

Last call

by Michael Surmann

„What?“

It was not only that John William did not understand what the man was saying, he did not even realize in which language he was talking to him. John William turned his face away from the Empire State building and looked at him. He was a grey haired person with a lot of wrinkles and seemed to be about sixty years old. He was wearing old clothes which did not fit one to another and did not exactly make a British gentleman out of him.

“Wunderbare Aussicht, nicht wahr? I never saw etwas Beeindruckenderes”

Although John Williams mind was somehow taken off by the fact that when the man’s mouth opened a strange teeth geometry appeared, John William assumed that it was a mixture of English and German.

“Yes, it is really beautiful” he answered in English.

“Sie können deutsch spechen” the man asked John William to talk German to him. Obviously he had seen the map, which John William had found and for some reason taken with him.

“How comes that you speak German?” John William asked.

“I learned it in school. In der Schule” the man answered and smiled. I like Germany very much! Everything is so well organised. Everything is so perfect. I was in Germany several times. Ich war in Berlin!”

“Oh, fine that you liked it. But I am English”

“Oh, England! I like it much more than Germany!” the man assured. “Do you like it here in New York?”

“Yes, very much. It is impressing. Somehow being here feels like being in the Centre of the new world.” John William answered in a sudden strike of euphoria. At once he regretted to have said this. He had shown a weak spot to this person.

“Yes, indeed” the man agreed and touched John William’s shoulder. And like a wolf that smelled the scent of the prey he continued speaking. “Maybe you know that for forty-two years this has been the highest building in the world. They needed only 14 months to build it.”

“Hm” John tried to behave somehow disinterested, but the man recognised that John William was eager to here more detail. John William even ignored, that the man was smelling bad and came closer to him than comfortable while talking. And so it happened that they became some kind of team for the time of John Willam’s visit of the Empire State building. The man explained, that the Building was 381 meters high, that with antenna it was even 449 meters. He explained that the logistic during the construction was so perfect, (like they do in England, he added) that no worker ever had to hang around doing nothing. 50.000 steel girders were transported with a

vertical assembly line. The steel girders were produced in Pittsburgh and delivered just in time when they were needed, he explained. Sometimes the steel was still warm when it was delivered, the man further explained. The only thing that the man did not explain was, why he, who knew all this, was here at all. Finally John William thanked him for the guidance and turned to leave.

“No! You cannot go now. You have to tell me something about England. Let me invite you for a drink.”

“Well...”

“Come on. I know a nice coffeehouse down the centre. Just for one coffee!”

John William made up his mind. This was strange person. It was, to be more exact, an ugly person to whom John William would not hand out his money, his car or his drink for one minute. So with the same rationality that characterized John William since his first year in school he agreed.

“Oehm, didn’t you say that it was a coffee house?”

John William and the man were standing in front of a rotten old wood door which was part of a rotten old House. The jalousies where down and with its grey in grey colours it had the charm of a Chinese prison of 1960.

“I know it is not so beautiful, but the coffee is really great” the man answered while he was knocking at the door.

Some more alarm signs in the back of John Williams head were ringing which meant that now all alarm signs were ringing. Which meant that it was far too noisy in John Williams head to think clearly and so he entered.

John William was surprised in a positive way. Okay, it was not a coffee house. It was more or less a cabaret hall. There were a lot of tables, there was a stage and there was a huge bar. But this was not the positive surprise. About fifteen women were sitting at the bar. Beautiful women, John William recognised. They all were wearing some kind of cocktail skirts, high heels and looking at them gave John William a feeling of a small boy receiving fifteen new toys at the same time. A feeling that it was too good to be true.

“I will return soon, take a seat at the bar until then” The man said to John William.

“Oehm... yes. “ John William eloquently answered.

The man went to some corridor and John William tried to walk to the bar and look as relaxed as possible.

He sat down, ordered one Vodka Martini and two Minutes later he was sitting in front of his favourite drink next to fifteen beautiful women. He sipped, found that it was tasting fantastic and did what he thought was the most logic thing in his situation. He asked himself what was wrong. After looking around a bit he recognised two things. One was the fact that he was the only guest. The other was that there were two tall door

stewards full of muscles. Well, John William thought, of course it was normal in such a location to have door stewards who take care that not everybody who liked could get in. The difference was that these door stewards took care that not everybody who liked could get *out*. Together with the first fact, namely that he was the only guest, John William had an idea who this ‘everybody’ was in this case. He turned to the barkeeper, who was looking serious, but not impolite.

“And... how are things going?”

“Perfect, thank you” the barkeeper answered.

A pause came up. John William drank his Vodka Martini, ordered a new one and then put the question which was burning in his head for some time.

“Excuse me, this is a wonderful place, you know, but how do you manage to be rentable?”

The barkeeper looked at him, still serious but not impolite, and gave John William a very short, logical and precise answer.

“We kill our guests and take their money”

John William enjoyed his staying as much as he could. That meant he was feeling unbelievably terrible. He quickly realised that the barkeeper was not lying. Two more tall guys full of muscles and wearing guns, helped him to get to this opinion: When John William wanted to visit the restrooms they guided him and looked carefully that John William did not do anything which was welcome. As he tried to call the police they explained him that this was part of the things which were not welcome. They destroyed his mobile phone, gave him some punches and guided him back to his seat at the bar. John William did the next thing which seemed logical to him. He reflected his live, found that he had had a good one and that after all he was a sinner like all others. He thought of the books he had not returned, the school lessons he had missed and the red traffic lights he had passed. And anyway he was becoming older. So, John William thought, why not die here without making a big raw out of it?

“Would you like something else?” The barkeeper interrupted his thoughts.

John William looked around and saw one of the security guards pointing at his watch and looking at the barkeeper.

“You can have anything you like. You have three more calls” the barkeeper added.

John William ordered the biggest drink he found on the card and said his second wish.

“I would like these ladies to dance for me.”

The barkeeper looked a bit surprised for a moment. Then he turned the music louder and with just one sign the women stood up, entered the stage and began to dance. Well, dancing was only partially the correct word. Partially they simulated some sexual activities and John William said to himself that the last minutes of his live, compared to all the other minutes of his life, were not too bad. Meanwhile the barkeeper and even the security guards had some pearls of sweat on their foreheads. After some minutes

the music ended and the ladies returned to their seats while John William and the service personal were clapping their hands. The barkeeper showed that he was a man of discretion by waiting a minute to give this moment a worthy end before he said

“Last call, my friend”

John William swallowed. Well, it was obvious that he had no chance to escape. He looked around again and asked what he could order.

“You can have anything you like and which we have here” the barkeeper answered.

John William looked at the shelves behind the bar. He saw all kinds of drinks. He saw whiskey, wine, beer, champagne – everything. Nevertheless it was hard to decide what should be his last drink. Then suddenly he saw it. Right in the middle of the shelves. He saw something really beautiful. He saw something that every man would like to have a major role in the last minutes of his life. He saw a football.

“I would like the girls to play football!”

The barkeeper looked at the girls, looked at the ball, took it and nodded.

“We call it soccer. And you should know that there are the autographs of our local team on it. But anyway, a last call is a last call.” Football, John William thought, football.

Then the barkeeper let the ball fall out of his hands and before it touched the ground he shot the ball over the bar right onto the stage. Without any further communication the ladies went onto the stage and began to play a bit. Soon the Ladies built up two teams and played against each other. It was more then playing, it was a wild fight with a ball in between. Then, after a goal fell, a lady shouted to the barkeeper.

“This was offside, we need a referee!” There was no need to say this twice. The barkeeper, who had the same glance in his eyes as John William, jumped over the bar and hurried to the stage. Nevertheless the game continued to be a wild battle. John William could not look to anywhere else. Somehow he had the impression that the ladies were continuing some conflict they had with one another, somehow it seemed to John William that they were showing some sexual attraction to each other. Then the same team shot another goal. Some ladies were screaming with fun and triumph. Then one of the other team shouted

“The teams are not fair. We need help”

John William’s first impulse was to flounce onto the stage, but he was too overwhelmed. He could do nothing but stare at this scene. But not so the others. Before he could recognise it, the game continued and one security guard after the other ran onto the stage and took part in the game. With all of his willpower John William managed to take his eyes away from this scene and looked around to the one thing which was as interesting as the game was. He looked at the door. Nobody watched over it. John William thought three seconds if he should escape or if he should just stay and take part in the match and die afterwards. Then he decided that in fact he was not such a big sinner and still young and healthy and anyway going on living was a thing worth

trying. So he ran to the door as fast as he could, did not listen to some great cheering and screaming in his back, found the door unlocked, ran out of this building right onto the street and crashed into a police car.

He was thrown away some meters and felt that everything in his body was aching he could imagine.

“Are you stupid?” one of the policemen asked.

“Are you hurt?” asked the other.

“Or maybe both?” the first added.

“Everything okay with me.” John William replied. “But there... criminals... they wanted to kill me!”

Both policemen took the fact that John William had run onto the street like an idiot without looking for cars coming as a sign that he was eventually telling the truth. They took out their guns and rushed to the entrance.

John William sighed and was happy that the problem was in the strong hands of the United States police as he heard one of the policemen say to the other

“Oh, Pete, look, girls in high heels playing soccer!”

Football, John William thought. Football.