

Translated extract from

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***Zielinski***

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"Insanity, I find, is what one calls that which has no  
echo in the others' mind."

*Bettina von Arnim  
to Caroline von Günderode  
about Friedrich Hölderlin*

I don't understand my neighbor anymore. I don't understand why she leaves the apartment every morning; I don't understand why she bothers going to the hairdresser, why she has a cat, why she greets people in the stairway when she runs into them. I'm out of shaving cream, that's unlike me. I'll go to the drugstore; I'll buy some hair wax and nuts as well. I'll step out the front door and after a first breath of air, I'll realize I haven't gone outside for days. It will throw me for a loop, so I'll tell myself something to calm me down, I'll say everything is good for something.

Because that's how I am, how I've become; on my way home I'll ask myself why I'm on my way home, what business have I got going outside, why am I carrying shaving cream, hair wax and nuts. Everything for something; I'll tell myself, everything is good for something. Maybe my neighbor will greet me in the stairway. Every Tuesday the stairway smells of hairspray.

A few Tuesdays ago, it suddenly seemed strange to me that I was standing at the cash register counting money and asking for a grocery bag. I didn't want to be greeted by my neighbor. I recall this distinct

sensation of not wanting to be greeted. It was a Tuesday and that Tuesday will forever be the day when my goodwill ran out, the day when, for the first time, I felt rage and also estranged from my surroundings. Tuesday is the day when my neighbor goes to the hairdresser. For the past few days, I have been behaving very calmly, I barely move around in the apartment. I know precisely that there is a good reason for staying calm, for this keeping still. It helps to avoid rage. Rage towards my neighbor and all the other neighbors. Rage for so quickly running out of reasons for one's own actions and the actions of others, one considers the reasons more precisely. Rage is dangerous at moments when, for example, it is impossible to understand why a neighbor goes to the hairdresser every Tuesday. I'm not sad, I don't have a fever.

I can't find my rubber boots, they are new, I'd like to put them on. The rubber boots are green with a sturdy sole and a thick tread. So now I'm sitting in the kitchen without my rubber boots and staring at the clock. Minutes turn into days, into weeks, into years. I wouldn't remember a Tuesday, if it was just any Tuesday. I have to give my neighbor credit for that.

It smells of wood in my largest room. I don't know if I've been to the drugstore. I should ask my sister to check in on me. Thoughts are dangerous. They dig corridors, lots of corridors where you can spend time, without grasping the big picture anymore.

I'm keeping an eye on the door. It is quiet, as though nothing were going on. You can get used to everything, if you allow it to continue long enough. I

have no desire to see anybody, or allow anybody to help me. I have no desires. This is another one of those dangerous ideas, I have no desires.

And so you sit on a chair, you hear yourself breathing, and that's it. You've forgotten the surroundings.

Men were standing in the stairway. One of them gave me a letter; he nodded to the other ones, they walked past me into my apartment, carrying large quantities of wood. They brought the wood into my largest room and kept bringing more in. They worked quickly, not hastily, they all wore the same clothes, blue trousers and white shirts; they were polite, they did not smell of sweat. The men stayed for a long time, they kept the door shut; I heard them inside the room hammering and sawing, swearing and laughing. They stayed for three days and then it was quiet in my apartment. The letter they handed me doesn't say much. The handwriting is even, slanted slightly to the right, curved smoothly above and below the line on fine paper.

*Don't worry about anything, with best regards Zielinski*  
is written there.

The next day, lots of royal blue velvet was delivered. Once again, men disappeared into my largest room; they shut the door and I heard them hammering, I heard them swearing and laughing; it went on like that for two days and then it was quiet in my apartment. They also had a letter for me, this letter also doesn't say much.

*I'm busy, I'll be a few days late, with best regards,*  
*also please the velvet on the lid of my crate, Zielinski*

I have to admit to myself, I can't find the letters. There's no point in looking for the letters, because I have alleged the letters exist. Nevertheless, I owe it to myself to look for them, ultimately, I'm certain I heard the men, how they swore, laughed and hammered away. Ultimately, I'm certain I had read Zielinski's handwriting. Therefore, I owe it to myself to believe in the existence of these letters and to look for them. It is advantageous to make friends with who you are, I am the one who can't find two letters in his messy drawers, and I should just leave it at that. The mess is responsible for my not being able to find anything.

I walked into my largest room, I'm positive I walked into my largest room. It smelled of wood. My furniture, my books and pictures had vanished; in my largest room stood a giant wooden crate with a door; it took up half the space and reached to the ceiling, it's still standing there, I've gone to my largest room plenty of times and checked. I'm certain next to the door there was bell with a name plate attached to it, or rather there *is* a bell with a name plate attached to it.

I read the name Zielinski aloud and then I rang the bell. The ringtone sounded familiar. Everything was silent, I opened the door and entered. It smelled of wood. It still smelled of wood, I'm certain of that. Walls of royal blue and velvet, royal blue and velvet walls surrounded me from floor to ceiling, my parquet served as the floor; a chandelier hung from a royal blue ceiling in the middle of the wooden crate, under the chandelier stood a simple dark brown wooden chair; there was nothing else inside.

I closed the door, I stood in front of the crate for a long while, I kept re-reading this name. Zielinski, I read. The next morning at nine, I heard steps inside the box. I heard Zielinski drag the chair across the parquet, across my floor, back and forth, from right to left, from left to right, Zielinski's chair. He did not bother to greet me, I'm sure of that, even after I knocked on the door and had cleared my throat several times, even after I had entered and called out my full name loudly and clearly, insisting on courtesy, Zielinski paid no attention to me.

- You are scratching my floor with your chair, I exclaimed.

Children are playing in the courtyard. They are calling each other names; they are cheering and screaming, the courtyard multiplies their shouts, their fights, their laughter. Chalk drawings are visible on the ground of the courtyard. Cars, monsters, trees, or heroes I don't know of. At night the courtyard is nothing more than the distance between the facing houses.

There is no reason to stare at the bottle of wine. I know exactly what the bottle looks like. I also know exactly what the ashtray looks like and the kitchen curtain, the water faucet, the table leg, the doorknob. There is no reason to stare at things. Everything is very quiet, while I stare; I am very quiet, nothing moves while I stare, and I don't move either. I should ask somebody to find out what this staring means. Maybe it is a symptom that fits some disease profile perfectly. There are so many frightening disease profile. To be precise, there seems to be for almost every state of being an appropriate disease profile, an

infinite repertoire of interpretable symptoms is available to any of us. You shouldn't look into it, you shouldn't be too well informed about the various choices of defects. I can't find my rubber boots.

At the moment, I would not find it pleasant to engage in conversation. I couldn't answer the questions they'd ask me very well. I couldn't find any friendly words.

If you want to deal with people, you have to be friendly. If you are done with being friendly, then you fall out of favor, it's not possible to be understood anymore, not even with yourself can you easily converse.

I go through the alphabet, I succeed effortlessly. Basically, I don't know why I'm losing the ability to be friendly more and more. It is possible for me to retrieve my displeasure by thinking about friends, relatives, even about people who I had only met once and very briefly in the past. I do not know why I provoke it, why I am trying to remember people so I can feel disgust.

Today the stairway smelled of hair spray, therefore it must be Tuesday. I don't know why I was standing in the stairway. I stood there until I didn't smell the hairspray anymore.

For five days I've been waiting. For five days, Zielinski has not stirred. He must have found the perfect place for his chair. I am not particularly comfortable with the idea that he has moved in.

I am not particularly comfortable with the idea he could leave again. I'm not particularly comfortable with any idea.

I am assuming that the person in this crate is called Zielinski. That's what was written and ultimately, you can rely on name plates.

For days I haven't gone to work. It's certainly not a good thing to do in the long run. My colleagues will wonder what could have happened to me. I should go to the doctor and have him sign a paper saying I'm sick. A doctor should be able to find a good explanation. But I don't want to leave the apartment, I'm not able to leave the apartment right now. I don't have a fever. I'm not sad. I keep considering what, aside from body temperature, can be equally uncomplicated to be represented in numbers. Blood pressure is measurable, blood sugar levels and the heart beat can be represented in numbers. This set of rules of good numeric results would be a useful means to get calm. I can't find the blood pressure machine, it's because of the messy drawers, it's because of the messiness that I can't find anything, I should organize it.

- Come inside already, bring your chair, you are warmly welcome, Zielinski calls to me from inside his crate. His voice is extraordinarily pleasant.

I don't know what to do. I want to see Zielinski and it's good to want something. Still, I don't know if it is right to approach him. His calling for me is a delight, I can't deny that. I'm getting a chair from the kitchen, then I'm quietly and slowly entering Zielinski's royal blue world. I don't know if it is right to approach Zielinski.



Step by step, I know less. I don't know how long it has been since I've left my apartment.

Zielinski is sitting in his chair under the chandelier in the middle of the crate. I sit down across from him on my chair, the open door is to my back; it smells of wood in Zielinski's crate. I have no idea what might happen now, I like it here, I have to admit to myself; I like Zielinski.

- We ought to address each other with the formal you. I won't remember your name, but don't worry about it, says Zielinski. His eyes are beautiful. He gets up with an elegant air, he moves slowly, he paces up and down, he walks with a cane without limping; even that seems elegant, an appearance of a very singular splendor. Zielinski is wearing a suit, he knows how to wear suits, nothing about him seems deliberate, everything about him turns out perfectly. Zielinski notices me looking at him.

-Once in a while, I like to walk with a cane, it's a whim I like to indulge, he says.

Zielinski sits down. I stare at the handle of his cane. I am completely taken by the sight of the greyhound head carved in ivory.

- We will not be able to avoid your asking questions, and not one of them will inspire me to answer you, he says, and he looks at me, it's a calm glance, almost gentle, Zielinski laughs. His teeth are well-cared for, his shirt is ironed, his fingernails are clean. He is an extraordinary person, no flaws in him to be found, I can't measure up to him, there is no way to maintain an undiluted self-image if you have to face Zielinski.

I should be furious at him, I should throw him out of my apartment, I should fly into a rage. His mouth is beautiful. I should ask a friend for advice.

- What are you doing here, this naturalness with which you take over my apartment, who are you anyway, I scream. My screaming is inappropriate at this moment, it is clumsy and without dignity. Zielinski is sitting in the middle of his royal blue crate, he is sitting under the chandelier and nods at my words, then he places his cane next to the chair on the floor, he crosses his legs, they are slim legs. I see no hair, his scalp is not shiny, it is flawless, he has big, open eyes, a very friendly gaze. His suit is made of the finest silk.

- It would be really important for me to know, I say, Zielinski lifts the cane from the floor, he looks at me and gets ready.

Zielinski hits me on the forehead with his cane, it is a hard, a precise, it is a perfect blow.

- Nothing is important to know, and next time I ask you to visit me, put your chair a little further away from me, thank you, says Zielinski, he says it in a friendly and calm way.

I take my chair and slowly walk to the door, I'm a little dizzy from the blow. I turn around to Zielinski, he has placed the cane next to him on the floor and is looking at me. I feel an urge to take my temperature, I do not know where the blood pressure machine is, I don't have a machine to measure my blood sugar, I should ask my sister to check on me. So there I am with an aching forehead, standing in Zielinski's crate near the door.

I don't know what to do, I don't know what tone of voice to use, nor do I know what words to say.

To keep up appearances, maybe I should have welcomed him, I lack the appropriate words to make up for this, my forehead hurts. I should design a logo. The head of a greyhound would be well-suited for it; I should create a kind of coat of arms. I should ask Zielinski if he already has a coat of arms, I should drink some water.

- The grip is made of ivory, the cane of ebony, welcome, I say quietly.

Slowly, I walk through his door, quietly I close it and look at the name plate. Inside his crate, Zielinski moves his chair, Zielinski, I read, and it smells of wood. I leave my largest room; quietly I shut the door to the room and, as if doing that would be enough to prevent something, turn the key twice in the lock.