

INTRODUCTION

During the period that Jaroslav Hašek was associated with the Anarchist movement he was won over to anti-militaristic ideas. The Anarchists spat on the Austrian uniform and refused to do military service for "the enemies of the Czech people". It was only natural, therefore, that the Austrian police should get onto his tracks, particularly when he was found to be visiting military barracks and contacting suspicious elements there. His wife, Jarmila, who was a journalist herself and often wrote stories in Hašek's vein, describes here how a year or two after their marriage the police carried out a search of their flat.

A house search*

...ONE DAY IN 1910, AT THE TIME OF THE ANTI-MILITARIST trial, Míťa [Hašek] returned home in the early hours of the morning.

“Has no one been looking for me, darling?”

“No, no one.”

“Listen, they took me round the barracks and confronted me with some soldiers. Tomorrow we’ll probably have a house search.”

“My God!”

“Don’t be an idiot, darling. A house search like that is just a bit of a lark. You’ll see.”

Dawn was breaking when we fell asleep. We were suddenly awakened by a loud ringing.

“They’re already here,” said Míťa, getting up.

He put on his dressing gown and went to open the door. I remembered that my own dressing gown was in the dining room on the chair and I wanted to make a quick dash to get it, but it was too late. A number of footsteps sounded in the hall and I heard the door of the dining room fly open.

“Sit down, Mr. Hašek, and be quiet!” said a strange male

* From *Drobné příběhy* (1960) with the permission of the Estate of Jarmila Hašková.

voice. "We are only going to look through your flat and take away your correspondence."

Some footsteps approached the door of my bedroom.

"Excuse me, Commissioner," said Mířa, "that's our bedroom and my wife has not got up yet. Surely you're not going to be so unmannerly."

Someone knocked at my door. "Madam, may I request you to come out to us immediately. Please don't remove anything or touch anything at all!"

"I can't, Commissioner, I'm just getting up and I haven't even got my dressing gown here."

"Mr. Hařek," said the Commissioner, "you may get up from your chair, half-open the door, and hand Madam her dressing gown. Please let Madam put it on as quickly as possible."

Everything took place as quickly as the Commissioner had ordered. I came into the dining room, unwashed and uncombed.

There were four people dressed in black there besides my husband. The Commissioner offered me a seat and another man a cigarette.

"Please sit down quietly and don't interfere with the execution of official business," the Commissioner said to me.

"Yes, darling, please let these gentlemen root about in our love letters, because there's a policeman standing behind the door ready to protect them if we should think of breaking their heads in or shooting."

While we sat at the table in the company of two of the gentlemen, who watched our every movement, the other two rooted about in the bookcase. They worked very thoroughly but after long and vain efforts they shut the glass doors of the bookcase with a sigh, only to throw themselves onto the writing desk. Here they opened one drawer at random. It was empty. Then they opened another. That, too, was empty. They half opened a third, and looked disappointedly and questioningly at the senior Commissioner.

"If I were you, I'd go on looking," said Mířa. "The devil never sleeps, and it was Christ who said 'Seek, and ye shall find'."

At that moment one of the gentlemen opened the first

drawer on the left, and Miřa commented, "You see, gentlemen, the Bible speaks the truth." The drawer was stuffed with correspondence. They opened a second drawer and a third, and all my files were revealed to their wide-open eyes: sighs of my friends, who wanted to go, at the age of fourteen, to a convent because they had *Weltschmerz*; maternal counsels and precepts; vows of undying love — my whole collection, all my treasures, preserved from the time I was six to twenty-two and beautifully tidied up. They took the letters in handfuls and carried them to the table.

"Gentlemen," said Miřa, "I think you came here to confiscate the suspicious correspondence of Jaroslav Hařek. I am he. The letters, which you are dragging out of the drawer, don't belong to me, but to my wife. There's a great difference, you know."

"You're mistaken, sir. We have the right to confiscate all the correspondence we find here. We shall read it, and, provided there's nothing irregular about it, Madam will get it all back again in perfect order. Please take it calmly."

Meanwhile the official ardour of the gentlemen, who had made that gigantic find of a thousand letters and cards in the writing desk, began to cool. *Pro forma* they had gone on to open the drawers in the sofa, the table, and the wash basin, and it was obvious that they were already getting tired. It was Sunday, and the gentlemen were in evening dress. Miřa's eyes were sending out sparks.

"If I were you, gentlemen," he said, "I would root about in the stove. You must concede that I've had enough time to burn the suspicious things, while you were coming to a decision as to whether or not you would carry out a house search in my home."

Reluctantly they went and rooted about in the stove and in the kitchen.

Unprompted, Miřa took the lead.

"I should turn the carpet upside down," he said, "to make sure that there's nothing hidden underneath."

Looking very angry indeed, they went and lifted up the carpet.

"I'd take the mattresses off the beds and look into the basket with the dirty linen."

They did that as well.

"I'd search through the drawers in the wardrobes."

They knelt on the ground and rummaged about in them.

Just before midday, they asked me for string and packing paper. It didn't matter what I offered them, Miña was against my doing it. Finally he gave them some pieces of old newspaper and tangled cord. The four packages packed in this way were not at all elegant and that was perhaps why, when they finally went away quite dishevelled, one of the gentlemen forgot his packet on the dining room table. Loyal Miña went to the window, opened it, and shouted after them, just as they were getting into the car, "Gentlemen, you've forgotten a packet of correspondence. Shall I throw it out after you?" But the gentlemen pretended not to hear.

Some time later I met one of them in a tram.

"Would you please tell me, Commissioner, when I'm going to get my correspondence back?"

"It's already prepared for you, Madam. But, my goodness, if you only knew what a trouble we had with it! Everything had to be translated into German and I went with it personally to Vienna. It was a confoundedly large consignment, Madam."

"Well, so you see, that's exactly what you deserve. By the way you had left behind one packet."

"Thank the Lord, Madam, only please don't tell anybody."

I burned all my correspondence when after half a year I saw it again. I burned everything except the package which they had left behind on that occasion, because it had not been translated into German or kept in their archives. And it happened to be the most interesting of them all.