

# **From an Old Pharmacy**

*a series of sketches*

**by Jaroslav Hašek**



***Liberated from  
capitalist control  
to educate the masses  
by  
Socialist Stories***

## INTRODUCTION

*When Hašek was thirteen, his father died. Until then he had done well at school, but he soon started neglecting his work and involving himself in street fights. Finally he failed his examinations and, following a series of complaints from the school and the police, he was expelled. In desperation his widowed mother tried to find him a job; thanks to her efforts, he spent the next three years working at two chemists' shops. These tales "From an Old Pharmacy" are based on his personal experiences as a chemist's apprentice.*

*It was not long before he was sacked from the first shop. There are two versions of how it happened. One was that Kokoška, the proprietor, fancied himself an artist and had covered the walls of his office with paintings of alpine landscapes. One day, when Kokoška was asleep, Hašek crept in and with a few strokes turned the face of one of the cows into a caricature of Kokoška complete with pince-nez and square beard. According to the other version, while up on the loft one day Hašek heard the sound of singing and the stamping of feet outside. Sticking his head out of the window he saw a procession of bakers on strike. Anxious to show his sympathy for them he tore down the red petticoat of Kokoška's maid, which was drying on the loft, and hung it out on the roof. The strikers broke into thunderous applause, shouting out the Czech patriotic greeting of "Nazdar" and singing "The Red Flag". The police came rushing up and cross-examined the proprietor. This was too much for the old man and he insisted that Hašek's guardian should remove the boy forthwith.*

*A job was then found for him with another chemist named Průša. He was a more easy-going man who had*

*progressive ideas and could appreciate Hašek's gifts. After a year, he persuaded Hašek's mother that the boy had too much talent to be left to spend all his life at a shop counter. And so young Hašek was sent to the Czechoslavonic Commercial Academy for further education.*

# The first day at the pharmacy

ON THE VERY FIRST DAY OF MY NEW CAREER AS A CHEMIST'S apprentice, Mr. Kološka, my chief, called me into his counting-house, which was the name he gave to a corner of his shop shut off by a wooden partition.

Mr. Kološka — an elderly gentleman with a long beard, who was of such short stature that I, a fifteen-year-old boy, was taller than him by a short head — sat down on the chair before his writing desk, fixed his shrewd little eyes on me, and began, "Young man, from today on you are my new apprentice, and as such, you must listen seriously to one or two things I am going to tell you and see that you are guided by them throughout your life. You are probably familiar with the proverb 'Good advice is more precious than gold'. . . . Very well then, be all ears now and pay attention to what I am about to say.

"Your new profession, young man, is a very difficult one. Up to now you have been at school, and there you only had to worry about learning things by heart. None of it was of the slightest use for your future life, except Latin which, as a fourth-form boy, you probably have a smattering of and which you will need as a chemist. In the trade nobody will ever ask you when this or that king reigned or what a thing is called, what geometry is and so forth. Nobody wants to know how far away from us some star in the sky is or how 'pterodactyl' is spelled. When a customer comes into the shop he

will not be interested in whether you speak correct Czech or not, and you certainly cannot ask him about his Czech either. It will be quite sufficient if you understand what he says and serve him to his satisfaction. In the shop all that is required of you is that you should be able to add up correctly and not lose out in the process. That's the right way to do things in business. You are a young man and you must learn from what you see, not from books as you did at school.

“When a customer comes into the shop, you must do exactly what he wants. If he wants sky-blue you must climb up to the sky and bring it down to him. Furthermore, you can think what you like about him, but you must not say it to him. A tradesman, remember, makes his living from the public. When anyone comes into the shop you must immediately call out, ‘I wish you good day, your Honour’, ‘I kiss your hand, Madam’, or ‘Good morning, Miss’. And when the customer leaves, you must be just as polite, even if he has bought nothing. And when you are selling — and you will be doing that after a time — remember for the future to say, ‘Please, sir, what can I offer you?’ or something like that, and you must



bestir yourself, rush about, serve him promptly, and never lose money. If an item isn't in stock, don't allow the customer to go away, but offer him something else. Once he is in the shop you must make him buy something, whatever it may be. For example, if he comes in and wants a toothbrush, urge him at once to buy toothpowder. Or if he wants toothpowder, urge him to buy a toothbrush and tell him that it is a special bargain.

"And you must tell whatever lies come into your head; you will learn all that in the course of time. But it goes without saying that although you may deceive a customer by telling lies, you must never lie to me. To me you must always behave as though I were your father, and if at any time I should swear at you, I would not advise you to answer back, because I have a very quick temper. When I give an order, you must execute it at once. With me everything must be done as it is in the army.

"You must be scrupulously honest — I hope there is no need to tell you that. You must not scrounge food or break anything. What you do have to do is work. It's only for your own good. I am telling you all this, young man, as if I were your father.

"Every morning you must come to me in my flat to fetch the key-box. After that you must go and wait in front of the shop. When the clerk comes, you will both of you open the shop. You will then go and hang out the angel sign, come back again and dust the shop thoroughly so that it is clean everywhere. And when I arrive at eight o'clock I shall give you your instructions.

"At ten o'clock every morning you will come and see me in my counting-house. I shall give you money and you will buy me half a litre of beer, two rolls, and a portion of anchovies. At one o'clock you may go to lunch, but you must be back again by two. At four o'clock you will come and see me again in my counting-house. I shall give you money and you will go and buy me coffee from the café — be sure you ask for a lot of cream. At eight o'clock you will go with the messenger, take down the angel sign, and shut the shop. You will then put the keys into the key-box and the clerk will lock it. He will take the key and you will bring the key-box to my flat.

“Every other Sunday between ten and eleven o’clock I shall allow you to go to church somewhere. And there’s another thing that I want to impress upon you. You must side with me and not with the staff. That is the most important thing. Today you will only clean the bottles. And while you are doing that, take a good look at the labels in Latin and Czech, so that you will know what is in them. That way you will gradually get to understand everything. So now, young man, remember all this very carefully. You may go.”

When I left the counting-house I was deeply affected. All Mr. Kološka’s instructions went round my head in a whirl. When I came back to the counter, the clerk, Mr. Tauben, said to me, “He bored you to death, I suppose, our Radix?”

“Whom do you mean?” I asked diffidently.

“Why, the old man, of course,” the clerk answered. “We call him ‘Radix’. We chemists like to use nicknames like that, you know. Our Radix is a bit weak in the upper storey, as the saying goes, but he’s a good chap otherwise. You probably think that what he’s just told you came out of his own head. Good Lord, no, my lad! He’s had to learn that whole sermon by heart exactly as his wife taught it to him. We call her ‘Acidum’. You mustn’t look on our old man as though he were God Almighty. He’s really nothing more than a cipher and it’s his wife who is everything. As soon as she comes into the shop, you’ll see at once who’s the real boss. So, my boy, see that you stick with us.

“I expect the old man told you that you have to clean the bottles today. Well, clean them—but not at the double! D’you understand? Just take it easy. There mustn’t be any ‘at the double’ about your work here. If there were, old Radix would soon twist you round his little finger. If today you clean fifteen bottles by the evening, you’ll have done your stint. After all, you’ll be cleaning bottles for the whole of the week, so take your time over it. Whatever you do don’t go and bust yourself, otherwise he’ll only shove more and more work on to you. And when his old woman comes here to see him, run straight up to her and kiss her hand. And if Radix sends you to a firm to fetch something or if you go anywhere to deliver anything, for heaven’s sake don’t run! Just

amble along comfortably in your own time, as if you were going for a stroll. That's what I always used to do. And be sure you don't come back too soon. If you do, Radix'll only send you on more errands every day and get so used to your returning quickly that in the end he'll think you just can't help doing things at the double."

Mr. Tauben paused and then went on, "You know what, my lad? I see you're a good chap. Here's money for two litres of beer. Go to the storeroom at the back and in that barrel at the end — you can see it from here — you'll find a jug. Take it, go through the back exit from the storeroom and across the yard into the bar. Then buy two litres of beer. Bring the jug of beer back and put it in the barrel. You can drink as much as you like. You know, I was an apprentice myself once."

Mr. Tauben gave me the money and I did as he asked. When I had returned with the beer and hidden the jug in the barrel, I came back and cleaned the bottles — *very* leisurely, in fact as leisurely as anyone could imagine.

Half an hour later Mr. Kološka called me into his counting-house.

"By the way," he said, "there's one thing I forgot to tell you. If by any chance that Mr. Tauben sends you out to fetch beer for him, let me know at once. They say that he's rather too keen on sending the apprentices out for beer. . . ."

These were the events of the first day, but let me add that altogether I went five times to fetch that forbidden beer for Mr. Tauben, and when the servant asked, "Well, what about the young apprentice?" I heard Mr. Tauben answer, "He's already of our persuasion and calls the old man 'Radix'. . . ."



## Mr. Tauben's instructions

FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS I FOLLOWED MR. TAUBEN'S ADVICE AND cleaned the bottles very slowly.

"When Radix comes," Mr. Tauben said to me, "and asks you why you aren't ready with them, tell him you're carefully studying the instructions on the labels. But leave your work now and I'll show you round the whole establishment."

He took me over the building. Mr. Kološka's shop was in an old house which no longer exists today. In that blackened building you could always smell the characteristic aroma of dried drugs, which in the first days stupefied me and permeated my clothes so thoroughly that everyone could tell a mile off that I was apprenticed to a chemist.

The ancient building had a special charm of its own. It conjured up in my mind memories of alchemists' workshops and medieval pharmacies I had read about. These impressions were confirmed by the sight of two giant mortars which were in the storeroom, and some big retorts on stands which were black with dust and as dirty as the retorts themselves.

From the storeroom Mr. Tauben led me to the carriage entrance, where under the cross-vaulting there stood some troughs, buckets, rolling pins, and various objects belonging to the particular business carried on here by a lady who sat at a little table near the entrance to the street.

“That’s Mrs. Kroupová, the cooper’s wife,” whispered the clerk. “Her husband is a real bad hat and everything she earns during the day he squanders in drink in the bar across the way. He sits there the whole day, and when he has no money left he comes to his wife and asks, ‘Have you sold anything dear?’ If, for example, she says, ‘One washtub’, he replies, ‘But that’ll only buy eight glasses of beer.’ He reckons everything up by glasses. And, when you’re a little older, my lad, you’ll understand what it means when I tell you that she puts up with anything he does because she’s living in sin with him!

“We don’t need to go so quickly,” Mr. Tauben continued. “If anyone should come into the shop, Radix will serve him. You already know the bar over there. When we get to around the twentieth of the month, I shan’t give you money for the beer. You’ll have to get it for me on tick. But the proprietor there is a cunning devil, my boy. Take care he doesn’t book you for three litres instead of two as he’s done sometimes. But his wife is nice. When later on you’re despatching alcohol for brandy and she comes into the shop to buy it, give her the best we have—not mixed with water like we give the public. She uses it for making



cherry brandy and I sometimes nip over to get some, so let's keep it good and strong. The last apprentice once poured out that adulterated stuff for her, and don't ask what the cherry brandy tasted like after that! And later when you'll be selling across the counter, if the proprietor comes to buy some drops for his stomach, give it to him free, because he sometimes waits up to three months for me to pay him.

"There, where those two dirty windows are, is where the concierge, Mrs. Pazderková, lives. She always comes to us first thing in the morning for a glass of kümmel. We have to give it to her *gratis*, so Radix says, because she could upset the whole house. For the three days since you've been here she hasn't shown her face. She's ill. She's always like that when the teacher keeps her son in — ginger-haired Francek. He's eleven years old and a real hooligan. He doesn't give anyone any peace, gets up to all sorts of mischief, but you're not allowed to punish him, oh dear no! Once I caught him making a hole in the big metal drum where the oil is kept, and I slapped him. Well, after that old Mrs. Pazderková came into the shop and insisted that Radix give me notice at once. And you should have heard the row in the street in front of the shop! Lots of people collected outside; she was holding ginger-haired Francek by the hand, he was howling and blubbing, and she was shrieking out that there was a man in the shop who'd beaten unconscious this innocent and defenceless child. So we had to invite her to have a glass of kümmel and give Francek some sweets. That ginger-haired Francek has caused me a lot of trouble. In the summer you'll see a regular pantomime in the yard. Francek'll get undressed and climb into the washtub in the middle of the yard just as God made him. And he'll splash about in the water from morning till evening. There's an old maid living upstairs on the first floor and once, when she saw Francek bathing in his birthday suit, she fell into a faint. The concierge, Mrs. Pazderková, is allowed to buy all goods from us at half price.

"Next door, by those windows, lives the butcher, Mr. Kavánek, and whenever he makes galantine of pork, he always invites me to have some too and gives some to the messenger as

well. The messenger and I both call this a *quid pro quo*. He doesn't cheat us and we don't cheat him either. You know, my boy, that's in the spirit of the German proverb: '*Leben und leben lassen*' — 'Live and let live.' It's true that we sell him spices at the normal price, but remember that when he comes in and wants a kilo of any spice, you must weigh out a kilo and a half, and bill him for only a kilo. Then he'll offer you some of his galantine of pork. But don't eat it in front of the boss. The last apprentice used to take it home with him. You'll learn all about that in the course of time. Now, come on, let's go down into the cellar."

When Mr. Tauben opened the door of the cellar and lit the lantern, my nostrils were assailed by the odour of acids and mustiness rising out of the darkness. At the same time a squealing sound could be heard.

"That's the rats," Mr. Tauben told me. "The last apprentice was bitten by one; you always get them, my boy, everywhere in old buildings. Ever since our Radix put down special poison for them they've multiplied quite considerably. In the summer months especially you'll see any moment a grey brute moving about somewhere in the cellar. And no cats have been able to survive here since a man who thinks he has consumption moved in next to the butcher. He catches all cats, skins them, and lays the skins on his chest. Be careful you don't slip on the steps. It's still damp from the time the messenger and I broke a drum of distilled water here. Since then when anybody has come and asked for distilled water, we have got it out of the well. So all our drops have a milky colour now, because I make them up with well water instead of distilled water. And our Radix has broken off business relations with three firms already because he thinks they sent him adulterated oil and ether for the drops. You see, my lad, that's what one has to do. A chap must never lose his head, and the main thing is to make sure we diddle the boss, because we have to reckon that, when we in turn one day become bosses, someone may diddle us too. I'll take you down to the cellar, my lad, just so that you can learn where we keep the olive oil."

Mr. Tauben opened the wooden partition and said, pointing

to a metal drum, "Look, here's the olive oil, although it's labelled 'Linseed Oil'. When Radix sends you down to the cellar to fill a bottle with olive oil, fill it with this, because about half a year ago we broke the drum of olive oil. Sometimes people send the oil back to us, and the old man has written lots of letters to the firm from which he ordered it, asking them why they sent such a bad kind. Radix never comes down here himself to look. He's frightfully afraid of rats, so, sometime when you come back from the cellar, don't forget to complain that there are so many rats there that it's too awful. Now let's go up again."

When we were in daylight once more, Mr. Tauben went on:

"I've got just one more thing to tell you young man. Did you notice the sweet shop in the street behind this house? The apprentices from that shop come to us in the summer to get crude salt for making ice cream. Always give it to them *gratis*, then you can eat as much ice cream as you like. But don't eat it in front of the boss. We won't go up on to the loft today — we can do that tomorrow. I'm sure Radix will be mad enough as it is, because he's alone in the shop at this time when there's so much custom."

"Where have you been lazing about, Mr. Tauben?" Mr. Kološka asked angrily when we came back into the shop. "You just go off and leave me all on my own to sweat like a horse."

"Oh, do please excuse me, sir," Mr. Tauben answered. "I was showing the new apprentice round the establishment and teaching him his job."

"Ah, well, that's another matter," Mr. Kološka said mildly. "But see that you teach him everything and that you make something of him."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Tauben. "I am quite confident that I'll make something of him."

## Mr. Ferdinand, the messenger

AT THAT TIME MR. FERDINAND WAS ABOUT FORTY YEARS OLD. HE had a high forehead, indicating an outstandingly developed intellect, which was confirmed for me by Mr. Tauben when he said, "He's a very cunning devil indeed."

He had kindly grey eyes, brown hair, and a slightly darker moustache. But what struck one immediately about him was his red nose, which was an infallible sign that he had once been a messenger in a wine and spirits shop.

His suit was always filthy and greasy. You could see on it the traces of all kinds of oil, spots burned out by acids, and various stripes of floor paint and streaks of varnish were spread all over his coat. His waistcoat sparkled with bronze dust which had firmly settled on stains left by a solution of rubber and petrol. The left sleeve of his coat reeked of essence of turpentine, the right sleeve of powdered cinnamon. In short Mr. Ferdinand's clothes were a mixture of every possible kind of drug and chemical, with the result (as I found out afterwards) that when he went across to the bar he sat in his customary place by the stove, where he was by himself, and opened the stove door so that the smell from his working clothes would not drive the other guests away.

But one thing was very peculiar: Mr. Ferdinand always wore shiny shoes. And, as soon as he was finished with any piece of work, he went to the storeroom and polished them so beautifully that they shone like mirrors. Mr. Kološka used to say that Mr. Fer-

dinand only did this to kill time. Be that as it may, after every piece of work, however minor, he went off to clean his shoes.

And that was also the reason why, not long after starting my apprenticeship, I had a heart-to-heart conversation with Mr. Ferdinand. He had just returned from the yard, where he had been grinding cinnamon in a mortar. He then went to the storeroom, and was taking a box of shoe polish and a shoe brush out of a cupboard, when I came in.

"Come here, my lad," said Mr. Ferdinand.

When I had come close to him, he said, "Do you have a lot of saliva, young man?"

"Yes, I do."

"Good," he said approvingly. "Somehow my throat has got dry with pounding that cinnamon."

"Yes," I said, not knowing what he wanted.

"When you grind down polish with ordinary water, my lad," the messenger continued, "you can't get the shoes to shine brightly enough."

"You're right," I said.

"It shines best with saliva," said Mr. Ferdinand and added, "Fire ahead, then."



When I said nothing, he began again. "Would it put you to a lot of trouble, my boy, if you were to spit into the polish for me?"

"You have to think of things like that right away yourself," he said, when I did what he wanted. "We must all of us help each other.

"Our sort must support each other," he continued, polishing his shoes. "That's how it is in the world, young man, and as long as the world goes on, it will always be like that. And the great lords" — he completed the sentence with an unexpected twist — "will do their best to stop the poor from supporting each other.

"You know, my boy, we are still very, very stupid," he said, pursuing his argument further. "We prey on each other. I see that best in Michle. Do you know where Michle is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I live in Michle, and next door to me lives another messenger and he's angry because I earn four guilders a week more than he does and can spend four guilders more on drink than he can. And so he makes a noise all the time in the corridor at home to drive into my head once and for all that I'm going to pay for this until the day of my death. And not long ago he shouted out that I had, or so he said, cheated our boss at the customs point with the invoice, and that he knew how it was done. I got angry and said that everybody had a different method. I said, 'Plaček, not everybody steals so damned stupidly as you do, you filthy scum. When you worked in that factory, the porter only had to undo your waistcoat to see at once what you were carrying home, you thief.'"

Mr. Ferdinand exhibited considerable anger, as could be seen by the rapid way he polished his shoes. The brush moved about on the shoes with unbelievable speed and he wrinkled his high forehead and went on, "'Well, what have you got to say to that, Plaček?' I said, and Plaček stood in the corridor and began to shout, 'You chemist creature, they can smell you two miles off with those filthy concoctions of yours.' 'Now take it easy, Plaček,' I answered, 'I didn't say anything bad about you. All you can do is swear, you thief.' Plaček went out into the passage again and shouted out, 'You sold my boy's shoes and now the poor little fellow goes about



barefoot. And you sold a kilo of pepper to a greengrocer — where did you get it from, tell me that? And you smashed your wife's face in from the jaw up, you brigand. And then at the inn you stole a salt cellar — all this in the course of this week.' And I answered, 'The cure for a foul mouth is a punch on the jaw.'

Mr. Ferdinand paused. "And now that miserable bastard wants to take me to court because I slapped his face once or twice. Oh, my saliva's gone again! Spit, my boy, spit once again into the polish. Shoes won't shine with ordinary water. That's the way! Thank you. We must each of us help the other. . . ."

Returning to the shop I was stopped and addressed by Mr. Tauben.

"Doesn't Mr. Ferdinand smell rather too strongly of beer today?"

"I don't know. It's impossible to tell," I answered.

"You're quite right, those clothes of his. . .," said the clerk. "But for safety's sake you'd better tell him to eat a lemon, because he's to come and see the boss. He's got to take his little trolley and fetch some varnish."

## Mrs. Kološková

THE FIRST IMPRESSION I HAD OF MY CHIEF'S WIFE WAS THAT IT was no wonder Mr. Tauben called her "Acidum", the Latin for acid.

Only two days after my conversation with Mr. Ferdinand, she appeared in the shop at about nine o'clock in the morning.

The old clock on the wall had just rattled out nine when the door opened; the head of the automatic advertising doll with the inscription "Welcome!", drawn by a cord fastened on the door, gave a bow and the bell above the door tinkled. Then a tall, stout lady with a powdered face and features which were quite pretty despite her corpulence came into the shop with a purposeful stride reminding me of an abbot coming along to make sure that the monks in the cellar were not drinking up all the wine. She wore a gaudy hat and the rustle of her silk dress could be heard from a distance.

Mr. Tauben, who only a moment before had been joking, suddenly changed his expression to a very solemn one and hastily whispered to me, "That's the chief's wife," and he at once rushed to greet her, saying loudly, "I kiss your hand, Madam."

I ran forward and kissed her hand too.

Not deeming us worthy of an answer, Mrs. Kološková advanced towards the counter and demanded, "Where is the master?"

"In the counting-house, Madam," the clerk answered. And with unusual speed he ran along the narrow passage between the counter and the shelves, opened the glass door of the wooden partition, and called out, "If you please, sir, Madam is in the shop!"

The little husband ran out from behind the counter and brought a chair to his tall wife, welcoming her deferentially, "How are you, Mary, my dear? At last you've come to see us in the shop again."

"But of course you were asleep in your counting-house as usual," Mrs. Kološková said furiously. "You take your nap and it never occurs to you that Mr. Tauben is lounging on the counter and yawning. . . ."

"But, Madam, pardon me," Mr. Tauben said in self-defence.

"Do you think I didn't see you?" Mrs. Kološková snapped. "You were lolling on that counter, idling and yawning away. Of course people generally do yawn after a night on the tiles."

"Madam, I was at home last night," the clerk pleaded.

"And what about those bags under your eyes?" stormed the wife to our chief. "Why, isn't it plain as a pikestaff from your



appearance that you spent the whole night in debauch? And you go on tolerating this?" she added, turning swiftly on her husband. "What are you the chief for, if you do nothing to forbid such dissipation of youthful energies in the taverns."

"It won't happen again," Mr. Kološka answered miserably.

"But pardon me, Madam, I never went anywhere yesterday. I really didn't," Mr. Tauben protested. "I don't have any money left."

"So that's it!" said Mrs. Kološková in exasperation. "When you have money, you go and squander it, and I'm not surprised that after that you look like a corpse." (To tell the truth Mr. Tauben had been nice and red and rosy only five minutes before her arrival.)

"You fritter away your money," continued Mrs. Kološková, "and then after a night like that you're in a state where you cannot even serve the customers properly.

"But of course that doesn't matter a pin to you, Kološka," she said, turning on her husband who at that moment seemed even smaller than usual, "as long as you can have your nap next door in your counting-house. If it wasn't for me you'd have been bankrupt twenty years ago."

"My dear, if someone were to come in . . .," Mr. Kološka pleaded nervously.

"If someone were to come in" — Mrs. Kološková sneered — "I'd speak out just the same. What was it that saved you then? It was that fifteen thousand from my dowry and it's that that's still keeping your head above water. And if on top of everything else I didn't go on keeping an eye on the business, it would go to rack and ruin. And out of all this I get absolutely nothing for myself. The Bázas have a villa somewhere near Dobřichovice although they have a smaller income than we have. For how many years have I been telling you that you should have a villa built — but what's the use? Mr. Kološka prefers his own self-indulgence. At ten o'clock he orders Pilsner beer and a portion of anchovies. In the afternoon it's coffee with cream. But he doesn't care a rap about improving his wife's position although he knows very well that if it hadn't been for her he would have been bankrupt twenty years ago. That would

have knocked all thoughts of Pilsner beer and anchovies out of your head, wouldn't it?" She went on scolding, refusing to abandon what was obviously her favourite theme. "Then you wouldn't have been getting any coffee with cream. How can you help being thirsty when you buy anchovies? And then you come to me and ask if you can send the servant for beer again in the evening, and when she's gone out you want to embrace me! Let me tell you that I could let myself be embraced by other people than you, Kološka. And if it hadn't been for my father and the money you owed him I would never have married you. Poor Papa thought that at least in this way he'd get his debt paid. Your father-in-law is still very good to you but he only does it for my sake, because he doesn't want me, your wretched victim, to suffer even more through squabbles and arguments in the family.

"I want to see the cash ledger for the last week," she commanded, when she had recovered her breath. "Bring it here at once!"

Mr. Kološka disappeared behind the wooden partition and shortly afterwards returned with the required object.

He put the book deferentially on the counter. Mrs. Kološková got up from her chair and Mr. Kološka pushed it towards the counter, after which his wife sat down again and began carefully to scrutinize the individual items of daily expenditure for the previous week.

It was pitiful to see Mr. Kološka at that moment. How different from his recent attitude when he had said to me, "My boy, from today on you are my new apprentice!" Then he had acted proudly and with dignity, and now he was pale and trembling. Supporting himself on the counter, an unusually humble and contrite expression on his face, he went through the items one by one with his wife. Great suffering was mirrored in his eyes.

I had the impression that he was making a vague attempt to cover with his elbow some item farther down in the book.

There was silence. One could hear the ticking of Mr. Tauben's watch and at one moment I thought I could hear the beating of Mr. Kološka's heart.

Mrs. Kološková pushed her husband's elbow away from the book and went on examining item after item. . . .

"What on earth is this?" she burst out, as her stern gaze fastened on the spot where a moment before her crushed husband had been resting his elbow.

"What's this? It says here: 'various disbursements 23 guilders 50 kreuzers'. What on earth are those 'various disbursements'?"

If the sight of Mr. Kološka had a moment ago been rather pitiful, it now became even more so. He opened his mouth, as though he were going to say something, but the words were stuck in his throat and his teeth began to chatter like those of a man who has just stepped out of a hot bath and has been suddenly exposed to an icy blast.

Mrs. Kološková's penetrating eyes fastened inexorably on his chattering teeth, which emitted a tremulous "ta-ta-ta-ta".

"What does this mean?" she thundered again. "Why these 23 guilders 50 kreuzers?"

There was no answer. Only Mr. Kološka's teeth emitted with incredible speed their tremulous "ta-ta-ta-ta".

"Are you going to explain this to me or are you not?" Mrs. Kološková demanded.

"Sa-sa-sa-sardines and Pil-Pil-Pil-Pilsner b-b-b-b-beer," said Mr. Kološka, shaking all over, "and r-r-r-r-rolls and co-co-co-coffee".

"You're not going to get away with that," Mrs. Kološková screamed. "You must be keeping some woman, some hussy. You're giving her money and robbing us at home. You're robbing us all."

Mr. Kološka recovered his breath and said, "It's not true, my darling, it really isn't. I—I must confess that I broke your antique vase in the drawing-room. Then I had to buy a new one and so that you shouldn't know I put the new one in place of the old. . . ."

At these words the cash ledger flew across Mr. Kološka's head in the direction of the counting-house, narrowly missing its human target. The chair by the counter was pushed aside and Mrs. Kološková, red in the face in spite of her make-up, headed for the door uttering slowly and emphatically the following warning:

“Don’t you dare come home to lunch, and this evening I’ll make it hot for you — that’s something you can look forward to, I promise you that!”

“You wait!” were her last words pronounced when she was already near the door, which she burst open. The bell tinkled, the advertisement doll over the door with the inscription “Welcome!” automatically bowed its head, and the train of Mrs. Kološková’s skirt whipped up the dust in the street as though to demonstrate the violence of her rage.

At once Mr. Kološka began to breathe again — rather like a man restored to the fresh air after having been shut up in a foul atmosphere. Solemnly, with bowed head, he withdrew behind the wooden partition, addressing me again in managerial language: “Young man, you probably know that proverb ‘Don’t wash your dirty linen in public’, and if you don’t know it then you’d better learn it and fix it in your memory.”

He disappeared into the counting-house from which his voice could be heard a moment later, “Mr. Tauben, come here!”

When Mr. Tauben came back from seeing his chief, he told me with a laugh, “He’s really had a fright. He asked me whether I know of a hotel where he could stay overnight!” Then a serious expression came over Mr. Tauben’s face and he added, “Watch out, young man! Ah, yes, it’s only too true. ‘Acidum’ is *acidum* and *acidum* means acid.”

## The shop's customers

THE FIRST PERSON TO TURN UP EVERY DAY IN OUR PHARMACY was Mr. Brouček, the public carrier. Even before the shop was open he would be waiting in the street outside, and he was always the first one in, greeting everyone with a "God grant you a good morning — and two kreuzers' worth of schnapps please."

For old acquaintance sake we poured it out for him, whereupon he smacked his lips, and as he handed back the empty glass, he always said, "The brute certainly knows how to warm you up! You really ought to have a bar here." When he saw me for the first time he added, "Stick to it, my lad, so that you can be a credit to us."

A stout policeman who had his beat along our street sometimes waited with him for the opening of the shop. This gentleman, who aroused respect more by his corpulence than by his sabre and revolver, saluted as soon as he stepped into the shop and said, "Everything in order."

Mr. Tauben poured out a glass of schnapps for him too — *gratis* of course — and after the stout policeman had tossed it down he saluted and said again, "Everything in order." And then he left.

The carrier, Brouček, would stay on for a little while making critical remarks about the weather on the previous day like, "Yesterday it rained" or "I really can't recall any day as fine as yesterday, but it was cold". Then he would add, "Very well then, have a good time! I owe you two new kreuzers again", and leave.



After him the next visitor was always the old Jewess, Mrs. Wernerová, who owned the bar in the street next door. She brought with her a huge glass bottle, and every day we filled it up with the six litres of pure alcohol which she bought.

"*Um Gottes Willen*, Mr. Tauben," she would say, "just imagine it! There was another brawl at our place yesterday, and when I think that I was in the bar quite alone I'm really scared stiff that one day they'll beat me up as they did my late husband."

She never forgot to repeat that story at least once a week, especially if there was someone else in the shop, a story common in wine and spirits shops where the manufacturer of spirits gets beaten up by drunkards when it was he himself who made them drunk, perhaps on their last few kreuzers.

"And my late husband," she would add sorrowfully, "had such a good heart, *ein goldenes Herz*. He never diluted the schnapps and, poor dear, they set on him just because they found a fly in it. *Ja, ja, eine Fliege!* How could he help that?"

And every day, as she paid her bill, she complained and argued that she had read in yesterday's paper that the price of pure alcohol had fallen by two kreuzers a litre.

She was followed by the concierge, Mrs. Pazderková, who came to drink her usual ration of kümmel and at the same time to



explain to Mr. Tauben the meaning of his latest dream, her interpretation invariably concluding with: "Yes, that means they'll soon be taking you off to the churchyard." That rogue, Mr. Tauben, always used to tell her that he had been dreaming about white horses.

After Mrs. Pazderková had asked in a confidential tone about the health of Mr. Kološka, Mr. Tauben, and Mr. Ferdinand, she usually began to grumble about the behaviour of the tenants in the house. Then she would complain bitterly about the teacher who had kept Francek again in the previous day.

After she had gone, ginger-haired Francek came on his way to school to get a stick of liquorice, or a pipette to use as a pea-shooter in class, and he always assured us that his mama would pay for it. After that came young ladies and their maids on their way to the market, buying all sorts of necessities in our line, such as medicinal herbs against coughs or hoarseness, for or against vomiting, dietetic remedies from the mildest to the most violent, various ointments, toilet sponges, floor polish, stomach drops, face powder and other cosmetic requirements, and so on, and so on. . . .

The ladies used to haggle, especially the younger ones. Mrs. Voglová, the wife of the furrier, came for remedies to stop the spread of clothes moths. She was an elderly lady who always said, "Now hurry, hurry!" as though the moths would be increasing prodigiously in the course of those five minutes. And there was also young Mrs. Kroupková, the locksmith's wife, forever complaining that her husband suffered from indigestion. "Do the cooking for him yourself, dear madam," urged Mr. Tauben. "But that's just what I have been doing," the young lady replied naively.

Other people came who showed an insatiable desire to quarrel with Mr. Tauben. Among them Mr. Křečan took pride of place. He appeared every week, on Saturday morning when custom was at its busiest, and worked inexorably with his elbows until he had succeeded in forcing his way up to the counter. Then he shouted, "Last time you again gave me a load of rubbish. Do you call this lime tea? Why, it's nothing but dust from the road. You seem to forget that I've been a customer of yours for years and

years. My good sir, this is not the way to do business. What have you got to say about it? Nothing? Then give me lime tea for forty kreuzers, but if it's the same old dust again I'll take it to the municipal authorities and show it to them."

Then he took out his snuff box, opened it and, leaning across the counter, said, "Try a pinch, Mr. Tauben. And may it do you good!" We called him crazy Mr. Křečan.

A farmer called Vlášek, who lived somewhere near Český Brod, always came to see us whenever he was in Prague. He used to place his hat on the table and solemnly take out of his pocket a piece of paper on which was written what he had to buy for everyone in the village—the teacher, the vicar, etc. . . . He would hand it to Mr. Tauben and begin to talk about farm work, "Now we're starting to mow the fields beyond the water," he would say, "Now we're going to harrow", or "The wheat is already starting to shoot". "Well, that's all," he would say when the goods marked on the list lay before him on the table, "and for myself, give me a packet of cattle herbs."

Another frequent customer was a tall gentleman with black glasses, of whom we only knew that he was the director of a minor orphanage. He always leaned across the counter and whispered to Mr. Tauben, "Could I have half a kilo of mercury ointment please?"

That mercury ointment! The very mention of it conjured up in my mind the memory of page 213 of Pokorný's *The Natural History of the Animal Kingdom*, and I saw myself as a small boy at school learning by heart: "C. Wingless insects. The Children's Louse (*Pediculus Capitis*) is greyish-yellow and wingless. It has short antennae, and a retractile proboscis with which it sucks blood. It is found only on the head, and most commonly in children." At the same time I remembered the words of our natural history teacher. "And so then they rub the heads of little children with mercury ointment. Don't laugh there at the back!"

Poor orphanage director! If only he had known that instead of mercury we put powdered graphite into the ointment. It was twenty times cheaper.

"It makes no difference," Mr. Tauben always said laughingly

after his departure. "At least the orphans will now have blacker heads and can play at being blackamoors."

Various people came into the shop and went out again — old people, young people, ladies, gentlemen, girls, and children; jolly people like the innkeeper from the Small Quarter who used to buy sneeze-weed from us, which he mixed with tobacco, afterwards offering a pinch of it to his guests with earth-shaking results; people who were miserable, like Mr. Wagner, a pensioner, who was always buying drops and medicinal herbs for his stomach until he completely ruined it, or like blind Josef, an old beggar, who struck the pavement with his stick and asked each day for a new kind of herb — such as dried cornflowers, peonies, and other plants — which he burned at home leaning over the smoke with his sightless eyes, in the hope that he might one day come across a herb which would help not only him but other blind people as well.

Then young ladies came for scent and powder, blushing and asking for various cosmetic preparations which did not do much good to their complexions but were considered "good tone". Violinists came for resin, boys from middle schools and secondary modern schools, enthusiastic about their chemistry experiments, came and bought chemicals which they bore carefully away with them. Twice a week the concierge from next door came in to buy rat poison. Servants arrived and laughingly asked for the lye they put into the washing without their mistresses' knowledge. A school porter came from a nearby secondary school and asked for various vessels and materials for school chemistry experiments. He was very fussy and always asked for them to be well wrapped up. "So that I shan't get blown to pieces one day," he said, putting cautiously into his pockets the things he had ordered.

And then it was the turn of the postman, who came and fetched the letters and price-lists which were to be sent out, and who was always treated to a glass of English gin. Representatives of various firms turned up in the shop and said, "Nothing today? We can offer very low prices." And every Friday the local beggars came one after the other to get the customary kreuzer. Sometimes too a

travelling apprentice or a travelling pharmacy clerk appeared and asked for help or perhaps a job.

And it was all these people who came in to the shop and went out again, known to us, or quite new faces, who made up the shop's clientèle.

## On the loft

YOU APPROACHED THE LOFT BY A WELL-TRODDEN WOODEN staircase and every step of it emitted a sound reminiscent of the twittering of birds waking early in the morning. It was at one and the same time a very gentle creaking and a whistling. Helping to produce this sound was one of the favourite amusements of the concierge's sandy-haired son, Francek, who whiled away his idle hours indulging in this particular game.

When I first went up onto the loft I did so on Mr. Kološka's orders to look for our messenger. These heights had remained a mystery to me until now. Two hours earlier Mr. Ferdinand had made his way up there to sieve bran, the main ingredient for our medicinal cattle herbs. When I climbed the staircase sandy-haired Francek was amusing himself half-way up it, hopping up and down from step to step and so forcing the stairs to emit that series of singular twitters and squeaks.

This otherwise quite inexplicable amusement of his was soon made clear to me by his own confession. "I've been jumping here for half an hour already and that old fool on the first floor by the stairway must be going crazy by now. He'll come out again any minute."

And so he did indeed. I had been following sandy-haired Francek's favourite sport for only a short while when the door of a flat off the staircase above burst open and an old gentleman in a

dressing gown appeared on the stairs with a cane in his hand shouting, "You damned young rascal. I'm going to give you a hiding you won't forget. Keep quiet, or I'll . . .!"

He came down two steps, brandishing his cane, and sandy-haired Francek hopped three times again so that three times the steps emitted their soft but jarring squeaks, then he shot away down the stairs.

"Catch that rascal for me!" the old gentleman shouted to me. "Or better yet, leave it to me. I'll thrash the life out of him. You know it's terrible—like scraping a plate with a fork." He went back to his flat and I continued up to the unknown regions.

I made my way along the gallery of the two-storey house. On the balustrade washing was hanging out to dry and through an open window I could hear a woman exclaim, "That's the new apprentice." I looked down into the yard. Francek was returning from his mother's flat with his hands in his pockets. The concierge was standing in the doorway, screaming, "If that clerk dares touch a hair of your head, I'll teach him what's what." Francek disappeared in the direction of the staircase and after a while the familiar squeaking and twittering of the old wooden steps could be heard once more.

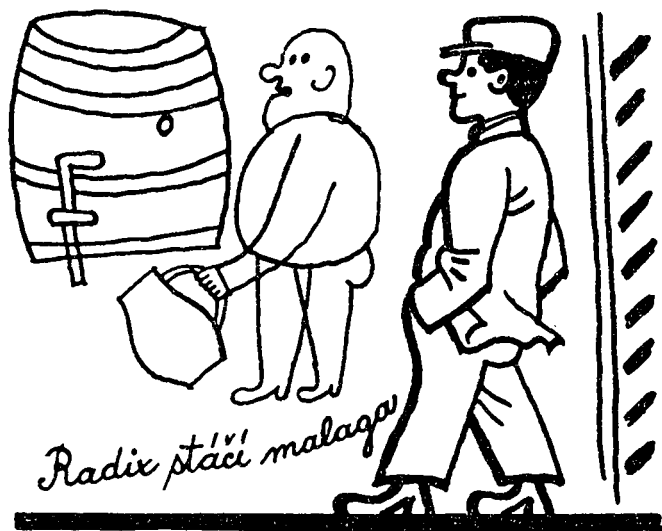
I went on to the end of the gallery and up the steps to the loft. In the passage where the steps led up to this highest part of the house, my eye caught an inscription drawn with black coal on the dirty plaster: "The apprentice Josef Kadlec came here for the last time on 29th February before his departure for Kladno, where he was going to complete his training. He had a good time here." Underneath this, in a less practised hand, was inserted the comment: "The apprentice Josef Kadlec was a dirty sneak and a stupid ass. Ferdinand." Underneath Mr. Ferdinand's gloss there was quite a clever sketch of a jug and some playing cards accompanied by the written confession: "That's the best thing in the world." I saw that it was in Mr. Tauben's handwriting. On the other side of the passage there was a sketch of a big barrel and below it half of a hideous scarecrow and the caption: "Radix bottling Malaga." And a little farther on, at the very door of the loft, a sentence shone out

in blue chalk: "Mr. Ferdinand is running after the concierge." These humorous inscriptions ended with the notice carefully executed on the door in black spirit varnish: "Pharmacy Loft."

The door was half open. When I opened it fully an overwhelming smell of dried herbs met my nostrils, and my ears were assailed by the kind of snoring which fully justifies the popular Czech comparison with the noise of a saw-mill.

The semi-darkness of the loft had a mysterious effect on my imagination. As I went in through a door on the right, which was open, its enormous padlock hanging loose on the bolt, it seemed to me terrifyingly like the entrance to a prison.

Inside, a feeble light seeped through the skylights of the roof and faintly illuminated long rows of barrels with dusty lids, containing herbs of every possible kind. The barrels gave out a stupefying aroma. They were ranged in two rows and in between them was a kind of path strewn with empty bottles and straw from bottle wrappings which had not yet been swept away. In the midst of this mess were scattered handfuls of various drugs, and here and there broken pieces of glass and china.





Among the barrels one could just make out some long kegs containing powdered dyes — yellow and brown ochre, and red clay — which had left traces of their colour on their surroundings. Some barrels had been turned upside down and their spilled contents had produced on the paved floor of the loft a hotch-potch of dyes, chemicals, and dried plants. Here in this first section there were packing cases with lids which did not shut properly; crystals of alum, saltpetre, and other salts sparkled from inside them.

In one corner a narrow strip of light fell on large chunks of crude rock salt, its crystals glittering with all the colours of the rainbow. Here the ground was littered with sieves and large porcelain dishes for grinding dyes. Among the many packing-cases could be seen gleaming metal drums full of oil and stone jars of acids, which were sealed with clay stoppers, and like the jar of smoking nitric acid, were enveloped in a small cloud of fumes which circled around and made one cough.

This area of the loft gave off an acid odour. It reeked of ammonia from a huge, round glass hectolitre bottle, and nearby an open barrel of white chloride of lime caused further irritation to the respiratory organs. My eyes slowly got used to the semi-darkness and I found I was standing by a ladder. My object was, as I have already said, to find Mr. Ferdinand, but this was no easy task. It is true that the moment I entered the loft I heard those snores, and this sound, an infallible sign of the presence of our messenger, ought to have been my lode-star. But it was quite a difficult problem. I thought I could hear “Kchoo-poo-kchoo-poowoo-kchoo-poo” first from one corner and then from another.

“Mr. Ferdinand,” I called in all directions, “you have got to bring downstairs the bran you’ve sieved!”

But I got no answer, only a muffled snore, “Kchoo-poo, kchoo-poo”, which reverberated through the loft and confused me in my attempts to find the sleeping messenger.

“Mr. Ferdinand,” I called out again, “you’ve already been here two hours. You’ve got to get up and bring downstairs the bran you’ve sieved!” Again not a word in answer.

Now I could hear a nasal sound, “Pfoo-pfoo-foo”.

I climbed the ladder to the upper part of the loft, determined to have a look there too. Between the roof trusses and across the rafters of the loft, some boards had been laid and on them stood sacks of dried herbs which rattled each time I took a step. The light here was slightly better and I was able to look all around me.

My first momentary impression was that Mr. Ferdinand was sleeping on the left behind a barricade of various loaded sacks. But when I had climbed over the barricade I saw that behind it there was an empty space. So I began to look on the right and there indeed I found Mr. Ferdinand fast asleep on a bed of roses—literally bedded on a heap of dried ones. He lay comfortably stretched out with his coat spread over his face. It muffled his snores and made them less distinct.

“Mr. Ferdinand,” I said, waking him and tugging at his leg, “you must get up and bring downstairs the bran you’ve sieved!”

At my third attempt Mr. Ferdinand woke up, pulled the coat from his head, drew himself up into a half-sitting position, yawned, and said, “Oh, it’s you, is it, boy? I’ve just had a five-minute nap.”

“You’ve got to bring down the bran you’ve sieved,” I said. “You’ve been here two hours already.”

“What, the bran?” was Mr. Ferdinand’s shocked reaction. “My God, I’d clean forgotten about that. I just came up here to take a nap for five minutes and fell asleep. Well, a chap gets tired walking, you know. Well, there it is. Now I’ll start doing the sieving.”

He put on his coat, jumped up, and observed, “You can sleep beautifully here. If I had pulled the ladder up you would never have found me, young man.”

As we were going down the ladder together, he turned round at the last step and said in a very low voice, “But you can sleep very much better in the summer, when the old women bring the fresh plants here, because then it’s just as if you were in the country in fresh hay and you can stretch yourself out in it and have a really glorious snooze. Now go and tell our old man that I had a fit of nose bleeding and couldn’t stop it.”

When I left the loft, I found Francek still amusing himself by extracting sounds from the old steps.

“When shall I say you’re coming?” I called, going up again into the semi-darkness of the loft.

“When it’s done,” answered Mr. Ferdinand.

His voice sounded from high above. I looked up to where he was speaking from and saw him going up the ladder towards his old place, where he had been lying on a bed of roses.

Literally on a bed of dried roses. . . .

# The trolley

GRADUALLY I GOT TO KNOW THE WHOLE ESTABLISHMENT. I already knew the cellar, the loft, the vaulted storeroom behind the shop, and the shed in the yard, where Mr. Ferdinand ground the herbs and where, along with the huge mortar and heavy pestle, he kept his trolley — a pushcart which changed colour from time to time because he repainted it so often.

This little vehicle, which he used for fetching or delivering goods of various kinds, was his pride. No other shop messenger could boast such a beautifully kept trolley. Its wheels, its frame — in brief, its whole surface — were finely painted in variegated colours — blue, red, and green.

Although anyone who saw that trolley could not help praising it this was not good enough for Mr. Ferdinand. He continually overhauled it and painted it over with fresh colours, always choosing the afternoon hours of Saturday to do it, so that the trolley could dry properly overnight and all day Sunday.

And if he took it out anywhere on Monday people everywhere he went saw how it shone with a new coat of paint in a bold mixture of colours, never before used for painting a trolley like that. They saw it sometimes coloured like the rainbow, the cross-pieces picked out in blood red with stripes in shades of green and blue, or at other times they saw how the cross-pieces had been picked out in bronze and the trolley itself painted black with yellow

and white stripes. Other Mondays would bring a new change: the trolley would be painted in zig-zag stripes of brown and white, the wheels yellow with black stripes. These daring combinations, these inventions of new and ever new colour schemes, could only have emanated from the brain behind Mr. Ferdinand's high forehead. He loved his trolley with paternal devotion — with the love of a foster-father who does his best to see that his adopted child always goes about beautifully dressed.

To insult it meant incurring Mr. Ferdinand's eternal wrath. When the cross-eyed Venca, a butcher's apprentice from the house, dared to say in the bar that it looked like a Red Indian covered with warpaint, Mr. Ferdinand used his favourite proverb, "The cure for a foul mouth is a punch on the jaw", and promptly practised what he preached. "I'll teach you for your Red Indian war-paint, you squinting fool!" he shouted, so loudly that he could even be heard outside in the courtyard.

From that time on the two became the bitterest enemies, openly displaying their hostility in looks and words. There was a chance that cross-eyed Venca would have made peace — particularly on that occasion when Mr. Ferdinand treated some of his friends to a tankard of beer in the bar. Then Venca came up to him and said, "I hope you're not still angry, Mr. Ferdinand." But that time Mr. Ferdinand only said very curtly, "I still am, you squinting fool." And when the tankards were carried round he said, "Not a drop for the squinting fool!" which showed how implacable he was to anyone who spoke contemptuously of his beautiful trolley.

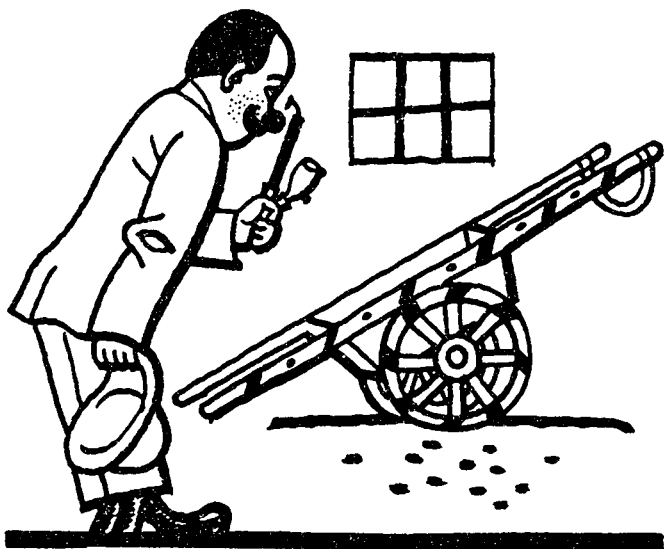
And how carefully he checked every evening to see whether the shed in which it was kept was properly shut. And how often, as if not fully convinced, would he return and examine the lock once more. "Goodnight, dear little trolley," he always said. And in the morning his first visit was to the shed to make sure that nobody had stolen his trolley during the night.

"Good morning, dear little trolley," he would say, "Here I am back again. The daily grind starts once more!"

The trolley was his constant companion on his journeys. It was a joy to see him pulling it and solemnly smoking his porcelain

pipe. When he stopped anywhere in a tavern along the way, it was a pleasure to see how he watched over it in the street with the anxiety of a father, how he continually kept his gaze fixed on it through the window, and how he immediately leaped up if anyone suspicious came near his charge.

This gaily-painted trolley brought him not only fame but profit. He used it to bring various goods from the railway or from the warehouses of big firms, and manoeuvred it so skilfully past the customs checkpoint that the dues on the wine, spirits, and other goods he transported, which should have gone to the city, went to him. He had adopted various tactics on these rounds to deceive the watchful eyes of the customs officials: the most common one was to pass the checkpoint very quickly, with the trolley carefully positioned between two big waggons. Of course you had to have a special gift for this sort of thing, a talent which consisted in waiting for just the right opportunity, exploiting the times when traffic was heavy, and choosing for your route streets where the waggons went in single file. Fast-moving carriages were no good to him. He had to wait for heavy freight waggons and nip in with his trolley at



the very moment that they passed the checkpoint after being given clearance. He had to move adroitly into the centre of the traffic, and, screened from the eyes of the customs officials, he would proceed at a carefully chosen pace — at first slowly and then faster and faster — eluding all prying eyes until his walk turned into a run and he was pushing his trolley along at the double. Passers-by saw nothing but the barrels and other goods bobbing up and down as the brightly coloured trolley flashed past them in an instant.

He would then turn off into side streets and there, far from the busy traffic, he would slow down until he was once more pushing his load leisurely and with dignity, calmly smoking his porcelain pipe and stopping from time to time to wipe the sweat off his brow or to consider by how much money he had cheated the city customs authorities to his own profit. Then he put the money earned through his admirable talent into his purse, anxious to try and spend it at the next opportunity in a tavern somewhere along the way. And at the tavern, sitting near the door, he would look gratefully at his trolley standing by the pavement — that good little trolley which never let him down.

Never let him down! What if at the most critical moment when he was crossing the checkpoint, screened by the waggons he had selected, the wheels of his trolley were to stick? What, if the axle, so beautifully polished, were suddenly to get bent. But no, his trolley would never fail him.

One day something very peculiar happened. Mr. Ferdinand returned towards evening with his trolley and the goods, but you should have seen the state of the trolley. It was spattered all over with dirt, the wheels were choked with mud, and its bright colours were completely covered in filth. Mr. Ferdinand himself was pale and mud-stained. It was as though he had intentionally picked out the biggest puddles he could find for his trolley. It was the first time we had ever seen it in such condition.

And wonders would never cease! Mr. Ferdinand put away the goods and shut the trolley up in the shed without cleaning it. Indeed he gave it a very rough shove.

And when he had shut up the shop he did not make his usual

trip back to the shed to check that the lock was securely fastened. He did not say, "Goodnight, dear little trolley," but instead he showed Mr. Tauben a yellow ticket and said to him, "Well, they caught me for the first time. Just at the very moment when I was passing the checkpoint that brute of a trolley wouldn't budge. Its wheels got stuck somehow. So I took it into a puddle and spoiled its colours for it."

And Mr. Ferdinand never again repainted his little trolley with new and fancy colours.



## Mr. Kološka's father-in-law

THERE WAS TALK ABOUT HIM ONE DAY AT NOON. MR. KOLOŠKA had gone off to lunch, there were no customers coming into the shop, and Mr. Tauben was sitting on the counter with his back to the door at one corner and Mr. Ferdinand at the other. That was the time when they always started gossiping.

"Radix has to put up with a lot from his father-in-law," Mr. Tauben remarked suddenly, lighting a cigarette.

"Even with a mother-in-law he wouldn't have had to put up with so much," Mr. Ferdinand said gravely. "It's true that people say 'From women's tongues Good Lord deliver us!', but when his father-in-law starts talking all hell's let loose."

"And the older his father-in-law gets, the worse it is," said Mr. Tauben. "Recently Radix told one of his friends here that his father-in-law suspects him of having taken out a licence for the sale of poisons for the express purpose of poisoning him. When he requires any medicine the father-in-law has it made up in a dispensary and not by us. When Radix comes home, his father-in-law even goes through his pockets to see that there isn't any poison there. Mr. Ferdinand, it's a damned curse to have a father-in-law like that."

"It's very sad indeed, Mr. Tauben," said Mr. Ferdinand. "Indeed far too sad when in the evening the father-in-law throws his shoe at his son-in-law's head as happened recently according to

what their maid told me. But he missed him. He's an old man, and you know, his hand shakes. Fancy his having the nerve to do that, Mr. Tauben! Only a very wicked man could have the nerve to do it. And then you must take into account that Radix can't say a word, because he has Acidum at home. A wicked wife and a wicked father-in-law. Both of them very peppery! I tell you, Mr. Tauben, it's a very great trial."

"And all the time, Mr. Ferdinand," said Mr. Tauben, "he throws it in his son-in-law's face that he put money into his business. Do you know, Mr. Ferdinand, how it came about that Radix married Acidum?"

"No, I don't really know," said the servant. "Mrs. Kroupová, the cooper's wife, says she once heard that they shut Radix up in the drawing-room and forced him to ask for her hand."

"That's not quite correct, Mr. Ferdinand," said the clerk. "It actually happened like this. Radix already owned this business before he was married, and Mr. Vaňous, who later became his father-in-law, had a wholesale drug business then. Radix got all his goods from him. But in those days he didn't buy for his elevenses just a portion of anchovies, a roll, and a glass of beer. He liked to give himself a proper treat. He guzzled tasty things in the shop and in the evening after closing-time he went and guzzled again. Like a young bachelor he flitted from one place of amusement to another, and spent money on others so that his business fell more and more into debt. In the end Radix frittered away all the money he made from goods bought on tick from his future father-in-law's wholesale business. He then went on ordering more and more goods without paying him a sou. Mr. Vaňous reminded him about this and one day Radix went to see him to beg him not to press him for payment. He went straight to his home and there he saw for the first time his future wife, Acidum.

"Old Mr. Kraus, Mr. Ferdinand — you know, that fellow who was here before you — said that when Radix was young he was a good-looking man and knew how to run after the girls and talk persuasively. And so it happened that at that time Mr. Vaňous took a fancy to him and apologized for having reminded him about the

payment. He even invited him to come and see him again. Well then, Radix went to see Mr. Vaňous quite a lot, and whenever he did so he took more and more goods from his storeroom and always on tick, instead of paying for them. And when the debt had grown to enormous proportions, Radix stopped going to visit him, which of course, as was to be expected, infuriated Mr. Vaňous who wrote him a letter threatening to sue him and get the court to declare him bankrupt. Old Mr. Kraus told me that Radix then said, 'Tomorrow I'll go there and settle things with him. There's no help for it, Kraus. If Mr. Vaňous makes me bankrupt, they'll sell my business and after that I'll have to start afresh.'

"Old Mr. Kraus also told me how Radix described his visit to Mr. Vaňous. 'I felt pretty small,' he told him, 'when I walked up the steps to Vaňous's. My legs trembled and an electric current went through me. I went there without any money, without any hope that Mr. Vaňous would have pity on me and agree not to take me to court. When I arrived, Mr. Vaňous said, 'Very well, let's go in here.' He led me into a room, locked the door, and started off, 'You haven't a sou in the world, young man. You're a rogue and a spendthrift. You take goods from me on tick. You make promises without ever keeping them.' 'Please have mercy,' I said. 'I'll try and improve.' Mr. Vaňous flew at me and said, 'Fiddle-de-dee! I'll never get my money back that way.' He walked furiously up and down the room and suddenly turned round and demanded,

"'Mr. Kološka, are you in debt anywhere else?'

"'Yes, in Ústí nad Labem.'

"'How much?'

"'About five hundred guilders.'

"You should have seen how Mr. Vaňous stormed around the room shouting, 'Well, that means I shan't get my money back at all. That means I shan't get my money back at all.' Then suddenly he calmed down a little and asked, 'I thought you were an honest man. Did you come and see me for my daughter's sake or did you only want to entice me into giving you further goods on tick?'

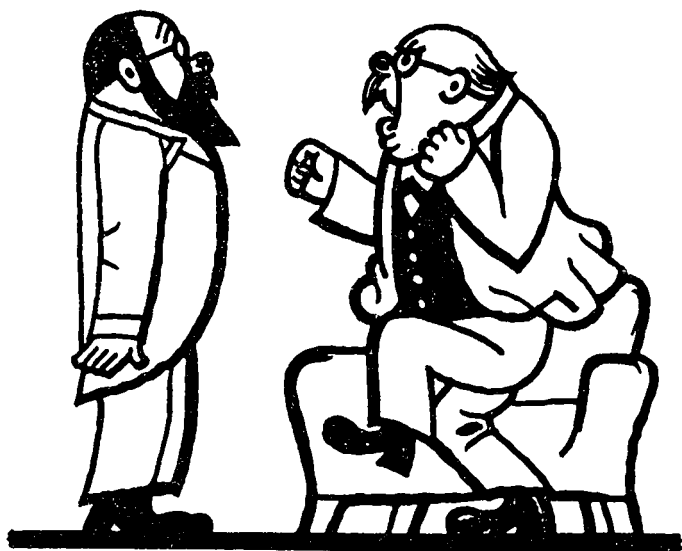
"I was astonished. I'd never given a thought to his daughter. But taken by surprise I told a lie in the hopes of winning him over

and blurted out, 'Because of your daughter, Mr. Vaňous.' Then I was quite astounded. Mr. Vaňous unlocked the door and called his daughter. When she came in, he said to her, 'Mary, Mr. Kološka has just asked for your hand. I have nothing against it, if you agree.' And before I could pull myself together that woman sprang at me and hugged me so tight that I thought she would choke the life out of me."

"Old Mr. Kraus always used to say, Mr. Ferdinand, that when Radix told him this the following day, he opened his mouth and kept it open for a whole quarter of an hour. That's how it was, Mr. Ferdinand. On that day Radix acquired a wife and a father-in-law, and his father-in-law imagined he would recover his money that way."

"It's frightful," Mr. Ferdinand gasped. "On that day Radix ruined his whole life. It's absolutely terrible to have a father-in-law like that."

"Mothers-in-law are already outdated," Mr. Tauben reflected, "but every mother-in-law is an innocent babe compared with old Vaňous. Once I came to see Radix in his home at about



noon. His father-in-law sat with his glasses on next to Radix and watched him to make sure he didn't help himself to a second portion. They were having fillet of beef in sour cream sauce, which Radix liked very much, so he made a timid attempt to take a second helping. His father-in-law noticed and got angry. 'Put it back, will you? Didn't we give you a large portion and haven't you still got some dumplings left? And now he's helping himself to another portion! When it comes to good things you're as voracious as a fox terrier is with rats. It would be a good punishment for you to let you eat nothing for a whole week.'

"On Sunday he has to spend the whole afternoon reading the newspapers aloud to his father-in-law," said Mr. Ferdinand. "In the meantime his wife goes for a walk or pays calls."

"Altogether his father-in-law treats him very badly," said Mr. Tauben. "When he gets angry with him, he locks up his pipe in a cupboard and Radix is not allowed to smoke for perhaps a whole week. And on top of it, his father-in-law has already broken several of his pipes."

"And his maid told me," the servant went on, "that Radix once came home in the evening and absent-mindedly greeted them with 'Good morning!' 'What did you say? Repeat that!' said his father-in-law. Radix became scared and in his fright stammered out, 'Good morning, papa.' So his father-in-law took his pipe, which was on a stand, and dashed it several times across his head. 'I'll teach you to make a fool of old people. The hooligan!' the father-in-law said angrily. In the evening he says to me 'Good morning!'"

"It's a certainty that he beats him," said the clerk. "It's a trial, and a very terrible trial."

"And when Radix had those little trees planted in the garden at home," said the messenger, "his father-in-law cut them down. I think that Radix can hardly wait. . . ."

"For what, Mr. Ferdinand?" Mr. Tauben asked.

"Well, until one afternoon we shut the shop and hang out a notice which Radix painted two years ago, when his father-in-law fell seriously ill," answered Mr. Ferdinand.

“Ah,” said Mr. Tauben, “you mean ‘Because of my father-in-law’s funeral the shop will be shut today’.”

“Exactly,” said the messenger. . . .

This conversation was suddenly terminated by a gentleman coming into the shop, requiring something for toothache. . . .