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logline

In the mid-seventies, six young idealists, dreamers and romantics are determined to rehabilitate heroin addicts at a time when that didn't exist. It was either a psych-ward or prison.

They move into a former girl's reformatory school in the countryside of Switzerland and call it Aebi-Hus. Their vision is an equitable, voluntary commune where everyone can live, work and heal together under one roof. But the reality is far more challenging.

As they deal with a hostile village population, they realize quickly that they are in over their heads as heroin addiction is a dominant and destructive force to be reckoned with. With no blueprint to follow and growing tension within the leadership, they have to pivot in order to succeed.

Drugs
+
Rehab
=
People Business

the inspriation

I was most likely conceived in a small dorm room at a defunct reformatory school for girls in the countryside of Switzerland. Not a romantic setting by any means but both of my Baby-Boomer, Hippie parents were exactly that; romantics with a drive to change the world.

My father, a novice pastor and my mother an elementary school teacher were part of a core group of six people - young intellectuals, idealists and dreamers - who founded and led the first heroin rehabilitation center in Switzerland called Aebi-Hus.

Well into the early seventies, people struggling with heroin substance dependency, were considered hopelessly incurable. That was also the case in Switzerland where heroin addiction, followed by crime was on the rise and started making national headlines, alarming a nervous public. The remedy at that time was simple, swift and punitive; a psychiatric ward or prison.

All that changes with Aebi-Hus, envisioned at first as an autonomous, grass-root community, a commune of sorts where everyone with or without addiction is equal and lives, works and heals together under the same roof. The reality however turned out a lot more challenging.

I was born into the turbulent and chaotic "experimental phase" of this motley crew trying to find a different way to treat addiction and to rehabilitate the people afflicted by it. The summer of 1974 marks the humble beginning when these six visionaries become pioneers by moving into a defunct reformatory school and welcoming a first wave of adolescent heroin addicts.

This is their story.

The story of the House Of Last Chances – Aebi-Hus, the first and eventually most successful heroin rehabilitation center in Switzerland, a pioneer of its time.

synopsis

On July 15th 1974, with financial support of a church foundation and the blessing of the federal health department, a core group of pioneers are moving into a stately, former reformatory for girls called the Aebi-Hus. They spend the summer in the Bernese countryside engaged in "Sensitivity and Self Awareness Training" to ready themselves for a first wave of adolescent felons and heroin addicts.

With zero prior training in mental health, nor a proven model or blueprint to follow, these young people are determined to figure out a lasting solution to what is becoming a fast-growing problem in Switzerland.

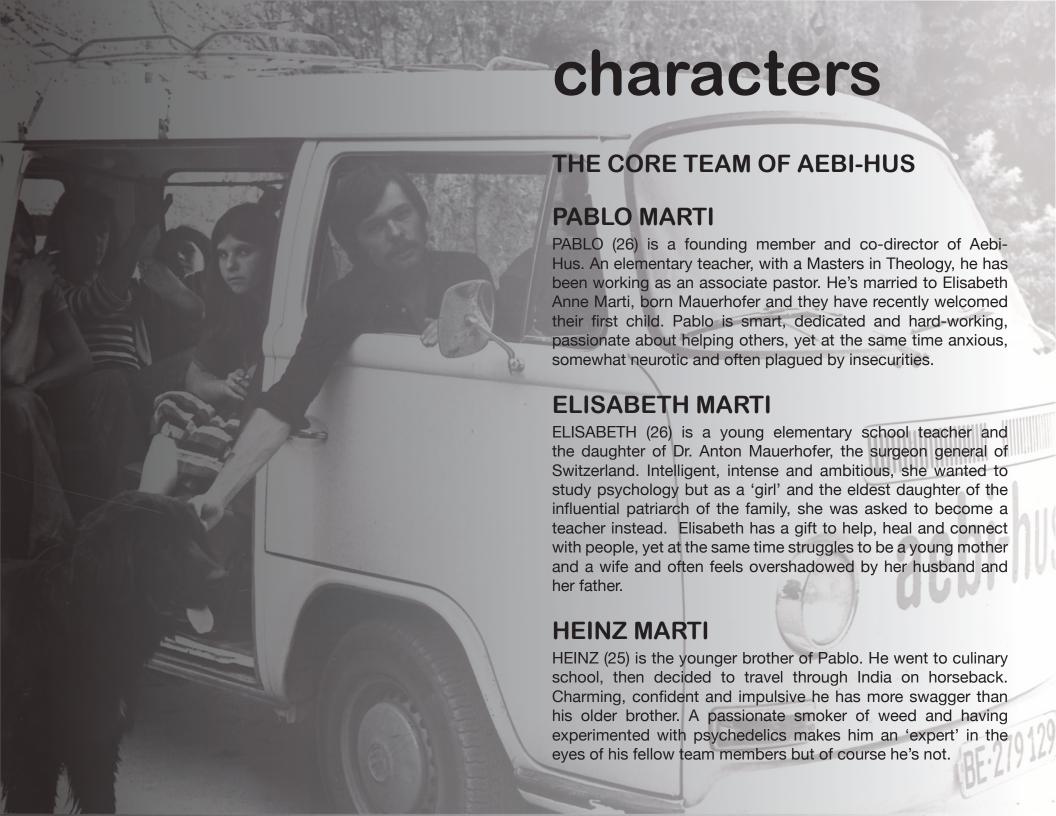
Two young pastors, armed with a master in theology, their spouses, a close friend and the brother of one of the pastors make up this motley crew. They are willing to fail in order to succeed and are ready to learn in order to grow. But the pressure and expectations from the public and their funders are sky high, a recipe for disaster.

The first few months are chaotic, disastrous, sometimes even dangerous with many missteps. Yet at the same time the group's perseverance, vision and passion for humanity is inspiring.

When nobody stepped forward to help these young people, afflicted by drug dependencies, they did. Just when the entire program is about to be doomed, an older, charismatic German Doctor helps them reinvent themselves. By adopting many elements from a US self-help group called Synanon (later a notorious and dangerous cult), communal living becomes much more structured, disciplined and mandated.

New arrivals are picked up from prisons from all over the country and are given an option to complete the program at Aebi-Hus or finish their stint in jail. The confrontational and intense group therapies, coined The Games become a daily routine and new chores are implemented for everyone. As the institution grows, so does internal rivalry and pressure from the government. Aebi-Hus follows the many stories of the people who led this historic institution. And it also tells the many stories of the people who walked through its doors - outcasts, rebels, immigrants, all beautiful souls that make up the fabric of Switzerland.





PETER TUTSCH

PETER (29) is a founding member and the co-director of Aebi-Hus. A university colleague of Pablo, he had spent a few years in Chicago and San Francisco as a community organizer and engaged in social work. Like Pablo, Peter is a vicar, associate Pastor and married the daughter of his mentor Pastor Berger. A gifted orator, confidant but also self-centered and slightly narcissistic, Peter tends to overshadow Pablo which turns them into rivals rather than associates.

NICOLE TUTSCH

Nicole (27) is married to Peter and is the daughter of PAUL BERGER, the pastor who was instrumental in getting project 'Aebi-Hus' off the ground. She's a trained nurse and is tasked with taking over medical service for this novice organization.

THE AEBIANER

CHARLIE

Charlie (27) is the oldest of that infamous first group that walked through the doors of Aebi-Hus. He spent his youth in group homes and juvenile detention. Charlie never had a stable home, nor a family and has found refuge in heroin. He tried to quit multiple time but always failed. He's very intelligent, witty but also explosive and volatile.





CHRISTOF

Christof (21) is the oldest son of a very wealthy and influential family from Zurich. Despite his family ties, he always felt like an outsider. His father kicked him out of the home when he came out as gay. Christof then drifted from place to place and found solace in drugs.

VITTORIO

Born to Italian parents, Vittorio never met his father until his funeral. He's a self-described "difficult child" who could never sit still. Like Charlie, Vittorio spent his formative year in and out of group homes and on the street. Vittorio is a doer with tons of energy and a big heart.

MAX

Max (19) only decided to give this new program a chance because of his girlfriend Elise. He's never tried heroin and doesn't intend to. He's a weedhead. Max is a drifter, a high school dropout and is estranged from his family.

ELECTED STRUCK TO THE

ELISE

Elise (19) never knew her birth parents. She was adopted by a devout Christian family and never felt she fit in anywhere. She ran away when she was 16 and has been in many group homes ever since. She was in prison before she decided to give Aebi-Hus a chance.

SUZETTE

Suzette (20) has only spent a few years living with her Swiss mother and her African born father. Most of her youth she spent in and out of juvenile homes and was deemed to be difficult and rebellious. And she never spent much time in any of these homes as she became a serial runaway.

treatment

EPISODE 1 "DRUG PASTOR"

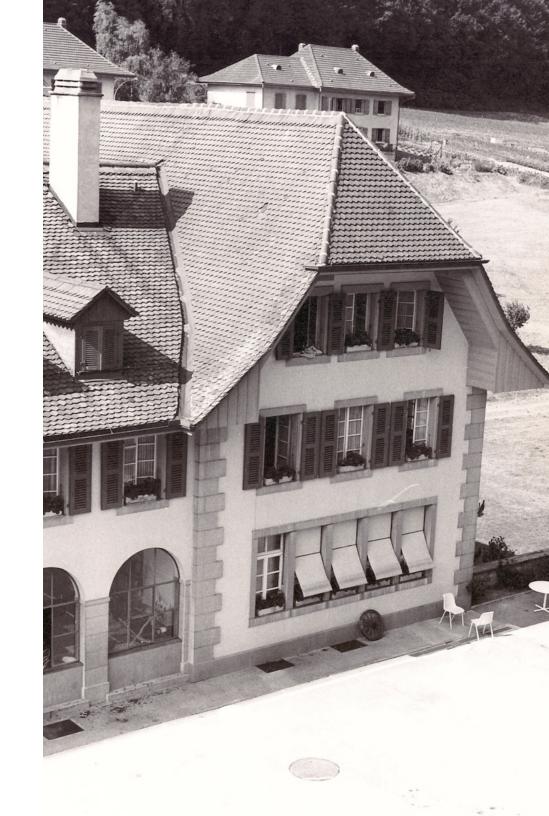
July 14th, 1974, Brüttelen Bad, Bern, Switzerland.

Cigarette in mouth, **PABLO** (26) is rushing down a long, narrow hallway of an annexed church building in Brüttelen-Bad, a small village in the Bernese countryside. The clickety-clack sound of his Italian leather loafers comes to a halt in front of the bathroom door. He throws it open and shuts it quickly. Pablo's nerves always find a way through his intestines. He fumbles with his belt, drops his pants and sits down on the toilet. A long sigh of relief followed by the sound of diarrhea can be heard through the door.

A knock startles him. "They're all waiting," says **ELISABETH** (26), his wife and the mother of his young daughter. "Are you okay?" she follows up, somewhat concerned. "Just give me a moment, please. Tell your father to start without me. It's probably something I ate." he moans and releases himself once more. Elisabeth cringes.

The community room is packed with a seated mob of angry locals and some press in the back. They're facing members of the board of directors and the core team of a newly minted heroin drug rehabilitation center called Aebi-Hus. **DR. ERNST MAUERHOFER** (56), the surgeon general of Switzerland is one of the board members and grins nervously as he sees Elisabeth, his eldest daughter, approach the table. "5 minutes" she whispers in his ear and takes a seat next to him.

Clenching his jaw, he's trying hard not to appear frustrated, Dr. Mauerhofer adjusts the microphone and smiles. He speaks with a booming and confident voice: "Welcome! Welcome! Tomorrow is a big day. As you know, we're taking over the former girl's reformatory in the village with the intention of running a drug rehabilitation center there..." The crowd is booing, some people even get up from their



seats, making their displeasure clear. One couple even leaves the room. "We don't want your city junkies here. They will turn all of us all into addicts!" yells one heavy set man in the back. "We have children. We're not your guinea pigs. We don't want these scumbags!" doubles down an otherwise fairly calm woman.



In the midst of this public outburst, Pablo walks into the room and takes his seat at the table. Booing and shouting continues. "I understand your concern. Addiction is not contagious and Pablo and Peter are co-directors of this new program they have designed. They did a lot of research and they will run this community in a very professional and respectful way." Dr. Mauerhofer points towards Pablo and his friend **PETER** (29) who sits to his right. They smile nervously. "Pablo and Peter are pastors, compassionate people, Men of God and experienced in social work. They know what they're doing."

Following the meeting, the villagers are streaming out of the building, not necessarily pleased with the community meeting and their newcomers. But the atmosphere is less hostile. Pablo

and Peter even stand by the door shaking a few hands, engaged in small talk or explaining to some interested people about their project. Dr. Mauerhofer is already in his car and stops to wave over Pablo. Rolling down his window he says: "There are a lot of eyes on this. And my name of course. Whatever you do, just don't mess it up." Mustering up the little confidence he has left, Pablo nods reassuringly.

Pablo, Elisabeth and Peter with his wife **NICOLE** (27) walk the short distance down main street to the sprawling estate of what was once a girl's reformatory school. It was built in the 17th century and has always been used for therapeutic purposes. The main three-story building has multiple dormitories, common areas and a cafeteria. A barn houses some animals, mainly a handful of pigs, two horses, rabbits and stray cats. A swimming pool is located in front of a smaller building with a gymnasium at the bottom and a quaint apartment for the headmaster atop. Although the reformatory closed its doors long ago, its headmaster **ROGER BLITZ** is still on government payroll.

Roger stands in front of the main entrance, dressed in PJ bottoms and a wool sweater. "It's late ladies and gentlemen" he says sternly, like a headmaster would. "We had a community meeting" replies Pablo, suddenly unsure why he has to justify or explain anything. "Well, bedtime it is," Blitz counters, turns around and walks away. "You understand you don't work for us and you're not our headmaster?" blurts out Peter finally. "As long as I am being paid, I will do my job. You're all fairly young and inexperienced to be in charge of anything so I will keep an eye on you" he barks back and disappears into the building. The two couples look stunned.

Pablo and Elisabeth share one of the bigger dorms in the main building. Their room is otherwise very sparsely decorated. A crib with their one-year old daughter is in the middle of the room. The child is fast asleep. Pablo and Elisabeth are lying on their beds that are on opposite sides. As soon as they turn off the lights, they hear loud moaning from the room adjacent to theirs. Annoyed Pablo flicks on the bedside lamp. "It won't last long" says Elisabeth calmly, turns over and closes her eyes. "Every night? Why do they fuck

every night?" Pablo asks. Elisabeth doesn't bother responding, but she sighs and falls asleep. Sitting on the edge of the bed, in nothing but his underwear, unable to sleep with sex noises in his ear, Pablo lights a cigarette and awaits the climax next door.

The next morning, a van pulls up the windy driveway. The Aebi-Hus leadership stands assembled outside the main entrance, eagerly awaiting the first wave of addicts. In addition to the two couples, **HEINZ** (25), Pablo's brother grins with confidence, ready for a challenge. He's a charming, self-proclaimed hippie with a mop of long curly black hair and dark sunglasses. **ERNST** (20), a dangly young man, an intern everyone calls Jimmy, nervously paces back and forth.



The van door slides open. These passengers will be the very first clients at Aebi-Hus and have supposedly all gone through detox. They are all young, lost souls and deemed delinquent, misfits and called junkies or worse by society. Like CHARLIE (25) the oldest of this group, sporting long blond hair, a weathered face. He's dressed in short gym pants and a tight T-shirt. He grew up in group homes and juvenile detention centers and just finished a stint in prison. The attitude is pure.

Or CHRISTOF (21), wearing tight white jeans and shouldering a

long white cape. His hair is dark, wavy and long and frames his angelic face. Christof was thrown out of his house by his father when he came out to his wealthy and influential family from Zurich. His father owns a chain of fashion boutiques and would not accept his gay son. Christof's life became very transient and he found refuge in drugs.

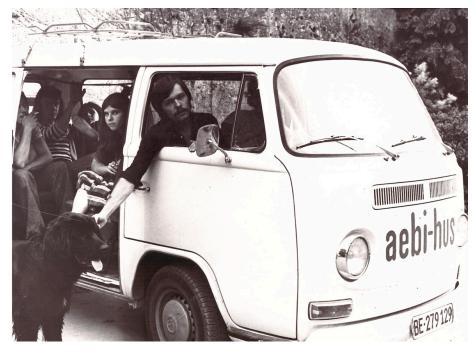
Next appears **MAX** (19) and **ELISE** (20) – a couple who decided to give Aebi-Hus a last chance. Max is not into hard drugs but loves smoking weed. But he's into Elise who has just been released from prison where she was forced to detox from heroin cold turkey. She has tried everything and has heard that Aebi-Hus might work.

VITTORIO (18) steps out next. He's the youngest son of Italian immigrants, a wild card with a heart of gold. But completely lost with zero guidance and no future. "Welcome" says Pablo. "Is there someone else? We're expecting 6." Vittorio points to the van. "Suzette. She fell asleep."

A few chairs are arranged in a semicircle next to the pool. It's the first group meeting and serves as an orientation. Pablo begins, haltingly at first, disturbed by what he sees. Charlie sits wide-legged vis-àvis and grins from ear to ear. His rather large penis and scrotum are protruding on one side of his fairly tight gym shorts. Pablo loses his train of thought by what he sees so Peter cuts him off and takes over. "We live together, we eat together, we work together and we have fun together. To us you're not delinquent, you're not addicts, you're not junkies. From today on you're Aebianer!" he shouts excitedly. "And you're here because you want to be here. You're not forced by anyone. You're not mandated by anyone. We're not a prison" he concludes. "But there are rules," Peter continues. Charlie sighs loudly and Christof snickers, tickled by his friend's attitude. "Abstinence. Abstinence! Absolutely no drugs! We, everyone here, will live without drugs. Which also means no alcohol." Demonstratively, Pablo lights a cigarette. Everyone stares at him. "But smoking cigarettes is allowed," he counters. "Well, that's certainly not confusing" Christof blurts out. The group laughs.

Roger, the former headmaster, is standing by the living-room

window in his upstairs apartment, spying. Hiding behind a long velvet curtain, he takes notice of the young people assembled in a circle and just shakes his head in disbelief. He sees how **SUZETTE** (19) bends the corner and joins the group. Still sleepy, she drags her small duffle bag on the pavement behind her.



After the meeting, the group gets a tour of the grounds. The Kitchen is first and Heinz's domain. Before extensively traveling through India on horse-back, Heinz finished culinary school to become a line cook. That's one reason why his brother asked him to join. But as an avid weed smoker and having experimented with LSD and mushrooms, Heinz was also the only member of the leadership team with any 'drug' experience. An asset they naively thought. "Everyone here has work. You have to earn your keep. And kitchen chores rotate daily." Heinz tells the group. "So, for tonight's dinner, the kitchen staff will be..." he looks around and locks eyes with Suzette who smiles flirtatiously. "Suzette" he says who seems pleased as she finds Heinz quite charming as well.

Pablo shows the new arrivals the rest of the estate; the barn

that houses the chickens and pigs and explains the daily chores everyone is responsible for. He points out the extensive vegetable garden that they will plant soon. As the group walks back to the main building, they see a tractor pulling a trailer filled with manure. **THE FARMER** at the wheel is the same vocal and angry gentleman from the night before. He slowly backs up into the driveway, walks to the trailer to open the hatch, dumping all of the manure in the driveway.

Pablo is as dumbfounded, as is the rest of the group. They all just stare in disbelief at the pile of shit in their driveway. Heinz, furious, starts running to the tractor that's still idling. He screams at the farmer who at this point managed to jump back on the tractor. The rest of the group follows suit, yelling and hollering. The farmer tries to make a hasty exit but Heinz pulls him from the driver's seat and shoves him hard against the tractor. "What's wrong with you?" he yells. "Ask your Drug Pastor over here and your low life junkies." The farmer replied angrily and pointed at Pablo. Charlie starts yelling at him as well, disliking being called names. More shoving, more pushing and lots more yelling as the fight escalates. Pablo looks on, somewhat helpless but unwilling to engage physically. Finally, Elisabeth rushes over to break it all up. Moments later, the farmer drives off and everyone ends up shuffling manure.

Heinz is prepping dinner with Suzette, his sous chef for the night. Music is blasting from a portable radio and they seem to be having a good time. Heinz definitely likes Suzette. She's his type, a head taller than him, dangly and skinny. Suzette doesn't mind the attention, on the contrary, she's flirtatious, almost giddy. A vegetarian soup is on the stove so they're cleaning up the mess they left behind. Heinz takes out a joint and lights it. Suzette's eyes light up. "Weed? Isn't there a zero-drug policy?" she ponders. "Smoking is okay my brother says" he replies and coughs. They both laugh, knowing they're bending the truth.

Pablo is sitting in his makeshift office, feverishly revising a spreadsheet. He loves spreadsheets. The walls are plastered with documents, lists and indeed spreadsheets. It's clear that they have been working hard on prepping for this day. The evening news is on

the radio and one particular segment catches Pablo's attention. An interview with a known drug expert, a doctor who spent decades on the west coast of the United States working as the medical chief for a self-help group called Synanon. Pablo turns up the volume and calls for the rest of his team.

The voice on the radio belongs to **DR. KLAUS DEISSLER** (64), a charismatic, fast talking and confident man. In that interview, Deissler discusses how it's pointless to treat drug addicts as criminals and how a punitive approach should not be the norm. He also detests to call addicts patients "It's dangerous and stupid if you tell an addict directly or indirectly he's a patient. They will be excited and they will agree with you" he explains. "They'll feel emboldened and say I always knew I was sick so I will continue to use heroin and you will treat me" he concludes. Deissler speaks crisply, critically and for the time progressively with a great sense of humor. He mentions his decades long experience with Synanon, a US self-help group that coined "THE GAME" an intense form of confrontational group therapy of sorts where verbal group sparring was a mandatory, daily routine. Pablo and Peter are smitten by what they hear. "We need to talk with this guy." Pablo exclaims.

Everyone enjoys dinner but Charlie. He slams his spoon on the table and sighs. All eyes are now on him. "No meat?" he inquires. "Vegetarian meals are really healthy and quite honestly better for you" Heinz explains. "How do you know what's better for me? You don't even know me. I need a lot of protein?" Abruptly, Charlie gets up from the table so that his chair tips over. "That's stupid" he yells and walks away. "There won't be any meat here unless you get it yourself and cook it" replies Heinz jokingly. Charlie turns around and walks back to face Heinz. A stand-off that ends in a shouting match.

The phone rings. Pablo sprints down the hall to his office so he doesn't miss the call. Dr. Mauerhofer, his father in law, is on the other line. "How is it going? How is this first group?" he wants to know. The shouting match between Heinz and Charlie from the common area, spills over. Pablo quickly closes the door so his father in law doesn't notice. "Everything is calm. So far so good.

We have our work schedule set for tomorrow. And everyone is getting acquainted with the program" he answers. "Great. Listen. The Radio station called and they wanted to do a short segment. A great opportunity to get the word out" Mauerhofer continues. "Not sure we're ready. This is still just sort of a trial phase" Pablo counters. "You worry too much. It will be fine. I will call back with details."



It's early morning. The sun has just risen. Dressed in work boots and overalls, the leadership team is ready for a long day of work chores ahead. But nobody else is, except Christof. "Where is everyone? Work chores start at 7A" Pablo states, frustrated. Christof shrugs. "Probably sleeping" he finally replies. Elisabeth and Peter volunteer to walk back to the main building to get the rest of the group.

Elisabeth knocks at the door of Charlie's dorm room. No answer. She knocks louder. Still nothing. She finally enters and sees Charlie sprawled on the bed, butt naked atop the covers. She sighs. "Charlie," she says. "Charlie!" she finally yells. Charlie moans and slowly turns over, exposing himself even more. "Good morning," he

says playfully. Elisabeth turns around, grossed out. "Get dressed. We need to work" she says and walks out of the room, slamming the door.

In the meantime, Peter is in Max and Elise's room. He shakes Elise but she is fast asleep. "Is she high?" Peter wants to know. "Absolutely not" replies Max somewhat nervously but with conviction. "She's clean," he follows up. Peter looks at the ashtray and a stump of a joint that's still burning. "That's not mine," Max says quickly. "Fine, but it's just weed. Not a big deal" he follows up. Peter shakes his head in disbelief.

Minutes later, all six Aebianer stand in front of the pigpen, some armed with a crap fork. Cleaning it out is their consequence for not showing up to work. "I'm not doing this" Christof says and leans against the barn door. Elise is barely capable of holding herself up and Max seems too concerned about Elise. "Where is Suzette?" Vittorio wants to know. "Kitchen duty with Heinz" Charlie says. "Again?" Vittorio starts cleaning the pen. Charlie helps him as the rest of the group watch them work. "That pig looks yummy, "Charlie says. "I'm hungry!" They snicker and continue their chore.

Pablo is driving by the barn, watching the Aebianer cleaning the pen. He honks a few times and waves. They wave back, barely excited. As he drives down the village, he encounters the tractor driven by his neighbor, the angry farmer. He honks and waves at him too but only gets the middle finger back in return. Pulling in front of the post office, Pablo drops a letter addressed to Dr. DEISSLER in the mailbox.

Everyone is assembling in the large common room after dinner. The atmosphere is tense. "This is not working, if you don't want it to work" Peter says. Everyone's head is down, eyes glued on the ground. "You have to show up. We can't help you if you don't let us" Pablo chimes in. At that moment, Roger Blitz, the former headmaster, peeks his head through the door. "Great job everyone!" he says in a chipper mood. "Not now!" yells Pablo, about to lose his mind. He gets up and paces around, trying to shake off his frustration. Elisabeth tries to calm him down to no avail. "I am



expecting everyone on time and on their best behavior tomorrow. I'm picking up a reporter who wants to do a story. This is really important for all of us."

By the next morning everything seems to be on track. It's a beautiful day in Brüttelen. Heinz is in the kitchen with his favorite sous chef Suzette. Their physical attraction is obvious but inappropriate. And once again they share a joint to start the day. Roger Blitz, always curious, walks by the kitchen and takes notice.

Pablo says goodbye to Elisabeth and his young daughter and is on his way to Bern to pick up his father in law and the reporter who is doing a story on "A new way to treat drug addiction."

Max and Elise are still in their room. Elise is carefully laying out heroin paraphernalia on her bed. Max has given up talking her out of it. He too lights a joint to start the day.

And Charlie and Vittorio are once again in the pigpen, cleaning. Elisabeth and Peter check in on them. "Have you seen Christof?" Elisabeth wants to know. "He left. He said he had enough. This is not for him apparently." Dumbfounded Peter and Elisabeth look at

each other. "When?" she demands to know. "Ah. Don't know. This morning?" Charlie says nonchalantly and doesn't even notice that Elisabeth and Peter have already left.



Charlie turns his attention back to the pigs. "Let's eat this one," he says. "Ha. Very funny. But seriously, I wish" replies Vittorio. "Let's do it" Charlie insists and takes out a gun. Surprised Vittorio takes a big step back. "What!? WAIT! Are you insane? Where did you get that?" Charlie fumbles with the gun. "Army" Charlie says drily and cocks it, pointing it at the unassuming animal. "Hold it!" Charlie demands. Vittorio freezes. "HOLD IT! So I can shoot it." Vittorio paces around. "You can't just shoot a pig," he yells. "Yes we can" he barks back. Vittorio finally relents and tries to grab the pig. But the pig resists and heads for the gate which was never locked so it takes off running. Freedom. The two young men give chase to the pig on the run.

In the meantime, Pablo is driving back back from Bern with precious cargo; Dr. Mauerhofer in the passenger seat and the **REPORTER** in the back. He glances back nervously through the mirror but keeps his eyes on the road. As he takes the turn toward the village he sees

a familiar figure walking down main street; Christof, shouldering his small bag over his flowy white cape, is hitchhiking. Clenching his jaw, Pablo hopes his passengers are not noticing the flamboyant young man on the side of the road.

He continues driving towards Aebi-Hus when from a far he spots two young men chasing a pig. One of them – Charlie – has his gun drawn and tries to aim at the pig all while running. "Goddamn!" Pablo mumbles.

Then all we hear is a big, loud PENG!

this season on aebi-hus

EPISODE 2:

Despite the chaos and missteps, Pablo and his team are determined to continue with their program. Meanwhile Roger Blitz is arrested on embezzlement charges and Heinz gets romantically involved with Suzette which threatens the entire operation.

EPISODE 3:

The Aebi-Hus finally gets a visit from Dr. Deissler which serves as a wake-up call. And Pablo picks up a teenager who is flown in privately from Luxembourg by hear wealthy father. And Jimmy takes the Aebianer on an outing to visit his estranged father.

EPISODE 4:

Dr. Deissler lets the young leadership know that their approach and vision will end in disaster if they don't make drastic changes. And Bread Making is a success but weely trips to sell it at the market, also brings back hard drugs.

EPISODE 5:

The leadership team realizes that heroin found its way into Aebi-Hus and they're faced with a difficult decision. Call it quits or pivot. Meanwhile Charlie wants to start a Aebi-Hus band.





