“Listen, Mr. Dastych,” Detective Captain Mejzlik said pensively , “the truth of the matter is that I’ve come to you for advice. I have a certain case I don’t know what on earth to do about.”\*

“Out with it then,” said Mr. Dastych. “Whom does the case concern?”\*

“Me,” sighed Dr. Mejzlik. “The more I think about it, the less I understand it. You know, a person could go crazy just thinking about it.”\*

“So who did what to you?” Mr. Dastych asked in a soothing voice.\*

“Nobody,” Dr. Mejzlik burst out. “That’s the worst part of it. I myself did something that I don’t understand.”\*

“Perhaps it’s not all that bad,” old Dastych consoled him. “Just what did you do, young man?”\*

“I caught a safecracker,” Dr. Mejzlik answered gloomily.\*

“And that’s all?” “That’s all.”\*

“And perhaps he wasn’t the right safecracker,” Mr. Dastych said helpfully.

“But he was; in fact he’s already confessed. He broke into the safe at the Jewish Benevolent Association; did you hear about it? His name was Rozanowski or Rosenbaum or something, from Lvov,” grumbled Dr. Mejzlik. “They found the safecracking tools on him and everything.”\*

“Well then, what would you like to know?” old Dastych encouraged him.\*

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“I would like to know,” the police captain began thoughtfully, “how it was I caught him. Wait, I’ll tell you just what happened. A month ago, it was March third, I was on duty till midnight. I don’t know if you remember, but it had been raining for three days straight.\*

So I stopped in at a coffee shop for a moment, and after that I meant to go right home, to Vinohrady. But instead of that I headed in the opposite direction, toward Dlazdena Street. Tell me, please, do you have any idea why I went straight to that part of town?”\*

“Perhaps it was merely by chance,” Mr. Dastych ventured.\*

“Listen, in that kind of weather a person doesn’t drag his feet through the streets merely by chance. I’d like to know what, by all that’s holy, I was doing there. What do you think, could it have been some kind of premonition? You know, something like telepathy?”\*

“Aha,” said Mr. Dastych. “It’s entirely possible.”\*

“So you see,” Dr. Mejzlik said worriedly. “There we have it. But it could also have been some kind of subconscious notion that made me drop by to see what was happening at The Three Maidens.”\*

“That’s that cheap dive on Dlazdena Street,” Mr. Dastych recalled.\*

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“Precisely. All the safecrackers and pickpockets from Pest and Halic bed down there when they come to Prague on business. We keep an eye on that place. What do you think, couldn’t it have simply been ordinary police routine for me to go there and take a look around?”\*

“It could,” declared Mr. Dastych. “Sometimes people do things like that quite automatically, especially when they feel a sense of obligation, you might say. There isn’t anything strange about that.”\*

“So I go to Dlazdena Street,” Dr. Mejzlik continued, “and while I’m in the neighborhood I check the room register at The Three Maidens, and then I go on down the street.\*

At the end of Dlazdena Street I come to a stop and I turn back again; kindly tell me, why would I have turned back again?”\*

“Habit,” offered Mr. Dastych. “The routine habit of a patrol officer.”\*

“Perhaps it was merely by chance,” Mr. Dastych ventured.\*

“Listen, in that kind of weather a person doesn’t drag his feet through the streets merely by chance. I’d like to know what, by all that’s holy, I was doing there. What do you think, could it have been some kind of premonition? You know, something like telepathy?”\*

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“Habit,” offered Mr. Dastych. “The routine habit of a patrol officer.”\*

“Might be,” the police captain agreed. “But I wasn’t on duty and I wanted to go home. Maybe it was a hunch.”\*

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“There’ve been such cases,” Mr. Dastych acknowledged. “But there’s nothing mysterious about a hunch like that. After all, it’s well known that people have higher powers of one kind or another.”\*

“My God,” bellowed Dr. Mejzlik, “was it routine habit then, or some kind of higher power? That’s what I’d like to know! But wait: While I’m trudging along, there’s some man coming toward me from the opposite direction.\*

You’ll say, why on earth shouldn’t somebody be walking along Dlazdena Street at one o’clock at night, in whatever direction? There’s nothing suspicious about that. I myself didn’t think anything of it; but I stopped directly under the streetlight and lit a cigarette.\*

That’s what we do, you know, when we want to check out somebody at night. What do you think: was it chance, or habit, or . or some sort of subconscious warning?”\*

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Dastych. “I don’t either,” Dr. Mejzlik shouted angrily. “Damn it all!\*

So I’m lighting a cigarette under the streetlight and this man is coming along towards me. I wasn’t even checking him out, just standing there staring at the ground. But as this fellow passed by, something started bothering me.\*

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Damn, I said to myself, there’s something wrong here — but what exactly? I mean, I hadn’t paid any real attention to his lordship at all.\*

So I’m standing in the rain under the streetlight and thinking things over; and all at once it hit me: his shoes! That man had something odd on his shoes. And I’ll tell you right now what it was: powder.”\*

“What kind of powder?” asked Mr. Dastych.\*

“Well, powder. In that instant I remembered that the man had some dusty powder between the soles and the uppers of his shoes.”\*

“And why wouldn’t he have dusty powder on his shoes?” Mr. Dastych wanted to know.\*

“It’s obvious,” Dr. Mejzlik cried out. “I’m telling you, sir, in that split second I saw, yes, saw the insulating material they use in safes that gets scattered all over the floor. You know, the powder between the steel plates. And I saw those shoes tramping through that powder.”\*

“That was intuition,” Mr. Dastych decided. “Ingenious, but pure intuition.”\*

“Baloney,” said Dr. Mejzlik. “Man, if it hadn’t been raining I wouldn’t even have noticed the powder. But when it’s raining, people don’t usually have powder on their shoes, understand?”\*

“That was empirical deduction,” Mr. Dastych said with certainty. “It was a brilliant inference based on experience. So what happened next?”\*

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“Well, naturally I followed the man; he went into The Three Maidens, of course. And I telephoned for two plainclothesmen and we raided the place;\*

we found Mr. Rosenbaum there along with his powder and his safecracking tools and twenty thousand from the Jewish Benevolent Association’s safe.\*

The rest of it doesn’t matter. But you know, the newspapers said that this time our police demonstrated considerable preparedness — what a lot of baloney!\*

Believe me, if I hadn’t by chance gone to Dlazdena Street and by chance noticed the shoes on that crook. What I mean is,” Dr. Mejzlik said dispiritedly, “if it really was only by chance. That’s the problem.”\*

“It makes no difference whatsoever,” stated Mr. Dastych. “Young man, it was an achievement for which you should be congratulated.”\*

“Congratulated!” Dr. Mejzlik exploded. “Why should I be congratulated when I don’t know what for? For my incredible shrewdness as a detective? For automatic, routine police work? For pure luck? For some sort of intuition or telepathy?\*

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Look, this was my first big case; a person has to have something to build on, right? Say that tomorrow they assign me some sort of murder; Mr. Dastych, what will I do? Am I supposed to run around the streets peering shrewdly at people’s shoes?\*

Or just go about my business and wait for some hunch or inner voice to lead me straight to the murderer? That’s it, you see, that’s my situation. Now the whole police force is saying: that Mejzlik, he’s got a real flair; that young fellow with the glasses is going to go places with his talents as a detective.\*

It’s an awful situation, no doubt about it,” Dr. Mejzlik muttered. “A person’s got to have some kind of method. Until I had my first case, I believed in all manner of exact methods; you know, like careful observation, expertise, systematic investigation, and similar nonsense.\*

But after dealing with this case, I see that — Listen,” he blurted out with relief, “I think it was nothing but chance.”\*

“It looks that way,” said Mr. Dastych prudently. “But there was also a bit of solid observation involved and a certain amount of logic.”\*

“And mechanical routine,” the young policeman added despondently.\*

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“And intuition. And also something of a talent for hunches. And instinct.”\*

“Jesus Christ,” moaned Dr. Mejzlik. “See what I mean? So what am I supposed to do now, Mr. Dastych?”\*

“ — Dr. Mejzlik, you’re wanted on the telephone,” the waiter announced. “Police headquarters.”\*

“Here we go,” Dr. Mejzlik murmured in alarm; and when he returned to the table, he looked pale and tense.\*

“Check, please,” he called out irritably. “It’s already started. They found some foreigner murdered in a hotel. Damn, if only — ”\*

and he left. It seemed that the resolute young man had a bad case of butterflies.\*

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