

STORIES FOR BOYS

by Kieron Barry

from Scene 10

Janet, a graphic designer, is giving a presentation to Adolf Hitler.

Janet ...And now, Hitler, the logo itself. The client – that's you! – wanted a logo that's straightforward and striking.

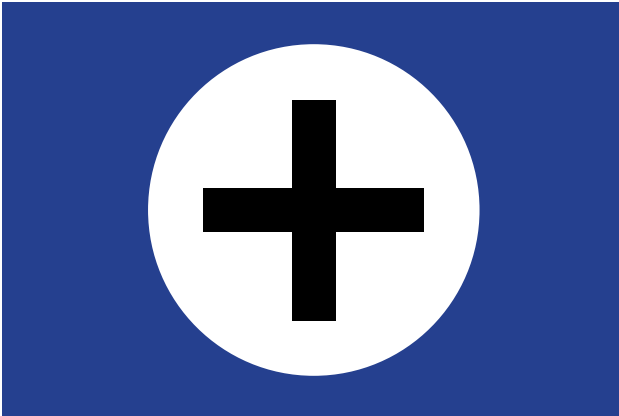
An iconic design to be used on letterhead, banknotes, cast in silver and held aloft on a pole at military rallies, and on flags unfurled outside commandeered centres of regional government in recently-invaded countries.

So, Hitler, speak freely. If you like it, fantastic. If you don't, just tell me and together we can improve it.

So: here we go!

She dramatically unveils the design.

We see a blue background, in the middle of which is a white disc. In the disc is a thick, black cross like a 'plus' sign (+):



Hitler studies it in silence for a LONG time. He approaches, he retreats, he cocks his head to one side, he squints etc.

Eventually:

Hitler I like it. I do like it.

Janet Fantastic.

Hitler I think it's good...

Hitler gives off a few subtle physical signals that he's not entirely happy, gestures of nuance, of being in two minds and even of grimace, but Janet does not notice them.

Janet That means so much to me.

Hitler It's... really good.

Janet What do you like about it?

Hitler You want me to tell you what I like about it?

Janet Please.

Hitler OK... er, it's... bold, which is great. It's... memorable, which is great. It's... it's... ah, it's never been done before –

Janet It's unique.

Hitler Which is great.

Janet I'm so happy.

Hitler *(smiles indulgently)* Mm-hm. *(beat)* I think... I think... yeah, I think we're almost there.

A pause

Janet What do you mean?

Hitler What's that?

Janet What do you mean; we're almost there?

Hitler Well, *(suddenly a bit nervous or uncertain)* It's a... it's a fantastic design, it's fantastic, and... I think we're well on the way.

Janet 'Well on the way.'

Hitler Yeah.

Janet 'Well... on... the... way.'

Hitler It's a great starting point.

Janet Starting point?!

Hitler I'd just like to try a few different things.

A long, ugly pause.

Janet *(controlled, but close to angry tears)* I have worked so hard on this.

Hitler I know you have.

Janet And you just come in and start criticising...

Hitler I'm not criticising. I think it's good. I'm talking about one or two little things we could change. *(he gestures to show how small)* Is that OK? If I suggest a couple of things.

A pause.

Janet *(clearly peeved)* Alright then. Go on.

Hitler Thank you. *(beat)* Firstly, the background colour.

Janet *(immediately, finally)* No way.

Hitler Could we try red?

Janet *Red?!*

Hitler I like red.

Janet It won't work.

Hitler I'd like to try it.

Janet What kind of red?

Hitler Scarlet?

Janet No.

Hitler Could we try it?

Janet Sorry.

Hitler *(a long sigh)* OK, how about a compromise?

Janet Such as?

Hitler Crimson?

Janet No way.

Hitler Just consider it.

Janet I'd *maybe* consider purple, but that's as far as I'm prepared to go.

Hitler Janet, I'm going to have to start putting my foot down. You say blue, I say red. Fine. Then I say crimson, you say purple. OK. Now we're getting somewhere, but the client's still not happy. If you'll consider a very dark pink then maybe we can make some / progress, but...

Janet / I will not consider a very dark pink.

Hitler I would like you to consider a very dark pink.

Janet I will not consider a very dark pink.

Hitler So what do you suggest?

Janet *(after a thoughtful pause)* Fuchsia?

Hitler Fuchsia?! We're the fucking *Nazis*, Janet. We're not going to march round the place in fuchsia.

Janet You say you want to compromise, but it's all on your terms.

Hitler The client is respectfully asking you to go away and come up with a red version of the logo.

Janet *(a pause)* Alright, I'll do a red version of the logo.

Hitler Thank you.

Janet But I'm not happy about it.

Hitler Thank you.

Janet Anything else?

Hitler The cross.

Janet What about it?

Hitler It's clear and arresting.

Janet Correct.

Hitler But there's something... I don't know... How about we tilt it. Spin it on its axis by 45 degrees. And extra arms added to the cross at right angles.

Janet Why?

Hitler It says we're iconoclastic, we're a bit edgy, a bit alternative, we're radical...

Janet So the cross at a jaunty angle.

Hitler I wouldn't say *jaunty*.

Janet No, that's what it is. A jaunty angle.

Hitler Not jaunty. Radical.

Janet A comic angle.

Hitler It's not comic, it's just... tilted.

Janet Why don't you all wear clown noses and spinning bow ties as well?

Hitler Just try it, Janet.

Janet *(writing in a surly fashion, with a huge sigh)* OK, I'll make a note. 'Cross... at... jaunty angle.'

Hitler Thank you.

Janet *(still as if writing)* 'Also consider a big rainbow and butterflies flying out of the ends of the cross.'

Hitler Look, Janet, I'm getting sick of this. I / simply asked –

Janet / *You're* getting sick of this? Don't you think I'm getting sick of this?

Hitler What possible right have you got to be sick of this?

Janet bursts into the most extraordinary tears, like a toddler.

Janet YOU DON'T LIKE MY DESIGN!

Hitler I *do* like your design.

Janet YOU DON'T THINK I'M TALENTED!

Hitler Janet, you're a creative genius. I could never do what you do. I *need* you.

Janet (*through tears*) The brief wasn't clear.

Hitler I know. I should have written a clearer brief. I'm sorry.

Janet Do you respect me?

Hitler Of course I do.

Janet Do you admire me?

Hitler Of course I do.

Janet Do you think I'm talented?

Hitler You know I do.

Janet Do you... *like* me, Hitler?

Hitler Janet. *Everyone* likes you.

Janet Really?

Hitler But sometimes getting a bit of criticism, whilst painful, is a great way to grow and become a better person. Yeah?

Janet (*snuffly*) OK.

Hitler We're all going to be criticised.

Janet That's true.

Hitler All of us. You are, perhaps even one day *I'm* going to be criticised...

Janet Uh-huh.

Hitler But we've just got to accept it.

Janet Yeah.

Hitler So you believe in yourself, and you keep going, girl.

Janet OK.

(*pulling herself together*) And that concludes discussion about the logo. Moving on now – (*she removes the logo card to reveal a new card underneath, on which is written: 'OTHER BRANDING CONSIDERATIONS: Physical Appearance.'*)

So. I'm afraid: the moustache has got to go.

Hitler (*flying immediately into a rage*) EVERYONE'S A CRITIC!!!

Scene 13

An uninspiring open-plan office.

Kathy This is the quarterly report Jenny asked for. It's pretty self-explanatory but there's a couple of things I'd like to go over with her.

Sally Didn't you hear?

Kathy What?

Sally I'm really sorry. I thought they would have told you.

Kathy No one's told me anything.

Sally Jenny's dead.

Kathy What?!

Sally I'm sorry.

Kathy Jenny's *dead*?!

Sally I'm afraid so.

Kathy I had no idea.

Sally I'm really sorry.

Kathy That's dreadful.

Pause

I hope she's OK.

Sally Who's OK?

Kathy Jenny.

Sally She's not OK though, is she; she's dead.

Kathy Yeah, but I mean: there's *dead* and then there's... *dead*.

Sally No... I think there's just... *dead*.

Kathy You're right. I'm sorry.

Sally It's very sad, but she is gone.

Kathy I understand. I hope I didn't seem confused.

Sally No, it's difficult to take in, isn't it. Sometimes I can't take it in either. It just seems weird.

Kathy Yeah. Weird. *(she shivers)* Ugh! *(beat – then a totally different, up-beat business mood)* OK, so just tell her the bracketed figures are estimates and if she imports the whole spreadsheet she can update it month-by-month as we go along.

Sally What are you talking about?

Kathy If you could just tell her that.

Sally Tell who?

Kathy Jenny.

Sally J- I just told you: / Jenny's dead.

Kathy / Jenny's dead. I know.

Sally OK then.

Kathy I know she's dead.

Sally Fine.

Kathy I'm saying when she gets back.

Sally Listen. She's dead. Do you understand that?

Kathy You don't need to be aggressive. I'm just asking you to take a message.

Sally There's no point taking a message. She's dead.

Kathy We've established she's dead. I'm saying she can update the spreadsheet month by month as she goes along.

Sally She won't *be* going along.

Kathy Month by month, / I mean.

Sally / She's not going to *have* any more months.

Kathy If you don't want to take the message, don't take the message.

Sally When would she pick it up? She's dead.

Kathy That's your answer to everything, isn't it. 'She's dead.'

Sally Jenny will not be picking up a message, and she won't be able to do whatever you're asking her to do *in* that message. That is the end of Jenny. She quite literally no longer exists.

Beat

Kathy You're right. I'm sorry. *You're right!* She's dead. She. Is. Dead.

Sally Yes.

Kathy Yes.

Beat

Did she say *anything* about when she'd be back?

Sally (*gently*) I hate to ask you this, Kathy, but do you actually know what death is?

Kathy (*laughing at the ridiculousness of it*) Do I know what death is!

Beat

Pretty much. I know the basics.

Sally What is it?

Kathy What's death?

Sally Yes.

Kathy (*sighs*) Death is... basically... I'll give it you in very rough terms... just the fundamentals...

Oh, what is it now? It's on the tip of my tongue. If you'd've asked me yesterday what death is...

Sally Any idea?

Kathy (*losing her temper a bit*) Look, I can't remember everything. I'm Senior Vice President of Mergers and Acquisitions, I've got a lot on my plate.

Sally So you don't know.

Kathy No, I don't know what death is. BIG DEAL! Do *you* know... the capital of Nigeria?

Sally Lagos.

Kathy Well, that's a bad example, but...

A pause.

Sally Do you want me to tell you what death is?

Kathy (*meekly*) Yes please.

Sally (*gently*) Death is the end of life. It's the point in someone's existence when they no longer move, or have thought. They cease to be. It's irreversible. When someone dies, everything about them stops and will never, ever start again. Their body, their mind, it's all permanently gone. Everything about them is gone forever.

This sinks in for a while.

Kathy Oh. My. God.

Sally I'm sorry.

Kathy I had no idea. And they never come back?

Sally Never.

Kathy It's senseless. Such a waste.

Sally I know.

Kathy Well, thanks very much.

Kathy starts to leave.

Sally Yes, it's very sad, but... it comes to us all.

Kathy stops in her tracks.

Kathy ... *What?!*