

Ulrich Hinse

The Way of St. James Conspiracy



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Arrival in Pamplona

Raschke stumbled. When he got off the train, he and his backpack would have been beaten by a hair on the platform in Pamplona.

"Heaven, ass and thread, that's a good start," he cursed so loudly that some travelers looked around irritatedly for him, "that's not a good omen for a pilgrimage."

A good five hours earlier, his plane had landed in Biarritz. During the landing, the plane had been shaken quite a bit, because a violent thunderstorm raged over the Pyrenees and the seaside resort at the French-Spanish border. The weather did not invite us to go to Saint Jean Pied de Port to begin the pilgrimage there, as many of his fellow travellers did. But he hadn't intended to, anyway, but had taken the train to Pamplona.

For years he had had the dream to walk the famous pilgrim path. Now it was finally time. It had been a book that had made him dream. Not that of Shirley McLaine, or Paulo Coelho. No, a book about the mysterious monastic order of the Templars, which was feared by many rulers in the Middle Ages and envied for its immense riches. The knights had left behind castles, churches and a host of other traces, which everyone had to stumble across, who walked along the Camino de Santiago, as the pilgrim route was called in Spain, to the tomb of the apostle James to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, the cool north-east of Spain.

Running almost eight hundred kilometres required good preparation and above all time. And that's exactly what the fifty-seven-year-old First Commissioner of Criminal Investigation, head of the Rostock Homicide Commission and four-time grandfather, had never had before. The usual three-week vacation would not have been enough to hike that far. Six weeks, he'd figured, he'd need. With a live weight of over a hundred kilograms, he was not an experienced hiker, and even during his training with the riot police he had managed to avoid the thirty-kilometre-long compulsory marches. He, who drove even the shortest distances by car at home.

Lost in thought, he scratched his white full beard. He had it grown extra. A real pilgrim, of course, had a full beard, he found.

When he had told his wife about the plan, she could only smile mildly. She knew from more than thirty years of marriage how pointless it was to keep her husband from something that he had firmly placed in his head. She had only insisted on one mobile phone in order to be able to keep in touch. First he had refused to take one with him, but then he agreed to calm her down.

His kids are very different. Grandpa, they had mockingly noticed when they learned of his plan. He should spend his holidays better with his mum at the sea or take a wellness cure than walking alone through northern Spain.

Call us, we'll pick you up, his colleagues had generously offered and placed bets behind his back

as to whether he would last a week or two. He wouldn't be able to do any more and would spend most of his time by bus, taxi or hitchhiking anyway.

But Raschke had worked unswervingly on his plan. He had been in outdoor shops again and again, had been advised on hiking underwear, socks and outerwear, had thought about the necessity of every single piece of equipment, bought maps, studied pilgrim guides and very carefully put together his equipment. So he had finally arrived at almost eight kilos of luggage. Like all other pilgrims, he had decorated the orange backpack with a scallop on the back. So they recognized each other and were recognizable as pilgrims for everyone in Spain. His bright red windbreaker, a broad, bright sun hat, a so-called sombrero, well worn hiking boots, with which he had trained extensively on the weekends, two hiking sticks and, very importantly, the pilgrim pass as legitimation for the hostels and documentation of his trip at the pilgrims' office in Santiago completed his equipment.

He had merged the two-year vacation, worked a lot of overtime, and when enough time was saved, asked his boss for the long vacation. The head of the directorate had not been particularly enthusiastic about having to do without his commissariat manager for so long, but had then signed the application growling.

Now he had arrived and was ready to show everyone that at fifty-eight he was still capable of such a feat.

The severe cold he had caught at home made it difficult for him to breathe as he walked from the train station towards the old town. Already with the first small ascent up to the city wall he struggled violently for air. If he was already blowing like an old hippopotamus, what was it going to be when the hike started? Besides, eight kilos on his back still seemed too heavy for him. Up by the city wall, like an asthmatic, he sat down on a bench in a small park, gasping for air, and leafed through his hiking guide to find a boarding house to live in. He had deliberately refrained from booking a pension from home. He felt like a pilgrim and wanted to find his own accommodation on the spot. Above all, it should be centrally located. After a few minutes of intensive study he thought he had found the right pension. It should be located in an alleyway in the middle of the old town near the cathedral. Quiet, far away from the hectic traffic, he believed. He set out to search. It was early afternoon. The city was extinct. Hardly a man was seen. Only a few other pilgrims, recognizable by their luggage and the searching look for signs, wandered through the empty alleys. When he stood in front of the house he was looking for, doubts came to him. The little inviting, grey old building had several floors, dingy windows and only on the bell-bar a barely recognizable hint to guest rooms. He went digging for his guide to look for another place to stay. Even before he had found something that would have met his expectations, it began to rain. So he stowed his guide away again and pressed the bell button with a

heavy heart. Inside the house, a door was audibly opening and a woman's voice shouted something he didn't understand.

The older, taciturn Spaniard, who opened the door for him, reinforced the bleak impression. She looked at him from top to bottom.

"Soy peregrino, buscando un habitation individual - I am a pilgrim looking for a single room."

"Veinte Euros - Yes, twenty Euros" was the short, almost unfriendly answer. With a wave of his hand he was asked to enter. In a dark stairwell, which was only laboriously illuminated by a dull ceiling sparkle, she led him up a creaking wooden staircase to the second floor. Already on the third landing he struggled for air again. The landlady looked at him pitifully. It was noticeable to her that she didn't trust him to walk on for long. She assigned him a small room right next to the toilet. From the window one looked into a narrow inner courtyard, in which the rain was splashing loudly on a corrugated iron roof. She collected her twenty euros, gave him the keys and disappeared. Silently he stood in the barren room with the ancient iron bed. Only the euphoria of the first hours of pilgrimage prevented him from turning around on his heel in order to leave the evil dosshouse again. Raschke took his things out of his rucksack, stowed them in the shaky locker that replaced the wardrobe, and quickly left the uninviting quarters to stroll through the city despite the incessantly falling rain. It wasn't really fun walking alone through the

rain-soaked alleys. And so, standing in front of the stone oval of the bullring, an imposing stadium that reminded him a little of the Colosseum in Rome, he decided to go down the street to the Rio Arga, which flowed around the old town of Pamplona in a wide arc. There was the Casa Paderborn according to the hiking guide.

The bishop's seat was the twin town of Pamplona and therefore the Jacob's Society operated a hostel here to look after the pilgrims. The old, beautifully renovated sandstone building was located below the city wall in a small park directly on the banks of the Rio Arga. Its dirty floods had come dangerously close to the foundation walls of the house due to the flood. A few centimetres higher and the hostel residents had to expect wet feet. But they already had them, as could be seen from the many hiking boots lined up to dry on a covered bench next to the hostel. Curious, Raschke entered the house. So this was the first pilgrims' hostel he met, and his impression was not bad. Well-groomed, clean and friendly, she looked. Quite different from his pension. And already he was annoyed about himself that he had only rented a single room there.

A friendly young pilgrim, who was standing in the hallway with an arm full of laundry, showed him the office. He laboriously dug out his pilgrim passport, knocked and entered. Two women in their middle years looked at him smilingly.

"Hello, welcome. We're the hospitaleras. My name is Marlene. Do you want to spend the night

here with us?" greeted the woman behind the desk. Her colleague, who had just pulled a pot of steaming coffee out of the machine, introduced herself as Gerda. Raschke shook his head.

"Raschke," the detective on pilgrimage called his name. He had not yet internalized that the pilgrims only speak to each other by their first names, "not really. I already have a boarding house downtown. I just want a stamp on my pilgrim's passport."

With it he laid his still virgin document so carefully on the table as if it were fragile. Marlene grinned.

"That's a good thing, because we're full, but we can serve it with a cup of coffee. Do you want one? It's filter coffee."

Raschke wanted. Since apparently all the pilgrims were taken care of, the Hospitaleras had time to chat with him. So he not only got helpful tips for the way ahead, but also a package of paper handkerchiefs.

"You should wait a few more days with the migration, otherwise you won't get far with your cold. Maybe the cough syrup that another pilgrim left here will help you," Gerda advised, fetching a large bottle from a shelf and giving it to him, "if you no longer need it, please give it back to the next hostel."

Raschke thanked him politely, took a large sip and stuffed the bottle into the pocket of his bright red anorak. Then the conversation revolved around the bad weather. He did not expect so much rain in

Spain, rather too much sun. The hospitaleras laughed.

"Yes, you're wrong. Here in the north it rains frequently and in Galicia even more. But this year, it's really unusual a lot. We have walked the Way of St James several times in the past years and have never experienced anything like it. But as a pilgrim, you have to deal with it. I give you the good advice not to walk over the Perdon Pass directly behind Pamplona", Marlene explained, "due to the heavy rain the path has become almost impassable. We heard there was a small landslide. It would be better to take the bus through the tunnel and start the hike to Eunate on the other side in Legarda."

At that moment there was a knock from the outside against the window pane. A wiry, energetic-looking man, in his mid to late fifties, passing by in an equally striking red rain jacket as Raschke owned it, waved into it. When he saw that the Hospitaleras had visitors, he shrugged regretfully and disappeared between the trees of the adjacent park. Raschke made a flap-like remark about the jacket of the same type, which was not mentioned by the ladies.

"That was Wolfgang. He arrived this morning already. We therefore had plenty of opportunity to chat. He knows a lot about the history of the Templars in Spain and wanted to stay with us for several days because the day after tomorrow the Templarfiesta will take place. But of course you can't. After all, we are a pilgrims' hostel. Anyone can

stay with us for one night. If you want to stay longer, you have to find a pension."

Raschke had listened with interest.

"Oh, I should talk to him. The history of the Templars motivated me to walk the Way of St James. Maybe I'll meet him on the way."

"Then you should come back tonight. We arranged to meet him here in the office for a chat over a bottle of wine, because that's exactly why we asked him. We're interested, too. Our first impression is that he's a good entertainer. I'm sure it'll be an interesting evening. But at ten o'clock it's over. Then we have a tattoo. Then the pilgrims go to bed and the guests go home."

At that moment there was a knock at the door and an elderly pilgrim with strikingly white, short hair asked the hospitaleras for help. The Australian woman was looking for a map of the city and had the hospitaleras describe to her inconvenient way to a hotel where she wanted to meet someone. Raschke fished his pilgrim pass from his desk and was a little annoyed because Marlene had not yet stamped it, said goodbye and walked up the steep climb to the old town for a long time.

After wandering aimlessly through the narrow streets of the city for a while, slowly filling up with passers-by, he drank a small bar in memory of Ernest Hemingway, who had made Pamplona and the bull run famous all over the world, his favourite

drink, a Martini on ice with a small shot of Campari. Before he went back to Casa Paderborn in the early evening, he bought a bottle of good red wine from Rioja.

Arriving at the hostel, he looked through the small, illuminated window. There Gerda, Marlene, Wolfgang and the white-haired Australian sat at a small round table in the office. A candle was lit, and everyone had a glass of wine in front of them. Raschke considered for a moment whether he should disturb the idyll. But then he knocked and carefully put his head through the door.

"Courage, young man," Marlene waved to him, "come and have a glass with us."

"I brought supplies," Raschke added and placed the bottle on the table. The Australian smiled at him and said goodbye. Although others protested, she stuck to it. In a round alone among Germans, without understanding the language, she does not feel comfortable. Raschke could understand that. The other way around, it would have been the same for him. He sat down on the chair that had become free. Gerda introduced him to Wolfgang, who looked at Raschke a little distant without much curiosity or interest.

"I know I can't compete with your neighbour," Raschke tried a joke, but it wasn't well received.

"Very right," Wolfgang buzzed, "your hair is too short and your beard too long. You're no substitute for Heather. But that's life, full of disappointments."

"It's always the point of view or the expectation that counts."

Wolfgang raised his eyebrows in amazement. After a few seconds he wrestled his way through to a smile.

"Philosophy of pilgrimage. But if the wine is good, be welcome."

Raschke placed the bottle on the table, sat down on the chair that the Australian had set free and received a clean glass from one of the hospitaleras.

"Marlene told me you were dealing with the Templars. A book about these fascinating monks made me want to walk the pilgrim way."

"Which one?"

Raschke named the title and author.

"Pretty superficial," Wolfgang nagged.

"Well, as man's takes. Anyway, it was enough to make me curious. I'd like to know more about the Order."

Wolfgang threatened to cross over to the hospitaleras with his index finger for fun.

"Well, you guys had a chat?"

"Yes, that's how it is on the Camino. You're not only supposed to walk, you're supposed to learn. And we'd also like to hear about the Templars. That's just in. After Dan Brown's sacrilege."

"Yes, yes. The good Dan Brown", sighed Wolfgang, "hair-raising theses. The history of the

Templars, especially their demise in France, is quite well researched. It is worth noting that science has criminally neglected the Templars on the Iberian Peninsula. "There's still a lot of mystery to be solved."

"You make me curious. I'd like to hear about the Templars here in Spain."

"We're interested, too. Don't take any more pleas. We don't have infinite time," Gerda added, relaxing the situation by uncorking the bottle of wine that Raschke had brought with her.

According to the look on his face, Wolfgang felt like he was brushing his belly.

"Even at the risk of becoming a lecturer, I like to say something about it. If you have any questions, interrupt me."

Raschke leaned back on his chair, crossed his arms and observe his fellow pilgrim of about the same age from the side. With his pale complexion, a typical office jockey or bookworm. He wore Voniseila's slightly reddish hair. Nothing in front, pages long. He probably combed his hair from the side up in the morning to cover the plate. For his age, he had hardly any wrinkles. By the smooth shave, and the missing eyebrows his small eyes gave him something pig-like.

Gerda poured the glasses full, while Marlene hung almost too devoutly on Wolfgang's narrow lips.

"Well, in a nutshell. The Order of the Knights Templar was founded by French knights in

Palestine during the Crusades. In the Middle Ages he provided the most powerful army of Christians and here in Spain he played an important role in pushing back the Muslim Umayyads. Of course, he didn't do it for nothing. In addition to privileges, the monks received influence, power and fortune. The skilful use of resources resulted in a medieval financial group operating throughout Europe, doing business worth millions. Something like that awakens desires, of course. After the Templars had been allowed to operate unchallenged for a good two hundred years, a plot by the French king and the pope lifted the Templars out of the saddle in 1312. The knights were accused of heresy, abuse of office and homosexuality. The truth was, it was all about money. The arrests took place on Friday 13 October 1307. Since that time, by the way, Friday the 13th has been referred to as an unlucky day.

In Paris they were put on trial, which ended with the dissolution of the Order and the death of its Grand Master Jacques de Molay at the stake. The files containing the records of interrogation were taken to the Vatican and kept under lock and key until today."

"There must be a reason for this," Raschke threw in.

"You can assume the Vatican does nothing without a reason. Jacques de Molay, confessor of the Queen, was informed about the forthcoming action. He chose twelve knights and a commander to save the fortune. Part of the property was to be

sent by six knights to Scotland, while the other six, the valuables deposited in southern France, were to be transported via San Bartolome to Ponferrada and further on to Portugal."

"What is legend and what is truth?"

"Well, if you knew for sure. Then science would be a big step ahead. Of course, the legend lives essentially from its myth. But, like many others, it has a true core. Fact is, there have been gold and jewels that have not been found yet and are still being searched for. In addition, the fate of the Templars in Spain was different from that of France or Italy. Among the Templars of Europe, the brothers played a special role in Spain. The commanderies in the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile actively opposed the plot of the French king and pope. They protected the Way of St. James and owned a mighty castle in Ponferrada with a heavily armed crew that had been battle-tested by the Reconquista. This army wanted to be defeated first of all. Fifteen months passed, believe it or not, before their final defeat, which was achieved only with heavy losses. The commander Raimund Sa Guardia, who had already saved part of the Templar's fortune, very quickly realized that the destruction of the Order could not be stopped even in the Spanish kingdoms. If already the real estates were not to be saved, then at least the movable fortune should be hidden or brought out of country to Portugal, was its opinion.

"The Portuguese didn't go for it?"

"Portugal had become independent in 1100 and had expelled the Muslims from the young state with the help of the Templars. Therefore, the King of Portugal actively defended the Order. Quite a few of the brothers persecuted in other countries left for Portugal. They just nailed a new name tag to the door. Thus the enormous fortune had remained in the country to the advantage of Portugal, and the knights had become again what they had been. The most powerful knightly order in Christendom. Yes, they even grew from being to the state power that lasted until 1789. Henry the Navigator, Bartholomeo Dias, Vasco da Gama and others belonged to this order. Who was so arrogant as to openly display the Templar Cross, forbidden by the Pope, on the sails of his ships. Not least for this reason the Vatican, called upon by Portugal and Spain as referees for the distribution of the New World, took Spain's side. As a result, only Brazil remained as a sphere of influence for Portugal."

"What about the Templar treasure that the whole world has been talking about since Dan Brown," Gerda wanted to know.

Wolfgang shook his head gruffly.

"The Templars' fortune was in Palestine in the Middle Ages. From there the last Grand Master had made it to southern France shortly before the dissolution of the Order. "That's where the trail gets lost."

"And what of the Grail?"

"I think it's a fantasy. Nothing that could be

explored by scientific means. A saga from which new exciting stories emerge all the time. I'll stick to the facts. The churches, the castles, the monuments and the artefacts that are still in the museums. And, of course, the written records. But they're in the Vatican and nobody can get to them."

"Must the Vatican not have an interest in clarifying the background itself?"

"Oh, he certainly did. And that's why the Templars were rehabilitated in the meantime. But if there were anything in the documents about the whereabouts of the property or background to the Grail, it would certainly not be made publicly available."

"Yes, you may be right," Raschke mused and wanted to get rid of one more question. But Gerda beckoned.

"Enough of this. It's almost curfew. Maybe you'll meet again on the way. There are still more than seven hundred kilometres to go."

Raschke got up, thanked him well and said goodbye to the hospitaleras and Wolfgang.

"Maybe we'll meet again on the Camino. It was very interesting to listen to you and on the way new questions certainly arise. I'd be happy if we could talk about it."

"Yeah, maybe. The Camino has its own laws. You can't force it."

Raschke thoughtfully went to his pension. While he was sniffing his feet on his much too short bed with

woollen socks, new guests arrived at the pension. There was a lot of running around in the hall. All the rooms seemed occupied and now the bathroom next to his room became restless. A permanent shower began. The pressure in his bladder became unbearable and so he had no choice but to pee in an empty water bottle. He finally fell asleep.

The Witness

He was awakened very early by the marched pilgrims by loud rumbling in the corridor. Several guests stumbled across a small wooden cupboard that stood directly on the wall next to his room door. But now the bathroom was finally free. With his misappropriated water bottle under his arm he went into the small bathroom and showered extensively. He felt like he was on edge. Then he went downtown to find a little bar for breakfast. Not as he was used to at home with rolls, sausage and egg, but with a typical Spanish breakfast. A sweet croissant and jam.

In a small souvenir shop under the arcades of the Plaza del Castillo, the central square in the centre of the old town, he bought a small silver scallop which he hung on his necklace next to a silver elephant which his wife had given him as a farewell present.

In front of a shop window with bags of all kinds and sizes on display, he remembered that he needed a waterproof shoulder bag if he didn't want to take off his backpack for every little thing he needed. He found it silly to walk around with a shoulder bag, but it proved to be an extremely practical utensil.

Although it rained lightly again and was cold as a rat with eleven degrees for the beginning of May, he visited some churches, disturbed by his cough a wedding celebration and walked, after the bride's father had driven him from the church with a stern look, over the old citadel into the park de Taconera

with his small zoo. But he was annoyed because he did not already walk on the Camino towards Santiago de Compostela.

Just when he arrived at the city wall near the Plaza Virgen de la O, a strong shower came from the sky. Raschke stood in an old gatekeeper's house on top of the wall. Some locals with umbrellas hurried past him over the small bridge through the city gate, without appreciating him for a look, although he stood in the cottage like a sentry from bygone times. Through a large, glassless window opening he had a beautiful view down to the Rio Arga, whose loamy yellow floods shot a good thirty meters below him between the arches of the Puente de la Rochapea in wild vortices.

His gaze was caught by two people who, about a hundred meters away, in the middle of the bridge, were engaged in a violent gesticulating discussion. The tall, slim man who turned his back to him wore a bright red jacket that looked like his own. A black baseball cap with large visor covered his hair. The second man, he was a little smaller and more rounded than his counterpart, was wearing jeans and a light summer jacket, from which he laboriously pulled out a small parcel in order to hand it over to his counterpart hesitantly. When the round one grabbed it the round one pulled it back again. There was a scuffle because neither of them wanted to let go of the object. At that moment a big truck with trailer drove over the bridge and covered Raschke's view. When he had passed after a few seconds, the tall slender man with the red jacket

and the baseball cap stood alone on the bridge, staring over the railing at the gurgling water. The man in the bright summer jacket had disappeared. Raschke suddenly felt a lump in his throat. The round one must have fallen over the relatively low railing into the river. There was no other explanation for the situation. If the man had run away, he'd still be around somewhere. In the short time he could not have left the bridge unseen in either direction. Besides, there would have been no reason for the slender one to look searchingly into the river. After a few seconds of motionless perseverance, he stepped back from the railing, stowed the small parcel in his jacket and looked around searching. He seemed to want to make sure no one had been watching him. His gaze fell on the pilgrim looking stunned down from the city wall, whose conspicuous red rain jacket with the large scallop dangling from a leather cord in front of it could not even remain hidden from a glimpse. Moreover, Raschke still wore the broad, bright sombrero, because he had expected sunshine and not rain. The slender fixed the German staring down at him. He seemed certain that his face could not be seen under the umbrella of the baseball cap, turned away and hurried towards the city wall, where he disappeared among the trees of the park below. Raschke looked at the dirty floods of the Rio Arga to perhaps recognize something of the fallen. But the dirty water, interspersed with branches, small tree trunks and all sorts of rubbish, flowed too quickly and too wildly for him to have great hopes of

recognising anything else. After a few metres, the view of the river was covered by tall trees. Raschke stared motionless at the water for a few more minutes. He couldn't believe what he had seen.

The rain shower had stopped in the meantime and slowly the German detective regained his composure. Of course, he was constantly in the service of victims of violence, casualties and corpses. But he had never witnessed a crime himself. And there was no doubt in his mind that this had been a crime. He had to report the incident to the police. But what could he say?

To tell what he had seen seemed absurd to him. His Spanish colleagues would probably look at him as if he was not capable of his senses. On a small piece of paper he noted down the time and some points about the clothes of the slim man and his victim. Then he looked in his hiking guide for the reference to the police and made his way over the Plaza del Castillo, past the palace of the governor of Navarre and along the Pasea de Sarasate to the building of the Policia National. Again and again he wondered what he wanted to tell his Spanish colleagues.

When he stepped into the heavily secured entrance hall of the police headquarters panting and sweating, he was curiously eyed by the uniformed duty officer sitting behind a bulletproof window. Raschke tried in vain to make himself understood in Spanish. His knowledge was not sufficient. Only when the uniformed man understood that the excited pilgrim had to be a German detective in

front of the window, apparently the word "Kommissar" had caused that, did he comfort himself to react. He spoke on the phone several times and then made it clear to Raschke, rich in words and gestures, that a German-speaking colleague would be coming right away.

It actually only took a few minutes, then an approximately forty-year-old, sporty, slim, black-haired man with gelled hair in a bright summer suit approached him, curiously examining him.

"José Lopez Castela, what can I do for you?" he introduced himself in accent-free German. Raschke shook the offered rights.

"My name is Raschke. I am the German Commissioner of Criminal Investigation, head of the Homicide Commission in Rostock, and am currently pilgrimaging along the Way of St James. I've been watching a murder." Castela raised her eyebrows.

"Well, Senor Raschke. I think you'll identify yourself, and then come into my office with me."

After Raschke had shown him a copy of his service card, which was in his document pocket for emergencies, along with other papers and cash, the Spaniard waved briefly at the uniformed man, then the electronically secured inner door was opened. We took the elevator to the third floor. In the corridors, uniformed and civilly dressed policemen were scurrying back and forth. No different than in a German office, thought Raschke. Through an antechamber, in which a young Spanish woman curiously examined them, they came into a

spacious office, apparently furnished according to the personal taste of the official. Comisario José Lopez Castela deciphered Raschke walking past on a sign next to the office door.

The Spaniard took a seat behind his desk and offered Raschke a chair. Then he asked once more for the copy of the official identity card and the identity card, noted down the details on a piece of paper and returned the papers.

"May I offer you a cup of coffee?"

Raschke nodded. Somehow he suddenly felt uncomfortable in his skin. The role was unusual for him. Besides, it was clear to him himself that his information was rather poor. But he had to get rid of his observation. The rest was Spanish business. He was torn from his thoughts by Lopez Castela.

"Señor Raschke, tell me what's on your mind."

Raschke carefully sipped on the coffee the receptionist had brought in in the meantime.

"Senor Castela," the German began, but was immediately interrupted.

"Lopez Castela," corrected his counterpart reserved.

"Señor Lopez Castela. Two hours ago I was on a walk through the city. Up from the city wall I watched two men fighting on the Puente de la Rochapea. There was a fight and one of them must have crashed into the Rio Arga. He went down and never showed up. His opponent was much bigger, I estimate almost ninety one meters and had a red

jacket similar to mine. He was wearing a black baseball cap. That's why I couldn't see his hair or his face. He had thick hiking boots on his feet. All in all, he looked like a pilgrim. Only without a backpack."

Raschke also gave the victim's personal description. Then took a break to observe the effect of his words. His counterpart neither took a look nor made any effort to write anything down.

"Did you see the little fat guy get pushed over the railing?"

"Uh, no. Right at that moment, a truck was covering the view. It's just a guess. But there's no other way."

"A German detective has no guesses on vacation."

Raschke deliberately overheard the ironic remark of the Spaniard, who continued something too lecturing for his taste.

"Yes. There are other possibilities. He might as well have jumped himself or fallen unhappy. The truck's violent wind could have blown him off the bridge or taken him for a heart attack."

Raschke noticed how the blush shot him in the face. It was not clear to him whether he was angry or because he had allowed himself to be led onto ice like a beginner. But the Spaniard was right. Exactly the same doubts he would have expressed in a similar situation. Lopez Castela rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Is that all?"

Raschke swallowed. He had feared the question.

"Yes, that's basically everything," he replied.

The Spaniard looked at the German detective thoughtfully and, as Raschke believed, somewhat pitifully. Only the courtesy to the German colleague apparently forbade him to simply compliment him out.

"I know that my information is rather poor," Raschke added after an embarrassingly long pause of silence. The Spaniard nodded.

"Yes, very poor information. We can't do much with that. There's a body missing. There's a motive missing. Why should a pilgrim here in Pamplona so nothing to me you nothing plunge someone into the Rio Arga? You're at least the only witness to this incident."

Raschke looked embarrassingly touched out of the window, only not to have to look at Lopez Castela. His mood was as gloomy as the weather outside. What impression did the Spaniard have of him? Sure, at home in Rostock he would have reacted in exactly the same way if a Spaniard had come to him with such a story. Unprofessional head suspect creator would have been his verdict on such a witness.

After a few minutes of thinking, Lopez Castela picked up the phone and had some conversations. Raschke believed he could hear that various police stations had been called. That's how much Raschke

understood, Lopez Castela asked if there were any indications of an incident on the Rochapea bridge. The answers varied in length. Apparently without result. Anyway, the Spaniard's face remained motionless. After he had put the receiver thoughtfully back on his telephone, he turned again to his German colleague.

"Señor Raschke, thank you. Of course we take your observation very seriously and will investigate the matter intensively. But you'll understand, without a body it'll be difficult. If I have any more questions, I'll know how to find you. As a pilgrim, you have an established path ahead of you. And here in Spain we still take the obligation to register seriously in hostels, hostals and guesthouses. Now if you'll excuse me, I have important appointments."

He stood up and accompanied Raschke to the door, where he asked his receptionist to escort the German colleague out. Arriving at the door, Raschke cursed himself. Embarrassing. His appearance with the Spanish colleague had simply been embarrassing. Unprofessionally to the power of three. With an ejection as final

While walking towards Plaza del Castillo again, he decided to forget the incident as soon as possible. There was a Spanish demonstration in the plaza. It looked more like a fiesta. Musicians played, adults chatted casually, children walked around screaming and laughing. Raschke found everything much more relaxed than such events in Germany,

especially without a large police contingent, and looked for a free table in a street cafe to watch the event curiously from there. While he was sipping his Martini with ice cream and Campari again, he could see out of the corner of his eye how a few meters away Wolfgang was sitting at another table. A small group of demonstrators had sat between them and covered the view. Raschke had to lean back a little to see Wolfgang, who had a coffee in front of him and wrote intensively in a small booklet. Actually, he had wanted to address his first pilgrim acquaintance in order to resume the interesting conversation of yesterday. But then he let it go, because he didn't want to disturb Wolfgang with his paperwork. So he observed the hustle and bustle on the Plaza.

Right in Raschke's line of vision, a strangely dressed man came out of the underground car park. In his trench coat and hat he looked like a caricature of the actor Humphrey Bogart. Raschke had to grin. Probably the tall, slim man had this effect in mind, because he attracted the attention of almost all café visitors. The kopie of Humphrey Bogart stopped directly in front of his cafe and looked for his guests. Like he's looking for someone. Raschke didn't know why, but instinctively he retracted his shoulders, turned to the side and stirred eagerly in his coffee. From the corner of his eye he tried to observe the unpleasant contemporary. He had apparently not found what or who he was looking for and had slowly moved on. When the living caricature disappeared in the crowd, Raschke looked over to Wolfgang again. But he was gone.

