambition to put himself forward, even though he was by far the better criminologist. Böhm's only hope was that Steinke might flunk the exams anyway. The Alex had more than its fair share of incompetent detective inspectors as it was.

'At last. There you are, Steinke.'

'I feel like a packhorse,' said the trainee and dropped the tripod on the ground. Then he went over to the dead man and gave the lifeless bundle a quick kick, as if it were a dog that had been run over.

'Oi, what do you think you're doing?'

'Just wanted to check the down-and-out's really dead and not just plastered.'

'If he wasn't dead, we wouldn't be here, would we?' said Böhm. 'Don't they teach you that the first rule of a crime scene is that you never touch anything until the evidence has been secured?'

'Yes, but...'

'Not to mention: show the dead more respect!'

'If I may, superintendent, he's a vagrant, a... tramp. I wonder why we have to come out at all for his sort.'

'What's that supposed to mean? That someone of *his sort* doesn't deserve an investigation into the circumstances of his death?'

'I was just saying....'

'Don't just say. Set up the camera and do your job. We want to get somewhere with this before we're all pensioned off.'

For a moment it looked as if Steinke had more to say. He opened his mouth just as a train pulled into the station overhead and the thunder of steel rails

made it impossible to hear anything. The trainee made a dismissive gesture and began to unfold the tripod.

Böhm got the black powder, brush and adhesive tape from the evidence collection kit and began meticulously dusting the girders. He didn't find any prints near the body but there were two in good condition and a half-smudged one about one-and-a-half metres up. He had just started lifting the prints with tape when Steinke released the shutter for the first time. The rivets on the girders reflected the flash and for the first time, in the unnaturally brilliant glare, the dead man's pallor looked genuinely deathly for a moment, rather than just the result of drink.

Böhm took the fingerprints over to the murder wagon and labelled them. Sitting in the comfortable back seat, he glanced through the window at Gräf, who had just picked up a cigarette butt with tweezers and was conscientiously marking the spot, and then at Steinke, who was listlessly working the camera as if he still didn't see why they'd come out in the first place.

'And you're meant to get a detective inspector out of that,' muttered the Oberkommissar, shaking his head as he bagged up the first fingerprint.

'These days you just have to be in the right party, then your career's smooth sailing.'

Böhm gave a start and turned round. Near the murder wagon stood Doctor Magnus Schwartz, as spruce as ever, his black leather doctor's bag in his right hand.

'You shouldn't talk like that, doctor,' Böhm said, jerking his chin in the direction of Steinke who was fiddling with the camera some way off. 'You never know what young people will overhear these days. Or where it will end up.'

‘In that case you should be more careful too, my dear Böhm. Personally, I refuse to let anyone make me watch my tongue. And besides, the nightmare of the brownshirts will soon be over. The elections are in a week.’

‘Let’s hope so, for God’s sake,’ said Böhm.

The likes of Steinke, who had wasted no time joining the National Socialist Student League at university, had the upper hand these days. And Dr. Schwartz wasn’t the only one who hoped that would soon change with the national elections. After all Germany was still a democracy, however much the Nazis prattled on about a national uprising.

Schwartz put down his case and looked round. ‘You’re not exactly out in force today,’ he said.

‘I’m glad they at least gave me the murder wagon so I didn’t have to take the bike. Even if they didn’t let me have anyone from forensics. The IS has got its hands full at the moment.’

‘Well, what can one do?’ said Schwartz. ‘A lot is going on these days. Another election campaign, and Germany has never been as sickly as it is now. Far worse than any flu epidemic.’ He pointed to the corpse. ‘This fellow doesn’t seem to be a victim of politics though, does he?’

‘No, nor of the flu.’

‘You’ve already established that? So what do you need me for?’

‘Best have a quick look at him all the same. He didn’t just freeze to death either.’

Böhm and the forensic pathologist went over to the corpse, which Steinke was bending over to take close-ups.

‘I think that’s enough, Steinke. Let the doctor do his job now.’

The Kommissaranwärter obeyed with alacrity. Oberwachtmeister Breitzke, who had waited patiently, saw his chance. ‘Excuse me, Oberkommissar,’ he

said, 'but before the doctor...I mean, you said I should have a closer look at the dead man when he'd been photographed...'

'Yes?'

'Because...' Breitzke looked at his pocket watch. 'I should start thinking about getting back to my rounds.'

Böhm gave him a hard look. 'Fine,' he said, 'he's all yours.' Carefully taking hold of the dead man's hair, he lifted up his head that was lolling to one side on his chest.

It seemed as if Heinrich Wosniak was looking at them almost reproachfully though his dead eyes. The right side of his face was scarred and bore an unappealing resemblance to a shrivelled potato. His right ear was barely recognisable as an ear at all, while his right eye had no eyebrow. The man looked as if half the skin on his face had been cobbled together from scraps. But the bitter expression he had worn to his death was clearly recognisable.

'Yep, that's Potato,' Breitzke said, unmoved. 'Just like I told you. Can I go now?'

'The nickname fits,' said Böhm. 'What left the poor fellow so badly disfigured?'

'A French flamethrower, maybe? At any rate he looked like that the first time I chased him off Nolle.'

'You chased him off?'

'Sometimes he harangued people too much. You've got to step in then.'

Böhm nodded. 'Off you go on your rounds now, corporal. Berlin has to be kept safe.'

Breitzke saluted and was turning away with a grave expression when Böhm called out after him. 'And make sure I get your written report at the Alex today, please.'

Breitzke saluted for a second time and then hurried off.

Dr. Schwartz bent down to the dead man.

‘Bad burns. Second or third degree.’

‘A war souvenir?’

‘No, the scarring’s not that old. If you ask me, he got them two or, at most, three years ago.’

The pathologist took a magnifying glass out of his doctor’s bag and a small torch which he shone in the dead man’s nose.

Böhm watched him for a while, growing ever more impatient the longer the pathologist remained silent. He shifted from foot to foot but refrained from asking the question that was on the tip of his tongue.

Schwartz, who in the meantime had put the torch between his teeth to have both hands free, muttered something incomprehensible. Finally he got up and packed away his equipment.

‘I’m not certain,’ he said, ‘but I wouldn’t be surprised if someone hadn’t rammed a knitting needle up this poor fellow’s nose and into his brain.’

‘A knitting needle?’

‘Not necessarily a knitting needle. But something like that, a long sharp object. Simple, but effective.’

‘An accident maybe? Was he trying to clean some dirt out of his nose with an unsuitable implement?’

‘I don’t want to offend the dead man. But first he doesn’t look like someone who thought about cleanliness for a moment, and secondly he’d still have to be holding the incriminating article. Or at least it would have to be lying around here somewhere, as long as a third party wasn’t involved, that is.’

‘What about time of death?’

Schwartz looked at the body with its layer of hoarfrost and pigeon droppings like a sort of blotchy icing. 'Hard to say in temperatures like this. He could have been lying there for days without the body starting to decompose. A frozen body simply doesn't decay.'

'So it's the same story: a definite answer after the autopsy.'

'I don't want to give you any false hopes, Oberkommissar.' Schwartz looked sceptical. 'The chances of an autopsy providing more accurate information in this case are unfortunately slim.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I could ask the weather service for the temperatures over the last few days, and try to take that into account. But even then an exact estimate of the time of death would hardly be possible. The man may have been lying here for anywhere between a day or a week.'

'Hmm.' Böhm looked disappointed.

'Witnesses are your best bet. Ask passers-by: maybe that way you'll find out how long the poor devil has been lying here dead, or motionless at least.

Damn it...'

The doctor cursed. One of the pigeons cooing overhead in the struts had left a light patch on his dark winter overcoat. Schwartz pulled out an immaculate white handkerchief and dabbed at the mess, but without much success. The spot became a white smudge on his left shoulder.

'If pigeons could talk, my dear Böhm,' said Schwartz, 'then you'd be one step nearer to solving your puzzle. But unfortunately they can only coo and shit.'

Böhm was too busy suppressing a smile to say anything.

'I suggest we get the body moved immediately,' said the forensic doctor, 'it's too dangerous for me here. I'd rather carry on in Hannoversche Strasse. Pigeons aren't admitted there.'

Böhm nodded and, looking at the corpse, scrutinized the thin layer of pigeon droppings covering the dead man. He wondered whether the pigeons mightn't be of some use to them all the same.

2

*'Who let a sparra, a sparra, a sparra... in the parla?'*

Willi Ostermann's song scratched out of the loudspeakers, drowning out the hubbub in the atrium of Tietz's department store as crowds of people flocked towards the escalators. A resourceful sales assistant had hooked up an electric record player to the intercom, so that even in Cologne's largest department store one couldn't escape the Kölsch hit.

Hearing the old stalwart Ostermann singing over the din of the shoppers, Rath felt as if he'd never been away. The peculiar electricity that charged Cologne's air in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday instantly made him feel at home. How long since he'd last felt that? How many years had he been living in a city where all this was unknown? Only now as he felt it again did he realise he'd missed the carnival fever. Even the inescapable Ostermann's songs.

The mannequins in Tietz's entrance hall were rigged out as gypsies, Mexicans, musketeers and clowns; they wore striped trousers and glittery jackets, false noses and gaudily coloured little hats, which were festooned with streamers and confetti. The costumed dummies gazed stoically at the people thronging past them, pushing their way through to shelves of wigs, masks and make-up, and clothes' rails hung with pointed hats, skimpy dresses and factory-made costumes. A feeling almost of last-minute panic filled the department store; in two days it was Rose Monday.

‘Nothing too crazy,’ said Rath. ‘Nothing original.’

‘You won’t find anything original in Tietz even if you try,’ said the blond-haired man at his side, with a sceptical look. ‘Everything you see here is going to be worn a thousand times over in the next few days.’

The eyes under the brim of the elegant felt hat crinkled with laughter. Paul’s face was almost permanently laughing, even if his mouth wasn’t. Sometimes Rath thought that his friend essentially observed the world and its everyday madness with a mocking distance. He had known Paul Wittkamp since childhood, since the Rath family had moved out to Klettenberg a few years before the war, and there was no one he knew better. Even though they’d hardly been able to see each other in the last few years, a look was always enough for them to know where they stood with each other.

Rath stopped in front of a shelf on which false noses of every imaginable kind awaited the shoppers in neat rows. Ostermann had given way to The Monacos, and now ‘There Once was a Hussar’ was blaring out of the speakers.

‘The main thing is that no one recognises me,’ said Rath, rootling through the false noses.

‘What are you up to?’ Paul wagged his index finger. ‘You should behave yourself, you’re going to be a married man soon.’

‘“Soon” being the operative word,’ said Rath and reached for the biggest rubber nose he could find. ‘But first it’s time to celebrate carnival. Like in the old days.’

He didn’t say the real reason he wanted to go unrecognised in the hurly-burly of carnival: his fear that he would be discovered in Cologne by one of the LeClerks reporters, and everything would start again. The headlines after the incident on Neusser Strasse had hit him much harder than he had

admitted to anyone at the time, even Paul. He hadn't recovered his peace of mind until he had got to Berlin.

Lost in thought, Rath stared at the rubber nose, an unbelievable hooter with a pair of thick black spectacles and a walrus moustache attached. Without missing a beat he held it up to his face.

'Well? How do I look?'

The moustache tickled a little as he spoke.

'Just add a black hat,' said Paul, 'and a black frock coat, and you'd look as if you'd stepped out of *Der Stürmer*.'

Rath studied himself in the nearest mirror. He really did look like an anti-semitic caricature, like one of the Isidore cartoons the Nazi rag *Der Angriff* had run relentlessly to pillory Bernhard Weiss, the vice president of Berlin's police.

'You think I'll have trouble with the SA?'

Paul shrugged his shoulders. 'More likely with a Jew who feels he's having his leg pulled.'

'But there are thousands of noses like this,' said Rath, pointing to the shelf.

'Anyone could wear one. And if I don't wear a black hat but something with red and white stripes or whatever, then I'll look like a village idiot, not a hymie.'

'Do whatever you like, Gereon. At any rate I can be sure that in a get-up like that you won't be in danger of turning any ladies' heads. Then at least I won't have to keep an eye on you.'

'Were you planning to?'

'Is your witness supposed to just watch on as you stray from the straight and narrow days before heading up the aisle?'

'Do I look as if that's what I'm after?'

Paul laughed out loud. 'No, definitely not. Not with that nose.' He slapped Rath on the back. 'Get those specs wrapped up smartish and then we'll go home and have a look through the dressing-up box. Unless you still want to go to Cords?'

'Nope,' Rath shook his head. 'I've had enough of department stores for today.'

The entire morning had been spent trailing through shops looking for wedding rings. They'd finally struck lucky in a jewellers on Hohe Strasse and ordered two simple but elegant rings. Paul was going to pick them up and bring them to Berlin for the wedding so there'd be no chance Charly would find them early.

Rath had splashed out on the rings, partly, possibly, to appease his bad conscience. Because his journey to Cologne, though he didn't want to admit it, was a sort of running away. Running away from Berlin, from everyday life, from Charly. After weeks and months of toing and froing, they had finally agreed on a wedding date and the closer it got, the more uncomfortable he felt. So he had gratefully accepted Paul's invitation to celebrate carnival together one more time. Especially as Gennat had been urging him for months to make a start on all the hours of overtime he had accumulated.

At the Schildergasse exit Rath saw a familiar-looking face in the throng outside the big glass doors. The penny took a second to drop. It was a good ten years ago when he was starting out in the Cologne police, which was still under the control of the British occupying forces then, one of his first arrests, a pickpocket: Schürmann, Eduard Schürmann, known as Two Finger Ede. The man had got three years, as far as Rath could remember, a stretch that had clearly not re-integrated him into society. In the throng by the doors,

Ede was standing suspiciously close to a corpulent gentlemen with a bowler hat.

‘Excuse me for a second. We’ll meet up outside.’ Rath thrust his purchases into Paul’s hand and dashed out onto the street. He couldn’t see Ede’s brown hat for a moment but he kept the fat man in sight. The idiot still didn’t seem to have noticed anything. Rath jostled him involuntarily as he pushed past to grab hold of Ede. He put a hand on the pickpocket’s shoulder.

‘Aren’t you getting a bit old for this line of business?’

Eduard Schürmann stopped as if rooted to the spot and turned round. Out of the corner of his eye Rath could see that he was hiding something black behind his back in his left hand.

‘What’s that supposed to mean, mister? Do we know each other?’

‘It’s been a few years but you’ve hardly changed. At least, in your habits.’ Rath gave him a friendly smile. ‘You still prefer the fat ones, eh? Because they’re lumbering?’

Although Ede was clearly making an effort to appear clueless, Rath could see the face under the brown hat was turning a shade paler.

‘Herr Kommissar,’ said Schürmann, with an unsuccessful attempt at a smile, ‘I didn’t recognise you. The word is you’ve hung up your hat.’

‘You clearly haven’t.’ Rath looked the man up and down. ‘Are you working without Raben these days? Or was I too quick for you two?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘The wallet you just took.’ Rath beckoned with his index finger. ‘Best if you hand it over. If you don’t want to pay a visit to the big building next to Cords’.’

Rath pointed to the police headquarters's tower at the other end of Schildergasse, looming up against the grey sky like the keep of a medieval castle.

'No need for that, Herr Kommissar, those days are over. I'm a watchmaker.'

'Ten years ago I had you put away on multiple charges of pickpocketing and you want to tell me that you're now working in the trade you apprenticed in?'

'I was in prison, Herr Kommissar, that's true, and I deserved to be in there too. But when I was inside I swore I'd become a better person. I've got a little shop now. Here...'

Schürmann handed Rath a business card. 'Just because everybody calls me Ede doesn't mean I'm going to be a bad lot until the end of my days. I'm an honest citizen now, ask my wife.'

Rath looked at the card, momentarily nonplussed. This wasn't what he'd expected.

E. Schürmann, Watchmaker

Corner of Unter Krahenbäumen and Eigelstein

'Ede Schürmann,' said Rath, 'not exactly a confidence-inspiring name. Or address.'

'Call me Eduard, that's got more of a watchmaker's ring to it for a start. And as far as the address goes, even round the station people still need watches.'

Paul had come up in the meantime.

'What's wrong,' he asked. 'Do you need any help?'

Rath pointed to the fat man whose bowler hat was already a fair way off in the crowd streaming down Schildergasse between the cars parked on either kerb. 'Do me a favour and tell that man to wait. The fat one with the bowler.'

'Has he committed a crime?'

Rath shook his head, 'The opposite, he's the victim.'

Paul looked briefly from Rath to Ede and then back again as if he was expecting further explanation. When none came, he shrugged and set off.

'My friend will detain the fat man you robbed,' Rath said to Ede, 'and I'll return his wallet.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Here's a suggestion. Either you give me the wallet and all's forgotten. Or us two will take a walk to Krebsgasse and I'll have you strip-searched.'

'I really don't know what wal...' Schürmann stopped short and looked down.

'Do you mean this one maybe?'

On the cobbles, nearer Rath's feet than Ede's, lay a black wallet. Ede made as if to bend down but Rath beat him to it and picked it up. The leather was still warm and soft, as if someone had been holding it in his hand for a while. Rath opened it and found some small change, a ten- and a twenty-mark note, a few discount coupons, and, in a side pocket, one of the identity cards the British had introduced into their zone of occupation. The fat man had been carrying a few pounds less in 1923, but it was clearly his face Rath was looking at. *Wilhelm Klefisch* was written under the passport photograph.

'Someone must have lost that, eh—no wonder in this crowd...'

A hard look was enough to nip Ede's excuses in the bud. Rath put everything back in the wallet and fastened it.

'Don't go getting the wrong impression: I'm not that stupid. The only reason you'll be sitting down for supper with your wife tonight at the usual time is because of my good nature, is that clear?'

'Clear as daylight, Herr Kommissar,' Ede replied, bowing obsequiously.

‘We’ll have our eye on you, Herr Schürmann, so mind your hand doesn’t immediately stray into some stranger’s pocket. You won’t get off so lightly next time.’

Ede remained silent.

‘Do we understand each other?’

‘Of course, Herr Kommissar.’

‘Now clear off.’

Eduard Schürmann bowed again, then did as he was told. Rath went looking for Paul and found him with the fat man who was gesticulating wildly.

‘Wilhelm Klefisch?’ he asked when he reached the pair. The fat man nodded.

‘You’ve lost something, Herr Klefisch,’ said Rath, waving the wallet.

The fat man felt his coat with a baffled look on his face and then gratefully accepted the wallet from Rath.

‘Thank you, kind sir. Where did you find it?’

‘Just over there, outside Tietz’s. People were just trampling on it.’

Klefisch unfastened the black leather strap and counted the notes and coins. Once. Twice. Then a third time.

‘Fifty marks is missing,’ he said finally, looking reproachfully at Rath.

‘Are you sure?’

The fat man nodded. ‘Dead sure. I don’t want to be too hasty voicing any suspicions but...’

The fat man looked imploringly at Paul, whose role in the situation he probably couldn’t entirely fathom. Rath, at any rate, he seemed to take for a thief. Either a very stupid one or one with an especially cunning fiddle.

‘I don’t know what you’re thinking, but...’ Rath pulled out his police identification. ‘If some money really is missing, believe me, I didn’t steal it.’

Klefish studied the I.D. card, still mistrustful. 'But someone must have taken it.'

Yes, thought Rath, and I know who too. The only trouble is he'll be long gone by now.

'We can go to headquarters and report the loss,' he said, 'but as a police officer I can't hold out much hope for you. In the crush over there anyone could have taken the money and put the wallet down. You should be pleased you've still got your papers.'

'Fine, sir, let's drop the whole thing. However, I must insist on taking your name!'

That's what you get for being good-natured these days, thought Rath, and folded Ede's business card which he was still holding into ever smaller squares.

3

Reinhold Gräf came into the office waving the file it had taken him almost three solid hours of rummaging through archives and filing cabinets to find. Böhm looked up from his desk, while Steinke was a picture of indifference. But not even the arrogance of the Kommissaranwärter, who, despite not having taken the exams still thought he was better than him, could spoil the Kriminalsekretär's mood. His spirits had revived since he had found the file marked Wosniak. The dead tramp may have ruined his weekend, which he had been looking forward to spending with Conny, but it was good to know that at least they had a starting point now; at least the work was worth it. Or might be, at any rate.

Fortunately Conny was understanding when their plans were scuppered yet again by an unexpected assignment. You couldn't just take that for granted, and Gräf was grateful. But still, what was he supposed to do? That's just how it was working for the police.

'Our man from Nollendorfplatz is already on record,' he said, not without a certain pride in his voice, and put the file on Böhm's desk.

'Well, I never!' said the Oberkommissar, nodding appreciatively. Higher praise was not to be expected from Böhm.

'Can't say that surprises me, Oberkommissar,' said Steinke in a pointedly casual, almost bored way. 'An anti-social character like that. I could have told you he'd be charged with something.'

'If you are so clairvoyant, Steinke,' said Böhm, 'I wonder why you didn't become chief of police long ago.'

'I'm just saying: rooting through files isn't enough on its own, Oberkommissar. You've got to trust your instincts too.' Steinke tapped his chest. 'I would have bet you anything you like that that tramp was known to the police. The minute I saw his face. With a criminal physiognomy like that you know immediately.'

'Well then,' said Gräf, 'in this case your instinct has deceived you.'

'Why's that? You said he was on record...'

'Heinrich Wosniak,' interrupted Gräf, 'does appear in our files, but not as a suspect.'

'No?' Steinke raised his eyebrows. 'As what then?'

'As a victim.'

Böhm opened the file. 'Arson,' he said.

Steinke got up from his desk and came over.

‘Correct,’ said Gräf. ‘Heinrich Wosniak was the victim of an arson attack that he only just survived.’ He cleared his throat. ‘If I can give you a quick summary?’

Böhm grunted in agreement.

‘So...’ Gräf looked at his notebook. ‘On New Year’s Eve ’31, Heinrich Wosniak was the victim of an arson attack. Seven dead, three serious casualties, one of whom died five days later from his wounds. All of them beggars and homeless. The wooden hut on Bülowplatz they were living in went up like a light.’

‘I remember. It was in the papers. So, one of the survivors from then is our man...’

‘Right. Was our man.’

‘Wasn’t it a child,’ asked Böhm, ‘that started the fire?’

Gräf nodded. ‘Hannah Singer. Born in 1916.’

‘What happened? Was she playing with fireworks?’

‘No,’ Gräf shook his head. ‘It wasn’t an accident. Our boys picked up Hannah Singer outside the burning hut with the matches she’d used to start the fire still at her feet. She had a whole suitcase full; she sold the things.’

‘Why did she do it?’

‘If only we knew.’ Gräf shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the file.

‘There’s a record of every time Hannah Singer was questioned in there. Eleven in total. And not once did she say a single word. The transcripts are each a page-long. Just questions, no answers.’

‘No discernible motive?’

‘No motive, but an interesting detail. Hannah Singer is the daughter of one of the victims.’

‘What?’ said Böhm, wide-eyed.

‘Our boys suspected that might contain the explanation for what she’d done. But what it might be, neither they nor the courts could find out.’

‘Did he assault his daughter?’

‘Heinz Singer,’ said Gräf, ‘was a poor old bastard who’d lost both his legs in the war. He wasn’t physically capable of assaulting anybody.’

Böhm nodded pensively and leafed through the file.

‘An act of mercy perhaps? A sort of assisted death for the crippled father?’

‘Burning someone to death out of mercy? And why should six innocent people have to die with him?’

‘Then hatred perhaps. A person who does something like that has to have a reason.’

‘Or not. Or at least, not one we understand. A psychologist’s report certified Hannah Singer as a paranoid schizophrenic. Life on the streets seems to have driven the poor thing mad. The judge had the girl sent to a lunatic asylum.’

‘Psychology, come on,’ said Steinke. ‘Just hearing that word...What a load of Jewish rubbish! Murderers belong on the gallows not in the madhouse.’

‘Hannah Singer was only fifteen. Even if she’d made a complete confession the girl wouldn’t have hung,’ said Böhm. ‘As a law student, you should know that.’

‘You can change laws.’

‘Yes, but luckily not without a sufficient majority in parliament. And at the moment nobody has that, not even your Nazis.’

‘That could soon change.’

‘Stop mouthing off, Steinke. You are a police officer, or at least you want to be one, so you have to abide by the laws as they stand. Whether you like it or not.’

‘People are still allowed to say what they think though!’

‘You'd make our work a lot easier, friend,’ retorted Böhm, ‘if you didn’t tell us everything that’s on your mind.’

4

Gereon Rath’s photograph stood on her desk and surveyed her with that strange look of his. Challenging and at the same time reserved, inward-looking. The thing that struck you most though was a feeling the photographer had caught him unawares. The photograph showed Gereon working in a slightly creased suit, hands in coat pockets, looking at the camera with a rather sullen expression. Reinhold Gräf had taken it about two years ago at a crime scene in Tiergarten. And now it stood on her desk thanks to her colleagues, who had given her the photo last summer after her engagement to Gereon had become common knowledge in police headquarters. It had been meant half-jokingly to tease the new arrival in Division G, but even so Charly had immediately put it on her desk. She hadn’t wanted to offend anyone by not properly appreciating the present. And she somehow liked it too. Reinhold was a good photographer. She caught herself thinking about her time in Division A again. She had often been out and about with Reinhold Gräf; she’d questioned witnesses and sometimes suspects too. Although strictly-speaking she was only employed as a stenographer back then, Wilhelm Böhm had completely ignored that technicality. Recognizing her talent for crime solving, he had used her accordingly. Police work was still fun then. Back when she wasn’t a policewoman yet.

Now she had acquired her official place in the police apparatus as a Kommissaranwärterin and what was she dealing with? Youthful hi-jinks.

The photographs lying on her desk had just been sent up from the lab on Kriminalrätin Wieking's instructions. They all showed the same thing. A bare brick firewall, of the sort you could see all over Wedding, Friedrichshain, Neukölln and other working-class neighbourhoods, across which someone had spelled out in white paint: *Germany awake, Jewry die!* In their best copybook writing, as if they had all the time in the world. Someone else had then crossed out this slogan with red paint and scrawled underneath, *Germany, open your eyes, Hitler has got an Ar(yan)rse face!\** Charly couldn't help smiling the first time she read it. Whereas her colleague Karin van Almsick was studying the photos in deadly earnest; she had even produced a magnifying glass.

'I don't know why we're only supposed to find who wrote the second line,' said Charly. 'After all it is completely illegal to cover walls with any sort of political slogan, no matter how beautiful your handwriting.'

'What matters is what you stand for,' Karin van Almsick said with an undertone of amazement, as if she were surprised she had to explain something so self-evident to Charly. 'And besides, where would we be if every young hooligan could get away with defacing other people's property scot-free?'

Charly said nothing. *Young hooligan.* That's why the photos had ended up on her desk. The political police suspected the slogans had been painted by some crazy young hotheads, and youth gangs came under the remit of the women's branch of the Kripo. The political police had enough on their hands at the moment with adults whose views were out of kilter with the times.

'I'll bet you any odds it was the *Red Rats*. They scrawled that sort of thing on walls last summer.'

Karin van Almsick was so zealously focused on the job Charly felt ill. With her magnifying glass and checked dress she looked like a female comedy version of Sherlock Holmes.

The *Red Rats* was a group of teenagers from around Kösliner Strasse who had the occasional innocuous gang fight with other kids, or put their local SA's backs up by defacing their meeting house with slogans or pouring sand and water in the petrol tanks of their cars. They might not be able to submit to party discipline – communist, which still ruled the roost in Kösliner Strasse, or social democrat – but the Rats were always one thing, and that was red.

Which was precisely what irked Friederike Wieking. Charly's boss made no secret of how delighted she was that the chancellor of Germany was called Adolf Hitler. Or how keenly she hoped his cabinet would survive longer than the one or two months the governments recently had managed.

Charly, meanwhile, was one of the people who hoped the whole nightmare would soon be over. Yet you couldn't help worrying when you saw the sort of approval Hitler's cabinet met with among the womens' branch of the Kripo alone. But the women's branch wasn't Germany, or even Berlin.

Charly couldn't believe that the majority of Germans would rally round the 'national uprising', as the Nazis bombastically called the appointment of their leader as chancellor of Germany, at the ballot box.

'The *Red Rats*, could be,' said Charly, shrugging her shoulders. 'So what happens if we really do catch them, and can prove something against them?'

'What do you think? They'll get the punishment they deserve.'

'Or they'll be beaten black and blue by a horde of SA auxiliary police.'

'What if they are? A quick hiding never hurt anyone. Especially if their parents didn't put them over their knee when they should have.'

Charly stood up. 'Sorry,' she said, pointing to her cigarettes, 'I've just got to take a quick break.'

Karin nodded. 'If you pass the kitchen can you put on some water? I want to make some more tea in a minute.'

'Of course!' Charly tried to smile but had the feeling it didn't come off.

They shared the little kitchen with the rest of the corridor and she was glad she didn't meet anyone as she filled the battered kettle with water and put it on the electric plate. She had known the sort of cases the women's branch of the Kripo specialised in: juvenile delinquency, girl gangs, underage prostitution and similar excrescences of the modern age. And she had come to terms with it, even though she missed the work in Gennat's homicide division and envied Gereon for that reason. But this? It wasn't just that she was sitting on her backside in an overheated office when she'd much rather be working outside in the streets, now she was being asked to blow up harmless hi-jinks into major political crimes, to hunt gangs of kids who had something against the new chancellor and, rather than keep their opinions to themselves like so many others, emblazoned them on walls.

There weren't many people in the canteen. Charly got a cup of coffee and a slice of walnut cake from the counter. She wasn't wild about cake, as a matter of fact, but sometimes she treated herself to a slice because it reminded her of the old days. Meetings with Ernst Gennat would hardly ever proceed without a cake on the table. And Charly had been more than just a stenographer to the head of homicide too; he was another who had prized her criminological acuity.

That's why, as she weaved between the rows of tables, balancing her tray, she felt as if the cake had been a spell that had conjured up the man she saw

sitting alone in the corner. Wilhelm Böhm. There he was, sitting over a cup of coffee slightly out of the way, behind a pillar.

‘Good evening, Herr Oberkommissar. May I join you?’

Böhm started, as if he’d been caught doing something illicit. His morose expression immediately brightened up, however.

‘Charly! Of course, sit down!’

Charly put down her tray and took a seat.

‘It’s been a long time since we saw each other,’ she said.

Böhm nodded. ‘It certainly has.’

She ate a piece of walnut cake and almost had a coughing fit. Far too dry, no comparison with the cakes at Gennat’s. She had to take a swig of coffee to be able to speak.

Böhm broke the silence. ‘How are you?’ he asked. ‘Women’s branch keeping you busy?’

Charly pushed the cake aside and reached for her cigarettes. ‘It depends,’ she said and lit a Juno. ‘Mainly routine. Not a patch on a murder inquiry. At the moment we’re dealing with harmless graffiti, and acting as if it’s a serious crime.’ She shrugged her shoulders, without knowing why: perhaps she felt she had to apologise for her work.

Böhm nodded. ‘Yes, the benchmarks seem to be shifting these days. Today I was advised not to devote too much energy to investigating the violent death of a homeless man. The police has more important business to attend to apparently.’

‘Who says something like that? Not Gennat?’

Böhm shook his head. ‘A self-important auxiliary policeman. An SA man summoned by an outraged citizen this morning on Nollendorfplatz. A body

had been found there. I was only out with three people, for goodness sake.

But it was still pretty obvious the man hadn't died of natural causes.'

'It's always been like that; the public generally doesn't understand our work.'

'Yes, but this ignoramus in a brownshirt is allowed to call himself a policeman thanks to our dear Herr Göring. When you're investigating a cause of death, you can really do without that sort of auxiliary policeman.'

'If you don't mind my saying, you can also do without a lot of seasoned policemen. At any rate that's my experience.'

'You're right there too.' Böhm grinned. 'It's good to see you, Charly. Reminds me of old times. Better times.'

'Believe me, I'd love it if Division A needed me on another murder investigation.'

'You know your boss frowns on that idea. And Kriminalrätin Wieking is – how shall I put it – opinionated.'

'No need to tell me that.'

Charly stubbed out her Juno, drank the last sip of coffee, and made a move to get up.

'You don't have a little more time by any chance, do you, Charly? I...I'd like to have your opinion on something. It's about...'

Böhm stirred his cup even though he had drunk all the coffee. 'I mean, it's to do with pigeon droppings and...Oh, I sound like an idiot!' The teaspoon landed on the saucer with a rattle. 'Best if I tell you the whole story from the beginning. Sit down, I'll get us some fresh coffee.'

Charly thought of her office, her colleagues, the potted plants on the window sill and the tea Karin would have brewed for her that was probably

lukewarm by now. Then she nodded and took her cigarette case out of her handbag again.

5

Teacups rattled on the tray Frieda had just brought into the drawing room and Rath felt uneasy. Even at one of his mother's coffee mornings, he wouldn't have seemed so out of place as he did in the company of these two men. Yet, apart from the maid, there were no women in the room. The men looked on in silence as the girl filled their cups. No one spoke until, having been dismissed by Engelbert Rath with a nod, Frieda had disappeared again and closed the door.

'Many thanks for the invitation, Engelbert.' The man by the window, who had taken the most comfortable chair, stirred his tea and leant back.

'Don't mention it, Konrad. I know how much good half-an-hour's peace between all the meetings can do. Carnival, elections – and the city still needs governing.'

'Who knows for how much longer?' Their visitor looked out at Siebengebirgsallee, where his gleaming black official car was parked. The chauffeur was standing by the garden fence, smoking. 'Soon I'm afraid I'll have more time on my hands than I like.'

'How can you say such a thing, Konrad?' Engelbert Rath smilingly tried to dispel the sombre mood his guest was in. 'First the Nazis will get their comeuppance at the national elections, then a week later at the local ones, and with that the whole nightmare will be over. They already lost millions of votes in November; they're definitely on the decline.'

‘If only.’ Their guest sipped his tea. ‘No, no, Engelbert. My time as mayor is over. *Our time* is over. The Nazis won’t settle for anything less than power.’ The mayor pronounced the word Nazi with a short ‘a’; it sounded more like *Nazzi*.

Rath had been afraid the conversation would be about politics; it almost always was with his father, especially with this visitor at any rate. Engelbert Rath took considerable pride in being able to count Konrad Adenauer as one of his close friends, a friendship that had also been of immense benefit over the last twenty years to his career as the chief of Cologne’s criminal police. Rath fished his cigarette case out of his pocket. He knew his father was foregoing his beloved afternoon cigar out of consideration for Adenauer, the non-smoker, but nonetheless he lit an Overstolz and looked out of the window. While they had been talking the chauffeur had got into the limousine. It was cold out, if not quite as cold as in Berlin.

Engelbert Rath gave his son a filthy look before responding to Adenauer. ‘It’s all up in the air. We’re still in the middle of the election campaign,’ he said. ‘That’s exactly why – and I’m in complete agreement – you didn’t receive Hitler a week ago. Because he came to Cologne as an election candidate rather than chancellor of Germany. And that’s also why you’ve had the swastika flags taken down from the Deutz Bridge again.’

‘Exactly. Because it’s about contesting the last few days in office bravely and with dignity.’

Adenauer put down his cup and, taking a piece of paper out of his pocket, unfolded it and showed it to father and son. A flyer. ADENAUER OUT read Rath.

‘That is the brownshirted rabble’s only message in the election. I’d be glad to still be mayor after 12th March but I’m not counting on it. I’ve already

prepared Gussie and the children.’ Adenauer stirred his tea pensively. ‘Hitler should have been opposed with force a year ago, at least,’ he said. ‘Now it’s too late.’

‘I can’t share your pessimism, Konrad! Hitler’s cabinet is entirely dependent on Hindenburg’s good graces. If the brownshirts push it too far then the president will call a halt. And the voters...’

‘Hindenburg is a complete political halfwit,’ cut in Adenauer. ‘Just like Papen, that intriguer. *We’ve just hired this Herr Hitler*, he’s supposed to have said in his club. Hard to believe a man like that was once in our party, that Westphalian misery!’

‘Our voters will never give the brownshirts their vote. The catholic bloc is loyal to the Centrists!’

‘That may be. But you’re forgetting the women. They’re all running after Herr Hitler.’ Adenauer looked out of the window as if Germany’s entire female population had assembled in front of the Raths’ villa. ‘We should never have given them the vote. Women’s suffrage was the first nail in democracy’s coffin.’

‘I don’t know...My Erika is certainly not going to vote for the browns. And your Gussie probably isn’t either.’

‘In any case the elections won’t change much now. The streets have belonged to the Nazis for a long time. If need’s be they’ll take what they want by force.’

‘Oh, politics!’ Engelbert Rath waved his hand dismissively. A future in which he couldn’t exploit his connections to the Centrists and Social Democrats clearly seemed unimaginable to him. Or at least not worth expending too much thought or anxiety about. ‘There are more important things in life,’ he said, and Gereon knew he didn’t mean it. There was

nothing more important to Engelbert Rath than politics, in as far as it served his professional advancement. 'How's Gussie and the children?'

'Thank you. All well. Although the SA's growing ever more insolent. Since the brownshirts have been allowed to pose as auxiliary police they've taken to loitering outside the house in the street. 'Escort', they say, if you ask them. Can you do anything about it?'

'Sorry, my hands are tied in that respect.' The great Engelbert Rath suddenly looked anaemic and weak. For a moment the façade of the omnipotent Kriminaldirektor crumbled. 'The SA have their own leader,' he said, 'they have their own commanders and they refuse to be integrated into the chain of command at police headquarters.'

'You see, Engelbert, that's just what I mean. Our time is over.' Adenauer set down his teacup as if to emphasize his last statement with the gesture.

Rath looked out of the window. The chauffeur had got out of the car again to smoke his next cigarette. Something he probably wasn't allowed to do in the mayor of Cologne's official vehicle.

'And the son and heir? Back in Cologne again?' asked Adenauer. At first Gereon didn't even notice the question was addressed to him. But then he realised the mayor was looking straight at him with his narrow eyes and he involuntarily sat up straighter in his chair. Adenauer stared at him as if he wanted to x-ray him. 'Are you moving back to the Rhine then?'

'Only temporarily.' Rath cleared his throat. 'A build-up of unclaimed overtime has allowed me an unexpected holiday.'

'And how do you like Berlin? Settled in yet?'

Rath shrugged his shoulders and stubbed out his cigarette.

'Gereon is getting married soon,' prompted his father with a smile. 'To a true blue Berlin girl.'

‘Now that’s a piece of news! Congratulations!’

‘Many thanks, mayor.’

‘So where’s the wedding going to be? Here in St. Bruno’s or where you are in Berlin?’

‘We...ah...we will...first we have to...’

‘Gereon’s fiancée is Protestant,’ said Engelbert Rath, as if he was apologizing.

‘Ah well, Berlin...’ Adenauer shook his head and looked as if he were surprised that such a thing as the German capital even existed. ‘So you must be here for carnival?’

‘Yes, of course... I mean, partly.’ Rath felt as if he were under interrogation.

‘Naturally I’m mainly here to visit my parents.’

‘Have you brought your fiancée? You must introduce her to me some time.’

‘I...No. Fräulein Ritter is working. She is a Kommisaranwärterin and...’

‘A policewoman?’

Rath nodded. ‘Yes. A very good one.’

‘We have already met Fräulein Ritter,’ Engelbert Rath hastened to explain.

‘A charming young lady.’ He paused briefly. ‘I’ve told Gereon that we are finally going to see a Rose Monday procession this year thanks to your good offices, Konrad.’

‘I just liaised. The Cologne business community has given generously, that is entirely down to them.’

‘Your modesty does you credit. There was something I wanted to ask you though. Tomorrow, on the town hall balcony... I should have asked earlier but my son’s visit caught me by surprise too... Would it be very inconvenient if you...’

‘Inconvenient? Of course not. There’s always room on the balcony for a Rath.’ Adenauer’s gaze shifted from Engelbert to Gereon Rath. ‘It would be a great honour if you would join us tomorrow, my young friend.’

‘Oh, thank you.’ Rath was so dumbfounded he couldn’t think of anything else to say in reply.

‘Don’t mention it.’ Adenauer looked at him with his slit eyes and for a moment Rath felt himself being appraised like a window display. ‘Perhaps you’re toying with the thought of moving back to Cologne one day. We can use honest policemen for the difficult times ahead.’

‘I will bear that in mind, mayor,’ said Rath, knowing he didn’t mean it. He would never get Charly to Cologne, or anywhere near Erika and Engelbert Rath. And in fact he didn’t want to come back either. Berlin was his home now, that strange city that did so little to make you feel comfortable and yet didn’t let go of you either.

Adenauer looked at a pocket watch, which he produced from his waistcoat.

‘Ah, I must be on my way. My driver will be impatient as it is.’ He stood up and offered both Raths his hand. ‘It was a pleasure, Engelbert. Believe me, I appreciate it when people maintain their friendship with me in these hard times.’

After the head of the household had personally shown the mayor to the front door, Rath remained standing at the window for a while. He watched as the driver opened the car door and lit his next cigarette. When the engine started up outside, Engelbert Rath came back into the drawing room.

‘Prime position on the town hall balcony,’ said Gereon, shaking out the match. ‘To what do I owe that honour?’

‘You heard: because you’re a Rath.’

‘And what makes you think I’d like the best seat in the house? Perhaps I’d prefer the rank and file’s worm’s eye view.’

‘It’s not a question of what you’d like. It’s our duty as democrats to show ourselves, especially now.’

‘Who says I’m a democrat?’

‘Gereon!’

‘And who of the people down below are going to know that when they see us up on the balcony? All people see are heads, the most important heads Cologne has to offer, including the triumvirate: they don’t care whether they’re democrats or not. And do you really think there’d be other heads on the town hall balcony if we didn’t have a democracy?’

‘Konrad Adenauer’s would be missing at any rate. You heard what the Nazis are saying about him.’

‘Oh, they’re just sounding off, everyone knows that. After the election they’ll crawl back into their hole. And you and your friends in the party will be back on top again.’

‘I hope you’re right. Konrad takes a different view.’

‘Adenauer is just tired of office. And he was always a pessimist, you know that.’

[END OF SAMPLE]

\*Translator's Note:

The joke works well in German. From *Arischgesicht* (Aryan face) to *Arschgesicht* (arse face) just with the omission of an 'i'. A full translation of the novel would, one hopes, render it in a less workaday way. The same applies to a number of things – an implied readers' ease with police hierarchy and ranks; Gereon Rath's Cologne background, especially, in this case, the Cologne carnival – which reflect the fact that this is Volker Kutscher's fifth Rath novel and so his world has been carefully and extensively established.