

Runges Epilog

a *Monster* fanfiction

by Rodo

for *Jan*

THE HOSPITAL STAFF had kindly provided Inspector Heinrich Runge with a newspaper. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* ran an entire front page on the Ruhenheim Massacre, as the media had come to call it. Interviews, speculation, an article about the apprehended fugitive Dr. Tenma ... Runge's right hand twitched with the urge to type up the information. Unfortunately, it was currently holding the newspaper, since his left arm was in a sling to allow his shoulder to heal. A knock on the door caused him to look up.

"Come in," he said, considering the possible identity of the visitor. A doctor or nurse who wanted to check up on him, policemen with more questions, a journalist, Dr. Gillen, Tenma's lawyer ... His daughter's nervous face came as a surprise. She was cautiously peeking into the room, as if she expected him to tell her to leave. Runge didn't know what to say.

"Hello," she finally greeted him. Then she entered with a toddler in tow. The boy didn't take his inquisitive eyes off him. "I got a call from the police telling me you were here," Monika explained. "This is Max, your grandson," she added after a small pause.

Runge stared. The timid boy stared back and sucked his thumb, while Monika looked back and forth between them as if she expected something to happen or be said.

"Hello," Runge said, deeming that the appropriate answer. He nodded at the boy. "I hope you weren't worried. I'm fine; it's just the shoulder and a slight concussion."

Monika's lip trembled. Runge could see tears forming in his eyes. "They said you were *there!*" She pointed at the newspaper. "How could I not worry? It must have been terrible. How did you even end up there? It's a miracle you're still alive." She took a deep, shuddering breath.

While Runge was still contemplating what to tell her about his vacation and how to best calm her down, Monika held up her hand. “No, don’t answer that. I can imagine, and I don’t think I want to know. Just ... promise me you won’t ever do something that dangerous again. Please, dad.”

Her pleading tone was impossible to miss. She was sure of his answer, he decided, but she asked anyway. And the longer he thought about it, the less he knew what to say. He had loved going after first Tenma and then Johann. The hunt had never been as thrilling, the puzzle never as complex. And now it was over, save for the tedious aftermath. He would miss it, but throwing himself into work would not work. Grimmer came to his mind, and how he appreciated the simple pleasures in life.

“I will try,” he answered at last. “Although it’s doubtful a situation like the one in Ruhenheim will occur again.”

Runge watched as his daughter’s eyes widened almost imperceptibly and her shoulders lost a tension he had not noticed before. They continued awkwardly, exchanging mostly of small talk and skirting around the topic of Ruhenheim. Monika (and Max too in the end) did most of the talking and, for once, Runge had nothing more important to do than listen to her. It felt strange, alien even, but not bad. When she left she gave him her e-mail address and phone number, and his fingers typed them on the discarded newspaper.

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The lecture had a much better attendance than his regular ones. Runge was not surprised. Dr. Gillen, his co-lecturer today, knew how to keep the students on the edge of their seats. Gillen enjoyed the attention too, just as he enjoyed toying with them. “The Psychology of the Criminal Mind: Famous Cases of Capital Offenses” was more sensationalistic than Runge’s usual lecture topics (information management, mostly), with two lecturers who were not only renowned specialists but also personally involved in the Ruhenheim Massacre. It attracted the students like flies.

Gillen was skilled enough to tease the students with bits of his knowledge, while still focusing more on Johann’s knowledge and understanding of the criminal mind and less on

the gory details. Runge himself had followed a similar strategy, although he had talked about the importance of motivation in every killer, including Johann. Still, at least in this case their interest in the details of the massacre helped them learn something important. The prurient students could simply look up the court documents.

“Students,” Gillen murmured as they left the university building amongst the chattering students. “They don’t ever change.”

Runge closed his eyes and gave himself a moment to enjoy the warm summer weather. It was the end of the semester; soon the holidays would start, but first there were exams. He liked Wiesbaden at this time of the year, and the FH always reminded him of his own time as a student.

“I suppose not,” Runge answered. He looked at Gillen and noted how he scrunched up his eyes in the afternoon sun. It was the look of a man who spent most of his time indoors. “They probably cheat as much as you did back in the day.”

Gillen laughed. “Well, at least that demonstrates their dedication and teaches them a lesson in human nature. It is hard to understand the realities of crime without that.”

Runge had to agree. “Still, I do hope they learn how to do proper police work.”

Gillen laughed again, obviously deeming that a lost cause. Then he glanced at his watch, and Runge could see the wheels turning behind his eyes. “Tell you what,” Gillen said, “why don’t you show me a good restaurant. I’ll pay, since I wanted to talk with you about something anyway.”

“About what?”

Gillen seemed somewhat embarrassed as he answered. “A book about Johann. There’s enough interest and his case is certainly worthy of one. His manipulation of other killers alone could fill hundreds of pages.”

Runge frowned, but didn’t say anything, which prompted Gillen to continue. “I thought we could write it together. You know much more about some of the cases and what happened in Prague.”

“Prost Mahlzeit,” toasted Fritz Wademann, his Maß of beer raised.

“To Grimmer,” added Suk solemnly. Runge noticed that the hint of sadness around his eyes was still present. He hadn’t lost it in all the months that had passed since Prague. Something had broken in him, Runge concluded, although that might not be such a bad thing. His superiors praised his new work ethic and dedication.

“To Grimmer,” Runge echoed. The beer did not quite go with the seafood pasta, but he had decided that honouring a fallen comrade came before authenticity.

“How is the family?” he asked Wademann after they had all had a chance to appreciate the food.

The man’s face lit up. “Fine. My son has started talking and won’t stop. My wife thinks he’s destined to become a lawyer, like me. I keep saying he might just as well become a politician.”

Runge nodded. “My daughter is the same. I am staying with her at the moment and her son is rather silent and observant. She keeps saying he is like me. I think he is just being curious, like most children.”

Suk looked at them with a wry smile on his face but said nothing and instead took another bite of his pizza. The door chimes rang, and Runge and Suk looked at the newcomers in reflex. Old habits died hard, and Runge was more than surprised that in this case, it paid off. He recognised the newcomers; it was Karl Neumann with his friend Lotte and Nina Fortner. Suk seemed almost paralyzed and stared openly, which aroused Wademann’s interest.

“Frau Fortner!” Wademann called, and the woman in question finally noticed them. Runge greeted her with a polite nod before she reached them. “What a coincidence,” he continued. “I was going to contact you about your application on Monday.”

“Really? Please tell me I got the internship!” Nina grabbed a chair from a nearby table, and by unspoken agreement she and her friends joined them for dinner. Nina and Wademann talked about their future plans, Karl Neumann interrogated Suk on life in Prague, and Lotte turned out to be quite smart and interested in causes and effects of crime, which had something to do with the topic of her magister thesis.

Runge found that he enjoyed the conversation and thought that if there was an afterlife, Grimmer would be smiling down on them and raise his pils in toast.

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Dear Monika,

I got back to Wiesbaden safely, even though the train was late and relatively full. I enjoyed visiting you and met a few old acquaintances by accident. I think I'll visit you again next year, if you don't mind.

Max told me a lot about dinosaurs and insisted on a T-Rex toy for his birthday. Unless you have already bought one, I'll get him one and send it by mail. I can't come since I'll be busy with work and it's the start of the semester, but I'll make sure to call.

Tomorrow I'll have another meeting with Gillen. It seems we're making progress, but there's still a lot of work ahead of us.

Goodbye,

Your father.

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