

## Night at the hotel

by Siegfried Lenz (born 1926/ died 2014)

The night porter ran with his bitten off fingertip thru the notebook, raised shoulders regretfully and turned his body to the left side, with the fabric of his uniform stretched dangerously under his arm.

"This is the only way," he said. "Nowhere else will you get a single room at this late hour. You are free, of course, ask other hotels. But I can tell you that, if you come back inconclusive, we will no longer be able to serve you. For the free bed in the double room you - I do not know for what reasons - do not want to take will then have found a weary soul, too ".

"Well," said Sponge, "I'll take the bed. Just as you might understand, I want to know who I have to share the room with; not out of caution, certainly not because I have nothing to fear. Is my partner- people one spends the night with could almost be called partners- there yet? "

"Yes, he is there and sleeps."

"He's asleep," repeated Sponge, let pass the registration forms, filled them out and handed them back to the night clerk; then he went up.

Involuntarily slowed Sponge his steps, when he saw the door with that number given to him, held his breath hoping to hear some noises the stranger might have caused and bent down to the keyhole. The room was dark. At the same moment he heard somebody coming up the stairs and now he had to act. He could have gone away, of course, and pretend as if he had mistaken the floor. Another possibility was to step into the room to which he was rightfully instructed and where another man was already sleeping in bed.

Sponge pushed the handle down. He closed the door and fumbled with a flat hand for the light switch. Then he stopped suddenly: beside him - and he concluded immediately that there had to stand the beds- someone said with a dark, but also energetic voice:

"Stop! Please do not switch on the light. You would do me a favour if you leave the room dark. "

"Have you been waiting for me?" asked Sponge scared; but he received no answer. Instead, the stranger said:

"Do not tumble over my crutches, and be careful that you do not fall over my suitcase standing about in the middle of the room. I'll safely conduct you to your bed. Go three steps along the wall, and then you turn left, and if you have again done three steps, you will be able to touch the bedpost."

Sponge obeyed; he reached his bed, undressed and slipped under the covers. He heard the breathing of the other and felt that he would not be able to sleep for now.

"By the way," he said hesitantly after a while, "my name is Sponge."

"So," said the other.

"Yes."

"Do you come here for a congress?"

"No, and you?" - "No."

"Business?" - "No, you cannot say so."

"Probably I have the strangest reason a man has ever had to come to town." said Sponge.

At the nearby railroad station a train switched.

„Do you want to commit suicide in the city?“, asked the other.

„No“, said Sponge, „do I look like it?“

„I don't know how you look like“, said the other, „it is dark.“

Sponge explained with anxious happiness in his voice:

„Heaven forbid, no! I have a son, Mr... (the other did not mention his name), a small rascal and because of him I came here.“

"Is he in hospital?"

"What do you mean? He is healthy, a little pale though, that may be, but otherwise very healthy. I wanted to tell you why I'm here, with you here, in this room. Like I said, this is connected with my boy. He is extremely sensitive, oversensitive, he already responds when a shadow falls on him.  
"

"So he's in the hospital."

"No," cried sponge, "I said that he is healthy in every way. But he is at risk, this little rascal has a glass soul, and therefore he is threatened. "

„Why doesn't he commit suicide then?“

„Now, come on! A child like him, immature, at such an age! Why do you say that? No, my boy is at risk for the following reason: Every morning when he goes to school - he is in fact always alone - every morning he must stop before a railroad crossing gate and wait for the morning train to pass. It is then that the little guy waves and waves violently and friendly and desperate. "- " And so?“

"Then," said Sponge, "then he goes to school, and when he comes home, he is confused and dazed, and sometimes he cries, too. He is unable to do his homework, he does not play and does not speak: that has been going on for months now, every single day. The boy will fall apart! "

"What causes him to such behaviour?"

"Look," said sponge, "this is strange: The boy waves, and - as he sees sadly - none of the travellers waves back at him. And he takes it to heart that we - my wife and I - have the greatest fears. He waves and no one waves back, you cannot force the travellers of course, and it would be absurd and ridiculous to adopt a provision in this regard, but ... "

"And you, Sponge, will now absorb the misery of your boy, by tomorrow taking the early train to wave the little one?"

"Yes," said Sponge, "yes."

"To me," said the stranger, "Children are nothing. I hate them and dodge them, for their sake - if you are fussy about it - I have lost my wife. She died in childbirth. "

"I'm sorry", said Sponge and propped up in bed.

The other said, "You're going to Kurzbach, right?" - "Yes."

"And you get no concerns with your project? Honestly spoken: aren't you ashamed of betraying your boy? For what you are going to do, you have to admit, is a sheer fraud, a deceiving. "

Sponge said upset, "How dare you, I ask you, how dare you!" He let himself fall, pulled the blanket over his head, lay there pondering for a while and then fell asleep.

When he awoke the next morning, he found that he was alone in the room.

He looked at the clock and was startled: till the morning train he had five minutes left, it was impossible for him to reach the train.

In the afternoon - he could not afford to stay another night in town - he came home dejected and disappointed.

His boy opened the door for him, gleeful and full of joy. He threw himself towards him and pounded his fists against his leg and cried:

"One waved, one waved for a very long time."

"With a crutch?" asked Sponge.

"Yes, with a stick. And finally he tied his handkerchief to the stick and held it out of the window until I could no longer see it. "