



‘The goalie watched as the ball rolled across the line . . .’



When Joseph Bloch, a construction worker who had once been a well-known soccer goalie, reported for work that morning, he was told that he was fired. At least that was how he interpreted the fact that no one except the foreman looked up from his coffee break when he appeared at the door of the construction shack, where the workers happened to be at that moment, and Bloch left the building site. Out on the street he raised his arm, but the car that drove past – even though Bloch hadn't been hailing a cab – was not a cab. Then he heard the sound of brakes in front of him. Bloch looked around: behind him there was a cab; its driver started swearing. Bloch turned around, got in, and told the driver to take him to the Naschmarkt.

It was a beautiful October day. Bloch ate a hot dog at a stand and then walked past the stalls to a movie theater. Everything he saw bothered him. He tried to notice as little as possible. Inside the theater he breathed freely.

Afterward he was astonished by the perfectly natural manner of the cashier in responding to the wordless gesture with which he'd put his money on the box-office turntable. Next to the movie screen he noticed the illuminated dial of an electric clock. Halfway through the movie he heard a bell; for a long time he couldn't decide whether the ringing was in the film or in the belfry outside near the Naschmarkt.

Out on the street, he bought some grapes, which were especially cheap at this time of year. He walked on, eating the grapes and spitting out the skins. The first hotel where he asked for a room turned him away because he had only a briefcase with him; the desk clerk at the second hotel, which was on a side street, took him to his room himself. Even before the clerk had gone, Bloch lay down on the bed and soon fell asleep.

In the evening he left the hotel and got drunk. Later he sobered up and tried calling some friends; since most of these friends didn't live in the city and the phone didn't return his coins, Bloch soon ran out of change. A policeman to whom Bloch shouted, thinking he could get his attention, did not respond. Bloch wondered whether the policeman might have misconstrued the words Bloch had called across the street, and he remembered the natural way the movie cashier had spun around the tray with his ticket. He'd been so astonished by the swiftness of her movements that he almost forgot to pick up the ticket. He decided to look up the cashier.

When he got to the movie house, the theater's lights were just going out. Bloch saw a man on a ladder exchanging the letters of the film for tomorrow's title. He waited until he could read the name of the next film; then he went back to the hotel.

The next day was Saturday. Bloch decided to stay at the hotel one more day. Except for an American couple, he was alone in the dining room; for a while he listened to their conversation, which he could understand fairly well because he'd traveled with his team to several soccer tournaments in New York; then he quickly went out to buy some newspapers. The papers, because they were the weekend editions, were very heavy; he didn't fold them up but carried them under his arm to the hotel. He sat down at his table, which had been cleared in the meantime, and took out the want-ad sections; this depressed him. Outside he saw two people walking by with thick newspapers.