

Timur Vermes, He's back

(Original title: Er ist wieder da)

Sample translation by Katy Derbyshire

Chapter xiv

Naturally, at this point I hear the doubting Göring' cries: But how can the Fuehrer of the National Socialist Movement take part in a televisual broadcast with a performer by the name of Ali Gagmez? And I can understand the question, provided it is posed out of, let's say, artistic concern, because of course one must never obfuscate great art with politics. One doesn't paint a swastika in the corner of the Mona Lisa, after all. Yet the stutterings of a conférencier – and that is all this Gagmez character is, ultimately – can never be regarded as a form of high culture. In fact, the very opposite applies. If, however, these concerns are raised out of fear that the National Socialist cause might suffer from a presentation in such a possibly inferior context, then I must counter that there are things that most people are unable to understand on a purely mental level, or indeed capable of judging. This is one of those matters on which one must simply trust in the Fuehrer's genius.

To be perfectly blunt, I must admit that I had been labouring under something akin to a misunderstanding during this time. I was assuming at this point that Madame Bellini and I were to collaborate on implementing my political programme, for the benefit of the German nation. In actual fact, however, what Madame Bellini was constantly referring to was nothing other than my supposed performance programme. And yet for this very reason, this is yet more evidence that pure, innate talent, the born Fuehrer's bare instinct, is radically superior to bookish knowledge. Whilst the laboriously calculating academic and the intently striving parliamentarian are all too easily distracted by superficial facts, the truly appointed spirit subliminally senses the call of destiny, even when a name such as Ali Gagmez appears diametrically opposed to his fate. In actual fact, I do believe that providence once again intervened in this case, just as she did in 1941 when an early and extremely severe onset of winter reined in the offensive in Russia before we advanced too far – and thus granted us victory.

Or would have granted us victory, had my incompetent generals not...

But no, I shall not lose my temper over that any more.

Next time around I shall approach it all very differently, with a loyal and devoted general staff, born and bred from the ranks of my SS, and then it'll all be a walk in the park.

In the case of Gagmez, however, fate used this misunderstanding as a trick, merely to accelerate my decision. For I would still have appeared on his show – and I say this to the doubters and the triflers – even had I known what type of product it was, albeit after a longer period of consideration, which might have come at the price of a missed opportunity. I explained to Goebbels early on that I am prepared to play the fool if necessary, as long as I get the people's attention. For one cannot win any man over if he does not listen to one's words. And this Gagmez character would bring me hundreds of thousands of listeners.

From the correct perspective, this Gagmez character was one of those 'artists', the like of which can only be produced by a bourgeois democracy. Due to genetic intermingling, he combined an unteutonic, Asiatic appearance with flawless German, albeit tainted by a barely tolerable dialect. It seemed to be that very mixture that granted this Gagmez character his public function, which was rather similar to that of those white actors in the USA, who painted their faces black in order to gain roles as simple-minded negroes. This parallel was conspicuous, the only difference being that the jokes consumed were not about negroes but about foreigners. There seemed to be such high demand for these witticisms that there were several of these interracial comedians. It was a phenomenon I was unable to understand. To my mind, the racial or foreigner joke is a contradiction in terms. Allow me to illustrate my point with a comical anecdote related to me by a comrade in 1922.

Two war veterans meet.

'Where were you wounded?' one asks the other.

'In the Dardanelles,' says the second veteran.

To which the first replies: 'Oh, they say it's terribly painful down there!'

A humorous misunderstanding, which any soldier can repeat with no further difficulty. Exchanging the personnel can alter the humorous and also the didactic effect. It can be increased, for instance, by occupying the role of the questioner with a notorious know-it-all, let's say Roosevelt or former chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. If, however, one assumes the stupid questioner were not a veteran but an earwig, the humorous effect is instantly lost, as every listener wonders: How would an earwig know where the Dardanelles are?

A stupid person doing stupid things is not comical. A good joke relies upon surprise so as to develop its didactic effect to the greatest possible extent. And it comes as no surprise, of course, if a Turk is a simpleton. Admittedly, were the Turk to adopt the role of the brilliant scientist in the joke, a humorous success would be guaranteed due to the absurdity of this prospect. Yet neither this Gagmez character nor any of his counterparts told jokes of this type. The common tender in this metier was droll stories and anecdotes about modestly to barely educated foreigners, who stammered hardly comprehensible nonsense in deplorable German. This circumstance revealed this so-called 'liberal' society's usual democratic hypocrisy: Whilst it was regarded as generally reprehensible to tar all foreigners with one brush and German political humorists thus had to perform a constant racial division, Gagmez and his questionable consorts were allowed to lump together Indians, Arabs, Turks, Poles, Greeks and Italians at the drop of a hat.

This procedure was admittedly to my advantage, and doubly so. A large audience for this Gagmez character secured major attention for myself, and in addition I could safely assume, due to the nature of his anecdotes, that the audience would be a particularly pure sample of the German race. Not because German viewers possess a particularly developed nationalistic awareness, unfortunately, but because the Turk, in contrast, is a simple and proud man, who enjoys a jolt of honest burlesque played out by all manner of fools, but does not value admonition and ridicule by former or emigrated fellow Turks. For a Turk, it is essential to be sure of general esteem and respect – which is of course incompatible with the role of a halfwit.

I therefore regard this type of humour as superfluous and pitiful in equal parts. A man with rats in his house does not call in a clown; he hires an exterminator. However, if such a course of action appeared necessary for my rise, then it was of paramount importance to show, from my very first appearance on, that an upright German has no need for foreign stooges for the purpose of making jokes about members of inferior races.

As I arrived at the studio a young lady approached me. She had an athletic figure; one might have taken her for a Blitz Girl loyally assisting the Wehrmacht, but since my experience with the Yasemin character I had resolved to be slightly more cautious when addressing young women of Aryan appearance. The young lady was hung about with a multitude of cables, apparently wearing some kind of microphone and generally looking as if

she had just arrived from Luftwaffe HQ.

'Hi,' said the young lady, extending her hand to me, 'I'm Jenny. And you must be...' She faltered for a moment, 'Adolf...?'

For a moment I wondered how to react to her rather direct, indeed crude familiarity. However, it did not seem to provoke surprise in anyone else. As it turned out, this was my first encounter with the jargon of the television business. Here, as it later conspired, people were obviously of the opinion that the experience of broadcasting had a unifying effect, rather similar to battling side by side in the trenches, and one was henceforth part of a brotherhood of fighters whose members swore one another loyalty and first-name terms until death, or at least until the end of the television programme in question. This approach appeared improper to me at first, although I did have to consider the attenuating circumstance that this Jenny person's generation had never had the chance to gather genuine experiences on the front. I intended to do something about that in the medium term, but for the interim I resolved to repay trust with trust, and I spoke calmly to the young whippersnapper.

'You can call me Uncle Wolf.'

She frowned and then said, 'Right, Mr, ummm... Uncle... Would you come with me to the makeup department please?'

'Of course,' I said, and followed her through the catacombs of the broadcasting building whilst she pressed her microphone stick to her mouth and spoke the words, 'Elke, we'll be with you in a mo,' into it. We walked along the corridors in silence.

'You've been on television before, Mr. Hitler?' she asked after a while. I noted that first names were no longer on the agenda. She had presumably been awed by my Fuehrer's aura.

'Several times,' I said, 'but all rather a long time ago.'

'Oh,' she said, 'anything I might have seen you in?'

'I suspect not,' I said. 'It was here in Berlin, at the Olympic Stadium...'

'Were you the warm-up man for a top-act?'

'Was I what?' I asked her, but she had stopped listening.

'I noticed you straight away – it was great what you did there. I'm really glad you've made it yourself now. You're doing something different now though, aren't you?'

'Something... very different,' I confirmed hesitantly. 'The Games have been over for some time now...'

'Here we are then,' said Miss Jenny, opening the door to a room with a makeup table. 'I'll leave you here with Elke. Elke – this is... er... Uncle Rolf.'

'Wolf,' I corrected her, 'Uncle Wolf.'

Elke, a neatly turned-out woman of about forty, frowned and looked at me, then at a note next to her cosmetics equipment. 'I don't know anything about a wolf. My list says Hitler's up now,' she said. Then she held out her hand and said, 'I'm Elke,' and then: 'And you must be...?'

I must have landed back in the first-name-terms trench. Madame Elke, however, appeared rather too advanced in age for Uncle Wolf.

'Mr Hitler,' I decided.

'Right, Mr Hitler,' said Madame Elke, 'sit yourself down then. Want anything special? Or shall I just do you the usual?'

'You have my fullest confidence,' I said as I took a seat. 'I can't take care of everything myself.'

'That's the ticket,' said Madame Elke, draping a cloak over my uniform as protection. Then she inspected my face. 'You've got great skin,' she praised me and reached for her powder. 'Lots of people your age don't drink enough. You should see some of the other actor's faces...'

'My favourite beverage is plenty of pure water,' I confirmed. 'Anything else is damaging to a German body and irresponsible.'

Madame Elke made a snorting sound, plunging the small room and the two of us into a large cloud of powder. 'Sorry,' she said, 'I'll get that sorted in a jiffy.' Then she began suctioning the cloud into a small appliance, which she also applied to my trousers. She was just dusting off large parts of my hair when the door opened. In the mirror, I saw Ali Gagez enter the room. He coughed.

'Is the dry ice part of the show?' he asked.

'No,' I said.

'That was my mistake,' said Madame Elke, 'but we'll soon have it sorted out.' I liked that. No false evasions, no excuses, but confessing staunchly to one's mistakes and putting them right under one's own responsibility – I was always pleased to note that the German racial characteristics had not descended entirely into the democratic quagmire over the past

decades.

'Super,' said Gagmez, holding out his hand to me. 'Ms Bellini told me you bang out one punchline after the next. I'm Ali.'

I rustled my unpowdered hand out from under the hairdresser's cloak and shook his hand. Small avalanches descended from my hair.

'How do you do. Hitler.'

'So how's it going? Everything OK?'

'I believe so. Isn't it, Madame Elke?'

'Nearly done,' said Madame Elke.

'Great uniform,' said Gagmez. 'Jesus! It looks just like an original! Where do you get that kind of thing?'

'Well, it's not all that easy,' I thought out loud. 'My last one came from Josef Landolt in Munich... I assume he's not in business any more, though' I told him.

'I can tell this is going to be a great combination, you with your Nazi thing and me. Even though the whole Nazi routine's not exactly brand new.'

'Meaning?' I asked suspiciously.

'Hey, no, it's still great every time,' he said. 'No big deal. Everything's been done before... I picked up the foreigner routine in New York, it was really big there in the nineties. Where did you get the Fuehrer thing?'

'Ultimately, from the Teutons,' I said.

Gagmez laughed. 'Bellini's right, you really go whole hog. OK, see you later. Do you need a cue? Or shall I bring up a particular topic before I announce you?'

'No need for that,' I said.

'I couldn't do it,' said Gagmez, 'not totally unscripted. I'd be up shit creek without a paddle. But I've never had much time for the whole impro thing... Anyway, break a leg, mate! See you in a bit.' With that, he left the room.

I had anticipated more instructions than that.

'And now?' I asked Madame Elke.

'Well, who'd have thought it?' she laughed. 'The Fuehrer doesn't know what next?'

'There's no need for arrogance,' I scolded her. 'The Fuehrer principle provides a guide for the state, not a tourist guide.'

With a snort, Madame Elke jerked the powder out of her nasal zone. 'You're not catching me out this time, Mr Hitler' she said, thus finally settling on last-name terms. She pointed at a corner of the room. 'See that? You can watch the show on this screen. There are more of them, in wardrobe and in catering. Jenny will pick you up again and make sure you get to your spot on time.'

The programme confirmed everything I had previously heard and seen of it. Gagmez announced various clips of material, at which point small films were shown of Gagmez costumed either as a Pole or a Turk, processing their racial shortcomings into staged jokes of various types. He was hardly a Chaplin, but that had its advantages. The audience was sufficiently predisposed to his performance, and the entire show was based at least partly on a form of political awareness – if one used the term broadly – which meant my message would doubtlessly have an opportunity to fall on fertile ground.

The handover was to take place with a fixed line, which Gagmez spoke without objection: 'And now our new political commentator, Adolf Hitler.' Upon which I took my first step out of the wings into the dazzle of the spotlights.

It was as if I were returning to the Sportpalast after many years of privation, far away from home. The heat of the lights burned on my visage as I registered the faces of the young audience. There may have been several hundred of them, standing in for the tens and hundreds of thousands watching on their television devices. They were precisely the future of Germany, they were the individuals upon whom I intended to build my vision. I felt the tension and the joy within me. Had I ever had doubts, they had been dispelled now in the whirl of preparation. I was accustomed to speaking for hours at a time, but now five minutes would have to suffice.

I stepped up to the lectern in silence.

My gaze circled the recording studio. I listened to the silence, eager to find out whether the decades of democracy had left only minor traces on the young minds, as I suspected. Laughter had spread across the audience when my name was announced, but it now swiftly ebbed away as my presence brought calm into the semi-circle of seats. I could read confusion on their faces as they first attempted to compare my appearance with the faces of professional actors with whom they were familiar, and I saw their anxiety, which I was able to transform into breathless silence by means of simple eye contact. My fear of

hecklers was unfounded – the number of disruptions at an average meeting in the Hofbräukeller had been far greater.

I took a step forward and gave the impression I was about to speak, but then merely folded my arms – the noise level instantly fell again to a hundredth, even a thousandth of the previous volume. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that dilettante Gagmez breaking out in a sweat at the apparent uneventfulness on stage. It was instantly obvious that he had no knowledge of the power of silence, but rather feared it. His eyebrows attempted a grimace as if I had forgotten my lines. A female assistant tried to give me a signal, tapping agitatedly at her watch. I drew out the silence even more by raising my head slowly. I sensed the tension in the studio, Gagmez's insecurity. I savoured it. I let the air flow into my lungs, righted myself fully and gave a sound to the silence. The drop of a pin can be sufficient when every ear is listening out for the thunder of cannons.

'Fellow German men and women!

What I,

what we

have just

seen

in numerous

clips

is true.

It is true

that the Turk is not culturally creative

and that

he never

will be.

That he has the soul of a grocer,

whose mental capacities

do not

usually

exceed those

of a bonded serf

by any great measure.
That the Indian
has a
religiously confused and chattering nature.
That the Pole's relationship to private property
is permanently!
distorted.
All these
are
general truths,
which make sense to
every fellow German
man and woman.
Yet it is a
national disgrace
that here in Germany
only
a Turkish! follower of our Movement
dares to say so out loud.
My fellow Germans:
When I consider the present state of Germany,
I am not at all surprised!
The present-day German
separates his waste more precisely
than his races,
with a single exception:
in the field of humour.
Here
only!
the German makes jokes about the Germans,
and the Turk makes jokes about the Turks.

The house mouse makes jokes about house mice
and the field mouse about field mice.

That has to change,
and it *will* change.

From today, 22 hours 45,
the house mouse shall joke
about the field mouse,
the badger about the roe deer
and the German about the Turks.

I am therefore in
absolute
agreement with
the previous speaker's criticism of foreigners.'

With that, I left the spotlight. The silence was astounding. Firm of step, I made my exit. There was still not a sound to be heard from the audience. A colleague was whispering in Madame Bellini's ear. I took up position next to her to observe the audience again. Their eyes were confused, seeking a hold on the stage and sweeping back to the presenter's desk. There sat that Gagmez character, opening and closing his mouth soundlessly in search of a witty farewell. It was the way he was obviously out of his depth that prompted a genuine storm of laughter from the audience. I watched his absolute incompetence with a certain satisfaction until it finally trickled out in a lukewarm 'Tune in again next time.' Bellini cleared her throat. She seemed uncertain for a moment, and so I decided to offer her a little succour.

'I know what you're thinking,' I told her.

'Do you?'

'Of course,' I answered. 'I felt the same myself once. We had just hired the Circus-Krone building and we weren't sure...'

'Excuse me,' said Madame Bellini, 'a phone call.'

She withdrew to a corner of the set and raised her mobile telephone device to her ear. She seemed not to like what she heard. I was just attempting to interpret her facial expression when I felt a hand on my uniform. It was that Gagmez character, tugging at my

collar. There was no longer the slightest hint of jollity on his face. Once again, I felt painfully the loss of my beloved SS as he pressed me against a wall and hissed between his teeth:

‘Don’t you go agreeing with any previous speakers round here, you stupid bastard!’

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a number of stewards rushing over. Gagmez pushed me against the wall again but then let me go. His face was a dark shade of red. Then he turned around and shouted, ‘What the hell’s going on here? I thought he was going to do his Nazi routine!’ At the same volume, he turned to Sawatzki, standing next to us, and demanded, ‘Where’s Carmen? Where? Is? Carmen?’

Pale but taut, Madame Bellini dashed to our side. I wondered whether I could count on her full allegiance at that moment but did not reach a final conclusion. She made consoling hand gestures and opened her mouth to make a statement, but had no opportunity.

‘Carmen! There you are at last! This guy’s a huge pile of shit! Did you see that? Did you see it? What kind of bastard is this guy? You said I do my foreigner thing and he does his Nazi crap. You said he’d contradict me! He’d go off on one about Turks on TV or whatever! And then this! What does he mean with his “follower of the Movement”? What movement? Why a follower? What does that make me look like, huh?’

‘I told you he’s different,’ said Madame Bellini, now absolutely under control again after an astoundingly fast recovery.

‘I don’t give a shit,’ the Gagmez character was practically foaming at the mouth. ‘I’m telling you here and now: I don’t want that dirty bastard on my show again. He doesn’t stick to what we said! I’m not letting that asshole ruin my show.’

‘Now calm down,’ said Madame Bellini, in a remarkably gentle yet assertive voice. ‘It didn’t go all that badly.’

‘Is everything alright?’ asked one of the two stewards.

‘Everything’s fine,’ Madame Bellini said in a placating tone. ‘I’ve got it under control. Calm down, Ali.’

‘I’m not going to calm down,’ barked Gagmez, and then screwed his index finger into me, just below my shoulder strap. ‘You’re not going to mess things up for me, buddy,’ hammering his finger against my chest as incessantly as a woodpecker, ‘you reckon you’ve got it made for you with your dumb Hitler uniform and your oh so inscrutable little number, but I’m telling you, there’s nothing new about it, it’s as old as the hills. You’re an amateur. What do you think you’re doing here? You think you’re going to stroll in here and take over? Well

you can forget that, my friend, that's not going to happen! If anyone's got followers around here it's me! That's my audience, they're my fans, and you can keep out of it! You're a pitiful amateur, and your uniform and your whole routine are a load of crap. You can take your stupid crap to the beer tents and shooting clubs, I bet you'll go down a bomb there. I'm telling you: you're a nobody!

'I don't need to be anybody,' I said coolly, 'there are millions of pure fellow Germans behind me, who...'

'Cut the crap, will you?' squealed Gagmez, 'you're not on air now! You think you can provoke me? You won't provoke me! Not!! Me!!!'

'Come down,' Madame Bellini interrupted, loudly now, 'both of you. OK, we have to work on it all a bit. It needs a bit of fine-tuning. But it wasn't bad at all. Something new. Now we'll all calm down and see what the critics say...'

And if ever I were absolutely certain of my calling in the recent past, then it was at that moment.

Chapter xvi

Ah, Mr Hitler,' said the newspaper vendor, 'well, isn't that nice? I thought you might turn up today!'

'Did you now?' I said with a laugh. 'And why is that?'

'Hey, I saw you on TV,' he said, 'and I thought to myself you'd probably want to read what the papers have to say about it. And you might go looking for somewhere with a larger choice of papers and magazines! Come on in, come on in! Take a seat. Would you like a coffee? What's up? Aren't you feeling well?'

It was rather unpleasant that he had noticed my momentary weakness, and it really was a moment of weakness: a surge of warm feelings, the like of which I had not felt for some time. I had awoken bright and early at half past eleven that morning, had breakfasted

lightly and then, as the newsagent had correctly surmised, decided to read the newspapers. My newly tailored suits had arrived two days previously, so that I had been able to slip into something less official. I had chosen a simple dark suit in a classic cut with my dark hat, and had then marched out and instantly attracted far fewer stares than usual. It was a sunny day, bright and clear and expectably fresh in temperature, and I felt released from all duties for the moment and strode with a firm step. The day was so peaceful, almost ordinary, and as I availed myself mainly of green pathways and small parks there was little that demanded my attention, apart from an insane woman whom I found crouching down, obviously attempting to locate and collect a small spaniel's excrement in amongst the rather long, unmown grass. For a moment a thought perhaps an epidemic was to blame for this widespread insanity, yet her actions did not seem to disturb anyone else. Quite the opposite, in fact. As I noticed shortly afterwards, the authorities had erected a type of automatic dispenser here and there, from which these disturbed women could remove small bags for their collectings. I came to the conclusion, for the time being, that these women must have been unable to fulfil their innate wish to bear children. This type of hysteria, in the form of exaggerated ministrations to all manner of canines, was of course inevitable in such cases. And I had to admit that providing these pitiable creatures with bags was an astoundingly pragmatic solution. In the long term, of course, it was far preferable to return these women to their actual purpose, but no doubt some political party or other had been against that. One knows how it is.

Amidst such minorly strenuous considerations, I had strolled to the newsagent's stand, untroubled, barely recognized if at all. The situation seemed remarkably familiar, but it was only the newspaper vendor's simple words that had made it clear to me exactly why. It was that delightful atmosphere, such as I had experienced all too often in my early days in Munich. After my release from the fortress I was hardly known in Munich, as yet only a minor party chairman, a speaker who looked into the hearts of the Germans, and it was the small folk, the men and women on the street, who showed me their appreciation and affection. I would stroll across the Viktualienmarkt and the poorest market stallholders would wave me over with a gesture of warmth, give me a couple of eggs, a pound of apples, and one arrived home like a forager, to be greeted with a smile from one's landlady, and the honest joy shone just as dazzlingly brightly from their faces as it did from the newspaper vendor's face at that instant. And that feeling of yore came over me so swiftly, before I could

even grasp it myself, so overwhelmingly that I quickly looked away. But the newspaper vendor, a man of great professional experience, had of course attained an impressive insight into human nature, such as only drivers of hackney cabs otherwise possess.

I gave an embarrassed cough and said, 'No coffee, please. A cup of tea would be very nice. Or a glass of water.'

'No problem, no problem,' he said, and poured water into an electrical kettle similar to the one provided in my hotel room. 'I've kept the papers for you next to the chair. There aren't very many of them. I guess the internet's the place to look.'

'Yes, this interweb,' I agreed, and took the proffered seat. 'A very good invention. I don't believe my success will depend on the whims of newspaper journalists.'

'I don't want to spoil your fun, Mr Hitler,' said the newspaper vendor as he took a teabag out of a drawer, 'but there's no need to worry... The ones that saw you all liked you.'

'I'm not worried,' I corrected him. 'What value does a critic's opinion have?'

'Well...'

'None,' I said, 'none! It was of no consequence in the thirties, it is of no consequence today. These critics only tell the people what they are supposed to think. They have no respect for common sense and the voice of the people. No, in his soul the true German knows what to think without our gentlemen critics. If the German nation is healthy then it knows very well what is good and what is not. Does the farmer need a critic to tell him how good the earth is in which he sows his wheat? The farmer knows that best himself.'

'Because he sees his fields every day,' said the newspaper vendor. 'But he doesn't get to see you every day.'

'But he does see what's on his television device every day. He can make comparisons. No, the decent German needs no one to plant opinions in him. He forms his opinions of his own accord.'

'You should know,' said the newsagent with a wink, holding out the sugar to me. 'You're the expert on freedom of opinion.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'You really have to watch out with you,' said the newsagent with a shake of his head. 'I always start talking to you like you're really you.' A hand knocked on the counter from outside the newsstand and he stood up. 'You have a read of what they say, I've got a customer. It's not all that much.'

I looked down at the small pile next to the chair. I was not on any front pages, but that was not to be expected. Nor had the major newspapers addressed the topic. The formidable *BILD* newspaper, for example, was not in the pile. Of course, that Gagmez character had been broadcasting for some time now, so reporting on him would not have been of great interest. As it turned out, it was only smaller, regional publications for which one of the editors had to watch the television device every day so as to fill a small column. Three of these editors had therefore switched on that Gagmez character's programme in search of light entertainment. All of them were of the opinion that my speech had been the most interesting thing about it. One of them wrote that it was astounding that a Hitler impersonator, of all people, had put his finger on the point and described exactly what the Gagmez programme had been all along: a collection of clichés about foreigners. The other two said that Gagmez had finally regained the bite he had been lacking for far too long through my 'wonderfully sharp routine'.

'So,' asked the newspaper vendor, 'are you happy?'

'I started from the very bottom once before,' I said and took a sip of tea, 'speaking in front of twenty people. A third of them had presumably wandered in by accident. So no, I can't complain. I must look to the future. What did you think of it?'

'It was good,' he said, 'intense but good. Ali Gagmez didn't seem to like it much though.'

'Ah yes,' I said. 'I am familiar enough with that problem. The establishment always makes a song and dance of it when a fresh, new idea takes hold. They start to fear for their sinecures.'

'Will he let you back on the show?'

'He'll do what the production company tells him to do. He lives by the system so he has to follow its rule book.'

'It's hard to believe I picked you up outside my newsstand just a few weeks ago,' said the newspaper vendor.

'The rules are still the same as sixty years ago,' I said. 'They never change. The only difference is there are fewer Jews in high positions. The Germans are much better off now. Speaking of being better off: I haven't ever said thank you properly. Did anyone...?'

'Don't worry about that,' said the newsagent, 'we came to a little arrangement. I'm not

out of pocket.’ Then his portable telephone rang. He raised the device to his head and spoke his name. In the meantime, I reached for one of the *BILD* newspapers and flicked through it. The publication contained a rather appealing mixture of public rage and venom. It began with reports on political idiocies, which helped me to form an image of a matron of a chancellor as naïve as she was benign, who was forced to shuffle along, hindered by a horde of intellectual dwarves. In parallel, the newspaper debunked almost every democratically ‘legitimated’ decision as absolute nonsense. Particularly the idea of a union of European nations was anathema to this marvellously inflammatory publication. What I liked most about it, however, was its subtle methods. For instance, a column of jokes about mothers-in-law and cuckolded husbands discreetly harboured the following witticism:

A Portuguese, a Greek and a Spaniard go to a brothel. Who pays? Germany.

A very successful agitation. Julius Streicher would have commissioned a drawing to go with it, of course, showing three swarthy, unshaven Mediterranean types groping an innocent young maid with their grubby paws whilst the honest German proletarian has to work his fingers to the bone, but on balance that would have been rather unnecessary in this case, and would have robbed the joke of its clever discretion.

Other than that, a pot-pourri of crime stories was scattered across the next few pages, followed by what has always been the best kind of reporting for placating the masses – the sports section – and then a collection of photos showing famous people looking old or ugly, the perfect symphony of envy, resentment and malevolence. For this particular reason, I would have been pleased to see a small mention of my television appearance on those hallowed pages. But the newsagent had been perfectly correct not to place the paper on the pile – there was nothing in there. I was just putting the rag down as the vendor put his telephone away again.

‘That was my son,’ he said. ‘He asked if you were the guy from my newsstand. He’s just seen you. On a friend’s mobile. He told me to tell you you’re totally rad.’

I gazed at the newsagent, uncomprehending.

‘He thinks you were good,’ the newspaper vendor translated. ‘I don’t even want to know what kind of videos they’ve got on their phones, but nothing ends up there if they don’t think it’s good or exciting in some way.’

‘The youth has an undistorted view,’ I confirmed. ‘There is no good or bad for the youth, they think just as nature intends. As long as a child is properly brought up he doesn’t make false

decisions.'

'Have you got children yourself?'

'I'm afraid not,' I said. 'That is, certain circles occasionally spread rumours about offspring born out of wedlock, as we tend to say...'

'Oho,' said the newsagent and lit a cigarette with a grin, 'they must have wanted maintenance...'

'No, they wanted to ruin my reputation. A ridiculous farce. Since when has it been wrong or dishonourable to bring a child into the world?'

'Tell that to the Bavarian conservatives.'

'Admittedly, one has to take the simple man into consideration. One can find as many rational arguments as one likes, and still they go over many people's heads. Himmler tried it once, in the SS. He wanted to establish equal rights for legitimate and illegitimate children of SS men, but not even that worked out right. Sadly, for the poor children. A little lad, a tiny girl gets dirty looks, gets teased, the other children prance around him singing cruel taunts. That's no good for public spirit. We're all Germans, the legitimate and the illegitimate children alike. I always say: a child's a child, from the cradle to the trench. Of course one has to take care of it, that much is clear. But what kind of swine would take off and abandon a child?'

I put the *BILD* back in its place.

'And what came of it all in the end?'

'Nothing. It was all just lies and slander, of course. And then no more was heard about it.'

'Well then,' said the newspaper vendor and took a sip of tea.

'Of course I don't know whether the Gestapo took care of the matter, but that probably wasn't even necessary.'

'Probably not. You had the press pretty much under your thumb, didn't you?' He laughed as if he'd made a joke.

'Precisely,' I nodded. Then the Ride of the Valkyries sounded out.

Miss Kramer had set that up for me. Once we had got all those computer things running she had remembered that someone had organized one of those portable telephones for me as well. This device was an incredible phenomenon, with which one could also travel around the interweb, even more simply than with the mouse device: one simply used one's fingers to

control it. I instantly sensed I was holding Aryan creative genius in my hands, and of course it was a matter of a few 'clicks', as they say, to find out that this technology had been developed and brought onto the market by the outstanding Siemens company. Admittedly, Miss Kramer had to carry out the actual clicks, as the reading display was illegible without my spectacles. I then wanted to leave the whole telephony matter to her – after all, the Fuehrer must not be distracted by too many petty things, that's why he has a secretarial department. On the other hand, as she correctly reminded me, her service was only available to me on a part-time basis. I gave myself a silent scolding at that for having become too dependent on my party apparatus. I was starting from the very beginning again so I would have to answer my own telephone now and then, for better or for worse.

'D'ya want any partic'lar ring tone?' Miss Kramer had asked.

'No I do not!' I had replied with a sneer. 'I don't work in a typing pool!'

'Alright then, I'll just give ya the standard one then.' Upon which a noise ensued that sounded like a drunken clown playing the xylophone, over and over again.

'What on earth is that?' I asked in horror.

'That's ya phone,' said Miss Kramer, adding a hasty 'my Fuehrer!'

'And that's what it sounds like?'

'Only when it rings.'

'Turn it off! I don't want people to think I'm a halfwit!'

'Tha's why I asked ya,' said Miss Kramer. 'Is this one any better?' More clowns playing various instruments.

'It's appalling,' I groaned.

'But don't ya not care anyway what people fink of ya?'

'My dear Miss Kramer,' I said, 'I personally consider the short *Lederhose* the most masculine trousers there are. And when I am one day supreme commander of the Wehrmacht once again, I shall equip an entire division with short leather trousers held up by braces. And woollen socks.'

At this point Miss Kramer made a rather unusual noise and immediately began blowing her nose behind a paper handkerchief.

'Never mind,' I continued. 'You don't come from the south of Germany, so you can't possibly understand. Yet when the time comes and this division exists, when it goes on parade, then one will see that all the oh so witty remarks about leather shorts are null and

void. But, and this is the point I want to emphasize: On my long journey to power, I learned that a politician in leather shorts is not taken seriously by the captains of industry and the elder statesmen. There is little I regret, but I was forced to give up my beloved leathers, and I did so for the sake of my cause and thereby for the sake of the German nation. And I say to you: I did not give up my wonderful *Lederhosen* just for a telephone device to put paid to my sacrifice and make me look like a complete Soupy-Kaspar! So will you please get a sensible sound out of this device for me.'

'Well tha's why I asked ya in the first place,' sniffed Miss Kramer, putting her handkerchief aside. 'I can make it sound like jus' a normal phone. Or I can get any other sound ya like. Words, noises, music...'

'Music?'

'As long as I don't 'ave to play it meself. It's gotta be on a record!'

And that was when she set the telephone to play the Ride of the Valkyries for me.

'Good, isn't it?' I asked the newsagent as I raised the apparatus smoothly to my ear. 'Hitler here!'

I heard nothing but riding Valkyries.

'Hitler!' I said, 'Hitler here!' And as the Valkyries rode on I switched to 'Fuehrer headquarters!' Just in case the caller was surprised to have got straight through to me. Nothing happened, except that the Valkyries grew louder. By now it was rather painful on the ear.

'HITLER HERE!' I shouted, 'THIS IS THE FUEHRER'S HEADQUARTERS!' It was like on the western front back in 1915.

'Press the green button, please,' called the newsagent with a plaintive undertone. 'I can't stand Wagner.'

'Which green button?'

'The thing on your telephone,' he shouted. 'You have to swipe it to the right.'

I looked at the device. There was indeed a green slider depicted on the display. I pushed it to the right, the Valkyries fell silent, and I shouted: 'HITLER HERE! FUEHRER HEADQUARTERS!'

Nothing happened, except that the newspaper vendor took my hand along with the device and, rolling his eyes, moved it towards my ear with a slight pressure.

‘Mr Hitler?’ I heard the assistant Sawatzki, ‘Hello? Mr Hitler!’

‘Jawohl,’ I said, ‘Hitler speaking!’

‘I’ve been trying to get hold of you for ages. Ms Bellini asked me to tell you: the board of directors is very pleased!’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘that’s good. I myself had expected a little more, however.’

‘More?’ asked a confused Sawatzki, ‘even more?’

‘My dear Mr Sawatzki,’ I said in a placating tone, ‘three newspaper articles are all very well, but we do have rather ambitious goals...’

‘Newspaper articles?’ crowed Sawatzki. ‘Who cares about newspaper articles? You’ve made it onto Youtube. And you’re getting no end of clicks!’ Then he lowered his voice and added, ‘Between you and me, there were a few people who wanted to drop you right after the show. I won’t name names. But now... Take a look at it! The youth demographic loves you.’

‘The youth has an undistorted view,’ I told him.

‘So that means we have to produce new stuff right away,’ said Sawatzki, clearly agitated. ‘Your share’s being extended. We’re planning short interview clips now too! You’ve got to come to the office right now! Where are you?’

‘In the newsstand,’ I said.

‘Great,’ said Sawatzki, ‘stay right there, a taxi’s on its way!’ Then he hung up.

‘Good news?’ asked the newspaper salesman.

I held out my telephone device to him. ‘Can you use this to access a matter by the name of Yootyoob?’

Timur Vermes, *Er ist wieder da* (He’s back)

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Jutta.Willand@Eichborn.de