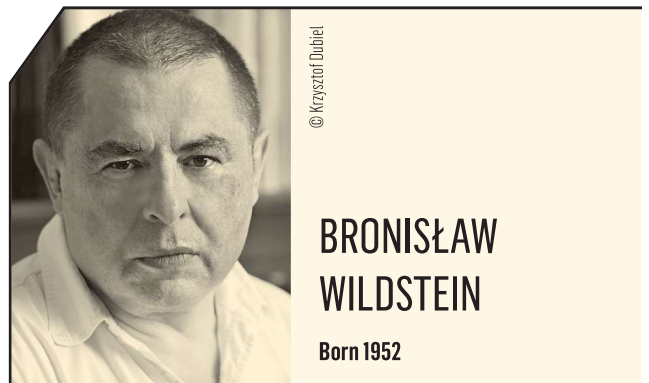


People are mortal, so they die – no, I did not say that, although it took effort to remain silent. The pompous seriousness with which Lefranc announced the otherwise truly unexpected death of Druon went further than his usual somewhat grandiose manner approaching self-parody. That self-parody got a mocking organ grinder going in my head. I was utterly surprised, however, by his next sentence. “He committed suicide,” the commissioner added, looking at me. Now all his behaviour was becoming obvious. A polite, but firm telephone invitation: “Right now. Naturally, I can wait a few minutes if you have something urgent to do...” I have never heard such decisiveness from him before. Although Lefranc always made sure to emphasise his position of authority, he never demanded real obedience. Appearances were enough for him. I had often had the impression that the more he depended on me, the more he took care in demonstrating his seniority. I got into the game of emphasising his managerial competence so much that at times I began to fear that I was exaggerating, and that my superior would view my irony as appalling rudeness. Until now, however, nothing of the sort had happened, and Lefranc would swallow my subservience with the face of a cat stroked under the chin. Now I understood the behaviour of the office staff that struck me the moment I had entered the building: those frightened glances when greeting me, those uncertain steps... A thought had even crossed my mind that the earlier rumours of reorganisation might turn out to be true, especially when I saw the expression on the secretary’s face before I had the time to tell her I was a god. “Boss, the commissioner wants you to call him. Should I put you on the line?” “So... do we know anything?” I was buying time face-to-face with Lefranc since I realised that Druon’s suicide was hard to believe. “You know... we’re all in shock. Such a king of life... suicide... anyone but him. Well, not everyone. If they told me, you committed suicide... heck, even if they showed me the photos and evidence, I wouldn’t believe it. Even if I saw your corpse... I hope you don’t feel offended?” “On the contrary, but what about Druon?” “He shot himself with his service pistol – well not exactly a service pistol since we are not really like the military despite all those recommendations to be armed and trained. Why am I even saying this when you know it as well as I do? He shot himself in his office at night, last night. The guard heard it. He banged on the door but couldn’t open it. Finally, they broke it down with the commander. That’s about it... You were friends with Druon.” I did not like Lefranc’s take on our relationship. “We knew each other.” “Exactly. Very well.” “Not too well.” Lefranc bristled, “I didn’t mean it like that. But all things considered... and just in case, I’d like to suggest that you talk – well – informally for now, to an officer... since we are not an ordinary police force and there will be no formal interrogation, you understand... Here and now, if possible. I mean, the colonel is waiting in the office next door.

I would much appreciate it, of course, and I hope you’ll agree.” The commissioner’s voice told me that refusal was not an option. I had never heard that tone from him before. Colonel Jugnot was polite, but inattentive. He went through the motions, but he seemed to think about something else and, while pretending otherwise, he appeared to have no interest in his interlocutor. Years of training. The subject of interrogation must be set at ease and relaxed – and an aura of indifference or inattention serves this purpose well.

Excerpt translated by Mirek Lalas



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