

It was not until twenty years had passed from Professor Ingeborg Karnten's retirement from her position as Head of the Faculty of History at Vienna University that a long letter was found recklessly concealed between a blank page and the cover of a book on the minor battle of Amstetten. That unexpected piece of writing had probably been left behind in haste, for the circumstances of Professor Karnten's departure had been most unusual, perhaps rather curt. Former students and staff may still remember the scandalous, yelling argument she had been involved in when a certain scholar, a disciple of Carl Schmitt's and a close friend of David Irving's, had been invited to give a lecture at the Festsaal. His purpose had been that of hinting at a partial, almost subliminal vindication of national-socialism; Professor Ingeborg Karnten, in those days a meager Privatdozent under the guiding wisdom of the renowned Greek scholar Albin Lesky, stood up to denounce his Nazi sympathies, which the man refused to acknowledge for about five minutes, until her verbal barrage and detailed exposure of his connections with Europe's darkest far-right groups broke him down. He withdrew from the stand and hurried down the grand staircase, chased by Professor Karnten's comprehensive onslaught as regards his being intellectually coddled and lavishly financed by the Deutsche Reichspartei. As a routed army, he abandoned copious booty scattered on the battlefield: his papers, notebook, briefcase and even a ball point pen lay in disarray on the marble steps of the Feststiege. Professor Ingeborg Karnten carefully picked up all of the loot. She threw away the briefcase made of crocodile leather, tore the papers to pieces and kept the ball point pen as a trophy. Later that evening, sharing a glass of wine with her academic tutor, she somewhat gloomily mumbled her feat had earned her little applause from her fellow professors. Austria was, they reckoned, still in need of the major political change denazification had yet been unable to convey, even if the Soviet threat in those forlorn years of the Cold War seemed all too grievous.

Some will argue Ingeborg Karnten's academic demise had had nothing to do with that ill-remembered episode, and point to an even more visible occurrence: in August 1969, the first anniversary of Red Army tanks rolling into Prague to put a swift end to Alexander Dubcek's attempt to introduce democratic reforms in the turf of the Communist gerontocracy, Ingeborg Karnten was asked to sign a joint document of condemnation and remembrance. She did, but in her turn she prepared a letter to be presented to the French representative at the United Nations protesting the imprisonment of Gabrielle Russier, a professor of Letters at the University of Marseille, trialed by the French government for having kept a liaison with a sixteen-year-old student. Most colleagues frowned upon her cause and therefore declined to stamp their signatures; her painstaking door-knocking trudging managed to gather a mere half-dozen successes. Dejected, Ingeborg gave up hope and silently placed the almost empty epistle within a brownish envelope, where it languished till her office was occupied by a new tenant. On September 1, Professor Gabrielle Russier committed suicide to avoid the humiliation of being incarcerated for a second time.

It was most likely around those weeks that the rumor that Professor Ingeborg Karnten was homosexual began to spread in earnest. Ingeborg's daily routine at the classrooms was almost always capped by a strenuous weight-lifting session at a nearby gymnasium. An unmarried, well-toned young woman who was never spotted in the company of a man, refused to accept any kind of courting by males (not that she was ever seen courted by women, though) and had lunch with the sole company of a book, unaware of the lusty looks placed upon her, was unsurprisingly suspicious for the conservative Vienna of the late sixties. Malicious gossiping, in this particular case, proved to be true. Ingeborg Karnten, a native of Lustenau, in Linz, kept a sour taste in her memories for her hometown, a rather small, quite industrial city in Upper Austria, but a sweet one for her fragmentary sexual debut the day after

her eighteenth birthday and the week before she was to move to Vienna in order to start college, in the skilled hands of a family woman who happened to have been her neighbor since the moment Ingeborg had been born. But for a mere bout of guilt-ridden crotch-rubbing, it had amounted to nothing else.

While still in her early twenties, Ingeborg learned there existed a peculiar kind of spectacle known as Frauen Schlammcatchen through a derisory report scribbled on a current affairs magazine. People thought it was just another American extravagance. Indeed, such messy matches had been commonplace in Germany during the later years of the Weimar Republic. Ingeborg cautiously preserved the magazine for the photographs, which depicted two women about to jump on each other inside a mud-filled ring, then rolling around covered head-to-toe in grayish, gooey stuff. A third pictured revealed that, although neither had gained the upper hand, one was about to slide on top of the other's back to get a bit of an advantage. When urged to seek sexual relief by means of masturbation, Ingeborg used to resort to the fantasy of rushing to the side of the mud pit to egg the wrestlers on and be allowed to kiss them in their muddy mouths, maybe even be dragged into the mud to wallow about with them. Climax overwhelmed her when she imagined herself and the two other participants struggling in a triple embrace to clash their breasts and genitalia together in that difficult and sensual setting.

Ingeborg majored in History with the highest honors at the tender age of twenty three. Two years later, still a virgin, she completed her post-graduate studies and was offered a post at the university. She met Marietta on the very first day she was to stand before a class. Ingeborg was a tall, lithe, gymnasium-drilled brunette who had unwillingly seduced all of her male professors in the course of her career by just swirling her jet-black hair around nonchalantly, with the remarkable exception of the middle-aged and extremely well-read Albin Lesky. Marietta was slightly on the

shorter side, a blonde, delicate, a tad too childish for her twenty one years. Much earlier than that she had realized that she was a lesbian and she had acted accordingly. A prolonged coffee at the Hawelka on a quiet Thursday morning confirmed that teacher and student would exchange places when the cloudy midday sun should pierce the blinds of Ingeborg's little apartment on Urania Strasse. Ingeborg, having her lips kissed for the first time ever by someone who was not her mother, listened to Marietta's gasped assertion that she enormously enjoyed to make love to the sound of music. The shaking hands of Ingeborg reached for a long-playing disc that featured Bach's Schweigt stille, plaudert nicht cantata and looked for the aria where Schlendrian tries to figure out what to do to make her daughter stop drinking too much coffee. The feeble sun bounced on their fastened nakedness. Marietta hummed along the splendid tunes and whispered in Ingeborg's ear that she did know where to search for a strip joint in which women took to battle in sloppy mire.

Love, like thunderstorms, waxes and wanes. Ingeborg and Marietta granted each other spells of bliss, streaks of boredom, a few months of renewed splendor and a final stage of strain, all of them seasoned with the encouraging anxiety of that which is forbidden and thus more stimulating. Three years had elapsed from that quiet Thursday morning to that even quieter Sunday afternoon when they parted, almost amicably, over coffee. Ingeborg felt that a red badge of pain would split her breast in two. Marietta sought to spirit away one of those halves and, when clearing Ingeborg's apartment of her belongings, coldly stole the magazine her former lover had treasured so cherishingly for so long, the one whose pictures they had discussed at length, those sacred images of women coated in ardent mess, tangled up in impossible holds; those women whose likenesses Ingeborg and Marietta had beheld as they had danced and stripped for them, whom they had tipped for naïve kisses, women by whom they had been splashed all over, whose eyes and mouths they had swabbed clean from muck in

between rounds, like naughty corner-girls, and then helped wash off the dirt in a tub. Women whose bold deeds in the mud wrestling ring they had praised but dared not imitate, for that minimum trickling of transgression, their being homosexual women, was more than enough burden to withstand amidst badly guarded secrecy pierced by the sneering or patronizing air of superiority colleagues and mates would meet them with.

At least, and fortunately for Ingeborg, there had been no academic complaints. Marietta was approaching the end of her studies; her path, although by no means as brilliant as that of Ingeborg's, was well above average. The obvious (that they had dated for years and had shared an apartment on Urania Strasse) was impossible to doubt; the odd fact (that Marietta was coached, but never examined with leniency or treated with partiality) was doubted by some but never flagrantly apparent. Ingeborg believed she had behaved fairly at all times, that was why she had spent several minutes engaged in quizzical stare at the plundered drawer where she was sure her beloved magazine was supposed to lie dormant, awaiting its being arisen again to provide much needed consolation in the vacuity of a sobbing weekend afternoon. The realization that her past darling had stolen it from her took a couple of hours to set in; she used that time to rummage around her tiny flat frantically until, when she had to come to terms with the undeniable, she grabbed the ravaged drawer and smashed it against a wall. Feeling utterly riled, she attempted to open the only bottle of Egri Bikavér remaining, a souvenir of happier times when she had unexpectedly and flawlessly accomplished to get Marietta to like wine varieties other than white; in return, Marietta had bought a splendid Mature Bordeaux Riedel wine glass, the only one the scarcity of her allowance could afford. Ingeborg was too incensed not to proceed clumsily: she was unable to unscrew the cork; her patience exhausted, she got hold of a carving knife and chopped the neck of the bottle off. A red flow of wine poured out like blood through the slit throat of a

sacrificial bull; Ingeborg raised the bottle and gulped down a large draft before getting choked. She dropped the bottle, which shattered upon contact with the floor, and coughed up some wine down into the kitchen sink. A doleful half-darkness enshrined the room; night was falling upon Vienna. Ingeborg Karnten, oblivious to the peril of stepping on the shards of glass on the floor, warily seized the Riedel glass and put it down on the table in the minute sitting room where she had shared life with Marietta until not so long ago.

One hour before the usual time, Ingeborg awoke. With uncalculated slowness she got up, had a shower and a negligent breakfast. That dawn promised a somewhat sunny day, perhaps vaguely marred by clouds. She correctly guessed the day would be a cold one; yet, she chose not to wear pants, a light orange one-piece cotton dress, ankle-high boots and a black leather jacket (a style of attire that had amused her by giving rise to too much idle talk). She made her face up unprovocatively, in a fashion devised to dodge the most doggedly adamant male admirers. Before setting out for her workplace, she put the Riedel glass in her attaché case and donned black leather gloves in her hands. As she had predicted, a haze of cold, thin air caressed her face when she reached the street.

A bustling cafeteria was the customary scenario one should expect to encounter on a Thursday morning at Vienna University. Ingeborg walked in, greeted by the circumspect smiles from her students glancing at newspapers or anticipating a tediously busy weekend. Professor Ingeborg Karnten ordered a Maria Theresia and strode over to the table where Marietta and another female student were chattering and giggling at some pieces of paper laid out on the table before them. As Ingeborg got closer, she could see paper clippings displayed on the table, like some sort of puzzle they were trying to reassemble. Marietta's taste for leather clothes matched that of Ingeborg's: she had picked a reddish leather jacket worn over a black dress that highlighted her blondness and gave ample room for the

exercise of seduction. Her reddish gloves had been placed by the coffee cup she had been drinking from as another ornament in an already well decorated table. In disbelief, Ingeborg watched as Marietta, still ignorant of her presence, played around with the scraps of the magazine article on mud wrestling women in far away America, uncaringly cut up from those pages into smaller and even smaller bits. The women's bodies were interrupted in the most awkward manners, as if by the work of the wild blade of a serial killer: heads were separated from torsos, limbs from waists, arms from shoulders; Marietta's new acquaintance's funny task was to find out a way to put it all back together, as she listened to Marietta's remarks on how foolish the sight of two women wrestling (and in a pool of mud!) appeared.

Professor Ingeborg Karnten sat down. Both Marietta and the other girl raised their eyes and met Ingeborg's stern look. It just took the anonymous woman a few seconds to become conscious of the fact that she had better find something else to do somewhere else. Ingeborg's glare was too intense for Marietta to put up with; she looked away in what seemed to be a fit of regret at first. Then, rightly conceding that the dice had been cast, she stared back at Ingeborg and smiled. A scornful shrugging of her shoulders intended to make the matters settled; it had been, Ingeborg had to understand, a simple tomfoolery. Professor Ingeborg Karnten opened up her case and produced the Riedel glass she had been presented with by Marietta in bygone years and smashed it noisily to smithereens on the table. Everyone's silent attention was then turned to the two women facing each other at a cafeteria table. Shyly, one of the waiters brought Ingeborg's order. She thanked him, took a sip from the cup and threw the rest over Marietta's face. Waiters remembered Professor Ingeborg liked her coffee just warm, never boiling hot, so Marietta's soft skin was not scalded, but she was shocked to the point of standing up in rage. Ingeborg rose, and it was only the table between both bodies that prevented them from coming closer as

their looks laced them up together in a way not too different from the one they employed when drawn to make love just weeks apart from that dueling present.

Much to the chagrin of those attentively following the atypical course of events, the University of Vienna's cafeteria was not to be converted into an improvised arena. Professor Ingeborg Karnten's right hand suddenly showed a set of keys, presumably that to her apartment's entrance and placed it on the table within Marietta's reach. She then left walking regally out of the university and into the weakly-lit streets under the almost midday sun. She was back in her flat in about forty minutes, her mind still floating in a wide sea of blank rage. Once inside, she kept all of her clothes on, lit a cigarette and made herself some warm coffee. She noticed something was missing, and immediately realized it was the music. The first notes of Bach's Kaffeekantate began to fill the house as Marietta opened the already unlocked door.

Ingeborg and Marietta had shared a slim helping of each other's life for too little a time, or too long, according to a range of views or opinions. Time is but the degree of decay with which we measure the crumbling of matter, terrific or repugnant, wondrous feelings or passionate indifference included. To both women, each had caused irreparable damage to the other and none would explain how or why; an open wound called for healing, a process that is sometimes given the crude name of revenge. Marietta has taken the first step; now as well as then, there can be found no scholarly evidence as to the truthfulness in her deprecation of Ingeborg's most intimate erotic joy other than, perhaps, her taking advantage of her knowledge of Ingeborg at her most vulnerable. To Ingeborg, the destruction of those hushed-up solitary symbols of pleasure meant plain indignation; wisely, in order to avoid the fastidious escalation a chain of vengeance and counter-vengeance would lead them to, she chose to exact payback wholeheartedly, once and for all.

It was Marietta who moved in suddenly, almost evading staredown. Ingeborg awaited in a firm stance beside the small sitting room table in the small sitting room, and they clashed in the middle, a sort of no woman's land. Grabbing each other by the shoulders and pushing forward, as if having locked horns, their gloved hands found it hard to hold on to the upper section of their shiny leather jackets. Ingeborg was the stronger one, but Marietta was by no means a weakling; they grappled back and forth until an abrupt shove by Ingeborg sent Marietta back on to the door. Ingeborg pressed on, but Marietta used the leverage of the surface on her back and managed to rock Ingeborg sideward into a cupboard. Ingeborg hit it with her left side and momentarily let Marietta go from her grasp. She lunged forward and caught Ingeborg almost by the waist, throwing all her weight on her rival. Ingeborg felt she was to fall back, but was able to stretch out an arm and lock it around Marietta's neck from above. They landed on the floor with Marietta on top, but her head was tightly caught under Ingeborg's right arm.

Marietta twisted and turned, but was unable to break loose from Ingeborg's grip. She attempted to lift her upper body by plating her hands on the floor and hoisting her head. In doing so, she gave Ingeborg the chance to roll her over to the right, and the situations were reversed. Ingeborg exerted more pressure on Marietta's back side of the neck, making her give out a painful groan. Infuriated, Marietta clasped Ingeborg's chin with both hands and pushed up. She was unable to garner all of her strength, though; Ingeborg's hold had placed her in too low a position to effectively use her triceps (something Ingeborg herself had taught her to develop when going together to lift weights) to hurt her opponent. To add to her further distress, Ingeborg had been able to wrap her legs around Marietta's waist. Her desperation growing, and with Ingeborg's full mass atop her, Marietta begged for mercy. Ingeborg pretended not to hear. Marietta begged again, in a louder voice, only to be answered by Ingeborg's thunderous silence. About to

sink into whining, she murmured she was being killed.

Ingeborg, as if blinded by lightning, loosened her hold right away. She sat up on a heavily breathing Marietta whose eyes had taken up the look of fear. At first she wanted to believe she could feel contempt; as minutes passed, she helped Marietta up and onto a chair. As Marietta was recovering from the effort and the alarm, Ingeborg noticed the pieces of broken glass on the kitchen floor and thought to herself they could have been badly injured had the fight taken place on the kitchen floor. She asked Marietta if a glass of water would be of use to her; her ex-girlfriend nodded. Ingeborg got into the kitchen and knelt down to clear the floor from the shards. She had barely finished when she felt Marietta's arm snaking around her throat from above and tying her up from behind.

Marietta closed the trap around Ingeborg's neck and attempted to keep that advantageous position so that she could choke Ingeborg into unconsciousness. Her gullible friend, cursing at having been deceived so stupidly, tried to stand up to break Marietta's hold; instead, they both fell backwards, with Marietta firmly clamped from behind. Now she could use her legs to get Ingeborg into scissors hold. She did, but Ingeborg had preserved both of her hands free. She reached backwards and grabbed a handful of Marietta's hair. Marietta unleashed a sharp scream; such was the force behind Ingeborg's odium. She retaliated by squeezing Ingeborg's waist with all of her might. Both women gripped their teeth as a way to resist the agony. Gradually, Ingeborg's skill allowed her to turn herself around little by little; she let go of Marietta's hair and concentrated on being able to defeat the scissors hold. She was almost done when all of a sudden Marietta also loosened her hold and tried to get behind Ingeborg again. She was not that quick; they both ended up entangled in each other's arms, with Ingeborg on top, but not for long. Marietta, with a supreme exertion, rolled her over to the right; she was trying to straddle Ingeborg, but the latter anticipated her intention and

hugged on to her. Marietta did the same, and a war of embraces began, both women's hands firmly locked behind each other's backs, chins dug into the other's shoulder, bodies tumbling about the room and upsetting chairs and the table, knocking down books from the shelves of the bookcase, sweating heavily under the leather jackets, drops of perspiration bathing each other's face. Wet hair clustered over each one's mouths muffled their grunts.

Maybe for four to five minutes the rolling momentum seemed endless, but with each turn Ingeborg's weight advantage became more obvious as exhaustion began to take its toll on both of them. They had bounced back from walls so many times their arms might have looked battered under their clothes. Being on top, Ingeborg undid her hold and pinned Marietta's arms to the floor, then sat astride her. Marietta had little strength left and put up symbolic resistance. Panting for air, she tried to break Ingeborg's grip on her wrists, to no avail. Ingeborg placed her perfectly round buttock on Marietta's breasts and her legs fixed Marietta's arm to the floor. Marietta wished to gasp for air and parlay, Ingeborg's response was a hard slap to the face. Drops of sweat trickled from her sticky black hair onto Marietta's puffy face. Marietta opened her mouth in an attempt to be heard, but another solid slap left her cheek as red as her leather jacket and gloves. Ingeborg would be unforgiving as she had been previously unrepentant.

Unexpectedly, Ingeborg stood up. Although relieved of the burden of the magnificent brunette, Marietta had almost no energy to bring herself to her knees. She saw Ingeborg go up to the bathroom and return with two bottles of baby oil. She heard her explain she used to anoint herself in that oil and pretend she was a messy wrestler when she masturbated alone, one of those women Marietta had treated with such shameful disrespect. Ingeborg lifted Marietta up and brought her, still utterly tired, to the all too familiar bedroom. Marietta was flung upon the bed and the contents of one of the bottles of baby oil were poured on her. The oil made her red

leather jacket look even glossier. Ingeborg then emptied the other bottle on herself, sensing the slimy oil as it slid upon and under the black leather clothes she was wearing. Marietta was ordered to fight her.

Marietta stood on her knees and was jumped by Ingeborg on the bed. She thought herself defeated, but did not want to endure such a heavy blow to her ego without her being able to dish out at least some punishment. She and Ingeborg caught each other again in a sweaty bearhug, this time even more slippery as oil and sweat mingled with leather to make matters madly erotic for them, as love and hatred, desire and disgust run through both of them like oiled-up blood. They rolled off the bed and onto the bedroom floor. Regardless who was on top they murmured in each other's ear things no one has recorded but we may imagine as the dialogues spiteful lovers maintain in their perpetual collisions: a challenge, a taunt, a moan, a curse, an insult. Breasts were pressed against breasts, flat bellies against each other, crotch against crotch. Eventually they rolled under the bed and got stuck there, in that enclosed and somber space. Ingeborg was on top; she caressed Marietta's vaginal zone with her thigh until Marietta was too aroused to keep herself from climaxing any more. When she was about to explode, Ingeborg kissed her in the mouth widely and profoundly, not even half an inch of Marietta's lips was rendered uncovered. Ingeborg received Marietta's orgasm right into her own mouth and devoured it all. As the absolute winner, Ingeborg dragged Marietta's limp body from under the bed and lowered both her skirt and underwear, as well as Marietta's. She then stuck her genitalia to that of Marietta's; the oiled outer lips of their sexes embraced as they had done before. Not illogically, Ingeborg chose to make Marietta come a second time in the student's position. Her superiority proven beyond any doubt, she finally allowed herself to seek her own pleasure applying that dominant sort of sexual scissors, the closed variant, halfway between wrestling and lovemaking.

Whatever happened next is not clear.

The letter found in Ingeborg's office draws to a close with the account of the fight in which Ingeborg made her former partner submit and humbly request pardon. It is known, though, that Professor Ingeborg Karnten was shortly afterwards promoted and successfully led the History Faculty until she moved to the United States some years later. The Vienna University, like all others, also possesses its share of mythologies. Ill-intentioned colleagues of hers never fail to mention her homosexuality, her brilliance (much to their regret), and two corridor legends that can still be heard when her name is pronounced with awe and contempt: that she had kept Marietta, even after she graduated, at her beck and call for as long as it took her ex-student to find a new copy of the magazine she had destroyed so thoughtlessly – not an easy task since issues are rarely reprinted and this one had been sold out. Maybe it had taken Marietta some five years to atone for her fault. And the other one, even more unbelievable, that Professor Ingeborg Karnten had left her Austrian homeland, her career, her prestige, her slightly tarnished reputation to become a middle-aged mud wrestler or a mud wrestling emcee when the show's popularity caught on during the early and mid-eighties in America.

But of course, if Professor Ingeborg Karnten were here after her daily routine at the gymnasium and her morning coffee at the Hawelka, she would surely laugh at those silly impertinences, and head back to her secluded apartment on Urania Strasse.

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