

# “Adolf”

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By Dave McClain

A young German immigrant shows up to paint the interior of a downtown office space, but a series of misunderstandings leads to one very awkward moment.

Adolf Pinter was uncomfortable around Americans and Americans were uncomfortable around him. For them, it was that unfortunate first name. For him, it was how different they were from the people he knew growing up. Americans talked fast, walked fast and, in the movies he saw, it seemed like they were always up to something – and it was usually nasty business.

Adolf came from a small town in Germany. As a teenager, he worked for his father's house painting business, but Adolf wanted to see more of the world. When he turned 21, he left Germany for the U.S. His father had some distant relatives in Austin, Texas, so that's where Adolf went. He found work using his only skill. Adolf Pinter was a painter. One Saturday afternoon, Adolf's boss sent him to an office building downtown, doing his best to explain the job. Adolf's English still wasn't very good.

"I put the address in the GPS. The floor manager's expecting you. Top floor. One wall. Got it?"

"Top floor. Vun vall. Got it. Danke."

Adolf found the building with no trouble and, this being Saturday afternoon, he was able to find a parking spot for his van right out front. He put his drop cloth, a gallon of paint, a painting tray and a few other items in a large black duffle bag. He was about to shut the van door when he realized he didn't have his paint roller. He grabbed it, locked the van and headed inside.

Adolf paused before choosing one of the buttons inside the elevator. He saw the letter "G", the numbers 2-12 and the letter "R". "Top floor," he said to himself, as he pressed the "R" button.

When the elevator doors opened, Adolf stepped out into a rooftop bar. There were a few dozen chairs lined up on opposite sides of a long row of tables. No people. He saw a standalone bar nearby. The open area was surrounded on three sides by a brick wall that was chest high. The fourth wall, the one that included the elevator, was about 10 feet tall. This must be his wall, he thought. He dropped his bag next to the elevator door, but forgot he was still carrying his paint roller as he started walking around, looking for someone who might be in charge. Then he noticed a man on the far end of the row of tables straightening chairs. Adolf approached the man, noticing his nameplate read "Bruce". As Adolf began opening his mouth to speak, Bruce spoke.

“Oh, hello! You’re very early. We’re not getting started for half an hour. Nice prop, though. We’ve had people bring props to these speed dating events for a while, but I haven’t seen a paint roller before. Original. Great conversation starter. Hey, can I get you a drink while you wait?”

“Drink? Vut drink?”

“Oh, you’re German! Great! I think there are some Germans in the speed-dating group that rented out the bar tonight! So, how about a nice German beer?”

Bruce didn’t wait for an answer, but headed straight for the bar. Adolf slowly sat down. Bruce quickly returned and set a full frosted glass in front of Adolf.

“No money,” said Adolf.

“No money needed,” said Bruce, cheerfully. “Open bar for your group.”

“Open bar?” asked Adolf, not really understanding.

“Yeah, it’s... complimentary. Uhhh... gift.”

Bruce did not know that “gift” is the German word for “poison”.

Adolf furrowed his brow and stood abruptly. He paused briefly, then headed for the elevator. He pushed the call button and looked back toward Bruce. Adolf saw Bruce talking with a woman who was dressed the same as Bruce was. She approached, reaching Adolf before the elevator did.

“Howdy! I’m Eileen. My co-worker said you’re a little nervous. First time speed dating?”

Adolf didn’t respond.

“First time?” repeated Eileen pleasantly.

“Ja. Yes. First... time,” said Adolf.

“Have a seat.”

Adolf sat down across from Eileen at the end of the table near the elevator. Adolf looked cautiously down the row of tables toward the bar to make sure no one was bringing him another glass of poison.

“Let’s practice,” said Eileen. “What’s your name?”

Adolf hesitated.

“I’m Eileen,” she said slowly, motioning as she spoke. “And you are...”

“Adolf.”

“Adolf. Interesting. Ummm, Adolf... what?”

“Pinter. Adolf Pinter.”

“Yes, I can see that you’re a painter,” said Eileen, nodding toward the paint roller that Adolf was holding awkwardly on his thigh, as if the roller had grown straight up out of his leg.

“Ja! Yes! Painter! I paint! Vun vall!” Adolf said, excitedly.

He ran to his bag, threw the black strap over the right shoulder of his brown overalls, unzipping the bag, and pulling out his painting tray, which still had a tiny bit of wet paint on one corner. Eileen came over to where Adolf was standing and looked up as he pointed towards the wall.

“I paint vun vall,” Adolf repeated, as Eileen nodded, finally understanding.

“You’re an actual painter. You’re here on a job. Well, Adolf, we didn’t call for any...”

Adolf suddenly dropped the paint tray in his bag and raised his hand to his mouth, just as he sneezed. When his hand reached his mouth, his thumb transferred the paint that had been on that paint tray to the area just under his nose.

Eileen tried to ignore the rectangular black smudge between Adolf’s nose and lip.

“Gesundheit!” she said, smiling. “Now, as I was saying, we don’t need a painter.”

Holding his paint roller in his right hand, he extended that hand upward toward the wall and was about to speak just as the elevator door opened. Several 20-somethings exited the elevator. One young woman held a banner which read, “Jewish Community Center Date Night.”

Adolf and Eileen stared at the group of young people and the young people stared back.

“Hi, y’all,” said Eileen sheepishly.

Adolf went home alone that night.

Eileen was fired the next day.