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Sample Translation by Catherine Venner

Notable Item No. 3

The Bavarian Handkerchief

Today, three white men visited the orphanage. Yet none of them were Father Fuchs. They were taken around by Father Holbein. He showed them the kitchen and the office, the school, the garden and the chapel. I followed them in secret. (These past few days, I have been able to walk again, although I'm only allowed to cross the chalk line to pay a visit to the latrine.) I kept my distance so that Father Holbein wouldn't notice me, and so I wasn't able to hear what was being said.

Father Holbein even introduced the men to Smitaben, Devinder and Hormazd. But they only spoke to Hormazd. I suppose it was because he is the only one who speaks English. The whole time, Father Holbein was waving his cane about. That kept the Others away. Though they still gathered behind hedges and doors in order to observe the visitors.

Of course, their clothes were extremely ugly and impractical; they wore trousers and shirts and their bodies were constrained by a large number of buttons meaning that practically no air could touch their skin. Their faces were almost as red as Smitaben's bindi.

But these men were a strange sight even for firangi. Above all, I noticed three things:

1. The way they walked. They took big steps as if they had to go as far as possible as quickly as possible. A Bombay native is more careful; his feet tread closely in front of each other for he knows that a careless step could lead him somewhere unpleasant. Furthermore, the men's steps reminded me of the steps Devinder takes when he is measuring out an area of the garden.
2. Their faces. They looked like three versions of the same man. The youngest of them wore a hat with a broad brim and had protruding, pointed ears like a bat. He was not much older than me. I can only describe his gaze as inward. In contrast his slightly older version, the middle one, looked around in amusement and swelled his fat cheeks as he breathed, while the eldest was cultivating a tuft of hair on his upper lip that twitched like a nervous pet when he spoke. And he spoke a lot!
3. Their effect on Father Holbein. In the presence of the men, he swung his cane through the air as if it were not a feared instrument but a paintbrush that he used to paint jolly pictures. He stumbled several times in his chappals because when walking he was paying attention to the men and not the ground. And he contorted his face into many kinds of smile: attentive, pleased, hopeful, kind. I hadn't known that Father Holbein was capable of smiling like that.

When he brought the men into the dormitory, I had already rushed ahead and was again lying on my bed. They came directly towards me.

"Is that him?" asked Tufty.



Father Holbein nodded.

“He is very small,” said Chubby Cheeks.

Bat Boy stepped closer and looked at me.

“Say something,” Father Holbein demanded.

“In what language?” I asked in German.

Father Holbein smiled and pointed the cane at me. “See,” he said to the men.

“How many languages do you speak?” asked Tufty.

“Why do you want to know?” I asked.

Father Holbein rested his cane on my shoulder, “Answer!”

“I know Hindi and English and German and Gujarati and Punjabi and Marathi. My Persian leaves a lot to be desired. But to make up for it, I am learning Bavarian.”

“Bavarian!” Chubby Cheeks called out.

“We are from Bavaria,” said Tufty.

“Do you know Father Fuchs?” I asked.

“We were in contact with him.”

“Do you know where he is?”

“No,” he said, “unfortunately not.”

“Say something in Bavarian,” Chubby Cheeks demanded.

I said, “Kruzifix.”

Tufty clapped his hands, “Very good.”

Bat Boy grinned. Chubby Cheeks narrowed his eyes, “I’m not convinced.”

“We could give him a try,” said Tufty.

“A wonderful idea!” said Father Holbein. “Do you want to take him with you straight away?”

Tufty looked at his younger versions. They nodded. “Why not?” he said.

“Then that has been decided,” said Father Holbein as he pointed his cane at the tip of my nose. “Have a wash

and put your clothes on!”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“You will find out soon enough,” said Chubby Cheeks.

“You should be thankful,” said Father Holbein, “that you may serve these men.”

“I am not a servant,” I said.

Chubby Cheeks wanted to say something but Tufty got in first, “Who are you, then?”

“I am Bartholomew.”

“One of the twelve apostles,” he said.

“I know,” I said.

“Hermann Schlagintweit,” he offered me his hand.

I shook it, squeezing it hard so that he felt my strength.

Hermann Schlagintweit’s hand was coarser than Devinder’s hands. Unusual for a firangi. He pointed at Chubby Cheeks first and then at Bat Boy, “They are Adolph and Robert Schlagintweit, my brothers. We are on an exploration expedition.”

“You are explorers?! What are you exploring?”

“Hermann,” said chubby-cheeked Adolph, “the meal is waiting.”

“Oh yes,” said Hermann, “but why don’t you come with us?”

“He’s already eaten,” said Father Holbein as he hustled the brothers towards the exit.

“I could still eat,” I said.

Father Holbein’s hand gripped his cane. But Hermann had already put his arm around me and started talking.

And he did not stop talking the whole evening. And so I discovered that the brothers are to travel through India and the Asian mountains for three years with the intention of carrying out scientific experiments during this time. But they want to spend some weeks in Bombay first in order to study the city and prepare for their expedition.

We were sitting in the dining hall at the adults’ table, where never before had a child sat. I could not see the Others but I knew that they were watching us. Smitaben served up enough food to feed an army. I stuffed myself by the handful, while Hermann stuffed us with words. It was as if he had to make use of all the words that Robert saved. He remained silent. (Maybe he didn’t have a voice.) In contrast, Adolph chomped more

than he spoke. And Father Holbein blew extensively on every spoon of dal before bringing it up to his mouth. In all the years, he had still not understood that dal only tasted good if you ate it while it was still steaming.

Hermann explained that he and his brothers were taking, or rather had already taken lessons in Hindi. With a Muslim, who Adolph called a Muselman and Hermann described as a munschi. With him they had agreed a compensation, which in their opinion was *high-er than necessary*. They did not reveal how high. Therefore, I suppose it was not particularly high. When it was time for payment, the munschi suddenly demanded the agreed sum for each individual. (“Of course!” said Father Holbein at this point with some excitement.) The brothers had refused to pay. “Vehemently,” emphasised Hermann. The day after, when they returned from measuring the ground water, they experienced an, as he put it, *Indian specialty*: they were served a court summons by a chaprasi.

The munschi had sued them and they were to appear before the Court of Petty Sessions. These courts are held alternately by a European and a local judge despite many more Indians than firangi living in Bombay. Yet, if you ask me, only every fourth or fifth judge is European. The firangi should count themselves lucky that they have any judges at all in our country. Do Indian judges hold session in London? Anyway, the brothers drew a Parsi judge. (“Of ... course!” Father Holbein again.) But to their surprise they were acquitted. (Of course!, I nearly called out. *We* are not as bias as *them* and anyway, it is well-known that the Parsis have a weakness for Westerners.)

“This experience,” said Hermann, “has led us to conclude that it is certainly not advisable to employ a crooked teacher but rather to engage a brilliant interpreter.”

With that he stopped speaking for the first time and looked at me. Lassi dripped from his tuft like paint from a brush.

“How old are you?” he asked.

“At least twelve,” I answered.

“Not very old.”

“Old enough,” said Adolph, “at his age we were climbing the Alps on our own.”

“Not exactly all alone,” said Hermann.

“He wouldn’t be either,” answered Adolph.

The pair of them stared at each other like Father Fuchs and Father Holbein do, when one is smiling and the other wants to use his cane.

Silence fell on the dining room.

I seized the chance and told them that I couldn’t help them.

Father Holbein put down his spoon and grabbed the utensil next to it, his cane. “You will do what they tell

you.”

“I can’t,” I said and wondered what part of my body would become acquainted with the cane for that remark.

Adolph laughed, “You are a sly little fox!”

“I am not a fox,” I said.

“It’s just a saying,” said Hermann.

“What does it mean?”

“That you can’t be trusted,” said Adolph and turned to his brother, “Leave it Hermann. Don’t forget, the boy was brought up by Jesuits.”

“Please have some respect,” said Father Holbein.

Adolph paid no attention to him and continued speaking, “What are we supposed to do with someone like him? He will only cause us problems.”

Hermann licked his fingers. (I was impressed that he had made the effort to eat with his hands.)

“Will you cause us problems?” he asked me.

Three brothers and one father were waiting for my answer. “Most likely,” I said.

Father Holbein gasped for breath, Adolph laughed to himself and Robert pulled his hat further down his face.

“He is coming with us,” Hermann said to Father Holbein.

Adolph said, “Hermann!”

Hermann said, “Adolph.”

Father Holbein said, “Wonderful!”

Robert said nothing.

And I said, “I can’t. I have to be here when Father Fuchs gets back!”

“It’s just for a few days,” said Hermann, “at most a few weeks.”

“Weeks!” I cried.

“Be thankful,” said Father Holbein, you will get to know a side of Bombay that you have never seen before.”

Then they sent me to get my things.

In the bedroom, I stuffed my notebook and my second kurta into a sack.

One of the Others asked me, "Are they taking you with them?"

He sounded confused. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

A lot of the Others looked sceptically at me from their beds.

On the way back to the dining room, I stopped by Father Fuchs' room. I tore a page from my notebook and wrote,

Dear Father Fuchs,

You have to help me. The Schlagintweit brothers have taken me.

Bartholomew

As I was attaching the page to the upper end of his mattress, I saw it. Under the bed lay the Bavarian handkerchief decorated with red roses. I took it, shook the dust off and put it in my sack.

Tonight is the first night in Bombay that I'm not spending in the Glass House. But maybe that is a good thing. Father Fuchs would never have left the handkerchief behind without good cause. He had put it there intentionally, as a secret message to me. Something has happened to him. He wants me to search for him. And Father Fuchs must be somewhere in Bombay. And I will find him.

Notable Item No. 13

A list of things that will come to pass

1. The caravan will become my new family. (I have already lost my family once and found a new one at the Glass House. There are many families and you just have to look for the right one.)
2. Devinder will find his way back to Bombay and his family on his own.
3. Hormazd will recover and I will no longer be his deathbed attendant and the kingdom of evil will retreat under our feet.
4. The Schlagintweits will need help that only I can give them, and when I give it to them, they will at last realise how important I am for their exploration and they will apologise to me and ask me to accompany them to the end of their journey, upon which I will answer that I will think about it, even though I don't actually have to think about it and have long since said yes in my head.
5. The Brits will go back to where they came from.
6. They will take the Others with them.



7. And Father Holbein.

8. I will return home after a journey of many years with the Schlagintweits, and will have written a museum about all of India, together its pages will be almost as heavy as me, they will liberate all Indians and I will go into the Glass House and Father Fuchs will be there because the Father Fuchs that they buried was another Father Fuchs. And my Father Fuchs will hug me and tell me the perfect name for the museum and cough happiness into my heart.