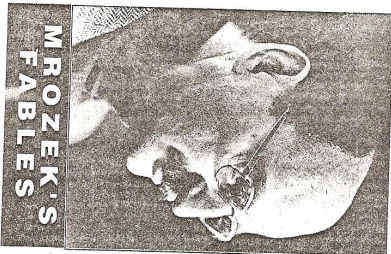


# BLACKMAILERS

By *Stawomir Mrozek*

**O**NE day the postman brought this letter:  
"Either you put one hundred thousand zloty under the stone in the main square in front of the café by Thursday, or else."



I was signed "Oswald". I calculated that my salary would not stretch to that. What was I to do? I was down and ready to die just yet. So I sat down and wrote.

"Dear Sir, Either I find one hundred thousand zloty under the stone in the main square in front of the café by Wednesday, or else, Yours faithfully Skull. PS. It's not for me but for someone more needy than myself."

On reflection, I crossed out "one hundred thousand" and put in "one hundred fifty thousand". I thought I might as well make a profit while I was about it.

Now I had to think where to send my letter since no one round here has any money to speak of. In the end, I sent it to my best friend, whom I've known all my life. He has no money and lives at least I know his address. On Wednesday I went to the square and looked under the stone. There was no money, but I found a note, there "Dear Mr Skull, I can only manage fifty thousand, but not before Friday, at the earliest."

"Dear Mr Oswald, I am sorry to say I can only manage fifty thousand, but not before Saturday, at the earliest. I remain, your Victim."

tip to me.  
"Dear Mr Oswald, This has gone on long enough. You can have one hundred zloty and will pay me back on Monday. You can have it on Wednesday. Regards."  
A week later, the following Friday, I found a packet of cigarettes under the stone. Well, that was something. The only one was, they were my cigarettes in the first place.



ILLUSTRATION BY THE AUTHOR

Translated from the Polish by *Yolanta May*