

Extra

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Translated by Gloria Custance

A television channel decided to make a film about unsolved murders. However, as there were no unsolved murder cases at the time, they commissioned a script writer to think up an authentic-style murder, scouted out suitable shooting locations, engaged actors for the roles in the film and an extra to play the corpse. One film location was the pathology department at the local university and the extra was Karl-Heinz Kleinschmidt. He was obliged to undress in the broom cupboard, made up to look as white as a sheet, and then had to lie down on a dissecting table. Wearing nothing but a loin cloth. They tied a label round his big toe with the most idiotic name they could think of: Norbert Niesfisch. Nobody on Earth answered to that name which was also a neat way of ruling out any possibility of future demands for compensation. Then filming began.

While Karl-Heinz Kleinschmidt alias Norbert Niesfisch was lying down pretending to be dead, a bogus police inspector declared, suitably affected, that he had not witnessed such an atrocious crime for a long time and the murderer must be apprehended at all costs.

It took almost the entire morning to film the scene. Sometimes the inspector fluffed his lines or the corpse twitched or a microphone strayed into the picture. And Karl-Heinz Kleinschmidt began to feel very, very cold. But when the film team broke for lunch they told him to stay where he was: the following scene would be filmed next and if he moved they would have to shoot the whole thing over again. Severely pissed off, Karl-Heinz vowed he would never again play a cadaver. In spite of the cold, he dozed off with his mouth open and was soon snoring. Actually, the story would end here but for the caretaker, who happened to be both conscientious and stone-deaf.

“A fine state of affairs”, he mumbled, “damn students are getting worse by the day. Now they’re even leaving the corpses lying about.” The caretaker pushed the table into the cold storage room, closed the door carefully, and went home for the day.

Next day, the extra was cut up into pieces by pathology students under the expert guidance of their professor. They diagnosed the usual degenerative processes and established that death had not been sudden but slow, probably due to hypothermia. A firm of undertakers buried him in a cemetery reserved for people of no fixed abode. A week later, when the film team was shooting there, the director got a nasty shock. “We took such a lot of trouble over that name,” he said pointing to a new grave, “and then there really is some idiot called Norbert Niesfisch.”

As they did not want to shoot the scene in the mortuary all over again, they set about finding his relatives; however, they encountered a wall of silence. Nobody admitted to have known the dead man, nobody remembered him. More sensitive to these experiences because of their line of work, the film people contacted the police. The police exhumed the body and made a horrific discovery: the body of the dead man was covered with deep cuts; some of the internal organs had been removed and then put back again in a haphazard fashion. Clearly the work of a psychopath. Police detectives were able to identify the scene of the crime as the pathology department at the local university. There it did not take them long to find a decisive clue: in the broom cupboard lay articles of clothing which did not belong to any students or staff in the department. Obviously the murderer had changed his clothes after committing the ghastly crime

so that he would not be recognised when he left the building. Yet like all psychopaths he had made a crucial mistake: he had left his identity card in the jacket.

Since then, Karl-Heinz Kleinschmidt has been wanted for murder. The detective superintendent in charge of the case swore that he would get him but he is still at liberty. Should you come across him, exercise great caution for the man is dangerous. He is around one meter eighty tall, with blond hair and blue eyes and wears round spectacles with black frames.