

Sample Translation
By Mia Spangenberg

PROLOGUE

Agent Peggory Jones nearly tripped over a root as he hurried through the underground foyer of the Secret Service for Top Secret Affairs. His eyes still needed to get used to the darkness. A pair of torches floating overhead weren't of much help.

“I'm a secret agent, not some mole,” Peggory grumbled as he brushed dirt off his briefcase. He hated having to pay a visit to Secret Service headquarters, which was well hidden under a fairy hill. Of course it had the great advantage of being practically invisible to human eyes, but at the entrance Peggory had to shrink down to fairy size with the help of heat-shrink yarn. It always made him terribly sick. A distinct disadvantage if you asked Peggory. Besides, it also smelled musty down there.

After he reached the other side of the foyer, he stopped at the entry control point. There had been a countless number of invaders who had tried to get inside the fairy hill over the centuries and steal the secrets guarded there. That's why certain safety precautions were necessary. Even so, the board of directors had decided against newfangled frills like fingerprint and eye scanners. No, here they still relied on good old magic. The archway you had to pass through to reach the secret offices beyond was blocked by a fine net of fairy hair. At first glance, it seemed more delicate than a spider's web, but it was stronger than steel. And it left ugly burns if you tried to tamper with it illegally.

There was a reception desk next to the archway, and a toad in a blue uniform sat behind it. She was busy solving crossword puzzles, and she happily flicked out her tongue every time she had the right answer.

“Morning, Hilda,” Peggory said, showing her his service ID for protocol's sake.

“You're late,” she replied. Without looking up from her puzzle, she flipped a switch, and the net went up in a poof of glitter dust. “I wouldn't want to be in your shoes,” she croaked. “The boss isn't very keen on you at the moment. Hey, can you think of a mythical fire-breathing creature that's six letters long?”

But Peggory had already dashed through the archway, and now he followed the winding passages deeper and deeper underground. He passed countless locked doors, none of which resembled each other. Some were tall and narrow, and others were short and wide. A few were emerald green in color, while others were burgundy, and still others were midnight blue. The doors also had the annoying habit of regularly changing their location so that you could never be quite sure where you had to go when you had an appointment. It was hard for Peggory to recognize anything in the dark. The floating torches had their own minds and flew wherever they liked, so there were always areas in the depths of the fairy hill where you could hardly see two meters in front of you. Peggory wondered if he had already missed the door he was looking for, but then he saw the round oak door with the golden filigree doorknob. It was the right door. The inscription on the door read: *Violet Smith – Head of the Department of Magical and Mythical Creatures.*

Peggory adjusted his hat and straightened his shoulders. He knew he may have overdone it this time. He went over what he intended to say in his head one more time. Then he walked through the door.

“Mrs. Smith, I know I’m late, but I have a good excuse. The fact is that...” he began.

But Mrs. Smith’s stern look brought him to silence. She wore a gray suit, and she looked almost like a completely normal boss sitting at her desk in a completely normal office. Except she had the pointy ears of a fairy.

She glanced at her watch. “Mr. Jones, would you please care to tell me where you’ve been? We have mythical creatures disappearing all across the country, and my best agent is unavailable. For heaven’s sakes, Jones, I put you on this case because I trusted you.”

“The case! That’s exactly what I want to tell you, Mrs. Smith. The mythical creatures that have gone missing...”

But Mrs. Smith refused to listen. She slammed a pile of loose papers on the table. “Do you see these here? These are all complaints about you.” She fished a piece of paper out of the pile. “Here’s one: ‘unauthorized incitement to use black magic.’”

“Black?” Peggory repeated. “Does it really say black? I’d rather say it was...maybe gray?” he said, smiling innocently at his boss.

Mrs. Smith closed her eyes and massaged the bridge of her nose. “Jones, you’re my best agent. You know that. But I’m afraid that if you don’t produce results soon, I’ll have to take you off the case.”

That was enough for Peggory. “Could I finally have the opportunity to say something?” he asked.

He put his briefcase on the desk and accidentally swept the stack of complaints onto the floor. While he fumbled with the lock on his briefcase, he said: “You can’t take me off the case! I’m on the verge of a breakthrough.”

Mrs. Smith drummed her fingers impatiently on the desk. “Go on, get to the point, Jones!”

“This black...ahem...gray magic, it all has to do with this case,” Peggory explained. “I let a witch fix my mythical compass!”

“You what?” Mrs. Smith gasped. “The compass is official property! You can’t just mess around with it any way you like!”

“It had to be done,” Peggory said. “And it happened to be worth it. Just look and see what it can do now.” He dug a crumpled map out of his briefcase. “Normally a compass like this only shows you where mythical creatures can be found at any given moment, right?” he asked as he unfolded the map and smoothed it out.

Mrs. Smith nodded.

Peggory had used a red pen to mark every location where a mythical creature had disappeared. It was a terrifying number.

“But now,” he said proudly, taking a small golden compass out of the pocket of his coat, “it also shows where mythical creatures are in critical danger!”

“And that’s supposed to work?” Mrs. Smith asked incredulously.

Peggory nodded and opened the compass. The compass rose on the mother-of-pearl inlaid baseplate shone like stardust. He slowly moved the compass over the map. Every now and again a golden shooting star whizzed over the baseplate.

“Isn’t everything as it should be?” the boss asked, raising her eyebrows

questioningly, but Peggory motioned for her to be patient. Suddenly a small, dark stain appeared on the compass, and the needle trembled. Peggory tapped his finger on the spot the compass had reacted to.

“The next mythical creature will almost certainly disappear right around here,” he said gravely. “At least if I can’t stop it.”

Mrs. Smith stared at the map. “Kiesbach?” she asked, frowning. “Where is that exactly? I’m not so sure...”

“It makes sense,” Peggory said. He unfolded the map a bit more. “Can you see it? There’s a mythical forest very close to the village.” He moved the compass over the forest, and a golden shower of shooting stars rolled over the compass.

Mrs. Smith’s eyes went wide. “It’s full of mythical creatures!” she said. “And you think they are all in danger right now?”

Peggory nodded.

The boss leaned back in her chair with a sigh and looked at her best secret agent thoughtfully. “Okay,” she finally said. “You get one last chance. Pack your things, and off to Kiesbach with you.”

Peggory breathed a sigh of relief. He stuffed the map back in his briefcase and rushed to the door.

“Mr. Jones!” the boss called after him before he stepped out into the dark passageway. “Don’t disappoint me!”

Peggory smiled at her and tipped the brim of his hat to her in goodbye. “Have I ever let you down, Mrs. Smith?”

“Not yet,” said the head of the department of magical and mythical creatures quietly to herself after the door had closed. The letters of complaint rustled indignantly on the floor.

CHAPTER 1

In which Olaf, the village policeman, chokes on a poppy seed roll

“10:13. Our target is eating his third poppy seed roll this morning,” Jannik dictated, and Lulu duly noted Jannik’s observation in the binder. It was as thick as three ham sandwiches stacked on top of each other, but there still wasn’t much worth mentioning in it.

“This is so boring,” Pola moaned and blew a ladybug off a flower. “Do we really have to spend our first day of summer vacation spying on the village policeman?”

“We’re not spying, we’re observing,” Jannik corrected her. “And of course we have to. We’ll be the first to know when something is up.”

“In Kiesbach?” Pola snorted. “The last major event was when a sack of flour fell over in Maja’s bakery.”

Jannik rolled his eyes even though he knew his friend wasn’t entirely wrong.

Jannik, Pola, and Lulu weren’t just in the same school, they were also best friends. But they disagreed on one very important thing: Jannik felt that Kiesbach urgently needed a detective agency, but Pola and Lulu didn’t see it that way. After all, nothing happened in this small village with its cozy marketplace and the old houses and crooked roofs. But the two girls didn’t have the heart to let Jannik down. For his sake, they had already convicted Pola’s stuffed animals of money laundering, investigated Lulu’s aunt for being a public nuisance (it had to do with her ugly pink Sunday dress), and arrested her cat for stealing treats. It was just that they had never had a real genuine case and solved a real genuine crime. Still, Jannik was sure that something was in the air in Kiesbach – and if the three of them could just stick to it a little longer, they would soon stumble onto their first real case.

And so it was that Jannik and his two fellow involuntary detectives were hidden in the bushes in front of Maja’s bakery observing Olaf, the village policeman, on the first day of summer vacation. Jannik peered through his binoculars, even though they were sitting only a few meters away from Olaf.

“I think Pola’s right,” Lulu said. A bee buzzed around her head and then settled on a flower. “This is a total waste of time. My parents would be really upset if they knew I wasn’t studying! Mrs. Kleppermann had to turn two blind eyes so I wouldn’t fail German. My parents promised her I would catch up on everything over vacation and take a review test. They’ve been at me ever since: ‘OK, Lulu, explain the rules for using commas!’ they say. Or then they ask me to spell some complicated word like ‘equipment.’”

“But at least your parents are interested in you,” Pola said. “My parents don’t even know report cards were just handed out.”

“Psst!” Jannik interrupted them. “Something’s going on!”

Olaf disappeared inside Maja’s bakery. But then he popped up a second later with another poppy seed roll. “10:24. Target...”

“I can see it myself,” Lulu hissed, scribbling a note in the binder. Olaf picked a poppy seed out of his teeth with his little finger.

“I hope nobody sees me here, I’d die of embarrassment!” Pola said as she opened the front camera on her cell phone and checked her hair. As usual, she had twisted her blue hair into two buns. It looked like she had cat ears.

Olaf leaned back and undid the top button of his pants. They were stretched as tight

as the casing on a sausage. Then he crossed his legs and opened the newspaper.

“Ahh, now I just need a cup of coffee. Maja, could you fetch me a cup? With three pieces of sugar, please!” he called out without even looking up from his paper.

“All right, I’ve had enough. I’m going swimming.”

Olaf looked up from his paper in surprise as Pola sprang out of the bushes.

“I’m coming, too!” Lulu said, getting up to follow Pola.

“Wait!” Jannik called out in excitement, pulling Lulu back by her shirt. “I’ve discovered something!”

The girls hesitated. Jannik squinted through his binoculars so he could make out something written on the front page of the newspaper. “Honey theft in Kiesbach,” he read. “Have you heard anything about it?” he asked.

Pola and Lulu shook their heads and clambered back inside the bushes.

“Seven jars of fine gold leaf honey were stolen early yesterday morning from the Piepenbrink Delicatessen. Witnesses are asked to provide any pertinent information to the local police.”

Jannik let out a soft whistle. “See, didn’t I tell you? There’s something fishy going on here!”

“I don’t know,” Pola mumbled. “It’s just a couple of honey jars.”

Olaf cheerfully bit into his poppy seed roll. Suddenly the radio on his belt crackled.

“Olaf, please hurry! There’s been a burglary at Grandma Ilse’s house!” a voice called through the static. Alarmed by the sudden intrusion, Olaf choked on his roll.

“Olaf, please come right away,” the voice called again.

But Olaf succumbed to a terrible coughing fit and couldn’t reply.

“This is Olaf,” he finally gasped into the radio. “What should I do now?”

“Go over to Grandma Ilse’s house and investigate. Over and out,” replied the voice on the other end.

Olaf sat there unhappily for a moment. But he buttoned up his pants, shuffled out to his bike, strapped on his bike helmet, and turned on the blue light attached at the front. Then he headed off to Grandma Ilse’s house.

Jannik, Pola, and Lula stared after him in shock.

CHAPTER 2

In which Olaf suspects Fiffi and is wrong

Since Jannik, Pola, and Lulu didn't have bikes, it took them a little longer to get to the crime scene. Olaf's interrogation was already in full swing when they arrived.

"I was only inside for a moment to make myself some tea. Chamomile tea. My stomach is always causing me problems," Grandma Ilse was saying on the record when the three young detectives walked through the garden gate. Olaf and Grandma Ilse were sitting outside under the sunshade on the terrace, and Olaf had a large glass of lemonade in front of him.

"Oh, hello children!" Grandma Ilse called. She was happy to see the children. Olaf eyed Jannik, Pola, and Lulu suspiciously. "What do you want? Are you following me?"

But before the children could respond, Grandma Ilse asked them if they would like to have some cookies.

"No thank you!" Jannik said impatiently. "Did someone really break into your house?" His stomach was full of butterflies. Maybe they were on the verge of their very first case!

"Ah, yes. I was just about to tell Olaf about that. Yes, I was robbed. Can you imagine! I was just in the kitchen for a second..." Grandma Ilse resumed her story.

"Well I'd like some cookies," Olaf interrupted, and Grandma Ilse went inside the house to fetch some.

"So tell us about the burglary!" Jannik said when she finally reappeared.

"Well it wasn't really a burglary per se." Grandma Ilse put the plate of cookies in front of Olaf. "It was more like a theft. Fiffi sounded the alarm. Right, Fiffi? You're a good boy!" She scratched her Dachshund's ears. "He barked like a big dog. But I'm not as quick as I used to be, and by the time I came outside, the thief was already long gone with his booty."

"So what was stolen? Jewelry? Gems? Jewels?" Pola asked, now curious herself, and Lulu opened their binder to take notes.

Grandma Ilse shook her head. "No, they didn't take any jewels. They took my honey bun! It was right there!" She pointed indignantly at the empty plate on the table. There were only a few sad crumbs left as a reminder of her breakfast.

"And the thief trampled my petunias, too!"

The children exchanged meaningful looks, and Lulu closed the binder.

"Isn't it possible – this is purely theoretical of course – that Fiffi ate your breakfast?" Olaf asked, and Fiffi almost looked offended.

"No, not at all!" Grandma Ilse laughed. "Fiffi doesn't eat honey! Now liverwurst, that would be another matter. But honey? That's completely out of the question."

Olaf was at a loss. "And now? Would you like to file a complaint?"

"Could I do that?"

Olaf shrugged. "I'll have to take a look back at the station. We must have a form you can fill out somewhere."

"No, that's not necessary, my dear. I don't want to give you any more work. You always have so much on your mind. But maybe you could do some investigating? I really would like to know who would steal an old lady's breakfast."

Olaf got up reluctantly. He put his hands on his hips and looked around. “Hmmm, where should I start?”

“You could check the plate for fingerprints,” Jannik suggested.

“Um, I don’t know exactly how that works,” Olaf said, who had cookies on his mind. He stuck two cookies in his mouth and looked at his watch. “Oh, it’s already time for lunch,” he said with relief. “I’ll be in touch when we have something, Grandma Ilse! But I don’t want to promise too much. There’s a lot going on at the station right now. Just yesterday something was stolen from the Piepenbrink Delicatessen. So there’s lots of paperwork.”

He got on his bike, nodded to the children, and rode away whistling.

“Of course!” Jannik slapped his forehead. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of it right away! The deli!”

Pola and Lulu looked at him blankly.

“Don’t you get it?” he asked them impatiently. “First the gold leaf honey, and now Grandma Ilse’s honey bun. It’s all connected somehow!”

“My goodness!” Grandma Ilse exclaimed.

Jannik circled around to the other side of the table. “Now pay attention and learn,” he said to Pola and Lulu. They both rolled their eyes until you could only see the whites. They knew what was in store for them: an involuntary lesson on how to conduct a professional investigation.

“A professional investigation,” Jannik began, “requires a cool head. We must be analytical and logical as we approach this case and keep our eye on what’s essential, so we don’t miss any details.”

He tapped a crumb off the plate with his index finger and then studied it from all sides.

“So this is where you put your honey bun?” Jannik asked. Grandma Ilse nodded. “And this is where your petunias got trampled...” he went on. He looked into the dense woods behind the garden fence. “The thief must have come out of the bushes and climbed over the fence.”

“Maybe it was someone walking by who happened to be hungry?” Lulu said.

“Possible but not likely,” Jannik said.

“Grandma Ilse, you haven’t seen anyone around?”

She pulled her cardigan closed over her chest. “I did actually see someone. But whether they have something to do with the theft or not...I don’t know. That was very early this morning when Fiffi and I came back from our walk. And I hadn’t even made my breakfast yet.”

Jannik nodded encouragingly for her to go on.

Grandma Ilse continued: “We noticed the new neighbor...now what’s his name? Mr. Gaunermüller? No, that’s not it...”

“Do you mean Mr. Grauenmeier?” Jannik asked.

“Yes, that’s it! So this Mr. Grauenmeier was creeping around at the edge of the woods. It was quite strange...he was looking around on all sides as if he were scouting something.”

“So how do you know this Mr. Grauenmeier?” Pola asked Jannik in surprise.

“He moved next door to us last week,” Jannik explained. “I read his name on the doorbell. But I haven’t seen him yet.”

“What a morning,” sighed Grandma Ilse. “I just hope Olaf will find something out. I’m not really comfortable with the idea of a thief lurking around here.”

“Don’t worry Grandma Ilse. Me and my colleagues here will find out what happened to your honey bun. We’re real bona fide detectives.”

“Is that right?” Grandma Ilse asked hopefully.

“We’ll find out who’s behind all this in no time at all,” said Jannik proudly.
“Detective’s honor!”