





Edith Krispien

# Tomorrow I'll be a Millionaire

*A narrative*

*Translated into American English  
from the original German by*

*Jeffrey Coulas*

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*The truly chosen ones have no choice.*

Stanislaw Jerzy Lec



My father realized early on that becoming a millionaire would have its advantages. It wasn't that he held much store in money, but that he found it really a nuisance not to be able to buy the necessities of life. He had fantastic plans to bring to fruition, research projects; and for all of these one needed money. In the end, so he would always explain, perseverance would be waving at you, but nevertheless also the abundance, the life without care, without the trivial expenses and naturally, further work on the even greater schemes yet to come.

Life with such a man, who always walks around lightheartedly, in constant anticipation of sudden wealth, is quite eventful and fascinating. However, it also brings a certain tension with it for the other members of the family especially if there is doubt lurking in their hearts and they are not able to share the feeling of certain victory with this inspired genius. My mother for example, whose last cash reserve were the coins buried in her sewing basket, spent many sleepless nights brooding over what to do, while at her side, my father lay there with a beatific smile on his face dreaming of the better days yet to come.

My father's sister, Aunt Hildegard, had made a rather subtle attempt to warn my mother before the wedding. She showed her his tomato vines growing on the overhang to the house, which only could be watered by performing an almost neck breaking stunt. In the cellar, she also showed her the giant boiler with tar and wood shavings in it.

My father had planned to produce charcoal lighters from this combination, but because of the enormous amount of smoke it caused, was not able to follow through on his plan. Something must have gone amiss with the formula. In spite of all this evidence, my mother only responded with the loving nod of an understanding bride. She married my father without hesitation and became a member of the Ferber family.

She brought with her a touch of the foreign which she never completely lost; at a glance, one saw her Swedish ancestry. She was blond, tall, and slender, with facial features drawn so clearly as if they would remain unchanged forever. Her eyes were deep blue. Her gaze brightened when she looked off into the distance, as if she always had the horizon in view; in contrast, up close, she seemed reserved, apparently cool, observant, and quiet.

The Ferbers were a completely different kind of people. Bubbling with temperament, happily eating, drinking and laughing together, they loved good

conversation and naturally good company. Making friends easily, they followed the motto, »better to have the company of three happy farmers, than one sad professor.«

Only one member of the family ever did the tradition to such an extent that it even went too far for the others; that was my father. From this period in his life, I only know his appearance from photos. He was of average height, lean and wiry, with a smile on his face and eyes that were so bright, you could almost see their color shining through the black and white of the photograph.

Not too long after the wedding, father had to undertake a short trip. My mother promised to care for the tomatoes on the overhang, and furthermore do his other duties to the best of her ability. Although she was very graceful, a tightrope walker she was not! Without further ado, she simply watered the tomatoes on the overhang with a well aimed garden hose from below. Her efforts were met with a chorus of outcries from the other side of the house. The stream of water had shot out over the tomatoes pouring down on to the terrace at the back of the house, into the coffee cups of the entire family gathered there. My grandmother rounded the corner, dripping wet and swearing, turned off the tap as quickly as she could, ranting, »Even when he's away he causes a disaster!«

My mother had little time to reflect on this ominous comment. For a moment later, the bell rang at the garden gate of that memorable house in Berlin-Zehlendorf. There stood a young man, looking half starved and was asking to see Herr Ferber.

»My husband is away on a trip«, my mother said, with the subtle pride of a new wife.

»Not a problem«, replied the young man quickly, »I'm just bringing the bill for the ›Flaming Angel‹. It's a bit more than 20 Marks. You see, I need it really soon ...«

That he needed the money was quite apparent to my mother, but to get at the truth, she added, »I have no knowledge of a ›Flaming Angel‹.

»But it's true! Here, please have a look at this.« Out of his pocket, he pulled a thoroughly crumbled newspaper. »There! That's the trademark for the charcoal lighter that your husband is producing. Good, isn't it?«

Skeptically, my mother took a look at the drawing of a rather wildly sparkling figure, with raised torch, flowing gown, and the wings of a duck. »But the charcoal lighters are no longer being produced«, she explained.

»And rightly so«, replied the young man. »There's no profit in it, but I was contracted to do the newspaper ad, and I need to be paid for my work.«

My mother paid him without batting an eye. And that was just the beginning ...

Sometime later, in that same house in Berlin-Zehlendorf, I was born. At the time of my birth, my father, a passionate animal lover, only had one dog and one cat in tow. This was no doubt due to the fact that his parents had not been keen on his plan to breed German Shepherds, although my father had explained to them how immeasurable the profit would be in relation to the minimum time and effort invested. They remained unmoved mainly because they knew that these animals not only consumed a lot, but would eventually, at sometime, all need to bark.

I therefore was incorporated into the small menagerie as the newest member on the farm. All three of us, Senta, Purzel and I apparently got along famously together. My mother related to me later, all the grandiose schemes that my father had at this time. Among others these included a nursery for fruit trees, a breeding farm for edible snails, construction of not only a lawnmower, but also a type of radio for insects, this to attract the creatures in multitudes, with its special transmissions during blossom time. From the very beginning, with a kind of well intentioned scientific lack of judgment, my mother had greeted this latter plan, with flypaper, so that it never really had a chance at success.

Here, I must mention that my father had studied agriculture and a bit of veterinary medicine.

His studies however were interrupted during the First World War, when he was sent to the Western Front there to encounter other new experiences. After a bullet tore into his left lung, his career as academic agriculturist came to an end, but not his dreams of great scientific discoveries; these lived on in his heart.

My grandfather, a publisher of technical periodicals, was the family's great director. In today's terms it might be said that he had thoroughly programmed every member of the family. He had 'computed' all their possibilities, assessed their strengths, and indicated their likely career paths. My paternal aunt was eventually the mother of six children and therefore exempted from other duties. My grandmother on the other hand was roped into service as proof reader, my mother had to take singing lessons, and my father's brother, Uncle Heinz, became the owner of a photocopy establishment, which revealed how visionary my grandfather had been at that time. However, now it was time for the eldest to start a new program.

My grandfather was of the opinion that his son, so severely handicapped in the war, should say good-bye, once and for all, to his career goals in agriculture. Grandfather attempted to install him in his publishing house doing light office work. But

after only a few weeks, as the office began to look more and more like a greenhouse with exotic vines clinging to the walls, growing ever upwards, my grandfather did the only reasonable thing possible:

He bought my father a piece of property where he could raise and plant what he wanted. This property was eventually all that remained of the entire family estate. It came about not only through the disastrous inflation with its currency devaluation, but because my grandfather went totally blind. The publishing house went bankrupt as well as the photocopy business – everything. Piece by piece, household possessions were sold off until finally the house went as well. Luckily, my grandfather passed away before the latter event occurred.

In 1934 – I was ten years old – we moved to Britz, where a new housing development for disabled war veterans was being built on the estate property; this new community was made up of duplex homes, each with their own large garden. Besides that, every family could lease additional land inexpensively, to build on as one pleased. From this point in time I have very precise memories, and especially of this day. My father's face was filled with a radiant look as all his grandiose plans seemed once again to be possible.

Through an unusual lottery system, we were more or less packed off to the place that would be our future home. Because all the houses in the development were built exactly the same, their future occupants were to be chosen through a raffle. Though identical in appearance, the duplexes had been constructed in different locations, some close to the street, some out by the fields. My father found this procedure of a lottery very fortunate, because he felt born lucky, confirmed by how easy life had been for him.

The drawing took place in the local school yard during beautiful spring weather where about three hundred people had gathered together. Much later on, they would become a community drawn together by the worst possible fate. On this day, however, they had no idea of what lay ahead for them, but smiled and laughed in anticipation of their new homes. Due to this opportunity, most of them were seeing each other for the very first time.

Someone gave a short speech. I remember that he was always shouting out, »quiet!« One time I was responsible for his constant request, due to my own sudden outburst, after someone had pulled on my braids. Then the speaker announced that the duplexes were now to be raffled off, but before this could happen, everyone should find themselves' partners. That meant that in the shortest amount

of time everyone was supposed to decide who their neighbor was going to be, because after all the lottery was for duplex homes. And not only that- between the two neighboring families, it would also be decided by raffle, which family would be in the right half of the house and which one in the left. We were given fifteen minutes to find our new neighbors.

And what an atmosphere that was! All the people who had moments before, stood around together, uninhibited, in a carefree mood, were now perusing each others' faces with over focused curiosity. They attempted in fifteen minutes, to find their neighbors for life, a momentous decision that would be irrevocable.

They ran around like chickens with their heads cut off.

Some however, were remaining completely still, trying to give Providence a free hand. As it would later prove to be, it would have been better not to have left this decision making up those assembled, but rather to have done this also by lottery. At least later on, no one would have been able to accuse anyone, or his or her spouse, that in this particular moment in time, their judge of character and keen perceptive abilities had malfunctioned. At that moment, many were taken in by angelic smiles that would later lead to hellish conditions.