

Fakebook

A Novel

Alexander Broicher

translated by Florian Eberhorn

(excerpts)

He logged out. He'd had enough. Frieder sat in his chair and dreamt of the day when he, too, would have friends. Real friends. Friends on Facebook. Then, everything else would follow: parties, women, all kinds of fun.

Looking out through the glass partition, he noticed the buzzing, hive-like activity of his co-workers. This early in the morning? Curious. Had some earth-shattering event happened while he wasn't looking? He checked several news sites. Nothing out of the ordinary, just the ubiquitous reports on the current heat wave.

Well, there was something new, something about an unknown infectious disease running rampant among the lemur population, but when the pictures of the emaciated animals flickered across his screen, he instantly closed the tab. Nobody who ever plans to eat again should look at that kind of stuff before lunch. Instead, Frieder turned to the gossip sites to arm himself with the true glue of social communication.

Kim and Kanye recording new album with Elvis's ghost in a burger joint in Hoboken, New Jersey!

Lady Gaga is NOT a man! Exclusive report on her next tour. All concerts sold out.

Ivanka Trump's former college roommate's sister's cousin bribed into on-camera sex. Watch her own cell phone video [HERE!](#)

So there really was nothing new, just the usual public outpour of blood, sperm, and tears. Once he'd scanned the news and blogs, he left the office, hoping to ferret out the reason for his co-workers' conspiratorial whisperings. But as soon as he came within earshot, they fell silent at their desks – as usual – and presented him with a façade of polite, yet obviously forced smiles.

The people Frieder worked with spent every hour of every day trying to master the art of being cool. Take their outfits, for example. As a rule, The Management™ wore black. Designer suits, black jeans, thin cashmere sweaters. The PR people had their own uniform, aka the Steve Jobs look: blue jeans and a black turtleneck. It was supposed to say: *creatives at work – respect the creative spark!* They drove Saab convertibles and wasted their money on brand name fetishes and narcotics to keep their minds off of themselves. If you didn't do coke, you smoked weed. If you didn't smoke weed, you drank. If you didn't do any of that, you probably shouldn't be working here – unless you wanted to risk being thrown in with the little people, the common folk, the 'consumers'.

No, Frieder's colleagues were better than that, they fancied themselves as artists, designers, creative optimizers, the fat-free frosting on everybody's cake. They were visionaries who could divine the ever-changing tastes of the consumer, or just went ahead and created them.

Frieder completed his tour of the offices and cubicles without learning a damn thing. Every time he entered a room, it was as if someone pulled the plug. Was it him? Did he really bore people that much? The rituals of social interaction would forever remain a mystery to Frieder.

The door opened and Yvonne entered his office. With her small nose and pointy lips, his young assistant had something bird-like about her. "Have you heard? The Consultants are here."

A-ha! So that was it.

"There's this rumor that someone from our floor will have to go because of the fusion with Imperial Chemicals? Question is, who?" She checked her cheeky nails, each decorated with an equally cheeky little gem.

"And how are they going to choose?" asked Frieder, trying hard to sound casual.

“The concept pitch, of course,” said Yvonne. Then, in response to Frieder’s look of utter confusion, added, “Didn’t you read the memo?” Her nails had passed the inspection, and now she was eyeing Frieder in much the same way.

“What memo?” He opened his mailbox with a nervous click.

“The email from Gelfort. Last Monday.”

Gelfort was Tastemaker’s Director of Marketing and had proven his knack for launching successful products many times over. Which was why The Management™ had placed internal product evaluation in his capable hands.

Food designers like Frieder and Hansen represented the middle class of the company, and it was their job to invent new food. The lab then made their designs a chemically created reality. Aroma, color, feel, chewing performance, functional additives like flavor enhancers – everything the food designer could dream up came true in the lab: a couple of fake griddle stripes on the processed chicken fillet, but not too dark, it can’t look unsanitary; maybe a hint of barbecue-smoked flavor – Jolanda’s chemistry set made it happen. And anything was possible. Frieder scrolled up and down, clicked the refresh button, and searched his inbox again. There was no email from Gelfort from last Monday.

“Everyone has to pitch an idea for a new, innovative food product,” Yvonne reeled off what everybody else already seemed to know. “The best pitch gets a big, fat development budget and will be put in production. And whoever presents the worst idea ... well.” She gave him a pitying look. “Remember now?” Frieder swallowed hard. He suddenly felt rather hot. His stomach was full of bricks. Present an innovative idea, in front of the whole team? So that was what Hansen had meant when he’d shown Frieder his neon-green chewing gum. His idea for the pitch was already in the final phase of development. Frieder, on the other hand, hadn’t come up with anything that had made it past market research for all of last year!

"I didn't get the mail - look. Look!" He gestured frantically at the screen.

"That must be your lamest excuse yet." Yvonne didn't even bother to look. "No one's going to believe that you're the only one who *didn't* get the memo."

"Then would you be so kind as to forward it to me again?"

"If I have to ..."

He watched her carefully as she left the office. His assistant hadn't always been in his corner, but so far she'd never openly opposed him either. How could an email just disappear? Had someone been messing with his computer?

The PC cut through his thoughts with a *pling*. Frieder opened the mail Yvonne had forwarded. The sender really was Gelfort. Frieder skimmed the list of addressees. The usual suspects - but his name was suspiciously absent! Active sabotage by someone out to get him or just some strange coincidence? His most pressing concern, however, was the presentation, that 'dazzling concept' the memo was asking for! Wasn't there an app for this kind of stuff, like *Millionaire Overnight* or *Six-Pack in Five Days*, but one that actually delivered on its promise? Frieder's less than six-packed mid-section reminded him with a growl of the growing unrest in his stomach. He knew perfectly well he wouldn't, *couldn't*, come up with an idea on his own, dazzling or not. He needed Jolanda! As the resident chief of chemistry, not only was she constantly experimenting with new flavors and textures, she also kept up to date with current developments in the industry. She ordered samples from all over the world, which were then made available to peruse and test through the company's sample pool. Frieder looked at his watch - almost time for lunch. He'd find her outside, near the school. Jolanda liked to stay in touch with the young people - she said they were the best kind of market research. She called it 'street cred'.

Frieder left the office and walked towards the park that bordered the school. Outside, it was as hot as ever, and Frieder broke into a sweat before he had taken two steps.

A schoolgirl in a tiny miniskirt and bare midriff came up to him and offered “a quickie in the bushes for fifty bucks.” He turned her down, politely and slightly confused, but made sure to thank her. He heard her screeching laughter as he walked away and wondered idly whether her offer had been genuine.

Jolanda was sitting on the lawn in the shade of a beech tree, two boys lounging on the ground next to her. A rather long cigarette was making the rounds. Freed of her horn-rimmed glasses, Frieder seemed to notice Joli’s pale blue eyes for the very first time. And finally understood why Lena had been so jealous of Jolanda. Her Snow-Whitish charm, the jet-black hair, and those hypnotic eyes. Suddenly Jolanda was proving quite fascinating.

“Sorry. Jolanda?”

She looked up in surprise. “Frieder? What are you doing here?” She narrowed her eyes. “You into schoolgirls?”

“I’m not sure I could afford one. I wanted to talk to you.”

“It’s kind of a bad time, right now.” She glanced at the boys, who grinned back at her.

CURVEBALL

A true story... unfortunately.

Revision 5

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(Translated by Florian Eberhorn)

(excerpts)

// Dialog marked with a *, e.g. LESLIE*, is in English,
everything else has been translated from German

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46 INT./EXT. BERLIN, PASSENGER TOURBOAT - DAY

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A typical passenger tourboat chugging down the wintry
"Landwehr" canal. It's preparing to dock.

Wolf is sitting inside at a table with a view out of the
panorama windows, watching as Leslie Shearer comes on board
with a gaggle of other tourists and shows her ticket. He
seems very pleased.

SUPERIMPOSE: BERLIN, November 2000

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Leslie enters the dining area and walks over to Wolf's table.
She greets him with an open and loving gesture.

LESLIE*
Hey, Doc. How's it going?

WOLF*
Hi. It's good to see you.

He pulls her close in a hug, then they sit, facing each
other.

WOLF*
You want to drink something?

He points at the coffee on the table in front of him.

LESLIE*
You think they serve Diet Coke?

*

WOLF*
Sure.

He tries to get the attention of a waiter while Leslie
studies the menu.

LESLIE*
And a currywurst.

WOLF*
Really?

Leslie shoots him a grin.

LESLIE*
That's the big thing here, isn't
it? Currywurst? Come on. We're in
Berlin! I'll go back to the healthy
stuff when I'm back home.

The waiter approaches the table.

WOLF

A Coke light and two currywurst,
please.

The waiter nods and leaves. Wolf and Leslie look at each other.

WOLF*

I'm glad you called. What brings
you to Berlin? *

LESLIE*

Uh, I'm part of some delegation,
classified stuff. You know, the
change in government has stirred
things up quite a bit at home.

WOLF*

I can imagine. What about Iraq?
They say the Bush family might want
to finish their business down
there...

LESLIE*

Maybe. They're still sorting things
out. I've read your report.

Wolf's ears perk up.

LESLIE*

Congratulations! You're quite the
celebrity now at the BND, aren't
you?

WOLF*

Leslie, I want to go back there and
find those trucks! That's what I
want.

LESLIE*

Doc... I checked the blood sample,
the one you gave me? We checked it
for anthrax antibodies.

WOLF*

And?

LESLIE*

Nothing. Either the guy wasn't
really there, or it didn't happen.

WOLF*

You're sure?

Leslie nods.

WOLF*
Maybe he was there but wasn't
exposed.

LESLIE*
Maybe.

WOLF*
It tells us nothing.

LESLIE*
No.

Wolf seems unwilling to settle for that.

The waiter serves the Coke and two plates of currywurst with
fries. The portions are huge.

LESLIE*
Whoa! Oh my god!

WOLF
(to the waiter)
Another beer for me, please.

They start to eat. Leslie makes a face.

LESLIE*
It's disgusting.

WOLF*
Yes! And it looks like an anthrax
accident!

LESLIE*
Tastes like one too.

They laugh, then continue to eat. Outside the panorama
windows, Berlin's government district passes by. The Federal
Chancellery building.

LESLIE*
Your boss. I wonder if they like
hoist a flag or something when he's
home.

WOLF*
Hey. That's not the White House,
he's not living there. It's just
his office.
And he's not my boss.

LESLIE*
You have to do what he wants you
to.
Which makes him your boss.

*

WOLF*
We Germans don't function like
that.

Leslie smiles.

LESLIE*
At the end of the day, everybody
"functions" like that. *

WOLF*
But it's not the end of the day
yet. *

Leslie smiles again. They both look out of the window. Wolf
seems a bit nervous. *

LESLIE*
So what are your plans for today?
Are you heading back down south
right away, or will you stay the
night?

WOLF*
I thought I... wanted to go... but
I don't know...

She smiles at him. *

**The
Most Beautiful Girl
in the World**

A NOVEL

Michel Birbæk

translated by Florian Eberhorn

(excerpts)

1.

April 15, 2016

If you really want to know what's wrong with this world – go on a Tinder date. A lot of the women on online dating apps use fake names to protect themselves from the idiots. Others lie about their age, as they have been led to believe that, somehow, you can get too old to be loved. And some, well, some do what 'Su37' – aka Susanne, age forty-three – is doing right now.

We're at a table in the Trattoria Napoli Da Salvatore, an upscale Italian restaurant in Frankfurt, and our getting-to-know-each-other is turning out to be an increasingly one-sided affair. The outcome of most first dates is decided in the first few minutes. If that already feels wrong, you might as well just get back up and leave, right? Some people do. I mean, there are bars now that actually advertise with 'Tinder Escape Routes', and that by itself says more about our world than I sometimes want to know. Of course, there are perfectly valid reasons for the instant turn-and-run. There was one time when I simply didn't recognize my date; her profile pictures had just been too old. Another time, the pictures weren't even her own. Usually it's the age that's fake, but people 'massage' the truth on pretty much everything – kids, marriage, job – and sometimes it doesn't take long for you to develop your own little theories as to why your opposite has remained so steadfastly single. Still, I never bailed on a date before it was over, never snuck out through the back door, or had a friend call me away on some fake phone emergency. Why? Because my very first Tinder date asked me to meet her in a café and then she didn't show. Or that's what I thought. But when I asked her via Tinder chat, after a fun thirty minutes of waiting, if she had forgotten our date, she replied: *I don't like your look. You dressed a lot better in your pics.* It took me a few seconds

to realize that she actually had been in the café, checking me out like an animal on display, and then left without a word. Rarely had I ever felt so humiliated.

But despite the occasional 'hiccup', dating has been a generally positive, even beautiful experience for me because there is one essential truth that I have taken to heart: A few years ago, I woke up in the bed of a one-night-stand and really wanted to be gone before she woke up too. We'd found out at dinner that we had quite different outlooks on our lives, but we liked each other and we both felt a certain deficit of tenderness, so we ended up at her place and shared that one night. As I quietly dressed myself, my eyes locked on to a note pinned to the wall: "Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always." So instead of sneaking off, I took her keys and went to get us some breakfast. And it wasn't even that she really appreciated the gesture. She had to get to work soon, and the morning after, we felt even more like strangers than we had the night before, but I believe that those thirty minutes of breakfast sprinkled with a few compliments, our goodbye-hug, and those two other magic words – 'thank you' – proved to be more precious than the night ever was. We all should be kind to each other. I believe that everyone should look out for everyone else, and with every person we meet, we should try and be more open about our need for love, tenderness, and a sense of belonging. It would allow us to regard every personal encounter as something that enriches our lives, instead of condemning any first date as a negative experience just because there won't be a second. In any case, the many and diverse needs and quirks of my encounters did make me a better person. The more different people I met, the more understanding and tolerant I also became of myself. And I try to meet my fellow man, or woman, with that very same appreciation, but my date-du-jour definitely does not make it easy ...

Susanne is pretty, especially when she talks about her hobby, ballroom dance. She's a kindergarten teacher and has a slight tendency to educate you on the ways of the world as if you were one of her students. She's also an early riser, which is

how we come to be sitting here, in the late afternoon, for an early dinner. When we spoke on the phone, I already thought she talked a bit much, but I put that down to nerves. When we met in front of the restaurant, she seemed nervous as well. But in the time that we're sitting here, she's grown more and more relaxed – and she just keeps on talking. At first she did ask some questions about my job, my marital status, and where I live, and we made a bit of small-talk, but for over an hour now, she's talking nonstop about her work day, her sick parents, her cat, and her ex-boyfriend. I'd tried to ask a few questions, but when she chose to ignore those, I limited myself to throwing in a few weird comments here and there, hoping she might at some point inquire as to what the hell I was talking about.

She shakes her head in frustration. "I love those kids, but god, they can be annoying. When I come home from a day trip, I always feel like calling in sick for a week, just to get back on my feet. But the kids want me along, so my boss insists that I go again on the next one. And the next. And the next."

I nod. "Imagine there's a war, and nobody shows up."

She smiles for a second, then keeps right on talking.