

Alraune

(Mandrágora)

Hanns Heinz Ewers



BERSERKER

BOOKS



Hans Heinz Ewers

Mandrake

(The story of a strange creature)



Hanns Heinz Ewers was born in Dusseldorf in 1871. He quickly gained a reputation for his volumes of satirical poetry and his performances as a member of a travelling theatre company. Between 1907 and 1922, he wrote several volumes of short stories and major works such as "The Magician's Wife", "Alraune" (filmed in the 1920s) and "The Vampire". At the height of his career, he held the post of President of the Fascist Writers' Union under Hitler. He died in Berlin in 1943.

His fantastic and gruesome stories are very popular

PREV

You do not deny, my dear friend, that there are beings - not men and not animals - strange beings, created by the depraved pleasure of an absurd thought?

You know, my gentle friend, the law is good, the rules are good, the strict norms are good: good is the great God who made these norms, rules and laws. And good is the man who respects them, who walks his path with humility and forbearance, and faithfully follows his good God.

Then there is the Prince who hates good, who destroys law and norm. A bargain too, but - mark well - *against nature*.

Evil and evil. And evil is the man who follows it. He is a race of Satan.

Evil, great evil: to meddle with the eternal laws, and to twist them out of their corners of brass with a reckless hand.

Just do the Evil. Aided by a mighty lord: Satan; let him act according to his own pride. Kick up the rules, twist them, turn nature upside down. But beware: whatever you create, it is a lie and a false sham. It may reach high, it may soar - but in the end it will collapse and bury its creator, the arrogant fool, in its fall.

.oOo.

The strange girl was created by Professor Dr. med. ten Brinken v. b. t. t. his Excellency, and created - *against all natural laws*. Even if the idea came from another, the work of creation was done by her alone. This being, who was baptized and named *Alraune*, grew up and lived to manhood. Everything he touched turned to gold, everywhere he looked, wild instincts ran riot. Sins sprang up where his venomous breath reached, and pale death-flowers grew on his light footsteps. He beat him to death whose thought had conceived, Braun Frank, the wounded man of life.

.oOo.

I didn't write this book for you, my blonde brother. Your eyes are blue and good and know no sin. Your days, like the heavy berries of blue glycena, fall eye by eye on the soft carpet: my feet glide lightly and softly along the gently gliding trellis of your gentle life.

My blond child, sister of my dreamless days, I did not write this book for you.

But I wrote to you, the wild, sinful brother of my feverish nights. When shadows fall on the land, and the angry sea devours the sun's gold, A bright ray of poison-green ripples on the waves. It is the laugh of sin, above the death-fearing, grey weekdays. And the laughter stretches out over the still waters, soaring high and showing off its gaudy yellow, red and dark purple colours. It breathes through the deep night and sends its plague breath to all lands.

If you are struck by its hot breath, your eyes widen and your young breasts rise more boldly. Thy nostrils tremble and thy fingers fan. From thy grey days the civil veil is lifted, And the serpent from the black night is slithered. Thy wild soul, my brother, shall rise, full of poison and ready for all shame. And with anguish and blood and kisses and lust, it shall soar to heaven and howl to hell.

Brother of my sins, I wrote this book for you.

CHAPTER ONE

Which shows what the house was like from which Alraune's idea sprang into the world

The white house in which ten Brinken's Alraun was conceived was situated on the Rhine, just outside the city, in the long Villenstrasse, which starts from the old archbishop's palace, now the university. At that time it was occupied by Justice Sebestyén Gontram, but the house was already standing long before Alraune was born and established.

Entering from the street, the path led through a long, ugly garden that had never seen a gardener. Passing through it, you came to the house, from which the plaster was falling; the threshold you sought in vain, you could not find. No one answered your call, no one answered your cry. If you pushed the door and entered, you had to climb up dirty, unwashed wooden stairs. And some big cat jumped in front of you in the dark.

At other times the large garden was populated by thousands of monkeys. The Gontram children. They were everywhere, hiding in the branches of the trees and sliding down into the deep holes in the ground. And the dogs. Two cheeky snitches and a mutty fox. There was also the dwarf cellar of the lawyer Manasse, a brown, rounded thing, like a quince, barely the size of a palm. They called him Cyklop.

The garden echoed with noise and shouts. Little Wolf, barely a year old, lay in his pram and howled for hours. Only Cyklop could compete with him; he barked incessantly, hoarse and ragged. Like the little Wolf, he would not move, only howled and howled.

The Gontram children were running wild in the bushes until late at night. Frida, the eldest, was put in charge; she had to see that the brothers and sisters behaved properly. In her opinion, they were well-behaved. At the back, in the ruined bodega, she sat with her friend, the little princess Wolkonski. They chatted and argued, for they were soon to be fourteen.

will be at an age when they can even get married. But they can have a mistress anyway.

However, both being religious, they decided to wait a little longer, at least fourteen days, until after the first Holy Communion, when they would get long skirts and go into adult clothes. Then they can have a mistress.

For this determination they considered themselves very virtuous. It would be good to go to church, they thought, for the May devotion. They should take account of themselves these days, and behave seriously and soberly.

- And maybe Schmitz is there too!" said Frida Gontram. But the little princess wrinkled her nose:

- Eh, the Schmitz!

Frida grabbed his arm.

- And the Bavarians in blue lace!"- Olga Wolkonski laughed.

- Those? - Those? - Blisters. You know Frida, *educated* students don't even go to church.

This was true, educated students did not do such things.

Frida sighed. She pushed the carriage aside with the snarling little Wolf and kicked Cyklop, who tried to bite her leg.

Yes, the princess was right, it would have been a shame to go to church.

- We're staying home!" the girls decided and returned to the bodzalugas.

The Gontram children were eager for life. They did not know - but they suspected, it was in their blood - that they must die young, fresh, in the prime of life. That of the time given to other men, they had only an arcane portion. They clamoured, they raved, they ate and drank to the point of trebling their time. Little Wolf, instead of three babies, roared in his carriage. His brothers and sisters raced around the garden as if there were forty-eight of them, not four. They were dirty, snotty, ragged, and always bleeding about something; they had either cut their fingers, skinned their knees, or scratched themselves badly.

When the sun went down, the Gontram children fell silent. They returned to the house, went into the kitchen. They ate a large pile of buttered bread,

thickly stuffed with ham and sausage. And they drank their water, which the great servant had coloured red with some wine.

Then came the washing up. He undressed them, dipped them in soap powder and scrubbed them like a pair of boots with a stiff brush of black soap. They were still not clean. In the scrub, the wild kids roared and raged again.

Then, tired to death, they climbed into bed. They fell like a sack of potatoes between the pillows and never moved again. They always forgot to tuck in, the maid threw the duvet over them.

.oOo.

This is usually when lawyer Manasse comes. Climbing up the stairs, he knocked on a few doors with his cane. He got no answer. Then he entered.

Mrs Gontram went ahead of him. She was a tall woman, almost twice the size of the dwarf Mr. Manasseh, who was curvaceous and bore a strong resemblance to his ugly dog, Cyclops. Short spines grew on her face, chin, and over her mouth, and in the middle of them was a small, round nose like a month-old's. He spoke in a pale voice, as if he wanted to catch someone.

- Good evening, Mrs Gontram!" he said. - Is the colleague not home yet?

- "Good evening, Mr lawyer, make yourself comfortable," said the tall woman.

- "I ask you, is your colleague not home yet?" shouted little Manasse. "And bring the child in, you don't understand a word he says!

- What?" asked Mrs Gontram, taking the antiphon out of her ear. The little Wolf! Get yourself one of those things, Mr. Advocate, and you won't hear it. "Billa, Billa!" she cried out of the door. "Or Frida! Can't you hear me? Bring in the little Wolf!

He was still in peach-coloured pongee. Her rich chestnut hair was pinned up in a mess; half of it was disheveled. Her eyes, wide open, blazing, full of restless fire, seemed infinitely large. But his temples were furrowed, his forehead was dented, his nose narrow and sunken, and his pale skin stretched taut on his bones. Great hectic spots burned on his face.

- Do you have a good cigar, Mr. lawyer?" he asked.

The lawyer took out his wallet, annoyed, almost furiously:

- How many times has Mrs. Gontram already screwed you?

- "About a mince," laughed the woman, "but you know, from the rubbish that costs four pfennigs apiece! It'll do you good to have a change. And she took out a heavy, almost black Mexican.

Mr Manasse sighed:

- What do you think? How long will it take?

- At least he shouldn't smoke so much!" snorted the little lawyer.

The woman stared at him. She lifted her narrow blue lips so that her white teeth showed:

- What does he say, Manasse? No smoking? Shut up! What am I supposed to do? Have a baby - one every year - run a household, with the brats on my back, and here's the dovetail - and don't even smoke?

The lawyer looked at him half angrily, half affectionately and dumbfounded. This little Manasse was more impudent than anybody else in front of the jury; he never lacked wit and sharp words. He snarled, he snarled, he bit, mercilessly, bravely. But here, in the presence of this disfigured woman, whose body was a skeleton, whose head grinned like a death's head, who had been three-quarters in the grave for years, and was now smiling as she dug the last quarter of her grave, here she felt the fear. His unruly, gleaming locks of hair, which even now were growing, growing thicker, more compact, as if their soil had been fertilized by death itself, his proportioned, sparkling teeth, which held firmly the black butt of a thick cigar, his eyes, too large, those hopeless and despairing eyes, which glowed with a glow they knew not how, took his word and made him dwarf, as he was, dwarfer than his dog.

Oh, he was a very skilled man, that lawyer Manasse! They called him a living encyclopaedia, for there was no question he would not answer in the heat of the moment. The woman swears by Epicurus, he thought now, she cares not for death. As long as she lives, there is no death. And when death comes, she is no longer here.

But Manasse saw clearly that, although she was alive, death was still present. It had been lurking around the house for a long time. He plays blindfolds with the woman who wears his ticket. Her children are also branded, and so she lets them roar and rage in the garden. The woman was right: death was not slow, it walked in step. But it did so on a whim. Only because it pleased him to play like a cat with the fishes of the goldfish bowl, with her and her life-greasing children.

"Oh, no, he is not here!" said Mrs. Gontram, who lay all day long on the couch, strapping on big black cigars, reading never-ending novels, and wearing an antiphon in her ear to keep out the children's noise. Oh no, he's not here!? But death grinned out of its miserable mask: Am I not here? He laughed at the lawyer and blew the thick smoke in his face.

Little Manasseh saw, saw clearly, death. He stared at it and thought long and hard, which death was this of many? Dürer's? Or Böcklin's? A filthy harlequin death: Bosch's or Breughel's? Or was it an insane, unsalvageable death painted by Hogarth, Goya, Rowlandson, Rops or Callot?

None of these. The death that sat in front of him and with whom he could talk was a good civil, even romantic death, a Rethelian death. A death who listened to words, who had wit, who smoked, who loved wine and who could laugh.

- It's good that he smokes, thought Manasse. - Very good, at least you can't smell him.

.oOo.

- Good evening, colleague, - entered Justice Councillor Gontram. - Have you arrived? And he went into a long story, detailing everything that happened today in the office and in the tribunal.

He told me all sorts of peculiar things. What can only happen in the life of a lawyer happened to Mr Gontram day after day. His incidents were strange in the extreme, sometimes hilarious and comic, sometimes bloody and overly tragic.

But - not a word of it was true. The magistrate was as afraid of the truth as he was of baths and wash-bowls; and this fear

could not overcome. If he spoke, his mouth opened to lie and at night he dreamed of new lies. They knew he was a liar, but they liked to listen to him, because his tall tales were funny and enjoyable, and if not, the way he told them was clever.

He must have been in his forties, grey, with a short, sparse beard and sparse hair. His gold-framed hat, which he wore on a long black braid, was always hanging down his nose, revealing his short-sighted blue eyes. He was untidy, ragged and unwashed, and his fingers were stained with ink.

A bad lawyer and a sworn enemy of all 'work. He let his law clerks handle the case - and although they were there for that reason, they also didn't work and often didn't show up at the office all week. He gave it to the clerks and clerks, but they slept. And once awake, they would formulate a lawsuit, which read: 'I deny... And they stamped the name of the Justice Counsel on it.

Yet he had a very good practice, much better than the knowledgeable and experienced Manasseh. All the judges and prosecutors liked him because he didn't fuss, he let things run their course. It was common knowledge that in the criminal courts and before the jury, the name Gontram was worth its weight in gold. 'I move,' the prosecutor once said, 'that extenuating circumstances be applied to the accused: Mr Justice Gontram is his counsel.

He was always able to get leniency for his clients, whereas Manasse, with his learning and strong speech, rarely did.

And then Justice Gontram had some cases, big cases, which caused a stir all over the country. He fought them for years, went to all the instances, but finally won them. Cases like this awakened his dormant energy. A case that had gone completely wrong, a case that had been lost six times, an almost impossible case that had gone from lawyer to lawyer, and was full of the most complex international issues, issues he had no idea about - that was what he was interested in. The Koschen brothers from Lenepp, who had been sentenced to death three times, were acquitted at the fourth retrial, even though they were proved guilty at the last minute. In the million-dollar zinc-mining scandal in Neutral-Moresnet, in which none of the lawyers in three countries knew him - and he certainly knew him least of all - he was finally

but still managed to get a favourable ruling. Now Princess Wolkonsky has been fighting her big marriage enforcement battle for three years.

And it is peculiar: this man never talked about his real achievements. He has never spoken of his achievements: he has never spoken of the truth.

- "Dinner will be here soon," said Mrs Gontram. "I've made a little bowl. Friss waldmeister. Shall I go and change first?

- "Keep it up, woman", the magistrate decided, forgiving the Manasseh. He interrupted her speech: - My God, how does that child roar? Can't you shut him up?

She went with long, soft steps to the door, and opened into the hall, where the servant was pushing the pram. Taking little Wolf by the arm, she brought him into the room and sat him in the high, square baby chair.

- No wonder he cries! He's all wet," she said quietly. "Hush, you little devil, can't you see we have a guest?

Visitor here, visitor there, little Wolf didn't bother. Mr. Manasse got up, patted and caressed his fat cheek, gave him the big paprika orange to play with, but the child pushed it aside and howled and cried incessantly. And Cyklop escorted him from under the table.

- "Hold on, sweetie, you're about to get something," said his mother. She took the black, cut cigar end out of her teeth and put it in the baby's mouth. Well, little Wolf, is that a good thing? What?

At that moment, the child was silent, drooling, sucking on the cigar and his big laughing eyes sparkling with happiness.

- "You see, Mr. Advocate, that's the way to treat a child," said the tall woman, in a calm, sure voice, with complete seriousness. You men, of course, don't understand.

The servant entered and announced that the table was set. "Beee...!" she teased, and plucked the end of the cigar from his mouth.

Wolf howled again. He took it in his arms, swayed it to and fro, and sang a melancholy song from his Walloon homeland. But he had no more luck than Mr. Manasse; the child roared and roared. Then he took out the cigar piece again, spat it out, rubbed it against his dirty kitchen towel to stifle the still-flickering fire, and put it back into little Wolf's red mouth.

Then he undressed her, washed her, cleaned her up and made her bed. The little Wolf didn't move, quietly and calmly tolerated being possessed. He fell asleep happily, his face beaming, with the terrible, black cigar-end between his lips.

Oh yes, the tall woman was telling the truth. She knew about children. At least she knew the Gontram children.

They dined inside and the justice councillor told them a story. They drank a light wine from Ruwer, the bowl was served only at the end of the meal by Mrs Gontram.

The husband did not like it. "Bring up some champagne," he said.

- No more champagne... "All we have is a bottle of Pommery in the cellar," said the woman, and she put the bowl on the table.

The man stared at him through his quiver and shook his head in shock:

- Well, look what a housewife you are! We have no champagne and you don't mention it? Well, well, well! No champagne in the house! Bring that Pomeroy upstairs! - Too bad there's no more!

He shook his head from side to side. - No champagne! "We must get it now!" he repeated. Come, woman, give me pen and paper; I will write to the princess.

When the paper lay before him, he pushed it back. "I've worked all day today," he sighed. "Wait, woman, I'll dictate.

Mrs Gontram did not move. - Write? That's just what I need! "I've just remembered!" she said. The magistrate looked at Manassé, who was sitting opposite. Would you mind? I'm so exhausted!

The little lawyer looked at him angrily. "Exhausted?" he sneered. "What for? From telling stories? I only want to know, Mr. Counselor, why your finger is always so inky! Certainly not from writing.

Mrs Gontram laughed. "Oh, Manasse, he's been inky since Christmas when he had to sign the children's bad report cards! Frida will write it.

He cried out the window for it. Frida came in with Olga Wolkonski.

- It's nice to have you here!" said the Justice Councillor, welcoming Olga.

- Yes, they've already had dinner, down in the kitchen.

- Sit down Frida," the father ordered. Frida obeyed. - Like this. Now take the pen and write what I tell you.

But Frida was a real Gontram child, she hated writing. She jumped up from her chair in a flash. - No, no!" she cried. Let Olga write, she writes much better than I do.

The princess was standing next to the pamlag, she didn't want to write either. "If you don't write," she whispered, "I won't give you a penance for the day after tomorrow!

This helped. Confession was the day after tomorrow, and the princess's confession slip was not exactly flashy. It was forbidden to sin in the serious days before communion, but sins had to be confessed. It was necessary to search, to search, to search the soul for sins. And that was something the princess was not at all good at. Frida, on the other hand, was all the more magnificent. Her confession slip was the envy of the whole class. She could invent a dozen or so particularly splendid sins of the mind. A skill she inherited from her father. He committed a whole pile of sins, but if he had sinned, the confessor certainly didn't know it.

- "Write to Olga," he whispered, "I'll give you eight big sins.

- Ten!" the princess demanded. And Frida Gontram nodded - "I won't turn that around; she'd be happy to give you twenty, if only she didn't have to write.

Olga Wolkonski sat down at the table, picked up a pen and looked up questioningly.

- "Write, then!" said the magistrate. "Dear Princess!"

- Is it for Mama?" asked the princess.

- Of course, who else? - Write. - Dear Princess.

The princess didn't write. - If it's for Mama, I might as well write it: Dear Mama!

- "Write what you want, kid, just get on with it!" the judicial councillor was impatient.

Dear Mama!" wrote the princess.

And he went on, as the Justice Councillor put it in pen:

"I regret to inform you that our case is not progressing sufficiently. I have much to think over, and if I have nothing to drink, I cannot think. And there is not a drop of champagne in the house. Please send me a basket of bowl champagne, a basket of Pommery and six bottles of - St. Marceaux for the success of your cock!" cried the little lawyer.

- St. Marceaux," continued the Justice Councillor. It's my colleague Manasse's favourite brand, who sometimes helps me.

Best regards From

your -"

- "You see, colleague!" he said, "how bitterly unfair you are to me! Not only do I dictate the letter myself, but I sign it myself! And he added his name.

Frida half turned away from the window. "Are you ready? "Yes? "I just want to say that you've done a useless job. Olga's mother has just driven up and is already in the garden.

He had seen the Princess for some time, but he did not say anything about it, nor did he interrupt the letter. If Olga is going to get ten beautiful sins, she should at least do something for them! The Gontrams were all like that, father, mother and children: they worked very, very hard, but they liked to see others work.

The princess arrived, fat, bloated and very vulgar. Her fingers, her ears, her neck and her hair were large brilliants. She was a Hungarian countess or baroness, and had met the prince somewhere in the East. It is certain that they were married, but it is also certain that they were cheating on each other from the beginning. The princess wanted the marriage, which was impossible for some reason, to go through legally, but the prince, although he thought it possible, wanted to annul it on the grounds of a certain formal defect at the very moment of its conclusion. This web of lies and reckless giddiness is an excellent

was a wall for Mr Gontram Sebestyén. Everything was wobbly here, nothing was firm; if one party asserted something, the other immediately refuted it: the weaknesses of one law were immediately removed by the law of another state. Only the existence of the little princess was beyond doubt... Both prince and duchess acknowledged her, and claimed for themselves the fruit of their strange marriage, for whom so many millions were waiting. At present the mother had the advantage, for she had the daughter.

- Sit down, madame duchess!" - The magistrate would have bitten off his tongue rather than call him "your majesty"; he was her client, and he treated her no more gently than the last peasant woman.

- We have just written to you," he said, reading out the beautiful letter.

- But please!" cried Princess Wolkonski. "You are very welcome! She took a heavy letter from her bag. "I have just come about the hammer, Mr. Councillor of Justice. This letter is from the factory in Nagybecskerek, from Count Ormos, Archbishop. You see.

Mr Gontram frowned: that's all we need! At this time of night, the king himself could not wait to work in his home. He got up and picked up the letter.

The princess objected. - But it is very urgent. It is very important -

The magistrate interrupted him. Is it urgent? Is it important? Tell me, what do you mean by urgent, important? Nothing! Such things can only be judged in the office. And then, with a good-natured reproach. You should know that it is not customary to burden people with business matters in the evening, in their homes.

The princess was still stubborn. "But I can never get hold of you in the office, Mr Justice Counselor. I've tried four times this week.

- 'Come and see me next week,' said Gontram, annoyed. 'You think I'm just here to do your job? 'Don't you think I have other work? How long will it take me to get Houten's murder case? His head is at stake, not a handful of millions like yours.

He went on endlessly, talking until he could not stop talking about this notable robber baron who lived only in his imagination and the legal exploits he had performed for this incomparable spy murderer.

The princess sighed, but listened. Sometimes she laughed, but always in the wrong place. Of her many listeners, she was the only one who never felt that she was lying, but she was also the only one who was not rewarded for her wit.

- "A pretty story!" yelped lawyer Manasse, just right for children. The girls listened eagerly, staring wide-eyed and wide-mouthed at the magistrate.

But he would not be interrupted.

Eh what, you can't get used to this kind of thing early enough. As if spy killers were the most common creatures you'd encounter dozens of times a day.

He finally finished his sermon and looked at his watch. Bedtime, children. Drink another glass of punch quickly.

The girls obeyed. The princess declared that she would not go home for the world. She is afraid and dare not sleep alone. She's not afraid to go out with miss, either. She wants to stay with her friend. She hasn't asked her mother for permission, only Frida and Frida's mother.

- I don't mind!" said Mrs Gontram. But don't fall asleep, so that you can be in time for church.

The girls said their goodbyes and walked out, hugging each other tightly.

- Are you afraid too?" asked the princess.

- "Everything Papa tells is a lie," Frida said. Yet she was afraid. But besides fear, she felt a strange desire for such things. Not to live them - oh, no way. But to be able to pick them out and tell them like that. Confessing such things! These are sins!" he sighed.

Upstairs, they finished the bowl and Mrs Gontram lit a last cigar. Mr Manasse got up and went into the next room. The magistrate told a new story to the princess, who yawned secretly behind her fan and tried again to get a word in edgewise.

- Right, Mr Justice Counsel, I almost forgot! May I come tomorrow at noon to pick up your wife in my car? I'll take you to Rolandseck.

- Of course, of course, if he wants to.

But Mrs Gontram said, "I cannot go.

- "Why not?" asked the princess. "It would certainly do you good to get out into the fresh spring air.

Mrs Gontram slowly removed the cigar from her teeth. I haven't a proper hat to wear.

The princess laughed, as if taking it as a joke. Tomorrow she'll send the fashion merchant with the new spring models.

- "I don't mind," said Mrs Gontram, "but send Becker, he has the best things from Quirinus Street. She slowly rose and looked intently at the extinguished cigar-light.

- "Oh yes, it's late, I must go too!" cried the princess quickly. The magistrate escorted her through the garden and out into the street.

He helped her into his cage and carefully closed the door. On his return he found his wife on the doorstep of the house, holding a candle.

- We can't go to bed," he said calmly.

- What?" asked Gontram. "Why not?

- "We can't go to bed," repeated the woman. "Manasse is in our bed!

They climbed the stairs to the second floor and entered the bedroom. In the huge honeymoon bed lay the little lawyer, lying sprawled and fast asleep. He had laid his clothes carefully on the chair and put his shoes beside it. She was wearing a clean nightgown, which she had taken from the wardrobe. Beside him, curled up like a young hedgehog, was his dog, Cyklop.

Justice Gontram took the candle and lit the bed.

- "And this man mocks me for being lazy!" he said, shaking his head in amazement.

- Shh! - Mrs Gontram pisses. - Shh, you'll wake them.

They took linen and underwear from the wardrobe and quietly left the room. Mrs Gontram made her bed on the pillows in the lower room. There they slept.

The whole house was asleep. Downstairs, next to the kitchen, Billa, the stout servant and the three dogs, and in the next room the four naughty children. Upstairs, in Frida's room with the balcony, the two friends; next to them, little Farkas with the black cigarette in his mouth, and in the drawing-room, Mr. Gontram Sebestyén and his wife. On the second floor, Manasse and his Cyclops were snoring in competition, and upstairs on the mansard slept Zsófi, the maid who had been dancing in the evening and was quietly sneaking up the stairs. They slept, they slept. Twelve men and four strong dogs.

But something was awake. It was hiding around the spacious house.

Down below, under the garden, the Rhine meandered. His breast between raised dikes peered into the sleeping villas, pressed close to the old toll. Cats and tomcats scampered through the bushes, snorting, fighting, bickering. They glared at each other with wide, glowing eyes. And they were immersed in lustful, denying, painful, tormenting pleasure.

Far, far away, from the city, the drunken singing of rowdy students could be heard.

Something was hiding around the white house in Rajnament. It darted across the garden, past the broken benches and rickety chairs. He watched the witchy chase of the lovelorn cats.

He went around the house. He scraped the walls with his sharp nails, so that the plaster clattered. His jogging made the doors shake as if the wind were rattling them.

He grew inside the house. He fell up the stairs, slid through all the rooms. He stopped and looked around with a serene smile.

On the mahogany cupboard stood heavy silver linen, precious treasures from the age of the Empire. The window panes were cracked and the cracks were papered over. On the walls hung good pictures by the Dutch masters Koekkoek, Verboekhoeven, Verwée and Jan Stobbaerts; but the linen was full of holes and the gold frames were black with cobwebs. A magnificent chandelier had once hung in the Archbishop's banqueting-room; its broken crystals were now stuck with fly-papers.

Something crept through the house and destruction followed in its wake. Wherever he went, something was ruined; it was nothing, a trifle, but again

and again.

Wherever he went, a noise arose from the silence of the night. The floor creaked, a nail loosened, an old piece of furniture bent. Squeaky shelves squeaked and glasses clinked strangely.

Everyone slept in the big house in Rajnament. But something was hiding around him.

CHAPTER TWO

Which tells how the thought of Alraune came to him

The sun was setting and the candles were burning in the chandeliers of the banqueting hall when Privy Councillor ten Brinken entered. He was in ceremonial dress: tails, a white shirt with the great star on it, a gold chain in the buttonhole, with twenty small stars on it. The Privy Councillor went to the front, greeted and introduced him to the guests. The old gentleman went round the table with a wry smile, and said a kind word to each one. To each of the celebrating girls he handed a gold ring in pretty leather; a sapphire to the blonde Frida, a ruby to the black Olga. Then he addressed a few words of wisdom to them.

- "Mr. Privy Councillor, won't you follow our example?" asked Mr. Sebestyen Gontram. "We've been eating twelve courses since four o'clock! Isn't it splendid? Here's the diet - take your pick!"

The Privy Councillor thanked him, it was after a meal.

Just then, Mrs Gontram entered the room, wearing a slightly old-fashioned, flowing blue silk dress with a high ponytail.

- "There's the ice cream!" he said, and Billa put it in the oven and scrambled.

The guests laughed. That's what it took to have fun in the Gontram House.

- Bring in the bowl!" shouted lawyer Manasse, "we don't see cosmic ice cream every day anyway!"

Ten Brinken was looking for a seat on the Privy Council. He was a short, clean-shaven ugly man with fat tears under his eyes. His lips were swollen, his nose large and fleshy. His left eye-shell covered the eye deeply, but his right eye was open and sandy.

- "Good afternoon, Uncle James," someone said behind him. It was Frank Braun.

The Privy Councillor turned back, and his face showed that he was not very pleased to find his nephew here.

- You here?" he asked. "Otherwise I should have thought.

- Of course!" laughed the student. "You're so clever, uncle. You're here too, by the way. And quite formally, as the Real Interior and as a university professor, in the proud regalia of all your orders. But I'm only here incognito - my badge in my vest pocket.

- "That proves you have a guilty conscience!" said the uncle.
When you can...

- Yes, yes!" interrupted Frank Braun. I already know. When I'm your age, I'll be free - and so on - isn't that what you wanted to say? But thanks be to all the saints, I'm not even twenty, Uncle James. And I'm quite comfortable like this.

The Privy Councillor sat down.

- "You're in your fourth semester and all you know how to do is fight, drink, sword fight, ride horses, make love and do silly pranks!" he said. Is that why your mother sent you to the university? - Tell me, boy, have you been to only one lecture?

The student filled two glasses.

- Here, uncle James, drink, it will be easier for you to bear! So: yes, I have been, and not just to one, but to a whole series of performances. I have been to each of them exactly once - and I don't intend to go more often. - Cheers!

- And you think that's enough for salvation?

- Enough? I think it's plenty!" laughed Braun Frank. It was completely unnecessary! What am I doing at the lecture? Other students may have a lot to learn from you professors, but their brains are wired for this method. Mine is not. I find you all to be incredibly dumb, boring and stupid.

The professor's eyes widened. "You're very arrogant, my dear boy," he said calmly.

- Really?- The student leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. I hardly think so! But even if I did, I think it wouldn't hurt. Look, Uncle James, I know very well why I said those things. First, to annoy you a little - for you are very comical when you are annoyed. Secondly, to hear you say in the end that I was right. You, for instance, are necessarily a shrewd old fox, or uncle, very clever, very wise, and full of

science, But you see, you are just as insufferable in lecture as your esteemed colleagues. Ask yourself, could you enjoy their lecture?

- Me? "Certainly not," said the professor. "But that's another matter. If you will, yes, you know what I mean. But tell me, boy, what the devil are you doing here? This is not a house your mother would want you in. As for me -

- Leave it alone," said Braun Frank. "As for you, I have my opinion of you. You rented the house to Gontram, who evidently doesn't pay you punctually, and so it's a good thing to show yourself from time to time. And I'm interested in his atrophied wife, as a doctor of course - all the doctors in town are fascinated by this lungless phenomena. Then there's the princess to whom you'd like to sell your little castle in Mehlem. Finally, uncle, there are the two pretty young chicks with the bucks, right? - Oh, I don't think badly of you, uncle James, with you one must never think badly!

He fell silent, lit a cigarette and let out a puff of smoke. The Privy Councillor glared at him with his right eye, angry and expectant.

- What does that mean?" he asked quietly. The student laughed.

- Oh, nothing, nothing at all. "He got up, picked up the cigar box from the smoking table, opened it and held it out to the Privy Councillor. "Light it, dear uncle. Romeo and Juliet, your favourite brand! The Privy Councillor went to all this expense just for you.

- "Thank you!" murmured the professor. "Thank you!" I ask you again: what do you want to say?

Braun Frank pulled the chair closer.

- I'll answer you, Uncle James. - I won't take any more reproaches from you, do you hear? I know myself that the life I lead is a little shabby. I'm not asking you to pay my debts. I only ask that you do not write letters home as you have done. Write that I am very virtuous; I am very virtuous, I am working hard, I am making good progress. And things like that. Do you understand?

- Should I lie?" asked the Privy Councillor. He meant to be endearing and humorous, but he was as slimy as the road a snail travels.

The student looked at him.

- Yes uncle, lie. I don't understand, you know that. He emptied his glass and paused for a moment.

- "I am curious," said the Privy Councillor, inquiringly and hesitantly.

- "You know my life," the student continued in a bitterly serious tone, "you know that I am - today - an immature dachshund. You think that because you are an old and clever man, a man of great knowledge, rich, well-known, full of titles and decorations, and also an uncle and only brother of my mother, you have the right to educate me. Whether you have the right or not, - you will not educate me, no one will - only life.

The professor slapped his knee and laughed out loud.

- Yes, yes - life! Just you wait, boy; it'll bring you up. It's got sharp edges and corners enough, pretty rules and laws, boundaries and hedges.

- 'But not for me,' said Frank Braun, 'any more than for you, If you have broken off its edge, cut through its wires, laughed at its laws-I hope I can do it.

- Listen, uncle, I know your life pretty well. The whole town knows it, even the sparrows chirp about what you wear. But people whisper, they talk about you in secret, because they fear you, your brains, your money, your power and your energy. I know how little Anna Paulert died, I know why your beautiful gardener bachelor had to sail so suddenly to America. I know your other little things. Oh I do not enjoy them, I do not. But I don't take it amiss. Perhaps I am a little surprised that you, a little king, can do so much with impunity. I just can't understand how you can get away with it with that ugly face of yours.

The Privy Councillor fiddled with his watch chain. He looked at his nephew calmly, almost flatteringly.

- You can't understand, can you?

- "No, not at all," said the student, "but I understand what made you successful. For a long time you have had everything you could wish for, everything that a man living within the normal bounds of civil relations could have. You long to get out. The brook bores in its old bed, sometimes recklessly escapes its narrow banks.

The professor picked up his glass and handed it to Frank:

- Load up boy!

There was a certain solemnity in his trembling voice. "You are right: it is the blood. He drank and held out his hand to his nephew.

- Do you write to my mother the way I want you to?" asked Braun Frank.

- Yes, that's right!" said the old man.

- "Thank you, Uncle James!" said the student, accepting the outstretched hand. "And now, old Don Juan, go to the girls. They are pretty, aren't they, in their holy dresses?

- "Mm-hmm!" grumbled the uncle. "You seem to like them too?

Braun Frank laughed. - For me? Ah, my God! No. Uncle James, I am not your rival, today I am even higher: my ambition. Perhaps when I'm as old as you are! - But I'm no chastity-chaser either, and the two celebrating roses want nothing more than to be plucked. Someone will, and soon. Why not you? Hey, Olga, Frida! Come on over here!

But the girls didn't come; they retreated to Doctor Mohnen, who poured into their glasses and told them ambiguous stories.

As the princess approached, Braun Frank stood up and offered his seat.

- Stay, stay!" said the princess. "I haven't even spoken to you yet!

"Just a moment, Your Highness, I'm just going for a cigarette," said the student. And my uncle has been waiting all evening to compliment you.

The Privy Councillor was not happy at all; he would much rather have been sitting next to the little princess and now he had to entertain her mother.

Braun Frank stepped to the window. The magistrate led Mrs Marion to the piano. Mr Gontram sat down, turned in his piano chair and spoke:

- A little silence, please, Mrs Marion is going to sing!" and turning to his lady, "-What are you singing, madam? "Les Papillon" again, I suppose. Or perhaps "Il bacio" by Arditi? - Let's hear it!

The student looked at it. She was still beautiful, this old, blooming dame, and no one doubted the many adventures she had been told about. Europe

was once the most celebrated diva in the world. Now, for a quarter of a century, she has lived in her little town house, quiet and secluded... In the evenings she takes long walks in the garden and weeps for half an hour on the flowery grave of her little dog.

He sang. His gorgeous voice was long since broken, but his performance still had that rare old-school charm. The old winning smile played on her painted lips, her features under the thick powder tried an eternal pose of winning charm. His fat, greasy hands played with an ivory trowel, and his eyes, as of old, now spied pleasure from every corner.

Oh yes; Madame Marion's Blood de Blood was perfect for this house, like all the other guests. Braun Frank looked around. Here sat his dear uncle with the Princess, and behind them, leaning against the door, stood the lawyer Manasse and the Reverend Chaplain Schröder. This lean, tall, black Chaplain Schröder was the first wine expert along the Moselle and the Saar, he had the most extraordinary cellar and without him wine tasting was unimaginable in the countryside. He wrote an infinitely clever book on the complex philosophy of Plotinus and, at the same time, farces for the Paprikajan theatre in Cologne. A fervent particularist who hated Prussians, who, when he spoke of an emperor, always thought of Napoleon first, he travelled to Cologne on the fifth of May every year to attend the solemn mass in the Church of the Minorites in memory of the dead of the 'Grande Armée'.

Here sat the large, awkward Szaniszló Schacht, cand. phil. In his sixteenth semester, too lazy to rise from his chair. For years he had been living in a furnished room with the widow of Prof. Dr. v. Dollinger - where he had long since exercised the rights of landlord. Next to him sat the small, ugly, overweight widow, pouring more and more into her glass and putting larger and larger portions of cake on her plate. Her tenderness grew with each glass; her bony fingers lovingly stroked his huge butcher's knuckles.

He was assisted by Károly Mohnen, Doctor of Law and Philosophy. He was a schoolmate and good friend of Schacht, so he studied for as long as he did. But he always had to take exams and therefore always had to change his career; he was now a philosopher and was about to take his third exam. He had the appearance of a merchant's assistant, shy, abrupt and over-sensitive. In Frank Braun's opinion, he would sooner or later become a merchant. And then, in the confectionery business, where ladies were to be served, he was sure to make a fortune. He was always on the lookout for a good party, but -on the street. Under windows

he used to walk around and was very good at making friends. He was mainly attracted to travelling English ladies, but they - unfortunately - had no money.

Someone else was here, now chatting with the girls: a little hussar lieutenant with a black moustache: the young Count Geroldingen, who was behind the scenes at every theatre performance; he was very handsome, played the violin with talent, and was also the best racehorse in the regiment. Now he was telling Olga and Frida something about Beethoven, which bored them terribly, and which they only listened to because it was told by such a pretty little lieutenant.

Oh yes, they all fit, without exception. They had some gypsy blood in them - in their titles and ordos, their tonzuras and uniforms, their brilliances, their gold-rimmed spectacles and their bourgeois jobs. In a way, they were out of touch, they had strayed somewhere off the demarcated path of civic decency.

A roar interrupted Mrs Marion's singing. The Gontram children were barking at each other on the stairs; their mother went out to quiet them. Then the little Wolf screeched in the next room until the girls took him up to the attic. Cyklop went with them, and they both made their beds in the cramped pram.

And Mrs Marion started another song: she sang the "Shadow Dance" from Meyerbeer's *Dinorah*.

The princess was interested in the secret adviser's latest experiments. Could she come again sometime to see the famous frogs, lizards and pretty monkeys?

- Come and see the new roses and the large white camellias planted by your gardener in your little castle in Mehlem.

But the princess was more interested in frogs and monkeys than roses and camellias. So she talked about her experiments in germ cell transfer and artificial insemination. He said that he had a pretty little frog with two heads and another with fourteen eyes on its back. He explained how he cuts the chicken cells out of the tadpole and transfers them to the other individual. How the cells continue to develop in the new body and how they adapt into heads, tails, eyes and legs. He then talked about his experiments with monkeys, telling us that he had two great apes. The mother that nursed them is a virgin and has never seen a male monkey.

This was of most interest to the princess. She asked questions about every little thing, down to the smallest detail, explaining her procedure, translating Greek and Latin words she didn't understand into German. The secret councillor spouted out obscenities, accompanied by the appropriate paraphrases. The saliva dripped from the corner of his mouth and ran down his big, thick lower lip. He enjoyed the amusement of his piggy chatter and listened lustily to the music of his impertinent words. He interspersed "your majesty" with the most obnoxious of words and sipped the titillation of the antithesis with delight.

And the princess took his word for it, red-faced, agitated, almost shivering, and soaking up with every pore the brothel mosquitoes the secret councillor had made with little scientific flags.

- "Do you only impregnate monkeys, Mr. Privy Councillor?" he asked, holding his breath.

- No, rats and guinea pigs too. Would your majesty look at him once, when he -He spoke in a hushed voice, almost hissing.

- Yes, yes!" cried the princess. "I'll see! I'd love to, I'd love to! When can I come? And she added, with ill-mannered dignity, "Because, you know, Mr. Privy Councillor, nothing interests me so much as medical science. I think I would have made a very good doctor.

The man looked at her with a broad grin. "Majesty, no doubt!" And he thought to himself: "But a much better brothel-mama. The fish was already in her net. She began to talk again of her roses and camellias and her little castle in Rhineland. It's a big burden for her, she only took it on as a favour. If only his majesty had made up his mind...

Princess Wolkonski did not hesitate for a moment. Yes, Privy Councillor, of course I will buy the castle! Braun Frank was passing by, the princess saw him and shouted: My student! My student! Come here! Her uncle had promised to show her his experiments - isn't that charming? Have you seen them?

- No! - Braun Frank said. - I'm not interested in them. He turned away, but the princess grabbed his arm.

- Give me, give me a cigarette! And yes, - a glass of champagne, please.

A hot tremor prickled him, sweat beaded on his flesh. His violent instincts, whipped up by the old man's impertinent speech, sought a vent, and their broad waves broke upon the young child.

- "Tell me, my student," she panted, her huge breasts almost bursting the corset, "do you think, Mr. Privy Councillor, that you could transfer your science and experiments in artificial insemination - to human beings?"

He knew very well that he couldn't, but he had to keep the conversation going, keep it going at all costs. And with this young, fresh, pretty student.

Braun Frank laughed; his instinct was to laugh.

- Of course, your Highness!" he said lightly. That's just what uncle is doing now - he has discovered a new cunning procedure; the poor woman knows nothing about it, until one fine day she feels that she is in a blessed state - and has been for four or five months!

- Beware of the Privy Councillor, your Highness, who knows if he is not already -

- "For heaven's sake!" cried the princess. "It would be unpleasant, wouldn't it?"

Especially if you have had no enjoyment from it!

Ropp! Something fell off the wall and right onto the head of the maid. The girl cried out sharply and dropped the silver tray on which she was serving coffee in fright.

- "What a pity for the beautiful Sévres!" said Mrs Gontram indifferently.

Dr Mohnen immediately took the maid under his wing. He cut off a lock of her hair, washed the area around the gaping wound and stopped the bleeding with a yellow iron chloride cotton wool. He also made a point of slapping the pretty girl's face and stealthily touching her firm breasts. He also gave her wine and whispered in her ear.

The lieutenant knight bent down and picked up the troublemaker. He lifted it high and looked at it from all sides.

Various strange objects hung on the wall. An idol of a Kanak, half man, half woman, with blue and red lines painted on the back of his head, A pair of old, shapeless, heavy riding boots with huge Spanish spurs. Various rusty weapons, one of old Gontram's medical diplomas, printed on grey silk, from the Jesuit college of Seville. There hung a

a beautiful ivory crucifix inlaid with gold; there hung a heavy Buddhist reader of large green jadeite stones.

The splintered thing was hanging over the top; you could see where it was, the wide tear in the wallpaper where the nail had torn up the dusty plaster. It was a brown, dusty thing, made of root-wood and hard as stone; it looked like a wrinkled old man.

- "Ah, our little Alraun!" said Mrs. Gontram. "Good thing it fell on Zsófi: she has a hard skull! Little Wolf would certainly have had her soft little head bashed in. He's a hateful man! 'He has been in our family for hundreds of years,' explained the magistrate. 'He did a similar stupid thing once before: one night he jumped on his head,' said my grandfather.

- What is this actually? And what is it for?" asked the lieutenant.

- "It brings luck to the house!" he said. Mr. Gontram. - So says an old saying. -Manasse will tell you. - Come on, colleague, Mr. polyhistor! - What's the Alraune saying? - Grind it down!

But he didn't want to tell the little lawyer. - What, everyone knows him!

- "Nobody knows you, Mr. lawyer," said the lieutenant. "Nobody, you overestimate the education of people today.

- "I myself have long been curious to know the true meaning of the odious beast.

Manasse started. He spoke dryly, professionally, as if he were reading an extract from a book. He did not get carried away, his voice barely rising. In his right hand, like a conductor's baton, the rootstock swung up and down.

- Mandrake, Mandrake, Mandragora - also called Mandragola - Mandragora officinarum. A plant of the solanaceae family, found in the Mediterranean basin, south-eastern Europe and Asia to the Himalayas. Its leaves and flowers contain an anaesthetic, which in the past was often used as an anaesthetic and was even used in operations at the Salerno Medical College. Its leaves were smoked instead of tobacco and its fruit was used to make a love potion. It was said to stimulate lust and to make the ingester fertile. Even Jacob used it to make Jacob's flock of Laban giddy. The Pentateuch calls the plant "dudaim". But in the saga, the root plays the main role: it is for an old man or woman.

is mentioned by Pythagoras; in his time it was believed that it could be used to make oneself invisible, and was also used as a magic potion, or vice versa: as a talisman against enchantment. The German Alraune-monda developed in the early Middle Ages, during the Crusades. The seed, hanged naked at the crossroads by a malefactor, falls off the moment his neck is broken, is planted in the ground and fertilised. From it develops the little man or woman - Alraune. They went out at night to dig it up; at twelve o'clock on the dot the spade had to be sunk into the base of the gallows. He was wise who stuffed his ears with cotton wool and fine wax, for the little man, bursting out of the ground, gave such a terrible howl that he fell down with fright - Shakespeare still speaks of it. Then they took it home and carefully preserved the root; at every meal they brought it to the table to eat, and on Saturdays they washed it with wine. It brought good luck in fights and war, was an amulet against witchcraft and brought wealth to the house. It made its owner patient. It was also used for divination. It brought love charms to women, made them fertile and eased their sickness. It also caused trouble and bitterness. It brought misfortune to the other occupants of the house, inciting its owner to miserliness, fornication and other vices. In the end, he ruined it and sent it to hell. Despite this, the Alrauns were still very popular, traded and sold at a high price. Wallenstein is said to have carried Alraune with him at all times; the same is said of Henry VIII, the matchmaking king of England.

The lawyer fell silent and threw the hard piece of wood on the table.

- "Very interesting, very interesting indeed!" cried Count Geroldingen. "I am much obliged to you for your little lecture, Counselor.

Madame Marion, on the other hand, said that she would not tolerate such things in her house for a minute. And she looked with frightened, superstitious eyes at the stiff, skeletal face of Madame Gontram.

Braun Frank quickly approached the Privy Councillor. His eyes shone. Excitedly, he grabbed the old man by the shoulder. "Uncle James," he whispered, "Uncle James!

- So what's new, son?" asked the professor. He got up and followed his nephew to the window.

- Uncle James! - repeated the student - that's it! You have to do this! It's worth more than silly jokes with frogs, monkeys and children. Go on, James.

Uncle. Step into the new path, where no man has gone before you!" his voice trembled, and he puffed the smoke of his cigarette with nervous eagerness.

- "I don't understand you," said the old man.

- Oh, you must understand, Uncle James! Did you not hear what Manasseh told you? - *Create an Alraune, a living one, of flesh and blood! You can do it; uncle, you alone can do it, no one else in the world!*

The Privy Councillor looked at him hesitantly, questioningly. There was such conviction in the student's voice, such a strength of faith, that he was startled against his will.

- "Explain yourself more clearly, Frank," he said. "I really don't know what you want.

His nephew shook his head violently. Suddenly he turned away, stepped over to Vilmik, who was carrying coffee around, took a quick sip of one cup, then another.

- Sophie, the other girl, has escaped from her comforter.

Doctor Mohnen was running back and forth, like a cow's tail when the flies were on it. He still had a sense of the need to work in his fingers. He took little Alraune in his hand, rubbed her with a large napkin, wiped the dust off. He hardly used anything: he hadn't cleaned it for centuries, the little Alraune soiled one napkin after another, but he himself was no cleaner. Then the industrious doctor caught him, waved him over, and with a deft swing threw him into the big bowlless bowl.

- "So, little Alraune!" he cried. "They care little for you in this house. You must be thirsty.

Then, standing on a chair, he made a long solemn speech to the two virgins in white. "May they always be so," he concluded, "I wish it with all my heart!

He lied; he did not wish to. Nobody wished it, least of all the two young ladies. Yet they clapped with the others, complimented and thanked the welcome.

Chaplain Schröder, who was standing next to the justice councillor, rudely scolded him that the deadline for the entry into force of the new civil code

is getting closer. In less than ten years, Code Napoleon will cease to exist. And the law will be the same on the banks of the Rhine as it is in Prussia. Unbelievable!

- "Yes," sighed the judicial councillor, "and the work! How much we have to learn again. As if we had not enough to do. "He was basically quite indifferent: he would be as little concerned with reading the civil code as he was with studying Rhenish law. Thank God, he had passed his exams.

The princess has offered herself. He took Mrs. Marion with him in his car. Olga stayed with her friend again. The others said their good-byes and left one by one.

- Are you not going, Uncle James?" asked the student.

- I have to wait - my car's not here yet. But you must come immediately.

Braun Frank looked out of the window. Despite being forty years old, little Mrs Dollinger was running down the stairs into the garden, as nimble as a squirrel. She tripped, leapt up again, ran to the thick beech tree, hugged the trunk with her arms and legs. Drunk with wine and lust, he kissed the trunk with hot, kissing lips. Schacht Sanislo plucked it off like a clinging insect, not roughly, but hard. He was still sober, though he had drunk a lot of wine. The woman screamed, breathing hard, not wanting to part with the smooth trunk. But he lifted her up and took her in his arms. Now the woman knew him, tore off his hat, kissed his bald head, shouting loudly, wildly -

The professor also stood up.

- "I have a request," he said to the magistrate. "Can you give me this man who caused this misfortune?"

- "Of course we will, Mr. Privy Councillor, just take the commissariat!" said Mrs. Gontram in her husband's place.

He reached into the bowl and pulled out the root beer. The hard wood hit the edge of the bowl. There was a sharp clink and the magnificent old crystal cracked and shattered along its length, shattering into shards and spilling its sweet contents all over the table and floor.

- 'Holy mother of God!' cried Mrs Gontram. 'It's really good to get this naughty thing out of the house at last!

CHAPTER THREE

Which tells us how Frank Braun persuaded the Privy Councillor to create his alraune

Professor ten Brinken and his nephew sat silently in the car. Braun Frank sat back, staring into space and deep in thought. The Privy Councillor watched him calmly and gestured expectantly in his direction.

The journey took less than half an hour. The car rolled down the highway, then turned right and crashed on Lendenich's bumpy pavement. In the middle of the village lay the ancient nest of the Brinkenes, a vast rectangular garden and park complex with unremarkable old buildings overlooking the street. They rounded the corner, past the village's patron saint, St Nepomuk, whose statue, decorated with flowers and two everlasting memorials, was built into a corner recess of the manor house. The horses stopped; a servant unlocked the gate and opened the carriage door..

- 'Get some wine, Alajos,' ordered the Privy Councillor, 'we're going to the library. And turning to his nephew: - Are you sleeping here, Frank? Or should the coachman wait for you?

The student shook his head.

- No. I'm walking back to town.

Crossing the courtyard, they entered the right side of the long low house. In fact, the whole house was one huge hall, with a tiny entrance hall and a few small side rooms. On the walls were huge shelves, densely packed with thousands of volumes. Here and there were low glass cabinets, crammed with the results of Roman excavations; many tombs had been emptied, robbed for their treasured treasures. The floors were covered with large carpets. Around it were desks, chairs, and cushions.

Entering, the Privy Councillor threw Alraune on the couch. They lit the candles, pushed two chairs together and sat down. The servant opened the dusty bottle.

- "You may go," said the master, "but don't lie down; the young man is going away, and you must lock the gate.

Then he turned to his nephew:

- No?

Brown Frank ivott. He was playing with the root beer, which was still a little wet and looked almost homeless.

You can see it quite clearly, these are his two eyes," he murmured, "this is his protruding nose, this is his mouth opening. Look, Uncle James, doesn't it look like he's grinning? His claws are a little curved and his legs are grown together to the knees. He lifted her up and turned her round. This is your new home. Here, in the house of Mr. James ten Brinken, you will fit in much better than in the Gontram house.

You are old," he continued, "four hundred, maybe six hundred years old, or more. Your father was hanged because he was a murderer, or a hangman, or because he carved a mockery of a great lord in armour or a ring. Whatever his crime, he was guilty in his time and hanged. And he vomited the rest of his life into the ground and begot thee, strange beast. And our Mother Earth received this farewell of the sinner into her fruitful bosom, and with a mysterious labour, He, the Mighty, the Almighty, gave birth to you, wretched, ugly human! And trembling with fear, they dug out by night on the crossroads, with a howling shrieking exorcism. And when first thou saw'st the moonlight, thou saw'st thy father hanging on the gallows: his broken bones, his rotting flesh. And those who hanged your father were taken with you. They grabbed you, dragged you home to bring you luck in their house! Yellow gold, young love. They knew you'd bring misery, miserable despair and ugly death. They knew it well - yet they dug it up, yet they took it with them; For love and gold they gave all they had willingly.

- "You have an interesting way of looking at things, my son," said the Privy Councillor.

- Yes," said the student, "I am. I am - just like you.

- "Like me?" laughed the professor. "I think my life has been quite realistic. His nephew shook his head:

- No, Uncle James, that is not so. You call realistic what others consider fantastic. Think of your experiments! For you, it's more

mean at play; paths that may once have led to some goal. A normal person would never have had such thoughts, only a phantasmagoric one. Only a wild skull, a man with hot blood in his veins like yours, the Brinkens, only such a man could do what you must do now, Uncle James.

The old man interrupted the flattering words with annoyance.

- And you don't know whether I am in the mood for the mysterious deed of which you speak, and of which I have no idea even now.

But the student would not budge; his voice rang clear, confident, convincing in every little syllable.

- You'll do it, Uncle James. I know you will. You will do it because no one else can, because you are the only person in the world who can do it. Surely there are some other scientists doing the same experiments you started, who are right there, maybe even further along than you. But they are normal people, cold, dispassionate men of science. They would laugh at me, call me a fool, if I went to them with my ideas. They might even throw me out of the door if I dared to approach them with similar things - thoughts they would call immoral, unacceptable. Ideas that interfere with the creator's craft, that defy all of nature. Not you, Uncle James, not you! You will not laugh at me, you will not throw me out the door. You will be stimulated, as I am stimulated: that is why you are the only one who can do it.

- "But what, for God's sake?" cried the Privy Councillor.

The student rose and filled the glasses to the brim. "Toast, old wizard," he said, "toast! Let new wine flow from the old hose. He toasted his uncle, emptied his glass in a single gulp and threw it to the ceiling. There was a clatter above, but the pots fell soundlessly to the heavy carpet.

He pushed his chair closer.

- And now listen, uncle, how I think. My long introduction must have made you impatient - don't take it badly. It was a good way of making the idea c l e a r , understandable and tangible. Here it is

I'll put it into words: create a Mandrake, Uncle James, make the old saying come true. What does it matter if it's superstition, medieval madness, mystic prattle. You, you make the old lie true. You create it: here it will stand, clear in the light of day, tangible for all the world to see - not the dumbest professor can deny it. You'll soon find the culprit, uncle. I suppose it's not important that he should die on the gallows and at the crossroads. We are advanced men; the prison yard and the guillotine are more comfortable. It's more convenient for you too: thanks to your good connections, you can easily get it out to obtain the rare substance with which to snatch new life from death. The earth? Understand the symbol, uncle, the earth: fertility. The earth is the woman, nurturing the seed that was entrusted to her womb. It nourishes, it germinates, it grows, it flowers, it bears fruit. Take then - she who is fruitful as the earth herself - take the woman. The earth is a perpetual whore, she is at the service of all. Eternal mother, ever the handmaiden of endless billions. She denies no one her luscious body, she gives to all who want her. Her joyful lap has fertilized all life for millennia. And that's why you must choose a concubine, Uncle James. Take the most immodest, the most shameful of them all, the one born to be a slut. Not one who plies her trade out of necessity, one who is seduced into bed. Oh no, not that! Thou shalt take one that was a lecher when she learned to walk, whose joy and whole life is shame. Take such a one. This one's lap shall be as the earth. Thou art rich - thou shalt find it. You are not a schoolboy in such things: you give him much money, you buy him for your experiment. When you find the right one, he'll shake with laughter, squeeze you to his fat breast and kiss you with delight. Because you're offering something no man has ever offered before! What comes next, you know better than I What you did with monkeys and guinea pigs, you can surely do with men. The main thing is to be on your guard for the moment your killer's head drops into the bag, cursing!

He jumped up, leaned across the table and looked at the old man with stiff, penetrating eyes. The Privy Councillor caught his gaze and stood stunned. Like a blurred Turkish handbag crossed with a flexible fencing blade.

- And then, my brother? And then what? When the child is born?

What will happen? The student hesitated; slowly, one by one, he let out his words.

- Then... magic-beings... will... be... between... our... hands... - His voice vibrated low, supple, vibrating like a string.

truth from ancient history. We can look into the bowels of nature.

The Privy Councillor opened his mouth, but Braun Frank cut in before he could speak.

- Then you can see if there is a mysterious something stronger than the known laws. You wonder if we are worth living this life for.

- What?" repeated the professor.

Yes. Uncle James, eh! You and I and the few hundred people who are - above life and yet forced to walk the same path the herd is taking. "Uncle James, do you believe in God?" he burst out suddenly, without a transition.

The Privy Councillor pursed his lips anxiously.

- Do I believe in God? Why is that relevant?

But Braun Frank rushed the answer, giving no time for reflection:

- "Answer me, Uncle James, answer me: do you believe in God?" he leaned close to the old man, holding him with his eyes.

- "What do you care, boy?" said the Privy Councillor. "With my mind, after what I've seen, I don't believe anything. My feelings I do - though feelings are something so uncontrollable, so -

- Well, well, uncle, - cried the student with your feelings, so yes?

The professor was still defensive, shifting back and forth in his chair. Well - to be honest - sometimes - quite rarely - at long intervals -

- You believe - you believe in God!!!" cried Braun Frank. The Brinkens all believed, all believed, down to you. Then you will do it, Uncle James. You must do it, nothing can save you from him now. For out of millions and millions of men, to you alone is given: *the chance - to tempt God! If your god lives, he must answer your daring question!*

He fell silent and paced up and down the long hall with long strides. Then he took up his hat and came to the old man.

- Good night, Uncle James!" he said. - Will you do it? He held out his hand. The old man did not notice. He was staring at himself, brooding.

- "I - I don't know," he said at last.

Braun Frank picked up the little Alraune from the table and slipped it into the old man's hand. His voice was mocking and haughty.

- Talk to him about it!

But immediately his tone changed:

I know, oh I know you will," he said quietly. He hurried towards the door. He stopped, turned and went back.

- One more, Uncle James! If you do -

- "I don't know if I will!" the Privy Councillor snapped.

- "Fine," said the student. Just in case you do - promise me something.

- What?" the professor asked.

- How dare you not invite the princess to watch!

- Why?" asked the Privy Councillor.

Braun Frank spoke softly and very seriously:

- Because - this thing - is

sacred. And then he left.

He left the house, crossed the yard. The servant opened the gate and creaked it shut behind him. Braun Frank stepped out into the street. He stopped in front of the statue of the saint and surveyed it with a scrutinizing gaze.

- They bring you flowers, O dear saint, and fresh oil for your lamps. But it is not this house that cares for thee, which has given thee shelter, here they value thee at best as an antique. Thou art fortunate that the people still trust in thy power.

And he hummed softly:

"John Nepomuk, Father of the Floods Guard my house! Keep it from flooding Let the foam rise elsewhere John Nepomukis Protect my house."

This village is easy to protect from flooding, O old idol, as it lies three quarters of an hour from the Rhine. And the Rhine is well regulated and flows between stone banks. But save, pious Nepomuk, this house from the harm that is about to fall upon it! Behold, I love thee, saint, for thou art the patron saint of my mother, whom Joan Nepomucena-

they called me Hubertina - and Hubertina, so that the mad dog wouldn't bite him. She was born in this house on the day dedicated to your memory, remember? That's why he was baptised in your name, John Nepomuk! I love him, my saint, so I admonish you - for him.

A new saint has come into this house tonight, you know - a very ungodly saint. He is a little man, not of stone like you, not clothed in fine folds like you - only of wood, and woefully naked. But he is old, perhaps even older than you, and they say he has wonderful powers. Try it, St. Nepomuk, bear witness to your power. One of the two of you must fall, either you or the man: let it be decided who is master of the house of Brinken. Then, my saint, show me what you know.

Braun Frank said hello and made the sign of the cross. Kurtán laughed and walked down the street with quick steps. When he reached the fields, he sucked in the fresh night air with his lungs full and strode towards the city. He slowed his steps under the blossoming chestnut trees in the alley.

Dreamily, he wandered on, humming quietly.

He stopped suddenly, hesitated for a moment and changed direction. He turned left onto the wide road leading to the nursery. He threw himself over the low wall and jumped down the other side. He ran across the silent garden towards a large red fork.

He stopped, looked up and pursed his lips into a whistle. His short, harsh whistle pierced the night. Three whistles in quick succession.

Somewhere a dog whimpered. A window slowly opened above his head and a blonde woman in a white nightgown leaned out.

- Is that you?" he whispered.

- Yes, yes!" he said.

The woman went into the room and came straight back. She dropped something in her handkerchief.

- Here's the key, darling! - But be quiet, very quiet! Don't wake the parents.

Braun Frank lifted the key and went up the small marble stairs. He locked the door and entered. And as he trudged up the dark stairs, his young lips hummed softly and quietly:

"John Nepomuk, father of floods, Save me from love! Give me rest from it, Give it to others. John Nepomuk, save me from Love!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Which tells the story of how his mother was found asleep

Up in the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein sat Braun Frank, two months old and three months to go. He had to spend the whole summer there. All because he and his opponent had each shot a hole in the air.

He was bored. He sat at his coffee in the well, which overlooked the Rhine from the steep cliff. He dangled his legs, stared at the sky and yawned. So did the three companions with whom he sat; none of them spoke.

They wore yellow canvas jackets obtained from soldiers. They had a huge black number painted on their backs, their cell number. Two, fourteen and six were there. Braun Frank wore the number seven.

A group of strangers arrived, English men and women, escorted by a sub-officer of the guard. He showed me the poor prisoners, who sat gloomily with large numbers on their backs. They felt sorry for them and, with exclamations of "ah" and "oh", asked the non-commissioned officer if they could not give the wretches a present. Strictly forbidden, said the guard, it would be a nuisance if they saw them. But he good-naturedly turned away and explained the country to the gentlemen. There lies Coblenz, behind it Neuwied, and there, down by the Rhine -

Meanwhile, the ladies have arrived. The poor prisoners put their hands behind their backs. Pieces of money, cigarettes, tobacco fell into the palms held under the fat numbers, and sometimes a card with an address written on it.

- This joke was invented and introduced by Frank Braun.

- "It was a humiliating thing to do," said Captain Baron Flechtheim, fourteen.

- "It would only be humiliating for us to think of ourselves as so distinguished; we give everything to the non-commissioned officers and keep nothing for ourselves. Damned English cigarettes, if only they weren't so perfumed!" he looked at his booty. Another one.

font! It will please the Petty Officer. And today, by God, I could use it!

- How much did you lose yesterday?" asked number two. Braun Frank chuckled.

- How much? All my money that came in yesterday. Plus a few thousand marks on my word of honour. Take the hangman's money!

- I've played my part," sighed the sixth, a young ensign, a child, with a face like a rose dipped in milk.

- So what do you think, we were different?" the fourteen-year-old snapped at him.

- To think that the three bums are spending our money in Paris!

- How long do you think they will be delayed?

- "Three days, by my estimate," said Dr. Klaverjahn, ship's surgeon and second castle keeper, "They cannot stay any longer, for their absence will be noticed. And the money won't last any longer than that.

It was about four, five and twelve. The night before, they had won big and had crawled down the hill early in the morning to catch the first train to Paris. To get some fresh air, as they said in the castle.

- What are we going to do on Sunday afternoon?" asked the fourteen-year-old.

- "Force your stupid skull," said Braun Frank to the captain. He jumped off the well and headed through the barracks yard into the officers' garden. He was in a gloomy mood. He whistled loudly.

It was not the loss that hurt him - it happened to him often, and it didn't hit him. It was the miserable life up here, the unbearable sameness. The rules of the castle were mild enough, and there was not one of them that the prisoners did not violate hourly. They had their own casino, with piano and harmonium; they circulated two dozen newspapers. Each kept his own bachelor. Their cell, for which they paid a penny a day to the state, was a vast room, almost a hall. Their food was brought from the best inn in town, and their wine cellar was in the finest order. The only objection was that the door of the room could not be locked from the inside. On this one point the command was extremely strict. Ever since a suicide, any attempt to install a lock was nipped in the bud,

thought Braun Frank. As if you can't kill yourself without a lock!

The missing lock was a constant torment, and spoiled all the joy of being here. It was impossible to be alone. He fortified the door with ropes and chains, put his bed and all his furniture in front of it. It was no use. After a few hours' struggle, everything was smashed and smashed, and yet the whole party triumphantly remained in their room.

Oh, the company! - Individually, innocent, nice, good-natured fellows, with whom you could talk for half an hour, but together they were unbearable. It was the lifestyle that ruined them, a nasty mixture of student and soldier life, interspersed with some strange castle follies. They sang, drank, played day after day, night after night. In between, a few girls to be carried up, a few trips into town - these were the exploits.

That's all they talked about.

Those who were in the castle the longest were the worst. Dr. Bermüller, who shot his brother-in-law and had been up here for two years, and his neighbour Count von Vallendar, a dragoon officer, who had enjoyed the good air of the castle for half a year longer. The newcomers, it took them less than a week, were like the others. He who was the most vain and the most insane among them had the greatest authority.

Braun Frank was like that. On the second day he closed the piano because he didn't want to listen to the Captain's "Frühlingslied" any longer. He threw the key from the castle bastion. He took his pistols with him and shot all day long. He could drink and swear as well as anyone up here.

He was looking forward to spending the summer months in the fortress. He carried up a great pile of books; new pens and clean paper. He thought he could work, glad that loneliness would force him to.

But he never looked at his books, never even wrote a letter. He was caught up in the wild, childish bustle, which disgusted him, and yet in which he was thoroughly involved day by day. He hated his fellows, all of them.

His servant followed him into the garden.

- Doctor, a letter, - he saluted.

- Letter? Sunday afternoon? He took it from the soldier's hand. It was an express letter sent afterwards. He recognized his uncle's thin features. Did he write? What did he want? He weighed the letter in the palm of his hand - ah, he would have liked to send it back with the addressee's refusal to accept it. What has he to do with this old professor?!

The last time he saw her was after a party at the Gontrams', when he drove her to Lendenich to persuade her to create an Alraune. It had been two years.

Oh, how far away it all is!

He enrolled at another university, passed his exams on time. Then he went to work as a paralegal in a nest in Lotharingia. Worked? Of course not! He continued the life he had led at the college.

Women and all those who liked the easy life were welcome. But his bosses could not have liked him. True, he worked now and then - but only when he thought it worthwhile. And it was always something his bosses said was a disgraceful swindle.

Whenever he could, he would sneak off and travel to Paris. He felt more at home on the Butte Sacrée than on the tribunal. You didn't know where it would all lead.

He will certainly not be a lawyer, a judge or any other official. But what else can you foresee? He lived without purpose and ran up debts -

He still had the letter in his hand, and although he was curious about it, he wanted to send it back as it was. As a belated reply to the other letter his uncle had addressed to him two years before.

It was shortly after that particular night. On his return from an excursion to the Seven Hills, he was riding through the village with five friends at midnight, and suddenly on a whim invited the students to dinner at the ten Brinken house.

They tore the bell down, shouting, banging on the wrought iron gate. They made such a hellish racket that the whole village was in a huddle. The Privy Councillor was not at home, and the butler Braun Frank let them in on orders. The horses were led to the stables and Braun Frank woke the servant. He had a great feast prepared and brought up the finest wine from his uncle's cellar. They feasted, they ate, they drank, they sang, they made noise in the house and in the garden; they clamoured, they shouted, they destroyed everything they could get their hands on.

It was only the next morning that they rode home, sheepish and whinnying, some clinging to their horses like wild cowboys, others like ragged flour sacks.

- The young gentlemen were behaving like pigs, Alajos reported to the Privy Councillor. For this the professor would not have wasted a word; it was not that which annoyed him. But on the glass stools lay the rare apples, peaches and pears from his glass-houses, bald peaches, fresh as dew. Noble fruits produced with endless toil. First fruits of young trees, in cotton wool, on golden plates, to ripen. But the students, showing no mercy to the professor's weakness, fell on the fruit without mercy. They bit into them, and then, because they were half-ripe, they left them. This angered the Privy Councillor.

He wrote a bitter letter to his nephew, asking him to never cross the threshold of his house again. Braun Frank was deeply offended by the letter, the reasons for which he found wretchedly petty.

Oh, if the letter he had in his hand had reached the place where it was addressed, Metz or Montmartre, he would have returned it without a moment's hesitation.

But here - here - in the terrible boredom of captivity?

Determined. - A change, anyway," he murmured and opened the letter. His uncle told him that, after mature consideration, he was willing to do what his brother had urged him to do. He already had a suitable father figure. Noerissen's petition for a retrial had been rejected, and there was no reason to believe that the pardon would be successful. He is now looking for a mother. He has tried a few places, but without success; it seems that it is not so easy to find the right one. Time passes, and now he asks his nephew if he is willing to support him in this matter.

Frank Braun looked at his crewman with a stare.

- Is the letter carrier still here?" he asked.

- "Yes, Doctor," the soldier reported.

- Tell him to wait. Here, give him a tip! - He searched his pockets, finally found a single. With the letter in his hand, he hurried back to the prison.

He had barely reached the barracks yard when the sergeant's wife came across the street with the telegram carrier.

- A telegram has arrived!" cried the woman.

It was sent by Dr Petersen, the assistant to the Privy Councillor. It read.

Is an urgent response coming? You are welcome.

Your Excellency? So the uncle has become a Pardoner. And that's why he was in Berlin. What a pity he was in Berlin. He could have gone to Paris, where it would have been much easier to find a woman...

Anyway, Berlin it is. At least it interrupts the bleak life. He thought for a moment. He could do it, tonight. But he hasn't a penny. And his friends have nothing either.

He looked at her.

- "Listen, Madam Sergeant," he began. But no, not that; it may be. "Tip this man and put it on my account.

She went to her room, packed her handbag, ordered her boyfriend to take her to the station immediately and wait for her. Then he went downstairs.

The prison sergeant was standing in the doorway, wringing his hands, almost beside himself. "Do you want to travel too, doctor?" he whined. Three gentlemen have already left - for Paris, abroad! My God, this can't end well! I'll pay for it - I'll take the responsibility.

- "No, it's not so dangerous," said Frank Braun, "I'm only going away for a few days, and the gentlemen will be here by then.

The sergeant continued to complain:

- Because I don't mind. I won't say a word! But the others are all so jealous of me. And Sergeant Becker is on guard duty today, and he -

Who keeps his mouth shut! We've just given you more than thirty marks - as a charitable donation from the English ladies - Otherwise I'm going to Coblenz to headquarters to ask for leave. - Are you satisfied now?

But the inspector was not at all pleased. - What? To headquarters? But doctor, you're not allowed to go down to the city. You want to go to headquarters?

Braun Frank laughed: - Yes, just about there! I'm going to have to cut the commander to pay for his travel expenses.

The sergeant fell silent, standing still, his mouth agape, as if staring at the stone.

- 'George,' said Frank Braun to his bachelor, 'give me ten pfennigs for bridge money.'

He took the coin. He crossed the courtyard with quick steps. He went to the officers' garden, and from there to the glacis. He swung himself up the wall, clung to the branch of a huge ash tree on the other side and slid down its trunk. Crossing the dense thicket, he descended the huge boulders.

He was down in 20 minutes. This was the road they used to take on their nightly wanderings.

He followed the Rhine to the bridge and crossed it to Coblenz. At headquarters he found out where the General lived and hurried there. He gave his card and said he was looking for him on a matter of great urgency.

The General, with his card in his hand, received him.

- What can I do for you?

- Allow me, Your Grace, I am a prisoner in the castle.

The old general scrutinised him resentfully, clearly annoyed at being disturbed.

- What do you want? - How will you get down to the city? Do you have a permit?

- Yes, Your Excellency, church leave. - He lied, but he knew very well that the General only wanted an answer. I want to go to Berlin. My uncle is dying.

The commander jumped up:

- What do I have to do with your uncle? There's no way I'm letting you go! You're not sitting up here to have fun, you're sitting up here because you broke the law of the land, you understand? You can all come with your dying uncle and aunt. If it's not a question of parents, I'll deny you any such freedom on principle.

- Thank you very much, Your Grace. I will immediately send word to my uncle, Professor ten Brinken, a veritable Privy Councillor, that his only nephew, unfortunately, has not been allowed to hurry to his deathbed and close his tired eyes.

He bowed, turned towards the door. But the General held him back, as he had calculated.

- Who is your uncle?" he asked hesitantly.

Braun Frank repeated the name and the beautiful address, took the telegram from his pocket and handed it over.

- My poor uncle in Berlin resorted to surgery as a last resort, which, unfortunately, was very unfortunate.

- "Hm", the commander hummed, "Travel, my young friend, travel at once. There may still be help.

- 'God help us,' said Braun Frank, with a sad face. 'If my prayers would help.' After a pretty sigh, he continued. 'Thank you very much, your grace. I have one more request.

The commander handed back the telegram and asked:

- What?

- 'I have no travelling expenses,' burst out Frank Braun. 'I would ask my lord to lend me three hundred marks.

The General looked at him with distrust:

- You have no money - hm - so - you have no money? But yesterday was the first of the month. Your money hasn't arrived, has it?

- "My money arrived exactly, Your Excellency," he replied quickly, "but I spent the night just as exactly!

The old commander laughed:

- Of course, of course, punishment for your sin, you villain! So you need three hundred marks?

- Yes, Your Grace! My uncle will be glad to hear that your Excellency has pulled me out of the seaweed.

The General turned, went to the iron cabinet, opened it and took three banknotes from a small cash box. He gave the prisoner a pen and paper, and made him sign an IOU; then he handed over the money. Braun Frank accepted it with a slight bow.

- Thank you very much, Your Excellency. - You're welcome. Have a safe journey.
Come back exactly. And give my regards to His Excellency.

One last bow and Braun Frank was out. He made the six steps in one leap

el. He had to pull himself together not to cheer loudly.

- He waved to a coachman and drove to Ehrenbreitstein, the station.

After scrolling through the timetable, he learned that he still had three hours to wait. He ordered his bachelor, who was looking after his bag, to run quickly up to the castle and send Ensign von Plessen down to the Red Rooster.

- "But send him, George, and no one else!" he said. "The young gentleman who has just come. He has a number six on his back. Stop! He threw him a ten marker.

He went to the wine bar and after a long selection, ordered an excellent dinner. He sat by the window and watched the Sunday citizens strolling along the banks of the Rhine.

Finally, the ensign arrived: - Well, what's new?

- Sit down," said Braun Frank. "Shut your mouth. Don't ask any questions. Eat, drink, have fun. - He handed him a hundred marker. - You pay the bill. The rest is yours. And tell them I went to Berlin - *with permission!* But I'll probably stay longer and not return until the end of the week.

The blond ensign stared at him with a rueful dreamy expression.

- Tell me - how did you do that?

- A secret," said Braun Frank, "but it wouldn't do you much good if I told you. A trap like this is a trap into which even the most benevolent of merciful men fall only once. Cheers.

The ensign walked him to the train, helped him with his bag and waved goodbye with his hat and handkerchief. Frank Braun stepped back from the window and at that moment forgot the ensign, all his fellow prisoners, the whole castle. He spoke to the conductor and stretched himself out comfortably in his semi-dome. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

The guide shook him thoroughly until he woke up.

- Where are we?" he asked dreamily.

- Right at Friedrichstrasse station.

He packed his things, got out and drove to the hotel. He got a room, took a bath and changed his clothes. Then he went down to the breakfast room.

At the door, Dr Petersen hurried to meet him.

- "Ah, you are here, my dear doctor!" he cried. "How happy your Excellency will be! Your Grace! Again, your Grace! Those three "e"s" hurt his ears.

- "How is my uncle?" she asked.

- Better? What do you mean, better? His Excellency is not ill!

- Like this? Not sick? Too bad. I thought he was dying. Dr Petersen stared at him dumbly: - I don't understand you -

- It is not necessary. I am truly sorry that the Privy Councillor is not dying. It wouldn't be bad! I'd inherit, wouldn't I? Assuming he didn't cut me out of the inheritance. Which is also possible, and very likely. He looked at the doctor, who stood before him, stunned, and for a moment he was delighted at his embarrassment.

- But tell me, doctor," he continued, "how long has my uncle been a pious man?

- Four days ago, on the occasion -

Braun Frank interrupted: - So it's been four days! And how long have you been with him, like - like his right hand?

- Maybe about ten years ago.

For ten years you have always called him "Privy Councillor" and "you", and now in four days you have become so excellency that you cannot imagine him as anything but "excited"?

- "Excuse me, doctor," said the assistant, surprised and confused, "I'm sorry, what do you mean?

Frank Braun reached in and led him to the table.

- Oh, what I mean, Doctor, is that you are a man of the world, where form and manner are important. You have an innate instinct for real culture.

- That's what I mean. - And now let's have breakfast, Doctor, and tell me what you've done in the meantime.

Dr Petersen settled down contentedly, completely reconciled, almost happy. The young barrister, whom he had known since he was a schoolboy, was a boorish young man, a great outlaw, but a nephew of his lordship.

The assistant, who was about thirty-six years old, was of medium build. Braun Frank said everything about this man was "medium". His nose was neither large nor small, his face neither ugly nor handsome. He was no longer young; but not old, his hair was not dark, but not light. He was neither stupid nor clever, not exactly dull, but not amusing, and his clothes were neither elegant nor vulgar. He was a good average man, in every way: just the man the Privy Councillor needed. He was a good worker, clever enough to understand and do what was required of him, but not so intelligent as to aspire to a clear view of his master's intricate games.

- How much is my uncle actually paying you?" asked Frank Braun.

- "Oh, not too much, but just enough," was the answer. I also got an extra four hundred marks for the New Year.

He wondered why the nephew started his breakfast with fruit, eating apples and a handful of cherries.

- What kind of cigar?" the trainee lawyer asked.

- What kind of cigar do I smoke? - Medium, not very strong. - But why do you ask, doctor?

- "Just!" said Braun Frank. "I'm interested. "But tell me what you've done about it. Has the Privy Councillor communicated his plans to you?

- "Of course!" nodded Dr Petersen proudly, "I'm the only one who knows about it, apart from you, of course. The scientific significance of the experiment is enormous.

- "Hm you think so?" cleared the lawyer's throat.

- "Absolutely!" the doctor insisted, "and it is downright brilliant the way his Excellency has managed to stifle even the possibility of an attack. He knows how careful we must be, how often we doctors are attacked by the uninformed lay public for experiments which are absolutely necessary. Here is vivisection - my God; people get sick just hearing that word. All

our experiments with pathogenic germs and vaccines are a thorn in the side of the lay press, even though we only ever work with animals. Even when it comes to artificial insemination, with humans! However, your Excellency has found the only possible way of solving this problem: by means of an executed murderer and a specially paid cocotte. Even the most humanitarian of priests would not want to expose himself for such a cause, would he?

- Great!" admitted Frank Braun. "You are indeed right to acknowledge your boss's capacity in this way.

- Dr Petersen then reported that His Excellency had made various attempts with his help to produce a suitable female, but unfortunately without success. It turns out that the class of the population from which these creations are usually drawn has quite peculiar notions about artificial insemination. It was almost impossible to get them to understand what it was all about, let alone to bargain with one or other of them, although his Grace excelled himself in persuasion, and although he repeatedly emphasised that, firstly, they were in no danger, secondly, they could earn a good deal of money, and thirdly, they were doing an excellent service to medical science.

One girl was particularly vocal: the whole science was out... Here she used a very rude expression.

- "Yikes!" said Braun Frank. "How could he say such a thing!

- It was therefore a good time for His Excellency to come to Berlin for the International Congress of Gynaecology. Here, in the metropolis, there is undoubtedly a much wider range of choice, and it may be assumed that the persons concerned are not so restricted as those in the provinces, and that in these circles there is less superstitious fear of novelty, more practical sense of material advantage, and greater ideal interest in science.

- Especially the latter," Braun Frank agreed.

Dr Petersen upheld. It's amazing what outdated views they encountered in Cologne! Any guinea pig or monkey is a hundred times more intelligent and clever than the women there. Even man's superior intellect was in doubt! But he hopes that here again his seeded faith will be strengthened.

- "It would be a laugh if monkeys or guinea pigs were any different from Berlin cocktails!

- By the way, when is my uncle coming? Is he up yet?

- A very long time ago!"His Excellency is not here; he has an interview at the Ministry at ten o'clock," the assistant explained eagerly.

- "Well, and then?" asked Braun Frank. "Yes, I don't know how long it will take. All I know is that His Excellency asked me to wait for him at the Congress meeting at two o'clock. At about five o'clock he has an important meeting here at the hotel with some of his colleagues from Berlin, and at seven o'clock he is invited to lunch with the Rector. Perhaps in the meantime, Doctor -

Braun Frank was thinking. Basically, he liked his uncle's all-day occupation, he didn't care.

- Please tell my uncle to meet me here in the garden at eleven o'clock at night.

The assistant looked doubtful. - At eleven? Won't that be too late? His Excellency is usually in bed by this time. Especially after such an exhausting day.

- His Excellency must make an even greater effort today. Tell him that, Doctor. It is not too late for our purposes, but rather too early - let us agree to meet at twelve. If the poor uncle is so tired, he can rest a little beforehand. And now addio - Doctor, to see you tonight.

He stood up, nodded and left.

He gritted his teeth; the moment he stopped talking, he felt how childish, how adolescent, everything he was saying in front of the good doctor was. How petty his mockery, how cheap his wit! He was almost ashamed. Every nerve in his body demanded work and wasted its energy on uselessness, his brain was throwing out a thousand sparks - and he was making student jokes!

Dr Petersen took a long look. He is a stupid man,' he said to himself.

- He poured coffee for you again, mixed a good deal of milk with it, and conveniently spread a new piece of buttered bread.

- Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall!" he quoted the German proverb with the utmost conviction.

And, reassured in his sober civic wisdom, he took a bite of the white bun and raised the cup to his mouth.

It was almost one o'clock at night when Braun Frank appeared.

- Excuse me, uncle," he said lightly.

- "Well, my dear brother," said the Privy Councillor, "you have kept us waiting long enough.

- 'God knows I had better things to do, uncle,' said the trainee lawyer. and looked him over. -You were waiting not for me, but for your own purposes.

The professor looked at him curiously.

- "Boy," he began. But he controlled himself. - No - never mind. Thank you, brother, for coming to my aid. Are you ready to come with us?

- "No!" said Frank Braun, with a childish stubbornness. "I'll have a whisky and soda first, we've plenty of time. "That was his nature; he liked to get things in order. He was a sensitive, over-sensitive man, who was offended by the slightest word, the faintest reproach, but who liked to treat everyone with defiant roughness. He always spoke the rudest truth, and could not bear the gentlest himself.

He felt good that he had hurt the old man. But the very fact that his uncle was offended, that he took his foolish childish manner so seriously and tragically - that bitter and hurt him. He took it as a degradation that the Privy Councillor should so little understand him, that the thin veneer of appearances should fail to see into his blond defiant head. Against this, whether he wished it or not, he had to defend himself, and appear uglier than he was. He had to put on the mask even more and follow the impertinent path he had found in Montmartre: épater le bourgeois.

Emptying his glass slowly, he rose, sloppily, like a melancholy prince who is bored.

- "If it pleases the gentlemen?" he said, with a gesture of deference, as if they were deeply beneath him.

- Waiter, car.

They set off. The Privy Councillor was silent, his lips set low, his fat tears hanging deep down his cheeks. His huge ears were stopped, his right eye glittered green in the darkness.

Dr Petersen sat on the bench, his mouth agape. He didn't understand - Braun Frank's absurd behaviour towards his Excellency.

But the young man quickly regained his balance. Eh, why get annoyed with the old ass! After all, he has his good points.

- "Here we are," he said, helping the Privy Councillor out of the car.

A large sign illuminated by arc lights read "Café Stern". Entering, a long course of small marble tables passed by, amid shouting and noisy crowds. Finally they settled down.

The fair was in full swing. All around sat street girls in huge hats, festooned with bright silk blouses: giant blocks of flesh, waiting for a customer, and spreading themselves out like a shop window.

- Is this one of the better places?" asked the Privy Councillor.

His nephew shook his head: - No, Uncle James, not exactly. Perhaps it is still very classy. We need your rubbish. We're hardly likely to find what we're looking for here.

In the back, a man sat at the piano, wearing a greasy, discoloured tailcoat. He played incessantly, one gassenhauer after another. The drunks shouted at him, but the director came and told them to calm down, explaining that this was forbidden in this respectable room.

Little shopkeepers were circling. At the next table sat good country people, considering themselves very advanced and immoral, chatting with the fat coquettes. Disgusting waiters pushed their way between the tables, serving brown and yellow juices called bouillot and mélanges, in cups and glasses, And full brandy bottles with lines on them to mark the cups they had consumed.

Two women came to their table. They asked for coffee. Without much deliberation, they sat down and ordered.

- Perhaps the blonde?" whispered Dr Petersen. But the trainee lawyer waved him off. It's all flesh. Then it's even better if she stays with my monkey.

However, a small black woman appeared in his eyes in the far corner of the room. Her eyes were sparkling with desire. She stood up and called him into the corridor. She broke away from her escort and headed towards him.

- You, I'll tell you what," he began.

- Not today. I already have a guest. Tomorrow, if you want," she said.

- Drop him in the water," the trainee lawyer urged. It was a tempting offer.

- "Tomorrow - can't it be tomorrow, my dear?" begged the black. "Today it is really impossible, my old guest. He used to give me twenty marks.

Braun Frank grabbed his arm:

- I'll pay you more, much more, you hear? You can make a fortune. I don't want you -that old man, there. It's about that iron business.

The girl was startled, her eyes following the direction of his gaze.

- "This?" he said, disappointed. "And what on earth do you want?!"

- Lucy," called the man from the table.

- "I'm coming," he said. "I repeat - not today. We can talk about it tomorrow if you want. Come here at this time!"

- Silly hen!" whispered the lawyer-boyfriend.

- I'm sorry! It'll kill me if I don't go with him today. He's always like that when he's drunk! - Come tomorrow, you hear? And leave the old man - come alone. I don't mind, don't pay if you don't want to.

He left her in the lurch and ran back to the table. Braun Frank watched the black gentleman in the bowler hat reproach him bitterly. He realized he had to stay loyal tonight.

He walked across the room looking at the girls. But there was no one who seemed to be sufficiently despicable. They all had the last vestige of civic decency, an instinctive remembrance of belonging to a certain society.

No, no, there was no one here who went on his way, disconnected from everything, brazen and self-conscious, as if to say: yes, I am a slut!

He could hardly have defined what he was looking for. He just felt it. He wanted someone who belonged here and nowhere else. Not like these people who had been brought here by stupid chance. Who might just as well have been little wives, maids, maids, maids, or even telephone operators, if the winds of life had blown differently. Who became bad only because the lust for men made them bad.

No, no, she was looking for someone who had become a street girl because she couldn't be any other, because her blood had commanded it, because every part of her body was thirsting for a new and new embrace, because while one man was making love to her, she was already longing for another man's kiss.

Be a street girl, as she is - stuck - what is she really? Tired, resigned, she finished the thought: as she is - a dreamer. She went back to the table:

- Come on uncle, we came here for nothing. Let's go one house over. The Privy Councillor protested, but he did not listen.

- "I promised to get you the girl, and I will.

They stood up and paid. They crossed the street and headed outwards towards the district called "Nord".

- Where to?" asked Dr Petersen. The trainee lawyer didn't answer, and continued on his way, looking at the large address signs in the cafés. Finally he stopped.

- Café Trinkherr - he mumbled. - This is the one.

In this dirty room, all the elegance of the talmud has been abandoned. Of course, there were no white marble tables, red plush sheets of cotton clinging to the walls, light bulbs diffusing the light and flat-footed waiters shuffling around in sticky tails. But it all gave the impression of trying to look like nothing more than what it really was.

The air was terribly smoky and stifling - but those who breathed it felt free and comfortable. They gave of themselves, without any constraint.

At the next table were older students, drinking beer and talking dirty to the women. They sat firmly in the saddle, they were home! A stream of filth poured from their happy lips. One of them, a little fat one,

whose face was marred by countless cuts, seemed inexhaustible. The women giggled, doubled over in laughter.

There were silk boys sitting next to the wall. They were playing cards or huddled in private, staring into the air, whistling what the drunken musicians were playing and sipping brandy. Occasionally a girl from the street would come in, step up to one of them, have a quick word or two and disappear again.

- That's it!" said Braun Frank. He waved to the waiter, ordered a maraschino and brought women to the table.

Four of them came. No sooner had they sat down than Braun Frank saw another woman turn out of the door: a huge, strong person in a white silk blouse. From under her small brimmed hat, a thick shock of bright red hair was spilling out. She jumped up and ran after him into the street.

The girl walked along the driveway, tunefully, slowly, swaying her hips gently. Turning left, she turned into a gateway, above which a red banner lit up with the words "Dance hall to the North Pole".

He followed her through the dirty courtyard and they entered the smoky room almost simultaneously. But she paid no attention, pausing in the doorway and watching the dancing crowd.

Men and women were shouting, bellowing, throwing their legs. They were shouting and shouting obscene rixdorf words into the music. They pushed each other back and forth, wild, rough and crude; they must have been dancing this dance that sprang from their own soil.

He thought of the craquette and the liqueur, danced up in Montmartre and across the Seine in the Quartier Latin, light, graceful, serene and full of charm. There was not a hair of what the Midinettes call "flou" in this repulsion. Hot blood was distilled from the violent rage of the Rixdorfers, a wild fury that unleashed itself in this lowly room -

The music stopped, the dance master collected the money in his dirty, sweaty palms, from the women and not from the men. Then this musical Napoleon of the suburbs waved a broad gesture up to the podium and gave the signal for a new dance.

But the crowd didn't need the rheinlander. They shouted at the conductor, shouted at him to knock the orchestra down. But the music continued nonetheless

playing, fighting against the hall, safe behind the ballustrade, high up.

Now they are gathered around the dance master. He knew the women and the men, held them tightly in his grip, unafraid of the drunken howls and the menacing rising fists. But he also knew when to let go.

- The Emil! - They shouted in the air. - Play the Emil!

A fat woman, wearing a huge hat, put her arms around the dancing master's dusty tails.

The shout of the dance master calmed the raging crowd. They laughed, crowded around him, cheering, patting his shoulders and poking his belly. When the waltz began, the crowd broke free and shrieked hoarsely:

"Emil, hey, you fine pi-pi

Pali in all your li-iba

You cooked me terribly, too.

You've got a one-two punch."

- Ni, the Alma! The Alma is here!" someone shouted from the middle of the room. Leaving his dancer behind, he leapt out of the crowd and grabbed the red-haired street girl by the arm. He was a small, black boy, with bright, piercing eyes and flat, bouncy curls that he brushed low into his forehead.

- "Come!" he said, and put his arm around her waist.

The girl danced. She was more daring in her "schiebenden Walzer", spinning faster than the others. After a few bars, she was dancing hard, wiggling her hips, swaying back and forth. She pressed her body against his, her knees always pressed to his. Unashamedly, vulgarly, with wild sensuality.

Braun Frank heard voices behind him, saw the dance master looking at her with appreciation.

- Damn dog that throws his tail!

Yes, he did! He threw it higher and more insolently than the "Baroness Gudel of Gudeld", to whom the "heir to the crown of the mind" also bowed, waving it like a flag, like a stormy banner of the most sublime sensuality.

He has his way!" thought Braun Frank. He followed his gaze as he danced back and forth across the room. When the music stopped, he hurried over and took her by the arm.

- Pay first!" said the black man, laughing at him.

He gave him money. She glanced at him, looked him up and down.

- I don't live far away!" he said, "just three minutes from here to -

- No matter where you live. Come on!" interrupted Braun Frank.

Meanwhile, at Café Trinkherr, the secret councillor was offering the girls a drink. They drank a sherry brandy and asked him to pay for what they had consumed: a beer, another beer, a portion of doughnuts and a coffee. The Privy Councillor paid; then he tried his luck. 'I have a proposition,' he said, 'if you like it, let me know. But if, as he supposed, two or three of them were willing to accept the very advantageous offer, perhaps all four of them, then take a chance.

- Well, man, the smartest thing to do is to roll the dice. 'There's no new trick you've got in store that me and the ladies won't try,' said the lean Jenny, putting her arm around the secret councillor's shoulder.

Little Elly with the blonde baby face has doubled up on you:

- What my friend does, I do. I'll be the one not to do it! Money talks, dog barks!

He jumped up and returned with a dice thrower.

- Come on, kids who are applying. On the old man's bid! Odd or even?

Fat Anna, who was called "chick", protested.

- I'm always unlucky in the dice, - tell me uncle, do you give a pain reward to those who dare not?

- 'Of course,' said the Privy Councillor, 'five marks each. And he put the three fat silver coins on the table.

- You are a cavalier!" praised Jenny. And to prove her gallantry, she ordered another round of Sherry brandy.

He was also the winner.

- "Here's the pain money," he said, handing the three coins to his colleagues; "and now, old fool, let's hear you say it, I'm ready for any outrage, the way you look at me!

- "Listen, my dear boy," began the Privy Councillor, "this is something quite extraordinary -

- "Don't give me the bank, you moon-head," she interrupted. "None of us are virgins, especially not tall Jenny! There are many strange beasts running about in the Lord God's zoo, but if a man has a good practice he'll learn all the dirty things. You'll have a hard time re-educating me.

- "You misunderstand me, my dear Jenny," said the professor, "I don't want anything special, as you think. On the contrary, it is a purely scientific experiment.

- "We know him!", Jenny snapped.

- Doctor or old man? I had a doctor like that once, who always started with science, - they are the biggest pigs! With me, everyone can enjoy to his own taste!

- "Prozit," said the Privy Councillor, toasting him, "I'm glad you're not prejudiced - we'll soon agree. So, in short: it's about an experiment in artificial insemination, my dear.

Jenny jumped up:

- About what - artificial insemination? What's the big trick? They do it quite simply!

- I value artificial fertility much more," grinned the black Clare.

- "I'll try to explain it to you, yes?" rushed Dr Petersen to his master's aid. And when the Privy Councillor nodded, he gave a veritable lecture on the idea at hand, the progress made so far and the possibilities for the future. He strongly emphasized that the experiment was completely painless and that all the animals they had worked with so far had stood up well.

- What animals?" asked Jenny.

- "Rats, monkeys and guinea pigs," said the assistant. The girl burst out.

- What? Guinea pigs? I am a pig, and I don't mind - you old pig! But a guinea pig - no one has ever dared to say that to my face. And you, you bald pig, do you want to treat me like a guinea pig? No, Jenny Lehmann won't have that, you understand?

The Privy Councillor tried to appease him and poured him a new brandy.

- Let us understand each other, my dear boy -But she did not listen.

- "I understand perfectly well!" he cried. "You want me to give myself to things you've used dirty fools for!" "You'll give me some dough and in return you'll inoculate me with some lousy serum and germs - or do you want to dissect me alive, eh?" He was getting more and more into it, dark red with anger and annoyance.

- Or should I give birth to a monster to show off at a fair? A baby with two heads and a rat's tail, huh? Or one that looks like a guinea pig? - At least I know where the Passage panopticon and Castan get all those freaks - you're agents of the Castan brothers, right? And that's what you want to artificially inseminate me for? Look here, you old pig.

He jumped up, leaned across the table and spat in the face of the Privy Councillor.

- Here, artificial insemination.

He picked up his glass, calmly drained it, turned on his heel and proudly stepped away. At that moment Braun Frank appeared in the doorway and motioned for them to come out.

- Come, Doctor, come quickly," he called excitedly to Petersen, who was wiping the face of the Privy Councillor.

- So, what's new?" asked the trainee lawyer, coming to the table.

It seemed to me that the professor was looking at him angrily. The three girls shouted incoherently as Dr Petersen recounted the events.

- What should we do?

Braun Frank shrugged his shoulders.

- What? - Nothing. Let's pay and go. I found the right one anyway.

They went out; the red-haired slut stood at the door, waving her umbrella at a carriage. Frank Braun helped him in; then the Privy Councillor and the assistant got in. Then he told the coachman the address and joined the others.

- Allow me to introduce you. Miss Alma, His Excellency Privy Councillor ten Brinken, Dr. Charles Petersen.

- Are you crazy?" the professor attacked him.

- "No, Uncle James," said the trainee lawyer calmly, "you see that Miss Alma, if she spends any length of time in your house or in your clinic, whether you like it or not, will know your name.

- No offence, Miss Alma, but my uncle is getting very old!

In the darkness he couldn't see the secret councillor, but he could hear his lips pressed together in helpless anger. He was glad of this, and almost expected his uncle to burst out at last.

But he was wrong. The Privy Councillor remained calm.

- Have you told the girl what it's about? Do you agree?

Braun Frank laughed in his face. - No way! I didn't even mention it! I had hardly walked a few steps with Miss Alma, - I had hardly said ten words to her. Before that - I saw her dancing -

- "But doctor," the assistant interrupted, "after the experience you have just had.

- "Calm yourself, my dear Petersen," said the trainee lawyer, deprecatingly, "I am convinced that the young lady will answer. I think that's enough.

The confectioner stopped in front of a wine bar. They entered. Braun asked for Frank's cigarette. The waiter led them up and held the wine list in front of them. The trainee lawyer ordered two bottles of Pommery and a bottle of cognac.

The waiter brought the wine and left. Braun Frank closed the door and went to the girl.

The girl handed over her hat. The hair of the silk, freed from the pins, fell over her forehead and face. Her face was, as red-haired women's usually are, almost translucent, with tiny freckles here and there. Her eyes gleamed greenish, her tiny white teeth shone out from her narrow blue lips. There was a consuming, almost unnatural sensuality about his whole being.

- "Take off your blouse," said Frank Braun. She obeyed in silence. Braun Frank unbuttoned two buttons on her shoulders as her shirt slipped down, revealing her classically shaped but slightly firm breasts.

- That's enough, isn't it?" asked Braun, looking at Frank's uncle. "You can guess the rest.

He turned to her again:

- Thank you, Alma. You can get dressed again!

The girl obeyed. She drained the glass he offered her to the bottom. Braun Frank was careful not to leave her glass empty for a moment.

And then he chattered. He talked about Paris, the beautiful women of the Moulin de la Galette and the Elysée Montmartre. He told me exactly what they were like, described their shoes, their hats, their dresses.

- "Listen, Alma," he turned to her, "it's a shame how you walk. Please don't take it badly from me. You can't show your face in a decent place like this. - Have you been to the Union Bar or the Arcadia?

No, it hasn't been there. Not even in the Cupid's Hall. Once, a cavalier took him to the Alte Ballhaus and when he tried to leave again the next night, alone, he was refused at the entrance. Yes, one must have decent clothes.

- Of course I do!" insisted Braun Frank. "And what do you think you can do with it out here at the *Oranienburger Tor*?

The girl laughed:

- Eh, if we take it, it's not important - a man is a man!

The trainee lawyer did not let this stand. He told amazing stories of women who made their fortunes in the big ballrooms. He told of pearls, fists full of brilliants, equestrians and white-horse carriages.

- How long have you been running around the streets?" he asked suddenly.

- Two years!" said the girl, calmly, "Since I left home.

Braun Frank interrogated him, and little by little he extracted what he wanted to know. He drank to his health and filled his glass again and again. And without her noticing, he poured brandy into his champagne.

Alma was nearly twenty years old and came from Halberstadt. Her father was a simple master baker, honest and decent, like her mother and her six brothers. Oh - yes - after she had finished school, a few days after her confirmation, she made the juice with one of her father's helpers. Did he love her? Not at all - that is, only if - Yes, and then came the second and the third. Her father beat her, her mother beat her, but she ran away again and again and stayed out all night. This went on for years until one day he was thrown out by his parents. Then he pawned his watch and came to Berlin. He's been here ever since -

- "Yes, that's right," said Braun Frank. "But today his lucky star is shining!" he continued:

- "Yes?" she asked. "How so? Her voice was hoarse, veiled.

One day is just like the next - when you have a man, you don't need anything else. But the trainee lawyer knew just what to do to catch him.

- But Alma, you have to be content with any man who wants you!
- Wouldn't you like it to be the other way round?

Her eyes lit up. - Of course I would!

The trainee lawyer laughed. "Tell me, haven't you ever met a man on the street that you wanted? And one who didn't care about you, who went on his way in peace? Wouldn't it be great if you could choose?

- You see, Jack; you would suit my taste!" she laughed.

He let her. - You could choose me. And this one, that one, - whoever you want!

- But you can only afford it if you have money. Today you can make a lot of money if you want to. That's why I say it's your lucky day.

- How much?" she asked.

- You can buy dresses so beautiful that they will open the doors of the best and most exclusive ballrooms - How much? Say, ten thousand marks.
- even twelve thousand.

- What?" the assistant shouted.

The professor, who had not even remotely thought of such a sum, snapped his fingers.

- I find you a bit careless with other people's money!

- 'You hear, Alma, how beside himself the Privy Councillor is,' laughed Braun Frank, cheerfully, 'he is very much in love with the amount he has to give you. But I assure you, it won't come to that. You will help him - let him help you. You'll pay him fifteen thousand?'

The girl stared.

- Yes, but what do I have to do?

- That's the strange thing. There was nothing. Just a little bit of decency. Cheers, there you go.

The girl was drinking.

- To behave decently?" he said cheerfully. "I don't like to. But if I have to - I'll do it for fifteen thousand marks! - Cheers Jack!

She emptied her glass, which he immediately filled to the brim.

- "There is a gentleman - a count - a prince, in fact. He's a beautiful boy, you know - I'm sure you'd like him. Unfortunately, you can't see him - he's in prison and will soon be executed. But basically the poor fellow is as innocent as you or I. Just a bit suddenly - and that's how it happened. He got drunk, got into a fight with his best friend and shot him dead. Now he has to die.

- And what can I do?" she asked, her nostrils quivering. The strange prince piqued her interest.

- You will help to make the last wish come true -

- Yes!" she cried quickly. "Yes, yes! You want to be with a woman for the last time, don't you? I'll do it, I'll do it gladly - I know you'll be pleased with me.

- Bravo Alma," said the trainee lawyer, "bravo, you're a good girl. But it's not that simple. Listen carefully so you understand. So, after stabbing - I mean shooting - her boyfriend to death, she fled to her family to be protected, hidden and helped to escape. But his family refused to do that. They knew how terribly rich he was and thought it was a good opportunity to get their hands on the inheritance soon. They called the police.

"Disgusting!" said Alma with conviction.

- Right? Was that a terrible thing for them to do?! The prince was locked up, of course - and what do you think he's up to now?

- He wants revenge!" she retorted.

The trainee lawyer patted his burly shoulders in amusement.

- Good, Alma, you didn't read novels in vain! So he decided to take revenge on the family of the traitor. And he's going to do it by screwing them out of their inheritance. You see?

- Of course I understand. Nothing for the ragheads. They deserve it.

The question is, how can this be taken out? After much thought, he found the only way to get the family out of millions was to have a child.

- And there isn't?" she asked.

- No - unfortunately, no. But the prince is still alive, he may yet be -The girl panted, and her breast rose faster.

- "I see," he cried. "Shall I have a child for the Prince?"

- That's it!" said the man.

- Yes, I do!" she cried. She leaned back in her chair, spread her legs wide and spread her arms. A thick lock of her red hair unraveled and fell over her neck. Then he jumped up and emptied his glass. "It's hot," he said. "Very hot! He held his glass out to the trainee lawyer. Come, let us drink to the health of the Prince.

They toasted.

- Pretty a history of robbery you tell, - hissed a secret "I wonder where you're going with this?"

- Fear not, Uncle James, - you'll hear that chapter in a moment. He turned to the red girl again.

- So that's taken care of, Alma; you're going to help us. But there's another snag, which I also need to explain. As you know, the Baron is in prison -

She interrupted him:

- Baron? I thought you were a prince?

- Of course he is a prince," corrected Frank Braun, "but he calls himself a baron incognito - that's what princes do. So the Prince's Highness -

- Majestic?

- Yes! Your Imperial and Royal Highness. But you must swear not to speak of it to anyone in the world. So the prince is languishing in prison, under the strictest supervision. No one is allowed to see him except his lawyer. According to this, it is absolutely impossible for him to be with another woman in his lifetime.

- Oh!" she sighed. Her interest in the unfortunate prince had visibly waned.

Braun Frank did not mind. He recited with uninhibited and full of pathos:

In his misery, in his terrible despair and in his unquenchable thirst for revenge, he thought of Professor ten Brinken, a veritable inner secret adviser, this shining torch of science and his strange experiments. The handsome young prince, who now, in the spring of his life, must address the world as a godsend, remembered clearly from his carefree childhood the kindly old gentleman who had nursed him when he had the donkey flu and who had often given him sweets. Look, Alma, here sits the old gentleman: he is the instrument of the poor prince's revenge! And with a grand gesture he pointed to his uncle.

- This worthy gentleman here," he continued, "is miles ahead of his time. You know, Alma, how children come into the world, and you know how they are made. But you do not know the secret which this benefactor of mankind has discovered: to create a child without the father and mother even seeing each other. The noble prince will be still mourning in his prison - or resting in his sorrowful grave - when you, daughter, with the kind help of the old lord and the initiated assistance of Dr. Petersen, will be the mother of his child.

Alma gazed at the Privy Councillor - this sudden quiproquo to replace the handsome, noble, death-stricken young prince with this old, ugly professor was unpleasant and she did not like it.

Braun Frank saw this clearly and used his powers of speech to allay her concerns.

- The little prince, Alma, your child, must be born in the greatest secrecy, of course. We must hide it until she grows up, so that the

from the wiles and intrigues of the family. Of course, the child will be a prince - just like his father!

- My child will be a prince!?" she whispered.

- Of course!" confirmed Braun Frank. "Or a princess, I don't know. She will have castles, large estates and millions. But you must not put obstacles in his way, nor put yourself up, lest you compromise him.

It worked, thick tears ran down her cheeks. Oh, she was getting into her role, she was already sorry for the silent pain of a mother who has to give up a beloved child. She is a slut, but her child is a prince! How could I approach him? Oh, yes, she listens, she endures, she suffers - she can only pray for her child. He'll never know - who was his mother -

A violent sob took hold of her, shaking her body. She fell on the table and buried her head in her arms, weeping bitterly.

Braun slid his hand over Frank's neck, affectionately, gently, and stroked his unruly locks. It felt good in the sugary water of the sentimental lemonade he was mixing, but at this moment he was serious! Magdolna - she whispered - Magdolna -

She straightened up and held out her hand to him. "I promise you," she said, "that I will never show myself - that I will never show myself or be heard.

- "What is it, girl?" asked Braun Frank quietly.

She grabbed his arm, fell to her knees in front of him, and put her head in his lap, sobbing.

- "Just one, just one!" he cried. "I can see you sometimes, can't I? Only from a distance - oh, only from a distance?

- Are you done with your corny farce?" the Privy Councillor interjected.

Braun Frank looked at him fiercely. He himself felt his uncle's rightness, and it was this that made his blood boil.

- "Shut up, you old fool!" he hissed. "Don't you see how beautiful it is? "And he bent down to her. "Yes, little girl, you will see your little prince. I'll take you with me when he rides out with his knights. You'll see him in the theatre, in his box.

Instead of answering, Alma held his hand and kissed it, crying. Slowly, he picked her up, carefully sat her down and gave her a glass of champagne with half a cognac.

- Do you want it?" he asked.

- Yes!" she said quietly, "I do. What do I have to do?"

- "First we'll write a small contract," said Braun Frank after a moment's thought. Do you have any paper, doctor?" he turned to the assistant. Then write. If you like, in duplicate.

And he dictated. For the experiment which His Excellency ten Brinken wishes to conduct, the undersigned volunteers. He gives his firm promise to obey the instructions of the said gentleman. Furthermore, that after the birth of the child, he renounces all claims to the child. In return for this, His Excellency undertakes to deposit in the name of the undersigned fifteen thousand marks immediately in a savings book and to hand over this book after the confinement. He further undertakes to bear all the expenses of his maintenance until that date and to support them with an allowance of one hundred marks a month.

He took the piece of paper in his hand and read it out loud.

- But there is no mention of the prince!" she said.

- Of course not," explained Braun Frank. "Not a word. It must remain a top secret.

The girl saw that. But something else was troubling her.

- "Why do you lose me?" he asked. "For the poor prince, everyone would like to do what they can.

The candidate lawyer hesitated. The question was somewhat unexpected. Yet he found an answer.

- You see, it's like this: the prince had a young love, a beautiful countess. He loved her with a passion that only a true prince can love. The Countess loved the noble young man no less. Only she died.

- What?" interjected Alma.

- In a bend. The noble prince's beautiful mistress had curls as golden-red as yours - and she looked very much like you. And the prince's last wish was that the mother of his child should resemble

to his childhood sweetheart. He gave us his picture and described it exactly. We searched all over Europe, but we couldn't find the one. Then tonight we saw you.

The girl was flattered by this speech.

- Do I really look like the beautiful countess?

- "You could be brothers." he said. "Otherwise we'll have you photographed; how the prince will be pleased when he sees your picture!

Braun handed the pen to Frank.

- There you go, sweetie, now sign it!

She took the paper and picked up a pen. "Al-" she wrote. She interrupted. There's dirt in the pen. She cleaned it with the napkin.

- 'Teringetté,' Braun Frank muttered, 'I just remembered, she's not even of age. In fact, we should name her father's signature. "Eh, what!" he said loudly. "Tell me, what's your father's name?

- My father's name was Raune and he was a baker in Halberstadt.

And he wrote his father's name in long, clumsy letters. Braun Frank took the paper from his hand. He put it down, picked it up again and stared at it.

"To All Saints!" he shouted loudly.

- What is it, doctor?" asked the assistant. Braun Frank handed over the contract.

- Look - look at the signature. Dr Petersen looked at the sheet.

- "Well?" he asked in amazement. I can't find anything special on it.

- No, no, of course not, not you! Give the contract to the Privy Councillor. So - read it, Uncle James!

The professor looked at the signature. She had forgotten to finish her first name: *Al Raune* was written on the piece of paper.

In any case - a strange coincidence, the professor said. He folded the bow carefully and put it in his inside pocket.

- Coincidence?" said his nephew. "Fine - let it be coincidence. "Everything that is strange and mysterious - they call it coincidence!" he rang the bell for the waiter.

Bort! "Wine!" he cried. "Give me a drink. "Alma Raune, *Al Raune*, to your health!

He sat down on the table and leaned towards the Privy Councillor.

- Do you remember, Uncle James, old Trade Councillor Brunner from Cologne? And the son he called Marco? We were in the same class, although he was a few years older. He christened him Marco as a joke, so that his son could live his life as Marco Brunner! I think they never drank anything but water, milk, tea and coffee in their house in Neumarkt. But Marco drank. He's a senior in high school, we drove him home drunk quite often. Later he became an ensign, then a lieutenant - and it was over. He drank, drank more and more, did stupid things until he was expelled. Three times he was taken to the old reformatories, but all three times he escaped and in a few weeks he was a bigger drunk than ever. And now comes another coincidence: Marco Brunner - he drank Marcobrunner. He became obsessed with it; he searched all the wine bars in town for his own brand, travelled the Rhine and drank what he found of his wine. He could afford it, for he had the fortune left to him by his grandmother. 'Hello!' he cried in his delirium, 'Marco Brunner will be destroyed by Marcobrunner! Why? Because Marco Brunner will destroy the Marcobrunner! - And the people laughed at his joke. - But I know that the councillor of commerce would have sacrificed hundreds of thousands if he hadn't made this joke - I also know that he will never forgive himself for having christened his poor son Marco and not John or Peter - even though it was an accident - a foolish grotesque accident - like the scribble of the Prince's bride.

The girl stood up and gripped the chair. "The prince's mate," she cried. "Bring the prince to my bed!

He reached for the brandy bottle and filled his glass to the brim.

- I want the prince, can't you hear me? To your health, my sweet prince.

- Unfortunately, not here!" said Dr Petersen.

- He's not here?" she laughed. "He's not here? Someone else, then! You - or you - or you, old man! Anyone - but a man!

She tore off her blouse, shook off her skirt. She untied her corset and threw it into the mirror so that it snapped.

- I want a man - all three of you! Get me off the street if you like!

Her shirt slipped off, she stood naked in front of the mirror and pressed her breasts up with her hands.

- "Who wants me?" he cried loudly. "Come in, all of you. It's a holiday today, I'm giving it away for free - children and soldiers only pay half." she opened her arms and hugged the air.

- soldiers - I want a whole regiment.

- 'Shame on you,' said Dr Petersen, 'is that fit for a prince's bride?

His gaze hung longingly on her firm breasts.

- Eh, what, - Alma laughed - prince or no prince! I'll get everyone who wants me! My children are sluts, whether they're made by a beggar or a prince!

Her bosom rose and her breasts pressed against the men. Her white flesh was panting hot lust, her blue veins flowing with lust. Her gaze, trembling lips, longing arms, inviting thighs, hips, breasts cried out wild desire: man, man! She didn't look like a slut any more - all the veils had fallen from her, all the barriers had fallen, she was a cavewoman, the last great cavewoman: sex from head to toe.

- Oh, she's the one!" whispered Braun Frank.

A violent shudder surprised her. Her skin tingled. Dragging her legs with difficulty, she slumped down on the mattress.

- "I don't know what's the matter with me!" he muttered, "everything's spinning around me!

- "You cheated me," said the trainee lawyer. "Here, drink up and then go to sleep. He held a full glass of brandy to his mouth.

- Yes - I want to sleep - stammered Alma. - Boy, won't you sleep with me? She stretched out on the pillow and put her legs in the air. She giggled sharply, and then she sobbed loudly. Then he wept quietly, turned to the side and closed his eyes.

Braun Frank put a big pillow under the sleeper's head and covered him. He ordered coffee, went to the window and opened it wide. But he closed it again immediately, for the light of dawn broke into the room.

- Well, gentlemen," he turned back, "are you satisfied with my choice?
Dr Petersen could not stop staring at her.

- "I think it's very suitable," he said.

- Would your Excellency like to see her hips? - she is almost predestined for a flawless delivery.

The waiter brought the coffee.

- "Call the nearest ambulance station," ordered Braun Frank.
-Send a stretcher. The lady is very ill.

The Privy Councillor looked at him with a stare: What is the meaning of this?

- "It means," laughed his nephew, "that I count everything. Uncle James. Do you imagine that the girl, if she sobered up, would take a step with you?
- As long as I keep on drilling her with words and wine, she'll go. But from you, heroes, money and all the princes in the world, she'll run away to the nearest street corner! Dr. Petersen himself, if they come with the stretcher, will take the girl to the station. The morning train, if I'm not mistaken, leaves at six o'clock; that's the time you'll be on it. He rents a whole compartment and puts his patient to bed. I think she won't wake up, but if she does, give her some brandy. You may add a few drops of morphine. That way you'll arrive comfortably in Bonn tonight - with your loot. Order the carriage of the Privy Councillor to be waiting at the station, put her in the carriage and take her to their clinic.

- "But forgive me, doctor," the assistant objected, "this has almost the colour of forced seduction.

- "That too," nodded the trainee lawyer, "by the way, your civil conscience is not guilty: you have the contract in your hand!

He turned to Dr Petersen, who was standing silently and thoughtfully in the middle of the room. Should he buy a first-class ticket? And to which room

accommodate the girl? Whether it would not be advisable: to hire a separate nurse? And that -

Meanwhile, Braun Frank stepped up to the sleeper. Nice girl. Like burning golden snakes, your curls are creeping. - He pulled off his thin gold ring with little pearls from his finger, - He put it on Alma's finger. - Take it from me. I got this ring from Steenhop Emmy, who charmed me with the magic of her youth. He was handsome and strong, a rare specimen, a slut like you! -Dream, my son, dream of your prince and your little prince!

He bent down and blew a kiss on her forehead -

The ambulance came with the bedside table. So they dressed the sleeping girl, laid her on top of him, covered her with a wool blanket and took her out.

- Like a dead man, thought Braun Frank.

Dr Peterson said goodbye and followed them.

.oOo.

They were left alone.

A few families have passed and none of them have spoken.

- "Thank you," said the councillor dryly, stepping up to his nephew.

- No need to thank me. - I only did it because I enjoyed it myself and it brought some variety into my life. I'd be lying if I said I did it for you.

The Privy Councillor stood close to him, twiddling his thumbs.

- I thought. Otherwise, I have one more announcement that I think you'll be interested in. Just now, when you were chattering about the prince's offspring, I had the idea of adopting the unborn child. 'You see, my dear brother,' said he, with a slimy laugh, 'your theory was not altogether incorrect: the Little Underling, even before he exists, is taking a handsome fortune from you. I'll put him in the inheritance. I say this only to save you from useless illusions.

Braun Frank felt the sting; he openly confronted his uncle.

- "All right, Uncle James. "You were going to cut me out of the inheritance sooner or later, weren't you?" he said calmly.

The Privy Councillor held his gaze, but did not reply.

- "It would be well," continued the trainee lawyer, "if we used this hour to settle our accounts with each other. "I have often annoyed you, I have often grieved you, and you have disinherited me: we are even. But you will allow me: this idea - I gave it to you. And that it can now be carried out, you have me to thank for that too. For all this, don't you owe me some credit. I have debts to pay.

The professor pricked up his ears. A quick grin flashed across his face.

- How much?" he asked.

- "Well - he'll do," said Frank Braun.- "Maybe twenty-odd mills.

- Well?" he asked impatiently.

- "No no", said the old man. "You don't really think I'm going to pay your debts?

Braun Frank stared at him and the blood rushed to his head. But he controlled himself.

- "Uncle James," she said in a trembling voice, "I wouldn't ask you if I didn't have to. One or two of my debts are urgent, and even extremely pressing. There are card debts among them, honest ones.

The professor shrugged:

- You shouldn't have played -

- "I know very well," said his nephew. Still holding his nerve, he held his ground.

- Of course you shouldn't have. But I played - and now I have to pay. Another thing, I can't go to my mother with these things. You know as well as I do that she does more for me than she can do; she has just now put my affairs in order. And she is ill at present - in short, I cannot and will not go to her.

- 'I am very sorry for your poor mother,' smiled the Privy Councillor bitterly, 'but she cannot induce me to change my mind.

- "Uncle James!" cried Frank Braun; the cold mocking mask had thrown him off his s t r i d e . Some people in the castle

I owe my fellow prisoner a few thousand marks, and I have to pay him by the end of the week. I also have a whole series of miserable debts; I cannot cheat small people who have lent me money for my image. I have also cut the commander to come to you.

- The commander too?" the professor interrupted.

- Him too! I lied that you were terminally ill and I wanted to be by your side in your last hours. And he gave me some rags.

The Privy Councillor bobbed his head from side to side.

- Is that what you told me? - You're a genius at pumping and dizziness. - When will it end?

- Holy Mary!" cried his nephew. "Come to your senses, Uncle James! I need the money, I'll lose it if you don't help me.

- "Well, it doesn't make much difference to me," said the Privy Councillor. "You're lost anyway - you'll never be an honest man.

Braun got both hands to Frank's head.

- And you say that, uncle, you?

- "Why did you throw your money away? And always in the most useless way.

- Lehoet, Uncle James. But I didn't get money in the most useless way, like -you," he said to his face.

The old man cried out. It seemed to Braun Frank as if he had struck the ugly old man in the face with a swish of his riding crop. He felt his blow hit and felt his swipe like foam and sticky slime, finding no resistance.

The Privy Councillor replied calmly, almost in a friendly manner:

- I see you're still very stupid, my boy. Allow your old uncle to give you some good advice, perhaps it will come in handy some day in your life. If you want something from people, remember, you have to go into their little weaknesses. I needed you today, you'll admit I took a few things from you. But you see, it helped. I got what I wanted. Now it's different - now you come to me with a request, but you have no intention of taking the more humble path. - I don't say that, dear brother, as if that method had been of any use to you. Oh, no! But

you may be able to use it some day, and then you will be grateful for the good advice.

- "I did it for the first time in my life; I did it when I asked you to do it - I asked you to do it as I have just done. What more do you want me to humiliate myself before you?

"I'll make you an offer, my brother," said the Privy Councillor, "Promise me that you'll listen to me calmly? You won't get angry, whatever it is?

- I promise, Uncle James!" said the boy firmly.

- Listen to me. - You will get the money you need to settle your debts. You'll get more - we'll agree on the amount. But I need you - I need you at home. I'll get you transferred, and I'll even get the rest of your imprisonment remitted.

- "Why not?" said Braun Frank. "It makes absolutely no difference to me whether I'm here or there.

- About a year, not a whole year!" the professor replied.

- I'm going in. - What am I going to do?

- "Oh, not much!" said the old man, "It's just a little routine side job, it won't be hard for you.

- What then?" pressed Braun Frank.

- "Look son," continued the Privy Councillor, "I'm going to need some help with the girl you've got. You're quite right: she would run away from us. She'll be bored to tears while she waits, and she'll certainly try to make it short in her own way. Our means of forcing him to stay are greatly overestimated. Such a thing can, of course, be done very well and very conveniently in any private mental hospital, where one can be looked after much better than in a penitentiary or prison. Unfortunately, we are not equipped for that. I just can't put you in the terrarium with the frogs or in the cages with the monkeys and guinea pigs, can I?

- Of course not, uncle! - You'll have to find another way. The old man nodded:

- I realised what was needed. I need someone to hang on to. It seems my Dr. Petersen is not the right person to hold your interest for any length of time. I don't suppose it would satisfy you for a night. But he must be a man: I thought of you -

Braun Frank was gripping the back of the chair as if to crush it. He repeated, panting:

- Me?

- Yes, on you!" continued the Privy Councillor, "One of the few things you can do. You will keep it there. You'll always be telling him new nonsense. For once you'll put your imagination to good use. And without her prince, she'll fall in love with you - so you can satisfy her sensual needs. If you can't settle for you, you have enough friends and acquaintances who will surely relish the opportunity to spend a few hours with such a tidy creature.

The trainee lawyer gasped:

- "Uncle," she said hoarsely, "do you know what you want? That I should be the lover of this loafer, while he carries the child of a murderer. Be his driver, who daily asked for a new lover for him, be -

- Of course!" the professor interrupted calmly. "I know very well. I think the only thing in the world you're good for, son.

Frank Braun did not reply. He felt the cut, felt his face darken red, felt his temples burn with fever. He felt as if long stripes were burning across his face, which he had struck with a sharp whip. And he felt: oh yes, the old man had taken his revenge.

The Privy Councillor noticed this and a satisfied smirk spread across his wan face.

- "Think it over, boy," she said slowly, "Why should we deceive each other, you and I? We can call the child by its true name: I want to hire you as a silk boy to this slut.

Braun Frank felt: now they had hit the ground. There you lie, helpless, unarmed, miserable and alone. You can't move. And the ugly Old Man stomps on you with his dirty feet and spits his angry spittle into your gaping wounds.

He could not find the words. He staggered, dizzy. Somehow she made it down the stairs. He stopped in the street and stared into the bright rising sun.

He didn't even know he was walking. He felt as if he were lying, prolonged in a filthy gutter, and had been thrown down by a dull, terrifying blow, which he had received on his head.

What a blow, he didn't really know anymore.

He crept through the streets as if he had been in hiding for centuries. He stopped in front of a billboard and read the theatre programmes and posters. But he saw only words, he understood nothing.

He found himself at the station. - He went to the small window and asked for a ticket.

- Where to?" asked the official.

- Where to? Yes, where to? He wondered at the sound of his own voice:

- Coblenzbe!

He took the money from every pocket.

- Third class!" he said. There was still time. He went up the stairs to the platform, and only then noticed that he had no hat. He sat down on the bench and waited.

He saw the ambulance carrying the stretcher, Petersen behind them. He didn't move from his seat, as if it was none of his business. He watched the train pull in, watched the doctor open a first-class compartment and the ambulance carefully lift the load.

He got into the last car of the train. Something like a spasmodic smile lurked in his jawbones.

- "That's right," he thought. "Third class - fit for a maid, a silk boy.

But sitting on the hard bench, he forgot all about it again. He crouched in the corner and stared at the floor.

The dull pressure in his head did not let up. He could hear the names of the stations being called out, sometimes it seemed like three or four in a row, like a train rushing along the track like a spark in a wire running along the side of an embankment. Other times, the journey from one station to the next took an eternity.

In Cologne, he had to change trains and wait for the train going up the Rhine. But he didn't even notice the interruption, he could hardly tell the difference between sitting on the bench here and on the train.

Once in Coblenz, he got out and walked the streets. It was nightfall, then he woke up, wanting to go up to the castle. Passing over the bridge, he climbed the narrow prisoners' footpath through the bush in the dark.

He's up. He found himself in the yard of the barracks. Then sitting on the bed in his room.

Someone was walking in the corridor and entered the room, holding a candle.

It was Dr Klaverjahn, the muscular ship's doctor.

- Hello!" he called from the door. "Well, the sergeant was right after all! You're back already, brother! Well, come over at once - the captain will give you the bank.

Braun Frank didn't move, he could barely hear the other man speak. It grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him hard.

- You're not going to bed, are you, groundhog? - Don't be clever, come on! Braun Frank jumped to his feet, pushed to his feet by something. He grabbed a chair, he raised it high and stepped closer.

- 'Get out,' he hissed, 'get out, you bastard!

Dr Klaverjahn saw him standing before her, saw his pale, distorted features, his tired, threatening eyes. The doctor awoke in him and in an instant made him understand the situation.

- "Is that so?" he said calmly. "Please forgive me.

Braun Frank stood there for a while, chair in hand. A cold laugh stiffened on his lips. But he could think of nothing, nothing at all.

There was a knock on the door, sounding as if it came from infinity. He looked up. The little ensign stood before him.

- "Are you here?" he asked.

Frightened, because the trainee lawyer didn't answer, he ran back and came in again with a glass and a bottle of Bordeaux.

- Drink. It will do you good.

Brown Frank ivott. He felt the wine sinking into his pulse, felt his legs shaking and as if they wanted to collapse under him. He collapsed on the bed.

The flagman supported.

- "Drink!" he urged. But Braun Frank refused.

- "No, no," he whispered. "I'm drunk.

- I haven't eaten anything today -

A clamour rang out, loud laughter and shouts.

- What are they doing?" he asked nonchalantly.

- "They are playing!" said the ensign. "Two new men arrived yesterday. "Then he reached into his pocket. "True, you have a telegram - a money telegram, with a hundred marks. He came last night. Here! Braun Frank took the paper, but he had to read it twice before he understood it. The hundred marks had been sent by his uncle, and he had written: 'Please consider it an advance.

He jumped up. The fog lifted, red blood sprayed before his eyes.

- Down payment! Down payment? Yes - for the job the old man had offered. Oh - that's why he sent you!

The ensign held out the banknote towards him.

- Here's the money.

He reached out. She felt the burn at the tips of her fingers and the sheer physical pain almost felt good. He closed his eyes, the burning ache spreading to his fingers, his hands, up his arms. His bones were seared to the core by this latest infamous desecration -

- "Give me that!" he cried. "Give me wine!

He drank, he drank, and it seemed that the dark wine put out the hissing cries.

- What are they playing?" he asked.

- No, - they play dice. Seven rags.

- "Come on, let's go over," said Frank Braun, and put his arm around the flagman.

They entered the casino.

- "I'm home!" he cried. "One hundred marks on eight. He threw the banknote on the table.

The captain picked up the dice thrower. He rolled a six.

CHAPTER FIFTH

Which signifies who was chosen to be the father, and how death took the godfatherhood when Alraune was born.

Dr. Charles Petersen had a large, handsome book commissioned by the Privy Councillor. In the upper left-hand corner of the red leather binding was the coat of arms of the Brinkens, with three large gold letters gleaming in the centre:

T. B. A.

The first few pages were blank; the professor kept the history to himself. The next section, containing a brief and simple history of the life of the mother of the strange creature, was written by Dr Petersen. For the book was intended to be the life of Alraune. The assistant retold the story of the slut's life and immediately put it down on paper. Alma had been punished twice for vagrancy, and five or six times for breaking the rules of her profession. The last time was for theft, but she claimed she was innocent of the theft, the brilliant pin having been a gift from the gentleman.

Dr Petersen also wrote the second section, which dealt with the presumptuous father, Peter Noerrissen Weinand, an unemployed miner who was sentenced to death by a jury in the name of the king. The Public Prosecutor's Office was kind enough to provide him with the files from which he could thus extract extracts.

It turned out that Noerrissen had been destined, as if in childhood, to fulfil this destiny. His mother was an inveterate drunkard, his father a casual labourer who had been convicted of aggravated assault on several occasions; one of his brothers had been in prison for ten years for the same offence. Peter Weinand Noerrissen himself, after finishing his schooling, was apprenticed to a blacksmith, who gave him a very good report for his skill and exceptional strength during his apprenticeship. However, he had to drive him away because he never obeyed orders and was constantly harassing the women in the house. He then worked in a number of different factories, and finally, after being released from the army because of a congenital defect (he was missing two fingers on his left hand), he was employed at the Phönix Steelworks in the Ruhr. One of the trade unionists

movement, nor the First Socialist League, nor the Christian Socialists, nor the Hirsch-Dunker party - which his defender eagerly tried to exploit as a circumstance in his favour in his defence. When, during a quarrel, he pulled a knife on a mine inspector and dangerously wounded him, he was dismissed; his first punishment: a year in prison, was also given for this. Since his dismissal, we are almost entirely lacking in in-depth information, relying solely on his own statements. He was put on the highway, crossed the Alpes twice, and rode from Naples to Amsterdam. He also worked when he had the opportunity; a few times he was mostly put in jail for vagrancy and petty theft. But it is assumed, at least in the prosecution's view, that during these seven or eight years he had bigger crimes to answer for.

The motive for the act for which he was convicted was not entirely clear: namely, the question of whether he intended to commit robbery-murder or murder by lust remained open.

The defence tried to present the case as if the accused, in the meadow at Elling in Rajna, at dusk, had only wanted to commit violence on the well-dressed and beautifully built nineteen-year-old Anna Szibilla Trautwein, the daughter of a house owner. And while he was about to take possession of the strong girl, he took a knife, stabbed her only to put an end to her wild cries. Then he took the fainting maiden by force, and in his fear of discovery he dealt with her to the end.

Naturally, he stole her meagre cash and few jewels to help her escape. This presentation was somewhat at odds with the medical vision, which showed a gruesome dismemberment of the victim, partly by expert cutting. The report ended with the imperial tribunal's refusal to grant a retrial, the Crown's failure to exercise its right to pardon, and the execution being scheduled for 6 a.m. the next morning. Finally, it was said that the condemned man had willingly agreed to the doctor's request in exchange for two bottles of rye brandy, which Dr. Petersen had promised to give him at eight o'clock in the evening.

The Privy Councillor finished reading and handed the book back.

- "The father is cheaper than the mother!" she laughed. "So you will appear at the execution," she turned to the assistant. "Give yourself a physiological saline solution; you won't forget, will you? And hurry as fast as you can - every minute

expensive. Other specific measures are hardly needed. I'll see you at the clinic tomorrow morning. No need for a nurse: the princess will assist you.

- Princess Wolkonski, Your Excellency?" asked Dr Petersen.

- "Of course," the professor nodded, "I have reason to invite you to this little operation, in which you are very interested. By the way, how is our patient behaving today?

- The old tune, Your Grace! For two weeks, since we have had it, always the same. He cries, he shouts, he rages - in short, he has no stay. Today he broke some wash basins again.

- Did you try to talk to him?

- I tried, but he barely let me speak. How we're going to keep him here until the baby is born is a mystery.

- Which is not for you to solve, Petersen. "The Privy Councillor patted him on the shoulder good-naturedly. "We'll find a way. "You just do your duty.

- "Your Excellency, you can trust me," said the assistant.

.oOo.

The Privy Councillor's white women's clinic was set in an ornate garden. The rising sun kissed the dawn's light, gently caressed the variegated, dewy dahlia beds and caressed the large, dark blue clematis crawling on the walls. Brightly coloured finches, large thrushes, scampered along the smooth paths, rustling on the clipped lawns. But they suddenly fluttered to life as eight iron horseshoes struck bright sparks on the paving stones of the street.

The princess got out of the car and hurried across the garden with quick steps. Her face was fiery, her strong breast heaving violently, as she climbed the high steps into the house.

The Privy Councillor went to him and opened the door himself:

- Well, Your Highness, that's what I call punctuality! Come near; I have made tea for you.

The princess gasped, panting:

- I saw it. It was fabulously exciting. The Privy Councillor led him into the room:

- Where do you come from, Your Highness? The - the execution?

- Yes. Your Dr. Petersen will be here in a moment. - I managed to get a ticket last night. - It was awful - it was awful.

The Privy Councillor offered him a chair.

- Do you allow me to load? The princess nodded.

- Your Excellency's very kind! - It's a pity he missed it! - He was a splendid fellow! - very strong.

- Who? The death row inmate?

- Of course it is," said the princess, sipping her tea.

- The murderer! He's wiry and sleek - his chest is huge - like a prizefighter's. He was wearing some kind of blue sweater - his neck was stripped bare. No fat

- just muscles and tendons. Like a bull.

- Did Your Highness see the whole execution well?

- Excellent! I was standing in the corridor by one of the windows, the platform was just in front of me. It was swaying a bit upstairs, I had to be supported.

- "Didn't he speak?" asked the Privy Councillor, serving the Princess.

- "But, Your Majesty!" he said.

The Privy Councillor grinned and lightly slapped his hand.

- I'm in front of me really don't need; to stress yourself. The princess giggled.

- No, of course not. So - but give me a slice of lemon. Thank you - put it in my cup right away! - So you said - no, I can't say it.

- "Your Highness!" said the professor, with a slight reproach.

"Old monkey!" thought the Privy Councillor, but he obeyed. The princess was still reluctant. I say it in French.

- Okay, say it in French!" the Privy Councillor was impatient.

The princess, pursing her lips, leaned towards him and whispered in his ear: - Merde! The professor leaned back, offended by the princess's strong perfume.

- Like this? Is that what you said?

"Yes," nodded the princess, "and she said it as if to say that she was indifferent to all this. I found her kind, almost cavalier.

- "Of course," confirmed the Privy Councillor, "It's just a pity he didn't say it in French either. And the other woman?

- "Ah, that wasn't nice." he sipped his tea and munched on a biscuit. It completely spoiled the good impression he made on me. "Imagine, your Excellency," he began to whimper and squeak like a child.

- "Ah!" said the professor. "Another cup, Your Highness? What did you cry? >She defended herself as best she could, silently, firmly, though her hands were clasped behind her back. The three assistants threw themselves on him, while the executioner, in his tails and white gloves, stood calmly watching. At first it pleased the murderer to shake the three butchers off him, and to see them tugging and pushing him again and again, without bringing him a step nearer. Oh, it was terribly exciting, your grace.

- I can imagine, Your Highness!

- Then," the princess continued, "the situation changed. One of the assistants threw a chain in front of her, and at the same time threw her arms, bound behind her back, up in the air, so that she fell forward. At that moment she felt that her resistance was useless, that she was lost. Perhaps - perhaps he was drunk - and suddenly sobered. Ew - and then he shouted -

The Privy Councillor smiled.

- What did he shout? Should I close my eyes again?

- No! - feel free to keep it open, Your Excellency. He is a coward, a pitiful coward, and full of fear.

- Mama, mama, mama!" he cried. Oh, a dozen times at least! Till they got him down on his knees, dragged him under the axe, and forced his head into the circular opening of the board.

So you called your mother at the last minute?" asked the Privy Councillor.

- "No," said the princess, "not quite. "When the hard board was tight round her neck, and her head stretched out on the other side, she was silent. Something seemed to be happening inside her.

The professor became attentive.

- Could you guess what it is? Did you get a good look at his face, Your Highness?

- As clearly as I see you now. But what went on inside him, I don't know. It only took a moment - the executioner looked around once more to see if everything was all right, and his hands were already searching for the button that would bring the knife down. I saw the murderer's eyes wide, and, as in a frenzy of lust, his mouth open, as if to gnaw the contorted features of the wretch.

The Princess's words trailed off.

- "Is that all?" asked the Privy Councillor.

- Yes. - Then the bard struck. The head jumped into the sack, which one of the whores was holding open. Your Excellency, please pass me the marmalade.

There was a knock; the door opened and Dr Petersen entered. In his hand he waved a long bottle, carefully concealed and wrapped in cotton wool.

J- good morning, Your Highness. Good morning, Your Grace. Here it is, here it is. The princess jumped up:

- In Muta...

The Privy Councillor restrained him:

- Slowly, Your Highness, you'll see soon enough. - If you like, we can get to work.

He turned to his assistant:

- I don't know if it will be necessary, but in any case it would be a good idea if - He hushed his voice and leaned towards the doctor's ear. He nodded.

- Yes, Your Excellency. I will issue the instructions immediately. They went down the white corridor and stopped at the end, before number seventeen.

- Here he lies!" said the Privy Councillor and carefully opened the door.

The clean white room sparkled with light and sunshine. The girl lay on the bed, fast asleep, the sunlight sneaking in through the thick window.

on his lattice, shivered on the floor, crept up the bedclothes on his golden barnet, and gently cuddled the girl's gentle face, and dipped his red hair in fiery flames. Her lips were half open, as if she were whispering soft, loving words.

- "He's dreaming!" said the Privy Councillor. He put his clammy, cold hand on his shoulder and shook it:

- Wake up, Alma.

A slight shudder ran through her limbs and she stood up dreamily.

- Mi-i - what is it?" he stammered. Then she recognized the professor and threw herself back between the cushions.

- "Come on, Alma, don't be so farcical," the Privy Councillor teased. Be smart, don't make our work difficult. With a sudden jerk, he pulled the sheet from under her and threw it on the floor.

The princess's eyes were filled with wonder.

- "She's gorgeous!" he exclaimed. That's just the ticket! She pulled down her shirt and covered herself with the pillows.

- "Get out of here!" he shouted. "I don't want to," the Privy Councillor waved to the assistant.

- Go!" he ordered. "Hurry, we must not waste time."
Dr Petersen left the room in a hurry.

The princess moved closer, sat down on the bed and tried to persuade the girl.

- Come on, baby. It won't hurt a bit.

He wanted to caress her, his fat, curled fingers trailing down her neck, the back of her neck and her breasts.

Alma pushed him away.

- What do you want? Who are you? Go, go - I don't want to! But the princess would not let you.

- I only want your good, my little one - I'll give you a present; a nice ring and a new dress.

- "I don't want your ring," she cried. "I don't need your dress. I want to get out of here, leave me alone!"

The Privy Councillor opened the bottle calmly, smiling.

- Later, you will be left in peace and can leave. But first you must fulfil the small obligation you have undertaken. Ah, doctor, have you arrived?

He turned to his assistant, who had just entered, chloroform mask in hand.

- Come quickly.

She stared at him with wide, frightened eyes.

- No! - he wailed. - No! No!

His face showed that he wanted to jump out of bed, and he pushed the assistant, who was trying to hold him back, with both hands in the chest, so that he staggered and almost fell.

Then the princess threw herself upon the girl with outstretched arms, and pressed her back upon the bed with the great weight of her body. He clasped her, digging his fingers into her shining flesh, and took her long red braid of hair between his teeth. Alma staggered, kicked her legs; she could not use her arms, she could not move under the heavy weight.

He saw the doctor lower the mask over his face, heard him counting softly: one, two, three. He shouted so that the walls echoed inside him.

- No! No! I don't want it, I don't want it! - Oh - oh - I'm suffocating - Then her cry died away. It was replaced by a plaintive, miserable whimper.

- Mama - oh - mama -

Twelve days later, Raune Alma, a prostitute, was brought to the court's detention centre as a remand prisoner. A warrant was issued for her arrest because the burglary suspect had no permanent address and was feared to have escaped. The complaint was lodged by His Excellency ten Brinken v. b. t. t. t.

The professor asked the assistant in the very first days if she had seen this or that thing that she couldn't find anywhere. So he was missing an old signet ring, which he had slipped off his finger when he was washing and forgotten; he was missing a small pouch, which, he clearly remembered, he had put in the pocket of his overcoat. He asked Dr Petersen to keep an eye on the staff, but without attracting attention.

Then the assistant's gold watch disappeared from her room in the clinic, from a locked drawer in her desk, which had been broken open. A thorough examination at the clinic, to which all the staff willingly submitted, came up negative.

- It could only have been one of the patients!" concluded the Privy Councillor and ordered an inspection of all the wards.

- This study, also led by Dr Petersen, was not successful.

- Did you not forget any of the rooms?" asked your boss.

- Neither, Your Grace! Except Alma's room.

- Well, why didn't you search that?

- But, Your Grace! Absolutely not. The girl was watched day and night. She was never allowed out of her room. And since she knows they've succeeded, she's been beside herself. She screams and screams all day long, fearing to go mad; thinking only of how she can get away, and how she can thwart our efforts afterwards. -To tell you the truth, your Grace, I think it quite impossible that we can keep her here so long.

- You think so?" smiled the Privy Councillor. "First of all, search room 17, Petersen. I don't think it's out of the question that she's the culprit.

A quarter of an hour later, Dr Petersen returned with a knotted handkerchief.

- "Here are the things!" he said. "I found them hidden in the girl's laundry.

- So you did!" nodded the Privy Councillor. "Phone the police immediately. The assistant hesitated.

- Forgive me, Your Excellency, if I dare to interfere. The girl is surely innocent, though appearances are against her. Your Excellency ought to have seen her when I searched the room with the old nurse and finally found the things. She was completely apathetic, as if unaffected. Certainly it had nothing to do with the theft, Someone on the staff must have stolen the items and then hidden them in her room for fear of discovery.

The professor grinned.

- You are very chivalrous, Petersen. - But - never mind! Just make the call.

- Your Excellency," the assistant asked, "perhaps we could wait a little longer. Perhaps we should question the staff again!

- Listen Petersen - think for a moment. After all, it doesn't matter whether the girl stole the things or not. The main thing is to get rid of her and keep her somewhere safe until her sick hour, right? She's in a good place in the prison, a much better place than ours. We'll pay him a fair price, and I'm even prepared to make up the difference for this little inconvenience, if we're lucky enough to get through it. He will not be any worse off in the prison than he is here: his room will be somewhat smaller, his bed not so soft, his linen less good, but he will have company -and that is worth a lot in his situation.

Dr Petersen looked hesitantly at the professor.

- All right, your Excellency, but won't the girl talk? It would be very unpleasant if -

The Privy Councillor smiled.

- How is it unpleasant? - You can talk all you want. Hysteria mendas - you know, you're hysterical, and a hysteric is only allowed to lie! Not a soul will believe him! Especially a hysteric who's pregnant! What can he tell us?

- The prince's story, with which my excellent nephew deceived him? Do you think that a judge, a prosecutor, a prison governor, a priest, a single wise man, pays attention when a slut is telling such fables? - Who is the doctor of the prison now? - I'll speak to him personally. Dr. Perscheidt.

- Oh, little Perscheidt, your friend. I know him too. I'm going to ask you to pay special attention to our patient. I will say that he was sent to the clinic by a friend who had an affair with him and that this gentleman is willing to look after the unborn child in every way. I will also draw his attention to his extraordinary and morbid tendency to lie, and I will tell him in advance what he will say.

at our expense, and we will present the case to him without giving him a moment's credit for what she says. What else are you afraid of, Petersen?

The assistant looked at her boss with a deep stare.

- Nothing! - Your Grace. Your Excellency thinks of everything. - As far as I am concerned, I will do my best to help your Excellency.

The Privy Councillor prayed aloud, then held out his hand.

- Thank you, dear Petersen. You wouldn't believe how hard it is for me to tell these little lies. But what can I do? Science demands such sacrifices. Our brave ancestors, the doctors of the late Middle Ages, if they wanted to study anatomy, were forced to steal corpses from the cemetery, to expose themselves to the danger of being persecuted for mutilation and such nonsense. So we should not complain. Such little shenanigans - in the interests of sacred science - must be reckoned with. Now go Petersen, make the phone call!

The assistant left with a great and honest respect in his heart for his boss.

.oOo.

Alma Raune was convicted of burglary. This was aggravated by his stubborn denial and the fact that he had a previous conviction for theft. However, she was also found to have mitigating circumstances, apparently because she was really pretty and because she was defended by Justice Gontram. He only got a year and six months in prison, minus the remand.

In fact, His Excellency ten Brinken took him out to have a substantial part of his sentence remitted, although his behaviour in prison was hardly exemplary. But it was taken into account that his bad behaviour was due to his pathologically hysterical state, which the Privy Councillor had strongly emphasised in his application for clemency; his near illness was also taken into account.

Early in the morning, when the first signs of labour appeared, she was released and taken to the ten Brinken clinic. There she lay, in her old room, room seventeen, at the end of the corridor, already in labour. Dr. Petersen reassured her that she'd get through it in a day or two.

But he was wrong. The pain lasted all day and night, and even the next day. Then they subsided a little, then came on with renewed intensity. The girl wailed, moaning in mad pain.

- This notable birth is the subject of the third short section of T, B A.'s leather-bound book, which also shows the assistant's handwriting. He assisted, together with the doctor of the dental hospital, in the extremely difficult delivery, which took place only on the third day and ended in the death of the mother. The Privy Councillor was not present at the birth.

In this description, Dr Petersen emphasised the mother's extremely strong body and excellent physique, which suggested that she was very easily taken ill. The complication that arose was due in the main to the child's peculiar lameness, which ultimately made it impossible to save both mother and child. He further mentioned that the girl, while still almost in the mother's womb, uttered an extraordinary cry, so loud and deafening that neither the gentlemen nor the assistant midwife had ever heard it in a newborn. And as if the scream had been deliberate, and the child had felt extreme pain at being forcibly removed from its mother's lap, it was so sharp and terrible that they shuddered against their will, and his colleague, Dr Perscheidt, had to sit down, and a cold sweat broke out on his temples.

Then the child calmed down immediately and didn't even whimper. When the midwife gave the very weak and miserable baby a bath, she diagnosed a very severe case of atresia vaginalis: so much so that the skin on her thighs had grown to the knees. The peculiar phenomenon, as it turned out after a thorough examination, was only a superficial adhesion of the epidermis, which could be easily removed by a quick operation.

As for the mother, she must have endured a great deal of pain and anguish. Anaesthesia or lumbar anaesthesia were as little thought of as the injection of scopolamine morphine, because the incessant bleeding caused great cardiac weakness. Her blood-curdling cries and wails for hours were only drowned out by the terrible screams of the baby at the moment of delivery. Later her moans died away and after about an hour and a half, without regaining consciousness, she fell asleep. The immediate cause of death was determined to be rupture of the uterus and consequent haemorrhage.

.oOo.

The body of the slut Raune Alma was given to the Institute of Anatomy: as her relatives in Halberstadt, who were informed of the case, did not claim her, and even agreed not to pay for her funeral.

He served for teaching purposes under Professor Holzberger of Anatomy, and certainly every part of his body was a valuable aid to the studies of his students, except his head, which was prepared by Fassmann, a medical student and member of the Hansea Burschenschaft, who forgot about it during the holidays, and then, as he had enough skulls and the head was no longer usable for a clean preparation, he had the skullcap made into a pretty dice-casting cup. Noerissen, the executed murderer, already had five dice from his cervical vertebrae and needed a suitable dice cutter. The medical apprentice, Mr Fassmann, was not superstitious, but he claimed that the dice cup made from the skull, whenever it was thrown out on a dice, who paid for the morning beers, did an excellent service. So loftily did he sing his praises that the bone goblet and dice rose to increasing fame as the semester wore on, first at the regular table of the Bursch gentlemen, then at the senior convention, and finally among the whole student body. The medical apprentice Fassmann was so fond of his dice-thrower that when he had to take an examination with His Excellency ten Brinken and the Privy Councillor asked him for the famous dice-thrower and dice, he considered it blackmail. In no case would he have complied with the request if he had not felt so extremely weak in gynaecology, and if the professor had not had the reputation of being such a strict and dreaded examiner. In fact, the medical pupil's examination was a brilliant success: while in possession of the dice, he had brought good luck.

Alma and Noerissen, who became father and mother to Alraune ten Brinken without ever having seen each other, became related after their deaths: Knoblauch, the servant of anatomy, threw what was left of them, bones and pieces of meat, as was his custom, into a cavernous pit in the garden of the anatomical institute, at the back, at the foot of the wall where the white runner-roses grow so luxuriantly.

INTERMEZZO

The sins, my dear friend, are brought by the hot south wind from the desert, where the sun has shone for thousands of years, and a rare white mist hangs over the sleeping sand. These mists are turned into soft clouds, which the whirlwind twists and turns into curious round eggs that do not let the sun's hot rays through.

In the misty night, there lurks the basilisk, once strangely created by the moon. The eternally barren moon is its father, its mother is the barren sand of the desert. Some say it's an animal, but it's not: it's a thought, grown here where there is no soil, no seeds. It sprang from the eternal barren and took a capricious form, of which it has no equal. Therefore no one can describe this being, indescribable as Nothingness itself.

But what people say about him is true: he is very angry. He devours the glowing eggs of the sun, whirled by the whirlwind in the dust of the desert. That's why he has crimson flames shooting from his eyes, and his hot soul is stagnant with grey vapours.

But the child of the pale moon, the basilisk, does not eat all the cloud eggs. When it's well fed, when it's drunk with hot poisons, it spits its green saliva on eggs still lying in the sand. It uses its sharp claws to split open their thin shells so its nasty slime can penetrate. And when the dawn breeze rises in the morning, he sees a strange ripple and life beneath the thin shells, as if violet and wet green veils are swaying.

And when in the lands of the south the eggs hatched by the glowing sun, crocodile eggs, turtle eggs, snake eggs, ugly lizard eggs, ancient reptile eggs, crackle, then the poisonous eggs of the desert crack with a soft pop. They have no seeds, no little lizard, no little snake: just airy, strange formations. Many-coloured as the torch, the dancer's veil, many-scented as the pale sanguine of Lahore, many-toned as the beating heart of the angel of Israel. And multitudinous as the hideous body of the basilisk.

The south wind picks up. It emerges from the swamps of the equatorial forests and dances across the sandy desert. It picks up the glowing veil of the sun's eggs

and fly them across the blue seas. She carries it with her like a light cloud, like the linen of the priestesses of the night.

So flies the poisonous plague of spies to the blonde north.

Our quiet days, my brother, are cold as the north. Your eyes are blue and good and know nothing of fiery desire. Like the heavy berries of blue glycenae are the hours of thy days, they lift me down to the soft carpet: so on the arbours of the sunlight my light feet tread.

But when the shadows fall, my fair brother, fire will tingle your young skin, and the mists from the south will breathe your longing soul. And thy lips offer a bloody kiss to the burning poison of the deserts.

.oOo.

My blond brother, sleeping child of my peaceful days, this is not the time I turn the pages of Mr James Brinken's leather-bound book. It is when the mysterious lightly stirs the blue waves, when sweet birdsong sings from the crown of my rosebuds. My blood flows slowly in my veins like the sea, and with infinite calm I read Alraune's story, with your calm eyes, I give it back as I found it, unmastered, simple, true, as one free from all passion.

But I drank of the blood that flowed from your wounds at night and mingled with my red blood, I drank of the blood poisoned with the sinful venom of hot deserts. And if my brain is feverish with your kisses that are pains and lust that is torment, I may tear myself from your arms, my wild brother.

Maybe I'll sit daydreaming at my window overlooking the sea, with the sirocco pushing its heat in. I may take up the leather-bound book of the Privy Councillor again to read the story of Alraune - with your angry, hot eyes. The sea roars beneath the steep cliffs - so roars the blood in my veins.

Other people, quite different people, like what I read. And I return it as I found it, wildly, with fire - as one full of passions.

CHAPTER SIX

Which discusses how the little alraune grew up

The acquisition of the dice thrower is also mentioned by the secret adviser in the leather-bound book, which from then on shows not Dr Petersen's clear, clear letters, but his own slender, elongated, barely legible letters. But even before this little episode there are some brief entries in the volume which are of interest to the course of the story.

The first entry deals with the operation for pediatric atresia vaginalis performed by Dr Petersen. This caused the untimely death of the assistant. The Privy Councillor mentions that, in view firstly of the money saved by the death of the mother, and secondly of the excellent assistance his assistant had given throughout the case, he had granted her three months' leave on full pay for a summer trip, and had also promised her an extra bonus of 1,000 marks. Dr. Petersen was extremely pleased with the trip, the first major journey of his life, but he insisted on arranging the relatively easy operation first, although it could have been postponed until later without any particular consideration. So, a few days before his planned trip, he operated on the child, and with excellent success. Unfortunately, he himself contracted severe septicaemia - all the more miraculous because he had always taken almost excessive care - and died in less than forty-eight hours, in severe pain. The immediate cause of the septicaemia could not be ascertained; it must have been caused by a wound on the forearm, scarcely visible to the naked eye, and perhaps the result of the little patient's slight scratching.

We also learn that the baby, whom the professor entrusted for a time to the personal care of the head nurse at the clinic, was an extraordinarily quiet and fragile child. He screamed only once, and that was during the act of baptism, which was performed in the cathedral by the chaplain Ignác Schröder. Then he howled so terribly that the small company - the nurse who held him, his godparents, Princess Wolkonski and Justice Councillor Gontram Sebestyén, the priest, the sacristan and the professor himself - could not

what to do. The moment they took him out of the house, he started to roar and didn't stop until he was back home from church. The screaming in the cathedral was so unbearable that the reverend superior, in order to relieve himself and all present as soon as possible from the horrible concert, hastened the service as much as possible. When they had finished, and the nurse and the child had got into the carriage, they breathed a sigh of relief.

It seems that the girl, whom the professor, on an understandable whim, called "Alraune", could not have had anything special happen to her in the first years of her life, for there is little to note in the leather-bound book. It is also recorded that the professor had already carried out his determination to adopt Alraune before she came into the world, and in his authentic will made her his sole heir, to the express exclusion of all relatives. The book also mentions that the princess gave the child as a godchild a very valuable but equally tasteless necklace of four gold chains set with brilliants and two strings of large pearls. In the middle, also richly beaded, was a necklace of sky-red hair, which the princess had had made from a lock of hair she had cut from the mother's hair when she was unconscious at childbirth.

The child remained in the clinic for four years, until only the secret adviser gave up the institute and the associated experimental stations, which he cared less and less about. He then took it to his estate in Lendenich.

There the child found a playmate in the person of little Farkas Gontram, the youngest son of the magistrate, who was, of course, four years older. Privy Councillor Ten Brinken barely mentions the collapse of the Gontram house, only briefly that death had bored the game away. in the white house at Rajnament and in the space of a year had snatched away the mother and her three sons. His fourth son, Joseph, whom he had intended to become a priest, was taken in by the Reverend Chaplain Schröder, while Frida, with her friend Olga Wolkonski, who had in the meantime married a dubious Spanish count, moved to Rome and spent her days in their house. These events coincided with the financial collapse of the magistrate, which could not be contained by the princess's handsome fee, which she paid when she finally won her marriage. The Privy Councillor describes the fact that she had taken the youngest child as an act of philanthropy, but adds that it was little Wolf who had done it,

who inherited a few vineyards with small buildings from his maternal aunt, so that his future was assured. He also notes that the father had entrusted the management of this property to himself, and adds that, out of tenderness, lest the child should later feel that he had been brought up in a strange house out of mercy and pity, he met the costs of maintaining the adopted child out of the interest. It is to be presumed that it was not the Privy Councillor who was bad at business.

Otherwise, from the entries with which the Privy Councillor enriched the leather-bound book this year, one can draw the clear conclusion that little Gontram Wolf had had his fill of the bread he ate in Lendenich. He was an excellent playmate for his foster daughter, and more than that, he was her plaything and her playpen. She, used to being bullied by her rambunctious siblings, transferred her affection to the fragile little creature, who wandered in private in the spacious garden, stables, greenhouses and other buildings. The reaping of death in her parents' house, the sudden collapse of all that was the world to her, for all Gontram's indifference, made a deep impression on her. The handsome little boy, with big black dreamy eyes like his mother's, became quiet, silent and withdrawn. This interest of his in a thousand children, so abruptly dried up like a weak vine, wound itself round little Alraune, and took root there by many tiny threads. What was in her young soul she gave to her new brother, gave with that boundless kindness which had been the radiant joy of her parents.

When he came back from the town high school at noon, where he always sat in the last bench, he would run past the kitchen, however hungry he was. He searched the garden for Alraune until he found her. The servants often forcibly carried him in and gave him his lunch. No one really cared much for the children, but while they had a strange aversion to the little girl, they did care for little Wolf. He had the somewhat awkward affection that the servants had shown for many years to the master's nephew, Frank Braun, when he spent his school holidays here. As once, little Wolf was now welcome to Froitsheim, the old coachman and his horses, to help him up and put him on a fleece blanket, and to ride him in the yard and garden. The gardener showed him the best fruits of the garden, pruned the most straggling canes, the servants kept his food warm and made sure he wanted for nothing. It was as if the boy had taken to himself

considered them alike, while the girl, small as she was, had a peculiar way of feeling the wide gulf between them. She never spoke to them, and when she did, it was a wish that sounded almost like a command, although in the depths of their souls that was precisely what the Rajnamell people could not bear. Not even from their lord - let alone from this strange child.

Verni was not beaten, the Privy Councillor had strictly forbidden it. But they made him feel ignored in a hundred different ways. They pretended he wasn't there. He walked around them - fine, let him run around. They took care of his food, his bed, his underwear and his clothes - but only in the way they put food in front of the old biting dog, scooped out his junk and untied his chain for the night.

The Privy Councillor did not care about the children, he let them go their own way. Shortly after he disbanded his clinic, he gave up his teaching practice, and since then he has devoted himself to his old passion, archaeology, in addition to his estate and mortgage business. He carried on, as he did with everything he set about, in the manner of a shrewd tradesman. He was adept at selling his cleverly assembled collections at good prices to museums all over the world. The land around the Brinkenes' seat, stretching as far as the Rhine and the city on the one hand, and as far as the Eifel mountains on the other, was full of things that the Romans and their allies had brought together. Long had the Brinkens collected. If, within ten miles of the border, a peasant's ploughshare got stuck, he dug it out carefully and brought his treasures to Lendenich, the old house dedicated to John Nepomuk. The professor bought everything, old coins by the potful, rusty weapons and yellowed bones, urns, handcuffs and tear jars. He paid in pennies, or at most in garas - but the peasant always had a cup of good brandy in his kitchen, and if he needed money for seeds, he got it, too, at a very high interest rate, of course, but without the collateral demanded by the banks.

In fact, the land has never been so rich in antiquities as it has been since Alraune was in the house. He brings gold into the house: laughed the professor. He knew well that this was done in the most natural way in the world, and that it was merely the more intimate study of things that produced the result, and yet he had deliberately associated it with the little creature. He toyed with the idea. He indulged in bold speculations, bought huge plots of land on the continuation of the wide Villenstrasse, dug them up and crushed every handful of land. He made deals that were so risky that

is unimaginable. He bailed out the Mortgage Bank, which every sane person predicted would fail in the shortest possible time. But the bank held its ground, and whatever it touched, it succeeded. Then, by chance, he found a source of sour water on his mountain estate, caught it and bottled it. So he started to work in the sour water business, he collected all the springs in the Rhine region and almost monopolized the industry. He set up a small trust, wrapped them in national colours and declared that he had to compete with the English Apollinaris abroad. The small landowners surrounded him as their leader, swore by his 'grace' and readily agreed to him when he tied up a whole lot of commission for himself in the formation of joint-stock companies. But they did the right thing: the Privy Councillor doubled their interest and cracked down hard on outsiders who didn't go along with him.

He got involved in a hundred different things, and the only thing they had in common was that they all had a connection to the land. This was another whim of his, a conscious playing with thoughts. Alraune was extracting gold from the earth, he thought, and so he was occupied with things that had to do with the earth. He did not believe in superstition for a moment, yet he made the success of the boldest speculation about land a certainty. All other business he rejected without a second thought. Profitable stock-market deals, the odds of which were as clear as day, and without the slightest risk. But he bought up a lot of cheap mining paper, shares in ore and coal mines, and became a shareholder in a number of disreputable mining companies. "Alraune has a hand in the game," he said with a smile.

.oOo.

The day came when this thought became more than a joke.

Little Wolf was rummaging in the garden, behind the stables, under the big mulberry tree, where he wanted to build Alraune's underground castle. He dug day after day, sometimes with the help of one of the gardeners. The child sat beside them, not speaking, not laughing, watching silently.

And one night the boy's shovel made a ringing sound. With the help of the gardener's daughter, a handful of brown soil was dug up from the roots. And they took a shield, a handle and a whole handful of money to the professor. Now he had dug expertly and found real treasures, rare and valuable Gallic pieces.

Of course, that was nothing special either. If the peasants could find something here and there, why shouldn't there be something hidden in his own garden. He asked the child why he was digging under the mulberry tree, and Farkas said that the little girl wanted it there and nowhere else.

He also asked Alraune. But Alraune was silent.

She's a magic wand, thought the Privy Councillor. She can sense where treasures lie in the earth. And she laughed - she was still laughing. Sometimes she took him with her, they walked down Villenstrasse to the Rhine. They went out to his estates, to the diggings.

- Where should we dig?" he asked dryly. She watched him keenly as he walked across the meadow, his frail body giving no sign, any clue.

But Alraune was silent and his little body said nothing.

Later he understood what he wanted from her. Sometimes he stopped at a certain place.

- Dig!" he said.

They dug and found nothing. And the girl laughed merrily.

- He is making fools of us, thought the professor. But still: he always dug when she told him to.

Once or twice they found something. They found a Roman tomb and a large urn with old silver coins.

- By chance!" said the Privy Councillor now. But this is what he thought. coincidence too!

.oOo.

One afternoon, as he left the library room, he saw the boy standing under the well, half naked, his torso down. The old coachman was pumping water; cold jets of water dripped down his head, neck, back and arms. His skin was red and dotted with small blisters.

- What's wrong, little Wolf?" he asked.

The child was silent through gritted teeth, but his black eyes filled with tears.

- "Nettles," said the old coachman. "The little girl beat him with nettles. The child protested:

- No, no, he didn't beat me. - I'm the reason - I slept with him myself.

The Privy Councillor questioned him in vain; with weariness and only with the help of the coachman was the truth learned.

She was really up to her hips, lying in the nettle and rolling around in it. Only he did it at his sister's request.

One day she accidentally touched a nettle and noticed that her hands were burnt, red and blistered. So he made her grab it with her other hand and roll around in it with her bare breasts.

- "Foolish fellow!" said the Privy Councillor; and then inquired whether Alraune had touched the nettle.

- Yes," said the boy, "but he didn't burn himself.

The professor went down to the garden, looking for his adopted child, and finally found her. He was standing at the back, by the high wall, plucking nettles from a pile of rubble. In his bare arms he carried it to the glycene hole and piled it on the ground. He made a bed.

- Who are you doing it for?

The little one looked at him and then said seriously:

- To Wolf!

He took her hand and looked at her thin arms. No sign of a blister.

- Come on!" he said.

He led her to the greenhouse, where there was a long row of Japanese primulas.

- Pluck these flowers.

Alraune broke off the primulas one by one. He stretched and twisted, his arms coming into contact with the poisonous leaves, but the fiery rashes just wouldn't show.

"And in the brown leather-bound book he has written a beautiful treatise on the action of urticaria when we touch *urtica dioica*, or *primula obconica*. He explained that the effect is purely chemical, that tiny pollen of the stem and leaves, which injure the skin, exude acid, which causes local poisoning in the wounded area. It has been found that the rare exposure to primulas and nettles

insensitivity, how closely related it is to witchcraft and fiendishness, and whether the basis of both phenomena is not to be sought in some hysterical autosuggestion that would explain immunity. Now that he perceived a peculiarity in the little girl, he consciously sought for any possibility that might support this idea. Thus it is in this place that the after-note is found, which Dr. Petersen's description of the child, considering it insignificant, overlooked - that the child was born at midnight on the dot.

So Alraune was born - *as it should be* - the Privy Councillor said.

.oOo.

Old Brambach came down from the hills four hours from the village of Filip. As a half cripple, he wandered the villages of the foothills selling church lottery tickets, holy pictures and cheap rosaries. He staggered into the courtyard, reported to the Privy Councillor that he had brought back Roman goods that a peasant had found in his field. The professor said he had no time to wait; old Brambach sat down on the stone bench in the courtyard, smoked his pipe and waited.

Two hours later, the Privy Councillor called him in. He always kept people waiting, even when he had nothing to do - nothing depresses prices like this waiting, he thought. But this time he was really busy; the director of the Germanisches Museum in Nuremberg was with him, and he had bought a fine collection of Gallic artefacts from the Rhine-Navids.

The Privy Councillor did not even let the lame Brambach into the library, he kept him in the small anteroom.

- "Come on, old limpy, show me what you've brought!" he said.

The cripple untied his big red handkerchief and carefully placed its contents: coins, helmet scraps, a shield button and a beautiful tear-glass on the rickety cane chair.

The Privy Councillor barely turned around, just gave the bottle a quick, grim glance.

- Well, Brambach, is that all?" he asked reproachfully.

And when the old man nodded, he gave him a good telling off. For an old man, he is as stupid as an immature dachshund! It took him four hours to get here; four hours to get back - he had to wait a couple of hours: he wastes his whole day for such rubbish! It's worth nothing, pack it up again and take it back, you can't give me a penny for it! How many times have you told me that the stupid peasants shouldn't run to Landenich for all this rubbish! Wait till a lot of them get together, then bring them all at once! Or is it so pleasant to hobble with crooked legs in this heat all the way from Philip and back for nothing? Shame on you.

The cripple scratched the base of his ears and twirled his brown flask between his fingers in confusion. He would have liked to have said something to change the professor's mood; he was usually a great talker when it came to praising his belongings, but now he could think of nothing but the long journey he had made, and that was what had incurred the professor's wrath. He was utterly devastated, and realized his folly; so he made no reply. He only asked to be allowed to leave the things here - at least he would not have to carry them back. The privy councillor waved his hand in agreement and gave him a half-march.

- Here, Brambach, for your journey! But be smarter next time and do as I say! Now go to the kitchen, give yourself a sandwich and a glass of beer.

Delighted that it had worked out this way, the invalid thanked him and limped across the yard to the kitchen.

And His Excellency Ten Brinken was quick on the uptake of the precious tear-jar. Carefully cleaning it with a silk handkerchief from his pocket, he examined the delicate purple bottle from all sides. Only then did he re-enter the library room, where the Nuremberg director stood in front of the glass cabinets.

- "Here, my dear doctor," he began, waving the bottle in his upraised hand.
- another rarity! It is from the tomb of Tullia, the sister of the general Aulus, in the Schwarc-

from the camp at Rheindorf - I just showed you another find from there!

He handed me the bottle and continued:

- Just state where it comes from!

The scientist took the bottle, stepped to the window and adjusted his glasses. He asked for a magnifying glass and a silk cloth, rubbed and wiped the glass and turned it back and forth towards the light.

- "Hm - it seems to be Syrian and from the glass factory in Palmyra," he said hesitantly and indecisively.

- "Bravo!" cried the Privy Councillor. "Hats off to you!" "You are a connoisseur!" "If the Nuremberg scholar had guessed agrigentus or mundai, he would have been so enthusiastic. "From what period, Doctor?

The director raised the bottle again.

- From the first half of the second century!" he said. His voice now had a definite ring to it.

- "I must bow to you," said the Privy Councillor, in appreciation. "I don't think there is anyone who has ever defined it so quickly and so accurately!

- "Apart from your Excellency, of course!" replied the scientist, who was well pleased by the flattery.

- "You greatly overestimate my knowledge, doctor," said the professor modestly, "It took me no less than a week of hard work to determine the origin of the jar with absolute certainty. But I don't regret the trouble, it's a rare piece of work - though I paid a high price for it. The fellow who found it made a fortune with it.

- I want to have it for my museum!" the director said.

- What do you want for it?

- Five thousand marks, because it's Nuremberg. - You know that I expect preferential prices for German institutions. Two gentlemen from London are coming to see me next week, and I shall ask them for eight thousand - and I shall certainly get it.

- "But, Your Excellency!" said the scientist, "Five thousand marks!" "You know I cannot pay such a price!

- "I'm very sorry!" said the secret adviser, "but I really can't give you the bottle any cheaper.

Mr Nuremberg was playing with the bottle.

- A beautiful piece. I'm truly in love with it. I'll give you three thousand for it, Your Grace.

- No, not a penny cheaper than five thousand! But I'll tell you what, Mr. Director: if you like the bottle so much, let me offer it to you as a gift.

- Keep it as a souvenir for the infallible statement.

- Thank you, Your Grace, thank you!" cried the director. He stood up and squeezed the Privy Councillor's hand firmly. "But I cannot accept any gifts in my position - so don't take it amiss if I refuse. "I am prepared to pay the price you wish, but only to keep this beautiful piece in the country, not to let it go to the English.

He went to the desk and wrote the cheque. But before he said goodbye, the Privy Councillor persuaded him to look at some less interesting items from the tomb of Tullia, the sister of the warlord Aulus.

The professor made an effort, walking his guest to his car. Returning to the courtyard, he saw Alraune and the little Wolf in the company of the peddler, who was showing off his colourful holy images. The old Brambach was once more chastened by food and drink, and then sold the cook a rosary, which he said had been consecrated by the bishop himself, and why it was thirty pfennigs more expensive than the others. All this made his tongue, which had been so frightened before, liven up, and he limped boldly to the Privy Councillor.

- "Professor," he said, "buy a nice picture of Joseph for the children! His Excellency Ten Brinken was in a good mood.

- St Joseph? - No! - But you have John Nepomuk?

Brambach had no Nepomuk. Anthony did, and John and Thomas and James - but unfortunately not Nepomuk. Again he had to endure reproach for not knowing his business:

In Lendenich you can only do business with St. Nepomuk, no other saint. The peddler was confused, but made one last attempt.

- Buy a lottery ticket! - For the rebuilding of the Laurentius church in Dülmen! - Just one mark - and everyone who buys it will be exempt from a hundred days of purgatory! - Here it is, in print! - He held the ticket under the professor's nose.

- "We don't need forgiveness," said the professor, "we're Dutch, we're going to heaven anyway.

- "Is it?" said the peddler. "Can't you win? There are three hundred prizes and the first prize is fifty thousand marks in cash! Here it stands!" he pointed with his dirty finger at the lottery ticket.

The professor took it from his hand.

- "Old ass!" he laughed. "It says here: five hundred thousand lottery tickets! He turned on his heel, but the cripple limped after him and grabbed his coat.

- "Try it, Professor," he grumbled. "People like us want to live.

- No, said the Privy Councillor. But the peddler would not yield.

- I have a feeling he will win!

- You always have that feeling!

- Draw lots with the little one, for luck!" begged Brambach.

The Privy Councillor was taken aback.

- "I'll try," he murmured. "Come on, Alraune! Pick a ticket.

The child patted me on the back. The cripple carefully formed a fan from his lottery tickets and held it out to her.

- "Close your eyes," he ordered. "Like this, now pull.

Alraune pulled out a lottery ticket and handed it to the Privy Councillor. After a moment's hesitation, Ten Brinken beckoned the boy to join him.

- "You too, Wolf," he said.

.oOo.

His Excellency reports in the leather-bound book that he won fifty thousand marks in the Dülmen church lottery. He adds that, unfortunately, he cannot say which ticket won the jackpot, the one drawn by Alraune or the one drawn by Farkas, because he put them both in his desk without writing the children's names on them. But he has little doubt that Alraune's ticket won.

Otherwise, he had an admiration for old Brambach, who had brought the money into his house by force, so to speak. He gave him five marks as a present and took it out to give him a permanent allowance of thirty marks a year from the district sickness fund for invalid warriors.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Which tells what happened when Alraune was a girl

From the age of eight until his seventeenth birthday, ten Brinken Alraune was educated in the convent of the Sacré Coeur in Nancy, from the age of eight until his twelfth birthday. In his spare time, he stayed at the boarding house of Mlle de Vynteelen on the Avenue du Marteau. During this time, he spent his twice-yearly holidays at the house of ten Brinken in Lendennich.

At first, the Privy Councillor wanted to educate the child at home: he hired a lady to educate the child, then a teacher, and then another. But soon they were all discouraged, and even with the best will in the world they could not manage the girl. She was not untutored, she was not wild, she was not sullen. But they asked her in vain, and she would not answer, and her stubborn silence could not be dissuaded. He sat still and silent, squinting his half-open eyes, and they could hardly tell if he was listening. He took the slate pencil in his hand, but could not be made to write hairlines, outlines, or letters, but drew some strange ten-legged animal, or a face with three eyes and two noses.

What he knew, even before he was sent to the convent by the Privy Councillor, he learned from the little Wolf. This boy, who had failed every class at school because of his endless laziness, who looked down on his schoolwork with sovereign contempt, was at home dealing with his brother with infinite patience. She made him write long lines of numbers, wrote their names a hundred times, and rejoiced when his clumsy hand got stuck and his dirty little fingers scribbled her name. For this purpose she got a slate, pencil and pencil, learned one numeral or word after another, memorized it quickly, wrote it down and repeated it with the child for hours. He always found something to pick out, sometimes this or that stroke was not right. He played the teacher - and that's how he learned.

When some headmaster-teacher came to the Privy Councillor once to complain about his adopted son's dismal progress, Alraune noticed that little Wolf was very weak in science. He would play school with him, check on him, make him curl up with a book until late at night, interrogate him and

so he got her to study. He closed the door, locked it, and did not let him out until he had finished his task. And he pretended to know all these things, and would not suffer him to doubt his superiority.

She had a very light and quick grasp. She did not want to appear weak in front of him, so she took one book after another in her hands. She plucked them out, out of context, in a wild jumble. So much so, that if he didn't know something, he asked him, confident that he would. Alraune delayed to answer, told him to think and scolded him. That bought him time, he searched the books, and when he couldn't find his way, he ran to the Privy Councillor and asked. Then he'd come back to the boy and ask him if he'd remembered. At last he gave him the answer.

The professor noticed this game and amused him. He would never have thought of letting her out of the house if the princess had not urged him. She used to be a good Catholic, this woman, but now she grew more religious with every passing year, as if every pound of fat she put on made her more pious. She had insisted that her goddaughter be brought up in a convent, and the Privy Councillor, who had been her financial adviser for years and operated with the Princess's millions as his own, thought it right to humour her on this point. And so Alraune came to Nancy, the *Sacré Coeur*.

.oOo.

In addition to the notes of the Privy Councillor for this period, the leather-bound book also contains some reports by *Mère Supérieur*. The professor grinned; when he had read the book, especially the praise of her extraordinary progress: he knew the convents and knew well that nowhere in the world could one learn less than from the pious sisters. And he was amused when the praising tirades which he had at first received, and which reach every parent, were very quickly replaced by a different tone in Alraune, as she informed him of various horrors with repeated and more pressing complaints. The reason for the complaints was always the same: it was not the girl's behaviour or her conduct that gave cause for admonition, but her influence on her schoolmates.

"It is true," he wrote, "that the child himself never tortures animals; at least, he never appreciated it. But it is also true that all the little

the cruelties which his schoolmates were not afraid to commit: they sprang from his head. First of all, they caught little Mari, a very brave and obedient child, blowing up frogs with grass stalks in the convent garden. When questioned as to how she had thought of such a thing, she confessed that Alraune had suggested the idea. At first we were reluctant to believe it, and even thought it an excuse to somewhat deflect the blame. But soon we observed two other girls sprinkling salt on naked snails, so that the poor animals, also creatures of God, were dissolved into slime in the greatest agony. And the children, again, confessed that Alraune had incensed them. I questioned him myself, and the child confessed without evasion; he told me that he had once heard of it, and now wanted to see if it were true. He also confessed that he had encouraged the girls to blow up the frogs; 'it makes a nice pop,' he said, 'if they throw a stone at the frogs. Of course, he wouldn't do it himself, because a smashed frog could easily splatter on his hand. When we asked him if he realised he had sinned, he said no, he had done nothing, and what other children did was none of his business.

In this place, in brackets, are the words of the Privy Councillor: 'You are very right'.

- In spite of all the punishment," the letter continued, "some other unfortunate things soon happened, and Alraune was also the author of them. Thus Klára Maassen, a few years older, from Düren, who has been with us for four years now, and who has never given us cause for complaint in all that time, has poked the eyes of a young mole with a knitting needle heated to the point of glowing. He himself was so terrified by what he had done that for several days, until the next confession, he was very agitated and kept crying for no reason, and only calmed down again when he received absolution. Alraune declared that moles hide in the dark earth, so it is quite indifferent whether they can see or not. We then found very cleverly constructed bird traps in the garden and the little bird catchers, who thank God had not caught anything yet, were not at any cost willing to tell us how they had come up with the idea. Only when we threatened them with the severest punishment did they confess that Alraune had tempted them to do so, and threatened them that there would be trouble if they betrayed it. The child's pernicious influence on his schoolmates has, unfortunately, increased so much of late that the truth is almost impossible to

to hollow out. So the nurse in charge of the class caught Petit Hélén catching flies during break time, carefully clipping their wings with scissors and tearing off their legs one by one and throwing them into an anthill. The little girl persisted in coming up with the idea herself, and even assured the Reverend that Alraune had nothing to do with it. It was just as stubborn a lie that her cousin Ninon told yesterday, when he tied a pléhfazek on the tail of our brave old cat, which nearly drove the poor animal mad. We are convinced that Alraune is at play here too.

He goes on to write to his Excellency that he has convened a conference at which it was decided to humbly ask His Excellency to take his daughter out of the convent and bring her home as soon as possible. The Privy Councillor replied that he was extremely sorry for what had happened, but asked that the child be allowed to remain in the convent for a while longer: the harder the work, the more valuable the success. He is convinced that the sisters, with patience and piety, will succeed in eradicating the bump and moulding his child's heart into a beautiful garden of the Lord.

He wanted to be sure that the influence of this fragile child was indeed stronger than the convent upbringing and the influence of the pious sisters. He knew very well that the cheap convent of the Sacré Coeur in Nancy was not the best place for sending children, and that if they could count an excellency's daughter among their pupils, they would be grateful. He was not disappointed: the ferryman replied that, trusting in God, he would try the girl once more, and that all the sisters had voluntarily declared their willingness to include Alraune in their evening prayers. Whereupon the Privy Councillor generously sent a bank note for a hundred marks for their poor.

During this vacation, the professor observed the little girl quite closely. He had known the Gontram family since their great-grandfather's time and knew that they had instilled a love of animals in their mothers from the time they were babies. However great the child's influence on the son, years older than himself, it is here that he finds a barrier; he is helpless against the boundless goodness that is rooted in the depths of his soul.

And yet one afternoon he found Gontram Wolf there, by the lake, under the hornflower bush. He was kneeling on the ground with a huge frog on a stone in front of him. The boy stuck a burning cigarette into the frog's wide mouth, deep down its throat. And the frog stoked it with deadly fear. He swallowed the smoke and sucked it into his belly, but he did not blow it out again

- and so he got fatter and fatter. The little Wolf stared at him. Thick tears

were streaming down his face. But when the cigarette burned out, still

he lit another, took the pipe out of the frog's mouth, and with trembling fingers replaced it with a new one. The frog swelled to its bony form, its large eyes bulging fatly from their sockets. It was a strong animal, it could hold two and a half cigarettes and only then did it burst. The boy cried out, his pain seeming to be much greater than that of the tortured animal. He jumped back, as if to escape into the bushes, looked around, and when he saw that the torn frog was still moving, he ran over, stamping the animal wildly and desperately with his heels to kill it and put it out of its misery.

The Privy Councillor took Wolf by the ear and first searched his pockets. He found a few more cigarettes and the boy confessed that he had taken them from the desk in the library. But he couldn't be persuaded to say who told him that smoking frogs bloat and pop. Persuasion didn't work. The professor had the gardener chew him out, and that was even less helpful. Even Alraune stubbornly denied it, even when one of the servants told him he had seen him steal the cigarettes. Still, he insisted that he had stolen the cigarettes and she insisted that she had not.

Alraune spent another year in the convent and was sent home in the middle of the school year. This time for no real reason: only the nuns and very little of the Privy Councillor, but no clever man, thought him guilty.

There has already been one outbreak in the Sacré Coeur: measles. Fifty-seven little girls lay sick in their beds and very few remained healthy: Alraune was one of them. This time, however, there was a much more serious epidemic: typhoid fever. Eight children and a nun died of it; the others, almost all of them, also contracted it. But Alraune ten Brinken was never as healthy as she was at that time; she was fat, blooming and running merrily from one sickroom to another. And because no one cared for him these weeks, he ran up and down the stairs, sat on every bed and told the children that they were going to die tomorrow and that they were all going to hell. But he, Alraune, would live and go to heaven. He presented them with holy pictures and told them to pray diligently to Mary and the sacred heart of Jesus - although it was no use. Yet they will be burnt, they will be thoroughly roasted - it's amazing how he was able to colour all this so brilliantly. Sometimes, when he was in a good mood, he softened: then he promised only a hundred thousand years of purgatory. But that was enough for the sick senses of the pious little girls. The doctor owned two

threw Alraun out of the room with his hand, and the nuns, firmly convinced that he had brought the disease to the convent, hurried him home.

The professor laughed and was delighted with the news. And when, shortly after the child's return, two of his servants fell ill with typhoid fever and died soon afterwards in hospital, he was not very serious. But he wrote an angry letter to the matron of the convent in Nancy. How could they have sent the little one to her house under these conditions?" she complained bitterly. She refused to pay the last term's tuition and demanded a refund of the money paid for the servants' illness. And it's true - - from a health point of view, the nuns of the Sacré Coeur should not have acted in this way.

.oOo.

In any case, your Excellency Mr ten Brinken did not do otherwise. He was not afraid of the danger of infection, but like all doctors, he much preferred the patient to be someone else. He kept Alraunet in Lendenich only until he found a good boarding-house in the town; then, on the fourth day, Spaba sent him to the famous establishment of Mlle de Vynteelen. He gave the silent Alajos to accompany him: during the journey nothing strange happened to the child, while the servant had two little experiences: on the way up he found a purse with some silver coins, on the way back, as soon as he had shut the cupola door, he crushed one of his fingers. The Privy Councillor nodded in satisfaction when Alajos made this report.

Miss Becker, a German schoolteacher, who also came from the university town of Rhineland and spent her holidays in Lendenich, told the Privy Councillor a lot about Alraunenak's years in Spa. From the first day Alraune began to rule the old Avenue du Marteau and extended his dominion not only to his schoolmates but also to the schoolmistresses, especially the miss, who in a few weeks became almost a helpless plaything for the girl's incapable whims. Thus, at breakfast, Alraune declared that he wanted neither honey nor marmalade, but butter; Mlle de Vynteelen, of course, gave no butter. A few days later, some other students asked for butter, and the whole institute cried out for butter. Even Miss Paterson, who had never had anything but toast with jam for her morning tea, suddenly felt an insatiable craving for butter. At last the headmistress relented and allowed the butter she had been demanding. But from that day on, Alraune was fond of orange marmalade.

In response to a specific question from the Privy Councillor, Ms Becker stated that there had been no cases of animal cruelty at the Vynteelen boarding house this year, at least none had been discovered. On the other hand, both Alraune and the other children had tortured the teachers and governesses, especially the poor music professor. In his burnoose cellar, which he used to leave in his coat hanging in the corridor, so as not to be tempted and not to snuff it during lessons, the strangest things had been found since Alraune's enrolment, such as fat cross spiders and cellar beetles, as well as gunpowder, pepper, powdered ink, and once a centipede cut into pieces.

At one time or another, girls were caught and punished - but never Alraune. Yet Alraune took a stance of passive resistance to the old musician, not practising, putting his hands in his lap for hours and not touching the keys. Then, when the professor, in desperation, once complained to the headmistress, Alraune calmly declared that the old man was lying. Mlle de Vynteelen appeared in person at the next lesson and saw that the little girl excelled in her lessons, played better than the others and showed admirable skill. The lady of the boarding-house reproached the music teacher - who stood there in silence, unable to say anything but this: "Mais c' est aiccoyable - c' est vraiment aiccoyable!"

From that time on, the ladies of the boarding-house called him "Monsieur Incroyable"; they called him by his name wherever he appeared, and pronounced him as if they had not a tooth in their heads.

As for the miss, she had hardly a day's peace; she was always being played silly jokes on. Itching powder was sprinkled on his bed, and once, after an outing, half a dozen fleas. Sometimes the key to her wardrobe or her room was lost, sometimes the clasps and buttons were untangled from the clothes she was about to put on. Once, when she wanted to go to bed, she was frightened to death by the champagne powder in her 'vase de nuit', and at other times, burning insects flew in through the open window, making her scream loudly for help. Sometimes they would smear his chair with glue or paint, sometimes he would find a dead mouse or an old hen's head in his pocket, and so they would go on their mischief; poor miss could hardly enjoy life for an hour. Inquiry after inquiry, always guilty parties were found and punished. But Alraune was never one of them, although everyone was convinced that he was the real author of all these pranks. The only one who was outraged by this suspicion

refused, it was the English Miss herself; she swore her innocence until she turned her back on the Vinteele Institute: this hell, she said, which had admitted only one precious little angel.

The Privy Councillor grinned as he introduced the leather-bound book, "This is the precious little angel Alraune".

She herself, Miss Becker continued to tell the professor, had avoided contact with the strange child from the beginning. This was all the easier because she was mainly concerned with French and English pupils, and only taught Alraune gymnastics and needlework. In the latter subject, seeing that Alraune was not only uninterested, but downright disgusted with it, he immediately excused her; in gymnastics, on the other hand, a subject in which Alraune always excelled, he pretended not to notice the child's whims. Only once did he have a slight quarrel with her, and that was shortly after Alraune's enrolment. He must admit that, unfortunately, he got the short end of the stick. One term, he overheard her telling her schoolmates about her stay at the convent, with such a hideous mouth and impertinent tongue in cheek that he felt obliged to intervene. On the one hand, he told the little ones how wonderful and sublime everything was there, and on the other, he told them real horror stories about the various misdeeds of the pious nuns. Having himself been brought up in the convent of the *Sacré Coeur* in Nancy, and therefore knowing very well how simple and artless life was there, and how the nuns were the most innocent creatures in the world, he took Alraune aside, exposed his lies and demanded that he should immediately denounce his untruths to his schoolmates. When Alraune stubbornly refused, he declared that he would then tell the girls. Alraune then stood on tiptoe, calmly looked her over and replied quietly:

- If you tell me, miss, I'll tell you that your mama has a cheese shop at home.

She, Miss Becker, admits that she was weak, gave in to her false sense of honor and the child's will triumphed. She added that the soft voice of the girl's voice was so loud that she was almost afraid of her at that moment. He left Alraune in the lurch and went to his room, glad that he had not come into conflict with the little creature. In any case, she was soon punished for her defiance of her good mother: the next day Alraune told the girls about the mother's cheese business

and it took him a lot of effort to slowly regain the respect he had lost in the institution that night.

Alraune treated his girlfriends far worse than his superiors - there wasn't a girl in the boarding house who didn't suffer at his hands. Oddly enough, the little one seemed to grow more fond of her with every bad action. True, the girl who had just been chosen to be the victim of his mischief, but the others always took his side. He was loved more than anyone. Miss Becker told the Privy Councillor all sorts of little things about her, and he mentions one of the most egregious cases in the leather-bound book.

Blanche de Banville was spending her holidays with relatives in Picardy, and the hot-blooded fourteen-year-old fell head over heels in love with her much older uncle. On his return, Spaba wrote to him and the young man B. d. B. replied *postea restant*; later, he evidently had more clever things to do, so that the letters were not sent. Alraune knew his secret, and so did little Louison. Blanche, of course, was very unhappy, sobbing all night long; when she did, Louison sat with her and tried to comfort her, but Alraune declared that she must not be comforted; her uncle had been unfaithful to her, had betrayed her, and Blanche must die in her unhappy shit. It is the only way; to bring her evil deed before the eyes of the faithless, so that her days are tormented by Furies till the end of her life. He knew of many known instances where this had been done. Blanche was ready to die, but it was not so easy; even in her great pain, the meal was always delicious. Alraune declared that if her heart did not break in pain, she would be obliged to commit suicide. He offered a firearm or a pistol, but they had neither. Nor could Blanche be induced to jump out of the window, nor to stick a hatpin through her heart, nor to hang herself. She wanted to swallow poison, nothing else. Alraune soon helped. In Mlle de Vynteelen's medicine cabinet was a bottle of lysol - she had stolen it with Louison. Unfortunately, there was very little left in it, and so she had Louison scrape off the phosphorus heads of a few boxes of matches. Blanche wrote her farewell letters to her parents, the Inspector and the treacherous lover, then drank the lysol and swallowed the match heads - they all tasted horrible. To make sure of that, Alraune made him swallow three more packets of sewing-needles. - He was not present at the suicide attempt, by the way, but retired to his room with

on the pretext that he would be careful, but first he made Blanche swear on the crucifix that he would do everything exactly. That evening little Louison sat at her friend's bedside and, with bitter tears, handed over first the lysol, then the match heads, and finally the three-leaf needle. The triple murderous poison had so poisoned poor Blanche that she vomited and cried out in pain. Louison wailed with her, the house roared with her, she ran out of the room, called the headmistress and the teachers in, and wailed that Blanche was dying.

Blanche de Banville had no intention of dying, a clever doctor gave her a strong emetic which withdrew the lysol, the phosphorus and the three leaf needles. One of the leaves burst open, half a dozen needles were lost in his stomach, and wandering through his body over the years they came out in all sorts of places, painfully reminding the little suicide of his first love.

Blanche stayed on the bed for a long time, in great pain: she was quite chastened. They all showed her compassion and kindness as they could, and granted her every little wish. But he wished nothing more than that his two friends who had helped him, Alraune and Louison, should not be punished. She begged and pleaded until the inspector promised - so that Alraune was not driven from the boarding-house.

Then it was the turn of Hilda Aldekerk, who was very fond of the Berlin doughnuts, which were available at the Place Royal, the German confectioner's. "She will eat twenty," she said; but Alraune said that she certainly could not eat thirty. It was a bet; whoever loses, pays for the doughnut. Hilda Aldekerk was the winner, but she was so ill that she kept her bed for fourteen days.

- "Big-bellied!" said ten Brinken Alraune, "you want it so!

From then on, the little girls called the fat, round Hilda "the eater". Hilda screamed a little, but then got used to the nickname and eventually became, like Blanche de Banville, Alraune's most loyal follower.

Only once had Alraune been severely punished in a boarding house, reported Miss Becker, and, in fact, decidedly unjustly. One full-moon night, the schoolmistress, who was teaching French, ran out of her room in terror, shook the whole house, wailed that a white ghost was sitting on the balustrade of her balcony. No one

ventured into the room, finally waking the porter, who entered armed with a huge dong. It turned out to be the ghost of Alraune, who sat there silently in his nightgown, staring wide-eyed at the moon. How he got there they could not make out of him. The headmistress thought the ghost was a very bad joke. It was only much later that it was evidently the full moon that had affected her; on other occasions she had been observed to sleepwalk. It is curious that Alraune suffered the unjust punishment she received - she had to write long chapters of the *Télémaque* on afternoons when there was no performance - without protest and with great conscientiousness, and would have been extremely indignant at any deserved punishment.

- "I fear the little girl will not give your Excellency much pleasure," said Miss Becker.

- I think so, yes. So far I am very satisfied with it," replied the Privy Councillor.

During the last two holidays, he did not bring Alraune home. He allowed her to travel to her boarding house friends, once to Maud Macpherson in Scotland, another time to Blanche's parents in Paris, and finally to the Rodenberg girls on their estate in Münster. There is no precise record of these episodes in Alraune's life - he only sketched out for himself the pranks he might have committed on these holidays. He was pleased to think that this creature he had created had extended the magic sphere of his influence so far. He had read in the newspaper that the summer he was at Boltenhagen, Count Rodenberg's colour, green and white, had done exceedingly well on the lawn, and had brought a considerable profit to his stables; he had also learned that Mlle de Vynteelen had come into an unexpected inheritance, which had placed her in such a position that she had been able to dissolve her establishment, and that she had stopped taking new pupils to her boarding-house, and had only kept the old ones until they had finished their studies. He attributed all this to Alraune's presence, and was convinced that wherever he stayed, at the convent of Nancy, at the Reverend Macpherson's, in Edinburgh, and at the Banville's on the boulevard Haussmann, he brought home gold: and thus he made amends for his little devilishness many times over. He thought that all these people owed his child a great debt of gratitude, and he felt as if he had brought into the world a strange being from another world, who had bestowed his gifts on all, scattering roses in the path of life for all who were fortunate enough to meet him. He laughed when he remembered that these roses also had sharp thorns and could carve pretty wounds.

- Tell me, how is your dear mamma?" asked Miss Becker.
- Thank you, Your Grace, - my mother cannot complain. Business has improved considerably in the last few years.
- There you see!" said the Privy Councillor. And he gave orders that all cheeses - emental, rokford, chestnut and hollandaise - were to be bought at Beckerne's in Münsterstrasse.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Explaining how Alraune became mistress of the Brinken seat

When Alraune returned to the house dedicated to St Nepomuk, Privy Councillor ten Brinken was seventy-six years old. But that age was only set by the calendar; neither infirmity nor the slightest suffering reminded him of it. He felt at home in his ancestral village, which was almost reached by the growing, far-reaching fingers of the city. He hung like a fat spider in the web of its power, which stretched out in every direction. Before Alraune's arrival, he felt as if he were being tickled, waiting as a favourite plaything for his whims, as a clownish lure to lure many more foolish flies and moles into his web.

Alraune arrived in the old man hardly seen as different from when he was a child. He studied him for a long time as he sat in the library before him and found nothing about him that reminded him of his father or mother. The young girl was small and pretty, slender, narrow-breasted and underdeveloped. Her figure was boyish and her movements were abrupt and somewhat boyish. You might have thought her a doll, but her head was not exactly doll's head. His cheekbones protruded slightly, his tiny teeth were hidden behind thin and pale lips. Her hair was rich and thick underneath, but it was not red like her mother's, but thick and chestnut brown. Like Mrs. Josephine Gontram, the Privy Councillor thought. He liked the thought of it, for it reminded him of the house in which Alraune had been pondered. He glanced at her, who sat silently before him, looking at her with a critical eye, like a picture, and looking at her, he sought other reminders.

- Yes! - His eyes!

Wide eyes opening beneath a thin, bold line of eyebrows, which accentuated his narrow, smooth forehead. They looked cool and mocking, at once soft and dreamy. They were green as grass and hard as steel - like the eyes of his nephew, Braun Frank.

The professor put on his broad lower lip. This revelation did not sit well with him. But then he shrugged - why shouldn't the boy who thought it up have so much of it? Little enough, and well paid for with the round millions the silent girl had taken from him.

- 'How bright your eyes are,' said the Privy Councillor. The girl nodded.
- Your hair is beautiful. Little Wolf's mother had hair like that.
- I will cut it down!" said Alraune.
- You don't do that anymore! Do you hear me?" ordered the Privy Councillor.

But she came to dinner with her hair cut. She was like a little boy, with a curly, boyish head.

- Where is your hair?" the professor shouted at him.
- Here!" she said calmly. She showed me a large cardboard box with metres of shiny braids.
- Why did you cut it off? - Because I forbade it? - Out of defiance? Alraune smiled.
- No! I would have done it anyway.
- Why?" the professor teased.

She reached into her dresser and pulled out seven long braids of hair. Each one was tied with a gold braid, and small cards dangled from the braids. On seven cards were seven names: Emma, Marguérite, Louison, Evelyne, Anna, Maud and Andrea.

- "Your girlfriends, aren't they?" asked the secret councillor. "And you, silly child, you cut your hair to send them a souvenir?!"

He was annoyed; this unexpected bacchanalian sentimentality was not at all to his liking. He had thought her much more mature, much more level-headed.

- No!" said Alraune, looking at the professor. "I care a lot about them! I just -He's finished.
- Just?
- I just - I want them to cut their hair.
- What should they do?" cried the old man.
- "Cut your hair!" laughed Alraune. "Quite a bit!" "Better than I did - quite short. I'll write that I cut it short - and so must they!

- "They won't be so stupid!" interjected the Privy Councillor.

- Of course they will," she said firmly. "They will. I said we should all cut our hair and they promised if I was the first, they would do it too. Only I forgot about it and only just now, when you were talking about my hair, I remembered again.

The Privy Councillor laughed at him:

- They promised! One promises many things. But they won't do it, you're just stupid.

The girl got up from the chair and stood next to the old man.

- "No!" he hissed vehemently, "they will do it, you see. They know they will, but if they did, I would tear out their hair. They fear me even when I am not beside them.

He was excited and trembling.

- Are you so sure they will do it?" asked ten Brinken.

- Yes, I am absolutely sure!" said Alraune firmly.

Now the same confidence had dawned on the professor, and he was not surprised.

- Why did you do that?" he asked.

She changed in an instant. All her strangeness disappeared. He turned into a moody, defiant child.

- "Just!" she laughed, and with her little hands she stroked the thick braids of hair. "You know, the heavy hair hurt me, it gave me headaches a lot. And I knew I looked good in short curls, but they looked awful. It's like a monkey cage in Mademoiselle de Vynteelen's first class! And how the fools will cry out. Mademoiselle swears and the new miss and the frejlejn swear and howl.

She clapped, giggled with joy.

- Help me?" he asked. - How do I pack it?

- "Send them one by one," said the Privy Councillor.

Recommended for.

- Yes, that's fine!" agreed Alraune. Over dinner, he described how the girls would look with their moustaches cut off. The tall Clifford Evelyn, whose

had thin, shiny, light-blond hair, and the thoroughbred brunette Louison, who wore a high turban. Then there were Anna and Andrea, the two Rodenberg comtessees, whose bony Westphalian skulls were covered with long curls.

- All these hairstyles will disappear," he chuckled, "They'll be like monkeys - the whole world will laugh if they walk like that.

They went back to the library room, and the Privy Councillor helped them to get what they needed, gave them a cardboard box, string, sealing wax, stamps. He smoked, chewed his cigar, and watched her as she wrote the letters to Spa. Seven little letters to seven girls. On the paper, the old coat of arms of the Brinkens: in the upper field, John Nepomuk, saint of the floods, and below, a silver egret struggling with a snake. The heron was the bird of the Brinkens.

He looked at her, and a faint tickling sensation hid in his old skin. Old memories awoke in him, longing thoughts of undeveloped boys and girls.

This one: Alraune, was a boy and a girl. Drool dripped from his fleshy lips and moistened his dark havannah. He looked at her with a longing, trembling anger. And in those moments he understood what drew men to this rabbit-like creature, like fish swimming towards the bait and not seeing the hook. But he could see the sharp hook. He'll just manage to get out of it, he thought, and take the good bite anyway.

.oOo.

Farkas Gontram was an intern in the city office of the Privy Councillor. After graduation, his guardian father took him out of high school and put him in a bank as an apprentice. Here he forgot what he had laboriously absorbed at school, forged ahead on his own path, did what was required of him. At the end of his apprenticeship, he was sent to the Privy Councillor's office, which he called his "secretariat".

His Excellency's secretariat was a strange thing. It was headed by Charles Mohnen, a doctor of four faculties, whom his old boss considered quite useful. He was still preparing to marry; wherever he went in the country he made acquaintances, and began new and new ties which never came to anything. His hair had long since fallen out, but his nose was better than ever - he sniffed everywhere for something: a wife for himself, a business for the Privy Councillor. It was the Privy Councillor who was better off.

Some accountants kept the books in remarkable order. They made sure that business ran smoothly. Above one room hung this sign: 'Legal affairs'. This was where Justice Gontram and Manasse, who had not yet won the title, used to come for an hour or two. They carried the Privy Councillor's nicely growing cock. Manasse took the hopeful ones, which he managed to win, and the old Justice Councillor took the bad ones, which he postponed again and again, but finally brought to an acceptable agreement.

Dr Mohnen also had a separate room, and he had Farkas Gontram working for him, whom he patronised and educated in his own way. This man of the world knew a lot, almost as much as little Manasse, but his knowledge was nothing like his personality. He did nothing with it; he collected his education like a child collecting stamps, because his classmates collected stamps. His collection lay in a drawer somewhere, he didn't bother with it; he only took it out and opened the album when someone wanted to see a rare stamp: Saxon three, red!

He pulled Gontram to Wolf something. Perhaps his big black eyes, which he had loved when they were his mother's; loved as much as he could love, loved as he loved five hundred other beautiful eyes. The more distant his affections for a woman, the more significant they seemed to him; to-day he seemed to be an intimate confidant of Gontramne, though he dared not kiss her hand. She increased her belief that his amorous stories were taken at face value by young Gontram, never doubting for a moment his exploits, and definitely regarding him as the great seducer he so terribly desired to be.

Doctor Mohnen guided the boy's dress, showed him how to tie his slip and, as far as he knew how, taught him elegance. He provided him with books, took him to the theatre and concerts so that his tales would always have a grateful audience. He considered himself a man of the world and wanted to make a man of the world out of Farkas Gontram.

There is no doubt that what Gontram Boy has become is entirely down to him. He needed a teacher, and he was a teacher who never demanded, always gave, day after day, almost every minute; who cultivated, even without being noticed.

That's how Gontram Farkas became a man.

Well done. Her beauty was noticed by everyone in town except Charles Mohnen, who could only conceive of beauty in close connection with a skirt, who thought everyone was beautiful as long as they wore their hair long. And that was all he considered beautiful. But others noticed. When she was still at grammar school, old gentlemen turned to look at her, winked at her, the glances of pale officers were forgotten, and at her sight more than one fair-cut head sighed and repressed its hot desire, with upset features, from which repressed desire screamed down.

Now glances shot from under veils and large hats, and beautiful women's eyes followed the young man.

- "This could be something!" murmured little Manasse in the musical garden where he sat with the magistrate and his son.

- If he doesn't turn around soon, he's going to get a neck ache!

- Who does it belong to?" asked the judicial councillor.

- Whose? "Look at him, my colleague, he's been staring at your adolescent son for half an hour, and he's been craning his neck for him.

- "Never mind," said the magistrate, in a placid tone. But little Manasse would not budge.

- Sit here, Wolf!" he ordered. The boy obediently sat down beside him and turned his back on the princess.

The beauty of the wolf frightened the little lawyer - under the beautiful mask, he thought he could hear the laughter of death, like his mother. The thought tormented him, tormented him, he hated the boy as he had once loved his mother. It was a strange enough hatred; it was a nightmare, a fervent wish that young Gontram should meet his destiny - and today rather than tomorrow... The lawyer thought it would be a deliverance for him. And yet he did his best to push it as far as he could; he fought for the boy whenever he could, and helped to smooth his path.

When his Excellency ten Brinken stole the ward's property, he was beside himself.

- "You're mad, you half-witted man!" he attacked the magistrate; he wanted to bite his leg, like his happy dog Cyclops.

Little by little, he explained to the father how his son had been lowly tricked. The Privy Councillor took over the vineyards and land that Farkas had inherited from his aunt, paying barely the going rate for them. He also discovered no less than three springs of sour water on the estate, which he tapped and exploited.

- "We would never have thought of such a thing," replied the magistrate calmly.

Little Manasse was furious and furious.

- That makes no difference! Estates today are worth six times as much. And what the old bandit paid, he charged in large part for the boy's upkeep. Filth!

None of this had any effect on the Justice Councillor. He was a man, so full of warm goodness that he saw only good in all men; he found a speck of good in even the most commonplace actions of the vilest villain. So he wrote in favour of the Privy Councillor, employing the boy in his secretaryship, and made a great cannon of the Professor's declaration that he would remember the boy in his will.

This? This? "The lawyer was red as a paprika with suppressed anger. "He won't leave a penny for the boy!" he said, picking the grey strands from his beard.

Besides, since the Rhine has been flowing, Gontram has never had a bad day. "The justice councillor concluded the debate.

He was telling the truth.

.oOo.

Since Alraune was home, Farkas had ridden out to Lendenich every evening. Dr. Mohnen got him a horse from his friend, Captain Count Geroldingen. His mentor also taught the boy to dance and to sword. These things a worldling needs, he explained. He told of his wild romps, his triumphant duels, his great successes in ballrooms, though he had never ridden a horse, never stood before a fencing blade and could barely walk a polka.

Farkas Gontram led the Count's steed into the stables, and then headed across the courtyard towards the lord's residence. He always brought a single rose, never more,

that's what Dr. Mohnen taught him; but always the finest that was available in town.

Ten Brinken Alraune took the rose and tore it petal by petal. It was like that every night. He pinched the leaves, formed them into little blisters, and popped them on the boy's forehead and cheeks. This was the grace he bestowed on him.

And the child wanted nothing else. He dreamed - but not even his wishes became wishes. They floated in the air, filling the old rooms like orphaned desires.

Like a shadow, he followed Gontram the Wolf's beloved, this strange creature.

Alraune called him little Wolf, as he did when he was a child. 'Because you are a big dog,' he explained - 'a good, stupid, faithful animal. Black and shaggy and beautiful, with loyal, deep, watchful eyes. That's why! Because you are good for nothing, little Wolf, except to run after someone, carrying his bag.

He ordered her to lie down on the floor in front of his chair and put her light legs on his chest. He scrubbed her cheek with his little suede shoes; then, throwing off his shoes, he dug his toes between her lips.

- Kiss me, kiss me!" she giggled.

And Gontram the Wolf kissed the delicate silk stockings that encircled Alraune's legs.

The Privy Councillor smiled sourly at young Gontram. He knew well that he was ugly and he was beautiful. He was not afraid that Alraune would fall in love with him, but his constant presence made him uncomfortable.

- "You don't have to come out every night," he muttered.

- Yes!" said Alraune. And Farkas came. - "That's just as well," thought the professor.

Take the hook, son.

That's how it happened. Alraune became mistress of the Brinken seat. She was mistress from the first day she returned from the boarding house, and yet she remained a stranger; an intruder, someone unattached to the ancient land, who had nothing in common with anything that lived and took root here. Servants, maids, coachman, gardener, called her "Miss", and so did the villagers.

- Here she goes, they said, as if they were talking about a visitor. But

they called Wolf Gontram "young master".

Of course, the wise Privy Councillor noticed this and liked it. People can see that he is not one of us. Even the animals notice.

- Written in the leather-bound book.

By animals, he meant dogs and horses; the slender buck deer running around in the garden, and the little squirrels hiding in the tree canopy. He and Gontram the Wolf were good friends, and they would rear their heads and run in front of him whenever he came near. But when she approached, they disappeared in a blur.

- "Only humans are affected," thought the professor. "Animals are immune."

He necessarily classed peasants and servants among the animals. "They have the same healthy instinct; they have the same instinctive aversion, almost fear. It was fortunate for him that he had been born lately, and not five hundred years ago: in a month he would have been proclaimed a witch in the village of Lendenich, and the bishop would have had a good snack."- His dislike of men and animals for Alraune delighted the old man almost as much as the peculiar attraction he had for the superior men. He was always finding new and new examples of such attraction and hatred, though there were exceptions in both camps.

From the notes of the Privy Councillor, it is clear that there is a conviction that there is a power in Alraune that exerts a sharply defined influence on his environment. The Privy Councillor therefore sought to gather and investigate all the evidence to support this hypothesis. In this way, of course, Alraune's life story, as described by its creator, is not so much a description of his actions as a reflection of what others have done as a result of his influence. Only in the actions of the people with whom he came into contact is Alraune's life reflected. He regarded the secret councillor as a phantom, a schematic creature who did not live in himself, a shadow being reflecting ultraviolet rays, whose form is given only by action outside the self. He clung to this idea so convulsively that sometimes he did not believe it to be a man, but rather an unreal creature to which he had given body and form; a bloodless puppet to which he had given a face.

He was flattered by the vanity of the old man: for he himself was the cause of all that Alraune had done.

And day by day he decorated his puppet with more colourful and beautiful ornaments. She made her a mistress, and adapted to her wishes and whims as well as any man

other. The difference was that he believed the game was in his hands, firmly convinced that ultimately the medium, through Alraune, was expressing his will.

CHAPTER NINE

Which describes who were and how were the worshippers of Alraune

Károly Mohnen, János Geroldingen, Farkas Gontram, Jakab ten Brinken and Raspe, the driver, these five men, loved Alraune ten Brinken. All are remembered in the brown leather-bound book of the Privy Councillor and all have something to say about Alraune in this story.

Raspe, Matthieu-Maria Raspe, drove the Opel car that Princess Wolkonski presented to Alraune on her seventeenth birthday. He had served with the hussars and now he had to help the old coachman with the horses. He had a wife and two small sons; his wife, Lisbeth, did the laundry at ten Brinken's house. They lived in a small building next to the library, near the gate that opened onto the courtyard.

Matthieu was blond and big and strong. He worked not only with his hands but also with his mind. Horses and machines alike obeyed his muscles. Early in the morning, he saddled his mistress's Irish mare and stood waiting in the courtyard.

She stepped out of the master's apartment and headed down the stairs.

He was dressed like a boy, in a yellow leather coat and grey riding clothes; his short pincers had a small, contrasting fist. It did not go into the stirrup, but Matthieu held it in his palm, and only after a moment's pause did it swing into the man's saddle. He struck the animal with his sharp whip, so that it reared up and darted out of the open gate. Matthieu-Maria had to scramble to catch up with the heavy yellow one.

The brunette Lisbeth closed the gate after them. She looked after them with pursed lips: the master she loved and the Miss ten Brinken she hated.

Somewhere in the meadows the little lady stopped. She turned and waited for Rasp.

- Where are we riding today, Matthieu-Maria?" he asked.

- Wherever the young lady commands.

- "Hop Nelli!" shouted Alraune, and snapping at the mare, he rode off.

Raspe hated these morning rides no less than his wife. It was as if she were riding alone and he were just an air, a staffage to the countryside, even as if he did not exist for her. And if he cared for her for a brief moment, he found it all the more unpleasant. For he must have wished her to do something strange again.

Alraune stopped at the Rhine and waited calmly for the man to come to his side. The driver drove slowly; he knew that he was on some new whim, but he hoped that this time he would forget it. But Alraune never forgot a whim.

- Shall we swim over, Matthieu-Maria?

Raspe made his excuses - even though he knew in advance that they were useless. The far bank is very steep, he said, they would not be able to get up. But the tide is very strong here and -

Raspe was annoyed. His mistress was merely doing something that had no purpose. Why ride across the Rhine? You get wet, you catch cold, and it's good to get rid of it with a cold. Besides, you're risking your life - for nothing, and nothing again.

He was firmly resolved not to follow her, let her do her foolish things alone: what does she care? He has a wife and child -

That's as far as he got in his mind - and then he was still in the foam. The tide swept his heavy Mecklenburg away, and it was only with great difficulty that he was able to land somewhere between the cliffs. He shook off the water, cursed, and galloped against the current towards his mistress. Alraune looked at him with a keen, mocking glance.

- Are you wet? Matthieu-Maria, - what?

Raspe was silent. "Why do you call him by his first name and why do you call him by his first name? His name is Raspe, he's a driver, not a stable boy. He had a dozen good answers, but his lips would not obey.

Other times they rode to the sandy square where the hussars practised. This was even more fateful for him. Some officers and non-commissioned officers remembered it from their days in the regiment. The mustachioed sergeant of the second company spoke to him with a sneer:

- Well, Raspe; shall we have a little taste?

- "Devil take this foolish white woman!" growled Raspe, but at Attak, when the young lady rode sideways with the hussars, he galloped after her.

Then Captain Count Geroldingen, on his bright English steed, stepped up to them and chatted with the young lady. Raspe stayed behind, but Alraune spoke so loudly that he had to hear him:

- Tell me, Count, how do you like my henchman?

- "Splendid!" smiled the captain. "Fitting for a young prince.

Raspe wanted to lick it up with the young lady, the sergeant and the whole grinning company. He blushed like a schoolboy in shame.

The afternoon drive was even worse. From his place at the wheel, he leaned on the door and breathed a sigh of relief when more people got out. When Alraune came alone, he could hardly help swearing. He would often ambush his wife to see if she would come alone; then he would quickly take some parts out of the machine, lie down and lubricate them, clean them as if he were repairing something.

- We can't drive today, Miss said.

And he smiled with satisfaction when she was out of the garage.

Other times it has not ended so well. She stayed inside and waited. She didn't say anything, but the driver seemed to know about the scam. But he still managed to put the screws together.

- Ready?" asked Alraune. Raspe waved yes.

- You see, Matthieu-Maria, it's easier when I'm here.

Returning from these journeys, when the Opel car was again under the roof and he sat down at the table set by his wife, he shivered more than once. He was pale and stiff-eyed. Lisbeth did not question him; she knew what was wrong.

- Damn woman!" muttered Raspe. The woman brought out the blond, blue-eyed boys in their clean white nightgowns and sat one on her knee. Among the giggling children she felt carefree and happy.

If the children were in bed, if he sat on the stone bench outside and lit his cigar, if he wandered about the village or the ancient Brinken garden, then

consulted with his wife.

- "He's always chasing and chasing - the pace is never fast enough for him. Fourteen times in three weeks they took notes.

- You are not paying the fine," she said.

- No, but I've got a bad reputation. As soon as the gendarmes see the white car with the I.Z. 937 on it, they'll have their notebooks out! "They're not wrong about this number, exceptionally!" he laughed.

He was silent. He played with a wrench he had taken from his pocket. His wife reached in, took off her hat, adjusted her tangled hair.

- What does he want, don't you know?" he asked. He was careful to keep his voice innocent and indifferent.

Raspe shook his head.

- No, woman, I don't know. Fool - that's all. He has a damned way of forcing a man to obey, even if he wants to oppose it so much, when he knows for certain that it is wrong. Today, for example -

- What did he do?

- Oh - the same as usual. He doesn't like it when cars go in front of us - even if it's thirty horsepower more powerful than ours. He calls this a game of catch. "Catch!" he says, and if I am reluctant he puts his hand lightly on my arm. I start the machine, and it goes like the devil himself is at the wheel.

He sighed and knocked the cigarette ash off his trousers.

- "He always sits next to me," he continued, "and the very fact of being next to me makes me anxious and nervous. I am always thinking what madness he will command. Avoiding palisades, sand humps and such like obstacles - that is his greatest pleasure. Gosh, I'm not a coward - but at least there must be some purpose to my daily risking my life. Go on," he said the other day, "nothing will happen to *me* anyway! He's jumping ditches at a hundred kilometres a mile with a calm mind - *he* may be all right, but I'll be broken tomorrow, the day after tomorrow!"

Mrs Lisbeth squeezed his hand. Try and quite simply, don't obey her. Say "no" if she wishes to be silly! You must not risk your life! I and your children need you.

The driver looked at him quietly, calmly.

- I know, woman, you need me, and I want to live myself. But see, that's just it: I can't say no to the little lady. No one can. Young Mr. Gontram follows her like a puppy; and all the rest, happy to indulge her foolish whims! And yet no one in the house likes him - and yet they do what he wishes, however foolish, however absurd.

- "No," said Mrs Lisbeth, "Froitsheim, the coachman, won't do it. Raspe whistled.

- Froitsheim! - You're right. He'll turn on his heel and walk on. But Froitsheim will soon be ninety years old and hasn't had blood pumping in his veins for a long time.

The woman stared.

- Is it blood, Matthieu, that makes you obey its will?

The man avoided the answer, and cast his eyes to the ground. But then he took her hand and looked into her eyes:

- See, Lisbeth, I really don't know. And I have often thought about it. I am angry, I could choke him if I saw him, and if he were not here, I would run about in distress: he would call me! - He spat on the floor. - Damn him! - I could only leave this job! I should never have taken it!

They mulled it over, tossed it around, tossed it back and forth, and came to the decision that Raspe was going to quit. But first he would look for another job, and to that end he would go to town tomorrow.

That night, Mrs Lisbeth slept peacefully. For the first time in months. Matthieu-Maria, however, did not close his eyes.

He asked for time off and the next morning he went to the job centre in town. He was lucky. The agent took him to see a trade councillor in Soenneken, who was looking for a driver and introduced him. He was hired. And besides.

that he was better paid than before, had less work to do and didn't have to bother with horses.

When they left the house, the intermediary wished him luck.

- Thank you," Raspe said, but he felt as if it was nothing to be thankful for and as if he would never take the new job.

When he told her the story, and her eyes lit up, he was glad.

- "Fourteen days, then!" he said. "If only we were over that time! The woman shook her head:

- "Don't go in fourteen days," he said firmly. They must agree; talk to the Privy Councillor.

- "It's no use," said Raspe. "He will tell you to go to the young lady," and Mrs Lisbeth took his hand.

- Let him instruct me. - I'll talk to the lady.

Leaving her master behind, she went across the courtyard and announced herself. While he waited, he carefully considered what he would say to make his request successful, so that they could leave tomorrow.

But he didn't have to say anything. As soon as she heard that Raspe wanted to leave without giving notice, she nodded curtly and said: good.

Mrs Lisbeth flew to her husband, embraced him and kissed him. One more night - and the evil dream will pass. She packs her bags immediately, and Matthieu calls the trade counsellor so she can take her job tomorrow. He pulled the old suitcase from under the bed. Her eagerness had spread to him.

He pulled out an ironed crate, cleaned it of dust and helped the woman pack it. He handed everything over to her, and ran to the village, ordering a forklift to carry their belongings. He laughed, pleased
- first at the ten Brinken house.

He took the cooking pots off the stove and wrapped them in newspaper.

- "The lady wants to go for a drive!" reported Alajos, the servant. Raspe stared at him, speechless.

- Don't go!" cried the woman.

- "Tell the lady," said the driver, "that he could not finish today; ten Brinken Alraune was at the door.

- Matthieu-Maria, I'm letting you go tomorrow. I want to go for a drive with you today.

With that he went out. Raspe followed.

- Don't go, don't go!" cried Mrs Lisbeth.

Raspe heard the words, but he did not know who was shouting, or from where.

The woman slumped on the horse. She heard their footsteps as they crossed the yard towards the garage. She heard the iron gate open, the soft clang of the iron gate as the car rolled out into the village streets, and then the short blast of the siren.

This was his master's farewell greeting whenever he passed through the village. She dropped her hands in her lap and waited.

He waited until they brought him home. Four peasants brought him, on a mattress. They laid him in the middle of the room between the boxes and cupboards. They undressed him and helped wash him as the doctor ordered. The long white body was covered with blood, dust and dirt.

Lisbeth knelt beside him, speechless and tearless. The old coachman took the crying children out. Then the peasants left, and finally the doctor. The woman did not ask, neither with words nor eyes. She knew what she would answer.

Once in the night Raspe woke up and opened his eyes. He recognized his wife and asked for water. She made him drink it.

- I'm finished!" he said quietly.

- How did it happen?" asked Lisbeth. Matthieu shook his head.

- I don't know. "Drive on, Matthieu-Maria," she said. I didn't mean to. And then she put her hand on my hand, I felt her flesh through the glove and - I drove. I can't do any more.

He spoke so softly that Lisbeth put her ear to his mouth.

- Why did you do it?" he whispered when she stopped talking. Her lips moved again.

- Excuse me - Lisbeth! I had to - I had to do it. The young lady looked at him; the fire in her eyes frightened him.

- Tell me, tell me, do you love him?" she cried. The thought came so suddenly, he said it almost before his brain had thought it.

Matthieu raised his head, but only by inches.

- Yes, yes, that's why I drove," he muttered, his eyes closed.

Those were his last words. He fell back into a deep swoon and lay there until dawn. Then slowly he fell asleep.

Mrs Lisbeth got up. She ran out of the door, straight into the arms of old Froitsheim.

- My master is dead!" he said. The coachman made a great sign of the cross and tried to sneak into the room. "Where is the young lady?" he asked quickly. Is she alive? Is she hurt?

The lines in the old man's face deepened.

- Is he alive? - What a question! He's standing there! Is he wounded? He hasn't even scratched himself. He just got a little dirty!

With a shaking gouty hand, he pointed to the courtyard. There stood our rabbit lady in a boy's dress. She lifted her feet and stepped into the palm of a hussar's hand.

- "He telephoned the captain that he had no groom for this morning," said the coachman.

Mrs Lisbeth ran screaming across the courtyard:

- My Lord is dead, my Lord is dead!

Ten Brinken Alraune turned in the saddle and whipped his riding crop.

- He's dead," she said quietly, "he's dead - it's a pity. He lightly mounted his steed, and with a step led him to the gate.

- Miss!" cried Lisbeth. "Miss, miss!

But the horseshoes sparkled on the old pavement, and Lisbeth saw her again, a brown-haired boy, striding boldly and rashly through the village streets like some haughty prince. But now it was a blue king-knight who passed behind her, and not her lord - Raspe Matthieu Maria.

- Miss!" he cried in wild anxiety. "Miss, miss!

Mrs Lisbeth turned to the Privy Councillor, pouring out all her despair and hatred. The Privy Councillor listened calmly, said he understood her pain and did not take it amiss. In fact, despite his resignation, he was willing to pay his master a quarter of his salary. But be wise and see that Raspe alone is to blame for this unfortunate misfortune.

The woman ran to the police; they were not so courteous to her. They had foreseen the end of it, they said; every man knows that Raspe was the most savage leader in the whole of the Rhine. It was a deserved punishment. It was his duty to warn him in advance. His master alone is to blame; shame on him for trying to shift the blame on to the young lady! Perhaps she was the one who was flying the plane? Yesterday? Or at any time?

Lisbeth ran into town and asked a lawyer. Then a second, then a third. But they were honest people and told her they couldn't take the job, no matter how much she paid in advance. Oh, yes, because it's all possible and easy to imagine. Why not? But do you have proof? No - actually there isn't - well! You can go home, there's no help. If it were so, and even if you could prove it, the responsibility would still be yours. After all, he was a man, a learned, thorough driver, and she was an inexperienced, barely grown-up creature.

The woman went home. She buried her husband in the small cemetery behind the church. She packed her things and put them on a wheelbarrow. She accepted the money offered by the Privy Councillor, took her children and left.

A few days later, a new driver moved into his flat. He was fat and small. He drank too. Miss Ten Brinken did not like him and rarely drove alone with him. There was no record of him, people said he was a good man, much better than the wild Raspe.

"Moth!" said ten Brinken Alraune in the evening, when Gontram Farkas entered the room. "You are the light!"
- he said.

"You'll burn your beautiful wings," said the girl, "and there you lie on the ground, you ugly little worm."

The boy looked at her and shook his head.

- Oh no," he said, "it's all right."

And it flew around the light, every standing night.

Two more were flying around him and were roasting. Károly Mohnen was one, János Geroldingen the other.

With Dr Mohnen, courtship was a matter of honour. Finally a rich party, he thought, the real thing! His boat was sailing with billowing sails. He was a little in love with all women.

Now, however, the marrow in his skull was burning, he was going mad, and he felt for one woman what he had felt for countless women over the years. And as he always did, he assumed his partner felt the same way he did. He thought ten Brinken Alraune longed for him hotly, boundlessly, soulfully.

The next day he told Gontram Farkas about his latest conquest. It pleased him that the young man rode out to Lendenich in the evenings as his love mail and sent him greetings, kisses and small gifts.

Not just a single rose, as he was not her cavalier. She was adored and adored, she should have sent more: flowers and chocolates, small cakes, pralines and fans. A hundred trifles and trinkets. Her little taste, which she had so successfully implanted in her protégé, was momentarily melted in the fiery flames of this love.

Often the captain would go out with him. They had been good friends for years; like Farkas Gontram, Count Geroldingen used to feed on the wealth of knowledge that Dr. Mohnen had accumulated. Doctor Mohnen scattered his treasures with both hands, glad to be of any use at all to his goods. - They sometimes went on adventures together; the doctor always began the acquaintance, and later introduced his friend the count. He would brag about him. And often enough the hussar's officer plucked the ripe cherries from the tree, which Charles Mohnen had discovered. At first he felt guilty, thought himself despicable, agonized for a few days, then openly confessed to his friend what he had done. He made a ritualistic excuse: she had taken such advantage of him that he had to bite her; it was a good thing she had, he added, because he did not believe she was worthy of his love. Doctor Mohnen came to his senses about it, said he didn't mind and that it was quite all right, citing as an example the Mayan Indians of Yucatan, who say; my wife is my friend's wife too! But Geroldingen saw that he did mind, which was why, the next time a new acquaintance of the doctor's favoured him again, he did not say

about it to a friend. Thus, in the course of time, Doctor Mohnen's wives became largely the pretty captain's wives, just as in Yucatán, except that most of them did not belong to Charles Mohnen. The doctor was the *chicari*, the hunter who tracked and drove the game, and the hunter was János Geroldingen. But the Count was good-heartedly silent, not wishing to hurt his friend's feelings, and so the hunter never knew if the hunter had found him and considered himself the most glorious nymph of the Rhine-Navids.

- Come, Count," said Dr. Mohnen, "I have a new conquest, English girl, like a painting. I caught her yesterday at the square music. Tonight I have an appointment with her at the Rajnapart.

- And Elly?" asked the captain.

- I have given way!", declared Károly Mohnen magnificently.

It is fitting how easily he has thrown away his loves. Once he found a new one, he was done with the old one, he simply stopped caring. And the girls didn't make it any harder. In this he was a greater master than the knight, who always had a hard time breaking up and from whom women had an even harder time breaking up. The doctor needed all his energy and persuasive powers to carry her off to a new beauty.

This time he said:

- You must see him, Captain! My God, I'm so happy to have escaped from all the adventures and not to be hooked anywhere: now it's finally here! He's mad rich, he's mad glad - the old gentleman has more than thirty millions - maybe forty. Well, what do you say, Count? And the little one is as pretty as a statue and as fresh as a flower! - By the way, between you and me, I've never been so sure of anything in my life!

- "And Miss Clare," interjected the captain.

- "I wrote him the letter today, in which I am very sorry that I do not have time for him because of my work commitments.

Geroldingen sighed. Miss Klara was a schoolmistress in some English boarding house. Doctor Mohnen had met her at a civic ball and later introduced her to a friend. Miss Klára was in love with the captain, and the captain hoped that when he married, Dr. Mohnen

he takes her from her. But this has to happen sooner or later: his debts are mounting and he has to settle his affairs.

- "My God, if I do it, you, who are no more than a friend, will do it much more readily! Man, you are very conscientious, too conscientious.

He was determined to take the Count to Lendenich to serve as a relief to little Miss ten Brinken. He punched me lightly on the shoulder:

- Count, you are as sentimental as a gypsy priest! I leave the girl in the lurch - and you're the one with a guilty conscience; always the same old song! Think what's at stake: the loveliest heiress on the whole Rhine - I cannot hesitate!

The captain went out with his friend to Lendenich and also fell in love with the young creature, who was so different from those who had so far offered their red lips for a kiss.

That evening, on his return home, the captain had a similar feeling to the one he had had twenty years before, when he had first married his friend's beloved. As if he had been shot, he felt as if he had been shot, for having so often and so successfully played the good doctor - and yet now he felt ashamed. For this - this girl

- was quite different. He had different feelings for this half-child, and, he could see clearly, his friend's feelings were different.

Something calmed him down: Dr Mohnen is certainly not needed by Miss ten Brinken, much less by any of the other women.

But that she would want him he did not think likely this time; all his natural confidence in himself had failed him with this doll.

As to young Gontram, it was evident that she was glad to have the handsome boy, whom she called her apron, about her, but it was equally evident that to Alraune he was no more than an unwilling plaything. No, these two were not rivals, neither the wavering doctor nor the handsome young man. For the first time in his life, the captain weighed his chances. He came from an old noble family and the King's Hussars were considered the first regiment in the West. He was a rabbit and of fine growth; he still looked young, though he was about to be made a major. He knew all the arts - and well enough; if he was to be honest, he had to admit that it was difficult to find a Prussian cavalry officer with a greater range of interests and

qualifications than he has. True - in fact, it's not surprising if women and girls fly at him. - Why shouldn't Alraune? He might look a long time to find a special one, if only because his Grace's adopted daughter has such an awful abundance of the one thing he has not, money!

Gontram Farkas appeared every evening at St. Nepomuk's house, bringing the captain and the doctor with him at least three times a week. After dinner, the Privy Councillor would retire and only occasionally come in for half an hour, listen to their conversation, look around and then disappear again. He made what he called a control test. And the three lovers sat round her, and did the pretty thing, each in his own way.

The young girl liked the game for a while, then she got bored. She found it a little monotonous and thought there was little colour in the evening scenes of Lendenich.

- Do something," Gontram said to Farkas.

- Who?" asked the young man. She looked at him:

- Who? - The two of them. Doctor Mohnen and the Count.

- Tell them what, and they will do it. Alraune's eyes widened.

- Do I know?" he said quietly. "You should know. He put his head in his palm and stared into the air.

- 'Say, little Wolf,' he said after a while, 'wouldn't it be good if they had a duel? If they shot each other to death?

- Why would they shoot each other? They're best friends.

- You are a fool, little Wolf! Whether they are good friends or not is irrelevant. We will make them enemies.

- Yes, - but why? Because it has no purpose.

Alraune kacagott. He put his arms around her curly head and suddenly kissed her nose.

- True, little Wolf, you don't have a goal, but why should you? However, it breaks the sameness. Can you help me?

The young man did not answer.

- Help me, little Wolf?" he asked again. Wolf nodded.

That evening, Alraune discussed with young Gontram how the two friends could be pitted against each other, even by forcing each to fight a duel. Alraune thought and plotted, and one proposal followed another; Gontram Farkas waved, but still a little preoccupied.

She reassured him:

- After all, they don't have to hurt each other - there is hardly any bloodshed in duels. After a duel, they make up and their friendship only strengthens!

She saw this and was happy to help me plan: she told me about their little weaknesses, where one was sensitive and the other - and so they came up with a plan. It wasn't subtle intrigue, but rather childish and naive. Only two such blind lovers could have stumbled on the clumsy stones. His Excellency Ten Brinken had noticed something: he had interrogated Alraune, and when she did not answer, young Gontram. From him he learned what he wished, laughed at him, and with a few more pretty directions helped the little scheme.

But the friendship between the two was stronger than Alraune thought; it was more than four weeks before it was fortunate that Doctor Mohnen, who was so firmly convinced of his own irresistibility, was persuaded that he might have to give way to the captain this time, and the captain was persuaded that it was not impossible that the doctor might take the baton for a change. - The captain thought, and so did Charles Mohnen; but Miss ten Brinken was always able to put off the statement they both wanted. One night she invited the doctor and not the captain; another night she rode out with the count and sent the doctor to some garden concert to wait for her. Both considered themselves honoured, but they had to admit that Alraune's attitude towards his rival was not exactly indifferent.

The old Privy Councillor himself was the instigator who lit the ember. He misled his chief clerk; in a long speech he let it be known that he was satisfied with his services, and that he would not look unkindly on being succeeded by one who was thus privy to all his business. Of course, he would not wish to anticipate his child's determination, and

warned him that someone he did not want to name was using all means to fight him, namely spreading various rumours about his loose lifestyle, and he had also told the young lady about it. Almost the same words were spoken to the captain by the Gracious Ten Brinken, only here he remarked that he would not be displeased if his daughter were to marry into such an old and good family as the Geroldings.

In the weeks that followed, the two rivals carefully avoided clashing, and doubled their attentions to Alraune; especially Dr Mohnen, who granted his every wish. When he heard of his admiration for a delightful seven-strand pearl necklace he had seen in Cologne at a jeweller's in Schildergasse, he immediately went over and bought it. Seeing that the young lady was, for a moment, enraptured by the gift, he thought he had at last found a sure way to her heart, and piled it with various beautiful stones. Of course, he had to draw heavily on the business funds of the ten Brinken office for this purpose, but he was so sure of his business that he did it with a light heart, and considered the little forced loan almost a legitimate credit, which he would return to the business as soon as he received the dowry from his father-in-law, which ran into millions. He was sure His Excellency would laugh at the little prank.

His Excellency did laugh - but in a slightly different way than the good doctor had imagined. The very day Alraune received the pearl necklace, he went to town and immediately ascertained where the suitor had obtained the funds for the gift. But he said nothing about it.

Count Geroldingen could not give you pearls as a gift. He had no treasury to draw on and no jeweller to lend him money. But he wrote really pretty sonnets for her, painted her in a boy's dress, and instead of his favourite Beethoven, he played Offenbach on the violin, whom Alraune liked to listen to.

Finally, on the birthday of the Privy Councillor, to which they were both invited, things came to a head. The young lady secretly asked them both to be shown to the table, and so when the servant reported that it was served, they both headed towards her. Each found the other's intrusion inconsiderate and violent, and each said a few half-spoken words.

Alraune beckoned Gontram Wolf to him.

- "If the gentlemen can't agree!" she said, laughing, and clung in.

At first, the table was silent, the Privy Councillor having to lead the conversation. But soon the two lovers warmed up. They drank to the health of the celebrant and his lovely daughter. Charles the Moor made a speech, and the young lady gave him glances that made the captain's blood boil in his temples. Later, however, at dessert, Alraune laid her little hand lightly for a moment on the Count's arm, but that was enough to make the doctor's fish-eyes go cold.

After they got up from the table, he walked and danced with both of them. During the waltz, she told each of them separately:

Oh, she was very nasty to her boyfriend! - She shouldn't have to put up with that!

Of course not!" replied the Count. Doctor Mohnen declared with a puffed-up face:

Count on me!

The next morning the little fidgeting seemed childish to both the hussar and the doctor-but they had the vague feeling that they had made a promise to Miss ten Brinken. In any case, the captain sent some of his comrades to his friend early in the morning, - let the court of honour examine him!

Dr Mohnen consulted with the challenge's deliverers, explaining that he was the Count's closest friend and had no animosity towards him. Apologise to him and all will be well. He also tells you in confidence that he will pay all his friend's debts the day after the wedding. The two officers declared that all this was very nice, but none of their business. The captain feels insulted and asks for satisfaction - he instructed them to ask him if he, too, is cavalier and accepts the challenge. Three shots fired at a distance of fifteen paces.

Dr Mohnen was startled:

- Three - three - sori bullet changes - he gasped. The officer laughed:

- Just take it easy, doctor. The court of honour would never in its life agree to such an absurd claim for so little.

Doctor Mohnen saw that; he trusted the good sense of the honourable gentlemen and accepted the challenge. He did more than that, he galloped to the Saxon Korpshaus, asked for protection, and sent two students to the captain. To outdo his adversary's claim, he asked for a five-shot exchange, ten paces apart. It sounds well enough, and the little lady is sure to be impressed.

The mixed court of honour, composed of officers and students, was quite sober: it decided on a single bullet change and set the distance at twenty paces. In this way they could not do much damage to each other and honour would be satisfied. John Geroldingen took note of the decision with a smile and a polite bow, but Dr. Mohnen was quite pale. He expected the duel to be declared unnecessary and both of them to be forced to apologise to each other. True; it was only *one* bullet - but this one might hit.

Early in the morning they drove out to the Kotten forest, all in plain clothes, but quite solemnly, in seven cars. Three Hussar officers and the surgeon-general, then Dr. Mohnen, with him Farkas Gontram, two corpsbursch from Sagonia and one from Guestphalia, who was to act as impartial party; also Dr. Peerenbohm, a physician, an old gentleman from the Palatinate, a member of the convention of seniors. Also two student council members, two officers and an assistant to the chief medical officer.

Also present was His Excellency Mr ten Brinken, who offered his medical assistance to his office manager. He had his old instruments cleaned and prepared.

They drove for two hours in the laughter of the morning: - Count Geroldingen was in a very good humour, he had received a letter from Lendenich the night before. He had a four-leaf clover >in it, and on a small slip of paper was written the single word "mascotte": - He put the letter in the bottom pocket of his waistcoat, which put him in a laughing mood and made him think of all sorts of good things. He chatted with his comrades and amused himself with the childish duel. He was the best pistol shot in town, he'd like to shoot one of the buttons off the doctor's sleeve, he said. But since, especially with a foreign pistol, the utmost safety does not exclude accident, he would shoot into the air instead. It would be a shame to even scratch the good doctor.

But Dr Mohnen, who was in the carriage with the Privy Councillor and young Gontram, said nothing. He, too, had received a letter with Miss ten Brinken's big, bold letters. It contained an ornate gold horseshoe. He had hardly even looked at it.

looked at your "mascotte", muttered about childish superstition, and threw the note on his desk. He was worried, seriously and very worried, and this feeling splashed like dirty dishwater on the salamander of his love. He felt like a fool to have risen so early in the morning only to go to the slaughterhouse, the fervent desire to apologise to the captain and thus escape from the trap, wrestled incessantly with the shame he should have felt before the Privy Councillor, and perhaps even more before the Wolf Gontram, who had so blindly believed in his exploits. In the meantime he had assumed a heroic air, smoking a cigarette and trying to look indifferent. But when the carriages stopped on the forest road and they set off along the footpath towards the wide clearing, he turned chalk-white.

The medical officers prepared their lockers, and the paramilitary aide opened the holsters and loaded the murder weapons. He carefully weighed the gunpowder so that both shots would be of equal force. The handsome pistols were the property of the Westphalian; the assistants drew lots for them with matchsticks: short loses, long wins. The captain smiled at the slightly contrived solemnity, which no one took very seriously. But Doctor Mohhen turned away and stared at the ground. He measured out the twenty paces with such leaps that the officers looked uncomfortable; they did not think it fitting that he should make a farce of it and so little respect for the decree.

- "It's going to be a small clearing!" cried Major von den Osten mockingly. The tall Westphalian replied calmly:

- Then the gentlemen can go to the forest - it's safer there.

The assistants led the parties to their seats, and the gentleman once again called on them to make peace, but did not wait for a reply.

After the reconciliation has been refused by both parties - please, gentlemen, pay attention to the signal.

He was interrupted by a deep sigh from the doctor. Charles Mohnen's knees trembled, the pistol fell from his trembling hand, and his features were as pale as a blindfold.

- "Just a moment!" cried Dr. Peerenbohn, and with quick steps hurried towards him, followed by the Privy Councillor, Farkas Gontram and the two gentlemen from Saxonia.

- "What's wrong?" asked Dr Peerenbohn. Dr Mohnen gave no answer, staring into the air, disoriented.

- "Well, what's the matter with you, doctor?" repeated the assistant, picking up the pistol from the ground and putting it in his hand again.

But Charles Mohnen did not answer, his face was like a drowned man's.

A smile flashed across the secret councillor's broad face. He stepped up to the Saxon and whispered in his ear. The student did not understand immediately.

- What does your Excellency say?

- Can't you feel it?" whispered the old man.

The Saxon chuckled to himself. But they kept the seriousness of the situation, took out their handkerchiefs and held them under their noses.

- Incontinentia alvi!" explained Dr Peerlenbohn with dignity. Taking a vial from his pocket, he dripped some opium tincture on a piece of sugar and handed it to Dr. Mohnen.

- Of course, such a duel - it's a terrible thing!

But the poor doctor could not hear, could not see, could not even taste the bitter taste of opium. He had a confused feeling that people were moving away from him; then he heard the voice of the gentleman from the party: - One, rang in his ears - then two - and at the same time he heard two shots. He closed his eyes, his teeth chattered, he felt dizzy. The loud crack from close range stunned him so that his legs gave out. He did not fall, but collapsed like a dying piglet on the dewy ground.

Maybe for a minute, but it felt like a long hour, and then he realised that the farce was probably over.

- I'm over it - he murmured with a happy sigh. He felt around, no, he was not wounded. Only his - only his trousers were damaged. Is that a problem?

No one paid any attention to him, he crawled up himself, clearly feeling the rapidity with which his vitality was returning. He took deep sips of the morning air-oh, it's good to be alive!

At the far end of the clearing, people were gathered in a dense thicket. He cleaned his clip top and looked - they were all turning their backs to him. He walked over, recognised Gontram Wolf, who was at the back, saw that some were kneeling, and someone was lying stretched out in the middle.

- Did the captain? - Did he hit? - Well, did he shoot at all?

He took a short detour through the tall pines and came closer, and now he could see clearly. He saw the Count's eyes fixed on him, saw his hand beckoning him languidly.

After being squeezed in, he entered the circle. John Geroldingen extended his right hand to him, he accepted it and knelt down.

- "Forgive me," he murmured, "I really didn't mean to. The captain smiled:

- It was an accident - a damned accident!

He was in great pain, he groaned, he moaned miserably. "I only want to say, doctor, I'm not angry with you," he went on softly.

Mohnen was not afraid, the edge of his mouth twitched fiercely, his eyes filled with grey tears. The doctors pushed him aside to attend to his wound.

- "No help!" whispered the chief doctor. "Let's try and get them to the clinic quickly," said the secret adviser.

- It's no use!" replied Dr Peerenbohn. It will die on the road... It would be useless to inflict the agonizing pains on him:

The bullet penetrated the lower body, pierced the intestines and lodged in the spine... As if lured there by a secret force: it passed through the vest pocket intact; through the leaf of Alraune, piercing the four-leaf clover and the precious word that:

"Mascotte."

.oOo.

Doctor Mohnen was saved by Manasse, the little lawyer. When Justice Councillor Gontram showed him the letter which had just arrived from Lendenich, Manasse declared that the Privy Councillor was the most cunning

a good-for-nothing he met in real life and swore to his colleague that until the doctor was safe, he would not file a report with the prosecutor's office. It was not about the duel - for which the authorities initiated proceedings on the same day - but about the embezzlement in the office of the reverend. The lawyer himself ran up to the delinquent and kicked him out of bed.

- Get up!" he yelled. "Get dressed! Pack! - Take the first train to Antwerp and then overseas! You ass! Teve! - How could you do such a stupid thing!

Doctor Mohnen rubbed his sleepy eyes; he could not understand it. The relationship he has with the Privy Councillor -

But Mr. Manasse did not even let him speak. "What a relationship you have with him!" he said. A brilliant affair! It was his Excellency who instructed the magistrate to report you to the Public Prosecutor's Office for stealing from his treasury, you fool!

Charles Mohnen had already forced himself to get out of bed.

His old friend, Sanislo Schacht, helped him to get there: he studied the timetable, he gave him the money, he arranged the car to take him to Cologne.

It was a painful farewell. For more than thirty years, Charles Mohnen lived in the city, where every house, almost every stone, brought back memories. It was the only place where he had put down roots, the only place where his life had a right. And now he's off, backwards and forwards to some foreign land -

- Write to me," said the fat Schacht. "What are you going to do?

Károly Mohnen delayed his answer. He was destroyed, shattered, collapsed; his life was a tangled heap of rubble. His shoulders were stooped, his kindly eyes sad.

- I don't know," he muttered.

But then the usual phrase slipped from his lips.

- "I'm getting married," she said, smiling through her tears. "There are plenty of rich girls in America.

CHAPTER TEN

Describing how he destroyed the wolf of Alraune Gontram

Charles Mohnen was not the only one to get under the wheels of His Grace's chariot at this time. The Privy Councillor had taken over the People's Mortgage Bank, which had long been under his influence, and at the same time he had taken control of the self-help cooperatives that had spread throughout the country and had extended their small savings banks to the last village under the clerical banner. This did not go without strong friction; it shook the tenure of some of the old officials, who opposed the new regime, which took away all their autonomy. Lawyer Manasse, who, together with Justice Gontram, acted as legal adviser on these transactions, tried to relax the strict regulations without being able to prevent the indiscretions of the Gracious Lord ten Brinken, who summarily threw out anyone he found even slightly superfluous and, by dubious means, forced some distant dismantling banks and savings banks to submit to his imperious controls.

He had already extended his power into the heart of the industrial region and all the enterprises of the Rhine lands that were connected with the land, coal and ore mines, waterworks, estates, buildings, economic associations, road building, valley closures, canal construction, were more or less all dependent on him. Since Alraune had been at home, he had taken up everything more boldly and was sure of success; he knew no harshness; he knew no obstacles or difficulties.

The leather-bound book covers all these deals in long pages. With obvious delight he has examined what there is against a new venture, how very little chance of success there is in principle - only to hit on one thing all the more surely, and credit the success to the creature in his house. Now and then he would ask her for advice, without, of course, giving her the details; that was all he asked:

- Shall I do it?- If he beckoned, he did it, and did not touch it if he shook his head.

The old man had not bothered about the law for a long time. He used to consult his lawyers for long hours; to find a way out; to find the open back door at some particularly delicate turn; to study carefully every conceivable obsolescence of the statute book, and to make very dirty deals legally defensible by a hundred tricks and wiles; now he had long since ceased to care for such tricks. Firmly confident in his power and his fortune, he broke the law openly; he knew well that if there were no complainants, there were no judges. His civil suits, of course, multiplied, his denunciations, which were mostly anonymous, but often with names, to the authorities, his connections, however, were very extensive, he was covered by the state as well as by the church, and was on the best of terms with both; his voice was authoritative in the provincial assembly, and the policy of the archbishop's palace at Cologne, which he supported at least financially, covered his back still more. The threads of his connection reached as far as Berlin: the extremely high decoration which the highest hand itself hung around his neck at the unveiling of the Emperor's monument is proof enough of this. It is true that he contributed a nice round sum to this monument, but the land chosen by the city had to be bought from him at great expense. Add to this his title, his venerable age, his acknowledged merits in the field of science - what little prosecutor would have dared to cross him?

On a couple of occasions, the Privy Councillor himself urged an investigation. "The denunciations did turn out to be wild exaggerations; they were popping like soap bubbles.

So much did he increase the scepticism of the authority against denunciations that when a young sitting judge, in a case which he thought was as clear as daylight, was anxious to intervene against his Excellency, the prosecutor-general, without even looking at the files, shouted at him:

- Nonsense! Complaining whining - we know! It's a disgrace!

The complainant was the temporary director of the National Museum in Wiesbaden, who buys various excavated objects from the Privy Councillor. He felt cheated by the professor and publicly accused him of forgery. The authorities did not deal with the complaint, but communicated it to the secret adviser, who successfully defended himself. In the Sunday supplement of his favourite newspaper, the "Kölnische Zeitung", he wrote a fine article under the humane title "Museum development". He did not expand on what he had been accused of, but he came out so bloodily

against his opponent, so thoroughly nullified him, made him look so ignorant, so cretinous, that the poor scholar was prostrate. He set in motion the machinery of his connections, and a few months later another gentleman was running the museum. When the prosecutor general read the news in the papers, he nodded in satisfaction and took the paper to the assessor:

- Read on, colleague! Thank God you came to me at the time and avoided that crazy nonsense!

The sitter was grateful, but not at all satisfied.

.oOo.

The sleighs and cars swung into a ball on the day of the Candlemas, when the society held its big carnival party. The high and mighty appeared, and around them surged everyone in town with uniforms, brightly coloured student badges and caps. Then there were the teachers, the law, the political and municipal authorities, and finally the rich; the trade councillors and the industrialists. Everybody was in costume, only the pronounced whales were allowed half masks. Even the old gentlemen had to leave their tails at home, appearing in a black domino called a friend's suit.

At his lordship's big table, Justice Gontram sat at the head of the table, he knew the old cellar, he could bring up the finest marques. There he was seated with the Princess Olga of Wolkonski, daughter of the Countess Figueirera y Abrantes, and Frida Gontram, who had visited him during the winter. Then the lawyer Manasse, some private tutors, professors and an equal number of officers. Finally, the Privy Councillor himself, who was taking his daughter to her first ball.

Alraune, as Miss Maupin, appeared in a boy's dress made from a drawing by Beardsley. She tore open the cupboards of the ten Brinken house, rifled through old litter-boxes and chests, but also found a whole pile of mechelen lace left over from her great-grandmother. They must have been the tears of poor seamstresses in damp cellars, like all the gorgeous lace dresses of the belles. But Alraune's defiant costume was soaked with fresher tears, the tears of the scolded seamstresses who could not make sense of the whimsical costume, the hairdresser whom Alraune beat for not understanding her hairstyle and failing to put on the chi-chi, the little maid whom he impatiently stabbed with long needles while dressing. Oh, what an agony

it was to dress this Gautier girl, in the bizarre conception of the English *picquet*!" but when he was done, when the whimsical boy, in high heels, with his ornamental sword, strode through the hall, all eyes followed him eagerly, old and young, gentlemen and ladies alike.

Chevalier de Maupin shared his success with Rosalinda. Rosalinda's last scene was *Gontram the Wolf*, a more beautiful phenomenon never seen on stage. Not since the days of Shakespeare, when rabbit boys played the female roles, and not since Prince Rupert's mistress Margaret Hews first played the fair maiden as a woman in '*Waterloo*'. Alraune dressed the young man; with infinite effort he taught him how to walk, how to dance, how to handle a fan, how to smile. And just as Alraune, in his Beardsley dress, looked like a boy and a girl, with Hermes and Aphrodite kissing his forehead at the same time, so *Gontram the Wolf* embodied no less perfectly the figure of his great countryman, the author of the *Sonnets*: in his red, gold-encrusted, gold-plated scalloped dress, he was a beautiful girl, but he was also a boy.

The old Privy Councillor was aware of this; perhaps little Manasseh, perhaps a little Frida *Gontram*, whose quick glances flitted from one to another; certainly no one else in the vast ballroom, with its heavy red rosaries hanging from the ceiling. But all felt the strangeness and the value of the thing.

He sent his royal highness's aide-de-camp for them, and had them both brought and presented. He danced the first waltz with them, first as a man with Rosalinda, then as a woman with Chevalier de Maupin. Later, at the menu, when Théophile Gautier's curly-eared boy-ideal bowed flirtatiously to Shakespeare's lovely maiden figure, he clapped his hands together loudly. The royal highness herself is a great dancer, first on the tennis court, best skater in town - she would have liked to dance all night with just the two of them. But the crowd also gave them their rights: and so Mlle de Maupin and Rosalinde went hand in hand, sometimes in the arms of muscular young men, sometimes with the hotly panting breasts of beauties.

Justice *Gontram* watched the dancers with indifference: the punchbowl juice he was cooking in Trier was far more important to him than his son's success. He wanted to tell the Princess Wolkonski a long story about some counterfeiter, but her majesty ignored him. He shared in the satisfaction and pride of his Grace, Mr. ten Brinken, for he was a sharer

felt that this creation, his godchild, Alraune, was in the world. Only little Manasseh was listless, muttering muffled curses to himself.

- 'Don't dance so much, boy,' he hissed at Wolf, 'you should take better care of your lungs. But young Gontram paid him no heed.

Countess Olga jumped up and flew to Alraune.

- "My beautiful cavalier," she whispered.

- Come, little Tosca," said the boy in lace. He spun her around the room so that she hardly breathed. Then he led the panting Olga back to the table and kissed her on the mouth.

Gontram Frida danced with her brother and stared at him with her clever grey eyes.

- It's a pity we are brothers!" he said. The boy did not understand.

- Why?" he asked.

- "Silly boy!" she laughed. "By the way, your question "why?" is perhaps a valid one. Because when you think about it, it really shouldn't be inhibiting, should it? It's just that the morals of our upbringing are still hanging over us like lead balls in our waistbands, and pulling the mantle of virtue over us in a fittingly smooth way. That's it, my beautiful brother!

Gontram Farkas did not understand a word of it; the girl laughed and left him in the lurch, and threw her arms around Miss ten Brinken.

- 'My brother is a prettier girl than you,' she said, 'but you are the kinder boy.

- And you, fair princess, who do you prefer, the nice boy?" asked Alraune, smiling.

Héloise has little choice. Poor Abalard had a terribly bad time, you know - he was slim and frail, like you! One learns modesty that way. But you, my gentle boy, who are like a strange little priest of a brave new religion, no one will harm you.

- My laces are old and precious," said Chevalier de Maupin.

All the better to cover up sweet sins," laughed the blonde princess. She took a glass from the table and held it out to Alraune.

The Countess came to them, feverish, with pleading eyes.

- Let me through, let me through!" he begged his girlfriend. But Frida Gontram shook her head.

- No," he said curtly, "*not him!*"

- He kissed me," Tosca defended her rights.

- "Do you think you're the only one in the night?" mocked Héloïse.

- "Decide, my Paris, who will you choose?" he turned to Alraune.

- For today?" asked Mlle Maupin.

- For today and as long as you like.

- I want the Princess Princess too - and I want Tosca too!" laughed the boy in the lace dress.

And she laughed and ran to the blond Teuton, dressed as a red executioner, who was showing off his huge axe made of bark paper.

- "Brother-in-law!" he cried, "I've got two mammoths! The student straightened and rolled up his sleeves.

- Where are they?" he roared.

But Alraune did not have time to reply, because the Colonel of the regiment asked him to two-step - Chevalier de Maupin came to the teachers' table.

- Where is your Albert?" asked the literary historian. "And where is your Isabella?"

Albert is running around the room, examiner," said Alraune, "two dozen of him!"

He stepped up to the professor's little girl, a shy creature of fifteen, who looked at him with big blue eyes, wondering.

- "Do you want to be my maid, little gardener?" he asked.

- You're welcome to choose me," said the blonde-haired girl.

- I'll call you "butler" if I'm a woman and "butler" if I'm a man,
- educated Chevalier de Maupin.

The little one nodded.

- Did I stand my ground, teacher?" chuckled Alraune.

- "Summa cum laude!" said the literary historian, approvingly. "But you'd better leave me my little Trude.

- "Now *I* ask the questions!" said Miss ten Brinken, turning to the little round botanist. "What flowers are blooming in my garden, Professor?

- 'Red hibiscus,' replied the botanist, who knew Ceylon's flora well, 'golden lotus and white temple flower.

- Not true! "Not true!" said Alraune. "Perhaps you will know, my Harlem comrade-in-arms? What flowers are blooming in my garden?

The professor of art history looked at him stiffly. A wan smile played around his lips.

"Les fleurs du mal," he said.

- "El!" said Mlle de Maupin. But they do not open for you, my learned gentlemen, you will have to wait until they are wilted and pressed into books or dried and engraved on pictures.

He drew his ornate sword, bowed, clicked his high heels and saluted. Turning on his heel, he danced a few steps with the Prussian Baron von Manteuffel, and then, hearing the royal highness's lively voice, he sprang to the princess's table.

- Countess Almaviva, do you wish something from your faithful cherub?

- I'm very unhappy with him, said the princess - he really deserves a cane! She wanders around the room with one Figaro after another.

- The Susanne's must not be allowed out!" laughed the princely husband. Alraune ten Brinken pursed her lips.

- What can a poor youth do who knows not the evils of the world?" he said, laughing. From the shoulders of the adjutant, who stood before him like Frans Hals, he unhooked the lute, and, taking a few steps back, began to sing:

You who know

The emotion of the heart.

Tell me, is it love that

burns within me?

- "Who do you want advice from, cherub?" asked the princess.

- Wouldn't Countess Almaviva know? His Highness laughed.

- "You're too reckless, your apron," he said.

- "It's an Apród habit," said the cherub. He pulled aside the lace on the sleeve of the princess's dress and kissed her hand. A little high and a little long.

- Shall I bring Rosalinda?" he whispered. He read the answer in her eyes.

Rosalinda was dancing in that direction. She hadn't had a moment's peace all evening. The Chevalier de Maupin took her from her dancer and led her up the stairs to the table of their Highnesses.

- Give him a drink, he's thirsty, my dear. "He took the glass from the princess's hand and brought it to the red lips of Gontram Wolf. Then he turned to the Prince.

The prince gave a dry laugh as he showed off his huge brown riding boots with the terrible spurs.

- You think I can dance like that?

- Try it," Alraune urged and pulled him up from his seat by the arm. But don't trample me to death and break me, you fierce hunter!

The prince glanced suspiciously at the frail creature clad in fragrant lace, then rolled up his huge buckskin gloves.

- Come on then, little one!

Alraune blew a kiss to the princess and circled the room with the awkward prince. People got out of the way and it went pretty well, there and back. The prince lifted her high, twirled her in the air so that she screamed loudly, then his long spurs caught on something and - poof - they both lay on the floor. The girl was on her feet in an instant and held out her hand to the prince.

- Get up, Count! You cannot wish me to pick you up.

The prince lifted his torso, but when he moved his right leg, a sudden "yow" slipped out of his mouth. He then leaned on his left hand and tried to straighten up. But he could not; his leg ached with a sharp pain.

The big, strong man sat in the middle of the room, unable to get up. A few men came up to him and struggled to pull off his huge boots, which covered his whole foot. But his feet swelled up so fast that he could not walk; they had to cut away the hard skin with sharp knives. The orthopaedic surgeon, Professor Dr Helban, examined him and diagnosed an ankle fracture.

- The dance is over for today!" growled the prince.

Alraune stood in front of the tight ring that encircled the prince, with the red groom pressed in beside him. Alraune remembered a little song the students used to sing in the streets at night.

- 'Say,' he said, 'how does that song go about the three ribs and the three hearts?

The long Teuton, who was a stalwart, reacted like an automaton when the ball was thrown into the pitch. He swung the executioner's axe high and failed:

He tripped over a stone. Tripped

over a - trállá-lállá - Tripped over
a stone,

His blood was
dripping! Three ribs
broken, three ribs
broken

And the right one - trállá-lállá-
lállá - And the right one's leg.

- Shut your mouth!" a student whispered. "Are you out of your mind? Then he was silent.

- "Thank you for the apt song!" laughed the good-natured prince. "But you could have left out the three ribs, my leg is quite enough!

He was carried out in a chair and lifted into his sledge. With him the princess left the room. She was not in the mood for this incident.

.oOo.

Alraune Gontram Gontram went in search of Wolf; he still found him at the empty table of his Highnesses.

- "What did the princess do?" he asked quickly.

- "I don't know," said Farkas.

Alraune took his fan and struck him fiercely on the arm.

- You know very well," he insisted. "You must know and you will tell me! Wolf shook his head.

- I really don't know. He watered me, brushed my hair away from my forehead. I think he squeezed my hand. But I'm not sure, because I don't know what he said. I said "yes" a couple of times, but I didn't listen. I was thinking of something else entirely.

- "You're awfully silly, little Wolf," said the young lady reproachfully. What were you thinking of?

- On you.

The girl stamped her foot in annoyance.

- On me! Always on me!... I want to know, why do you always think of me?

Wolf looked at her pleadingly with his big, deep eyes.

- "I can't help it," he whispered.

The music rang out, breaking the silence that had been caused by the departure of their Majesties. The "Roses of the South" was played softly, seductively. She took his hand and pulled him along:

- Come on, Wolf - let's dance!

They agreed. They circled around, they alone in the huge room. The greybearded art historian, seeing them, climbed up on his chair and shouted:

- Silentium! Special issue. Waltz of Chevalier de Maupin and Rosalinda.

Many hundreds of eyes rested on the pretty couple. Alraune could clearly see their admiration and took every step in the knowledge that they were being admired. But Farkas Gontram noticed nothing, he just felt the melody carrying him. His big black lashes, half lowered, shaded his deep eyes.

Chevalier de Maupin was in charge. Sure, deliberate, like a slender little boy who has been used to the flat parquet floor since childhood. His head lightly

leaning forward, with his left hand he held Rosalinda's two fingers, and the golden hilt of his sword, which he pressed down so that the end lifted the lace. Her curls of rice-powder waved like silver snakes, a smile split her lips and her white teeth showed.

Rosalinda gave in to the gentle pressure. Her golden-red fin glided across the floor, her figure sprouting like a graceful flower. Her head bent low on her neck, pressed down by the white ostrich feathers of her large hat. Withdrawn from the world, far from all that surrounded her, she floated beneath the rosaries.

They danced around the room again and again.

The guests were pressed up against the wall, the people behind them stood on tables and chairs and watched with restrained souls.

- "Your Excellency has my felicitations," murmured Princess Wolkonski.

- "Thank you, your Highness," replied the Privy Councillor, "You see that our efforts have not been entirely in vain.

It has been changed. The chevalier led his lady across the room. Rosalinda stared wide-eyed, silent, amazed at the crowd.

- "Shakespeare would fall to his knees at the sight of this Rosalinda," explained the professor of literature.

At the next table, little Manasse looked down from the top of his chair at Justice Gontram:

- You stand up too, colleague! Look at this! The look in the boy's eyes is just like his happy wife's - just like her!

The old magistrate continued to sit quietly, tasting a new bottle of wine from the recent harvest.

- "I don't remember my wife's look clearly anymore," he said indifferently. Oh, she remembered well, but what did other people have to do with her feelings?

The two of them danced up and down the room. Rosalinda's white shoulders rippled more violently, her face flushed redder. But Chevalier de Maupin smiled just as prettily, confidently and practised under the rice powder.

Countess Olga pulled the red sedge from her hair and threw it at them. Chevalier de Maupin caught one of the strands in the air, held it to his lips and

thanked. Others reached for the colourful flowers, took them from the vases on the table, plucked them from their clothes and untied them from their hair. And they waltzed in a shower of flowers, almost flying to the tune of "Roses of the South".

The orchestra started again and again. The musicians, dulled and exhausted from playing every night all season, leaned out on the gallery elbows and looked down. The conductor's baton swung faster, the violin strings sizzled hotter.

And in deep silence, gliding tirelessly through the rose garden of colours and sounds, the couple Rosalinda and Chevalier de Maupin.

The conductor tapped the orchestra, and there was a ruckus. Baron Von Platen, Major of the Twenty-eighth, shouted in a stentorian voice from the gallery:

- Long live the couple! Long live Miss ten Brinken! Long live Rosalinda!

Glasses clinked, people shouted, cheered. They crowded onto the floor, surrounded them and nearly crushed them to death.

Two students from Renania were carrying a huge basket full of roses. They had got them from a florist's wife somewhere. Some hussars brought champagne. Alraune only tasted it, but the heated, thirsty Gontram Farkas greedily sipped the cool drink, one glass after another. Alraune pulled away and made his way through the crowd.

The hangman in the middle of the room stretched his neck forward: and held his axe out with both hands to Alraune.

- I have no flowers!" she cried, "I am the red rose!

Alraune left him high and dry. He led his lady on through the tables under the arbour and into the winter garden. He looked around: there were just as many people here, all waving and shouting at them. Then, behind the heavy curtain, he saw the small door leading to the balcony.

- "Oh, good!" he cried. "Come, Wolf!" He drew aside the curtain, turned the key, and pressed the handle, when five clumsy fingers came to rest on his arm.

- What do you want?" said a harsh voice.

He turned around: it was Manasse, a lawyer in a black domino.

- What do you want out there?" he repeated.

She shook off his ugly hands.

- "What's it got to do with it?" he said. Manasse nodded eagerly.

- I thought so - that's why I followed it. But he won't. He won't do it! Miss Ten Brinken straightened up and looked at him sternly.

- Why shouldn't I? - perhaps you want to stop us? The lawyer involuntarily flinched at the look in his eyes.

- Yes, I want to prevent it - I want to prevent it! Can't you understand what madness you are committing? You're both hot, you're drenched in sweat and you want to go out on the balcony at twelve degrees below zero!?

- But we're going out!" stubbornly insisted Alraune.

- 'Go on,' snorted Manasse. 'What *you* do, miss, is quite indifferent to me. I only want to keep the boy, Gontram Wolf, back - only him.

Alraune looked him up and down. He pulled the key from the lock and opened the door wide.

- "There!" he stepped out onto the balcony and beckoned to Rosalinda. "Will you come out with me into the winter night? Or will you stay in the hall?

Farkas Gontram pushed the lawyer aside and quickly walked out the door. Little Manasse jumped in his way, clinging to his arm, but Farkas, without saying a word, pushed him back again, so that he fell helplessly against the curtain.

- "Don't go, Wolf!" cried Manasseh. "Don't go!" he almost wailed, his hoarse voice trailing off.

Alraune laughed out loud:

- Brains, Eckart! - Stay out of the way and look after the Hörselberg!

He shut the door in his face, inserted the key in the lock, turned it twice.

The little lawyer tried to look out of the frosty window. He tugged at the door handle, scraping the floor furiously with both feet. Then slowly he calmed down. He stepped from behind the curtain and back into the room.

- This is fate!" he muttered. He gritted his untidily grown teeth, went back to his lordship's table and slumped into his chair.

- What's wrong, Mr Manasse?" asked Frida Gontram. 'Your face looks like seven short years!

Nothing! "Nothing at all!" snorted the lawyer. "Your brother is an ass. Give me something too!

The justice councillor refilled his glass. And Frida Gontram said with conviction:

- I believe he's an ass.

.oOo.

Rosalinda and Chevalier de Maupin were standing in the snow, leaning against the balcony railing. The full moon was baking the wide street, casting its gentle light on the baroque-style university and the Archbishop's old palace. It played with the voluminous white surfaces, casting fantastic shadows on the pavement.

Gontram Farkas was foaming at the mouth in the icy air.

- "How beautiful," she whispered, pointing to the white street, whose deep silence was undisturbed by the slightest sound. Ten Brinken Alraune looked up at her, saw her white shoulders gleaming in the moonlight, her large eyes shining darkly like two black opals, and said to her:

- You are the beautiful, more beautiful than the moonlit night.

The boy's hands came off the iron elbow, and he reached for her and put his arm around her.

- Alraune, - he said - Alraune -

She tolerated it for a brief moment. Then, freeing herself, she waved her hand.

- No! No!" she laughed. "Your name is Rosalinda, I'm the boy, I'm courting you.

He looked around, got a chair from the corner, dragged it forward, and swept the snow off it with his sword. - Here, sit down, my pretty lady - unfortunately you're a bit too tall for me! - that's all right - the difference evens out!

He bowed ceremoniously and knelt down.

- "Rosalinda," he chirped, "Rosalinda!
- Alraune!" the boy began. But she sprang up and covered her lips with her hands.
- You must call him "sir!" So: - Will you let me steal a kiss from you, Rosalinda?
- Yes, sir!" stammered Wolf. Stepping behind her, he put his head between his hands. And kissed him, slowly, in turn.
- First your ear," he chuckled, "your right ear, now your left! And your face
- and your stupid nose, which I have kissed so many times. And finally - be careful Rosalinda - your pretty mouth!

She bent down, and put her curly head over the boy's shoulder, under his hat. But he got it back.

- Don't hurry, pretty girl, let your hands be! Let them rest in your lap, nice and chaste.

The boy dropped his trembling hands to his knees and closed his eyes. Alraune kissed him, kissed him long and hot. At last his little teeth found her lips, biting into her, so that heavy drops of red blood fell into the snow.

Then he broke away from her, stopped in front of her and stared wide-eyed at the moon.
Suddenly, a shudder ran down our spines.

- I'm cold, he whispered. He picked up one leg, then the other. My lace shoes are full of stupid snow!

He pulled off one of his shoes and beat the snow out of it.

- "Put mine on," said Farkas. "Mine is bigger and warmer.

And he's already taken it off. The girl stepped in.

- Is it better now?

- Yes, now it's good again! I'll give you another kiss for that, Rosalinda. He kissed her again - and bit her again.

Then they both laughed as the moonlight fell on the red spots on the white background.

- Do you love me, Gontram Wolf?" asked Alraune.

- I think of nothing but you!" said the boy.

She hesitated for a moment, then continued to question him:

- If I wish - would you jump off the balcony?

- Yes!

- Even from the roof? The boy nodded.

- Also from the cathedral tower? The boy nodded again.

- Would you do anything for me, little Wolf?

- Yes, Alraune, if you love me.

She lifted her lips and rocked her hips gently.

- "I don't know if I love you," he said slowly, "Would you do everything even if I didn't love you?"

The boy's beautiful eyes, inherited from his mother, shone more intensely and deeply than ever. And the moon in the sky, envious of these human eyes, fell and hid behind the cathedral tower.

- Yes, yes - even so!

Alraune sat on the boy's lap and put her arms around his neck.

- That's why Rosalinda - that's why I kiss you a third time!

And he kissed her, longer and hotter. And bit him - even more savagely and deeply. But they could no longer see the heavy drops on the white snow, for the envious moon hid her silver torch.

- Come on," whispered Alraune, "come on, let's go.

They changed their shoes back, shook the snow off their clothes. They unlocked the door, stepped inside, and from behind the curtains they slipped back into the hot, stifling air of the room. The arc-lamps sparkled at them.

Gontram Farkas was staggering when he let go of the curtain and grabbed his chest with both hands.

The girl noticed.

- What's wrong, Wolf?

- Leave it!" said the boy. "Nothing - just a prick! They walked hand in hand across the room.

.oOo.

Farkas Gontram did not go to the office the next day.

He lay in a raging fever, he would not get out of bed; he lay like that for nine days. Sometimes he was delirious, calling out Alraune's name - but all the time he never regained consciousness. Then he died. Of pneumonia. He was buried outside in the new cemetery.

Miss Ten Brinken sent a large dark rose to his grave.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Which gives back how Alraune killed the Privy Councillor

On the night of Leap Day this year, a windstorm swept across the Rhine. It came from the south, caught the floating ice floes, piled them on top of each other and threw them crunching against the old toll. It tore off the roof of the Jesuit church, twisted ancient lime trees in the courtyard park, unleashed the strong pontoons of the swimming pool and smashed the mighty pillars of the stone bridge into a posh pile.

The hurricane was raging in Lendenich too. It knocked down three chimneys in the village hall and destroyed the old barn of the Rooster Inn. But the greatest evil was committed in the house of ten Brinken, where the evergreens lit in honour of St John Nepomuk were extinguished.

In all the centuries that the manor house has stood, there has never been a similar incident. It is true that the village devotees filled the candles and lit them the next morning, but there were rumours of great misfortune and the certain end of the Brinkenek. For, as the night showed, the saint had taken his hand off the Lutheran house. No storm in the world could have quenched it-if he had not let it.

- "It's not the storm," some whispered, "the lady went out at midnight - she put out the lanterns.

But, it seems, people have been wrong with their predictions. In the lord's house, despite the fast, there were great celebrations. The windows were brightly lit, and night after night, music filtered out, loud laughter and singing.

"We need fun," she said, "after the loss we have suffered. "And the Privy Councillor did as she wished.

He crept after her wherever she went, as if he had taken over the role of the little Wolf. He glared at her wistfully when she entered the room, and followed her with a wistful look when she left. Alraune, noticing how hotly the blood tingled in the old man's veins, laughed loudly and threw back his head.

He took on ever more macabre whims, ever more extravagant desires.

The old man gave in, but he bargained, always demanding something in return. Tickle his bald head or play the piano on his arm with nimble fingers. Sit on his lap, even kiss him. And again and again he made her wear a boy's dress.

Alraune dressed up in a riding habit, then in the lace dress of the happy-maid's ball. Then as a fisherman's boy with an open blouse and bare legs, an elevator boy in a tight red uniform with bulging hips, as a hunter Wallenstein, Prince Orłowski, or Nerissa, a forensic clerk. And a spic in a black tails, a rococo apron, or Euphorion in a tunic and blue tunic.

On these occasions, the Privy Councillor would sit on the pamlague and walk up and down in front of him. His sweaty hands stroked his trousers, his feet sliding back and forth on the carpet. And he searched his soul for a way to begin.

She stopped and gave him a challenging look. She cowered under his gaze, at a loss for words, searching in vain for a cloak to cover her nasty desires.

The girl went out with a mocking smile. As soon as the door slammed shut and she heard his raucous laughter on the stairs - her thoughts came. Now it would be easy, now she knew what to say, how to get things started. Often he called after her, and sometimes she came back.

- Well?" he asked.

But it didn't work, it just didn't work.

- Oh, nothing!" he muttered.

.oOo.

His security was missing. That was the problem. And to make sure he was still in control of his old art, he sought another victim.

He found it in the person of the tinker's thirteen-year-old daughter, who brought home a patched cauldron.

- Come to Marika! - she said. - I'll give you something.
And he pulled in into the library room.

.oOo.

Quietly, like a sick animal, the little one crept out half an hour later. He walked close to the wall, his eyes wide and glassy.

And the Privy Councillor walked triumphantly across the courtyard towards the lord's building with a broad smile.

Now he would have dared to act with more certainty, but Alraune evaded him. When he seemed calm, he would come out, but he would retreat as soon as his eyes fluttered confusedly.

- He's playing, he's playing with me too!" said the professor, gritting his teeth.

Then one day, when Alraune got up from the table, he grabbed her hand. He knew exactly, word for word, what he wanted to say, but in that instant he forgot. He was annoyed, and the look in her eyes made him angry. He sprang at her quickly and roughly, twisted her arm behind her back, and threw her screaming on the couch.

She staggered, but leapt to her feet again before he could approach her. She giggled, sharp and long, so long that her ears hurt. And she went out without a word.

He stayed in Alraune's suite and did not come to tea or dinner. For days he did not show up.

The professor was shuffling outside his door. He flattered her, pleaded, begged. But she would not come out. She sent in letters, pleading and promising more and more. But she never answered.

Finally, after hours of moaning outside her door, she let him in.

- Shut up!" he said, "Your speech hurts me. What do you want?"

He apologised. He was surprised by the attack, he could not control his emotions, he said.

- You're lying!" said Alraune calmly. Then he dropped his mask. He told how he longed for it, how he could not breathe without it. He told her how he loved her.

Alraune laughed. But still he negotiated, he set conditions.

The professor was still bargaining, trying to get some leverage here and there.

Dress as a boy once a week - just once a week.

- No!" cried Alraune. "Daily if I like, never if I don't.

The professor was satisfied with that too. And from that day he was a slave to her without a will. Hű kutyája, ott szűkölt körülötte s a morzsákat ette, melyeket ha jól esett a lánynak, szemérmetlen ujjaival lesepert az asztalról, úgy szaladgált a saját házában, mint egy kegyelemből tartott öreg koszos állat, aki csak azért él, mert röstellik a fáradságot, hogy agyonverjék.

And he gave his orders: take care of the flowers. Buy a motorboat. Today invite these gentlemen, tomorrow those. Fetch my handkerchief. The professor obeyed. And he felt richly rewarded if he suddenly appeared like an Etonian schoolboy, with a high hat and a big round collar, if he stretched out his legs towards him and was free to tie the silk ribbon of his tiny shoes.

Sometimes, when he was alone, he would wake up. He'd raise his ugly head, shake it from side to side, wondering what really happened. Was he not accustomed, for a lifetime, to rule? Was not his will sacred in the seat of ten Brinkens?

He felt as if a tumour had formed in his brain, swelling up to a fat puff and blocking his thoughts. Some poisonous insect had crawled in through his ear or nose and stung him. Now it buzzed around him, close to his face, buzzing mockingly in front of his eyes. "Why don't you stomp this worm to death?" he half straightened, struggling with a resolve:

- I'll finish him!" he muttered.

When he saw her, he forgot all about it. His eyes widened, his hearing grew, he could hear the faintest rustle of her silks. He sniffed the air, longing to smell her flesh, his old fingers twitching inside, licking the saliva that dripped from her lips. All his senses were sneaking after her, greedy, lustful, angry, full of nasty desires. She held him on such a tight rope.

Mr Sebestyén Gontram visited Lendenich and found the Privy Councillor in the library.

- 'Watch out,' he said, 'we've got a lot of work to do before we can put everything right again. You should take a little more care of things, Your Grace.

- "I don't have time," replied the Privy Councillor.

- "That's none of my business!" said Mr Gontram calmly. In the last few weeks he hasn't cared about anything, he's letting everything go his way. Be careful, my lord, it may come back on you!

- Oh," the Privy Councillor scoffed, "what has happened?

- "But I have written it," replied the magistrate, "but he doesn't seem to read my letters any more. The former director of the museum in Wiesbaden has written a pamphlet - you know that, don't you - accusing you of all sorts of things, and you have been summoned to court. He called for experts to be brought in, and this committee examined your pieces and declared that they were largely forgeries. All the papers are full of it, the accused will certainly be acquitted.

- Don't worry about it!

- As you wish, your Excellency," continued Gontram; "but he has made a new complaint to the public prosecutor, and the authorities will be obliged to deal with the charge. Besides, that is far from all. In the bankruptcy of the Gerstenberg Coal Works, the receiver has filed a complaint against you on the basis of some documents for falsifying the balance sheet and fraudulent failure, and a similar complaint has been filed, as you know, in the matter of the Karpen brickworks. Finally, lawyer Kramer, who is representing the tinman Hamecher, got through that the prosecutor's office ordered a medical examination of your daughter.

- "The child is lying," cried the professor, "hysterical child.

- "All the better," the magistrate waved his hand, "at least your innocence will be proven. Here is also the complaint of the merchant Matthiesen for damages and the repayment of fifteen thousand marks, in which he states that he has at the same time denounced you for fraud. In another document, the opposing counsel in the case of Plutus G. m. b. H. accuses you of forgery and states that he will take the necessary steps to initiate criminal proceedings. Hardly a day goes by without something new.

- "Are you finished?" the Privy Councillor snapped.

- "No," said Mr Gontram indifferently, "not exactly. It was only a few stems from the fancy bouquet that awaits you in the city. I advise you, my lord, to go quickly - don't take it so lightly.

- I told you, I don't have time. You really should leave your uselessness alone. The magistrate got up, put his files in his leather bag and closed it carefully.

- "As you wish," he said. There is a rumour that the Mühlheim Credit Bank is going to stop its payments in the next few days?

- "Nonsense," said the professor. "Besides, I have little money lying around.

- "Not much?" asked Mr Gontram, with some astonishment. "You have only half a year ago given the Institute more than eleven million to give you a freer hand in controlling the potash business. I myself sold Princess Wolkonski's mining bonds for that purpose.

His Excellency Ten Brinken nodded:

- The princess - yes. - But am I a princess? The justice councillor shook his head anxiously.

- You're going to lose your money," he muttered.

- "I don't mind!" said the Privy Councillor, "Nevertheless, we'll see if we can help you.

He stood up and drummed his hands on the desk.

- You're right, Mr Justice Counselor, I should be a bit more concerned about the cases. Please meet me in my office tomorrow at six o'clock. Thank you.

He shook her hand and walked her to the door.

But he did not go into town on the afternoon in question. Two lieutenants came for tea, he was sneaking around in the room, he went in for something, he didn't dare to leave the house. He was jealous of everyone who spoke to Alraune, of the chair he sat on, the carpet he trod.

And it didn't work the next day and the third day. The magistrate dismissed one messenger after another. He dismissed them without answer; he even disconnected the telephone so that they could not call him.

The Justice Councillor then turned to her and told her that the Privy Councillor had some very urgent business in the office. Alraune rang for the car, sent his butler to the library room and told the Privy Councillor to get ready because they were going into town.

His Excellency was shaking with joy at the first time in weeks that they were going somewhere together. He put on his coat, went out into the courtyard and opened the carriage door for Alraune.

She didn't say anything, but he was happy to sit next to her. Alraune drove into the office and ordered her out.

- Where are you going?" asked the Privy Councillor.

- I have shopping to do.

- "Will you come and pick me up?" he said.

- I don't know. Maybe - Alraune smiled.

The Privy Councillor was grateful for the "maybe". He went up the stairs and opened the door to the left, into the room of the Justice Councillor.

- Here I am," he said.

The judicial adviser had a stack of files in front of him.

- Here's the toffees, - beckoned pretty collection. Among them are some old things that we thought had been settled long ago and are now being discussed again. And three new ones from the day before.

- "A bit much," the Privy Councillor pleaded. Will you kindly report, Mr Justice Counsel?

Gontram shook his head:

- Wait until Manasse comes, he's better informed than I am. He must be coming soon, I called him. He's with the examining magistrate on the Hamecher case.

- Hamecher?" asked the professor. "Who is it?"

- "The tinker," reminded the judicial counsellor, "The medical opinion is very incriminating. The prosecution has ordered a preliminary examination. Here is the summons. I think this is the most important case for the moment.

The Privy Councillor picked up the files and leafed through one booklet after another. He was restless, listening nervously to every sound, every footstep in the corridor.

- I don't have much time," he said.

The Justice Councillor shrugged and lit a new cigar, comfortably. They waited, but the lawyer did not appear. Gontram phoned the office and then the court, but he couldn't get him anywhere.

The professor pushed the files aside.

- I can't read it all today. Anyway, I'm not very interested in them.

- "Are you not feeling well, Your Excellency?" asked the magistrate. He had wine and seltzer water brought.

Then the young lady arrived. The Privy Councillor heard the car approaching at a crawl and stopped, immediately jumped up and grabbed his coat. He went into the corridor ahead of her.

- Are you ready?" asked Alraune.

- "Of course," he said, "absolutely.

But the Justice Counsel intervened.

- Not true, miss. We haven't even started yet. We're waiting for lawyer Manasse. The old man's on fire:

Nonsense! I'm coming with you, son. It's all irrelevant. Alraune looked at the magistrate.

- "In my view, it is very important for Papa," he said.

- "No, no!" the Privy Councillor stubbornly insisted.

- "You're staying," decided Alraune. "Mr Gontram," he said, turning and descending the stairs.

The Privy Councillor went back into the room, went to the window, saw him get into the car and drive off. He stood there and looked down into the street, into the twilight. Mr. Gontram lit the gas flames, sat quietly in his chair, smoking a cigar, pacing.

They were waiting. They closed the office, the employees left one by one, opened their umbrellas and splashed around in the sticky street corner. The two of them didn't say a word.

The lawyer has finally arrived. He slammed on the stairs, ripped open the door.

- "Good evening," he muttered, setting his umbrella in the corner, pulling off his muddy shoes, throwing his wet cloak on the pillow.

- "It is high time, my colleague," said the judicial councillor.

- It is high time, yes, high time!" the lawyer retorted.

He walked up to the Privy Councillor with his legs apart and stood in front of him and shouted in his face:

- The arrest warrant has been issued.

- "Eh, what!" hissed the Privy Councillor.

- "Eh, what?!" the lawyer scoffed. "I saw it with my own eyes! It will be carried out tomorrow morning at the latest.

- We have to post bail," the magistrate observed piously.

- "Do you think I didn't think of it?" said little Manasseh. "I offered bail at once-half a million. "The court has changed, your grace; I always thought it would. The Counselor declared quite coolly. But I fear you will have little luck. The evidence is downright damning, which dictates the utmost caution! These are your own words! Not very edifying, are they?

He filled his glass to the brim. He drained it in slow sips.

- I'll tell you more, Your Excellency! I met in the tribunal with Meier II. lawyer, who is our opponent in the Gerstenberg case; he also represents the municipality of Huckingen, who filed a complaint yesterday. I asked him to wait - I shall have a longer talk with him; that is the reason why I came so late, my colleague, - frankly, we are, thank God, loyal to the tribunal! I learnt from him that the enemy's lawyers had conspired; they had held a great conference the night before yesterday. Some members of the press were present, among them the inveterate Dr. Landmann of the Generalanzeiger. Your Excellency knows that he has not a penny to his name in *this* paper! -I tell you, the roles have been well assigned - he will not escape the trap easily this time!

The Privy Councillor turned to Gontram:

- What is your opinion, Mr Justice Counsel?

- We'll just have to wait and see, and then we'll find a way out.

- And I say: there's no way out!" cried Manasse. "The noose is ready, it's tightened - then your excellency can dance in the air, if he doesn't jump quickly from the gallows first!

- So what is your advice?" asked the professor.

- The same as I advised poor Doctor Mohnen, whose loss is on your conscience, your Excellency! It was wicked of you - but what good is it if I tell the truth now?! I advise you to collect as much money as you can at once, - otherwise we can do it without you - pack your things and go away - today!

- They will issue a warrant," said the judicial councillor.

- Of course," said Manasse, "but without any particular emphasis. I have spoken to my colleague Meier about this, and he shares my view. It is not in our opponent's interest to start a scandal and the authorities will be happy to avoid it. They only want to render Your Excellency harmless, they want to put an end to his activities - and, believe me, they have the means to do so. But if he disappears, living quietly somewhere abroad, we can settle everything here in peace; of course it will cost a good deal of money, but what will that do? Even now, it is in your best interests not to throw this magnificent morsel to the radical and socialist press.

He fell silent and waited for a reply. His Excellency Ten Brinken paced up and down the room with slow, heavy, shuffling steps.

- How long do you think I should stay away?" he asked finally. The little lawyer turned to him.

- How long?" he snorted. - What question? As long as he lives! He should be glad that he has at least that possibility: it is certainly more pleasant to spend one's millions in a nice villa on the Riviera than to end one's life in a prison! And that would be the end of it, I can vouch for that!... Otherwise the authorities themselves would have left this door open, the examining magistrate could just as well have signed the arrest warrant this morning; now

would be fulfilled. Damn decent people these people are, but they'd take it badly if you didn't use the door. If they should be forced to touch it, they would grab it too; and then your Excellency would sleep the last night as a free man.

- "Go away," said the Justice Councillor. "After all this, I think it's really for the best.

- Oh yes," Manasse snorted, "the best. The very best. The only good one! Travel. Go away. Go away - to never see you again. And take the young lady's daughter with you. Lendenich will be grateful, and so will our town.

The Privy Councillor pricked up his ears. For the first time in the evening, some life had come into his features, the stiff, apathetic mask had fallen away, and nervous anxiety fluttered like a fleeting light.

- "Alraune," he whispered, "Alraune... if you will come with me. He sat down, gave himself a glass of wine, drank it down. It would be good if you could explain everything once more. - He reached for the files and took down the top one.

The lawyer began his calm, professional presentation. He went through the files, weighing up all the probabilities, even the slightest possibility of defence. And the privy councillor was a man of his word, interjecting here and there, sometimes, as in the old days, finding a new opportunity. The professor's mind grew clearer and clearer, more and more comprehensive, as if with every new danger his old resilience was more and more refreshed.

A number of cases were separated as relatively harmless. There was still enough left to break his neck on. He dictated some letters and gave many instructions. He made notes, drafted motions and complaints.

He then studied the timetable with the gentlemen, drew up a route plan and gave precise instructions for the nearest time. Leaving the office, he could say that his affairs were in order.

He hired a car; he drove out to Lendenich with courage and confidence. It was only when the servant opened the gate for him, when he crossed the courtyard, when he went up the stairs to the master's apartment, that he lost his security.

He was looking for Alraune. He took it as a good omen that he had no guests. He had heard from the butler that he had dined in private and was now in his room; so he went upstairs, knocked at his door, and at the "hello" entered.

- I need to talk to you! Alraune was sitting at his desk.

- "I can't!" he said, raising his eyes. "I'm not in the mood.

- Very important. - It will not be delayed!

She looked at him, crossed her legs lightly.

- "Not now!" he said. "Go downstairs.

The professor went out. He took off his coat and sat down on the cushion. He waited. And he thought about how to communicate the matter, weighing every sentence, every word.

After a good hour, he heard her footsteps. He got up, went to the door - and there she was, dressed as an elevator boy in a tight strawberry-coloured uniform.

- "Ah!" he cried in surprise, "that's kind of you.

- 'As a reward,' chuckled Alraune, 'for obeying me so nicely. And now speak: what news?

The Privy Councillor did not mince his words, he told everything in detail, as it was; he added nothing. Alraune did not interrupt him. Let him speak, let him confess.

- "It's all your fault," he said. "I could have done everything without too much trouble. But I minded my own business, I minded only you, and so the heads of the hydra grew.

- "The evil hydra," mocked Alraune.-Does it cause much trouble to poor good Hercules?-Anyway, it seems that this time the hero is the angry salamander and the dragon-snake is the punishing revenge.

- Of course!" nodded the professor, "from the point of view of the people, absolutely. They have their laws, I have made my own. In fact, that is all my sin - I think you understand.

- "Of course, daddy, why not?Have I reproached you?" laughed Alraune merrily. "Tell me, what do you intend to do?

The professor explained that they would have to escape, tonight. "They will travel a little, see the world. Maybe London or Paris first...

they spend time there to stock up on the things they need. Then they cross the ocean, visit America, Japan - and India, if you like. Or both, because they have plenty of time. Finally, Palestine, Greece, Italy and Spain. Where it pleases him, they will stay; and when he has had enough, they will leave. Finally they buy somewhere on Lake Garda, or the Riviera - they buy a nice villa. With a big garden, of course. You'll have horses, cars, even your own yacht. You can bet on whoever you want, you can have a big house -

He was not stingy with promises. With vivid colours he described the tempting greatneses, and still he found new and particularly tempting ones. Finally he paused and asked:

- Well, my boy, what do you say? Would you like to see all this? Would you like to live like this?

Alraune sat on the table, swinging her slender legs.

- Oh, yes," he nodded, "I'd love to.

- "Only?" the professor asked suddenly. "If you have any more wishes, let me know! I will certainly grant it.

Alraune laughed at him.

- I would love to travel - just not with you!

The Privy Councillor stepped back and, dizzy, clutched the back of a chair.

He searched for words, but could not find any.

- "I'd be bored with you," said Alraune. "You'd be a burden! The professor laughed too, trying to make himself believe she was joking.

- "I am the one who has to travel," he said.
- tonight!

- Go on, then!" she said slowly.

- "And you, Alraune?" the Privy Councillor snarled.

She reached for his hand, but Alraune pushed her arms back.

- Me? - I'm staying!

The professor began the begging and wailing all over again. "He needs it," he said, as if it were the air he breathed. 'Have pity on him, he'll be eighty soon, surely he won't be a burden much longer. Then

threatened, shouted, excluded from the inheritance, thrown out on the street without a penny -

- Try it!" interjected Alraune. He started again and again, painting the colourful glitter he wanted to give. She will be free, as no other girl is, to do as she pleases. She will have no wish, no thought that she will not make come true. Just come with her, don't leave her alone.

Alraune shook his head.

- I'm doing fine here. I didn't do anything wrong - I'm staying. Calmly, slowly, he said. And he did not interrupt the professor, He made her talk, he made her promise, over and over again. But as soon as she asked him that one question, he shook his head.

Finally he jumped off the table. He walked past her, his footsteps light as he headed for the door.

- "It's late," he said, "I'm tired. I want to sleep. Goodbye daddy, have a good trip.

The professor stood in his way and made one last attempt. He stressed that he was his father, he spoke of filial duty, like a priest. Alraune laughed: - to go to heaven, - what? He stood beside the pamlague and sat down on its side. "How do you like my legs?" he asked suddenly. She stretched her slender legs far towards him and swung them to and fro.

The man stared at his thighs. He forgot what he wanted, he thought nothing of escape or danger. He saw nothing, felt nothing, but the straw-coloured, slender legs of a child's foot, swinging up and down before his eyes.

- "I'm a good child!" chirped Alraune, "a very good child, who wants to please his foolish father. Kiss my feet, daddy, caress my pretty feet, daddy!

The professor fell to his knees. He reached for his shin. He traced his trembling fingers over her red thighs, over her taut legs. She pressed her wet lips to the red post and licked them long with her writhing tongue.

Now the girl jumped up lightly and nimbly. She tugged at the professor's ear, patted his cheek.

- "Well, daddy, have I done my childhood duty well?" she asked in a ringing voice. Have a good journey and take care you don't get lost

pinch you - it can be very inhospitable in the prison. Send me a nice postcard now and then, you hear?

He was in the doorway before the professor rose. He bowed, curt, taut, boyish, and raised his right hand to his cap.

- Your humble servant, Your Grace. And don't make too much noise when you're packing down here - it'll disturb your sleep.

The professor staggered after her, saw her running rapidly up the stairs. He heard the door open, heard the lock click and the key turn twice. He was about to go after her, his hand on the armrest. But he felt that he would not open the door, in spite of all his pleading, that this door would remain closed to him if he stood there all night, until, until -

Until the gendarmes come and take him away. He stood still. He listened, heard her light footsteps above his head, pacing up and down. And then he heard nothing. There was silence.

He slipped out of the house, headless, and crossed the yard in the pouring rain.

Entering the library room, he looked for matches and lit a few candles on the desk.

- Who is this? What is it? What kind of creature?" he whispered, slumped in a chair.

He unlocked the old mahogany table, pulled out a drawer, took out a leather-bound book. He put it in front of him and stared at the cover.

- T. B. A. - read half aloud - Ten Brinken Alraune.

The game was over, completely over, he felt. And he lost - no more cards in his hand. It was his game, he alone shuffled the cards. He had all the trump cards in his hand - and still he lost.

He smiled, but angrily. So now the bill has to be paid.

- Pay? - Yes, pay! But how much?

He looked at his watch - it was after twelve. They'll be here with the arrest warrant at seven at the latest - so you've got over six hours. They'll be very polite, very tactful - they'll take you to the remand centre in your own car. Then - then the fight begins. It's not bad - he can hold on for months, he'll defend every inch of space against his opponents. But eventually, in the main trial - true for Manasseh - he will break. And eventually - prison will follow.

Or run away?-But alone, in private?-Without her?-He felt he hated her at the moment, but he also knew he could think of nothing but her. Running about the world uselessly, aimlessly, and hearing nothing, seeing nothing but her bright, chirping voice, her red swaying feet. Oh - she would starve without him. Abroad or in prison, it makes no difference.

- Your feet - the sweet slender feet of a child! Oh, how could she live without those rosy feet? He's lost the game - he's got to pay the bill. He'll pay it at once, this very night, He'll pay it with what he has left - his life.

His life is worthless anyway, he thought, and he ends up deceiving his playmates.

That thought was a good one: he wondered if he could kick them again. It would be some satisfaction.

He took out his will from his desk, in which he made Alraune his heir. He read it over, then carefully tore it into tiny shreds.

He took out a sheet of paper and dipped the pen in it. There his sister - her son Braun Frank, his nephew -

He hesitated. Ö? Will you leave your fortune to him? Was it not she who had brought this gift into his house, this strange creature who had ruined him? Him as well as the rest! Oh, Braun must wound Frank more than Alraune.

- *You tempted the god*," said the adolescent, "You ask him a question so audacious that he must answer it.

There, now you have your answer.

But if he must die inexorably, let the boy who suggested the idea, Braun Frank, share his fate. Oh, for he has a beret-edged weapon, his little daughter, ten Brinken Alraune, who will take Braun Frank to where he is now -

He thought. He shook his head, grinning smugly, in a sure sense of one last triumph. And he wrote the will, in hasty, mocking strokes, without interruption.

Alraune is the sole heir. But he also left a legacy to his sister and nephew. He appointed her executor of his will and she

as his guardian until he comes of age. So at least she will have to come here, stay close by and breathe in the stifling steam of her lips. And she'll walk like all the others! Like the Count and Doctor Mohnen, like Gontram the Wolf. Like the chauffeur. And finally like himself.

He laughed out loud. He also added that if Alraune died without issue, the inheritance would go to the university, so he excluded his nephew in any case. Then he signed the paper and waved it.

Now he took out the leather-bound book. He has read it, written the history and conscientiously made up for what has happened in the last time. He ended with a little appeal to his nephew, dripping with mockery:

"Try your luck!" he wrote. "Too bad I won't be there when it's your turn, but it would have been a lovely sight!

He carefully dried the wet ink, closed the volume and put it back in the drawer with the other memories. There was the necklace of the princess, the root-man of Gontram, the dice cup, the shot-white card which he had taken from Count Geroldingen's waistcoat pocket, with the word 'Mascotte' beside the four-leaf clover, and much black, curdled blood stuck to it.

He stepped to the curtains, untied the silk cord. With the big scissors, she cut a piece of it and threw it in the drawer with the rest of her things.

- Mascotte! - kacagott - Ca porte bonheur pour la maison!

He looked at the wall, stood up on a chair. With great effort, he lifted the huge iron tension rod off the thick hook and laid it carefully on the sofa.

- "Forgive me for evicting you," he grinned. "It's only for a short time - a few hours - I'll be a worthwhile substitute!

He tied the noose and threw it on the high hook. Then he pulled it to make sure it was strong. And he climbed on the chair a second time.

.oOo.

The gendarmes found him early in the morning. The chair was knocked over, but the dead man was still standing on his tiptoes. It was as if he regretted what he had done; as if he had tried to escape at the last moment. His right eye widened and darted towards the door. His swollen, blue tongue stuck out long.

It was disgusting.

INTERMEZZO

My blond brother, perhaps the silver bells of your quiet days ring the soft tones of sleeping sins.

The golden rain sheds its poisonous yellow where the pale acacia's pale moon lay, the hot clematis boast their deep blue where the glycine's gentle berries ring peace. Sweet is the light play of yearning desires, sweeter still in the night-time The cruel agony of passions. But on a hot summer's afternoon the sleeping sin is sweetest.

- She's sleeping softly, my gentle friend and must not be woken.
Because it's most beautiful when you're asleep.

My dear sin rests in a mirror, Near me, in a thin silk shirt, On a white sheet, Your hand, my brother, falls on the edge of the bed, Your slender fingers, wearing my gold ring, are bent, Your rose-coloured nails shine transparent as the dawn's blush: Fanny manicured them, your black maid, She made these little wonders. And I kiss in the mirror your pink nails, these transparent wonders.

Only in the mirror - only in the mirror. Only with a caressing glance and the silent breath of my lips. For they grow, they grow, when sin awakens, they sharpen into tiger claws. They tear my flesh -

Your head rises from the lace pillow and your blonde curls fall. They fall softly around you, like the flame of golden flames, like the soft breeze of the morning breeze. Thy tiny teeth laugh from between thy narrow lips, Like the milk-pals on the moon-goddess's shining bracelet. And I kiss your golden hair, my brother and your flashing teeth.

Only in the mirror - only in the mirror. With the faint breath of my lips and a flirtatious glance. For I know that when the hot sin awakens, your little milk balls will become huge fangs, your golden ears into fiery vipers. The tiger's claws will tear my flesh, its sharp teeth will inflict horrible bloody wounds, The flaming vipers will whip around my head, crawl into my ears, spurt their venom into my brain, whispering tales of wild lust, flattering -

Your silk shirt slips off your shoulders, your little child-boobs fall out. They're lazing like two young white kittens, gasping for air with their sweet rosy lips. They look up into your lovely eyes, which, like blue stones, refract the light: they sparkle like star sapphires in the golden head of a world-wise buddha.

See, my brother, how I kiss sin - behind the mirror? For I know well that when eternal sin awakes, blue lightning will flash from your eyes and strike my poor heart. They make my blood boil, they melt the strong barriers in their glow, so that madness is loosed and spills out into the universe.

Then, free of its chains, the frenzied beast rushes forth. He rushes at thee, my sister, with a roaring agony. And into the sweet childish breasts, which now that sin is awakened, have grown into the mighty breasts of a matchless slut - he tears them open with his claws, strikes them with his terrible teeth - and in rivers of blood the pain rears up.

But my eyes are even quieter than the steps of the nuns guarding the holy tomb. And more softly, more softly still, the breath of my lips rises, like the kiss of the soul on the wafer in the cathedral, which turns the bread into the body of the Lord.

Do not even wake up, rest, slumber the beautiful sin.

For nothing, my dear friend, I hold sweeter than the virgin virgin in her light slumber.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Which gives us an idea of how frank braun entered the world of alraune

Braun Frank returned home to his mother's house. Somewhere from his aimless travels, from Kashmir or Chaco, Bolivia. Perhaps from the West Indies, where he played at rebellion in foolish republics, or from the South Seas, where he dreamed tales of slender daughters of a runaway people.

It arrived from somewhere -

He walked slowly around his mother's house. In the white staircase, where rama and rama crowded the walls, old engravings and modern scratchings. In his mother's spacious rooms, where the spring sun shone through yellow curtains. Here hung the ancestors. Many Brinken, smart and stern faces, people who knew their place in this world. His great-grandfather and great-grandmother - good pictures from the age of empire. His beautiful grandmother - aged sixteen in the costume of Queen Victoria. There hung her father and mother and her own portrait. As a child, with a ball in her hand, her long, shoulder-length curls of light blonde hair. And as a boy in a black velvet dress, reading from a fat old book.

Copies in the next room. From everywhere. From the Dresden Picture Gallery, the Cassel and Brunswick, the Palazzo Pitti, the Prado and the Ryksmuseum. Many Dutch, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Ostade, then Murillo, Titian, Velasquez and Veronese. They were all a little darkened; they glowed a reddish gold in the beaming light that broke through the curtains.

And he continued to wander around the other rooms where the modern ones hung. Many good pictures, many not so good, but not a bad one, not a sweet one. All around was old furniture, lots of mahogany - empire, directoire and biedermeier. No oak, but many simple modern pieces. There was no trace of a single style, all piled up in a mess over the years. And yet there was a quiet, complete harmony: everything was related.

He went upstairs, which his mother had given him. Everything was just as she had left it when she last moved out - two years ago. Not a single paperweight was put anywhere else, not one. Not a chair had been moved. Yes, her mother made sure that the servants were careful and sparing in their cleaning and dusting. Here, even more than elsewhere in the house, there were countless little things in a tangled mass on the ceiling and walls. Five continents had sent their eccentricities and bizarrenesses here. Large masks, wild wooden devil idols from the Bismarck Islands, Chinese and Anami flags, many weapons from the countries of all the rulers. Also hunting trophies, stuffed animals, jaguar and tiger skins, giant tortoises, snakes and crocodiles. Iromba drums from Luzon, long-necked wind instruments from Radsputana, simple-minded guzlicas from Albania. On one wall, huge reddish-brown fishing nets reaching to the roof, with giant starfish and urchins, sawfish saws, silvery shimmering scales of tarpon. Huge spiders, strange ocean fish, shells and snails. Old brocades on the furniture. And then Indian silk dresses, variegated Spanish mantillas and mandarin gowns with large gold dragons. Many idols, silver and gold Buddhas of all sizes, Indian reliefs of Siva, Krishna and Ganesa. And the absurd, unashamed stone idols of the Chan people. Among them, where there was only a little free space on the walls: glass ramps. A daring Rops, a fierce Goya and a small drawing by Jean Callot. Also Cruikshank, Hogarth and many colourful, wild cards from Cambodia and Mysore. Alongside many modern ones with the artists' names and signatures. Furniture of all styles and cultures, chock full of bronzes, porcelain and endless odds and ends.

All of this put together - it was Braun Frank. His bullet pierced the polar bear, whose fur he stomps with his foot, he himself caught the blue shark, whose huge teeth hang in a triple row of teeth in the net. He took from the wild buccas these poisoned arrows and spears, he received as a gift from a Manchu priest these foolish idols and this tall silver priest's brain. He stole the black thunderstone from the forest temple of Houdon-Badagri with his own lips and drank blood of this bombita with the chief of the Toba Indians at Mate, the swampy pariah of Pilcomayo. For this curved sword he gave his best hunting-rifle to a Malay sultan in Borneo, for that other long hangman's sword he gave his small pocket-hat to the viceroy of Santung. The magnificent Indian rugs were a gift from the Maharajah of Vigatpuri, whose life he saved on an elephant hunt, the

an eight-armed durgah of clay, splashed with goat's and human blood and red. Kalighatban was given to him by the dreadful Kali high priest.

All her life she had lain in these high rooms, every shell, every colourful rag, evoking old memories. Here are his opium pipes, there is his big mescal box, made of Mexican silver dollars, and next to it, in a tightly closed box, the snake venoms of Insulinde. And a gold bracelet with gorgeous cat's eyes - given to him in Burma once by a girl who smiled for ever. He paid for it with many kisses -

Twenty-one trunks and trunks, piled on the floor, stood and lay, containing the new treasures, and had not yet been opened.

- Where do we put these?" laughed Braun Frank.

Next to the large double window, a long Persian spear stretched into the air; a huge snow-white cockatoo sat on top. A black-tailed parrot, with a tall, flamingo-red bill.

- Good morning, Peter!" said Frank Braun.

- Atja, Tuwan!" said the bird. Dignified, he climbed onto the post and from there down to his perch. Then it clung to a chair, and from there down to the ground. With sinuous, dignified steps, it came towards him and crawled up onto his shoulder. He ruffled his proud brow and spread his wings wide like the bird of Prussian arms.

- Atja, Tuwan! Atja, Tuwan! - he shrieked.

Braun Frank scratched the neck of the white bird stretched towards him.

- How are you, Peter? Are you happy to be home again?

He went halfway down to the big covered balcony where his mother was having tea. Down in the garden, the candles of the great chestnut trees were lit; beyond, in the great cloister garden, lay a white sea of glittering petal-moons. Beneath the giggling trees walked brown-hooded Franciscans.

- Ni, the Father Barnabas!

He put the pope's eyes over the mother's and looked down.

- No, that's Father Cyprian -

A green Amazon clung to the iron bars of the balcony. And as soon as she put the cockatoo there, the cheeky little parrot came scurrying towards her. Comically, limping like

a shambling Galician peddler.

Alright - he cried, - Alright! - Lorita real di Espana e di Portugal! - Anna Mari-i-i-i-a. - He caught his beak towards the big bird, which was shaking its beak and said softly:

- Ka-ka-du.

- Are you still so cheeky Phylax?" asked Braun Frank.

- "He's getting cheekier every day," laughed his mother, "Nothing is safe from him, he'd like to tear the whole house down.

He dipped a lump of sugar in his tea and offered it to the bird in a silver spoon.

- Did Peter learn anything?

- Nothing. He just says the flattering "cockatoo" and Malay nonsense.

- Which, unfortunately, you don't understand," laughed Braun Frank.

- No, but I understand the green Phylax all the more. He chats all day long, in all the languages of the world - and always something new, until I lock him up in a cupboard for half an hour's peace.

He caught the amazon, which, walking in the middle of the tea table, attacked the butter and put the cowering bird back on the grid.

His brown dog stood on his hind legs and rubbed his head against his knees:

- Like this? Are you here too? You want your tea, huh?

She poured tea and milk into a small red bowl, added a lump of sugar and chopped white bread.

Braun Frank looked down into the large garden.

Two spherical hedgehogs were playing on the lawn, gnawing on the young buds. They must be old - he had brought them from the forest on a school trip. The male was called Wotan, the female Meier Tobias. Or maybe these are their grandchildren, or great-grandchildren. - He saw the little hill next to the white-flowered magnolia bush: he had buried his black poodle there once. Two big yuccas grew there, with a hundred white bells and large flowers in summer. Now, for spring, her mother has planted there many coloured primulas.

Vines and many wild vines crawled up the high wall of the house to the roof, where sparrows were chirping and chirping.

- There is the thrush nest, see?" asked his mother. She pointed to the wooden archway of the gateway from the courtyard to the garden, where the round nestling was half hidden among the thick foliage. She had to search until she found it.

- He has laid three small eggs.

- "Four," his mother corrected him, "he laid the fourth this morning.

- Yes, four! I can see all four now. - How beautiful it is here, mother. The mother sighed and put her old hand on her son's.

- Yes, son. - I just wish I wasn't always so alone.

- Are you alone? - Don't you have as many guests as you used to?

- But there is. They come every day. Young people who come to see the old woman. They come here for tea and dinner, they know how pleased I am when they think of me. But you see, my boy, they are strangers. They're no substitute for you.

- But I'm here now," said Braun Frank. He changed the subject, talking about all the wonderful things he had brought, asking if he wanted to be present when he unpacked.

The maid brought up the mail that had just arrived. Braun Frank tore open the letters and glanced at them cursorily.

He was struck by one of the large arches. It was a letter from Justice Gontram, briefly informing him of the events at his uncle's house. He also enclosed a copy of the will and expressed his wish that he should come over as soon as possible to settle matters.

The tribunal has temporarily assigned him, the magistrate wrote, but now he hears that Braun Frank has returned to Europe and asks him to take over this duty.

The mother was watching. She knew his slightest gesture, the smallest features of his smooth tanned face. And from the faint twitch of the corner of her mouth, she could tell she was reading something important.

- What is it?" he asked in a trembling voice.

- "Nothing bad," said Frank Braun, lightly, "You know that Uncle James is dead.

- Yes, I know. It's pretty sad.

- "Yes," he nodded, "Justice Gontram is sending the will. I'm the executor of the will, and the girl's guardian. So I have to go to Lendenich.

- When do you want to leave?" asked the mother quickly.

- When? - I guess - tonight.

- Don't go!" her mother begged, "don't go! You've only been home three days and you want to leave again?

- But mother, - I'm only going for a few days. I just want to tidy up a bit.

- You always say: just for a few days! And then you stay away for years.

- Here is the will: uncle left you and me a very considerable sum - which I really did not expect from him. We both need it.

The mother shook her head:

- What good is money if you're not there for me, son? Braun Frank stood up and kissed his mother's grey hair.

- I will be with you again at the end of the week, dear mother. I'm travelling by train, less than two hours away.

The mother stroked her son's hands with a deep sigh.

- Two hours or two hundred hours, what's the difference? Either way, you're far away!

- Goodbye, my dear mother!" said Braun Frank. He went up to his room, packed his bags, but only a small handbag, and came out again on the balcony.

- Goodbye, my son!" said the mother slowly. She heard him slip down the stairs, the door slamming behind him. She stroked the clever head of her little dog. The dog looked at her with his faithful eyes as if to comfort her.

We are alone again, my little dog. Oh, he's only coming to go away again - who knows when we'll see him again!

Bitter tears fell from her kind eyes, ran down the furrows of her cheeks and dripped down the dog's long brown ears. The dog licked his red tongue.

They rang the bell. He heard voices and footsteps on the stairs. She quickly wiped away her tears and adjusted the black lace shawl on her head. She stood up, leaned out of the grate and called down into the courtyard for the cook to make fresh tea for the arriving guests.

But it was nice to have so many people come to visit! Gentlemen and ladies - today and always - he could talk to them, tell them stories, tell them stories - about his son.

.oOo.

At the station, he was met by Justice Gontram, whose arrival he acknowledged.

He took me to the Kaiserhof garden terrace and told me all I needed to know. He asked her to go to Lendenich today, to speak to the young lady and to call on her at her office the next morning. He could not say that she was being difficult, but he had a strange, unpleasant feeling towards her which made any meeting intolerable. Strange: she has known many villains in her life, robber-murderers, murderers, burglars, infanticides, angel-makers, and goodness knows what other kind of sinners, and she has always found them, whatever their inclinations, to be very decent, very gentle people. With the little lady, however, who has no crime to be imputed to her, he always feels as he does with other such prisoners. Surely the fault must lie with her -

Braun Frank asked him to call her on the phone and report her. Saying goodbye, he strolled leisurely through the fields and onto the driveway to Lendenich. He walked through the ancient village, passed St. Nepomuk and greeted him. He was already at the iron gate. He rang the bell and looked into the courtyard. At the entrance, where before there had been a poor lamp, three huge gas candelabras were lit - the only new ones he had seen.

She looked out of the window, trying to make out the stranger's features in the bright light. She saw that Alajos was quickening his steps, that he was feverishly fitting the key into the lock more than usual.

- Good evening, young master!" cried the servant. The stranger held out his hand and called him by name, as if he had returned from a little journey.

- How are you, Alajos?

Then the old coachman staggered out of the stony yard as fast as his gnarled gouty legs could carry him.

- 'Young master,' he screamed, 'young master, in Brinken, damn you.

- Froitsheim! - Are you still here?- "It's good to see you again," said Braun Frank, shaking the old man's hand for a long moment.

The cook and the wide-legged housekeeper came, with them Paul the butler. The whole servants' room was empty, and two old servants came up to shake hands with him, but first they carefully wiped their hands in their aprons.

- Praise be to Jesus Christ!" the gardener greeted.

- Forever and ever amen!" laughed Braun Frank.

- "Here's the young master!" cried the grey-haired cook, taking the handbag from the hand of the porter who followed her. They all stood around, each longing for a special greeting, a handshake, a salutation. The young people who didn't know him stared at him with wide eyes and smiles. The driver stood a little to one side, puffing his short pipe, even his indifferent features flickering with a smile of complaisance.

Miss Ten Brinken snapped her fingers.

- "They seem to like my guardian," he said, half aloud. "Take the master's things to his room!" he cried.

Dew fell in the fresh spring of arrival. They hung their heads and said no more. Only Froitsheim shook his hand once more and escorted him to the steps of the master's apartment:

- Good to have you here, young man.

He went to his room and washed up. Then, following the butler who announced that he had been served, he entered the dining room. He was alone for a moment. He looked around. The giant glass stool was still in place, heavy gold plates gleaming with the Brinken coat of arms. But there was no fruit in them today.

- "It is early yet," he murmured, "and perhaps my niece is not interested in early fruit.

Through the other door came a young lady in a black silk dress, richly decorated with lace. She stood in the doorway for a moment, then stepped closer and

greeted: good

evening

uncle!

Good evening," said Braun Frank, holding out his hand. Alraune gave him only two fingers, and he pretended not to notice. He took her whole little hand and shook it vigorously.

With a wave of his hand she offered him a seat and sat down opposite him.

- We have to do each other, don't we?

- "Of course," nodded Frank Braun, "It was always the custom with the Brinkens. He raised a glass:

- Cheers, little sister!

"Sister," thought Alraune, "he calls me sister. He thinks of me as a plaything. But it suited him: - "Prozit, great uncle. He emptied his glass and motioned to the servant to refill it. He drank it again.

- God bless you! - guardian!

She made him laugh. Guardian - guardian? It sounded so dignified.

- "Am I really that old?" thought Braun Frank. "To your health, my ward.

Alraune was annoyed. - Girl, just another girl? Oh, - we'll

see, between the two of them, who's above the other.

- How is your mother?" she asked.

- Thank you," nodded Braun Frank. "I suppose so. "Of course, you don't know him yet, do you? You should have visited him by now!

- "He hasn't visited us either," said Alraune, and seeing the man's smile, she quickly added: "Really, we never thought of it, uncle.

- I can believe that," Braun Frank said dryly.

- Papa hardly ever talked about it - and not about you at all. Alraune spoke a little fast, as if he were chasing himself.

- I am very surprised that he chose you as his guardian.

- I admire him myself," said Braun Frank, "and I'm sure he did it on purpose.

- Deliberately? - With what intention? Braun Frank shrugged:

- I don't know yet, but I'm sure it will come out.

The conversation did not stop. Like a ball in a game, short sentences flew back and forth. They were open, affectionate and courteous, but they watched each other, alert. They did not get together: a rigid net stretched between them.

After the meal, Alraune led Braun Frank to the piano room.

- Do you want tea?" he asked.

But Braun Frank asked for a whisky and soda.

They sat down and continued chatting. Then Alraune went to the piano.

- Shall I sing?" he asked.

- Please!" the man said politely.

She lifted the lid of the piano and sat down.

- "Do you have a wish, uncle?" she turned to him.

- I don't have a little sister. I don't even know your repertoire.

Alraune pursed his lips slightly. He'll have to get over that, he thought. He struck a few notes and sang half a verse. He stopped, started a new song. He interrupted that too, sang a few bars of Offenbach, then a few lines of Grieg.

- "You don't seem to be in the right mood," Braun Frank remarked calmly.

Alraune put his hands in his lap, was silent for a while, and drummed nervously on his knees. Then he lifted his hands, quickly dropped them on the keys and began to play:

Il était une bergère,
et ron et ron, petit patapon,
il était une bergère,
qui gardait ses moutons.

She turned to him, pursing her lips. Oh, yes, her little face, framed by short curls, could have easily belonged to some charming shepherdess.

Elle fit un fromage,
et ron et ron, petit patapon,
elle fit un fromage
du lait de ses moutons.

- A pretty shepherdess!" thought Braun Frank. And this: - poor lamb.

Alraune wagged his head, his left foot stretched out to the side, and with his splendid shoes he thumped the beat on the parquet floor.

Le chat qui la regarde, et ron et ron, petit patapon, le chat qui la regarde. D'un petit air fripon! Si tu y mets la patte, et ron et ron, Petit patapon, si tu y mets la patte, tu auras du baton!

Alraune smiled into his face, her white teeth gleaming. "You think I'm going to be your little cat?" he thought.

The girl's face grew slightly serious. His half-half-caught voice had a sly, gently mocking threat in it.

Il n'y mit pas la patte, et ron et ron, petit patapon, il n'y mit pas la patte, il y mit le menton. La bergère en colère. et ron et ron, petit patapon, la bergère en coliore, tua son petit chaton!

- "Pretty," said Braun Frank. "Where did you learn that nursery rhyme?"

- In the monastery. The sisters sang.

- Well look: in the monastery! "I had no idea," laughed the man.

- Stop it, sister!

Alraune jumped up from the piano chair.

- I finished: the cat died - that's how the song ends!

- Not exactly - But your pious nuns were ashamed of the punishment - and so the pretty shepherd girl could, in their opinion, commit her ugly sin with impunity!

Alraune went back to the piano and played the melody. The man sang:

Elle fut a confesse, et ron et ron, petit patapon, elle fut a confesse, pour obtenü pardon. Mon père, je m'accuse, et ron et ron, petit patapon, mon père, je m'aceuse, d'avoir tuè mon chaton! Ma fille, pour pénitence, et ron et ron, petit patapon, ma fille, pour pénitence, nous nous embrasserons! La

pénitence est douce, et ron et ron, petit patapon, la pénitence est douce - nous recommencerons!

- Ready?

- Oh yes, absolutely and completely!" laughed Braun Franlc. "How do you like the lesson, Alraune?

It was the first time he had called her by her name - it struck her, and she hardly paid attention to the question.

- "Fine," he replied indifferently.

- It's a nice little lesson, isn't it?- teaches us that little girls should not destroy their little kittens with impunity!

The man was standing directly in front of her. He was a good two heads taller than her, and she had to look up to catch his eye. What a difference a silly thirty centimetres makes, she thought. She would have liked to have been in a man's clothes: what an advantage even the coat gave her. At the same time she remembered that she had never had this feeling with other men. She staggered up and shook her curls lightly.

- "Not all shepherdesses do penance like that," he chirped. Braun Frank rubbed out the cut:

- And not all confessors dissolve so easily.

Alraune - in vain - could not answer. He was annoyed enough. He would have liked to please her - in his own way. But this was a new way - an unusual language, which he understood but did not yet speak well.

- "Good-bye, guardian," he said suddenly.

- "Good night, sister," he smiled. "Sweet dreams!

Alraune climbed the stairs. He did not skip about as usual, walking slowly and thoughtfully. She didn't like him, no! But it excited him, made him contradict himself.

And when the maid had untied his corset and handed him his long lace shirt, he said:

- It's good to have my guardian, Kata! At least I'm not bored! - And he was almost glad to lose this preliminary attachment.

.oOo.

Braun Frank had lengthy discussions with Justice Gontram and lawyer Manasse. He consulted with the orphanage president and the probate court; he did a lot of running around, a lot of bothering. With his uncle's death, the criminal charges were, of course, dropped, but civil suits swelled into a flood. All the little rascals who had trembled when His Excellency had so much as touched them now came forward w i t h new claims and demands for compensation of a suspicious nature.

- "The prosecutor's office now has no worries about us," said the old judicial councillor, "and we're not causing the criminal court any trouble. But we have rented the tribunal.

The second civic council became the private institution of the late Privy Councillor for six months.

- "It will be great fun for the deceased to look down from the furnace of hell," remarked the lawyer.

When Braun Frank handed over his inheritance, the Burberg mining shares, he laughed.

- "If the old man were here to see your face for half an hour!" he growled. "Wait a minute, he's in for a surprise.

He took the papers and read them together.

- "One hundred and eighty thousand marks," he said, "one hundred mille for your mother, and the rest for you!

He picked up the phone, connected himself to the Schaafhausen Banking Association and asked one of the directors to answer the phone.

- Hello! - he barked. - Is that you, Friedberg?- I have some mining shares in Burberg - at what price can I sell them?

A thunderous laughter sounded from the device, to which Mr Manasse also countered loudly.

- "I thought so," he interjected. "So they're worth nothing - eh? Are there new payments for years to come? - Best to give away the whole lot - no

of course! -A company set up to defraud, which will surely be dissolved sooner or later to the public satisfaction?!

- Thank you, Director, sorry to bother you! He hung up the phone.

"So, now you know what you're up to," Braun turned to Frank angrily, "and excuse my love of justice - you're making the same stupid face as your philanthropic uncle expected of you!"

.oOo.

The biggest difficulty - before Braun Frank arrived home - was the big Mühlheim Credit Bank, with which they had almost daily negotiations. Week after week, the bank dragged on with the most desperate effort in the hope of obtaining from the heirs, at least in part, the aid solemnly promised by the Privy Councillor. With heroic courage, the directors, the masters of the board and the supervisory board kept the leaking ship afloat, always ready to be capsized by the slightest jolt. His Excellency had carried out astonishingly daring speculations with the help of the bank; for him, the Institute was a veritable gold mine. But the new ventures which the bank got into through him all turned out badly

- His own fortune was no longer at risk, of course, but that of Princess Wolkonski and other rich people was. Moreover, the savings of many, many little people, penny speculators who followed the good star of his Grace. The legal representatives of the Privy Councillor's estate promised to help as much as they could, but the hands of Justice Gontram, the temporary guardian, were tied by law, as were those of the orphan chairman. The orphans' money was sacred!

Yet there was a solution, and Manasse found it, If Miss ten Brinken were to be ennobled, she would have the freedom of disposition to redeem her father's moral obligation. This was what all concerned wanted, and it was in this hope that the bank's people made new sacrifices at the expense of their own pockets. Fourteen days before, with a final effort, they triumphantly

they were able to beat back a strong attack on the cashier - but now it had to fall.

Until now, the young lady has been shaking her head. She calmly listened to the gentlemen's explanations, then smiled and said "no".

- "Why should I be an adult?" he asked. "I'm quite well off as it is. "And why should I give money to save a bank that has nothing to do with me?"

The president of the orphanage made a long speech: it was about his father's honour! Everyone knows that the professor alone is the cause of the difficulties the institute is experiencing, and it is his duty as a child to keep his father's reputation clean.

Alraune laughed loudly in his face:

- Your reputation?

Manasse went to a lawyer:

- Tell me, what do you think?

Manasse didn't answer, curled up in his chair, snorting and hissing like a stricken tomcat.

- "Not much more than me, it seems!" said the young lady. "And I wouldn't give a penny for it.

Counsellor Lützmann, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, put forward the need to have regard for the old princess, who is such an old friend of the House of Brinken. And to the little people who would lose their bitterly-earned money.

- "Why are you speculating?" asked Alraune calmly, "Why are you taking your money to such a dubious bank?"

His logic was as clear and ruthless as a sharp knife. He knew his father, he said, and he who had bargained with him on a rye was certainly not much better than he.

But it's not about a handout at all, the first bank director objected. It is very likely that the bank will survive if it gets the aid; it just has to get through the crisis. It will get its money back, with interest, every penny.

Alraune appealed to the orphan president:

- Tell me, Mr. Counsel, is there a risk in favour of it? - Yes or no?

Of course there is a risk. You cannot deny it. Of course, unforeseen circumstances can arise. It is his official duty to tell him so, but as a man he cannot help but urge and identify his request with that of the gentlemen. He is doing a great and good deed, saving a whole lot of livelihood. And the possibility of loss is so small by human reckoning.

Alraune stood up and suddenly interrupted him.

- So there is a risk, gentlemen," he said mockingly, "and I'm not taking any risks. I don't want to save any lives, and I'm not in the mood to do anything great or good.

He greeted the gentlemen, went out and left them with thick, red heads.

But the bank still refused to give in and kept fighting. He drew new hope from a telegram from the Justice Counsel, which signaled the arrival of Braun Frank, the de facto guardian. The gentlemen immediately contacted him, arranging a meeting for one of the next few days.

.oOo.

Braun Frank now realised that he would not get out of here as quickly as he had thought. He wrote to his mother.

The old woman read the letter, folded it carefully and put it in the big black box with the rest of her son's letters. On long, lonely winter evenings, she opened the box and read the old letters to the brown dog.

He went out on the balcony, looked down at the tall chestnut tree, which held many shining candles in its huge arms, at the white blossoming trees of the monastery garden, under which silent brown friends walked and walked.

- When is my dear son coming back?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Which mentions how he learned the truth from Princess Alraune of Wolkonsk

Justice Councillor Gontram wrote a letter to the Duchess, who was receiving treatment in Nauheim, outlining the situation. It took a long time for her to understand what was going on, and it took Frida Gontram a great deal of effort to make her understand.

First she laughed, then she thought, then she wailed and wailed. When her daughter came into the room, she fell into his arms, wailing.

- "My poor child," he cried, "we have become beggars. We are on the streets!

He poured all the filth of his eastern fury on the dead minion, sparing no profanity.

Frida contradicted:

- No, not that dangerous. There's also his villa in Bonn and his castle in Rhineland. Then there's the wages from the vineyards in Hungary. Finally, Olga's Russian allowance and -

- "We can't live on this!" the old princess interrupted.

- We must try to get her to change her mind. As Papa advised!" observed Frida.

- "Your father is an ass!" cried the princess. "You old scoundrel!" she cried. "He has conspired with the secret councillor who has robbed us! It was he who brought me together with the ugly villain. She called every man a cheating scoundrel; never in her life had she known any other. Is not Olga's master, the excellent Count Abrantes, like him? Would he not have squandered all his wife's money, with dirty tinglitangli women, if he could have got hold of it? Even now he has run away with a circus rider, because the secret councillor has pulled the string of his purse and not given him a red penny.

- "In that case, then, the old gentleman has done good," said the Countess.

- "Good?" cried his mother. "As if it weren't always, who steals the banknotes? "Pigs!"

Still, he realised he had to try his luck. He wanted to travel himself, but was dissuaded. He would get carried away and would certainly not go any further than the bank's men. "One must be very diplomatic," Frida explained, "one must be considerate of the little lady's whims and fancies. It's best if she goes.

Olga thinks it would be even smarter if she travelled. The old princess objected, but Frida explained that it would certainly not be a good idea for her to interrupt her cure and subject herself to such excitement. She saw that.

The two friends agreed and travelled together. The princess stayed in the bathroom, but she was not idle. She ordered a hundred masses at the parish priest's for the soul mate of the happy Privy Councillor: a true Christian act, she thought. And because her deceased husband was Orthodox, she travelled to Wiesbaden and also paid the priest a hundred funeral masses in the Russian chapel. This act was extremely comforting to her. Once it occurred to him that prayer would be of little use, since his Excellency was a Protestant and a free thinker. Bless them that curse you, love your enemies, do good to them that hurt and persecute you.

And twice a day, he prayed for his Excellency with a particularly deep devotion. He bribed the good god.

.oOo.

In Lendenich, Frank Braun welcomed the two ladies, took them up to the terrace and talked to them about old times.

- "Try your luck, children," he said. "My word is no good!"

- "What did he say to you?" asked Frida Gontram.

- "Not much," laughed Braun Frank. "He didn't listen all the time. With a deep bow and a devilishly dignified smile, he said that he appreciated the great honour of being his guardian, and that he had no thought of giving him up for the sake of the princess. He added that he wished to speak no more of the matter. He bowed again, more deeply, smiled again, more respectfully - and disappeared!

- Did you not try a second time?" asked the Countess.

- No, Olga. I'll leave the second attempt to you. From the determined look with which you left me, I was firmly convinced that all my persuasive powers would be as ineffectual as those of the other gentlemen.

He got up, made a gesture to the servant and brought tea.

- "Otherwise, ladies, you may have a chance," he continued, "before half past midnight, when the magistrate announced you by telephone, I told my relative that you were coming and why. I was afraid that he would not want to see you, and I wanted to get that much out of him anyway. But I was wrong. He told me that you were both very welcome, and that you had been in very lively correspondence for months.

Frida Gontram interrupted:

- Did you write to him?" he
said sharply. Countess Olga
gasped:

- I... I... wrote to him a few times... condoled... and... and...

- You're lying!" cried Frida. The Countess jumped up.

- And you? - You didn't write? I knew you wrote, you wrote every other day, that's why you always stayed so late in your room.

- "You spied on me with the maid!" said Frida. Her friends' eyes flashed together with a glowing hatred, sharper than any words. They knew each other well: the Countess felt that for the first time she would not do her friend's bidding, and Frida Gontram felt the first defiance of her ruling superior. But they were bound together by the ties of long years, and there were many shared memories that could not be burnt to ashes in an instant.

Braun Frank saw this.

- "I don't want to disturb you," he said. "By the way, Alraune will be here in a moment, he's dressing.

He said goodbye at the garden steps.

- I hope to see you ladies again.

The girlfriends were silent. Olga sat in the cane chair, Frida walked up and down with long strides, then stopped in front of her friend.

- "Listen, Olga," he said quietly, "I've always been there for you, whether it was a joke or something serious. In all your adventures and affairs. Right?

- True," nodded the Countess, "but I did the same, and I helped you no less.

- "If you had the chance," said Frida Gontram, "I'm happy to admit it. Do you want us to remain friends?

- Of course! Just - just - I don't wish for much!

- What do you want?

- Don't put obstacles in my way!

- Barriers? What obstacles? Let's both try our luck, I told you at the candle-lighting ball!

- No," the Countess said stubbornly, "I don't want to share any more. I've shared countless times and I've always got the short end of the stick. We are fighting with unequal weapons, so resign this time for me.

- Why fight with unequal weapons?- said Gontram Frida.- But you still have the advantage - you are the prettier one.

- Yes," said his girlfriend, "but that's nothing. You're the smart one. And I've often found that it's worth more - in things like this.

Gontram Frida took his hand.

- Listen, Olga," he flattered, "be clever. But listen: if I succeed in changing your little lady's mind, if I save your millions, will you give me a free hand? You'll go down to the garden and leave me alone with her?

Thick tears welled up in the Countess's eyes.

- 'I can't do that,' he whispered. 'Let me talk to him - I'll let you have the money. It's all a sudden whim on your part, anyway.'

With a loud sigh, Frida threw herself onto the sofa and dug her skinny hands deep into the silk cushions.

- A whim? - Do you think I'd be doing so much thinking if it were a whim? I'm afraid it's not much different with me than it is with you! Olga, seeing this, knelt before her friend, who bowed her blonde head. Their hands met, pressed together, and their tears silently fell.

- What shall we do?" asked the Countess.

- "Let's resign!" said Gontram Frida firmly. "Let's resign - both of us. We'll find a way!"

Countess Olga nodded and snuggled up to her friend.

- "Get up," whispered Frida. Dry your tears quickly. Here's my handkerchief.

Olga obeyed and went over to the other side. But ten Brinken Álraune saw what was happening. He stopped on the threshold of the great doorway, dressed in a black jersey like the merry prince in Bat. He bowed curtly and kissed the ladies' hands.

- 'You mustn't cry,' she smiled, 'you mustn't; crying will cloud the most beautiful eyes.'

He smashed his palms together and had the servant bring champagne. He filled the glasses himself, handed them to the ladies and offered them to them.

- That's how it is with me, - he trilled - chacun a son gout.

He led Countess Olga to the cot and stroked her full arms. Then Gontram sat down beside Frida and gave her a long smiling look. She kept her role, offering biscuits and cakes and dripping Peau d'Espagne from her golden jar onto the ladies' handkerchiefs.

- "True," he began suddenly, "it is very sad that I cannot help you. I am really very sorry."

Frida Gontram stood
up.

- And why not?" he asked. His mouth opened with difficulty.

- No reason, really no reason! - I just don't want to - that's all.
He turned to the Countess:

- "Do you think your mum is losing a lot?" He said, "a lot", trailing off. She chirped sweetly and cruelly, like a swallow on a hunting trip.

The Countess trembled under his gaze.

- Oh no," he said, "not too much. And he repeated Frida's words. And the wages from the vineyards in Hungary. And finally I get my Russian pension and -

He was stuck, he knew no more; he had no idea of their relationship, he hardly knew what money was. Only that one could go to nice shops with it, buy hats and other pretty things. And for that he had plenty enough. He apologised a hundred times that it was his mother's idea. But she need not mind him, hoping that this unpleasant incident will not interfere with their friendship.

And then he went on babbling, recklessly, giddily, and pointlessly. He did not catch his friend's stern glances, but clung warmly to the green glint of Miss ten Brinken's eyes, like a rabbit in a field of cabbage in the sunshine.

Frida Gontram Gontram was worried. First of all, she was annoyed by her friend's terrible stupidity, and she found her behaviour absurd and ridiculous. No fly would fly so blatantly on poisoned sugar, she thought. And finally, the more Olga chattered, the faster the conventional snowdrift of her emotions melted under Alraune's gaze, the more alert was Frida to the feeling she was trying to suppress at all costs. Her eyes flickered to the other side, hanging jealously on the rabbit-like form of Prince Orlowski.

Mandrake noticed.

- "Thank you, my dear Countess," he said, his words very reassuring. Gontram turned to Frida:

The Justice Councillor has been telling horror stories about the Princess's certain ruin!

Frida tried one last grip, forcing herself on him:

- My father was telling the truth," he said bluntly. "Collapse is inevitable, of course. The princess must sell her castle -

- Oh, it's nothing!- explained the Countess - we'll never live in it anyway!

Shut up!" cried Frida. Her eyes clouded over, she felt that she was fighting in vain for a lost cause. It is doubtful whether she can keep a car: probably not.

- "Oh, what a pity!" said the black prince on the flute.

- You will have to sell your horses and carriages," Frida continued, "you will have to get rid of most of your servants -

Alraune interrupted.

- What will become of you - Miss Gontram? Will you stay with the princess? Frida was startled by the unexpected question.

- I - I, of course," he panted.

- "For I would be very glad to offer you my house," said Miss ten Brinken, "I am so lonely and in need of company - come to me.

Frida struggled, wavering for a moment:

- To you - miss?

- No, no! "You must stay with us!" interposed Olga.

- I've never been to your mother's. "I was at your house," Frida Gontram declared.

- "Either way!" cried the Countess. I don't want you to stay here!

- 'Oh, I'm sorry,' scoffed Alraune, 'I thought the young lady had a mind of her own.

Countess Olga stood up, all the blood drained from her face.

- No!" he cried, "No, no! "If you don't come of your own free will, don't come at all!" laughed the prince. I will not force you.

- stay with the princess, Miss Gontram, if you prefer it there.

He stood by and took both her hands.

- "His brother was a good friend and playmate," he said quietly, "I often kissed him -

Alraune saw this woman, almost twice his age, lower her eyes under his gaze, felt her hands sweat at the light touch of his fingers. He drank, enjoying his triumph to the bottom.

- Will you stay here?" he whispered.

Frida Gontram Gontram was breathing hard. She stepped up to the Countess and without raising her eyes, she said!

- Excuse me, Olga, I'll stay here.

His girlfriend threw herself on the sofa, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed hysterically.

- No, no, no!" he wailed. He stood up, raised his hand as if to hit his girlfriend, and then laughed sharply. He ran down the stairs into the garden, hatless and without an umbrella. He ran across the yard, out into the street.

- Olga!" cried Frida after her. "Olga! Olga, do you hear? Olga!

- "Let him be. He'll tame himself," said Miss ten Brinken. Her voice rang out huskily.

Braun Frank was having breakfast in the garden, under the lilac tree, while Frida Gontram was pouring her tea.

- It is good for the house that you are here. You never seem to do anything, and yet everything goes like clockwork. The servants have a peculiar aversion to my niece, and delight in passive resistance. They have no idea of the means of fighting socialism, but they have already reached a gender of sabotage. The open revolution would have broken out long ago if they had not had some affection for me. Now that you're in the house, suddenly everything's fine. I bow to you, Frida.

- Thank you. I'm happy to do something for Alraune.

- But the more the princess misses it, the more she misses it, everything there is upside down since the bank stopped paying her. Here's my mail, read it!

He pushed some letters in front of him.

Frida Gontram shook her head.

- No, I won't read it - sorry. I don't want to know about all this.

- "You must know, Frida," insisted Braun Frank, "If you don't read the letters, I'll give you the facts. Your girlfriend has been found.

- Is he alive?- whispered Frida.

- Yes, it is. After he ran away from here, he wandered all night and the next day. He must have gone inland, into the mountains, and then back in an arc to the Rhine. Carters saw him not far from Remagen. They observed him and, finding his behaviour suspicious, stayed close by. And when he jumped off the dam, they rowed him over and soon had him fishing out of the waves. This happened about noon, four days before. In spite of his vehement opposition, he was taken to the court house.

Gontram rested his head on Frida's elbow.

- To the prison?" he asked quietly.

- Of course! - Where would they have taken it? It was clear that he would immediately repeat the suicide attempt on the loose - so he was taken into custody. He also refused to give any information, remained silent. His watch, his purse, even his handkerchief, had long since been thrown away - and no one could make out the crown and the silly letters sewn into his underwear. Only an official investigation commissioned by your father could establish his identity.

- Where is it?" asked Frida.

- In the city. - He was brought home from Remagen by the Justice Councillor and taken to Professor Dalberg's private mental hospital. Here is his notification

- I am afraid Countess Olga will have to stay there for a long time. The Princess arrived last night. -You, Frida, could visit your poor friend, and as soon as possible, as the Professor says she is very quiet and calm.

Gontram Frida Gontram stood up.

- "No, no!" he cried. "I can't do it. He walked along the gravel path, under the fragrant lilacs.

Braun Frank looked into it. Like a marble mask, his face was like a steadfast destiny carved in hard stone. Then a sudden smile flashed across the cold mask, like a playful sunbeam zigzagging through deep shadows

in the middle. He raised his eyelids. His eyes searched the beech woodland pool leading to the lord's building. Alraune's merry laughter sounded from there.

- His power is strange. Uncle James is right in his meditations on the leather-bound book.

He thought about it. Oh, it's very hard to escape from it. No one knows what it is and yet they all fly into the glowing flame. He too? Surely there was something about him that stirred her. He wasn't sure how it affected his senses, his blood, or perhaps his brain? But that it did: he felt it well. It wasn't true that he had only business to attend to: because of the fires and the negotiations, he was still here, since the Mühlheim Bank affair had been settled, he could have done everything with the help of the lawyers, without his personal presence.

And yet here it is - still here. He found that he was fooling himself, artificially creating new reasons to postpone his departure by all sorts of protracted negotiations. And it almost seemed to him that his niece had noticed this, and even that he was acting under her secret influence.

- Tomorrow I'm going home, - he thought. Then the thought came to him: why would he go? Is he afraid of this fragile child?

- What can happen?- At worst, a little adventure! Not the first and hardly the last! Not an equal or even stronger opponent? Were there not also dead men lying on the road he trod? Why should he run?

He created it once: he, Braun Frank. He had the idea, and his uncle's hand was only the instrument. He is the strange creation - much more so than his gracious lord.

It was young then, fermenting like must. Full of bizarre dreams, fantasies of the sky, chasing stars. Then he burst a rare fruit in the unfathomable, dark jungle, which checked his wild footsteps. He found a good gardener and gave it to him. And the gardener planted the seed, watered the seedling, nurtured the seedling, and waited for the sapling to grow.

Now that she's back: her flowering tree smiles in her eyes. He is angry with certainty: he who rests beneath him, his breath will reach. It hath killed many that walked in its sweet perfume - Killed the wise gardener that reared it.

But he is not a gardener, for whom the rare tree is dearer than all. He is not one of those who wander the garden casually and unconsciously.

It was he who once brought the fruit, gave the seed. But since then he has ridden many a day in the fathomless wild woods, he has waded many a day in elusive, stunted, feverish swamps. Many a hot poison has his soul inhaled, many a pestilent breath, the choking smoke of sinful blazes. Oh, he was in pain, he was in agony, he was in festering boils, but he could not overthrow him. Healthily he rode back again from beneath the skies - And sure as in blue steel armour he was.

Oh yes - it was inviolable -

This fight felt like a game. But then - if it's just a game - it should go away, shouldn't it? If Alraune's puppet is just that - a danger to everyone else, but a harmless toy for his powerful fists - then adventure is easy. Only a real fight with weapons of equal power, only worth the effort -

Dizziness!" he thought again. To whom, in fact, is he telling his heroic virtues? Has he not had his share of too often too easy victories, episodes?

No, it is no different now than it has always been. Have you ever known the strength of your opponent? Was not the sting of the little venomous wasp more dangerous than the caiman's throat, on which he could point his Winchester rifle with a sure hand?

He couldn't find a way out, always running in the same circle, no matter which way he turned.

It always came to this point: - stay!

- Good morning, uncle!" laughed ten Brinken

Alraune. Gontram stood next to him with Frida.

- "Good morning," said Braun Frank curtly, "read these letters. "It would do you no harm to think about what you have done again. "It is time you stopped fooling around and did something clever, something worthwhile!

Alraune looked at him sharply.

- "Is that so?" he said, drawing out every word. "And what do you think is worth the effort?

Braun Frank didn't answer - because suddenly he couldn't. He stood up and shrugged and went into the garden.

- 'We're in a bad mood, my lord guardian, eh?' the girl's laughter followed.

.oOo.

In the afternoon he sat in the library room. In front of him lay files sent yesterday by lawyer Manasse. But he did not read them. He stared into the air and eagerly lit one cigarette after another.

Then, pulling out the drawer, he took out the leather-bound book of the Privy Councillor again. And he read it slowly, sternly, pondering every little thing.

They knocked. The driver entered.

- "Doctor," she said, "the Princess Wolkonski is here. She was very excited, and from the carriage she called after her. But we thought it might be better if you saw her first. - Alajos will show her in.

- Good!" said Braun Frank. He jumped up and went to the princess.

The princess pressed wearily through the narrow doorway, twisting her large body in the dim room, whose green shutters let in only a little sunlight.

- "Where is she?" he asked, panting.

Braun held out his hand to Frank and led him to the sofa. The princess recognized him, called him by name, but didn't think to strike up a conversation.

- "I am looking for Mademoiselle Alraune," he cried, "bring her out!

He did not rest until Braun Frank rang for the servant and told him to announce the princess's visit to the young lady. Only then did she listen to him.

Braun inquired about the state of Frank's child and the Duchess was very verbose about the condition in which she found her daughter. She did not even recognise her mother, sitting quietly and apathetically by the window, looking out into the garden. Professor Dalberg had converted the former clinic of the secret councillor, that impostor, into a neurological institute. The same house in which this -

Braun Frank interrupted, putting a stop to the torrent of words. He quickly reached for her hand, bent down and looked at her rings with colourful interest.

- "Excuse me, Your Majesty, where did you get this magnificent emerald?" he minced.

- A truly magnificent, rare specimen.

- "It was a button from my first husband's ornamental glass," she replied. She was about to continue, but Frank Braun stopped her.

- "A stone of extreme purity!" he assured himself. "And what a rare size! I have only seen one like it, in the Maharaja's stable in Rollinkore - who had it fitted in place of the left-hand pommel of his favourite steed. He wore a Burmese ruby in his right eye, only a little smaller.

And he told me about the Indian princes who like to gouge out the eyes of their beautiful horses to replace them with glass eyes or large cabochons.

- 'It sounds cruel,' he said, 'but I assure your majesty, you would be chilled at the sight of such a magnificent animal looking at you with stiff Alexandrite eyes, or gazing at you from deep blue star sapphire eyes.

And he talked about gems; he remembered from his student days that the princess knew something about gems and pearls, that was about the only thing that really interested him. The princess answered; at first she spoke quickly, choppily, then she grew more relaxed with each passing minute. She pulled off her rings, showed them one by one, and told each one her little story.

The man nodded, giving me his attention. My niece can come now, he thought, the first storm has settled.

But he was wrong.

Alraune came, opened the door noiselessly, stepped softly on the carpet and sat down opposite the princess.

- "Glad to see you, Your Highness," he fluted.

The princess cried out, gasping for breath. She made a big cross, then a second one, in the Orthodox manner.

- Here he is, he groaned, - sitting here!

- Yes," laughed Alraune, "in person and in real life! He rose and held out his hand to the princess.

- I am really sorry about the incident. My sincere condolences, Your Highness.

The princess did not accept his hand. For a moment, she seemed to be silent.

He was panting, trying to control himself. But then he got the word.

- "I don't want your sympathy!" he cried. Alraune sat down and waved his hand lightly.

- Speak, please, Your Highness.

The princess began. "Does she know that her Excellency has lost her fortune through her manipulations? "Of course she does, for the gentlemen told her in detail what she should have done - but she refused to do her duty!" Does she know what has happened to her daughter? He told me how he found her in the asylum, and what the doctors thought. He grew more and more agitated, his voice grew shriller and shriller.

- You know all this well," Alraune admitted calmly.

- What is your intention now? "What are you going to do?" asked the princess. "Are you going to step into your father's dirty shoes? Oh, he was a learned outlaw, your grace, a more cunning trickster could not be found in a novel. But he got his reward. He continued to occupy himself with his Excellency, saying aloud whatever came to his tongue. - He was under the impression that Olga's sudden attack was due to the failure of his mission, and to the fact that Alraune had turned his old friend's heart away from him. If she helped him now, she could save not only her fortune, but also her child by this news.

- I do not ask," he cried, "I demand. I want what is right. You have committed the injustice, my own goddaughter, you and your father! Make amends, as far as possible. It is a shame to have to say this, but you could not think of any other way!

- "What can I still save?" asked Alraune quietly. "As far as I know, the bank collapsed three days ago. So your money is gone, your Highness!

Sívítva mondta, hogy fffucssccc - szinte hallatszott, amint a bankjegyek röpködnek a szélben.

- "The magistrate told me that your father had invested not quite twelve millions in the wretched

to the bank. You simply pay the twelve million - with your own money. It's nothing to you anyway, I know that!

- "Oh," said Miss ten Brinken, "is there nothing else your Highness wishes?"

- "Of course not," said the princess, "you will let Miss Gontram know that she is to leave your house at once. 'Come with me at once to my poor daughter; I trust your presence will have a very beneficial effect on the Countess-perhaps a sudden recovery; especially if you bring the news that the sad affair of fortune is settled. I will not reproach Miss Gontram in any way for her ungrateful conduct, and I will refrain from further stigmatising your proceedings. But I wish you to put the matter right at once.

He was silent and deeply sighing after the great effort of a long speech. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the fat drops of sweat that beaded on his crimson face.

Alraune rose slightly and bowed slightly.

- Your Majesty is very gracious - he fluted. And then he was silent. The princess waited a while, then finally asked:

- Well?

- Well?" said the young lady, with the same tone.

- "I am waiting," said the princess.

- "Me too," said Alraune.

Princess Wolkonski was sliding back and forth on the sofa, whose old springs were sinking deep under her heavy weight. Pressed into her huge corset, which nevertheless forced the huge mass of flesh into a certain shape, her movements were clumsy and awkward. His breath caught and his fleshy tongue involuntarily licked his dry lips.

- "May I serve your Highness a glass of water?" she chirped. The princess pretended not to hear.

- So, what are you going to do?" he asked solemnly.

- "Nothing," said Alraune, with infinite simplicity.

The old princess fixed her round cow eyes on him, as if she did not understand what the young creature was saying. She rose with great difficulty, and after a few steps she looked around as if searching for something. Braun Frank stood up, poured water from the pitcher on the table into a glass and handed it to her. He drank it greedily.

Alraune also got up.

- I beg leave to go, Your Highness. May I give your regards to Miss Gontram?

The princess was coming towards him, hot, almost bursting with suppressed rage.

- Now he's going to pop, thought Braun Frank.

The princess searched in vain, finding no words to begin her speech.

- Tell him," he panted, "tell him to keep out of my sight! He is a common person, no better than you!

He paced the room with heavy footsteps, puffing, sweating, his huge arms waving in the air. Then his eyes fell on the open drawer, and he saw the necklace he had once given his goddaughter: a gold chain studded with brilliants, large pearl strings, and her mother's bright red curls. The joy of triumphant hatred streaked his chubby face. He snatched the necklace from the drawer.

- Do you know what this is?" he shrieked.

- No," said Alraune calmly, "I never saw him. The Duchess stepped close to him:

- Then the secret councillor, the cudar, embezzled it. It's like him! I gave it to you for your christening, Alraune!

- "Thank you," she said, "Pearls are very beautiful, and so are stones - if they are real.

- "They are real!" cried the Duchess. "Real as the hair I cut from your mother's head.

He threw the necklace into her lap. Alraune picked up the strange jewel and examined it thoughtfully.

- "My mother's hair?" he asked slowly. "It seems she had very nice hair.

The Duchess was crouched in front of him, her hands on her hips. She was sure of what she was doing.

- Very nice hair - he chuckled, - very nice! So beautiful, that all the men ran after it - they paid a fortune to sleep one night in the shadow of that beautiful hair!

She jumped up, for a moment all the blood drained from her face, then smiled again, calmly, mockingly, she said:

- You are getting older, Your Highness, getting older and more childish.

It was the end, now there was no "back" for the princess. She was outraged, vulgar and boundlessly shameless, like a drunken brothel-mother shouting, her voice was hushed - she was screaming, the foul language just pouring out of her. She was a slut, Alraune's mother, of the vilest kind, who sold herself for marks. Her father was a miserable spy-murderer, Noerissen was his name, you know. The secret councillor bought the street girl for money for his weed experiment, impregnated her with the seed of the executed murderer. He was present in person; when his Grace injected the vile seed, whose rotten fruit, O Alraune, sits before him! The daughter of a murderer, the child of a whore!

That was his revenge. Triumphant, he went out with light steps, fattened by the triumph and rejuvenated by ten years. He slammed the door so that it rattled.

It was quiet in the spacious library. Alraune sat silent, slightly pale in his chair. He played nervously with the necklace. Her lips were barely perceptibly pursed.

Finally he woke up.

- Nonsense!" he whispered.

He walked around the room a little, then changed his mind. He went to his uncle.

- Right, Braun Frank?" he asked. The man hesitated for a moment.

- "I think it's true," he said calmly, and stood up.

He went to the desk, took out the leather-bound book and handed it to Alraune.

- Read it.

Alraune was silently about to leave.

- Take this too!- the man shouted after him. She handed him the dice cutter made from her mother's skullcap and the dice made from her father's bones.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Which marks how Frank Braun played with fire and how Alraune woke up

This evening she did not appear for dinner, but had only a little tea and some biscuits with Frida Gontram. Braun Frank waited for her for a while, hoping that she might come down later. Then he went into the library room. He reached unkindly for the files on the desk. But unable to bury himself in his reading, he folded them up again and decided to go into town. First he took the last souvenirs out of the drawer: the piece of silk cord, the shot-through card with the clover, and finally the root beer. He wrapped them all in brown paper, sealed them and sent them up to the young lady. He did not add a word, since the leather-bound book, decorated with initials, contained all the explanations.

Then he shook hands with the driver and drove into town. As he waited, he found Mr. Manasse in a small wine bar in Münsterplatz - with him was Schacht Sanislo. He sat down beside them and they struck up a conversation. He and the lawyer went into legal matters, discussing the pros and cons of this and that cock. It was decided that some dubious cases would be referred to the judicial adviser, who would make some sort of acceptable settlement, while for others Manasse was confident of a favourable verdict. In some cases, Braun Frank advised him to accept a suitable settlement, but Manasse objected: - "Not to admit anything, - even if the opponent's claim is as clear as day and a hundred times justified! He was the straightest and most honest lawyer in the tribunal, one who always told the truth to his client's face without fail; who in the tribunal preferred silence to lying, and yet was much more a lawyer than had not in his blood a hatred of admitting any right of his opponent.

- It only increases our costs," objected Frank Braun.

- "Well, well!" snorted the lawyer. "What does he do with such a fortune? Then I tell you: we know nothing in advance. One always has a chance.

- Legally, perhaps - replied Braun Frank, - but -

He was silent: there is nothing else for a lawyer. The court is the judge - and whatever it decides is the truth. Today it rules one way, and in a few months' time, at a higher instance, it will rule another. Yet: the judgment, which is sacred, is ultimately given by the tribunal and not by the party. But to agree is to judge alone, to anticipate the judgment of the court. And Manasse was a lawyer, a client, and just as he wished the judge to be impartial, so it was a torment for him to have to give or accept a judgment for his client.

Braun Frank smiled.

- As you wish," he said.

Then he talked to Sanislo Schacht, asking questions about his friend Dr Mohnen and all those who were here when he was a student. József Theyssen is now an old government adviser, Professor Klingelhöffer in Halle, and next time, he will probably get the new anatomy chair. And Frici Langen and Bastian and -

Frank Braun was listening, leafing through this living almanac of the university, who knew everyone's personal relationships.

- Are you still a student?" he asked. Sanislo remained silent, annoyed.

- Don't you know? "You've had your doctorate for five years!" the lawyer barked.

It's been - five years now! Braun Frank did the math. It must have been in his forty-fifth, no, forty-sixth semester.

- Well, he did!" he said. He stood up, held out his hand, which Schacht shook vigorously.

- Then allow me to congratulate you, Doctor! But tell me - what are you actually going to do?

- If only he knew!" said the lawyer. Chaplain Schröder entered, and Frank Braun went to greet him.

- "Are you home for once?" cried the man. "This calls for a celebration!

- I am the master!" declared Sanislo Schacht. "You will toast my diploma with me.

- "To me and my new appointment as vicar," laughed the priest, "let us share the honour, if you don't mind, Dr. Schacht.

They agreed. The white-haired vicar ordered a ninety-three-ounce Scharzhofbergi, which the winemaker obtained through his intermediary.

He tasted the wine, nodded in satisfaction and toasted with Braun Frank.

- "You have a good job," he said, "sticking your nose in unknown seas and countries, reading the papers. People like you and me have to stay at home, and can at most console ourselves with the fact that the wine is still good along the Moselle. You certainly don't get that brand abroad!

- "The brand, yes," said Frank Braun, "but not the wine. What are you doing, by the way, sir?

- What would I do?" said the priest. "I am annoyed: our old Rajna is getting more and more dusty. One writes rotten, amusing plays for Tünnes and Bestevader, for Schal, for Speumanes and Marizzebil. I have already robbed the whole of Plautus and Terentius for Peter Millovitsch's paprikajan theatre in Cologne, and now I am on to Holberg. And guess what, this guy, who now calls himself director, even pays me a fee - another Prussian invention.

- Be happy for him!" murmured lawyer Manasse. "By the way, he has published a work on Jamblichos," Braun turned to Frank, "I can tell you, it's an excellent book.

- "It's worthless," said the old vicar. "It's only a modest attempt -

- "Go on," interrupted Sanislo Schacht, "Your book is a fundamental work for understanding the whole point of the Alexandrian school. It is the relevant theory of the Neoplatonists' doctrine of emanation.

He taught me like a warrior bishop in the council. Here and there he was stuck on something; he did not think it right that the author should have placed himself on the basis of the three cosmic principles, if only so that he might have succeeded in fully grasping the spirit of Porphyry and his disciples. Manasseh was drawn into the controversy, and so was the vicar at last. And they argued as if there were nothing more important in the wide world than this

a strange monism, which is essentially nothing other than the mystical annihilation of the "self" through ecstasy, asceticism and theurgy.

Braun Frank was silent. "This is Germany," he thought, "my country. A decade ago, he remembered, he had been sitting in a bar somewhere in Melbourne or Sidney, with three people, a chief justice, a bishop and a famous doctor. They were arguing and arguing like the three of them sitting here now, but it was about who was the better boxer: Jimmy Walsch from Tasmania or our rabbit Fred Costa, the New South Wales Sampion.

But here sits a small lawyer who has always been passed over for appointment as a judicial councillor, a priest who wrote silly plays for puppet theatres, who had a few titles but not a parish, and finally, the heiress, Sanislo Schacht, who at forty-one and a half years old has been lucky enough to get his doctorate and no longer knows what to do with it. And these three little starving students talk about the most academic, the most unprofessional things, which, moreover, have not the slightest connection with their profession, with the same lightness and objectivity with which the gentlemen from Melbourne would talk about a boxing match. Oh, we could rust the whole of America, the whole of Australia, add to that nine-tenths of Europe, and find no such abundance of science -

- But - unfortunately, this science is dead, - he sighed. - It died a long time ago, it smells of dissolution, - of course these gentlemen don't notice.

He asked the vicar what his foster son, young Gontram, was doing. Lawyer Manasse immediately stopped the debate.

- Yes, speak up, Reverend, that's why I'm here. What does it say?

Vicar Schröder unbuttoned his coat, pulled out his wallet and took out a letter.

- Here, read it yourself! Not very comforting!" he said, handing the envelope to the lawyer.

Braun Frank took a quick look at the stamp.

- "From Davos?" he asked. "So you did inherit your mother's illness?

- 'Alas,' sighed the old priest. 'What a lively, good boy Joseph is! He wasn't really born to be a priest, - God knows I'd have given him to another career, though I wear a cassock myself, if I hadn't promised him a mortal death.

on his mother's bed. Otherwise he'd be on his own path by now, like me - I say: he graduated summa cum laude with a doctorate! I got him a dispensation from the Archbishop, who loves him very much. He helped me valiantly with my work on Jamblichos - yes, it could have been something! Only - unfortunately -

He paused and slowly emptied his glass.

- Is it so sudden, Reverend?" asked Braun Frank.

- "It is safe to say," the priest replied, "that the first attack was probably caused by a psychological impression: the sudden death of his brother, Farkas. They should have seen Joseph, out in the cemetery; he did not leave my side; during my little speech he stared at the huge wreath of blood-red roses lying on the coffin. He held on until the end of the service, but then he became so weak that we had to carry him, Schacht and I. In the car she seemed to be better, but at home she was again quite apathetic. The only thing I could get out of him this evening was that he was the last of the Gontram boys and it was his turn. This apathy never ceased - from that hour he was convinced that his days were numbered, though the professors, after a thorough examination, had at first encouraged him with every good thing. Then it went fast, with a noticeable decline day by day. We sent him to Davos - but it seemed that it would soon be over.

He fell silent, fat tears welling up in his eyes.

- "His mother was tougher," the lawyer muttered, "she laughed in the face of death for six years.

- May God grant their souls eternal rest," said the vicar, filling the glasses, "Let us drink a quiet toast to them - in memoriam.

They raised their glasses and emptied them.

- "Soon the old Justice Councillor will be all alone," observed Dr Schacht. "Only his daughter seems to be in perfect health.

- And the only one who will survive.

The lawyer mumbled:

- Frida? - No, I don't think so.

- Why?" asked Braun Frank.

- "Because... because..." she began. "Eh, why shouldn't I tell you?" he looked at her bitingly, angrily, as if he wanted to grab her by the throat.

Frida won't get old, you want to know?... I'll tell you: because she's right in the clutches of that damned witch!... No... now you know!

'Witch,' thought Frank Braun, 'she calls her a witch, like Uncle James in his leather-bound book. He asked:

- What do you mean by that, counsel?

- "Exactly as I say," barked the lawyer. "He who comes near Miss ten Brinken... sticks to her like a fly to honey; and he who sticks to her once... ..is suffocated, and all his struggling is in vain! Be careful, doctor, I warn you! It is ungrateful to admonish a man thus; I did it once, with the little Wolf, but without success... Now it's your turn... escape before it's too late. What else have you got to do here? You look as if you've already had a taste of honey!

Braun Frank laughed, but it sounded a bit forced.

- "You have no reason to worry about me, Counselor!" he said. But Manasse was not convinced, and himself even less.

They sat and drank. They drank to Schacht's degree and the priest's dignity as vicar. Also to the health of Charles Mohnen, whom no one had heard from since he left town.

- "He is gone," said Sanislo Schacht; he was surprised by a sentimental mood; he sang sentimental songs.

Braun Frank has recommended himself. As in the old days, he walked out to Lendenich through the smelly trees in their spring bloom.

.oOo.

Passing through the courtyard, he saw a light in the library room. He entered

- Alraune was sitting on
the sofa.

- "You're here, little sister?" he greeted. "Still awake at this hour?

The girl did not answer, but waved her hand for him to sit down. Braun Frank sat down opposite her and waited. But Alraune didn't speak, and he didn't bother her.

- I wanted to talk to you." he finally said.

Braun Frank nodded, but again she remained silent.

- Have you read the leather-bound book?" he began.

- Yes. - She took a deep breath and looked at him. - So I'm just a joke, Braun Frank, your joke?

- A joke? - Say: a thought.

- OK, so it's a thought, the word doesn't mean much. What is a joke but a clownish thought? And I think - that's funny enough. - He laughed. - But that's not why I'm waiting for you here; I want to know something else. Tell me, do you believe it?

- What do I believe? That everything was just as Uncle tells it in the leather-bound book? Yes, I believe.

Alraune shook his head impatiently.

No, that's not what I mean. Of course he did, why would he lie in this volume?... I want to know if you believe it... what my... my... I mean: what your uncle believed, that I was different from other people... that I was what my name meant?

- How do I answer the question? Ask a physiologist and he will tell you that you are as human as anyone else in the world, even if your introduction here was a little unusual. He will add that everything that has happened is purely accidental; a mere circumstance which -

- "I don't care about that," interrupted Alraune. "Your uncle has made these side circumstances his business. Whether they were or not is essentially immaterial. I want to know from you: do you share this view? Do you also believe me to be a strange creature?"

Braun Frank was silent, searching for an answer, but he didn't know what to say.

Sometimes he believed, sometimes he didn't.

- "You see," he began at last.

- "Speak, then," urged Alraune, "Do you believe me to be your reckless joke - who later took shape? Thy thought, which the old Privy Councillor threw into a crucible, boiled, distilled, till I became what I sit before thee?"

This time Braun Frank did not think:

- If you put it like that: yes, I think so.

Alraune chuckled in passing:

- I thought. And that's why I waited for you tonight, to cure you of your arrogance as quickly as possible. No, uncle, you did not put that thought into the world, no more than the old Privy Councillor.

Braun Frank did not understand:

- Who else?" he asked. Alraune reached under the pillows.

- This one!" he shouted. He threw the little Alraune into the air and caught it again.

He stroked her gently with his nervous fingers.

- This? Why this? Alraune answered with a question:

- Did you ever think about it, before the day when Justice Gontram celebrated the first communion of two children?

- No, not really.

- The thought came to you when this thing fell off the wall.

Isn't that right?

- Yes, it is - confirmed Braun Frank.

- "So," continued Alraune, "the idea has come to you from outside, from wherever. When the lawyer Manasse was making his speech, when he was talking like a book of knowledge, explaining to you what Alraune is, what it means - that's when it was born in your mind. It grew, it grew strong, so strong that it gave you the strength to make your uncle believe it, to make him take the idea out and create me. If, then, it be said, Braun Frank, that I am a thought which has sprung into the world and taken human form, you are but a mediator-no more than a secret counsellor, or-an assistant, no more than-

He stopped, he fell silent.

But only for a moment. Then he continues:

- like the slut Alma and the robber-killer, whom you - and death - have paired together.

Alraune placed his root beer on the silk cushion and looked at him with almost intimate eyes:

- You are my father, you are my mother. You are the one who created me.

"Perhaps so," thought Frank Braun, looking at her, "The thoughts, like pollen, swirl in the air, circulating playfully, and finally

settle in a human brain. Often they wither there and die - oh, they rarely find good soil. "Perhaps you are right," he thought. My brain has always been a well-tended hotbed of all follies and elaborate fantasies. "And it made no difference to him whether he had thrown the seeds of this thought into the world or whether he was the fertile soil that received it.

But he did not say anything, he kept her in his faith. He looked at her: like a child playing with her doll.

Alraune rose slowly, and clutched the ugly little man in one hand.

- "I wanted to say something else," he said quietly, "to thank you for giving me the leather-bound book and not burning it.

- What?" asked Braun Frank. Alraune did not continue.

- "Shall I kiss you?" he asked.

- Is that what you wanted to say Alraune?

- No, not that! - I just thought: after I told you, I could kiss you once. But first I'll tell you what I wanted to tell you: get out of here!

Braun Frank bit his lip:

- Why?

Because - much better for you - maybe for me too. But this is not about me. At least now I know how it is - you opened my eyes. And I think, as it has happened before, it will certainly happen again - with the difference that now I'm not running blind, but now *I see*: I see everything. Next it will be your turn. So you'd better go.

- Are you so sure of what you're doing?" asked Braun Frank. And Alraune replied:

- Wouldn't I be?

The man shrugged.

- Maybe - I don't know. But tell me: why do you want to spare me?

- I love you," she said softly. "You've been good to me. Braun Frank laughed:

- But not the others?

- "But," she said, "they were all good. But I didn't feel that way. And they all loved me.

She went to the desk, picked up a postcard and handed it to the man. "Here's a card from your mother, it arrived last night, the servant brought it up in my mail by mistake. I read it. Your mother is ill and begs you to go home - she begs you too.

Braun Frank took the postcard. He stared hesitantly ahead of him. He knew they were both right, he felt it was foolish to stay any longer. Then he was seized by a childish defiance that made him shout "no".

- Are you travelling?" asked Alraune.

He pulled himself together and spoke with a firm voice:

- Yes, little sister!

He looked at her sharply, taking in every feature of her face. A little twitch at the corner of his mouth; a light sigh would have been enough; something to show that she was sorry to see him go. But Alraune remained silent and grave, not a line of her stiff face faltering.

This offended Braun Frank, he saw it as an insult, a humiliation. He pressed his lips together.

Not like this, he thought, I'm not going like this. She walked towards him and held out her hand.

- "Very well," he said. I'll kiss you goodbye, if you like. A quick fire flared in Braun Frank's eyes.

- Don't do it, Alraune, don't do it!" he said involuntarily. And his voice took on her tone.

Alraune raised his head.

- Why not?" he asked suddenly.

Again, he used her words, but she sensed that it was innuendo.

- "I love you," he said, "you were good to me today. Many red lips kissed my lips - and they were very thin. Now - now it's your turn. So you'd better not kiss me.

They faced each other, their eyes flashing hard as steel. An imperceptible smile played around the man's lips, his good weapon clean and strong.

Now she had a choice. The "no" was her victory and Alraune's defeat - so he could move on with a light heart. But his "yes" meant a fight.

And she felt as good about it as he would, just as she had on those first nights. Except that was when it all started, that was the first cut, - there was still a lot of hope for a clash in the doubles tournament then. But now - it's the end.

He was the one who threw the gloves - She picked them up.

- "I'm not afraid," he said.

Braun Frank was silent, the smile dying on his lips. It became serious.

- "I want to kiss you," she repeated.

- Watch out! - I kiss you back. She held his gaze.

- "Good," he said and smiled. "Sit down, you're a bit big for me!"

- No," said Frank Braun briskly, "not like that!"

He stretched out on the wide sofa, his head resting on the cushions. His arms were wide open and his eyes closed.

- Come on, Alraune!

She stepped closer and knelt at his head. She looked at him hesitantly, then suddenly threw herself beside him, grabbed his head and pressed her lips to his.

Braun Frank did not embrace her, nor did he move his arms. But his fingers clenched into fists. He felt her tongue, felt the faint bite of her teeth

-

"Kiss me more, kiss me more," he whispered. A red mist fell over his eyes. He heard the secret counsellor's ugly laugh, saw Mrs. Gontram's big, strange eyes asking little Manasseh to explain Alraune's saga. He heard the muffled laughter of the two celebrating girls, Olga and Frida, and the broken yet beautiful voice of Madame de Vére singing "Les papillons". He saw the little Hussar lieutenant eagerly reading the lawyer's words, he saw Charles of Moorland wiping little Alraune's face with a large napkin.

Kiss me more!" she murmured.

And Alma - the girl's mother. Red as a blazing fire, with little blue veins on her snow-white breast. And her father's execution - from the mouth of the princess - as Uncle James described it in the leather-bound book -

And the hour in which the old man created her - and the hour in which his doctor delivered her -

- Kiss me, - he crooned - kiss me.

He drank her kiss. And Alraune drew the warm blood from her lips, which his teeth tore. And Braun Frank was intoxicated, consciously and deliberately, like a foaming wine, like an oriental poison.

- 'Leave me,' he cried suddenly, 'leave me, you don't know what you're doing!

Alraune's curls fell even tighter across his forehead, her kisses rained down on him hotter and wilder.

The clear thoughts of the day lay trampled. Dreams grew and swelled the red sea of blood. Menads wagged the Thyrsos' staffs, and Dionysus' holy rapture was foamed.

- Kiss me!" the man screamed.

But Alraune dismissed him, his arms drooping. He raised his eyes and looked at her.

- Kiss me!" he repeated softly.

But the girl's eyes were lightless, her spirit was stagnant. She shook her head in denial. Braun Frank jumped up.

Then I kiss you!" she cried. He lifted her in his arms, and, in vain, threw her on the couch. He knelt down - on the same spot where she had just been.

"Close your eyes," he whispered. And he bent down to her.

His kisses were good, very good - flattering and soft, like a harp on a summer night. They were also wild and fierce and rough, like a storm in the North Sea. Hot as the fiery breath of Aetna's mouth, rushing and devouring like Maelstrom's whirlpool -

- It sinks, everything sinks - Alraune felt.

And then the fire started, and the sky was full of flames. She put her arms around him and cuddled him close to her breast.

- Burn! - he wailed - I'm burning -

And he tore the dress from her body.

The sun was high when Alraune woke up. He saw that he was naked, but he did not cover himself. She turned and saw him sitting beside her - also naked.

- Are you travelling today?" he asked.

- Stay! - whispered Alraune - stay!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Which tells how Alraune lived in the park

He did not write to his mother, neither that day nor the next. She put it off until the following week and on for months. She spent her days in the Brinkenek's vast garden, as she had once done as a child during the school holidays. He would sit in the warm greenhouses or under the huge cedars, whose shoots had been brought from Lebanon by some pious ancestor. He would walk under the strawberry trees, along the little pond, which was shaded by the weeping willows.

This summer they owned the garden, they alone, Alraune and Braun Frank. Mademoiselle had given strict orders that none of the servants were to enter, day or night. Nor did she make an exception for the gardeners, sending them to the city to tend the garden of her villa in Coblenzerstrasse. The tenants were delighted and admired her attentiveness.

Only Gontram Frida was on the roads. She didn't say a word about what she didn't know and yet suspected, but her pursed lips and shy eyes spoke loudly enough. She always avoided Braun Frank when she met him - and yet she was always there when she was with Alraune.

- "The devil take him," murmured Braun Frank, "I wish he would go to the witches.

- Is it Terhedre?" asked Alraune. The man also answered with a question:

- Maybe not for you?

- I hadn't thought about it before. I hardly noticed him.

That evening, Frank Braun found Frida Gontram in the blooming pear bushes. She got up from the bench and was about to leave. Hot hatred shot from her eyes. He walked towards her.

- What's wrong, Frida?

- Nothing!" she replied. "You can be satisfied. She'll soon be rid of me.

- How come?

His voice was shaking:

- I have to go tomorrow. Alraune said I'm a burden.

There was an infinite misery in his eyes.

- Wait here Frida, I want to talk to her.

He hurried into the house and came back after a while.

- "Alraune and I have changed our minds," he began, "There is no need for him to go away for good. Only, I make you nervous with my presence, Frida, and forgive me, you make me nervous too. You'd better go away, but only for a while. Go to Davos to your brother and come back in two months.

She stood up, looking at him questioningly, still full of concern.

- Right?" he whispered, "Only for two months?"

- Of course it's true, Frida. - Why would I lie?

She took his hand, her face shining with joy.

- I am very grateful to you! - Just let me come back, then everything will be fine!

He said goodbye and headed for the house. Suddenly she stopped and went back to him.

- One more thing, doctor, I got a cheque from Alraune this morning, but I got it, because, because - in short, I got it. Now I'll need money after all. I don't want to go to him, he'll ask questions and I don't want him to ask questions. Can't I get the money from you?

Braun Frank nodded.

- Of course you can have it. - Am I not allowed to ask why you tore up the cheque?

She looked at him and shrugged.

- If I had to leave him forever, I would no longer need money -

- "Tell me, Frida, where would you have gone?" he pressed her.

- Where?" a bitter laugh came from the girl's narrow lips. "Where? To the same road Olga went! Only believe me, doctor, I would have reached my destination!

He nodded lightly, disappearing among the trunks.

.oOo.

Early in the morning, when the sun came up, Braun Frank put on a kimono and left his room. He walked into the garden along the path that led along the espalier. In the bed of roses, he engraved *Boule de Neige* and *Empress Augusta Victoria*, *Frau Garl Drusky* and *Merveille de Lyon*. Then he turned left where larches and silver pines towered.

Alraune was sitting on the edge of the lake. He wore a black silk cloak, crushed breadcrumbs and threw them to the goldfish. When the man came, she quickly and deftly made a wreath of pale roses and crowned her tresses with them. Dropping her cloak, she sat in a lace gown, her bare feet splashing in the cool water.

They barely spoke. But she trembled when his fingers touched her back, when his close breath caressed her cheek. Slowly, she took off her shirt and threw it on the bronze lintel beside her. Six naiads sat in a circle on the marble ledge of the lake, water dripping from jugs and urns and spouting from their breasts in thin streams. Around them crawled a variety of animals, large marine and freshwater crabs, turtles, fish, snakes and crawlers. In the centre, Triton blew his horn, and around him a chubby sea-folk spouted huge jets of water into the blue sky.

- Come, my friend!" said Alraune.

And they entered the water. It was so icy cold that Braun Frank shivered; his lips turned blue, his arms went gooseflesh. He had to swim vigorously, squirming, gasping, to warm his blood, to get used to the unusual temperature. Alraune was not cold at all, he was in his element from the first moment he laughed at the man. Like a little frog, he swam.

- "Turn off the tap," he said.

Braun Frank did it, near the edge of the lake, around the statue of *Galatea*, small waves rose at four points. They bubbled and rippled for a while, then grew higher and higher. They bulged high; hard, violent, they surged up and back, surging even higher than the rays of the sea-folk. Four silver cascades of brilliant sparks.

And there stood Alraune in the shimmering spray, in the middle of the four jets of water that rose up. A rabbit and a fragile, graceful child. Long the man kissed her

his gaze. There was no fault in the proportion of these members, this sweet sculpture was absolutely flawless. Its colour was uniform: white marble with a slightly yellowish tinge. Only the inner side of her thighs shone with a rosy glow, and a curious line was visible.

This is what ruined Dr Petersen, thought Braun Frank. He bent down and, kneeling, kissed the rosy spots.

- What do you mean?" she asked.

It's starting to dawn on me now: Look at the girls of the sea around here, they have no thighs, only long, scaly fish tails. Mermaids have no souls, but they say they love men sometimes. A fisherman or a knight errant Then they hatch out of the cold waves and onto dry land. They go to an old witch or a wizard doctor who concocts nasty poisons they must drink. Then he takes out a sharp knife and starts cutting. He cuts deep into the fish's tail. It hurts, it hurts a lot, but for the love of Meluzina, she suppresses her pain. He doesn't complain, he doesn't cry, until the pain robs him of his senses. But when she wakes, her tail is gone and she walks on two beautiful legs like a human. All he sees is the scar where the wizard doctor's hand worked.

- And yet she remains a mermaid? - With human legs? - And the wizard breathes no soul into her?

- No, - he can't. But they say something else about mermaids.

- What?

- Meluzina has its mysterious power only as long as it is untouched. But when she falls into her lover's kisses, when her knight's embrace takes her maidenhood - the spell is broken. She can bring up no more treasures, no more the treasure of the Rhine, but the black pain that has followed her until now is lost from her doorstep. He becomes a man.

- If only!" whispered Alraune. She tore the white wreath from her head and swam towards the sea people, the Tritons, mermaids and Naiads. He threw open roses into their laps.

- Take it, my brothers, take it!" he laughed.

.oOo.

A huge four-poster bed stood in Alraune's bedroom, on low baroque pillars. At its feet were two other columns with golden flame cups. On its sides were carvings of Omphale spinning Heracles on his rococo, Perseus kissing Andromeda, Hephaestus holding Ares and Aphrodite in his net - many vines interlaced, doves playing and children with wings. The old ornamental bed, once brought from Lyons by Mademoiselle Hortense de Monthyon, when she became great-grandfather's wife, was richly ornamented with gilding.

Alraune was standing on a chair at the head of the bed, with heavy tongs in his hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Braun Frank. Alraune laughed. "Hang on, I'll be ready in a minute. "He was carefully hammering and tearing at the golden amour that hovered over their heads with its bow and arrow. He drew out a pin and another, grabbed the little god, twisted it this way and that until it came off its place. He took it in his hand, jumped down with it and put it on top of the cupboard. He took the Alraune man out of the cupboard, climbed up on the chair again and attached it to the head of the bed with wires and strings. Getting down, he looked at the work critically.

- "What's the man doing there?" he asked.

- I didn't like the golden amor - it's very vulgar.
I want Galeotto, my root man.

- What do you call it?

- Galeotonak! Wasn't he the one who brought us together? - So hang over our heads, watch us at night.

.oOo.

Sometimes they rode out in the evening, sometimes on moonlit nights. They would sneak between the Seven Mountains, or to Rolandseck, or into the interior of the province.

Once they found a white donkey at the foot of Dragon Rock, at the place of those who hired out animals to be ridden to the castle. Braun Frank bought it. It was a young animal, well groomed and gleaming like freshly fallen snow. They called him Bianca. They carried him along, tied to the horses on a long rope, but the animal stopped, buried his front legs like a stubborn mule, let himself be dragged and strangled.

They finally found a way to break its stubbornness. Frank Braun bought a large bag of sugar in Königswinter. He released Bianca from the rope and threw the sugar at him from the saddle, grain by grain. So the donkey ran after them, crouched right next to the stirrups and sniffed Braun Frank's cavalcade.

When they arrived, old Froitsheim took the pipe out of his mouth, spat thoughtfully and grinned with pleasure.

- Donkey! - he brayed, - new donkey! We haven't had a donkey in the stable for almost thirty years. Do you remember, young master, how I made him ride old grey Jonathan?

He brought a bunch of young carrots, gave them to the animal and stroked its badger fur.

- What's your name, young sir?" he asked.

Braun Frank said to Bianca.

- "Come, Bianka," the old man called, "I'll give you a good turn, we'll make friends.

Then he turned to Braun Frank again.

- My lord, I have three grandchildren in the village, two girls and a boy; they are the children of the cobbler who lives on the road to Godesberg. Sometimes they come to visit me on Sunday afternoons. May I have them skinned on the donkey? -Only here in the yard.

Braun Frank nodded, but before he could reply, the young lady spoke:

- Why don't you ask me, old man? The donkey is mine, I got it as a gift!

- Well, I'm telling you now: I'll let you skin your grandchildren. Even in the garden, when we're not home!

The look on his friend's face said thank you, not the old coachman's. He looked at him half suspiciously, half in wonder. He muttered something unintelligible. He lured the donkey into the stable with the soup-carrot. He called out to the stable boy, introduced him to Bianca first, then to the horses in turn. He led Bianca behind the farm buildings, showed her the cowshed with the heavy Dutch cows and the young calf, black and white Lizi, showed her the dogs, the two clever spooks, the old watchdog and the cheeky Cape sleeping in the stable. She led him to the pigs, where the huge Yorkshire pig was nursing nine little piglets, led him to the goats and the

to the poultry yard. Bianka followed, chewing her carrots; she seemed to like it here in Brinken.

In the afternoons, the lively voice of the little woman could often be heard from the garden.

- Bianka! Bianka!

At this time the old coachman opened Bianka's stall and opened the stable door wide. Bianka went into the garden at a light jog, paused a few times, ate the green fleshy leaves, nuzzled her high clover, and then, when the call "Bianka" came, turned and ran away. He looked for his mistress.

Alraune and Braun Frank were lounging on the lawn under the ash trees. They didn't use a table - just a big board hat lying on the grass, covered with a white damask tablecloth. On it lay much fruit, various delicacies and delicacies, amid roses; on the edge of the board were the wines.

Bianka was snooping. She looked down at the caviar, the oysters no less; she turned away from the pâtés with disdain. But she went to work on the scones, took a piece of ice from the fridge and devoured a few roses.

- Strip me," said Alraune.

Braun Frank unbuttoned the buttons, unlocked the clasps and the pins.

He lifted the naked girl onto the donkey. She sat on the white animal's back, clutching its badger mane. Slowly, in stride, she rode across the meadow, the man at her side, his right hand resting on the animal's head. The clever Bianka carried the slender boy proudly, not stopping, walking smoothly as if he had a velvet horseshoe on his foot.

Where the dahlia beds ended, a narrow path led across a small stream. This little stream fed the marble lake. They didn't cross the wooden bridge; Bianka waded carefully across the clear water, following the trail. She glanced curiously to the side when a green frog leapt from the bank into the foam. Braun Frank led the animal past the raspberry bushes, picked red raspberries and shared them with Alraune. Then he led it through the thick rose bushes.

There, surrounded by deciduous elm trees, lay the great field of sedge. His grandfather had planted it for his good friend Gottfried Kinkel, who loved the flower. Every week for as long as he lived, he sent a large bushel to the poet.

Little feathered needles, tens of thousands of them, as far as the eye could see. The flowers shone silvery-white and their long, narrow leaves silvery-green. Far, far away, a silver carpet in the twilight.

Bianka carried the white girl round and round, round and round. The white girl walked deep in the silver sea, which kissed her feet, waving in the playful wind.

Braun Frank stood on the edge of the pew and watched her. He was saturated with sweet colours.

- Isn't it nice here, my dear?" she asked, riding beside him.

- Very nice," said the man seriously. "Ride on.

- I am happy," she said. She put her hand lightly behind the smart animal's ear as she started. Slowly, slowly, stepping in the gleaming silver

-

- Why are you laughing?" asked Alraune.

They were sitting on the terrace; having breakfast. Braun Frank was reading his mail. He had a letter from Mr. Manasse; he had something to write about the mining shares in Burberg.

- "You must have read in the newspapers about the gold deposits near Hocheifel," the lawyer wrote, "Most of the deposits are in the exploration area of the Burberg Mining Company. Whether the rational exploitation of the thin gold ores will pay off at the considerable cost involved seems very doubtful to me. The fact is that the price of the papers, which were completely worthless four weeks ago, has soared, partly thanks to the clever press manoeuvres of the mine directors, and was already at par before a week had elapsed. I have just today been informed by Mr Baller, the bank manager, that he is already subscribing for two hundred and fourteen. Why, I have given your shares to this gentleman, who is my friend, and asked him to sell them immediately; this will be done tomorrow, perhaps at an even higher price.

- "Even Uncle James wouldn't have dared to dream of this," laughed Braun Frank, handing the letter to Alraunen, "Otherwise he would have left other shares to my mother and me.

Alraune took the letter and read it carefully. Then he turned it down. He stared at himself with a waxy white face.

- What's wrong with you?" asked Braun Frank.

- But yes... he knew," said Alraune slowly, "he knew well!... 'If you want to win, don't sell the shares,' Braun continued, turning to Frank in a serious tone, 'they'll find more gold... your shares will go higher, much higher!'

- Too late, - said Braun Frank lightly - I just sold the papers!... Anyway... are you so sure?

- Are you sure?" repeated Alraune. "Can anyone be more sure than me? His head slumped on the table and he sobbed loudly.

It's starting... it's starting... Braun Frank stood up and hugged her.

- Nonsense!" he said. "Get these bugs out of your head! Come, Alraune, let's go and have a bath, the fresh water will wash away the silly brain spells. Speak to your mermaid brothers - they'll confirm that Meluzina can bring no harm once she's kissed her lover.

She pushed him away and jumped up. She stood facing him and stared into his eyes.

- I love you," he said, "yes, I love you. But it's not true... the magic hasn't stopped! I am not Meluzina, I am not a child of fresh water! I come from the earth, created by the night.

There were sharp sounds coming from him and he didn't know whether he was crying or laughing. He took her in his strong arms, ignoring her protests and thrashing. He held her down like a fussy child and carried her down the steps into the garden. She screamed in vain, and he threw her into the pond, in a wide arc, clothed.

The girl bobbed up out of the water, standing dazed and confused for a moment. The man played with the fountains, a splashing shower slapping her.

- Come on, - he shouted with a loud laugh - you come too!

She undressed and mischievously threw the wet clothes on his head.

- Are you still not ready?" he urged.

When he was standing next to her, she saw that he was bleeding. Blood was dripping from his face, neck and left ear.

- I bit you," he whispered.

The man nodded yes. Alraune stomped up. He put his arms around her neck and fanned the red blood with glowing lips.

- Well, now you're cured! They swam around the lake.

Braun Frank later went into the house and brought the girl a cape. And when they returned hand in hand from the lake, under the copper beech tree, Alraune said:

- Thank you, my dear!

.oOo.

They lay naked under the red Pyrrhus. In the hot midday hours, their twisted bodies disintegrated.

Their entreaties, their sweet words, lay limp, drenched. Like the little flowers, weak grasses, plucked by the storm of their love. Dead the conflagration that devoured itself with greedy teeth: from the ashes a terrible hatred grew, hard as steel.

They looked at each other - now they knew they were mortal enemies.

He found the long red line on her thighs disgusting and repulsive, the saliva pooling in his mouth as if he had sucked bitter poison from her lips. The small wounds torn by her teeth and nails ached and burned and swelled

-

- He will poison me, he thought, as he once poisoned Dr Petersen.

She laughed at him, green-eyed, impulsive, mocking and defiant. He closed his eyes, biting his lip and clenching his hands into spasmodic fists. And she stood up, turned and kicked him carelessly and contemptuously.

He sprang up, stopped in front of her, their eyes crossed. Not a sound came out of Alraune's mouth. But he pursed his lips and raised his hand. He spat at the man and struck him in the face.

The man threw himself at her, shook her, teased her by the hair. He pushed her to the ground, stomped on her, beat her, choked her.

She defended herself well. Her nails smashed into his face, her teeth into his arms and chest. And in cheese and blood they sought each other's lips, met and possessed each other in lustful pain.

Then he grabbed her, pushed her away from him, so far that she fell unconscious on the lawn.

Braun Frank staggered forward, but after a few steps he dropped. He gazed at the blue sky, no desire, no will, his temples throbbing, he squeaked -

Until her eyes closed -

When he woke up, she was kneeling at his feet. She was drying her bleeding wounds with the curls of her hair, tying them up expertly with her shirt, which had been torn into long strips.

- Let's go, darling. The evening has fallen," he said.

.oOo.

Tiny blue eggshells lay on the road. After some searching in the bushes, the man came across a robbed nest of a crossbill.

- Cheeky squirrels! They have overgrown the park; they are driving away all our songbirds.

- What can we do?" asked Alraune.

- We've shot some of them! Alraune applauded.

- Yes, yes!" he laughed. "Let's go hunting!

- Do you have a gun? Alraune was thinking.

- No... I don't think so, it's not usable. We'll buy it. But wait a minute," he said, "the old coachman has one. He used to shoot at strange cats when they went wild.

Braun Frank went to the stables.

- Hey, Froitsheim. You got a rifle?

- "Yes," said the old man.

Braun Frank bicentett. Then he asked:

- Do you hear, old man, you wanted to ride your great-grandchildren on the Bianca, didn't you? They were at your place on Sunday - but I didn't see you put them on the chariot.

The old man growled, went to his room and hung the rifle from the wall. He came back, sat down silently and started cleaning the gun.

- Well, don't you want to answer? Froitsheim mumbled with a dry throat:

- No - he muttered.

Braun put his hand on Frank's shoulder.

- Be a smart old man, tell me what's on your mind. I think you can speak frankly in front of me.

- "I don't want any favours from our little lady," said the coachman, "I don't want her present. I'll have my bread and my wages, I'll work for it.

- That's all I want.

Braun Frank felt that all persuasion was futile with this stubborn man. He took advantage of a small catch by throwing bait. Maybe he'll bite. - If the young lady asks you to do some extra work, will you do it?

- "No," said the old man stubbornly, "only what I have to do.

- But if you pay extra for the extra service, will you do it?" continued Braun Frank.

The driver still refused to confess.

- It depends, he mused.

- Don't be adamant, Froitsheim!" laughed Braun Frank.

- no I'm borrowing your rifle, he wants to shoot squirrels. - It's not your duty, is it? And so - understand: in return, he lets you ride the kids on the choo-choo. You'll take that deal?

- Yes," said the old man with a grin, "I'll do it like this. He handed over the rifle and took a scatula cartridge from the drawer.

- "I'll give you this!" he said. "So I've paid you well, and I don't owe you anything. "Will you ride this afternoon, young master?" he continued. "Good, the horses will be ready at five o'clock.

He sent for the stable-boy, told him to run to his granddaughter, the cobbler, and send the children here for the evening -

Early in the morning, Braun Frank stood under the acacia trees that kissed the little woman's window. He whistled.

Alraune opened the window and called out that he would be right there.

His light footsteps sounded sharply on the cobbles, and with a leap he sprang down the steps of the garden terrace and was in front of him.

- "Let me see you?" he said. "Are you in Kimono? Is that how you go hunting? Braun Frank laughs:

- It's good for the squirrels. - But how do you paint?

Alraune was dressed as a Wallenstein hunter, - the uniform of the Holk regiment!" he said.

He wore tall yellow riding boots, green sleeves and a huge greenish-grey hat with waving feathers. He had a rude pistol in his belt, and a long sword in his thighs.

- Put that down! - You'll scare the game if you go in like that. She pulled her mouth away.

- Am I not beautiful?

She took him in her arms and kissed him quickly on the lips.

- You're beautiful, vain kid! And for squirrels, your Holk hunter uniform is as good as my kimono.

He unsheathed her sword, her long spurs, put aside the flintlock, and took the coachman's Lefauchaux rifle in his hand.

- Come on, buddy. Luck up!

They walked quietly through the garden, looking at the bushes and the treetops. Braun Frank loaded the rifle, pulled the trigger.

Did you have any other rifles in your hand?" he asked.

- "Oh, yes!" she waved, "Farkas and I were together in Pützchen at the big farewell, and we practised in the shooting gallery.

- Even better: you know how to hold the gun and how to aim it. The branch broke above them.

- "There's one," she whispered, "shoot, shoot!

The man raised the rifle and looked up. But he lowered it again.

- "I won't hurt it!" he said. "It's a young animal, barely a year old. Let it live a little longer.

They came to where the stream emerges from the birch woods into the meadow. Fat, pale tadpoles buzzed in the sunlight, yellow butterflies swayed on the daisies.

There was buzzing, buzzing everywhere, crickets chirping, bees buzzing, grasshoppers large and small hopping at their feet. Toads crunched in the water and in the air little larksonged.

Crossing the meadow, they headed towards the copper beeches. Near the edge of the woods they heard a restless chirping and saw a small hempling emerging from the bushes. Braun Frank crept forward, peering with lynx eyes.

- The robber is here!" he murmured.

- Where?" asked Alraune.

Already Braun Frank's shot rang out as a large male squirrel popped off the trunk of a beech tree. He lifted it by the tail and showed where he had hit it.

- It does not rob more nests.

They continued stalking in the big park, the second squirrel he popped from the dawn arbor, the third, a greyish brown, from the crown of a pear tree.

- "Not always you!" said Alraune. "Give me the rifle too!

Braun Frank handed over. He showed him how to load it and shot it a few times at a tree trunk.

- "Come on," he said. "Show me what you've got. He pushed down the barrel of the gun.

So, he taught, the mouth of the pipe should always be facing the ground, not the air.

Near the pond, a young squirrel was playing on the road. Alraune immediately pointed his gun at him, but Braun advised Frank to sneak a few steps closer.

- So now you're close enough - go for it!

Alraune squeezed the trigger, the squirrel gazed around, jumped onto a tree trunk and disappeared into the thicket of branches.

The second attempt didn't go any better, he took the distance too far. But when he tried to get closer, the animals fled before he could use the gun.

- "Stupid creatures!" scolded Alraune. "Why do they stay at your place? Braun Frank, in his childish annoyance, found it delightful.

- Probably because they want to please you," he laughed. "You're making a lot of noise with your leather boots! But wait, we'll get closer!

Close to the manor house, where the hazelnut bushes grow right up to the acacia trees, Frank Braun spotted another squirrel.

- "Stay here!" he whispered, "I'll drive her here. Look over there at the bush, and if you see it, whistle to let me know. At the whistle he turns round - then go on!

He went in a wide circle around the bushes and spied. At last he spotted the animal in a dwarf acacia and chased it away; he chased it towards the hazel bushes. Seeing that it was heading towards Alraune, he stayed back and waited for her whistle.

But he heard nothing. Then he went back to her in the same arc, and behind her, on the wide path. Alraune, rifle in hand, stood; watching the bushes anxiously. And a little to his left, not ten feet away, a squirrel was frolicking merrily among the hazel branches.

- "Why, there it is!" cried Braun Frank, half aloud. "Up there, a little to the left!

Alraune, hearing the man's voice, turned quickly towards him. Braun Frank saw his lips open in speech, heard a simultaneous thud and felt a slight pain in his side.

Then he heard her sharp, desperate cry, saw her drop the gun and run towards him. He rips open his kimono and grabs the wound with both hands.

He lowered his head, looking down. It was a long but very light bruise, barely squeezing out any blood. Only the skin was burned, a long black line was visible.

- The devil take it!" laughed Braun Frank. It was right over my heart!

She stood before him, cittering. She was trembling in every limb, she could hardly stand up straight. He supported her, encouraged her.

- But, child, nothing happened, really nothing! We wash it a bit, then we put oil on it. Make sure it's nothing!

He pulled the kimono even closer and showed her naked breasts. She felt the wound with hesitant fingers.

- "By the heart, by the heart," he cooed. Then suddenly he put both hands to his head. A wild terror seized him, and he looked with a horrified look at the

at him, tore herself from his arms, ran into the house and up the stairs.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Which announces how Alraune will end his life

Braun Frank went up to his room, washed and dressed the wound. He laughed at her hunting skills.

Now he remembered the look she had given him when he had run away. She was broken, full of wild despair, as if she had committed a sin. It had been an unfortunate accident, which had been quite fortunate.

He is stunned: - Coincidence? Ah, that's it: *Alraune* didn't think it was a coincidence. He thought it was fate.

He thought about it. He certainly did. That was why he was frightened, why he ran away when he saw his own face in his eyes. He was frightened by death, which scattered its flowers wherever his feet trod.

The little lawyer waved him on. Didn't *Alraune* say the same thing when he asked you to leave? And wasn't the old magic working on him as much as on everyone else? His uncle had left him worthless papers, and now they were milking gold from the rocks. *Alraune* made him rich, but he brought death on his neck.

He was frightened, only now he was frightened. He revealed his wound again.

Oh yes, his heart was beating just below the bruise. It was saved only by the small movement of turning his arm to point at the squirrel.

But he doesn't want to die, no. Not just because of his mother. But even if she wasn't his mother. Not for you. He's learned to live over the years, and now he's master of this great art, which offers him more than a thousand others. He has lived intensely, intensely, enjoying the world and all its greatness to the full.

- "Fate loves me," he thought, "and I must be careful. This admonition is more sensible than the lawyer's words. He pulled his suitcase from under the wardrobe, tore open the lid and began to pack. What was the last word of Uncle James's leather-bound book? "Try your luck! It's a pity I can't be here when it's your turn: it would have been a very nice sight!

Braun Frank shook his head:

- "No, Uncle James," she murmured, "I won't please you this time, not this time.

She threw up her shoes and reached for her stockings. Then she prepared the shirt and the dress she was going to wear. Her eyes fell on the dark blue kimono hanging on the back of the chair. He put it on and looked at the burnt tear the bullet had made in it.

- I should leave it here, he said, as a reminder to Alraune. Put it with the rest of his memories.

He heard a deep sigh from behind him. He turned around. She was standing in the middle of the room, wearing a thin silk robe and looking at him with wide, wide eyes.

- "You're packing?" he whispered.

He felt as if a bullet was choking his throat. But he forced it down and pulled himself together:

- Yes, Alraune, I am travelling.

She slumped in a chair, didn't answer, watched him pack his bags without a word. The man went to the washbasin and took everything down, combs, brushes, soaps, sponges. Finally he slammed the lid on the suitcase and closed it.

- "There!" he said firmly. He went to her to shake her hand.

Alraune did not move. He didn't offer a hand. His pale lips remained closed. Only his eyes spoke: - Don't go away, they cried. - Don't leave me.
Stay with me!

- Alraune - the man muttered.

His words sounded like a reproach and a request to let him go. But she would not let him go, and held him prisoner in her arms.

with his eyes: don't leave me.

The man felt his will softening. And he almost forced his eyes away from her. But then Alraune spoke:

- Don't go away, stay with me!

- No! "You'll ruin me like the others!" cried Braun Frank.

He turned away from her and stepping to the table, tore some dumplings from the cotton wool he had used on his wounds. He dripped oil on it and plugged his ears tightly.

- So. Now speak if you like. I must go, you know: let me go. I cannot hear you. I cannot see you.

- "But you do," she said quietly. She stepped up to him and took his arm gently. The tremor of her fingers told him so: "Stay with me. Don't leave me.

It was so sweet, so sweet, the tender kiss of her hands. Just a little while longer! Her hands rose and his face trembled at the soft touch. Slowly Alraune put her arms around his neck, drew his head to hers, stood on tiptoe, and reached her wet lips to his mouth.

- How strange - really - thought Braun Frank. - He speaks to his nerves and my nerves understand.

She pulled him aside with a step and pushed him down on the bed. She sat on her knees and wrapped him in a cloak of flattering endearments. She plucked the cotton wool with her pointed fingers and whispered hot words of endearment in his ear. She spoke so softly that he could not understand her words. But she could sense their meaning, she felt them saying: - Stay!

And he says: - How good that you stay.

His eyes were still closed. She could still hear the confused whisper of his lips, feel his tiny, pointed fingers running over her breasts and cheeks. He didn't pull her to him, didn't force himself - and yet he could feel the current of her nerves pulling him to the bed. Slowly, slowly, he sagged.

Suddenly the girl jumped up. He opened his eyes, saw her running to the door and closing it, then pulling the heavy window shut tightly

curtains. A soft twilight crept into the room.

The man wanted to get up, wanted to stand up. But she was back before he could move. She threw off her black cloak and went to him. With soft fingers, she closed her eyes again and put her lips to his.

He could feel her small breasts in his hands, feel her pointed fingers playing with the flesh of her thighs. He felt her curls falling against his face.

And he did not resist. He gave himself as she wanted him to -

- Are you staying?" asked Alraune.

And he felt that it was no longer an issue. He just wanted to hear it - from his lips, too.

- Yes - he said quietly.

Alraune's kisses showered like May rain, her caresses flickered like a swarm of almond blossoms in the evening breeze, her words of endearment leapt like sparkling pearls from cascades in the park pond.

- You taught me!" she breathed. "You showed me what love is - now you must stay here for my love, which you have brought to life!

She gently touched his wound, kissed it with a caressing tongue. She lifted her head and looked at him with blurry eyes.

- 'I've hurt you,' he whispered, 'I almost hit you in the heart. Beat me! Shall I fetch the whip? Do what you will with me! - Tear me with your teeth, take a knife in your hand. Drink my blood - or whatever pleases you - anything, anything! - I'm your slave!

The man closed his eyes again and sighed deeply: - You are the mistress -he thought. - You are the winner.

Sometimes, as he entered the library room, Braun Frank thought he heard laughter coming from somewhere in the stacks. When he first heard it, he thought it was Alraune laughing, though it didn't sound like his voice. He looked around, but saw no one. Uncle James' hoarse voice, he thought. - Keep laughing. -Then he came to himself, pulled himself together. Hallucination, he muttered, and no wonder. My nerves are overstretched.

Like a drunk, he walked around when he was alone. Camming, staggering, with limp movements and a stiff, apathetic gaze. But

exhausted and overwrought with nerves, when he was with Alraune; - his blood, which otherwise ran slow and weary, rushed through his veins.

He was your teacher - that's true. He opened his eyes, taught him the secrets of the Zenana of the Orient, the games of the ancient peoples, for whom love was an art. But it was as if he had told her nothing new, as if he had simply recalled something that had long been his own. Often, before he had said what he wanted to say, sudden desires would flare up in him, biting away as suddenly as a forest fire in the summer season.

He threw the buoy. And yet he shuddered at the fiery fire that scorched his flesh, that made him feverish and burning, and then again he was ravished and the blood in his veins froze like ice.

Once, passing through the yard, he met Froitsheim.

- Doesn't the young master ride any more?" asked the old coachman.

- No, not any more," Braun Frank said quietly. His gaze fell on the old man's eyes and he saw his pouty lips part.

- Don't talk, old man!" he said quickly. "I know what you want to say!

The driver took a long look as he went into the garden. He spat, shook his head thoughtfully and then made the sign of the cross.

One evening, Frida Gontram sat on the stone bench under the blood beech. Frank Braun stepped up to her and held out his hand:

- Is Frida back already?

- Two months have passed.

Braun Frank got to his forehead.

- It's been?" he murmured. "I thought it was barely a week. How is your brother?

- He's dead!" she said, "a long time ago... We buried him there in Davos, Vicar Schröder and I.

- He is dead," Braun Frank repeated. Then, as if to clear his thoughts, he quickly asked, "How's it going out there, anyway? We're living like hermits, never leaving the garden.

- "The princess was hit by the wind and died," Frida began.- "Countess Olga - But Frank Braun wouldn't let her go on.

- No, no!" he cried, "don't say anything. I don't want to hear it. Death, death and death! Shut up, Frida, shut up.

He was happy to have her here. They spoke little, just sat quietly side by side. In secret, when she was in the house. Alraune was annoyed that Frida Gontram had returned.

- What are you doing here? I will not tolerate it. I don't want anyone but you.

- Leave it. He's not in anyone's way, he hides when he can.

- "You are together when I am not with you," said Alraune. But take care of yourself!

- What do you want to do?" asked Braun Frank.

- What would I want? - Nothing! Have you forgotten that I don't need such things? What I want will come of itself.

Once again, the resistance awoke in the man.

- 'You're as dangerous as a poisonous berry,' he said. Alraune pursed her lips.

- Why are you licking your lips? - I ordered you to go away forever! But you took it out to make it two months. You're the reason.

- No!" said the man. He would have drowned himself if you had sent him away -

- Best solution!" laughed Alraune. Braun Frank interrupted.

- "The princess is dead," he said suddenly.

- Thank God!" laughed Alraune.

He gritted his teeth, grabbed her arm and shook her.

- "You're a witch!" he hissed. "I should beat you to death.

She didn't even defend herself when his hands grabbed her flesh.

- Who would beat you to death?" he laughed. - You?

- Yes, me!" cried Braun Frank. "Me! I have planted the seed of the poisonous tree, I will find the axe with which to cut it down, at least

I will rid the world of you!

- "Come on, do it," the girl played gently. "Do it, Braun Frank!

Her taunt was fuel for the fire that burned him. Hot, red steam floated before his eyes, pushed into his mouth and threatened to choke him. His face contorted, he abruptly dismissed her and raised his clenched fists high.

- "Hit me!" cried the girl, "hit me!

At this, his arm drooped, his poor will drowned in the waves of her tenderness.

.oOo.

He woke up in the night. A shimmering beam of light fell on him, flooded by the candles of the silver candlestick on the stove. She lay in her great-grandmother's huge bed; the wooden man was hanging over her, just above her.

His eyes slid down. Alraune was crouched at the end of the bed, quiet words coming from his lips, something rattling softly in his hands. He turned slightly and fell over.

The dice thrower was in his hand, his mother's skull diced with his father's bones.

- Nine, - murmured. And seven is sixteen!

Again he put the bone cubes back into the skull cup and gently shook the rattling cattle to and fro.

- Eleven!" he shouted.

- What are you doing?" interrupted Braun Frank. Alraune turned around.

- I was playing. - I couldn't sleep, so I played.

- What did you play?

Alraune, a smooth little snake, slithered up beside him.

I played it out as it should be. As it should be with you and Frida Gontram.

- So what will it be like?" continued Braun Frank. Alraune drummed his fingers on the man's chest.

- She will die, - he chirped, - Frida Gontram will die.

- When?" he urged.

- No I know. Soon, very very soon. Braun Frank made a fist.

- So what about me?

- I don't know," said Alraune. "You interrupted me. Shall I continue the game?

- No!" cried Braun Frank, "don't go on! I don't want to know! He fell silent and stared into space with a deep brooding. Suddenly he was frightened,
sat up and stared at the door.

Soft footsteps shuffled by; he could hear quite clearly the sound of a board breaking.

He jumped out of bed and strode towards the door, watching me anxiously. Now, as if shuffling up the stairs.

- Come on, stop wondering about his fate! "What do you care?" came Alraune's lively laughter from behind him.

- Whose fate should I not ponder? Who are you talking about?

- "About Gontram Frida," said Alraune, still laughing, "Your concern is premature, my knight - he is still alive!

Braun Frank sat down on the edge of the bed.

- "Bring me wine!" he cried. "I want a drink.

Alraune jumped up, ran into the next room, brought in the crystal jug and drained the Burgundy blood into grinding glass beakers.

- Always wandering," Alraune explained. He says he can't sleep. That's why he wanders around the house.

Braun Frank didn't listen to what she said, he poured the wine and held his glass out again.

- More! Give me more!" he demanded.

- No!" said Alraune, "Not like that: Lie down, I'll give you a drink if you're thirsty.

He pushed her head down on the cushions and knelt on the floor in front of her. She took a sip of wine into her mouth and gave him a drink. Braun Frank was intoxicated by the wine, but even more so by the lips that offered it -

.oOo.

The midday sun was blazing. They were sitting on the marble ledge of the lake, swimming in the water.

- Go to my room," said Alraune, "there's a hook on the left side of my toilet table, fetch it!

- I'm not going. No fishing. Did the goldfish hurt you?

- Go get it!

But the man got up and went into the house. When he reached the girl's room, he took the hook in his hand and looked at it with a scowl.

- "Well, it won't take much with this stuff!" he smiled with satisfaction, then interrupted his thought, and a heavy frown creased his forehead. "No? Even if you throw a hook and a hook of meat into the water, you'll still catch goldfish!

His gaze fell on the bed, and he saw the rootlet on the head of the bed. He threw the hook into the corner. With sudden determination, he took a chair, placed it on the bed, climbed on it, and with a quick jerk, tore the little Alraune off. He picked up paper, threw it into the stove, lit it, and laid the little man on top.

He sat on the floor, watching the flames. But the flames were only licking the paper, not roasting the man, just burning him. It seemed to him as if the little man laughed, as if his hideous face twisted into a grimace, - ah, the grin of Uncle James! And now again the slobbery laughter came from every corner.

He jumped up; he grabbed his knife from the table, opened the sharp blade and snatched the man out of the fire.

It was a tough and infinitely hardy root; it could only pull off small chips. But he would not let go; he carved and carved, one piece after another. The sweat beaded in fat drops on his forehead; his fingers ached from the unusual work. He paused, carrying fresh paper to the stove, piles of newspapers he had never read. He threw the shavings on it and doused it with Alraune's rose oil and otkolon.

Now it was on fire, flaming. The flames matched Braun Frank's strength, and he split the splinters from the tree faster and harder, feeding the fire. The little man was wasting away, losing his arms,

his legs, but still not surrendering, he defended himself, jabbing sharp, deep barbs into Braun Frank's fingers. The ugly head bled in, and the man continued to tear at it with a fierce laugh.

Then Alraune's voice cried out, hoarse and broken -

- What are you doing?

Braun Frank jumped up and threw the last piece into the devouring flames. He turned around. His green eyes fluttered wildly, frantically.

- I beat him to death!" he cried.

- You beat me to death, me!" wailed Alraune. He clutched at her breast with both hands.

- "It hurts, it hurts a lot," he whispered.

Braun Frank stepped past him and slammed the door.

Yet an hour later, she was back in his arms, again slurping his angry kisses.

True - he was her teacher. Under his guidance, she walked in the park of love and, far from the many wide chins, she wandered deep into the hidden paths. And in the dense thicket, where there was no path, where he turned back from the deep ravines, Alraune went on, laughing. Without apprehension, without the slightest fear or fright, lightly, almost in a dance step. No red poison berry grew in the park of love that she had not torn off, that she had not tasted with a smile.

From Braun Frank, Alraune learned the sweet delight of the tongue sucking tiny drops of blood from the flesh of his beloved. His desire was insatiable; his burning thirst unquenchable -

That night, he grew languid with her kisses, unfurled from her embrace. He lay stiff-eyed, motionless, like a dead man. But he was not asleep, his senses were awake with all his weariness.

He lay like that for long hours. The bright full moon cast its rays in wide sheaves through the open window onto the white bed. Alraune shifted on her side. He groaned softly, whispering meaningless words as he always did on moonlit nights like this. He heard her rise, hum, go to the window, then return. He felt her bend over him and stare at him for a long moment.

He didn't move. She got up again, ran to the table and returned again. He felt her panting quickening in his left breast.

Alraune also read the man's soul.

Then Braun Frank felt something cold and sharp scratch his skin. He knew it was a knife.

- It's going to sting, he thought. But it felt as if it wasn't painful at all, sweet and very good. He didn't move, silently waiting for the sudden stab that would open his heart.

She slowly, lightly plunged the knife into his body. She didn't cut very deep - but deep enough to make his warm blood gush out. She heard his rapid panting, opened her eyes slightly and blinked. His small, pointed tongue moved wistfully between his white teeth and the slit of his half-open lips. Her white breasts rose rapidly, her glassy green eyes flashed with a confused fire.

Then suddenly she threw herself at him. She put her mouth over the open wound and drank, drank the blood.

He lay still and silent; he felt her blood rushing to his heart; it was as if she were draining every drop of his blood. He drank, he drank, he drank for an eternity -

At last she lifted her fiery head; her face was red in the moonlight, tiny drops beaded on her forehead. With flattering fingers he teased the dried flush of her red lips, pressing a few quick kisses to the wound. Then she turned and stared at the moon -

Something pulled. He stood up and walked with heavy steps to the window. He sat down on his chair, stepped on the window-sill with one foot - bathed in the silvery light of the moon -

Then, with quick determination, he got off again. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, and strode across the room.

- "I'm coming, I'm coming," he whispered. He opened the door and left.

For a while Braun Frank lay still and listened to the sleepwalker's footsteps, which were lost somewhere in the distant rooms. Then he got up, put on his shoes and stockings and reached for his coat. He was glad she was gone, at least he could sleep for a while. Away, away - before she came back -

He walked down the corridor towards his room. He heard footsteps before he was trapped in a doorway. But it was not Alraune, but some black figure: Frida Gontram in mourning. She carried a candle in her hand, as she always did on her night walks, and burned it, though the full moon was shining. He looked at her. He saw her pale, troubled features, the hard wrinkles across her nose, her pursed, writhing lips, her widening, upturned eyes -

- He's gone mad!" he thought, "he's gone mad - just like me.

For a moment he thought about talking to her, thinking about it, - maybe - maybe. But then he shook his head.

As the mourner had blocked the way to his room, he decided to go to the library room and sleep there, on the sofa. He descended the stairs, reached the door, pushed aside the latch and removed the chain. Slowly he slipped out and stole across the courtyard.

The iron gate was open as if it were daylight. He wondered. He went out through it, looked down the street. A deep shadow fell over the holy niche, but the white stone of the statue flashed all the more brightly. Many flowers lay at the feet of the saint, and among the flowers four or five lamps flickered. It seemed to Braun Frank as if the flames of men, called perpetual flames, were trying to dim the light of the moon.

- "Miserable candles," he muttered. And yet, as if they were a help, a protection against the inscrutable powers of a terrible nature. Here in the shade, near the sacred, lit not by the moonlight but by its own flames, he felt safe. Glancing at the statue in the glowing light of the candles, it seemed as if the saint's hard features had come alive, as if he were stretching higher and gazing haughtily out into the moonlight.

And then Braun Frank sang, humming softly, as he used to do, hotly, almost reverently:

"John Nepomuk, father of
the floods, protect me from
love!
Give me peace of mind from it,
Benefit others with it.

János Nepomuki

Protect me from love."

The old coachman sat on the stone bench in front of the stables and waved to him, holding out his arm.

Braun Frank hurried across the paved courtyard.

- What's up, man?" he whispered.

Froitsheim did not answer, but raised his arm and pointed upwards with his short pipe.

- "What is it?" asked Braun Frank.

You've already seen it. On the high roof of the stately building, a slender, naked, boyish figure strode calmly, surely. It was Alraune.

He opened his eyes wide and looked up at the full moon.

Her lips moved, her arms stretched out into the starry night. Like a statue of desire, of yearning wish.

And then he kept walking. All the way to the edge of the ridge. Step by step.

It will fall, it will fall for sure! Fierce fear gripped her, her lips parted to speak to him, to warn him.

- Alr -

But his cries are drowned out. The warning, calling out his name would mean: kill him! He sleeps, and as long as he sleeps and sleepwalks, he is safe. But if he speaks to her, if she wakes him, then, then he must fall!

Something nagged him inside: - Shout! Shout!

Shout and you're saved! One short word, one name only - Alraune! Your life and your life on the tip of your tongue! Shout!

He gritted his teeth, his eyes closed, his hands clasped tightly together. But he felt: *now, now it must happen*. Oh there is no way out, he must do it. All his thoughts merged together and forged themselves into long, sharp kills: - Alraune -

And then he cried out in the night, screaming sharply, in wild despair:

- Alraune - Alraune!

He opened his eyes, staring up. He saw the creature lower its arms and a violent shiver ran through its limbs. Then he turned and looked back in horror at the large black figure emerging from the attic hole. Gontram Frida runs forward with open arms and hears her anguished cry again:

- Mandrake!

Then he saw nothing. A confusing mist blurred his eyes. All he heard was a dull crash, followed immediately by a second one. Then a sharp scream -

The old coachman grabbed her hand and pulled her along. He staggered and stumbled, then sprang up and ran with quick strides across the yard towards the house.

She knelt down beside Alraune and wrapped her sweet body in her arms. Blood, much blood stained her short curls.

He put his ear to his heart. He heard a soft thumping.

- He is still alive, oh, he is still alive!" he whispered. And he blew a kiss on her pale forehead.

Glancing sideways, he saw the old carriage as Gontram busied himself around Frida. He wags his head and climbs up.

- He broke his neck," she heard him say.

What did he mind? - *he's alive* - Alraune is alive - Come on, old man, let's take him in," he said.

He shrugged, and Alraune looked up.

- "I'm coming, I'm coming!" he whispered - Braun did not recognise Frank. Then his head snapped back -

Braun Frank sprang to his feet - his fierce shout resounded loudly, breaking through the houses and spilling into many voices in the garden.

The old coachman put his rusty hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

- Not a young master. Miss Gontram shouted at him.

- But wasn't it my wish?" snorted Braun Frank, insultingly.

The old man's face darkened.

- It was my wish," he said bluntly.

The servants came out of their houses with candles in their hands. They shouted, shouted, shouted, and populated the spacious courtyard.

Brown Frank was dizzy, as a like a drunk. From
old driver leaning on the arm of the old man.
- "I want to go home," he whispered.

READ MORE

It's late summer, the raspberries are rearing their heads. Their pale-yellow, purple and soft pink petals are swaying limply.

When you knocked, my dear friend, spring awoke. When through the narrow gate you entered the garden of my dreams, swift little swallows sang goddess to daffodils and yellow primroses. Blue and goodly were your eyes, and your suns, like berries of light blue glycine, fell eye by eye on the soft carpet: and I softly trod on the beating arbours-

Then the shadows appeared. And in the time of night, eternal sin rose out of the sea. It came from the south, from the glowing sand desert. It spat its plague breath far and wide, and scattered its veil of hot beauty in my gardens. My wild brother, then awoke thy venomous, glowing soul, ready for all sin. Drank my blood, wailing up from painful agonies and kissing lusts.

Your rose-coloured nails have grown into wild claws, the sweet miracles that your little maid Fanny manicured. Your huge fangs, your opalescent white teeth, your last slut's hard cheeks, your snow-white kittens: your sweet child-boobs. Your golden curls hissed like fiery vipers. Your eyes, gentle gem-eyes, refracting the light, like the shining star sapphire eyes of my silent golden Buddha. They zigzagged lightning, whose glowing heat Melted all shackles from madness.

But in the lake of my soul a golden lotus grew, spreading its broad leaves over the wide surface and hiding the cruel whirlpool. The silver tears of the clouds sat like great pearls on the green leaves and shone in the midday sun like cut glass. Where the pale acacia's pale snow had lain, And now the golden rain shed its poisonous yellows - There, my brother, I found the great beauty of virgin sin. And I understood the desires of the saints.

I sat before the mirror, my beloved friend, and drank from the mirror the abundance of your sins. In summer noon, when you slept on white sheets in a thin silk shirt.

You were a different blonde friend, a gracious sister to my quiet days, when the sun laughed in my splendid garden. And quite another, my fair fair friend, wild sister of my sinful nights, when the sun was in the sea and quietly emerged from the

from the bushes in the terrible darkness. But I saw the sins of the night in your naked beauty, even in bright sunlight.

It was the mirror that lit me up, the old, gold-framed mirror that had seen so many love games in the spacious balcony room of San Constanzo's castle. It was from this mirror that I came to know reality, peering up from the pages of the leather-bound book. It was from this mirror that I learned that the virgin sin of innocence is sweeter than all.

.oOo.

- That there are creatures, not animals, strange creatures, born of the absurd pleasure of depraved thoughts, - you will not deny it, my dear friend, you will not.

Good is the law, good are all strict standards. Good is the God who created these laws and good is the man who respects them. But it is Satan's race who with reckless hands twists these eternal laws out of their coffers.

It is aided by a mighty Lord: the Evil One, so that, *against nature*, it can create according to its own arrogant will. His work may reach for the heavens - but it will crumble and, in its fall, bury the daring oaf who conceived it.

.oOo.

I wrote this book for you, my brother. I have torn open old, healed wounds, mixed their dark blood with the pure fresh blood of my new torments: beautiful flowers bloom from the soil fertilized with blood. Very true, my fair friend, all that I have narrated - yet I have turned to the mirror, I have taken from it the events of last cognitions, the old memories of ancient events.

Take this book, my brother. Take it from a wild adventurer, who was both a proud fool and a quiet dreamer -

From someone, my brother, who has passed away.

Table of contents PREFACE

CHAPTER ONE

Which shows how it was the house from which
Alraune's thought sprang into the world

CHAPTER TWO

Which tells how the thought of Alraune came to him

CHAPTER THREE

Which tells us how Frank Braun persuaded the Privy
Councillor to create his alraune

CHAPTER FOUR

Which tells how they found his mother asleep

CHAPTER FIVE

Which signifies who was chosen to be the father, and how
death took the godfatherhood when Alraune was born.
INTERMEZZO

CHAPTER SIX

Which discusses how the little alraune grew up

CHAPTER SEVEN

Which tells what happened in the girlhood of Alraune

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

Which explains howlett alraune mistress a at
the seat of the brinkens

CHAPTER NINE

Which tells us who were and how the worshippers of Alraune
walked CHAPTER TEN

Which tells how he destroyed the wolf of Alraune Gontram

CHAPTER TEN

Which gives back how Alraune killed the secret adviser
INTERMEZZO

CHAPTER TWELVE

Which gives us an idea of how frank braun entered the world
of alraune

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Which mentions how I learned the truth from the
Princess of Alraunewolkonsk

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Which marks how braun frank played with fire and how
Alraune woke up

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Which tells how Alraune lived in the park CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

Which announces how Alraune will end his life

READ MORE

BERSERKER

BOOKS

